EMPLOYEE PERSPECTIVES REGARDING RESPONSES TO TOXIC LEADERSHIP IN THE MODERN WORKPLACE: A Q METHODOLOGICAL STUDY

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ABSTRACT

Currently, in the United States, four generations with four very different cultural norms are working in the workplace simultaneously. These four generations include Baby Boomers, Generation Xers, Millennials, and Generation Zers. The four generations working in the workplace at the same time may have different beliefs as to how they respond to toxic leaders. Consequently, some responses may promote toxic leadership to flourish, and other responses may suppress toxic leadership, including workplace bullying. The purpose of this study was to demonstrate the range of perceptions regarding employee responses to toxic leadership in the modern workplace. As a result, this research asked employees how they tend to respond to toxic leaders and then analyzed to what extent do participant characteristics inform differing viewpoints. The toxic triangle was applied as a lens to understand the interplay between toxic leaders, a conducive environment, and followers. Specifically, this study extended followership by investigating *unsusceptible followers* and *susceptible followers*.

This study employed the methods and techniques of Q methodology to illustrate the subjective viewpoints of 31 employees who worked in the United States. Using a forced distribution, participants sorted 41 statements ranging from "most uncharacteristic" to "most characteristic" according to their beliefs about how they would respond to toxic leadership. Additional qualitative data collected post Q sort and via interviews assisted with interpretation.

Findings from this Q study demonstrated three distinct emergent viewpoints: *Suffer in Silence* (Viewpoint 1), *Confront and Advocate* (Viewpoint 2), and *Quiet yet Concerned* (Viewpoint 3). In addition, differences were noted among the three viewpoints and participants' generational identity, toxic leadership exposure, and education. Overall, this study found that susceptible follower beliefs are consistent with those in Viewpoints 1 and 3, whereas

unsusceptible follower beliefs existed in Viewpoint 2. Lastly, practical implications and recommendations for future research are presented.

Keywords: toxic triangle, toxic leaders, destructive leaders, followers, unsusceptible followers, susceptible followers, workplace environments, generations, generational cohorts, beliefs, perceptions, workplace bullying, Q methodology

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DEDICATION

I dedicate this dissertation to all participants:

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CHAPTER 1. INTRODUCTION

Background

In the United States, 49% of workers have experienced bullying or witnessed the bullying of others at work (Workplace Bullying Institute, 2021). This percentage translates into over 76 million American workers impacted by workplace bullying. Even more concerning is that the most recent bullying rate is significantly up from 2017 by 11% (Workplace Bullying Institute, 2021). In other words, since 2017, the bullying rate has gone up by 11 percentage points. These large numbers of individuals who have experienced workplace bullying are disturbing. Scholars have extensively researched workplace bullying, and this literature suggests that bullying does not discriminate in the corporate sector. Workplace bullying research resides in higher education (Hollis, 2017; Lester, 2013), hospitality (Ariza-Montes et al., 2017), nursing (Berry et al., 2016; Peng et al., 2016; Wolf et al., 2018), across cultures (Salin et al., 2018), human resources (Mokgolo & Barnard, 2019), and even throughout generational research (Walton-Robertson, 2019).

Workplace bullying between superiors and subordinates can have many different terms used within the literature. These include words such as abusive leadership (Starratt & Grandy, 2010), abusive supervision (Xu et al., 2015), academic bullying (Frazier, 2011; Lester, 2013), counterproductive work behavior (Spector et al., 2006), dark side of leadership (Conger, 1990), destructive leadership (Mulvey & Padilla, 2010; Padilla et al., 2007; Schyns & Schilling, 2013; Shaw et al., 2015; Thoroughgood, 2013; Thoroughgood & Padilla, 2013; Thoroughgood et al., 2012), dysfunctional leadership (Xu et al., 2015), generalized work harassment (Boncoeur et al., 2019), insidious work behavior (Greenberg, 2010), narcissist leaders (Mousa et al., 2020), negative leadership (Lee et al., 2018), oppressive bosses (Stanojevic et al., 2020), petty tyranny

(Ashforth, 1994), poor leadership (Naidoo, 2019), Prozac leadership (Collinson, 2012), pseudo-transformational leadership (Hughes & Harris, 2017), supervisor misbehaviors (Barone, 2016), supervisor undermining (Greenbaum et al., 2015), toxic leadership (Flynn, 1999; Heppell, 2011; Laing, 2012; Lipman-Blumen, 2005a, 2005b, 2006; Mergen & Ozbilgin, 2021; Milosevic et al., 2019; Schmidt, 2008, 2014; Whicker, 1996), and workplace bullying (Einarsen, 2000; Lester, 2013; Yoder, 2019; Zabrodska & Kveton, 2013). These studies investigating workplace bullying and leadership provide two takeaways. First, a universal term and definition are not yet adopted when describing this type of destructive leader behavior within the workplace. Second, these terms highlight leadership destructively rather than traditionally discussed in a positive tendency who emulate best organizational practices.

As previously illustrated, empirical literature seemingly talks about workplace bullying without holding a universal term. However, toxic leadership has been operationalized to define workplace bullying between a superior and subordinate. Based on Schmidt's (2008) investigation to construct and validate a measurement of toxic leadership, toxic leadership is "narcissistic, self-promoters who engage in an unpredictable pattern of abusive and authoritarian supervision" (p. 57). Schmidt's (2008) study was the first empirical research to operationalize toxic leadership. Operationalizing constructs "represents an attempt to get a grip on an abstract construct by means of concrete variables" (Welman & Kruger, 2001, p. 24). As a result, operationalizing a construct increases the construct's clarity and utility. However, a limited number of empirical research studies have studied toxic leadership to support Schmidt's (2008) conceptualized definition (Gallus et al., 2013; Green, 2014; Hitchcock, 2015; Maxwell, 2015; Özer et al., 2017; Roter, 2011). Therefore, more research needs to use toxic leadership as a conceptualized

construct to promote clarity and consistency. This current study uses the toxic leadership construct to measure employee toxic leadership exposure.

Currently, toxic leadership research is studied less than workplace bullying, and it is only in more recent years, the literature surrounding toxic leadership has begun to emerge. For example, research regarding toxic leadership appears in the military (Gallus et al., 2013; Schmidt, 2008, 2014), nonprofit organizations (Hitchcock, 2015), nursing (Roter, 2011), healthcare, (Özer et al., 2017), human resources (Maxwell, 2015), and educational settings (Green, 2014). While Schmidt (2008) argues that the military offers a unique context for studying toxic leadership because it tends to accept toxic behaviors, other scholars have pointed out that toxic behaviors are welcomed and encouraged by other civilian sectors (Lester, 2013). One key difference between the military and civilian workplaces is that the military is often stereotyped as toxic with boot camp drill-like behavior (Schmidt, 2008). The civilian sector does not expect these boot camp behaviors, so when they do occur, they generate significant organizational and individual consequences when these behaviors occur. Likewise, the military sector could also face significant consequences from toxic leader behaviors for individuals and the organization.

Organizational Consequences of Toxic Leadership

Organizational consequences that stem from toxic leadership are vast and disturbing. Empirical research has shown that organizational effects in toxic leadership can be debilitating for an organization financially, employee retention, and detrimental to the community in which the organization thrives. First, the financial cost of toxic leadership to companies is considerable. For example, a leader's toxic behaviors cost a single company $14,000 per employee because of a lack of employee productivity (Morin, 2017). Additionally, those victims of bullying are forced

to retire early and use more sick leave (Kılıç & Günsel, 2019). Most disturbing is that employees who experience toxic leadership often intentionally harm their workplace with deviant behaviors such as theft, fraud, and sabotage out of spite (Veldsman, 2016). As a result of these adverse behaviors stemming from toxic leaders, companies are losing significant dollars.

Moreover, researchers know that toxic leadership stressors are as debilitating as more familiar workplace hazards. These familiar workplace hazards include safety, physical, and biological hazards because toxic leadership can also result in a loss of productivity, retention, and employee growth (Winn & Dykes, 2019). In total, companies are willing to invest billions of dollars each year in improving Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA) workplace safety programs and injury reduction (Shimshack, 2014; United States Department of Labor, 2017; United States Food and Drug Administration, 2016). Yet, this workplace hazard of toxic leadership can often go unresolved. Perhaps this hazard of toxic leadership goes unresolved because toxic leadership may be harder to address. This current research provides information that can help make toxic leadership easier to recognize by demonstrating employee beliefs regarding their responses to toxic leaders. Consequently, if workplaces do not address toxic leadership, organizational hazards permeate throughout the organization.

Additionally, employee retention is a concern to organizations where toxic leadership exists. To illustrate, a vast body of research demonstrates high turnover intentions among workers who have experienced toxic leadership (Matos et al., 2018; Mehta & Maheshwari, 2014; Naeem & Khurram, 2020; Snow et al., 2021). Examples of employee attrition from individuals who experience toxic leadership can include leaving their job altogether, entering early retirement, taking career breaks, or future intentions to leave (Snow et al., 2021). As a result of employee attrition, organizations are cycling through employees rapidly and accordingly have

increased expenditures. As a result, toxic leadership forces companies to spend valuable resources such as energy, time, and money searching for, hiring, and training new employees.

Lastly, toxic leadership may affect the community long-term if organizations cannot solve toxic leadership. For example, organizations play an integral part in the foundation and stability of their employees' livelihoods. To illustrate, if employees leave at rapid rates and companies are forced to sustain substantial economic costs of hiring and training new employees, the organization may have to close its doors if the company cannot afford these increased financial pressures. Consequently, the closing of an organization would result in lost jobs, which is detrimental to the overall community in which the organization resides. Therefore, problems stemming from toxic leadership will impact the community if an organization is forced to close, including loss of jobs and loss of tax revenue. These negative organizational implications present one facet of the consequences that stem from toxic leadership.

Individual Consequences of Toxic Leadership

The second facet that stems from toxic leadership is individual consequences. Individuals who experience toxic leadership can have their behaviors and overall mental health negatively impacted. First, toxic leadership victims experience decreased job satisfaction, which in turn can promote negative feelings, attitudes, and behaviors (Lipman-Blumen, 2006; Snow et al., 2021). Equally important is that employees are increasingly stressed (Snow et al., 2021; Winn & Dykes, 2019). Although being stressed is an old term in the workplace, it has become a norm for the American worker, and many are willing to accept stress as a normal part of the job (Tran et al., 2020). While this may hold true, workplace stress is a significant factor adversely affecting employees' physical and mental health (Lagrosen & Lagrosen, 2020; Sohail & Rehman, 2015). Research consistently shows that negative repercussions stemming from toxic leadership affect

both workplace and employees (Mergen & Ozbilgin, 2021). In addition, the bulk of this research has focused on toxic leaders. Thus, to address, and hopefully, begin to mitigate, the effects of toxic leadership, we need to turn our focus to the receiving end of the toxicity to determine what perceptions exist regarding responses to toxic leaders to identify areas of consensus and disagreement among followers. The value of identifying areas of consensus and disagreement among employees who experience toxic leadership is useful for determining the diverse landscape of beliefs that exist, particularly in developing organizational policies such as reporting unethical behavior (e.g., like toxic leaders). Overall, demonstrating the range of viewpoints will assist in anticipating any likely barriers for reporting toxic leaders.

What is more, stress within the workplace causes employees to become disengaged. As a result of this disengagement, changes in one's emotions and behaviors permeate, including high blood pressure, muscle problems, depression, and hostility (Sohail & Rehman, 2015). Other dangers stemming from toxic leadership experiences include depression, anxiety, fear, and various health issues such as migraines, weight gain, substance abuse, and suicidal thoughts (Snow et al., 2021). As previously mentioned, these health hazards resulting from toxic leadership result in employees using more sick time, resulting in increased unnecessary costs for organizations (Morin, 2017). Furthermore, high costs for individuals may perpetuate if the various health issues need medical attention. These negative individual consequences that stem from toxic leadership are disturbing. Therefore, researchers must spend more time understanding an individual's viewpoints regarding responses when navigating toxic leadership.

Toxic Leadership in the Modern Workplace

Understanding the variety of employee viewpoints about responding to toxic leadership in the modern workplace is arguably more important now than ever. More specifically, this

importance stems from four generations sharing the workspace. These four generations include Baby Boomers, Generation Xers, Millennials, and Generation Zers. Simply put, each generation holds different individual ideologies based on their experiences and how they view the world. In other words, ideologies set up what people value and find most important.

Sometimes, generational ideologies work together; other times, generational ideologies work against each other. For example, in general, Generation Xers, Millennials, and Generation Zers value work-life balance and flexibility, whereas Baby Boomers value a live-to-work ideology (Christensen et al., 2018). Therefore, if a Baby Boomer boss cultivates a culture where work comes first, and if other generations work for that Baby Boomer, their values and behaviors will clash. As a result of these contrasting generational ideologies, individuals may work against each other with results that can range from simple miscommunication to incivility to full-blown toxic leadership (Milligan, 2016). Consequently, this dissonance amongst ideologies may promote workplace stress. In fact, research has demonstrated that intergenerational conflict emerges because of these generational differences in the workforce (Leavitt, 2014; Milligan, 2016; Urick et al., 2017). To illustrate, Sohail and Rehman (2015) showcase specific workplace instances that promote workplace stressors that include less authority, lower levels of decision-making power, negative boss behavior, lacking appreciation, underutilization of skills, and oppressive management. For instance, if individuals are just getting out of school with higher degrees than their bosses, they may feel their skills are underutilized if placed in an entry-level position.

Furthermore, as previously mentioned, research has also shown that workplace bullying rates have significantly increased from 2017 to 2021 (Workplace Bullying Institute, 2021). One avenue of thinking speculates that the rise in workplace bullying rates may be in part a result of

the four generations working together while at the same time holding to very different foundational ideologies. Whatever the root causes, it is apparent that more research is needed to bridge the gap between older and younger workers to minimize conflict between generations. Bridging the gap between generations begins with understanding the variety of viewpoints of their responses to workplace conflict, such as toxic leadership. Demonstrating the variety of viewpoints will illustrate areas of agreement and disagreement regarding responses to a toxic leader. This is useful in developing effective communication practices for reporting unethical behaviors, like toxic leadership.

The Present Study

The present study does not argue that all stress is bad stress. On the contrary, as shown, stress is a fundamental component of an individual's growth and development (McGonigal, 2016). However, there is a fine line between too much and too little stress. Namely, toxic leaders create unnecessary stress that is counterproductive to employees' growth, development, and overall health and productivity. As an illustration, McGonigal (2016) showcases that the leader sets the tone of whether stress will promote growth or adversely affect health and productivity. On the one hand, an effective leader addresses workplace problems by focusing on a team approach to resolution. On the contrary, a toxic leader would promote workplace problems with their dysfunctional behavior, and as a result, excessive stress will percolate throughout the environment (*see* Schmidt [2008] for toxic leaders in a military environment; *see* Padilla et al. [2007] for dysfunctional behavior in organizations). Namely, stress and emotional exhaustion emerge among individuals who experience toxic leadership (Hadadian & Sayadpour, 2018). In brief, a balanced amount of stress begins with leadership.

In summary, toxic leadership promotes unnecessary stress that results in negative organizational and individual consequences. In fact, it is a costly kind of stress that does not produce healthy leadership. Corporations are quick to take care of workplace issues like safety, physical, and biological hazards because they are costly and sometimes deadly. Because of toxic leadership's hazardous outcomes, corporations need to understand the variety of viewpoints regarding employee responses to toxic leadership to understand better how individuals manage toxic leadership to identify and decrease toxic leadership opportunities. This topic is more important now than ever because the workplace has become more diverse. Namely, more generations are working together simultaneously with different ideologies which may promote workplace conflict, such as toxic leadership.

Destructive Leaders and Toxic Leaders: Definitional Issues

It is important to note that the terms *destructive leaders* and *toxic leaders* are two different terms that refer to the same organizational misbehavior stemming from the leader. While there is inconsistent terminology in the literature, Padilla et al. (2007) and Schmidt (2008) were foundational scholars who defined the terms. First, Padilla et al. (2007) pointed out that there are profound definitional issues with the term *destructive leadership* and that scholars have treated this concept like a "know it when you see it phenomenon" (p. 177). In fact, this phenomenon is anything but such and requires a complex systems approach. Consequently, Padilla et al. (2007) defined destructive leaders by building on prior research and developed the toxic triangle, which encompasses leaders, followers, and the environment. Based on Padilla et al.'s (2007) review of literature, five characteristics define destructive leaders. These five factors include charisma, personalized use of power, narcissism, negative life themes (e.g., childhood trauma and low socioeconomic status), and an ideology of hate (*see* p. 180).

Secondly, Schmidt (2008) recognized definitional issues with the term and described this dysfunctional and destructive behavior as “amorphous” (p. 4), suggesting vagueness remains. Accordingly, Schmidt (2008) operationalized the term *toxic leadership*. As a result of Schmidt’s (2008) work, toxic leaders are “narcissistic, self-promoters who engage in an unpredictable pattern of abusive and authoritarian supervision” (p. 57). In sum, both Padilla and Schmidt argue this type of leadership emphasizes organizational misbehavior that produces adverse outcomes.

Indeed, Padilla et al. (2007) and Schmidt’s (2008) terms are similar as they view this destructive phenomenon as both a *process* that produces adverse *outcomes*. For instance, the *process* suggests that specific behaviors are toxic, and these particular behaviors displayed by a leader produce negative *outcomes* for the organization. As an illustration, Padilla et al. (2007) argue that destructive leadership outcomes lie on a “destructive-constructive continuum” (p. 179). Therefore, a destructive leader’s behaviors produce adverse outcomes that fall on the destructive end of the continuum. Hence, both destructive leadership and toxic leadership focus on the damaging outcomes associated with this organizational misbehavior. The goal of covering literature in both areas (e.g., destructive leadership and toxic leadership) is to differentiate between the two terms.

As I have noted, to illustrate that these two terms are more similar than different, destructive leadership and toxic leadership harm individuals who experience this negative behavior. For instance, Padilla et al. (2007) refer to this harm as a reduced “quality of life for constituents,” and a “detract[ion] from the organization’s main purpose” (p. 179). Similarly, Schmidt (2008) demonstrates toxic leader outcomes predict turnover and low job and supervisor satisfaction levels. Thus, an agreement between Padilla et al. (2007) and Schmidt (2008) demonstrates broad systems of employees and organizations who experience adverse outcomes.

Both terminologies consist of selfish tendencies from the leader, and the behavior produces undesirable consequences that are counterproductive to the workplace to function correctly. Therefore, this study will refer to this organizational misbehavior as destructive leadership and toxic leadership throughout the document. Also, to illustrate a comprehensive literature review, I investigated both terms. While these two terms are the same conceptually, this study will specifically examine toxic leadership from Schmidt's (2008, 2014) research when measuring the degree of toxic leadership in the workplace. Please refer to Chapter 1 and its list of terms for a complete list of definitions.

Research Problem

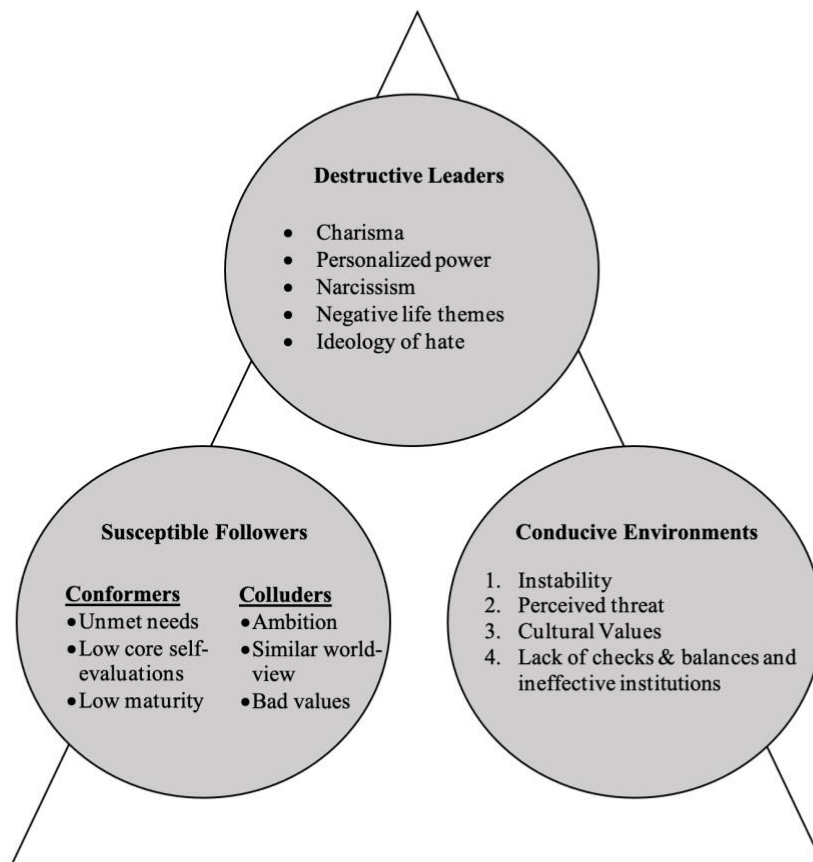
This study is needed to demonstrate the range of perceptions that exist of employees regarding their responses to toxic leadership in the modern workplace. The presence of a multigenerational workforce and the connection between generational differences and toxic leadership could benefit from further empirical support. The world is becoming increasingly complex, and leadership has changed recently (Uhl-Bien, 2021). Furthermore, failed leadership, such as toxic leadership, is also failed followership. In other words, those who experience toxic leaders play a critical role in promoting or discouraging toxic leadership opportunities. Follower responses may promote or discourage toxic leadership opportunities. More research needs to focus on the complexity of leaders who lead, individuals who choose to follow, and the context in which the leadership occurs to understand the comprehensive picture of toxic leadership (Uhl-Bien, 2021). Therefore, this study will utilize Padilla et al.'s (2007) toxic triangle to illustrate these three components further.

The toxic triangle will be used as a lens to understand the viewpoints of employee responses regarding toxic leadership. More specifically, this research study will illuminate

general agreement and the presence of similar viewpoints regarding responses to toxic leadership along with disagreeing viewpoints among perspectives. Relative to the toxic triangle, identifying perspectives from employees who experience toxic leaders will contribute to the followership component of the toxic triangle. The toxic triangle is a lens that describes *destructive leaders*, *conducive environments*, and *susceptible followers* (Mulvey & Padilla, 2010; Padilla et al., 2007). This triad elucidates the interplay among destructive leaders, conducive environments, and susceptible followers conducive to workplace systematic, cultural toxicity (*see* Figure 1).

Figure 1

The Toxic Triangle



Note. Figure 1 illustrates the elements of the three domains related to the toxic triangle. From "The Toxic Triangle: Destructive Leaders, Susceptible Followers, and Conducive Environments," by A. Padilla, R. Hogan, and R. B. Kaiser, 2007, *The Leadership Quarterly, 18*(3), p. 180 (https://doi.org/10.1016/j.leaqua.2007.03.001). Reprinted with permission.

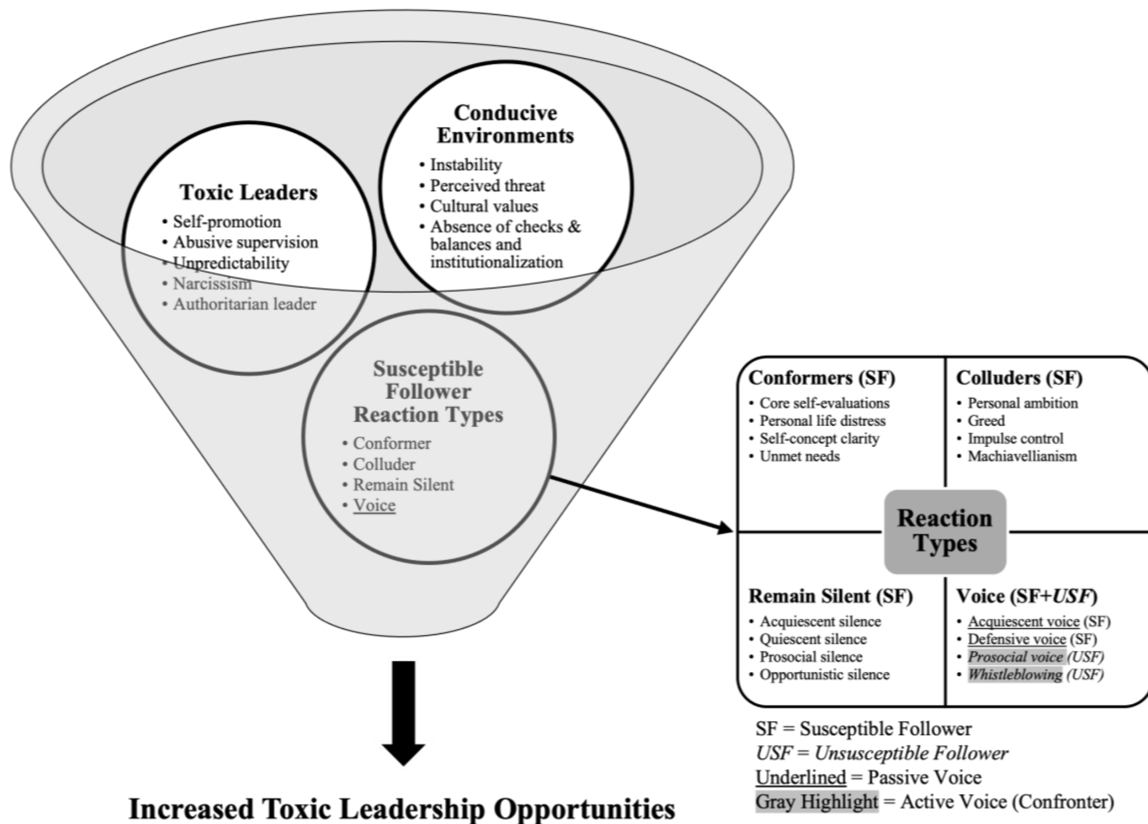
Past scholarship on the toxic triangle has focused primarily on toxic leadership, and more research is needed to focus on the conducive environment and susceptible followers (Porter & McLaughlin, 2006; Thoroughgood, 2013; Thoroughgood et al., 2018). In fact, some scholars also argue that a conducive environment and susceptible followers are the most essential components of the triad; therefore, researchers must study them together to obtain an all systems approach when investigating this destructive leadership (Mulvey & Padilla, 2010; Thoroughgood, 2013; Thoroughgood et al., 2018). What is more, Mergen and Ozbilgin (2021) argue followers are "agents and co-creators of the toxic phenomenon in terms of understanding why individuals become and remain followers of toxic leaders" (p. 2). Therefore, although toxic leaders are an essential part of the toxic triangle, this research is not concerned with toxic leaders alone. Instead, this study will view individuals who experience toxic leaders as *agents* and *co-creators* when experiencing toxic leadership. In other words, responses from those who experience toxic leaders enable (e.g., conformers, colluders, remain silent, passive voice) or disable (e.g., active, prosocial voice such as whistleblowing) toxic leadership. Hence, this present study will concentrate on the empirical need to investigate the subjective viewpoints of individuals (i.e., agents and co-creators) regarding their responses to toxic leadership in the modern-day workplace (*see* Figure 2).

The study has two goals: first, to demonstrate employee perceptions regarding their typical behaviors, thoughts, and reactions when navigating a toxic work environment, and second, to understand to what extent do participant characteristics inform differing viewpoints. This study applies Q methodology to the toxic triangle as a lens to understand the range of employee perceptions regarding responses to toxic leadership to gain a holistic understanding of the interplay between toxic leaders, a conducive environment, and followers. Q methodology

combines quantitative and qualitative mixed methodological approaches in its research design to understand subjective viewpoints of individuals (Stephenson, 1935, 1986). More specifically, Q research shows areas of agreement and disagreement among participants' views. In addition, this study looked for patterns of subjective perceptions regarding responses of toxic leadership among participant characteristics (e.g., toxic leadership exposure, generational identity, education, gender, race, and English as a first language) and differing viewpoints. Hence, Q is an ideal methodology for understanding the diversity of a group of individuals' opinions on a specific topic (Rieber, 2020). This study presents a detailed methodological design in Chapter 3.

Figure 2

An Adapted Toxic Triangle Lens



Note. Figure 2 adapts from Padilla et al.'s (2007) original research on the toxic triangle by modifying destructive leaders with Schmidt's (2008) toxic leader operationalized term and the

five toxic leader typologies. Further, the literature review will illustrate the four reaction types to demonstrate how individuals may respond to toxic leaders as susceptible followers or unsusceptible followers. Adapted from "The Toxic Triangle: Destructive Leaders, Susceptible Followers, and Conducive Environments," by A. Padilla, R. Hogan, and R. B. Kaiser, 2007, *The Leadership Quarterly, 18*(3), p. 180 (https://doi.org/10.1016/j.leaqua.2007.03.001). Reprinted with permission.

Reaction Responses to Toxic Leaders

This study proposes that individuals under a toxic leader identify as either *susceptible followers* or *unsusceptible followers*. According to Padilla et al.'s (2007) toxic triangle framework, two types of susceptible followers exist, *conformers* and *colluders*. Furthermore, the literature suggests that certain generations may be more prone to holding susceptible follower positions because of their rule-follower nature and low level of authority in the workplace (Becton et al., 2014; Trickey & Hyde, 2009). Thus, this study extends Padilla et al.'s (2007) research on followership by suggesting that *remaining silent* and engaging in *passive voice* are additional dimensions of *susceptible followers*. In addition, based on Mergen and Ozbilgin's (2021) beliefs, this study views followers as central to any leadership phenomenon. Hence, this study will treat individuals under toxic leaders as *agents* and *co-creators* in terms of the toxic triangle to bring about change and to speak out against toxic leadership. Therefore, this study will extend the toxic triangle by introducing *unsusceptible followers* to include *prosocial active voices* such as *prosocial voice* and *whistleblowing*. Next, I will briefly examine the characteristics that make up susceptible followers and unsusceptible followers to help illustrate how employees view responses when navigating toxic leadership.

Conform. First, the literature indicates that individuals may respond to toxic leaders by taking on a *conformer* role. This would suggest that conforming individuals would be *susceptible* as followers to toxic leaders. To illustrate, Lipman-Blumen (2010) offers one explanation implying that individuals within the toxic triangle choose to conform because they fear not

having their most basic needs of food and shelter met. These unmet needs may mean that if individuals decide to conform, they may be doing so out of fear. Research suggests that one explanation for conforming is that finding a new job may be challenging because the job market has declined and unemployment rates have rapidly increased (Şahin et al., 2020). Consequently, because of fear of not having one's most basic needs met, individuals may choose to stay in a toxic work environment to ensure financial security.

Regardless, conforming is dangerous because individuals follow the leader based solely on fear, resulting in unhappy employees. Furthermore, it is known that disgruntled employees result in negative work performance and low productivity (Kılıç & Günsel, 2019; Meriläinen et al., 2016). Therefore, if an individual who experiences toxic leadership holds a conformer positionality, this would suggest that it would cost the company a significant financial amount because of decreased work performance and low workplace productivity. Moreover, and what may be most dangerous in the conformer position, the individual experiencing the toxicity remains silent. As a result of this silence, toxic leadership opportunities increase, and the hazardous work environment of the toxic triangle flourishes.

Collude. The second way the literature suggests that *susceptible* individuals respond to a toxic leader is by *colluding*. One key trait for individuals who collude is that they are narcissistic self-promoters (Schmidt, 2008). This means that these selfish tendencies result from an attempt to get ahead or to be promoted. In addition, narcissism is destructive; in fact, Schmidt's (2008) research identified narcissism as one of the five types of a toxic leader. Consequently, individuals who hold these traits may also collude. Colluders actively participate in a toxic leader's agenda. In other words, colluders are ambitious, hold bad values, and share similar world views with a toxic leader. If individuals collude under a toxic leader, they may be

“trained” by their toxic leader to mirror destructive behaviors. Under this “training,” the individual may learn toxic leadership behaviors that Schmidt (2008) identified. As a result, the toxicity would increase throughout the workplace.

As previously mentioned, Padilla et al.’s (2007) toxic triangle framework surrounding conformers and colluders provides an excellent foundation for understanding the complexities behind destructive leadership. However, it remains insufficient for understanding the multidimensional complexity of followership. Therefore, in this study, a new framework is proposed to help illustrate the variety of perceptions between employees and their responses regarding toxic leadership (*see* Figure 2). The subsequent paragraphs provide further detail into these additional viewpoints that emerge from the literature regarding followers’ responses toward organizational misbehavior. This study contributes and advances Padilla et al.’s (2007) toxic triangle by refining viewpoints regarding responses to toxic leaders. A detailed literature review suggests that individuals who experience toxic leadership may react differently to what Padilla et al. (2007) initially proposed in the toxic triangle, either by *remaining silent* or using *voice* (either *passive voice* or *active voice*). While remaining silent and some passive voice responses are not mutually exclusive from conforming or colluding, there can be a variety of reasons why one remains silent.

Remain Silent. Individuals who experience toxic leadership may choose to respond by *remaining silent*. As mentioned, remaining silent is not mutually exclusive from responding as a conformer or colluder as these two types of susceptible followers remain silent, too. At the same time, both conformers and colluders have different end goals. To illustrate, conformers remain silent based on fear. In contrast, colluders remain silent for personal gain as they are seeking to

promote their own and the toxic leader's personal agenda. What is different with remaining silent as an independent response is the various reasons behind the silence.

This study will extend on Padilla et al.'s (2007) toxic triangle of remaining silent by expanding on silence as a multidimensional construct with four different types of silence. Those four types of silence include *acquiescent silence*, *quiescent silence*, *prosocial silence*, and *opportunistic silence* (Knoll & van Dick, 2013). First, *acquiescent silence* suggests that an individual remains silent because speaking up is pointless and is often too much work (Van Dyne et al., 2003). Second, *quiescent silence* indicates that the person would rather suffer in silence and go along with the status quo (Knoll & van Dick, 2013). In other words, remaining silent based on fear is consistent with quiescent silence. Third, *prosocial silence* is a type of silence that individuals will engage in to protect their colleagues or organization (Van Dyne et al., 2003). Here, maintaining social capital and protecting one's social identity is crucial. Lastly, *opportunistic silence* suggests that an individual will choose to engage in this self-interest silence to withhold information or avoid additional work (Knoll & van Dick, 2013). In other words, the individual uses their silence as an opportunity to mislead, disguise, or cause confusion to the organization or co-workers (Knoll & van Dick, 2013).

Despite which type of silence an employee chooses to engage in, remaining silent in a toxic leader situation is problematic for two reasons. First, potentially good employees are lost if they decide to leave the organization. Each employee carries valuable assets, such as teamwork, outcomes, and commitment to getting the job done. If an employee chooses to leave, this will increase employee turnover and become costly to organizations when hiring and training new employees (Matos et al., 2018; Mehta & Maheshwari, 2014; Powers et al., 2016; Starratt & Grandy, 2010). A second danger to remaining silent is that there are no repercussions for the

toxic leader for their toxic behaviors. As a result, the toxic triangle continues, resulting in additional organizational and individual hazards. In sum, remaining silent is a dangerous way to respond to toxic leaders because the toxicity will continue throughout the organization, resulting in even more hazardous, costly toxic behavior.

Voice. Finally, the literature suggests a fourth response to how individuals may respond to toxic leaders. Here, a person may react to toxic leaders by using their *voices* either *passively* (susceptible follower) or *actively* (unsusceptible follower) through vocal behavior that encourages change. On the one hand, a passive voice is a dangerous response, allowing increased toxic leadership opportunities. However, while opting to use an active voice may decrease toxic leadership opportunities, the active voice may incur reprisals for the individual speaking out against the toxic leader. As a result, caution must be taken when engaging in active voice.

First, a passive voice is a vocal response in which an individual passively agrees with someone for various reasons. *Acquiescent voice* and *defensive voice* are two examples of passive voice. In an *acquiescent voice*, an individual will use their voice to passively agree to something despite having negative feelings towards it (Van Dyne et al., 2003). This voice is a form of groupthink that goes along with the status quo. In a *defensive voice*, a person may speak to protect oneself from harm (Van Dyne et al., 2003). This may mean that an individual will attempt to move the attention away from themselves to others. In both acquiescent voice and defensive voice scenarios, an individual passively agrees. Thus, in the toxic triangle, these passive vocal behaviors promote a toxic leader's organizational misbehaviors, allowing the toxic triangle to flourish.

Second, *active voice* is *prosocial behavior*. This study classifies active voice as an *unsusceptible follower* type within the toxic triangle. In other words, these voices align with

individuals who *confront* a problem. *Prosocial voice* behaviors argue that individuals will use their voice to express concerns for the organization's benefit or the benefit of colleagues (Van Dyne et al., 2003). This type of voice is motivated by cooperative motives, such as altruism. In workplace literature, prosocial voice is commonly referred to as *whistleblowing* and is often the riskiest type of voice (Near & Miceli, 1985). Here, the person is speaking up about some workplace problem. As previously mentioned, whistleblowing in toxic leader situations, speaking up, and going against the status quo can be risky. To demonstrate, Liang and Yeh (2019) argue that non-anonymous whistleblowing (i.e., identified whistleblowing) results in group social isolation and increases workplace bullying. What is more, Liang and Yeh's (2019) research demonstrates that significant repercussions will stem from speaking up when an individual engages in identified whistleblowing (i.e., where one's name is attached to the reporting of the unethical behavior). Overall, these active, vocal behaviors aim to impede the toxic leader's plan and, subsequently, decrease toxic leadership opportunities.

After an individual uses an active voice and responds to the toxic leader by bringing up the problem and advocating for change (i.e., confront the problem), the individual may either stay in the organization or leave the organization altogether. As previously mentioned, vocalizing a concern about someone in a position of authority is dangerous because the person vocalizing the concern may face repercussions from the toxic leader. As a result, these consequences may include losing one's job, having the toxic leader abuse become more intense, or gaslighting the victim, another form of abuse (Lipman-Blumen, 2010). For example, suppose an employee chooses to speak up and then faces repercussions from the toxic leader. This may result in the employee leaving the job, thus ending the toxic triangle for the individual who speaks up but perhaps continuing with another employee in the organization. Alternatively, suppose the

individual who speaks up decides to stay. In that case, they may continue to face the toxic leader's bullying, which would result in more workplace stress, costly organizational implications, and personal health consequences.

Purpose Statement

The purpose of this study is to demonstrate the range of perceptions regarding employee responses to toxic leadership in the modern workplace.

Research Questions

One overarching question drove this inquiry: *What is the range of perceptions regarding employee responses to toxic leadership in the modern workplace?* The goals of this research project are two-fold. The first is to understand how employees tend to respond to toxic leadership by examining their perceptions regarding navigating a toxic work environment. The second is to understand to what extent do participant characteristics inform differing viewpoints. The toxic triangle will be applied as a lens to gain a holistic understanding of the interplay between toxic leaders, a conducive environment, and followers. This study will answer the following research questions:

RQ_1: What are employee perceptions regarding their typical behaviors, thoughts, and reactions when navigating a toxic work environment?

RQ_2: To what extent do participant characteristics inform differing viewpoints?

Significance of Study

While the literature indicates toxic leadership lurks in many companies and organizations worldwide and carries significant financial and health hazards to its constituents, it is unknown how employees perceive responses to toxic leadership in the modern workplace. This study will contribute to the empirical organizational research in three ways:

a) by examining the toxic triangle outside of solely destructive leadership to shift its primary focus on followers, including susceptible followers and unsusceptible followers,
b) by employing Schmidt's (2014) toxic leadership measurement while using the toxic triangle as a lens to quantify toxic leadership exposure, and
c) in relation to toxic leadership, by investigating the four most prominent generations that make up the workforce by implementing Q research design.

First, it will contribute to an increased understanding of Padilla et al.'s (2007) toxic triangle framework by focusing primarily on followers, including *susceptible* and *unsusceptible followers*. Research has suggested that much of the toxic triangle research has looked at the destructive leadership component but has failed to examine the interplay between a conducive environment and followers (Mulvey & Padilla, 2010; Thoroughgood, 2013; Thoroughgood et al., 2018). More specifically, research lacks followership, as individuals who experience toxic leadership are *co-creators* and *agents* (Mergen & Ozbilgin, 2021). Limited existing literature on the toxic triangle's three components is concerning because no single piece stands alone in the toxic triangle. In addition, all three parts of the toxic triangle work together to understand the complexity of toxic leadership as a systematic process. Therefore, more research needs to invest in understanding followership and their viewpoints of responses regarding toxic leaders. This study is the first to my knowledge to demonstrate the range of perceptions of employees and their responses to toxic leaders by using the toxic triangle as a lens.

Second, this study will employ Schmidt's (2014) toxic leadership measurement while expending the toxic triangle as a lens to quantify toxic leadership exposure. To illustrate, this study will use Schmidt's (2014) Toxic Leadership Scale to measure toxic leadership among

respondents. The purpose of this scale in this study is to gauge participants' work history and experience with toxic leaders. Furthermore, using the toxic leadership measurement and term allows increased clarity and its utility and usefulness for readers and future research. Empirical research will struggle to advance its utility if researchers lack a concrete word to describe negative leadership. In addition, if researchers use a term to explain everything, then the term becomes useless, and meaning is lost. Implementing the operationalized term of toxic leadership and measuring the degree of experience with prior toxic leaders will provide clear parameters of what toxic leadership is and is not.

Third, this study contributes to generation literature by applying a Q research design. Research shows barriers in the workplace are prevalent (Holmes & Stubbe, 2015; Lagacé et al., 2020; Morrison & Milliken, 2000; Özer et al., 2017). One of those barriers in today's modern workplace is the four generations' beliefs and values, as the workforce has four generations working side-by-side (Geeraerts et al., 2021). Consequently, these differing generational views may cause workplace conflict (Weeks et al., 2017). Therefore, reaching an agreement in the workplace may be challenging due to these different beliefs. Hence, research must investigate the diversified perspectives and preferences when navigating toxic leaders because interventions may need to be more targeted. In this sense, it is vital to understand the perceptions of employee responses and identify areas of differences and agreement concerning the responses regarding toxic leaders.

Furthermore, understanding generational perspectives in toxic leadership situations will contribute to the ongoing conversations to strategically identify how to decrease toxic leadership opportunities. While Q methodology can uncover perceptions of responses regarding toxic leaders that may potentially decrease toxic leadership opportunities, it cannot determine cause

and effect. At most, Q is a tool for offering insights into perceptions, beliefs, and opinions. Therefore, Q is well suited to identify those perspectives of consensus and disagreement regarding responses to toxic leaders. In other words, Q demonstrates areas of agreement and discord among beliefs. Identifying these areas can be a useful tool for developing policies and procedures. In addition, this study examines the extent of participant characteristics that inform differing viewpoints.

Including generations as a participant characteristic in this study is valuable. To demonstrate, generations consist of individuals born within the same historical and socio-cultural contexts, typically spanning two decades (Mannheim, 1952). In other words, an individual's age places them in a stratified social hierarchy. What is more, age is one of the most common predictors of attitude and behavioral differences (Barile et al., 2021; Mattioli et al., 2022; Moon, 2021; Otterbring & Folwarczny, 2022; Sorce et al., 2005). In other words, the research examines age to predict beliefs surrounding attitudes and behaviors. For instance, understanding each other's views and values will increase appreciation of one another and promote effective communication. Specific to the workplace, understanding these different views and values are imperative for institutional effectiveness, such as productivity and teamwork (i.e., getting along with co-workers).

In addition, each generation has had different life experiences, which brings unique perspectives to the workplace. Overall, I believe that when we study generations in the modern workplace, we can add another dimension to today's cultural diversity. Precisely, I think that there are many contextual factors in addition to age that we can use to categorize generational cohorts. By studying generations, I believe we are offered a glimpse into the future based upon societal shifts (e.g., Roe versus Wade, September 11th attacks, advancements of technology,

death of George Floyd) that demonstrate defining moments. Simply put, these defining moments are events in which groups of people lived through their formative years. For this current study, understanding employee perspectives from different generations will help strengthen effective workplace communication, including communicating in toxic leadership situations. Q is an appropriate methodology for this current study because it quantifies an individual's subjectivity. Namely, Q's goal is to demonstrate the perceptions, opinions, and beliefs of groups of people. This current study will quantify the subjectivity of employee responses regarding toxic leaders. Further, this study will investigate to what extent do participant characteristics, like generational identity, inform differing viewpoints.

What is more, Padilla et al. (2007) argue future research should investigate destructive leaders, susceptible followers, and conducive environments using a "holistic, systems view of destructive leadership" (p. 188). In fact, one of Q methodology's strengths is holism (Watts & Stenner, 2012). In Q, this means that holism reflects that the data captured encapsulates the whole viewpoint, thus contributing to the toxic triangle by employing the strength of Q research by revealing the dominant patterns and clusters of opinions that arise within each group based on holism.

Assumptions

Several assumptions existed for this project. First, I assumed that each participant would respond to the best of their ability. Second, I presumed that each participant answered truthfully. A combination of these two assumptions suggested that participants provided accurate and insightful data. Third, I assumed that the Q set (i.e., the sample of statements) that the P set (i.e., participants) sorts would reveal different points of view during the data analysis. Fourth, based

on generational diversity literature, I assumed that organizations would be more diverse as Generation Z entered the workforce.

What is more, based on the fact that the literature uses the terms *toxic leadership* and *destructive leadership* interchangeably, I assumed that toxic leadership and destructive leadership encompass both adverse organizational and individual consequences. For instance, Padilla et al. (2007) mention the term toxic leadership while discussing destructive leadership. Chapter 1 provided evidence that definitional issues remain with these two terms. While I believe that both toxic leadership and destructive leadership are equivalent despite their different names, this study includes literature on both destructive leadership and toxic leadership to ensure a robust literature review surrounding the organizational misbehavior stemming from leaders. However, this current study implemented “toxic leader” and “toxic leadership” into the data collection tools for consistency to Schmidt’s (2008, 2014) empirical research. This was because Schmidt (2008, 2014) provided clarity surrounding the operationalized term. Overall, the operationalized term illustrates specific toxic leader behaviors that demonstrate toxic leadership.

Finally, Q and R have different measurements for reliability and validity. For example, Stephenson (1935) argues that reliability is not applicable in Q. Furthermore, Watts and Stenner (2012) agree by claiming that reliability and validity are not relevant. According to Thomas and Baas (1992/1993), the only reliability in Q is the emergent of similar factors. Likewise, since there are no prerequisites for an individual’s point of view, the validity of this nature is not a concern in Q (Brown, 1980). I assumed that the Q research design delivered what it claims to deliver—in other words—I believed that this research design captured participants’ viewpoints in their Q sorts. More specifically, I assumed that statements represent the toxic leadership

experience and how individuals may respond to that experience, thus reflecting qualitative validity.

Definition of Terms

The following definitions provide an understanding of the terminology and context of terms used in the study:

a) *The toxic triangle* is a framework used to understand the interplay between destructive leadership, a conducive environment, and susceptible followers (Padilla et al., 2007).
b) *Destructive leaders* are characterized by "charisma, personalized use of power, narcissism, negative life themes, and an ideology of hate" (Padilla et al., 2007, p. 180).
c) *Toxic leaders* are "narcissistic, self-promoters who engage in an unpredictable pattern of abusive and authoritarian supervision" (Schmidt, 2008, p. 57).
d) *Susceptible followers* carry characteristics relating to conformers or colluders with a toxic leader within the toxic triangle (Padilla et al., 2007).
e) *Conformers* are susceptible followers who follow a toxic leader based solely on fear (Padilla et al., 2007).
f) *Colluders* are susceptible followers who follow a toxic leader due to their selfishness or personal gain (i.e., getting promoted, getting ahead within an organization) (Padilla et al., 2007).
g) *Remaining silent* is an intentional behavior in which an individual holds information, opinions, concerns, and suggestions to a problem (Knoll & van Dick, 2013; Pinder & Harlos, 2001).
h) *Acquiescent silence* is suppressing ideas, information, or opinions because of some resignation, such as it is too much work to speak up (Van Dyne et al., 2003)

i) *Quiescent silence* is suffering in silence because of being too fearful of speaking up (Knoll & van Dick, 2013).

j) *Prosocial silence* is a type of silence that someone will choose to engage in because they have some piece of information that would negatively impact their co-workers, supervisor, or organization if it were to be disclosed. Here, the primary motivation for remaining silent is being concerned about the organization's stability (Knoll & van Dick, 2013).

k) *Opportunistic silence* is silence that withholds information to avoid additional workload or cause confusion within the organization (Knoll & van Dick, 2013).

l) *Voice* is "constructive change-oriented communication intended to improve the situation" (LePine & Van Dyne, 2001, p. 326). However, this current study differs from LePine and Van Dyne (2001) and argues that voice is either a) submissive in which an individual will passively agree or b) a prosocial response in which voice will improve a situation.

m) *Acquiescent voice* is a submissive, passive voice in which an individual will agree and express support based on resignation (Van Dyne et al., 2003).

n) *Defensive voice* is a submissive, passive voice in which an individual will agree and express agreement based on fear to protect oneself (Van Dyne et al., 2003).

o) *Unsusceptible followers* are individuals who use active voice, such as prosocial voice like whistleblowing, to speak out against a toxic leader (Near & Miceli, 1985; Van Dyne et al., 2003)

p) *Prosocial voice* is an altruistic voice that may be risky in which an individual will use their voice to express alternative ideas for change to promote the organization's well-being (Liang & Yeh, 2019; Van Dyne et al., 2003).

q) *Whistleblowing* is a prosocial type of voice in which an individual reports the wrongdoing of another individual or organization to someone or some entity that can stop the wrongdoing behavior (Near & Miceli, 1985).

r) *Baby Boomer Generation* are individuals born between 1945 and 1965 (Lyons & Kuron, 2013).

s) *Baby Boomer(s)* are members of the Baby Boomer generation.

t) *Generation X* are individuals who were born between 1965 and 1979 (Christensen et al., 2018).

u) *Generation Xer(s)* are members of the Generation X generation.

v) *Millennial Generation* consists of individuals born between 1980 and 1995 (Christensen et al., 2018).

w) *Millennial(s)* are members of the Millennial generation.

x) *Generation Z* consists of individuals born between 1996 and 2012 (Gabrielova & Buchko, 2021).

y) *Generation Zer(s)* are members of the Generation Z generation.

z) *Conducive environments* are one component of the toxic triangle that fosters toxic behaviors to permeate increased toxic leadership opportunities. Conducive environments have the following characteristics: unstable, perceived threat, cultural values, and an absence of checks and balances (Padilla et al., 2007; Pelletier et al., 2019).

aa) *Q methodology* is a research design that quantifies the subjectivity of viewpoints to show areas of agreement and areas of disagreement among individuals' beliefs (Stephenson, 1935).

bb) A *modern workplace* is a place where a group of individuals works in the 21st century.

cc) *Perception* is a process in which individuals interpret their thoughts based on their prior experiences to produce something meaningful, which may not represent reality (Lindsay & Norman, 1977; Pickens, 2005).

Organization of Dissertation

This dissertation contains five chapters. Chapter 1 included information that provided a brief overview of the study. Then, I identified the research problem and focus and explained why this research is relevant and needed to advance organizational leadership literature. Furthermore, this introductory chapter illustrated followership and how the toxic triangle would be applied as a lens to understand the range of employee viewpoints of responses regarding toxic leadership. Lastly, this chapter provided assumptions and a list of terms and definitions.

Chapter 2, the literature review, presents a review of past and current research to situate readers for the study's methodology. First, Chapter 2 provides a brief overview of the history and development of toxic leadership and illustrates this phenomenon in organizations, popular culture, and the media. Then, I outline the generational trends and assumptions to give a baseline understanding of the five generations alive and define moments throughout their lifetime that have helped shape how each generation views the world. Next, the adapted toxic triangle overview will assist in applying the framework as a lens to understand its three components – toxic leaders, a conducive environment, and followers. Then, the triad addresses how individuals may respond to toxic leaders and what contexts are essential when understanding a toxic leader's conducive environment. Lastly, Chapter 2 presents an argument for pursuing the two research questions.

Chapter 3 delineates a detailed overview of the study's research design, participants, instruments, and data collection. Next, this chapter includes data analysis for each of the two

research questions. Lastly, I present my positionality statement. The purpose of the positionality statement is to provide my readers with a lens through which I have viewed this research process. Furthermore, my positionality statement is my attempt to be reflexive in the research process by providing readers with a clear view of potential influences to this research design.

Chapter 4 presents a detailed description of the data analysis and interpretation for the two research questions. In addition, this chapter includes a written summary of the results for each of the three emergent distinct viewpoints. Lastly, a written summary provides insights into participant characteristics associated with each of the three viewpoints.

Finally, Chapter 5 summarizes the findings for each of the three emergent perspectives. Next, I present a discussion relevant to the major themes that emerged from the results. After that, Chapter 5 will provide implications of these findings for theory and practice. Additionally, this chapter will focus on assumptions, delimitations, and limitations. Finally, this chapter will present future research recommendations and a brief conclusion.

CHAPTER 2. LITERATURE REVIEW

First, Chapter 2 presents the history and development of toxic leadership. Next, I examine toxic leadership in organizations, popular culture, and the media to illustrate the significance and severity of toxic leadership in the modern-day workplace. Then, I briefly discuss generational trends and assumptions. Following, I give an overview of the toxic triangle. Here, the literature examines the toxic triangle's three constructs: toxic leadership, a conducive environment, and followers. Then, I present these three constructs that guide the conceptual framework for understanding beliefs regarding how employees may respond to toxic leadership. The purpose of this section is to help illuminate and provide context for similar and differing viewpoints among participants as susceptible or unsusceptible followers, looking at the four reaction responses: *conformers*, *colluders*, *remaining silent*, and *voice*. Finally, this chapter highlights generations, focusing specifically on generational labels, differences, intergenerational conflict, and perceptions.

History and Development of Toxic Leadership

Historically, toxic leadership has been a term used since the late 1990s (Flynn, 1999; Whicker, 1996). A comprehensive literature search demonstrates that toxic leadership definitions and understandings vary among scholars. In the literature, this term can vary, including terms such as abusive leadership (Starratt & Grandy, 2010), abusive supervision (Xu et al., 2015), academic bullying (Frazier, 2011; Lester, 2013), counterproductive work behavior (Spector et al., 2006), dark side of leadership (Conger, 1990), destructive leadership (Mulvey & Padilla, 2010; Padilla et al., 2007; Schyns & Schilling, 2013; Shaw et al., 2015; Thoroughgood, 2013; Thoroughgood & Padilla, 2013; Thoroughgood et al., 2012), dysfunctional leadership (Xu et al., 2015), generalized work harassment (Boncoeur et al., 2019), insidious work behavior

(Greenberg, 2010), narcissist leaders (Mousa et al., 2020), negative leadership (Lee et al., 2018), oppressive bosses (Stanojevic et al., 2020), petty tyranny (Ashforth, 1994), poor leadership (Naidoo, 2019), Prozac leadership (Collinson, 2012), pseudo-transformational leadership (Hughes & Harris, 2017), supervisor misbehaviors (Barone, 2016), supervisor undermining (Greenbaum et al., 2015), toxic leadership (Flynn, 1999; Heppell, 2011; Laing, 2012; Lipman-Blumen, 2005a, 2005b, 2006; Mergen & Ozbilgin, 2021; Milosevic et al., 2019; Schmidt, 2008, 2014; Whicker, 1996), and workplace bullying (Einarsen, 2000; Lester, 2013; Yoder, 2019; Zabrodska & Kveton, 2013). While researchers contest the term for the same behavior, they all agree that it is harmful behavior that is hostile and obstructive.

A variety of toxic leadership definitions exists throughout the literature. First, Whicker (1996) coined the term toxic leader. Whicker (1996) argued that toxic leaders are "maladjusted, malcontent, and often malevolent, even malicious" (p. 12). In other words, Whicker's (1996) premise for toxic leaders indicated that these individuals succeed by tearing other individuals down. Consequently, according to Whicker (1996), toxic leaders dimmish productivity and halt organizational progress. In sum, toxic leaders are problematic to organizational effectiveness.

In another instance, Flynn (1999) defined toxic leadership as "…the manager who bullies, threatens, and yells. The manager whose mood swings determine the climate of the office on any given workday. Who forces employees to whisper in sympathy in cubicles and hallways. The backbiting, belittling boss from hell" (p. 1). In other words, Flynn's definition suggests specific organizational misbehaviors that toxic leaders exhibit toward their subordinates. In addition to Flynn's particular behaviors, researchers have identified toxic leadership as a cumulative effect of behavior that affects the workers' morale and environment (Lipman-Blumen, 2005a; Reed, 2004). Researchers agree that toxic leadership harms workers

and promotes polarization and division in the workplace (Heppell, 2011; Milosevic et al., 2019; Whicker, 1996; Wilson-Starks, 2003). In sum, all definitions echo themes of negative actions that have a negative impact on individuals and organizations.

Extending on Whicker's (1996) research, Kellerman (2004) highlighted that research has been biased by defining leadership as "good" and has disregarded leadership as "bad." In other words, Kellerman's (2004) premise argues that bad leadership is still leadership. Additionally, bad leaders are still leaders. Kellerman (2004) postulates that leadership research has ignored bad leadership and bad leaders and that there is an infatuation with positive leaders. In sum, Kellerman (2004) argues that we refuse to compare good leaders to bad leaders, which has been one reason why bad leaders and bad leadership research has not evolved.

What is more, Lipman-Blumen (2005a, 2005b, 2006, 2010) has contributed significantly to numerous commentaries surrounding toxic leadership. Early on, Lipman-Blumen (2005a, 2005b) presented a framework surrounding the term toxic leadership. In these commentaries, Lipman-Blumen (2005a, 2005b) explains the complexity of toxic leadership, suggesting that one toxic leader may be a hero to another employee and vary among their degrees of intensity. Furthermore, presented are specific behaviors and personal qualities. Lipman-Blumen (2005a) presents a working definition for toxic leaders as "individuals who, by virtue of their destructive behaviours and their dysfunctional personal qualities or characteristics, inflict serious and enduring harm on the individuals, groups, organizations, communities and even the nations that they lead" (p. 2). In addition, Lipman-Blumen (2005a, 2005b, 2010) discusses followership, drawing from Abraham Maslow's (1971) hierarchy of needs. Using this framework, Lipman-Blumen suggests that susceptible followers seek leaders to provide some structure as a replacement for their parents, who have provided psychological needs such as safety, esteem,

and self-actualization. Lipman-Blumen (2005a, 2005b, 2010) argues that susceptible followers miss these authority figures and actively seek toxic leaders who provide structure. However, what is missing from Lipman-Blumen's contribution is the lack of empirical support for the reasoning behind their commentaries. Instead, Lipman-Blumen (2005a, 2005b, 2010) simply provides a narrative review for conceptualizing toxic leadership. While those commentaries offer some insight into toxic leadership, it is merely a discussion lacking empirical evidence in an effort toward a multidimensional framework to include toxic leaders, their environment, and their followers.

Later, Padilla et al. (2007) introduced the toxic triangle. The toxic triangle contributed to Lipman-Blumen's (2005a, 2005b, 2010) call for more research on developing a multidimensional framework to include the complex and systematic interplay between toxic leaders, their environment, and individuals who follow. To demonstrate, Padilla et al.'s (2007) toxic triangle contributed to the empirical need to describe the interplay between destructive leaders, a conducive environment, and susceptible followers. As previously indicated in Chapter 1, destructive and toxic leadership are two different terms used to describe the same organizational misbehavior in a superior and subordinate relationship. In other words, Lipman-Blumen (2005a, 2005b, 2010) refers to this organizational misbehavior as toxic leaders, and Padilla et al. (2007) refer to these dysfunctional behaviors as destructive leaders. Likewise, Lipman-Blumen (2005a, 2005b, 2010) and Padilla et al. (2007) argue that these organizational misbehaviors result in adverse outcomes for organizations and those who follow.

It was not until 2008 that Schmidt first operationalized the term toxic leadership. Using a mixed-methodological approach of focus groups and surveys, Schmidt empirically created toxic leadership dimensions and developed a survey that measured toxic leader behaviors. Previous

research has referred to destructive leadership as a broad set of behaviors with negative actions towards various subordinates and the entire organization without specifications (*see* Einarsen et al., 2007). Schmidt (2008) extended past empirical research by showcasing a more precise focus and suggesting that toxic leadership is a narrower set of behaviors that focus on harmful actions toward subordinates. The results of Schmidt's (2008) study resulted in five types of toxic leaders emerging. As a result of operationalizing toxic leaders, five toxic leader typologies emerged to include (a) self-promotion, (b) abusive supervision, (c) unpredictability, (d) narcissism, and (e) authoritarian leader.

Moreover, Schmidt (2008) listed specific behaviors that fit each of the five toxic leader typologies (*see* Schmidt [2008] for final scales). These typologies propose that specific behaviors identify particular types of toxic leaders. Practical implications for this information are that these specific behaviors presented by Schmidt can be a checklist for hiring leaders. Yet, one can argue that someone would not display these traits in a job interview as they are undesirable. Examples of these specific behaviors include making subordinates feel incompetent (abusive supervision), controlling subordinate tasks (authoritarian leadership), enhanced personal entitlement (narcissism), aiming to get ahead (self-promotion), and demonstrating random outbursts toward subordinates (unpredictability). As a result of these toxic leadership behaviors displayed by superiors, they can create hazards to subordinates and the overall functioning of the workplace.

Relative to these emergent hazards resulting from toxic leaders, in 2014, Schmidt extended their researcher surrounding toxic leadership. In this study, Schmidt (2014) investigated the relationship between toxic leadership, job outcomes, and group cohesiveness among military deployment. As a result of this study, Schmidt (2014) found that toxic leadership had adverse effects on a group's job satisfaction, productivity, organizational trust, commitment,

and group cohesion, implying hazards for individuals who experience toxic leadership and organizations in which toxic leaders lead. What is more, Schmidt's (2014) follow-up study to Schmidt's (2008) research provides empirical support that toxic leadership is a multidimensional construct that perpetuates a broad range of debilitating behaviors (Schmidt, 2014).

Yet, one problem that still exists is that empirical research, besides Schmidt (2008, 2014), believes that there is no concrete definition to describe this dysfunctional leadership that produces outcomes (Hodgins & McNamara, 2019; Mergen & Ozbilgin, 2021; Padilla et al., 2007); despite Schmidt operationalizing toxic leadership. What is concerning is that Heppell (2011) reviewed literature surrounding the dark side of leadership, looking at varying definitions of leadership to include bad, destructive, narcissistic, evil, dark side, and toxic. However, in Heppell's (2011) review, Schmidt's (2008) attempt to create and validate a toxic leadership measurement is not mentioned. Equally important, other researchers have not attempted to replicate Schmidt's (2008) study. Even more, researchers have failed to adopt this operationalized term into the literature since Schmidt (2008) first operationalized toxic leadership. Therefore, because of the complexity of toxic leadership and lack of agreement surrounding the term used to describe the organizational misbehavior that stems from a leader, I used various search terms associated with bad leadership to include "destructive," "toxic," "problematic," "bad," and "poor." As previously indicated in Chapter 1, the terms *destructive leaders* and *toxic leaders* are two different terms that refer to the same organizational misbehavior stemming from the leader. As a result, this literature review will use these two terms interchangeably.

Schmidt's (2008) research made a significant contribution and advanced workplace destruction and dysfunction literature. First, it contributed to the literature by developing survey

items to measure toxic leadership. Second, because of developing survey items, toxic leadership was operationalized for the first time, demonstrating specific behaviors that encompass toxic leadership. Namely, Schmidt's (2008) research clearly illustrates what toxic leadership is and is not. Third, Schmidt (2008) defined toxic leaders. Specifically, toxic leaders are "narcissistic, self-promoters who engage in an unpredictable pattern of abusive and authoritarian supervision" (Schmidt, 2008, p. 57). This definition provides clear direction for future researchers studying toxic leadership. In addition, it offers other researchers the ability to have increased clarity and increase toxic leadership's utility. Consequently, if researchers use a term to mean everything, it will mean nothing as it loses its value and utility. Yet, while there is some clarity by giving researchers one part of the story surrounding the definition of toxic leadership, the complexity of understanding toxic leadership still exists. Therefore, Padilla et al.'s (2007) toxic triangle is an ideal framework to use based on its whole systems approach to exploring the range of perceptions regarding responses to toxic leadership in the modern workplace.

Toxic Leadership in Organizations, Popular Culture, and the Media

It is concerning that toxic leadership in organizations, popular culture, and the media has become widespread within recent years. Two examples of organizations displaying toxic leadership include the financial and healthcare sectors. In the financial industry, Wells Fargo made headlines for opening unauthorized accounts. This fraudulent issue was due to the top-down pressure from higher-level management to subordinates to open accounts to increase profits and meet quotas (Arnold, 2016). In the healthcare industry, top leadership at Sanford Health faced accusations of knowingly selling a subordinate's medical device for personal gain regardless of employees bringing this illegal behavior to their attention. As a result, Sanford Health paid more than $20 million to settle the lawsuit of defrauding the government while

maintaining its innocence (Ellis, 2019). According to Schmidt (2008), in both Wells Fargo and Sanford Health scenarios, these behaviors align with a self-promoter type of toxic leader. In other words, self-promoter toxic leaders will act based on their best interest. In this case, the self-promotion's best interest was for financial gains.

Furthermore, toxic leadership is prevalent in popular cultures such as film and television. In the film industry, toxic leadership is a comedy. For example, in the film, *Horrible Bosses* (Gordon, 2011), Dave Harken is the boss who addresses his employees by demonstrating an abusive supervisor to his subordinates. As Schmidt (2008) identified, specific toxic behaviors that Dave Harken presents include ridiculing and publicly belittling his subordinates and reminding them that they are incompetent. This film presents toxic leadership as a comedy rather than suggesting toxic leadership as a destructive behavior that requires serious attention. In television, *The Ellen DeGeneres Show* has made headlines for the toxicity experienced by employees. In these headlines, past and present employees came forward about their experiences with unethical practices from top leaders. Specific examples of toxic leadership behaviors felt by this show's employees included unjust termination, racism, a culture of fear, and intimidation perpetuated by top executives of the show (Gerstein, 2020). As a result of these allegations, staff changes and the dismissal of numerous top executives from the show occurred. The most telling about these toxic leadership allegations is that *The Ellen DeGeneres Show* boasts that being kind to one another is instrumental at the end of every show. If these allegations of toxic leadership at *The Ellen DeGeneres Show* are true, then a facade exists to the show's viewers.

In summary, these examples of toxic leadership provide evidence that toxicity is prevalent in various organizations, popular culture, and the media. In other words, toxic leadership does not discriminate based on the type of work. Moreover, these examples of toxic

leadership illustrate that individuals at the top of the organization are responsible for promoting or discouraging toxic leadership opportunities. In addition, these examples demonstrate that overlooking toxic leadership can have consequences that can be detrimental to the organization, including increased financial pressures and rapid employee turnover. Lastly, overlooking toxic leadership can be damaging to individuals experiencing toxic leadership and their overall well-being.

Generational Trends and Assumptions

Generations are best understood from a socio-cultural perspective that derives from generational trends and assumptions. Mannheim (1952) first introduced generational cohorts to stratify social hierarchy. Based on Mannheim's (1952) article, generations consist of individuals born within the same historical and socio-cultural contexts. This definition articulates that each generation has been through experiences and defining moments throughout their lifetime, resulting in similarities that shape their assumptions and how they view the world. Each generation experiences different defining moments, and it is because of these significant moments, each generation has different assumptions of their worldview. These shared life experiences shape values that each generational cohort carries. Scholars have identified five generations to categorize this socio-cultural perspective. These five generations include *Traditionalists*, *Baby Boomers*, *Generation X*, *Millennials*, and *Generation Z*. It is important to acknowledge that only some scholars agree that these shared life experiences create shared values (*see* Costanza & Finkelstein, 2015) which is a critique of the generational view.

Traditionalists

First, *Traditionalists* are individuals born before 1945 (Lyons & Kuron, 2013). Out of all five generations, Traditionalists are the oldest generation in the American culture. Other names

for this generation include “Matures” and the “Silent Generation.” This study refers to this generation as Traditionalists. Events that shaped this generation include World War II and the Great Depression (Christensen et al., 2018). Specific examples of events during World War II include Hitler’s invasion of numerous counties (e.g., Poland, Italy, and France), the bombing of Pearl Harbor, the Battle of Midway, and the bombing of Iwo Jima. Other wars existed for this generation, including the Korean War. Themes present throughout defining moments for Traditionalists were a time of financial hardships and war hardships.

Traditionalists make up the smallest generation in the workforce today. Approximately five percent of Traditionalists make up the workforce as most of this generation has entered retirement or exited the workforce (Dawson, 2021; Wiedmer, 2015). In other words, one could postulate that the major portion of Traditionalists has strong ties to their organization. While there is no direct research evidence, conventional wisdom tells us that this may be one explanation. According to Wiedmer (2015), this generation prefers a hierarchical structure and a top-down chain of command in the workplace. Therefore, understanding who has authority and power within the workplace is essential to this generation. Furthermore, Traditionalists aim to hold themselves to high expectations as they are loyal and disciplined in their work.

Baby Boomers

The second eldest generational cohort, *Baby Boomers*, can be best defined as the cohort of individuals born between 1945 and 1965 (Lyons & Kuron, 2013). This study refers to this generation as Baby Boomers. Events that occurred for this generation include: the end of World War II, the assassinations of John F. Kennedy, Robert F. Kennedy, and Martin Luther King, the Cold and the Vietnam War, and Apollo 11 (Chaney et al., 2017; Christensen et al., 2018). The

Baby Boomer generation was an era shaped by wars and the death of prominent leaders and individuals.

In terms of the workforce, this generation's retirement is on the horizon. To illustrate, Baby Boomer retirement numbers will double from 2010 until 2050 (Wiedmer, 2015). This flux in Baby Boomers who are retiring is concerning because Baby Boomers are the generation that has established careers and have positions high in power and authority (Bursch & Kelly, 2014). In other words, this increase in retirement means that as more Baby Boomers retire and leave leadership positions, these leadership positions will become open, and future generations will need to take over these leadership positions. This is concerning because if newer generations are not equipped with proper training to take over these leadership positions that Baby Boomers once filled, organizational effectiveness may be halted by more recent leaders. As a result of the vast number of Baby Boomers entering retirement, future generations must be well equipped to take over these vacant leadership positions.

Furthermore, a financial concern exists for Baby Boomers who are rapidly entering retirement. Baby Boomers' retirement will be costly for organizations requiring new employees to take over these positions. Additionally, when Baby Boomers are ready to retire around age 65 or older, there will be a concern about funding Social Security and Medicare benefits (Wiedmer, 2015). This lack of funding means that Baby Boomers will find second or third careers (Leavitt, 2014). As a result, this means that some Baby Boomers will opt-out of full retirement and continue to work. As a result of Baby Boomers working longer, this will lead to more generations working in the workplace at the same time. In other words, the increase of more generations working in the workplace simultaneously may promote different ideologies among co-workers, perhaps resulting in increased incivility.

Generation X

The third generational cohort, *Generation X*, can be best defined as those born between 1965 and 1979 (Christensen et al., 2018). Events that have shaped this generation include the threat of nuclear war, severe unemployment, and several disasters, including the Space Shuttle Challenger, Watergate and Nixon impeachments, 1992 Los Angeles race riots, and civil unrest (Chaney et al., 2017; Christensen et al., 2018). These examples demonstrate how Generation X lived in a time categorized by fear. Accordingly, this generation carries the "Fear Generation" title (Chaney et al., 2017). Other defining moments for this generation included high rates of divorce within households and that for the first time, both parents were working simultaneously (Christensen et al., 2018).

In terms of the workforce, Generation X resists micromanaging bosses (Wiedmer, 2015). In other words, toxic leaders have been known to micromanage subordinates (*see* Schmidt, 2008). This micromanaging characteristic means that Generation Xers may not get along with leaders who value micromanaging leadership traits. Generation Xers expect the workplace to be enjoyable and flexible. This trait implies that Generation Xers under Baby Boomer leadership may not enjoy their job as much as Baby Boomers. Perhaps this is because Generation Xers hold different values and beliefs than previous generations.

Millennials

The fourth generation, *Millennials*, are also referred to as "Generation Y," "Nexters," "Trophy Kids," and "Generation Me" (Lyons & Kuron, 2013). This study refers to this generation as Millennials. However, the Millennial birth year range is debated in the literature and varies depending on which empirical article one reads (Galdames & Guihen, 2020; Srinivasan, 2012). In a systematic literature review of 162 articles from 2000 to 2018, Galdames

and Guihen (2020) found the most frequent Millennials' age range to be born between 1980 and 2000. Some defining moments for this generation include unplanned and uncontrollable changes such as the Oklahoma City bombing, school shootings like Columbine, the September 11 attacks on the United States, technological advancements, and recognition of climate change (Christensen et al., 2018). In addition, Millennials have been shaped by wars in Iraq and Afghanistan, as the 9/11 terrorist attacks had historical significance. Christensen et al. (2018) argue that Millennials are the first generation whose parents are "helicopter parents." This illustration indicates that Millennial parents hover over their Millennial children and are overly involved in every facet of their children's lives. In other words, helicopter parents aim to protect their children from harm and disappointment. What is more, the internet and social media influenced the Millennial generation; however, Millennials are not as influenced as much as Generation Z (Christensen et al., 2018).

In terms of the workforce, understanding Millennials is a timely and critical need for further exploration. Currently, Millennials are the largest generation in the United States workforce (Desilver, 2019). This influx in Millennials in the workforce means that today, almost half of the workforce consists of Millennials. One characteristic of Millennials is that they are often "optimistic" and see things on the brighter side than other generations (Howe & Strauss, 2000). However, if Millennials are optimistic about bad situations, such as their experience with toxic leadership, are they likely to advocate for change (i.e., confront the problem), or will they just accept it? In addition, understanding Millennials' perceptions about less-than-ideal situations remain unclear. Therefore, this study will quantify the subjective viewpoints of employee responses to toxic leadership to determine what perceptions exist.

Additional characteristics of Millennials are that they are team-oriented (Galdames & Guihen, 2020) and rule-followers (Howe & Strauss, 2000). What is more is that they feel pressure to succeed (Coomes & DeBard, 2004). Perhaps this high pressure of success stems from their helicopter parents, who aim to protect them from failure. In other words, when something goes wrong in the workplace, Millennials are more likely to find a solution than previous generations (Emeagwali, 2011). Moreover, Millennials may be more adept at working with different people, including diverse ethnicities and backgrounds, than previous generational cohorts (Myers & Sadaghiani, 2010). This may suggest that there might be less workplace conflict based on generational differences. While Millennials may be more diverse than previous generations, the most recent generation, Generation Z, is the most diverse generation of all (Christensen et al., 2018).

Generation Z

Finally, *Generation Z* is the most recent generation to emerge in the workforce. As a result, defining moments for this generational cohort are in their beginning stages. Literature has revealed that this generation is known to have many terms and includes "Gen Z," "iGeneration," "Homelanders," and "post-Millennials" that are born between 1996 and 2012 (Dimock, 2019; Gabrielova & Buchko, 2021; Paukert et al., 2021). This study will refer to this generation as Generation Z. Like Millennials, this generation is most known for being tech-savvy. Events that have shaped this generation include the constant connectivity of Wi-Fi, social media, cell phones, and an everchanging evolution of technology at the hands of their fingertips (Dimock, 2019). As previously mentioned, defining moments for this generation are still being determined; however, research suggests this is the most diverse generation to date (Christensen et al., 2018).

Generation Zers are slowly beginning to enter the workforce. This generation recently graduated high school in 2013 and began completing college in 2017 (Gabrielova & Buchko, 2021). As a result, this generation is relatively new within the workforce. Consequently, very little empirical research has examined Generation Z within the workplace to understand their values, beliefs, and behaviors (Villarreal, 2021). Comparisons among Generation Zers and Millennials are prevalent. In contrast to Millennials, Generation Zers are the most technologically savvy generation and are driven by flexibility. They are the first generation to enter the workforce post-COVID-19 pandemic, which, as we know it, has changed the way that organizations operate (Villarreal, 2021). As Generation Z begins to become established within the modern-day workforce, investigating Generation Zers' viewpoints remains critical.

Summary

As mentioned above, each of the five generations experiences different moments that shape their beliefs and worldview throughout their lifetime. In other words, these generational trends and assumptions may promote different beliefs and values when working together. Accordingly, the different beliefs that each generation has regarding their responses to toxic leaders may encourage workplace conflict. Likewise, toxic leaders are one dimension of workplace conflict. While five generations have been identified, this study will focus on Baby Boomers, Generation X, Millennials, and Generation Z, as these four generations make up most of the current workforce. Therefore, this study will refer to these generations as "the four generations." What is more, this study will look at the four generations with an open lens to identify areas of consensus and disagreement in viewpoints regarding responses to toxic leadership. Recognizing and understanding the extent of participant characteristics, such as generational identity, that informs differing views will be central to this study.

The Toxic Triangle Overview

The purpose of a theory is to help researchers make sense of social interactions and phenomena that otherwise would be difficult to interpret and understand (Collins & Stockton, 2018). In other words, theories attempt to clarify social experiences and certain phenomenon. This study answers the call for more research into the understudied topic area of followers who experience toxic leaders. Therefore, this study will use the toxic triangle as a theoretical lens to describe destructive leaders, conducive environments, and followers (Mulvey & Padilla, 2010; Padilla et al., 2007). As previously indicated, the terms *destructive leaders* and *toxic leaders* are two different terms that refer to the same organizational misbehavior stemming from the leader. For this study, this lens offers guidance for helping theorists and practitioners make sense of the interplay between *toxic leaders*, *the environment*, and *followers* —a complex systematic process (*see* Figure 2). The toxic triangle is an ideal lens to utilize in this study because it holistically views all three components—that is, the chaos of destructive leadership, a conducive environment, and followership. To understand the toxic triangle to its core, one must first understand toxic leadership in its entirety and the interplay of the environment and followers. Scholars aiming to understand the toxic triangle suggest that the toxic leadership component is the most studied of the trio (*see* Porter & McLaughlin, 2006; Thoroughgood, 2013). First, I give background on the characteristics of toxic leadership. Then, I will examine the triad's two understudied components—that is the environment and followers.

Characteristics of Toxic Leadership

Research shows that approximately half of the United States workforce is affected by toxic leaders and believes toxic leadership is problematic in organizations (Morris, 2019). One leading researcher within the realm of the toxic triangle is Art Padilla, who has published several

empirical articles (*see* Mulvey & Padilla, 2010; Padilla et al., 2007; Thoroughgood & Padilla, 2013; Thoroughgood et al., 2018). According to Padilla et al. (2007), destructive leaders play a central role in the vitality of the toxic triangle, and negative characteristics vary to include "charisma, personalized use of power, narcissism, negative life themes, and an ideology of hate" (p. 180). In other words, traits like selling a vision for a desirable future (i.e., charisma), using power for personal gain (i.e., personalized use of power), arrogance and entitlement (i.e., narcissism), early childhood trauma (i.e., negative life themes), and rhetoric that promotes hate (i.e., an ideology of hate) are dimensions of destructive leaders (*see* Padilla et al., 2007). What is more, Schmidt (2008) agrees with Padilla et al.'s (2007) toxic triangle lens that toxic leader characteristics overlap with one another. For example, a few examples of Schmidt's (2008) specific leader examples identified in developing and validating the Toxic Leadership Scale include narcissism, self-promotion, unpredictability, abusive supervision, and authoritarian leadership. In other words, Padilla and Schmidt share the belief that narcissistic leaders are one dimension of bad leaders. What is more, Schmidt's (2008) research has shown that toxic leaders display behaviors that openly undermine their subordinates. Moreover, these constructs of leaders can predict subordinates' turnover intent, satisfaction with one's job, and the satisfaction of their leader (Schmidt, 2014).

Another prominent name involved in toxic leadership inquiry is Jean Lipman-Blumen. Lipman-Blumen has studied and written several articles on toxic leadership over the years. As previously indicated, Lipman-Blumen (2005a) suggests toxic leaders are "individuals who, by virtue of their destructive behaviours and their dysfunctional personal qualities or characteristics, inflict serious and enduring harm on the individuals, groups, organizations, communities and even the nations that they lead" (p. 2). Their research on toxic leadership has identified this

leadership as an *intentional* act in which the supervisor will do whatever they want at an employee's expense (Lipman-Blumen, 2005b). In other words, a toxic leader will have no regard for employee well-being. There is consensus among other scholars with Lipman-Blumen's beliefs, stating that toxic supervisors are primarily concerned with themselves (Padilla et al., 2007; Reed, 2004; Schmidt, 2008, 2014; Whicker, 1996). This self-interest poisons the culture and gives a feeling of powerlessness to those subordinates under toxic leadership (Milosevic et al., 2019), confirming a continued lack of regard toward employee well-being.

As showcased thus far, most empirical research has focused on the leader rather than the individual who experiences the toxicity (*see* Porter & McLaughlin, 2006; Thoroughgood, 2013; Thoroughgood et al., 2018 for exemplars of the focus on leaders over followers). Consequently, the overemphasis on studying one facet of toxic leadership within the toxic triangle has neglected the environment and followers' highly complex, multifaceted social-organizational process. To demonstrate, Porter and McLaughlin (2006) argue that research has overstudied toxic leader behavior and traits. What is more, scholars have ignored the literature topics of a conducive environment and followers. Therefore, this study is interested in examining the environmental component and understanding followers' perceptions as if they were to experience toxic leadership. More specifically, this study will contribute to the literature by focusing on employee perceptions of responses regarding toxic leadership to understand how they view responding to toxic leaders.

Conducive Environment

First, we must discuss a *conducive environment* before *followers* because a toxic leader must have an environment that allows such organizational misbehaviors to exist. In other words, the environment allows the situation of toxic leadership to occur. A conducive environment is

arguably the most essential part of the triad to enable an interplay of the triangle's three elements to connect (Pelletier et al., 2019). This interplay means that toxic leaders, a conducive environment, and their followers all affect each other, despite the environment and followers being the most understudied concepts (*see* Porter & McLaughlin, 2006; Thoroughgood, 2013; Thoroughgood et al., 2018). According to Padilla et al. (2007), four components make up a conducive environment in which toxic leadership permeates and includes "instability, perceived threat, cultural values, and absence of checks and balances" (p. 185). First, the current literature review discusses contextual factors that may be part of a conducive environment. Then, the literature review examines the four environmental components to show that the toxic triangle is a valuable model for understanding viewpoints, beliefs, and opinions among the four generations that make up the workplace.

Contextual Factors

Certain contextual factors may increase a toxic leader's opportunities for organizational misbehaviors. For example, Salin (2021) proposed the idea that an individual's social categories such as gender, ethnicity, age, and sexual orientation may affect an individual's experience of workplace bullying along with their sense-making and how they respond to that experience. In other words, contextual factors are the social categories that an individual is part of that help shape an individual's beliefs. This means that individuals have certain characteristics unique to themselves. This study acknowledges that it is not possible to include all contextual factors. This current research is saying that numerous contextual factors impact the interplay between the triad. Therefore, this present research study will discuss contextual factors relevant to generational research that may promote a conducive environment for increased toxic leadership opportunities.

Additionally, not all contextual factors may be present in the environment. Everyone has different contextual factors that make up how one views the world. In fact, toxic leaders can manipulate the environment. For example, toxic leaders can position the four components of *stability*, *perceived threats*, *culture*, and *checks and balances* in place or lack thereof. In other words, toxic leaders can impose abuse of power to limit checks and balances, promoting perceived threats to gain followers (e.g., conformers or colluders), which alters the stability of the environment. If checks and balances are not in place, toxic leaders may abuse their power. We look at the four components first identified by Padilla et al. (2007) to understand this. These four components that make up a conducive environment will help understand how contextual factors play a role in employees who experience toxic leadership.

Instability

The first of the four environmental components of a conducive environment is *instability*. In an unstable environment, toxic leaders thrive on the organization's instability (Padilla et al., 2007). The unstable environment means that toxic leaders use instability for their gain to increase their power. Some examples of instability in the workplace include job cuts, high turnover between employees and leaders, and a lack of clear policies. According to Padilla et al. (2007), times of instability allow a toxic leader's power to be enhanced. This means that toxic leaders use organizational change and instability as an opportunity to gain followers. As a result, the toxic leader makes quick decisions without calling on others' thoughts (Padilla et al., 2007; Vroom & Jago, 1974). To some, toxic leaders who make quick decisions may provide some stability in the workplace which offers short-term comfort to their employees but ultimately gives the toxic leader more power. Resultingly, decisions that are in the best interest of the toxic leader are made.

Workplace hierarchy is one example of power within the workplace. Within a conducive environment, power is present in unstable environments. As a result of this instability, a conducive environment becomes more susceptible to toxic leadership, and a toxic leader thrives. Research is vast surrounding power within the workplace. For example, Holmes and Stubbe (2015) indicate that "Power is treated as a relative concept which includes both the ability to control others and the ability to accomplish one's goals" (p. 3). To illustrate, one example of power in the workplace includes the organizational hierarchy between a supervisor and subordinate. While there is always an imbalance of power in a supervisory relationship, this imbalance becomes even more severe within the toxic triangle. For instance, the imbalance of power between two parties is the fundamental premise for systematic toxic leadership to emerge. In addition, Holmes and Stubbe's (2015) definition suggests toxic leaders thrive off power for self-promotion as they aim to achieve their goals. This aligns with Schmidt's (2008) beliefs because self-promotion toxic leaders will act only in their best interest and utilize any means to get ahead. As Schmidt (2008) identified, in these situations, toxic leaders will use their hierarchical position to enact power amongst their subordinates, suggesting organizations with high power distance may result in increased toxic leadership opportunities.

Perceived Threat

The second component in understanding the conducive environment within the toxic triangle is the *perception of threat*. Specifically, Padilla et al. (2007) suggest that it is the *perception* of danger and that *actual* threats are unnecessary. This means that if an individual *perceives* that threat is imminent, that person will validate those feelings as *actual*, making decisions based on those feelings. Padilla et al. (2007) argue that the perceived threat component of the conducive environment is more about threats perceived by subordinates. However, this

current study argues that perceived threats are not only felt by leaders but also by susceptible followers and toxic leaders. For toxic leaders, a perceived threat may make them feel like they are losing power within the organization and their followers (Padilla et al., 2007). As a result, the toxic leader needs to regain lost control. Historically, we have seen examples of leaders who have felt threatened and attempted to regain control in communist and post-communist countries (*see* Luthans et al., 1998). Often, the manipulation and exploitation of susceptible followers are common throughout these countries. For followers, they are encouraged to join toxic leaders because the toxic leader often blames the perceived threat on some external or outside factor when in fact, it is the toxic leader that is at fault (Padilla et al., 2007). When this happens, toxic leaders instill a false fear in susceptible followers to gain their loyalty. This instilling of false fear means that the toxic leader will provide the victim a false perception of safety to reel the victim closer to the toxic leader. As a result, this strengthens the toxic leader's power. Consequently, perceived threats enhance the conducive environment and result in increased toxic leadership opportunities.

Cultural Values

Cultural values make up the third domain of the toxic triangle environment. Padilla et al. (2007) show that an organization's culture may promote toxic leader behaviors. Behery et al.'s (2018) research corroborates Padilla et al.'s (2007) findings relative to the toxic triangle, suggesting that organizations that support cultural values such as high uncertainty avoidance, collectivism, and significant power distance are more susceptible to toxic leadership. This means that some cultures will avoid unknown situations because they value planning and certainty. In other words, they will seek to reduce uncertainty at all costs. For high uncertainty avoidance cultures, this means that the group will look for leaders to provide hope and certainty. In other

words, within the toxic triangle, the toxic leader is the one to provide leadership and hope in times of uncertainty. For cultures that support collectivism, they value cooperation and group loyalty (Padilla et al., 2007). In other words, organizations that support collectivist values are more susceptible to toxic leadership because individuals in collectivist cultures are more likely to conform and not deviate from the status quo (Hong et al., 2016). For cultures that support significant power distance, factors such as having a large gap between status differences promote susceptibility to destructive leadership (Padilla et al., 2007). Accordingly, this would suggest that the combination of disparities among superiors and subordinates, such as workplace hierarchies, are dangerous in toxic leadership scenarios. While hierarchies are present in almost all workplaces, coupled with other elements of the conducive environment (e.g., instability, perceived threats, and an absence of checks and balances and institutionalizations), workplace hierarchies become even more threatening within the toxic triangle.

Systematic racism is another example of cultural values that toxic leaders may promote in a conducive environment. For example, systemic racism is a type of discrimination in which systems and procedures are in place that cause inequities amongst racial and ethnic minorities (Gee & Ford, 2011). These inequities mean that People of Color have systematically experienced stereotypes, ideologies, and narratives passed down from generations to shape the culture and how we view the world today. Concerningly, systemic racism can be seen in almost every area of life and continues today despite laws and education on promoting social justice, whether intentionally or unintentionally, and systematic racism is used as a destructive tool (*see* Lavalley & Johnson, 2020). Some examples of disparities of systemic racism include health disparities in United States health care (Feagin & Bennefield, 2014; Sexton et al., 2021), incarceration (Cox, 2020), and education (Gillborn, 2006). In the workplace specifically, Lester (2013) found that

People of Color report being bullied based on their racial and ethnic backgrounds. Unfortunately, no single entity is responsible for systemic racism, making this concept so challenging to study.

Cultural racism may be promoted in the toxic triangle, specifically within the conducive environment. For example, cultural racism is "the instillation of the ideology of interiority in the values, language, imagery, symbols, and unstated assumptions of the larger society" (Williams et al., 2019, p. 110). In other words, stereotypes and norms in organizations that promote racism at an individual or systematic level may enhance the conducive environment. Furthermore, this implies that cultural racism may make employees feel like they cannot speak up or leadership will not take their concerns seriously, promoting toxic leadership opportunities.

Absence of Checks and Balances and Institutionalization

Finally, the *absence of checks and balances* (e.g., policies and procedures in place) *and institutionalizations* (e.g., strong workplace norms established over time that are difficult to change) is the last component of a conducive environment. Padilla et al. (2007) showcase that checks and balances are not only critical in the workplace but have been in place dating back to Madison in the Federalist Papers. Specifically, Padilla et al. (2007) discuss the importance of limiting hierarchical power within organizations, and checks and balances need to be present to avoid abuse of power. In fact, Padilla et al. (2007) argue that checks and balances are the most central part of the environment. In sum, power should be equally distributed to limit destructive leadership, and too much power given to a single entity is dangerous, particularly in toxic leadership situations. Distributing power equally can be challenging if people are in charge of others.

Further, Bierema (2008) agrees with Padilla et al. (2007) that workplaces must provide checks and balances to avoid destructive leadership. This means that if checks and balances are

not present within an organization where toxic leadership permeates, no one holds the toxic leader accountable for their actions. As a result, the toxic leader's behavior is encouraged, and negative behaviors toward susceptible followers exist. On the other hand, suppose there are checks and balances, such as an outside board with distributed power across the organization. In this scenario, if a toxic leader victim attempts to bring light to the toxic leadership problem, then the outside board may be more likely to intervene. In other words, in the presence of checks and balances, the toxic triangle may decrease toxic leadership opportunities.

Gaslighting. Gaslighting is a psychological term coined by Barton and Whitehead (1969). Specifically, gaslighting is a social phenomenon of psychological abuse that encompasses mind manipulation (Sweet, 2019). Relative to the toxic triangle, gaslighting is a behavior that may result in the absence of checks and balances. For instance, in gaslighting, cognitive dissonance exists in which the victim feels "crazy" about their experience. As a result, the gaslighted victim often questions whether the abuse actually happened, and the victim will question their reality. In addition, the abuser (i.e., a toxic leader) will often play "mind games" with the victim (i.e., follower) to further enhance their feeling of "crazy." Specific to the toxic triangle, a toxic leader may manipulate their subordinates, making them question their reality if the abuse is real (*see* Schmidt, 2008; Whicker, 1996). While gaslighting is typically examined in domestic violence situations, gaslighting can also be a valuable tool for understanding dyadic relationships within the workplace (Sweet, 2019). In other words, gaslighting offers researchers an opportunity to theorize and learn more about social inequalities and power in interpersonal relationships.

What is more, personal characteristics may make an individual more susceptible to a toxic leader's wrath. For example, Sweet (2019) suggests that gaslighting begins at macro-level

inequalities. To illustrate, examples of these macro-level inequalities include an individual's gender, sexuality, race, nationality, and class. This means that if inequalities between a superior and subordinate exist, the superior may use those inequalities as an opportunity to gaslight the subordinate. Simply put, these inequalities may make an individual more susceptible to becoming victims of gaslighting.

One probing question between gaslighting and the modern-day workplace remains: *How does gaslighting translate into generational research as the workforce becomes increasingly diverse?* Research demonstrates that Millennials and Generation Z are two of the most diverse generations out of the five generations (Christensen et al., 2018; Myers & Sadaghiani, 2010). Additionally, LGBTQ+ adults are most likely to be bullied in the workplace (Lester, 2013; Will, 2021). What is more, research suggests that gaslighting and diversity are connected. For example, Riggs and Bartholomaeus (2018) refer to this connection as an identity-related abuse that is a reflection based on societal ideologies. Simply put, if society holds stereotypical views and does not accept diversity, then an individual may feel gaslighted. In other words, people who do not take someone's experience of racism, sexism, or other constructs seriously may promote feelings of gaslighting. As a result of experiencing gaslighting, they may begin to question their reality.

As previously mentioned, gaslighting is a form of abuse. While this study is not specifically studying gaslighting, gaslighting provides a nuanced dimension for understanding the dyadic relationship between superiors and subordinates. For example, Hornstein (1996, 2016) identified eight-category schemes that exemplify supervisor-subordinate abuse. These eight categories include abuse by deceit, constraint, coercion, selfishness, inequity, cruelty, disrespect, and self-deification. Furthermore, these eight categories identified by Hornstein (1996, 2016)

relate to Schmidt's (2008) toxic leadership behaviors. To demonstrate, Schmidt's (2008) specific behaviors include publicly belittling subordinates (i.e., cruelty, disrespect) and feeling superior to other lesser in the hierarchy (i.e., inequity). In sum, the power dynamic employed within Hornstein's eight categories suggests that disrespect and inequities play a role in supervisor abuse toward subordinates.

Gender. *Gender* is a socially constructed term that creates inequities among men and women (World Health Organization, n.d.). Specifically, gender is "the socially constructed processes and differences, often aligned with being feminine, masculine, blended elements of both, or neither" (Rushton et al., 2019, p. 2). In other words, gender is a social category to which an individual belongs. Consistent with Salin's (2021) beliefs, this current study uses gender to illustrate the societal and cultural norms and expectations that align with a person's social category "as opposed to the biological distinctions between men and women" (p. 2). In addition, Salin (2021) argues that gender creates a hierarchy. As a result of this hierarchy, an imbalance among individuals can lead to gender bias and inequalities. Which, in turn, may promote a conducive environment within the toxic triangle.

What is more, differences exist between men and women and their experience with workplace bullying (*see* Salin, 2021). More specifically, men and women experience different bullying perpetrators. To illustrate, men are more likely to be bullied solely by their boss (Salin, 2003). On the other hand, women were more likely to be bullied by several persons within their workplace, including their boss, co-workers, and subordinates (Salin, 2003). Additionally, research suggests that women are more likely than men to be targets of workplace bullying (Hoel & Cooper, 2001; Lester, 2013; Lewis & Gunn, 2007; Salin, 2003). Finally, women are at greater risk for workplace bullying if they are employed in male-dominated fields (Salin, 2021). These

differences among gender suggest that research should examine gender as a social construct when investigating toxic leadership.

Age. *Age* is an additional dimension when investigating gender and discriminatory workplace practices. For example, age stereotyping is ageism, which works as a blockade against recruiting and retaining employees (Lagacé et al., 2020). What is more, an individual's age may have implications for workplace bullying. For example, Zabrodska and Kveton (2013) found that employees in their mid to late twenties reported the most workplace bullying and that gender was less significant to their risk of being bullied. This finding would suggest that age is the more important factor when looking at workplace bullying rather than gender. Lagacé et al. (2020) argue that as the workforce is rapidly aging, it is imperative to look at chronological age as a factor. Relative to this study, investigating age is vital as the workforce becomes increasingly diverse when exploring the perceptions of responses regarding toxic leadership.

In sum, the current study includes gender and age because these two dimensions emphasize how individual identities create different discrimination and privilege. Furthermore, these two dimensions help illustrate how specific social and cultural categories exist within individuals or groups. In other words, this means that gender and age interact and inform other social constructs or identity markers, like stereotypes, biases, power, and racial inequalities. As a result, the toxic triangle is better understood when societal and cultural facets are investigated.

Summary

In summary, observing the conducive environment within the toxic triangle allows researchers to understand what promotes toxic leadership. This section demonstrated that toxic leaders thrive in social environments characterized by sexism, ageism, racism, and other stereotypes. What is more, increased toxic leadership opportunities exist when the workplace

lacks stability and employees feel threatened or insecure in their positions. Finally, this section illustrated that an absence of policies and procedures further promotes a toxic leader's agenda and hurts individuals under toxic leadership. Therefore, each dimension within the conducive environment plays a pivotal role in understanding environments that promote toxic leadership opportunities.

As mentioned in Pelletier et al. (2019), one question was asked at the end of their toxic triangle case study: *How do the actions by individuals who challenge toxic leaders collapse the toxic triangle?* Thus, it is reasonable to assume that researchers can follow several steps to contribute future recommendations regarding the toxic triangle. First, research must identify what actions exist for individuals who experience toxic leaders. In other words, the first step is identifying what actions individuals can take to navigate toxic leader situations. Then, after researchers identify those actions, researchers must investigate how individuals feel about those actions. Therefore, with the help of Q methodology, the purpose of this study is to identify those actions available and then seek to determine the range of employee perceptions of responses regarding toxic leadership. Lastly, this study will assist in understanding areas of consensus and disagreement among participants' viewpoints. The value of identifying areas of consensus and disagreement among employees who experience toxic leadership is useful for determining the diverse landscape of beliefs that exist, particularly in developing organizational policies such as reporting unethical behavior (e.g., like toxic leaders). Overall, demonstrating the range of viewpoints will assist in anticipating any likely barriers for reporting toxic leaders.

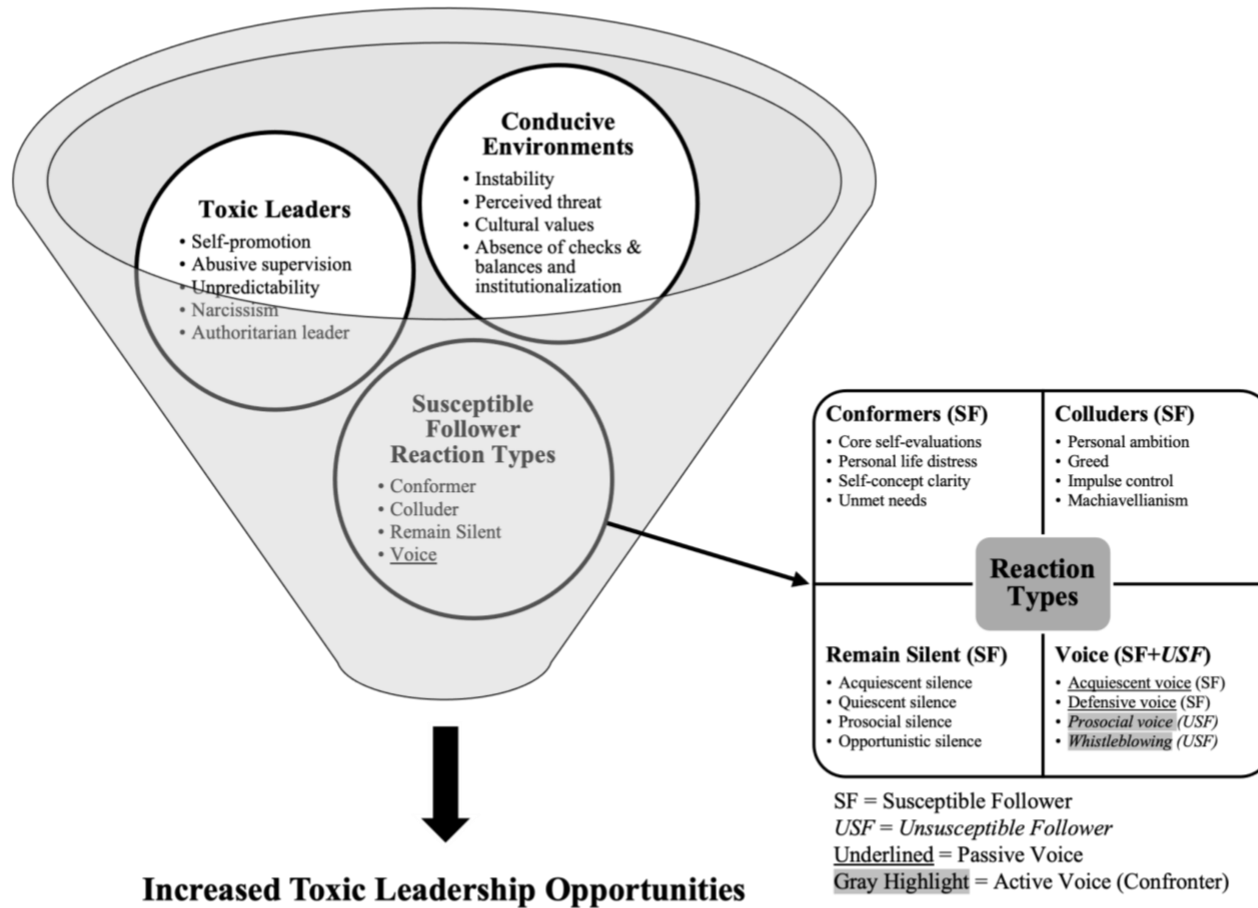
Reaction Responses to Toxic Leaders

In the workplace, followership includes "subordinates who have less power, authority, and influence than do their superiors and who therefore usually, but not invariably, fall into line"

(Kellerman, 2008, p. xix). This definition suggests that a ranking between superiors and subordinates exists. Furthermore, the behaviors of the subordinate serve as a response to the superior. In Padilla et al.'s (2007) toxic triangle framework, two types of *susceptible followers* exist: *conformers* and *colluders*. However, from a thorough literature review, Padilla et al.'s framework is insufficient for a comprehensive understanding of how people may respond to toxic leadership. What is more, followership becomes even more complex with the four generations in the modern workforce as each generation holds different values, beliefs, and experiences. For example, some research suggests that certain generations are more likely to be vocal over workplace problems, while other generations may remain silent (Christensen et al., 2018; Dixon et al., 2013; Emeagwali, 2011; Howe & Strauss, 2000; McGaha, 2018; Thompson & Gregory, 2012). Therefore, in this study, a new framework is proposed to help delineate the variety of perceptions that exist between employees and their responses regarding toxic leadership (*see* Figure 3). More specifically, I employ Mergen and Ozbilgin's (2021) beliefs in which they argue followers are central to any leadership phenomenon. Specifically, those impacted by toxic leadership are *agents* and *co-creators*. In other words, those impacted by toxic leadership contribute to increasing or decreasing toxic leadership opportunities. Hence, this study will look at two dimensions. First, this study will examine the previously researched term, *susceptible followers*. Second, this study proposes a new dimension to the toxic triangle, *unsusceptible followers*. This current study investigates both dimensions of followers (e.g., susceptible followers and unsusceptible followers) and their responses to toxic leadership.

Figure 3

An Adapted Toxic Triangle Lens Restated



Note. This adapted version of the toxic triangle figure was restated from Chapter 1, introducing this figure. Chapter 2 will discuss this framework in greater detail. Therefore, for convenience, it is restated again. In addition, this figure serves as an illustration for treating followers as agents and co-creators for promoting toxic leadership opportunities or decreasing toxic leadership opportunities based on their perceptions regarding reaction types to toxic leaders.

This new framework contributes in two ways. First, this framework proposes two additional reaction responses for susceptible followers: *remain silent* and *passive voice*. It is important to note that *remaining silent* and *passive voice* are not mutually exclusive from *conformers* or *colluders*. The *remain silent* and *passive voice* dimensions provide greater depth for examining *susceptible followers* and the range of responses regarding toxic leadership. Secondly, this framework contributes by proposing an alternative response to susceptible followers, which is *unsusceptible followers*. In addition, this framework provides two additional reaction responses for unsusceptible followers: *active voice* (i.e., confronter), which includes *prosocial voice* and *whistleblowing*. The presence of prosocial voice and whistleblowing suggests that individuals within the toxic triangle that view unsusceptible follower responses as more characteristic of themselves will be more likely to decrease toxic leadership opportunities.

This first section will expand on susceptible followers and Padilla et al.'s (2007) two reaction responses of *conform* and *collude*. Here, I will present how *remaining silent* and *passive voice* may be reaction responses from subordinates who experience toxic leaders. In the second section, I will expand on the unsusceptible follower. Finally, this second section will expand on *active voice*, including *prosocial voice* and *whistleblowing* responses to toxic leaders. These reaction responses will shed light on the variety of perceptions of employee responses regarding toxic leaders.

Susceptible Followers

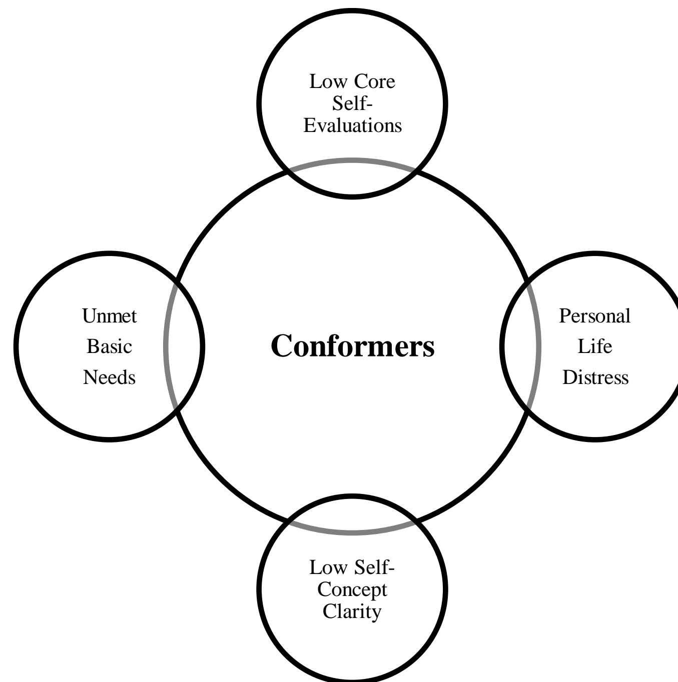
The understanding of conformers and colluders has developed over time (Padilla et al., 2007; Thoroughgood, 2013; Thoroughgood et al., 2018). To illustrate, Padilla et al. (2007) first introduced the toxic triangle with two types of susceptible followers: *conformers* and *colluders*. Padilla et al. (2007) developed conformers and colluders from *bystanders*, those who stand back

and allow bad leadership to occur, and *acolytes*, those who join the toxic leader. Over time, Thoroughgood (2013) further refined Padilla et al.'s (2007) understanding of conformers and colluders. For example, Thoroughgood's (2013) investigation developed and validated conformer and colluder scales to understand followership. More specifically, Thoroughgood's (2013) research investigated four underlying dimensions of conformers: *low core self-evaluations*, *personal life distress*, *low self-concept clarity*, and *unmet basic needs*. In contrast, colluders have different underlying dimensions: *personal ambition*, *greed*, *low self-control*, and *Machiavellianism* (Padilla et al., 2007; Thoroughgood, 2013).

Conformers. According to Padilla et al. (2007), conformers follow toxic leaders because of feelings of fear. Indeed, the act of conforming suggests that an individual's participation is fear-based and intended to mitigate toxic leader repercussions. However, due to being fearful, conformers are vulnerable because of "unmet basic needs, negative self-evaluations, and psychological immaturity" (Padilla et al., 2007, p. 183). To meet these unmet needs, one must conform to the toxic leader's ideologies and remain in a toxic work environment. Thoroughgood's (2013) research contributes to a deeper understanding of conformers by providing researchers with underlying dimensions of conformer followership. These four underlying dimensions include *low core self-evaluations*, *personal life distress*, *low self-concept clarity*, and *unmet needs* (*see* Figure 4). Each of these dimensions manifests within the conformity followership of toxic leaders.

Figure 4

Dimensions Underlying Follower Conformity with Destructive Leadership



Note. Layout adapted from "Follower Susceptibility to Destructive Leaders: Development and Validation of Conformer and Colluder Scales," by C. Thoroughgood, 2013, p. 137. Reprinted with permission.

Low Core Self-Evaluations. *Core self-evaluations* are "basic conclusions or bottom-line evaluations that individuals hold about themselves" (Judge & Bono, 2001, p. 81). Essentially, these are the beliefs surrounding self-evaluations of one's self-worth and capabilities. According to Judge and Bono (2001), core-self evaluations are composed of four specific traits: *self-esteem*, *generalized self-efficacy*, *locus of control*, and *emotional stability*. Researchers have shown that the lack of these four traits increases follower susceptibility (Luthans et al., 1998; Padilla et al., 2007). For example, Padilla et al. (2007) suggest that low core self-evaluations make conformers more vulnerable to toxic leadership. Thus, holding negative self-evaluations about oneself can be concerning when faced with toxic leadership for several reasons. To understand those reasons, the four specific traits that make up core evaluations must be examined.

First, *self-esteem* refers to “the overall affective evaluation of one’s own worth, value, or importance” (Blascovich & Tomaka, 1991, p. 115). Essentially, self-esteem is how one views or evaluates him or herself. In addition, an individual with a high level of self-esteem is more assertive than individuals with low levels of self-esteem (Oducado, 2021). In other words, being assertive in the workplace allows individuals to express how they feel with confidence and honesty. In terms of individuals who experience toxic leadership, individuals who hold low levels of self-esteem may feel like they need to conform because they cannot speak up to a toxic leader. In other words, individuals who conform may not feel confident about speaking the truth when faced with a toxic leader.

Second, those who have high levels of *generalized self-efficacy* can cope, perform, and be successful (Judge & Bono, 2001). According to Bandura (1994), self-efficacy is the belief that one can succeed or accomplish complex tasks. Alternatively, individuals with low self-efficacy tend to shy away from challenging tasks. As a result, these challenging tasks coupled with low self-efficacy can be perceived as threatening to individuals (Bandura, 1994). To illustrate, in a non-toxic leadership situation, either the leader would help the employee develop professional capacity, or the employee would be able to communicate with the leadership about concerns about the challenging new work. However, if the employee is already dealing with a toxic leader, what could have been a learning opportunity becomes a perceived threat. Consequently, those with low levels of generalized self-efficacy may feel pressure to succumb as a conformer. Alternatively, it may be more about the prospect of confronting a toxic leader that is perceived as a challenging task. In other words, people feel they lack the ability to address the toxic leader situation.

Third, *locus of control* refers to an individual's belief that one can control factors in their life (Judge & Bono, 2001; Rotter, 1954). Two types of controls exist: internal and external locus of control (Kovach, 2020). Internal locus of control is when one believes that they control their actions: people with a strong internal locus of control have more confidence when faced with challenges (Rotter, 1954). External locus of control refers to the belief that things are beyond their control and that some external source decides the outcome (Rotter, 1954). This means that those with an external locus of control often feel hopeless and powerless and do not believe they can change their situation. In terms of the toxic triangle, if individuals believe that they do not have control over the outcomes of their lives, they may feel like they must conform to toxic leadership out of fear and a sense of learned helplessness.

Lastly, *emotional stability* suggests that an individual is confident and secure (Judge & Bono, 2001)—which of course describes the opposite result of a low core self-evaluation—that is, a person without confidence or security. In other words, emotional stability is one's ability to remain stable and develop a way to solve problems relative to their thinking and judgment. Judge and Bono (2001) refer to emotional stability as "low neuroticism" (p.3). Thus, if a person's emotional stability is poorly regulated, then the likelihood that that person suffers from some sort of neuroticism would be more probable. Thus, if an individual who experiences toxic leadership lacks self-confidence and safety or good emotional stability, they may be more sensitive to toxic leaders. For instance, in this scenario, these individuals may have a more challenging time solving problems as their thinking and judgment may be unstable compared to individuals who have self-confidence and can satisfy their own most basic emotional needs.

Furthermore, Padilla et al. (2007) and Schmidt (2008) both identify narcissism as a destructive leader element in the toxic triangle, which may heighten the toxic leadership effects

for those employees with low core self-evaluations. In fact, Nevicka et al. (2018) suggest that followers with low core self-evaluations can suffer more from narcissistic, toxic leaders because they feel abused. As a result of these perceptions of abuse, the susceptible follower lacks productivity and experiences enhanced feelings of burnout. In other words, low employee productivity is a consequential outcome for the organization, whereas burnout is a consequential personal outcome.

In summary, low core self-evaluations may promote follower susceptibility. To reiterate, these four characteristics that enable low core self-evaluations include self-esteem, generalized self-efficacy, locus of control, and emotional stability. Consequently, if an individual does not possess these four traits, they may conform to a toxic leader. Equally, low levels of these traits may decrease an individual's confidence about confronting a toxic leader or bringing this problem to the attention of others, resulting in an employee who experiences toxic leadership feeling burned out.

Personal Life Distress. It is reasonable to assume that most individuals have experienced some distressing moments throughout their lives. However, *personal life distress* relative to the toxic triangle encompasses events as routine as life transitions (e.g., job change; aging; or family transitions) or other emotional triggering events (e.g., failing out of college; death of a family or friend; losing one's job) (Thoroughgood et al., 2012). Further, other examples of personal life distress include safety and well-being concerns, conflict, relationship strains, and other stressful events (Thoroughgood, 2013). As a result, research suggests that personal life distress increases one's risk of becoming a *susceptible follower* (*see* Padilla et al., 2007; Thoroughgood et al., 2012). Padilla et al. (2007) provide one explanation for increased follower susceptibility in those who experience personal life distress; emotional chaos stemming from stressful situations may

cause individuals to become more vulnerable because they are looking for immediate needs to be fulfilled (Padilla et al., 2007).

Research on personal life distress relative to the toxic triangle and susceptible followers is found in the literature addressing the dynamics of cults. First, cult leaders offer grandiose and charismatic promises to secure loyal followers (Crabtree et al., 2020; Padilla et al., 2007). One infamous illustration of cult followership is Charles Manson and his followers. To illustrate, Atchison and Heide (2011) highlight a case study on three of Manson's followers to elucidate the leader and follower behavioral dynamics behind the notorious killings. First, Atchison and Heide (2011) demonstrate that 1969, the time of the Manson murders, was a time where the younger generation engaged in "rebelling against conservative values and norms" (p. 772). Further, when Atchison and Heide (2011) investigated the three followers' childhood and adolescent years, they found that all three experienced some *personal life distress* throughout their childhood and teenage years. More specifically, all three followers' life events indicated that they lacked feelings of belonging and friendship throughout their formative years. This absence is related to *unmet basic needs*. Consequently, this lack of relationships resulted in the unmet basic need for community, belonging, and worth (Padilla et al., 2007). This made Manson's followers more susceptible to Manson's toxic leadership. As a result, Manson used his followers' vulnerability to orchestrate his followers to kill.

Another dimension of commonality between cults and the toxic triangle is the environment. In other words, cult environments and toxic leader environments are both *unstable*, consistent with *perceived threats*, convey *cultural values*, and *lack checks and balances*. Thus, the environment provides a rich opportunity for toxic leaders and cult leaders to engage in dysfunctional behaviors and an environment that coerces susceptible followers to enable the

continuation of the toxic leader. For example, susceptible followers support a leader's ideologies and cultural values in a cult. As a result, this powerful belief system overturns and controls an individual's environment, making followers more vulnerable (Tourish, 2011). In addition, cult leaders reward compliant behavior; any follower variance from the leader's vision is penalized. Thus, follower variance from a toxic leader's vision reflects the presence of perceived threat, a core dimension of *conformers*. As previously mentioned, when an individual feels threatened, they will feel the need to regain control (Padilla et al., 2007). This means that the toxic leader will begin to provide false hope and promises to secure followers and maintain power. Likewise, the toxic triangle culture is one-dimensional, cultivating a conducive environment for increased toxic leadership opportunities, thus generating susceptible followers (Padilla et al., 2007). Again, like in cults, maintaining a common culture among followers is primary to maintaining the leader's power.

In sum, cult leadership and followership exemplify many commonalities and common threads across the literature, particularly in the common follower experiences of significant and/or ongoing personal life distress. As mentioned, personal life distress creates chaos in one's life. This chaos flourishes within one's environment, making the individual vulnerable to follower susceptibility. In fact, these ideas appear in various literature and can reflect the most extreme cases in toxic leadership (*see* Padilla et al., 2007) and cult behaviors (*see* Atchison & Heide, 2011). While cult leadership is not primary to this study, it provides a nuanced dimensional view into understanding susceptible followers' positionality within the toxic triangle.

Low Self-Concept Clarity. *Low self-concept clarity* is another central subconstruct in conformer follower *susceptibility*. Self-concept clarity is "the extent to which the contents of an

individual's self-concept (e.g., perceived personal attributes) are clearly and confidently defined, internally consistent, and temporally stable" (Campbell et al., 1996, p. 141). For example, people who have a clear understanding of their self-concept have goals aligned with their interests. In contrast, individuals who have lower levels of self-concept clarity may have trouble discerning personal goals. Furthermore, Padilla et al. (2007) argue in their foundational literature review of destructive leadership that draws on multiple disciplines of psychology and leadership that a low level of self-concept is related to the lack of psychological maturity in the toxic triangle. For example, psychological maturity develops moral reasoning and self-concept over time (Padilla et al., 2007). In other words, Padilla et al. (2007) argue that psychological maturity develops as one ages, which helps oppose destructive leaders.

Milgram's experiment is relative to psychological maturity and conforming to toxic leadership. For instance, Stanley Milgram (1963) was a Yale University psychologist who investigated obedience to authority in the 1960s to understand World War II crimes and followership. In this study, Milgram measured how willingly participants obeyed an authority figure who instructed them to perform acts that conflicted with their ethics. Namely, superiors ordered participants to deliver painful shocks to others if they did not answer the question correctly. These shocks ranged from slight shocks to deadly shocks. Milgram wanted to determine how far subordinates would follow a superior's order. Results from Milgram's study concluded that people are likely to follow orders from those with authority. In fact, Milgram's study is relevant to the toxic triangle and follower susceptibility by providing a nuanced dimension into why subordinates succumb to toxic leaders. Relative to Milgram's study, Bastardoz and van Vugt (2019) argues that children are trained to comply from an early age, and thus, "humans are good followers" (p. 34). Consequently, if individuals are more apt to comply

and lack psychological maturity, they may be more likely to conform to a toxic leader's plan even if the agenda conflicts with their values. In other words, high self-concept clarity is central to opposing toxic leaders.

What is more and relative to psychological maturity development and self-concept clarity, researchers have identified young and less mature individuals as particularly vulnerable to conformity (Padilla et al., 2007; Thoroughgood et al., 2012). This research reflecting one's age and follower susceptibility may suggest that younger generations working for toxic leaders may have different, more compliant perceptions due to low self-concept clarity regarding responses to toxic leadership, demonstrating the need for this current study to illustrate employee perceptions regarding responses to toxic leaders. In addition, this current study contributes to the empirical need to understand to what extent do participant characteristics, such as generational identity, inform different viewpoints. To date, research has not investigated generational perceptions regarding responses to toxic leadership. Therefore, this study is an exploratory first step in bridging that gap to demonstrate the existing viewpoints and participant characteristics.

Unmet Basic Needs. Individuals with *unmet basic needs* are more prone as susceptible followers to destructive leadership (Padilla et al., 2007). To illustrate, Maslow's hierarchy of human's basic needs provides an understanding of fundamental human needs. For example, Maslow's hierarchy on basic needs and Lipman-Blumen's research surrounding toxic leadership may help explain why individuals choose to conform and stay in the toxic triangle. Lipman-Blumen demonstrates how Maslow's hierarchy and toxic leadership are related. For example, Lipman-Blumen (2005a, 2005b) asserts that toxic leadership victims sit on the sidelines and wait for others to bring toxic leaders to justice as escaping from a toxic leader may be too risky. According to Lipman-Blumen (2010), some reasons for an individual to stay with a toxic leader

may include “an assortment of practical needs – such as shelter, food, and doctor’s bills that need to be paid” (p. 217). In other words, Maslow’s hierarchy emphasizes that it is challenging to achieve greater pyramid levels if the lower-order basic needs are unmet (Maslow, 1971). Overall, knowing that unmet basic needs will imply that conformers within the toxic triangle may fear unmet basic needs if they leave the toxic work environment.

Additionally, Lipman-Bluman offers two explanations as to why individuals stay in toxic leader situations. First, as noted previously, Lipman-Blumen (2010) demonstrates that Maslow’s hierarchy plays a significant role in limiting employees who experience toxic relationships. In other words, there is a need to make money to secure the basic needs of food and shelter. The second reason followers stay with toxic leaders is their grandiose promises and unrealistic offers (Lipman-Blumen, 2010). As previously mentioned, there is a connection between susceptible followers in cults as there are grandiose promises cult leaders make to their followers. These grandiose promises may include toxic leaders who give privileges to specific groups of people. As a result of privileges, loyalty is secured, and the toxic leader remains in power.

In summary, conformers are vulnerable individuals who follow toxic leaders based on fear. Thoroughgood’s (2013) four dimensions underlying follower conformity explain what makes an individual susceptible to conforming. These four constructs of low core self-evaluations, personal life distress, low self-concept clarity, and unmet basic needs are helpful when examining followership from the toxic triangle perspective. Simply put, these four dimensions offer the clarity for understanding the variety of perceptions that exist regarding how employees respond to toxic leaders.

Collude. *Colluders* are one of the two broad categories for susceptible followers first identified by Padilla et al. (2007). According to Padilla et al. (2007), colluders actively engage

and support the toxic leader's agenda. As a result, colluders are susceptible followers concerned with their self-interest. Colluders may choose to follow a toxic leader to prevent the abuse from happening to them or get promoted. These two strategies illustrate that colluders are interested in self success. One's success may look different depending on one's goals, including monetary value and political reasons. For example, one might try to stay on the toxic leader's good side to remain unharmed. Regardless of one's goals, colluders are ambitious and share the toxic leader's selfish views (Padilla et al., 2007).

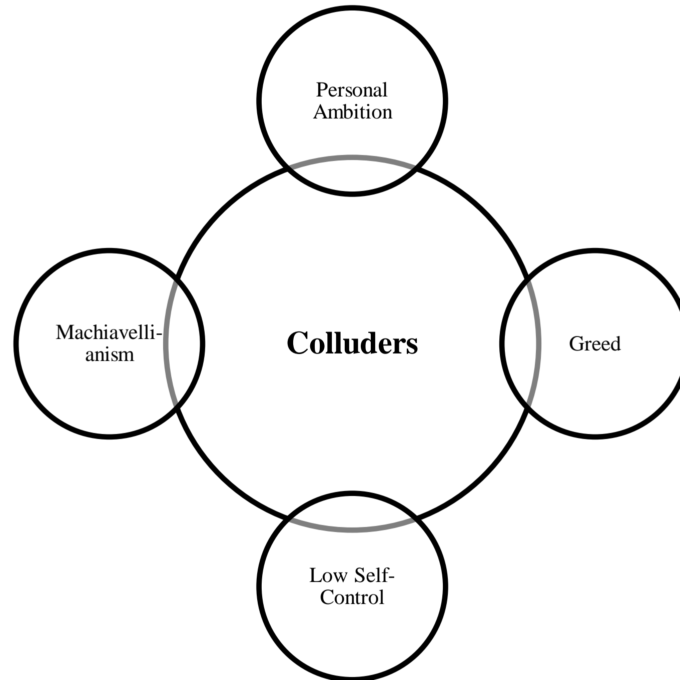
Toxic leaders may appear attractive to followers who identify as colluders. For example, Matos et al. (2018) suggest that toxic leaders carry confidence. In other words, this confidence influences others, and colluders may find a confident leader attractive. What is more, toxic leaders tend to appear influential to people in a higher power than themselves (Matos et al., 2018). In other words, this may suggest that toxic leaders were once colluder followers themselves. Relative to colluders, Schmidt (2008) identified specific toxic leader behaviors that demonstrate toxic leaders will say whatever to advance their agenda. According to this, if subordinates respond to toxic leaders by colluding, both the superior and subordinate share toxic leader views that revolve around personal gain.

Thoroughgood's (2013) research advances Padilla et al.'s (2007) work on characteristics of colluders. To illustrate, the four underlying dimensions that Thoroughgood (2013) examined included *personal ambition*, *greed*, *low self-control*, and *Machiavellianism* (*see* Figure 5). Thoroughgood (2013) determined that personal ambition was not highly correlated with colluders; in fact, personal ambition may be confused with the Machiavellianism construct, which measures status and success, too. Therefore, while personal ambition remains an unclear

dimension of colluders, this study included personal ambition as an underlying dimension to encapsulate the holistic understanding of colluders as first identified in Padilla et al. (2007).

Figure 5

Dimensions Underlying Follower Colluder with Destructive Leadership



Note. Layout adapted from "Follower Susceptibility to Destructive Leaders: Development and Validation of Conformer and Colluder Scales," by C. Thoroughgood, 2013, p. 138. Reprinted with permission.

Personal Ambition. *Personal ambition* is commonly referred to "as a desire to achieve ends, especially ends like success, power, and wealth" (Judge & Kammeyer-Mueller, 2012, p. 759). According to Padilla et al. (2007), an increase in an individual's ambition may make one more prone to colluder followership. On the one hand, we know that the toxic triangle has adverse effects in the workplace (Hoffman & Sergio, 2020). But, on the other hand, followers who collude under the toxic triangle may flourish and use their ambition to advance their agendas. Summed up, this means that a person with high levels of ambition may do whatever it takes to get ahead and follow the toxic leaders by promoting the toxic leader's agenda. This may

be why the personal ambition factor did not load as much as the other three factors (Thoroughgood, 2013).

Examining historical accounts of susceptible followers can help understand personal ambition and followership. First, Adolf Hitler is a prime example of utilizing individuals who are high in ambition. Researchers have shed light on how Hitler's leadership behaviors secured colluder followership by high personal ambition (Padilla et al., 2007). Additionally, Kellerman (2008) agrees that Hitler illustrates this type of followership. For example, Hitler instructed his susceptible followers to kill millions of Jews. In sum, Hitler's oppressive ideologies and hate ignited a path for individuals willing to get ahead by taking on Hitler's plan.

Another example of personal ambition and followership is the company Enron. Here, Enron went from being one of the most innovative companies to filing for bankruptcy in 2001 (Li, 2010). In this scenario, Enron fostered an organizational culture that promoted high levels of ambition. Enron leaders promoted a culture of a compelling vision and individual considerations by engaging in discourse to their employees that those hired were among the elite and the best employees across the globe (Tourish & Vatcha, 2005). Enron believed that it had to be the best at everything it did. As time went on, Enron did whatever it could to cover up its mistakes. Regarding follower susceptibility, colluders will do whatever it takes to get ahead, even if that means engaging in corruption or unethical behavior (e.g., personal financial gain or political gain) (Thoroughgood et al., 2012).

Greed. *Greed* can be defined "as a tendency to manipulate and betray others for personal gain" (Sekhar et al., 2020, p. 2). Historically, humans are scavengers, and this searching is the root cause of greed (Hayat & Naqvi, 2019). In organizations, the culture determines what appropriate and inappropriate behavior is. Therefore, organizational cultures that lack clear

policies may promote greedy behavioral tendencies. While administrative procedures serve a role to ensure the following of rules and regulations, they also serve another role in greed. Bruhn and Lowrey (2012) argue that an organization needs to ensure that greed does not take precedence. Toxic environments that do not follow organizational policies and lack institutionalization promote toxic leadership.

We can illustrate organizational greed from the previously mentioned case of investigating the leadership at Enron. In this scenario, Enron held a high presence of ambition and greed. Other organizations that illustrate these behaviors and beliefs include Bear Stearns, Fannie Mae, and Freddie Mac (Thoroughgood, 2013). In all these scenarios, leaders carried corporate greed in an attempt for financial gains. Based on this, a combination and high personal ambition and greed is a dangerous formula when responding to a toxic leader.

On the one hand, Thoroughgood et al.'s (2012) research demonstrate that excessive greed is a dangerous workplace trait to hold. However, on the other hand, other research suggests that being greedy has its positive outcomes in the workplace. For example, when a person is greedy, they may improve their job performance or ignore organizational norms by becoming innovative to achieve their success (Hayat & Naqvi, 2019). In another instance, Zhu et al. (2019) confirms Hayat and Naqvi (2019) and demonstrate that the more greed one has, the more the person will desire increased social status. In other words, this would suggest that the greedier the individual is, the more likely they will be to collude with toxic leaders. In sum, adding greed into the manifestations of the toxic triangle cultivates a dangerous situation to promote increased toxic leadership opportunities.

In addition, a relationship exists between employee job strain and greedy behaviors. In an empirical study examining how job strain affects employee greed of over 500 participants, Hayat

and Naqvi (2019) found that job strain positively and significantly predicts employee workplace deviance through employee greed. This means that when employees experience job strains such as psychological strain, role conflict, role ambiguity, anxiety, irritation, or dissatisfaction, they become greedy (Hayat & Naqvi, 2019). In other words, this would suggest that anxiety or other dissatisfying situations, like experiencing toxic leadership, may result in an individual becoming greedier. In fact, a toxic leader who promotes a culture that is high in strain may be contributing to susceptible followers and their manifestation of greed. If this is the case, the susceptible followers who experience strain may opt to do whatever is necessary to get ahead for their gain and ultimately view colluding as a resourceful way to respond to toxic leaders.

Low Self-Control. Self-control can be defined as the "tendency to avoid acts whose long-term costs exceed momentary advantages" (Gottfredson & Hirschi, 1994, p. 4). On the contrary, *low self-control* suggests that immediate gratification is superior to long-term advantages. In other words, self-control is impulse control. In fact, self-control in the workplace is different from self-control in other contexts, such as smoking cessation (Weinberger et al., 2021), weight-loss practices (Young et al., 2020), and spending (Flores-Pajot et al., 2021; Zinman, 2010). In these contexts, the outcomes affect oneself (e.g., getting healthy or saving money) and not the organization. Simply put, in these personal contexts, self-control outcomes relate to an individual's self and well-being beyond organizations. In the workplace, low self-control relates to colluders where the person will do whatever to get ahead. The outcome of employee self-control may hurt the organization's effectiveness (e.g., promote toxic leadership or cause financial loss and ruin). However, employee self-control outcomes often affect an organization financially (Kaur et al., 2015).

Research has shown that individuals with low levels of impulse control situate within the toxic triangle as susceptible followers who collude when money, status, and power are involved (Thoroughgood, 2013). This means that the colluder wants immediate gratification. Equally important, individuals with low levels of impulse control lack regard for ethics. As a result, when faced with a toxic leader, they may choose to follow along in the toxic leader's path of destruction and act only in their best interest. These self-interest tendencies parallel Schmidt's (2008) toxic leadership typology of self-promotion. In other words, they will do whatever it takes to get ahead and are only acting in their self-interest.

Research has investigated self-control in the workplace. For instance, the research examined specific concepts that contribute to low levels of self-control. To demonstrate, individuals who make decisions in an environment of high uncertainty experience less self-control (Conlon et al., 2012). Relative to toxic leadership, toxic leaders produce feelings of high uncertainty for followers. For example, characteristics of an unpredictable toxic leader include exhibiting anger at employees for unknown reasons in explosive outbursts and forcing employees to try to "read" the leader's mood (Schmidt, 2008). These behaviors may cause the subordinate who experiences these behaviors to feel high uncertainty. In other words, in the presence of high uncertainty, like toxic leadership, subordinates may have less self-control despite being a pre-existing trait. For an individual who has low self-control, this means that when faced with a toxic leader, they may not make the best decision when responding to a toxic leader.

Another example relative to self-control examines perspectives of subordinates who experience supervisor workplace abuse. For instance, Lian et al. (2014) investigated abusive supervision and retaliation while utilizing self-control as a framework to understand if

subordinates would or would not aggress against abusive supervision. In Lian et al.'s (2014) research, they found that employees were most likely to retaliate (e.g., aggressive behaviors and hostility towards a supervisor) against workplace abuse in the presence of low levels of self-control. This means that if individuals have low levels of self-control, they may be more likely to retaliate against workplace abuse, like toxic leadership. Specifically, employees who experience abusive leadership will expend their resources in an attempt to understand the cause of the abuse (Lian et al., 2014). This means that employees will spend their time and energy attempting to make sense of their experience rather than working. As a result, employees with low self-control have reduced interpersonal workplace relationships and lower productivity (Lian et al., 2014). In contrast, those with the ability to regulate self-control are less impacted by abusive leadership. These aggressive behaviors identified by Lian et al. (2014) are contrary to colluding with a toxic leader (Thoroughgood, 2013).

Machiavellianism. *Machiavellianism* is a psychological term based on Niccolo Machiavelli's foundational work, *The Prince* (Machiavelli, 1513/1998). Throughout Machiavelli's book, he argues that people can manipulate other people. Machiavellianism varies among definitions. It was not until Christie and Geis (1970) first proposed Machiavellianism as a psychological construct and defined it as "a strategy of social conduct that involves manipulating others for personal gain" (p. 285). This definition suggests that an individual high in Machiavellianism will engage in various unethical and deceitful behaviors to achieve their goals. Most notably related to Machiavellianism in the workplace, Kessler et al. (2010) define Machiavellianism "as the belief in the use of manipulation, as necessary, to achieve one's desired ends in the context of the work environment" (p. 1871). In sum, Machiavellianism focuses on manipulation and achieving one's goals at the expense of others.

Christie and Geis' (1970) developed a model consisting of four components to describe characteristics related to controlling and manipulating others. These four components include (a) lacking affect in interpersonal relationships (i.e., people are objects), (b) an absent concern for moral or ethical issues (i.e., manipulative people focus on utilitarianism), (c) lacking gross psychopathology (i.e., the manipulator takes an instrumental view of others to resolve problems), and (d) low ideological commitment (i.e., manipulators hold ideologies that focus on the short-term and quick tasks rather than the long-term goals) (*see* pp. 3-4). In addition, Christie and Geis (1970) developed a Machiavellianism measurement based on Niccolo Machiavelli's writings. In this measurement, participants rate their level of agreement with Machiavelli's writings.

Research examining Machiavellianism and the toxic triangle concepts is scarce. In one instance, Thoroughgood et al. (2012) began to shed light on susceptible followers who were high in Machiavellianism. This research suggested that susceptible followers high in Machiavellianism engage in destructive greed-like behaviors such as stealing and holding little regard for organizational rules and regulations (Thoroughgood et al., 2012). In another instance examining leadership solely, LeBreton et al. (2018) investigated the dark triad (i.e., malevolent personality traits) and workplace behavior, explicitly drawing on malevolent traits like psychopathy, narcissism, and Machiavellianism. LeBreton et al.'s (2018) research suggested a relationship between high Machiavellianism leaders and lower career satisfaction coupled with higher emotional exhaustion experienced by subordinates. In other words, Machiavellianism is associated with undesirable outcomes for subordinates.

In addition, Kessler et al. (2010) examined Machiavellianism in the workplace. Kessler et al. (2010) suggest that employees high in Machiavellianism are comfortable exploiting others to advance themselves. In other words, these employees reflect colluders. What is more, Kessler et

al. (2010) developed 91 items drawing on Machiavelli's foundational work, *The Prince* (1513/1998), which advised leaders on best practices for ruling people. As a result, Kessler et al. (2010) found that Machiavellianism is multifaceted and is composed of three specific dimensions: maintaining power, harsh management of others, and manipulativeness.

In summary, colluders actively support the toxic leader's plan because of their selfish tendencies. Padilla et al. (2007) and Thoroughgood (2013) provide depth into the dimensions of colluders to explain what makes an individual susceptible to colluding. These four dimensions included personal ambition, greed, low self-control, and Machiavellianism. Moreover, these dimensions are helpful when examining followership from the toxic triangle perspective to understand the variety of perceptions that exist regarding how employees respond to toxic leaders. Finally, investigating colluders as susceptible followers is imperative, given that leaders typically carry positions of power. Therefore, it is reasonable to assume that if colluders become the next leaders, this would suggest that the colluder would take control, and toxic leadership would continue within an organization.

Remain Silent. Employee silence is a pervasive problem in modern workplaces. Employees who *remain silent* are defined broadly as an intentional behavior in which an individual withholds information, opinions, concerns, and suggestions on workplace problems (Erkutlu & Chafra, 2018; Van Dyne et al., 2003). More specifically, employee silence is "the withholding of any form of genuine expression about the individual's behavioral, cognitive and/or affective evaluations of his or her organizational circumstances to persons who are perceived to be capable of effecting change or redress" (Pinder & Harlos, 2001, p. 334). Equally important, scholars argue that employee silence is multidimensional and complex (Knoll & van Dick, 2013; Pinder & Harlos, 2001; Van Dyne et al., 2003). For example, although speaking up

and voicing concerns is needed to solve workplace problems, sometimes, people do not speak up because they do not have something meaningful to solve the problem (Morrison, 2014). However, people do not speak up because they fear repercussions, like backlash from their supervisor (Knoll et al., 2019). In other words, remaining silent may be safer. Table 1 illustrates employee silence.

Table 1

Silence Literature

Pinder and Harlos (2001)	Van Dyne et al. (2003)	Knoll and van Dick (2013)
Acquiescent silence	Acquiescent silence	Acquiescent silence
Quiescent silence	Defensive silence	Quiescent silence
	Prosocial silence	Prosocial silence
		Opportunistic silence

Note. These authors identify employee silence as a multidimensional construct.

Knoll and van Dick's (2013) research was the first to empirically examine and conceptualize four forms of employee silence. These four forms of silence include *acquiescent silence*, *quiescent silence*, *prosocial silence*, and *opportunistic silence*. Furthermore, they contributed to the investigation surrounding employee silence by developing and validating a measurement of the four forms of employee silence. Each of these forms of silence refrains from calling attention to workplace issues, promoting increased toxic leadership opportunities.

Acquiescent Silence. Pinder and Harlos (2001) coined *acquiescent silence* to make sense of additional employee silence within organizations concerning an unjust work setting. Acquiescent silence refers to silence that withholds "relevant ideas, information, or opinions, based on resignation" (Van Dyne et al., 2003, p. 1366). Resignation is one characteristic related to acquiescent silence (Pinder & Harlos, 2001). These emotions suggest that individuals are typically uninvolved even when they may have ideas to solve a problem. Namely, speaking up

for individuals who resonate with acquiescent silence is viewed as too taxing (Van Dyne et al., 2003). In other words, speaking up would require too much effort. For example, an employee may believe that speaking up is pointless and that saying anything will not make a difference. As a result, the employee feels hopeless and acts passively.

Acquiescent silence manifests as a follower response within the toxic triangle. A toxic authoritarian leader provides one illustration for why a follower may choose acquiescent silence. For instance, a toxic authoritarian leader will only support their ideas and ignore differing views (Schmidt, 2008). Additionally, toxic authoritarian leaders will decide all the decisions while maintaining no regard for others (Schmidt, 2008). In other words, toxic authoritarian leaders will not allow subordinates to approach goals in new ways. This would suggest that an employee who has a new idea to solve a problem will not speak up and resonate with acquiescent silence because they feel that saying anything is pointless. Equally important, followers may respond using acquiescent silence because they know that the toxic leader will not change. In sum, feelings of hopelessness emerge for the follower.

Quiescent Silence. The second type of silence that Pinder and Harlos (2001) coined was *quiescent silence*. Quiescent silence refers to a state of "disagreement with one's circumstances, in effect suffering in silence while being aware of existing alternatives to change the status quo, yet unwilling to explore them" (Pinder & Harlos, 2001, p. 348). Like conformers, being fearful motivates an individual who chooses quiescent silence. Employees who respond with quiescent silence disagree with a specific action and have alternative views. Yet, these employees choose to withhold information for their best interest while maintaining an interest in their work (Knoll & van Dick, 2013). Simply put, these employees suffer in silence.

Quiescent silence manifests within the toxic triangle. For example, an unpredictable toxic leader may explain why employees navigate toxic leadership by engaging in quiescent silence. To demonstrate, an unpredictable toxic leader has explosive outbursts and expresses anger at their employees for unknown reasons (Schmidt, 2008). As a result, these toxic leader behaviors can cause individuals to walk on eggshells around the workplace. Schmidt's (2008) specific toxic leader behaviors are consistent with Pinder and Harlos's (2001) research regarding quiescent silence. Namely, Pinder and Harlos (2001) demonstrate that characteristics of those engaging in quiescent silence include fear, anger, despair, cynicism, and depression. As a result, these individuals who experience unpredictable toxic leaders may choose to remain quiet for fear of the erratic behavior that their leader portrays.

Prosocial Silence. *Prosocial silence* can be defined "as withholding work-related ideas, information, or opinions to benefit other people or the organization – based on altruism or cooperative motives" (Van Dyne et al., 2003, p. 1368). Hence, individuals who engage in prosocial silence will be concerned about their co-workers, supervisors, or organization. More importantly, these individuals who engage in prosocial silence are concerned with the organization's unity and stability and may conceal information that negatively affects it. The prime motivation behind this type of silence is concerned with the distress for others rather than the fear of one's consequences that they may face as a repercussion from speaking up (Van Dyne et al., 2003). In fact, Knoll and van Dick (2013) suggest that an individual may engage in prosocial silence for many reasons, including a general altruistic personality, being motivated for affiliation, maintaining social capital, and protecting social identity. As a result of prosocial silence, positive outcomes for the organization emerge (Knoll et al., 2019). However, adverse

effects occur for the external stakeholder who is not informed and increase stress for the person maintaining silence.

Prosocial silence manifests within the toxic triangle. For example, there may be a distinct parallel between prosocial silence and colluders, both situated as susceptible followers. To illustrate, an individual may see their toxic leader engaging in unethical behavior in the workplace. Despite this unethical behavior, this individual may decide to remain silent for the organization's good. Relative to colluding, this individual may have goals someday to take over that high power position. As a result, these employees will do whatever it takes to preserve their social status because they do not want to get their leader or organization in trouble. In that case, that individual may do whatever it takes to save the organization's face.

In contrast, there may also be a parallel between prosocial silence and conforming. Similar to prosocial silence and colluders, as identified in the previous paragraph, prosocial silence and conformers are susceptible followers. In other words, prosocial silence is a tactic used by susceptible followers. To illustrate, individuals may choose to remain silent rather than voicing their concerns in a toxic leadership situation to ensure that their co-workers do not get in trouble. In other words, prosocial silence ensures co-workers are protected against the toxic leader.

Opportunistic Silence. Knoll and van Dick (2013) proposed *opportunistic silence* as the fourth type of silence. This form of silence is based on Williamson's (1985) term of opportunism and one's self-interest. Opportunistic silence is silence in which employees choose to withhold information in their self-interest (Knoll & van Dick, 2013) or avoid additional workload (Knoll et al., 2019). Here, the primary motive to remain silent is to mislead, disguise, or cause confusion in the organization or among their co-workers (Knoll & van Dick, 2013). While this is a

relatively new term, research has identified information withholding as a counter-productive work behavior in which employee behaviors negatively affect organizational effectiveness (Younus et al., 2020). In combination, both opportunistic silence and toxic leadership cause adverse organizational outcomes.

Opportunistic silence manifests within the toxic triangle. For example, while research has not explicitly studied opportunistic silence concerning the toxic triangle, past research has examined personality traits, like narcissism and silence in the workplace (Mousa et al., 2020; Wu et al., 2018). Regarding opportunistic silence, Wu et al. (2018) found that employees choose to remain silent because of role conflict, role ambiguity, and role overload when under destructive leadership. This means that employees choose to remain silent because of depleted resources. In fact, employees viewed remaining silent as a safer way to navigate destructive leaders (Wu et al., 2018). In other words, employees do not want to be given more tasks under destructive leaders.

In summary, silence may look like a simple construct. Yet, silence is anything but simple. Padilla et al. (2007) provide an initial understanding of follower susceptibility by examining conformers and colluders. Yet, Padilla et al.'s (2007) two dimensions for responding to toxic leaders remain insufficient for advancing the multidimensional complexity behind followership. In fact, Padilla et al. (2007) present response types for followers rather than tactics. Therefore, as a result, more research is needed to look at silence with a multifaceted lens. Hence, for this study, I do not view silence as an absence of voice. Instead, I view silence in a variety of forms. Moreover, the driving force of silence is employee motives. Therefore, I view silence as multidimensional, consistent with Van Dyne et al.'s (2003) views. As a result, this study will focus on the four motives: resignation *(acquiescent)*, fear *(quiescent)*, altruism *(prosocial)*, and self-interest *(opportunistic)*.

Voice Overview. Both employee *voice* and employee *silence* are two types of behaviors. While voice and silence in the workplace may seem like simple constructs on the surface, Van Dyne et al. (2003) argue that voice and silence are complex and multidimensional. In this section, I focus solely on voice in the workplace. Table 2 illustrates voice. What is more, researchers have identified employee voice as a behavior rather than perception (LePine & Van Dyne, 1998; Weiss & Morrison, 2019). Accordingly, LePine and Van Dyne (2001) define voice "as constructive change-oriented communication intended to improve the situation" (p. 326). However, LePine and Van Dyne's (2001) definition of voice does not cover all three types of Van Dyne et al.'s (2003) voice because two (e.g., acquiescent voice and defensive voice) out of the three voices are submissive, passive voices that do not improve the overall situation for the organization. While voice is a complex construct, one thing remains clear. To engage in voice, one must be motivated to engage in voice behaviors (Morrison, 2014). In other words, to be motivated means that if individuals can meaningfully contribute to solving the problem and bring about change (i.e., confront the problem), they will be more likely to engage in voice.

Table 2

Literature Surrounding Voice

Van Dyne and LePine (1998)	Van Dyne et al. (2003)	Park et al. (2008)
Voice	Acquiescent Voice	Formal vs. Informal
	Defensive Voice	Identified vs. Anonymous
	Prosocial Voice	Internal vs. External

Note. This voice literature identifies the viewpoints of employee voice.

While examining voice that applies to organizational behavior, three categories of voice emerge. These categories include (1) formal and informal (i.e., formal procedures and policies), (2) direct and indirect (i.e., talking directly to the person), and (2) individual and collective (i.e.,

in a group or by oneself) (Wilkinson et al., 2018). Additionally, many individuals can engage in voice. Examples of people who engage in voice include oneself, co-workers, a direct supervisor, and constituents outside of the organization (Morrison, 2014). For the goals of this study, I will focus directly on the voice that applies to organizational behavior in which the voice is used specifically at the supervisor to address problems with toxic leadership. In other words, this study will focus on the individual who experiences toxic leadership. Research has not studied how active voice (i.e., unsusceptible followers like confronters) manifests within the toxic triangle. Therefore, this study will investigate employee perceptions and responses regarding toxic leadership in the modern workplace.

As previously mentioned, this study adopts Van Dyne et al.'s (2003) approach that voice is a multidimensional construct and complex. To illustrate, Van Dyne et al. (2003) present a conceptualized framework that provides three subconstructs of voice. These include *acquiescent voice*, *defensive voice*, and *prosocial voice*. As previously mentioned, acquiescent and defensive voices are both *passive* forms of voice. Alternatively, prosocial voice is an *active*, vocal response to implement change (i.e., confronters). In other words, *passive* voice *promotes* toxic leadership opportunities, whereas *active* voice *decreases* toxic leadership opportunities.

Passive Voice. Mergen and Ozbilgin (2021) argue that followers are "not passive, innocent bystanders" due to their "willful, self-interest" (p. 7). This current study's belief is consistent with Mergen and Ozbilgin's (2021) beliefs. For instance, choosing not to act is also a choice, one that supports the status quo. In other words, innocent bystanders are passive followers and agents who sustain and support the toxic leader, despite not wanting to support toxic leaders. This means that, sometimes, individuals must engage in passive voice to protect themselves. To illustrate, acquiescent voice and defensive voice are two dimensions of *passive*

voice. Simply put, individuals who engage in a passive voice approach will submissively agree with the toxic leader because of resigning or protecting themselves. Consequently, using one's voice passively may be a safer route than using active voice. Furthermore, as previously mentioned, passive voice promotes toxic leadership opportunities.

Acquiescent Voice. First, the term *acquiescent voice* is "the verbal expression of work-related ideas, information, or opinions – based on feelings of resignation" (Van Dyne et al., 2003, pp. 1372-1373). In other words, the individual will express support for a project, despite having negative feelings. Expressing support for a toxic leader may be more likely in toxic leadership situations. For instance, Schmidt (2008) demonstrates, toxic authoritarian leaders will ignore ideas that are contrary to his or her own, resulting in a follower who engages in acquiescent voice to go along with the status quo of the toxic authoritarian leader. In addition, going along with the status quo is passive communication. In sum, employees who engage in acquiescent voice will automatically support a project even when they have hesitations about potential problems that may arise.

What is more, individuals with low self-efficacy respond using acquiescent voice (Van Dyne et al., 2003). In other words, those with low self-efficacy passively agree with the group. In addition, this passive voice is a form of groupthink. Groupthink is "a mode of thinking that people engage in when they are deeply involved in a cohesive in-group when the members' strivings for unanimity override their motivation to realistically appraise alternative courses of action…a deterioration of mental efficiency, reality testing, and moral judgment that results from in-group pressures" (Janis, 1983, p. 9). Groupthink is dangerous because it leads individuals to set aside their own opinions to conform to the group's decisions. In toxic leadership situations, conforming has been shown to promote toxic leadership opportunities (Padilla et al., 2007).

Consequently, this type of voice does not contribute to the organization's greater good (Lee et al., 2018).

Defensive Voice. Second, *defensive voice* can be defined "as expressing work-related ideas, information or opinions – based on fear – with the goal of protecting the self" (Van Dyne et al., 2003, p. 1372). Specific examples of defensive voice include blaming others for problems, moving the attention away, and offering justifications for their actions (Van Dyne et al., 2003). Protecting oneself is key in a defensive voice. Researchers argue that individuals must feel safe to voice their concerns (Klaas et al., 2012). Likewise, defensive voice is similar to acquiescent voice because both are submissive forms of communication and passively agree rather than voicing true concerns for a problem within the workplace. Namely, in defensive voice, a passive agreement is a tactic used to protect oneself. In other words, individuals who engage in a passive defensive voice may agree with a toxic leader by saying whatever it takes to move the attention away from themselves.

Regarding the toxic triangle, an individual may want to engage in a defensive voice to protect themselves and feel safe from the wrath of the toxic leader. For example, if individuals fear consequences from voicing their concerns about a toxic leader, they may use a defensive voice to protect themselves. Even more, research argues that when policies are in place, individuals will be more likely to be vocal about their concerns because they feel as if these policies are a safety net (Klaas et al., 2012). In other words, when policies are lacking, an environment that promotes toxic leadership is generated.

Unsusceptible Followers

This study contributes to the toxic triangle to better understand individuals who may be less susceptible as followers based on their response to toxic leaders. For this study,

unsusceptible followers use *active voice*, such as *prosocial voice* and *whistleblowing* (i.e., confronters). What is more, unsusceptible followers speak up about wrongdoing within an organization. Specifically, related to the toxic triangle, this active voice is speaking up against a toxic leader. First, this section will give an overview of active voice. Then, it will discuss how prosocial voice benefits the organization. Finally, the text presents whistleblowing as a characteristic of unsusceptible followers to illustrate how whistleblowers may engage in reporting wrongdoings within organizations.

Active Voice. In the workplace, an *active voice* allows individuals to express their concerns about a problem. In other words, an individual can *confront* the problem. *Prosocial voice* and *whistleblowing* are two different types of active voice. Under toxic leadership, employees who engage in active voice and vocalize their concerns face a double-edged sword. This double-edged sword means that, on the one hand, employees are raising concerns about some organizational problems. Raising concerns and confronting a problem provides hope that leads to positive organizational outcomes such as team performance (Sherf et al., 2018) or overall employee performance (Huang et al., 2018). However, on the other hand, employees who voice their concerns may become the next target of the toxic leader as they often face reprisals for speaking out (Liang & Yeh, 2019). As a result, employees must carefully weigh the pros and cons of engaging in voice under toxic leadership.

Prosocial Voice. Next, I examine *prosocial voice*. While defensive and prosocial voices may look similar on the outside, understanding an individual's motivation is critical in differentiating the two constructs. A defensive voice's motivation is in one's best interest, whereas a prosocial voice focuses on the organization's interest. Most notably, prosocial voice is an active form of voice. Specifically, prosocial voice is the act of "expressing work-related ideas,

information, or opinions based on cooperative motives" (Van Dyne et al., 2003, p. 1371). In addition, prosocial voice focuses on altruism, such as cooperative efforts benefiting the organization (Van Dyne et al., 2003). To illustrate, examples of prosocial voices include alternative ideas for change and the organization's benefit (Van Dyne et al., 2003).

Prosocial voice may be the riskiest of the three types of voice. To illustrate, Liang and Yeh (2019) investigated whether employee voice in organizations may produce social isolation in a group. To answer this research question, they surveyed employer and employee dyads. Findings suggested a significant positive relationship between voicing concerns (i.e., confronting the problem) and workplace bullying. This means that employees who voice their concerns may suffer from rejections and resistance from other employees in their workplace. It could also mean that those who experience bullying may be more likely to speak up. However, this may be risky because individuals must be willing to speak up even when not following the status quo. For example, suppose an individual responds using a prosocial voice within the toxic triangle and against the toxic leader's beliefs. In that case, they may be at risk for repercussions from the toxic leader.

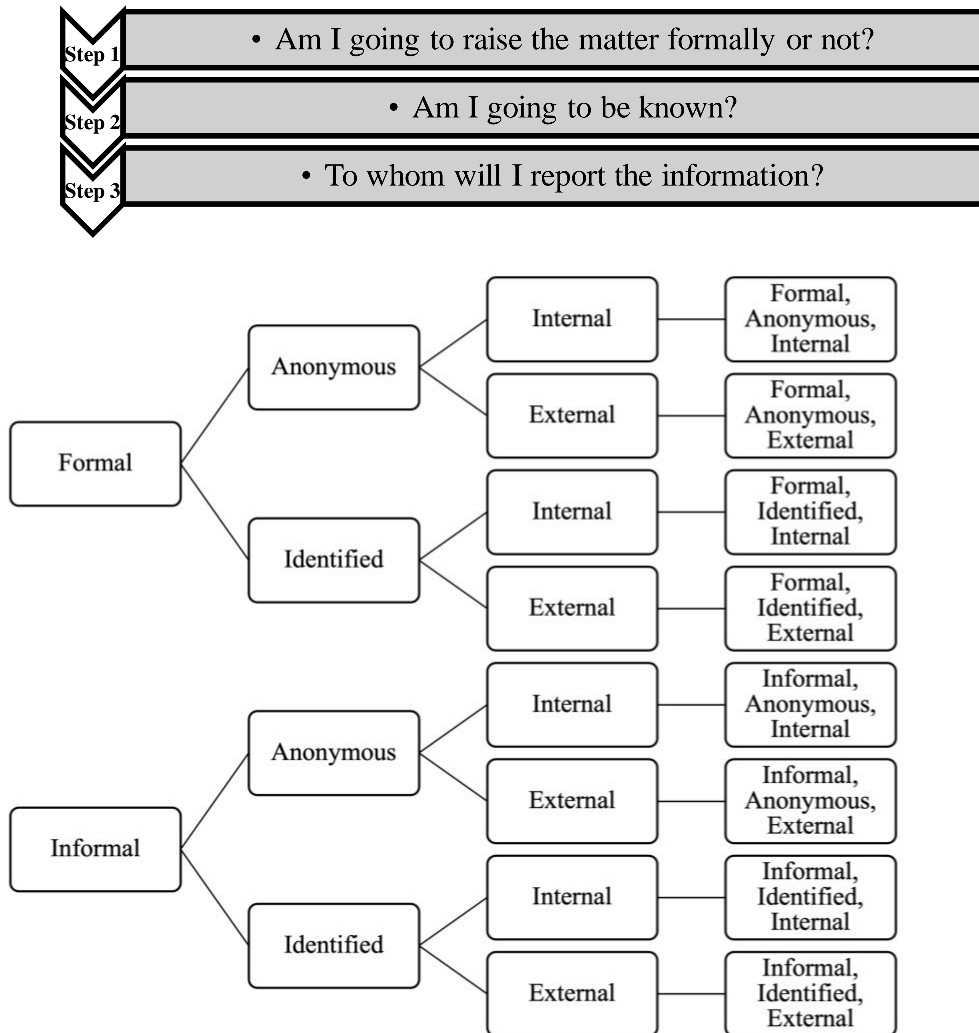
Whistleblowing. *Whistleblowing* is a term used in the workplace to describe an individual prosocial voice that reports the wrongdoing of another individual or organization to someone or some entity that can stop the wrongdoing behavior (Near & Miceli, 1985). In other words, "whistleblowers" are employees who express their concerns. According to Near and Miceli (1985), whistleblowers have at least four characteristics. First, the individual must be part of the organization where the wrongdoing occurs. Second, the individual must lack the power to make changes and hold a lower-level position than those doing the wrongdoing. Third, the whistleblower may remain anonymous (*also see* Elliston, 1982). Fourth, individuals may have

roles in which whistleblowing is part of their job (e.g., internal auditors, ombudsmen). However, as Near and Miceli (1985) demonstrate, a whistleblower may feel pressure to remain silent despite the last two characteristics.

Park et al. (2008) provide greater depth to Near and Miceli's (1985) definition of whistleblowers by providing a typology of whistleblowing. Park et al.'s (2008) research focused on three dimensions of whistleblowing. These three dimensions are *formal* versus *informal*, *identified* versus *anonymous*, and *internal* versus *external*. According to these three components, whistleblowers must make three decisions that could happen in any sequence. Typically, it begins with first deciding which communication channel will be utilized for reporting the whistleblowing (formal versus informal). Here, the whistleblower must ask themselves: *Am I going to raise the matter formally or not?* Second, whistleblowers must decide if they want to be known (anonymous versus identified). Finally, whistleblowers much choose to whom they will report the information (internal versus external). Each of these three dimensions provides employees with eight choices for reporting questionable acts within the workplace (*see* Figure 6).

Figure 6

A Typology of Whistleblowing



Note. Figure 6 illustrates the three steps and eight ways to blow the whistle. Adapted from "Cultural Orientation and Attitudes Toward Different Forms of Whistleblowing: A Comparison of South Korea, Turkey and the UK," by H. Park, J. Blenkinsopp, M. K. Oktem, and U. Omurgonulsen, 2008, *Journal of Business Ethics, 82*(4), p. 18 (https://doi.org/10.1007/s10551-007-9603-1).

As mentioned previously, Park et al.'s (2008) research illustrate the eight ways to call attention to workplace concerns. More precisely, Park et al. (2008) examined various ways employees use whistleblowing in organizations across cultures. To demonstrate, Park et al. (2008) distributed surveys to students across three different cultures. This research aimed to

study the relationship between nationality, cultural orientation, and attitudes towards the various ways in which employees may engage in whistleblowing. Results from this study indicated that regardless of nationality or cultural background, participants preferred formal, anonymous, and internal methods of whistleblowing.

The first dimension of whistleblowing is *formal* versus *informal whistleblowing*. As previously mentioned, the whistleblower must ask themselves: *Am I going to raise the matter formally or not?* First, formal whistleblowing refers to the formal procedures for reporting wrongdoing (Park et al., 2008). This means that the organization will have policies and standard procedures for reporting misconduct. For example, a person may choose formal procedures if a company provides clear directions on reporting illegal or dishonest activity. Examples of these formal procedures may include having the whistleblower contact their immediate supervisor or the Human Resources Director and coordinating any necessary corrective action. Thus, this dimension of whistleblowing referencing checks and balances is within the environmental component of Padilla et al.'s (2007) toxic triangle. Consequently, if procedures for formal whistleblowing are nonexistent, the whistleblower must choose an informal whistleblowing method.

In comparison, informal whistleblowing is when an individual informally tells someone they trust (e.g., another colleague) about the wrongdoing. The individual engaging in informal whistleblowing trusts that the person to whom the wrongdoing has been reported will help to correct the wrongdoing. Informal whistleblowing may provide safety and security to an individual whistleblower if they do not feel safe formally reporting the wrongdoing. If formal procedures are not in place, then the whistleblower must informally report the misconduct. Park et al.'s (2008) research demonstrated that participants preferred formal whistleblowing over

informal. In terms of the toxic triangle, this would mean that a conducive environment to toxic leadership is enhanced if policies and procedures for formal whistleblowing are not in place.

Next, the second dimension of whistleblowing is *anonymous* versus *identified*. This classification refers to whether the whistleblower can be linked-to reporting the wrongdoing. For example, anonymous whistleblowers only express concerns about wrongdoing if they remain anonymous. In other words, they only report wrongdoing without revealing their name or by using an alias (Park et al., 2008). On the other hand, identified whistleblowing is voicing concerns about wrongdoing even if that individual can be identified. To illustrate, disclosing one's name while reporting the wrongdoing would be an example of identified whistleblowing.

The literature is inconclusive about whether remaining anonymous or being linked to reporting wrongdoing is best. In one example, Near and Miceli (1985) state that individuals are likely to report wrongdoing when rewards are in place (e.g., provides monetary rewards). In another example, Park et al.'s (2008) research demonstrated that participants preferred anonymous whistleblowing means rather than identified means. What is more, Putri (2018) agrees with Park et al.'s (2008) research surrounding anonymous whistleblowing measures. That is, Putri (2018) argues that whistleblowers were more likely to report fraudulent activity through anonymous means even when a reward system was in place for an identified whistleblower. In sum, this latter finding from Putri (2018) means that whistleblowers perceive that the risks inherent in identification cannot be offset by a reward when reporting fraudulent activities or other wrongdoings.

Finally, the third dimension of *internal* versus *external whistleblowing* is the foundation for whether an individual gives information to someone inside or outside the workplace (Park et al., 2008). More specifically, internal whistleblowing shares the wrongdoing with someone

inside the organization (e.g., upper management). As a result, internal whistleblowing is risky because the employee who engages in it may face reprisals from others, such as rejection even though they want what is best for the organization (Park et al., 2008). In contrast, external whistleblowing refers to sharing the wrongdoing with outside forces (e.g., the media, authorities, and the public). In other words, these external entities have the power to correct the wrongdoing. In one instance, Park and Lewis (2018) examined adverse health effects on individuals who identified as external whistleblowers. In this study, external whistleblowers experienced organizational retaliation, which negatively impacted their emotional well-being. While both types of whistleblowing have proven to be risky, Park et al. (2008) research found that participants preferred internal whistleblowing over external whistleblowing.

While voice may seem like a simple construct on the surface, it is anything but such. The voice literature suggests that voice can be a submissive response, like passively agreeing with an individual. In this case, *passive* responses promote *follower susceptibility*. Alternatively, voice can be an active prosocial response, like addressing a concern for the organization's good. In this case, *active* responses promote *follower unsusceptibility*. Regardless of voice type, each of the subconstructs of the voice of acquiescent voice, defensive voice, and prosocial voice, including whistleblowing, are different based on an individual's motivation and behavior (i.e., what is being communicated).

Summary

In summary, this section covered a wide range of susceptible and unsusceptible followers. On the one hand, susceptible followers perpetuate characteristics like conforming, colluding, remaining silent, or engaging in passive voice. These characteristics of susceptible followers are problematic responses to toxic leaders for various reasons. However, the most

significant reason is that toxic leadership continues to flourish, and increased toxic leadership opportunities remain widespread. On the other hand, unsusceptible followers use active voice, such as prosocial voice and whistleblowing (i.e., confronters). The purpose of active voice is to speak out about the wrongdoing within the organization, resulting in decreased toxic leadership opportunities from unsusceptible followers. It is important to note that decreased toxic leadership opportunities are not always the result if an individual's report is not successful (i.e., the upper management that they report the toxic leader to is also toxic or if upper management does not do anything with that information). However, individuals who speak out still face risks such as reprisals if policies and procedures are not in place for reporting those behaviors.

Thus, we can make the following conclusions about how employees view responding to toxic leaders. While the underlying reasons for reporting toxic leaders are complex and far-reaching, it is reasonable to assume that many employees will fall into one or more of these categories of susceptible or unsusceptible followers when faced with toxic leadership. In other words, individuals may respond differently to toxic leaders. However, it remains unclear what variety of subjective responses regarding toxic leaders exist. More specifically, this section has shown that the same behaviors can result from different perceptions of the situation. As a result, this study will quantify the subjective opinions of responses regarding toxic leaders and identify areas of consensus and differing beliefs about those responses. This exploratory study will be the first to shed light on employee subjective viewpoints and their responses regarding toxic leadership.

Generations

The purpose of this section is to illustrate differences among the four generations currently in the workforce. Additionally, this review will demonstrate how those generational

differences may manifest and present themselves within the toxic triangle. In doing so, the section will show the tendencies of each of the four generations to suggest why conflict within the workplace may arise naturally.

Generational Labels

First, I would be remiss if I did not mention generational labels while discussing generations. Generational labels describe a specific generation. Generations are a social perspective as a group of individuals spanning approximately two decades in a particular period who share historical and socio-cultural contexts (Mannheim, 1952; Pilcher, 1994; Rudolph et al., 2020). On the surface, generations may appear clear cut with birth years defining their boundaries. However, research illustrates generational labels are more complex than placing individuals within these defined boundaries. Simply put, Campbell et al. (2017) refer to generations as "fuzzy social constructs" (p. 130). What is more, depending on the article one reads, generational cohorts have varying birth years (Rudolph et al., 2020). However, one thing is clear. It seems that researchers cannot agree upon an exact year of any of the birth years and that generational lines are arbitrary (Costanza & Finkelstein, 2015). As a result, generational boundaries remain blurred and are contentious for debate within empirical research.

This study uses the generational labels of Baby Boomers, Generation X, Millennials, and Generation Z to classify the four generations in the modern workplace. This study will apply generational labels for consistency with past research. Moreover, these generational labels will help understand the social perspectives that describe the individual changes over time (Campbell et al., 2017; Rudolph & Zacher, 2017). As a result of these arbitrary lines used to categorize individuals, this study is careful to follow the recommendations of past research when studying generations. For example, past research cautions that research surrounding generations remain

cognizant of ensuring that generational membership does not explain *why* individuals act the way they do (Costanza & Finkelstein, 2017). But instead, the use of generational labels is acceptable if they do not explain the causes of why someone does something the way they do. Consequently, this study will remain cautious not to use generational labels to explain the way that certain groups act. Instead, the purpose of this study is to distinguish the variety of perceptions regarding responses to toxic leadership in the modern workplace and to determine to what extent do participant characteristics, such as generational cohort, inform differing viewpoints. Then, based on those participant characteristics, relate this current study's findings to prior research, concepts, theories, and ideas.

Generational Differences, Intergenerational Conflict, and Perceptions

Mannheim (1952) first conceptualized generational diversity. According to Mannheim, individuals make up generational groups based on shared social experiences and historical events during one's lifetime. Examples of social experiences and historical events include World War II, the Vietnam War, massive corporate layoffs, 9/11, and the recessions of 2000 and 2008 (Christensen et al., 2018). As shown below, much research explores generational differences and characteristics (*see* Table 3). Research has suggested that generations do hold different values from one another. However, researchers who study generational differences often have various views as to whether generational differences exist.

Table 3

Generational Differences

	Traditionalists	Baby Boomers	Generation Xers	Millennials	Generation Zers
Birth Years	1922-1945	1946-1964	1965-1979	1980-1995	1996-2012
AKA	Veterans Silent Generation Matures	Me generation	Latchkey kids	Generation Y	iGeneration
Age (in 2021)	76-99	57-75	42-56	26-41	9-25
Personal Characteristics	Hard-working	Dedicated	Independent	Open-minded	Open to new experiences
Work Characteristics	Prefers hierarchy and top-down chain of command	Competitive	Outcome-oriented	Team-oriented	Teamwork and outcomes-oriented
Work is	Employer loyalty Privilege	Live to work	Work-life balance	Work smarter, not harder	Flexibility
Change jobs	Almost never	Rarely	Only if necessary	Sometimes	Regularly
Motivated by	Clear expectations Flexibility in hours worked	Money Rank Prestige	Flexibility Freedom	Work-life balance	Transparency Self-Reliance Personal Freedom

Note. This information was based on statistics and research in 2021 (Bursch & Kelly, 2014; Christensen et al., 2018; Dawson, 2021; Gabrielova & Buchko, 2021; Galdames & Guihen, 2020; Lyons & Kuron, 2013; Wiedmer, 2015).

On the one hand, Costanza and Finkelstein (2015) argue that no theoretical backing to generational-based differences exists. In fact, Costanza and Finkelstein (2015) say that this is because *age* (birth years are arbitrary), *period* (varied historical periods), and *cohort* (various shared experiences among groups) are challenging to separate as effects to generational-based differences. However, on the other hand, Geeraerts et al. (2021) argue that differences among generational cohorts exist when examining chronological age. As a result, Geeraerts et al. (2021) recommend future research exploring differences other than age, such as experience, tenure, or seniority. Therefore, this current study examines age along with experience with toxic leadership.

Intergenerational Differences and Conflict. Different ideologies held among generations may promote conflict. For instance, Leavitt (2014) argues that differences among generations can lead to conflict within the workplace, and more research is needed to understand these differences. One way that an individual can understand these differences, as Leavitt (2014) suggests, is that each generation must recognize and embrace different generational preferences. As a result of embracing differences, this will increase productivity and enhance employee engagement (Leavitt, 2014). This would indicate that if other generations do not value generational preferences that this may cause an increase in workplace conflict. Thus, toxic leadership may stem from leaders who do not embrace generational differences. In other words, this embracing generational differences situates within the cultural values dimension of the conducive environment. That is, examining other things that generations value and place preferences on.

In another study, Urick et al. (2017) argue that it is not the actual differences among generations but rather the perceptions of generational differences that may promote intergenerational conflict. In Urick et al.'s (2017) study, researchers presented a model that explains how perceived intergenerational differences may result in conflict along with strategies to manage that conflict. Urick et al. (2017) interviewed older and younger individuals. As a result of these interviews, results showed that tensions between generations emerge from perceptions. These tensions include perceptions of *values* (e.g., closed-minded versus open-minded), *behaviors* (e.g., earned versus entitled; leveraging technology usage), and *identity-based* (e.g., self-versus team approach) differences. Because of these perceptions, Urick et al. (2017) suggest that research should not forget about generational differences and that more research is needed looking at generational perceptions. In another study, Rauvola et al. (2019)

agree by indicating that what people expect of certain generations and common misconceptions promote intergenerational conflict.

What is more, recent attraction investigating the relationship between generational differences and intergenerational conflict. Numerous empirical articles have attempted to make sense of conflict among generations (Ho & Yeung, 2021; Sipocz et al., 2021; Yaghoobzadeh et al., 2020). Perhaps the recent attention is due to age diversity becoming increasingly prevalent within the workplace with four generations with four different values, beliefs, and perceptions in the workplace working simultaneously. Research refers to two terms to describe intergenerational differences and conflict: *intergenerational conflict* and *ageism*. First, *ageism* is the stereotyping and prejudice toward older individuals (Yaghoobzadeh et al., 2020). In other words, these stereotypes and prejudices compose of individual beliefs, attitudes, and behaviors. Yaghoobzadeh et al. (2020) reviewed over 200 articles to investigate intergenerational contact and ageism. In other words, they examined ageism and the beliefs, attitudes, and behaviors among intergenerational relationships looking at moderating factors such as age, gender, and culture. Yaghoobzadeh et al. (2020) discovered that ageism toward older adults is pervasive across Western and Eastern countries. Relative to this current study, this would suggest that ageism exists towards older adults in the United States. Second, *intergenerational conflict* is conflict among generational cohorts, whether younger or older than one's generational cohort. Regardless, both terms describe the age-related conflict.

In another study, Sipocz et al. (2021) investigated intergenerational conflict and connectivity by examining discourse on Twitter during the COVID-19 pandemic. In other words, Sipocz et al. (2021) examined intergenerational conflict and discourse in a time of crisis to identify speech relative to conflict and connectedness. While not all may agree with this analogy,

the toxic triangle may portray a similar experience to the COVID-19 pandemic as both are crises. To illustrate, within the toxic triangle, the time of crisis perpetuates chaos and dysfunctional organizational misbehaviors for those classified as *susceptible* or *unsusceptible followers*. Furthermore, Sipocz et al. (2021) concluded that generational stereotypes amplified with discourse during chaotic times. Specifically, the emergent discourse revolved around blaming other generations, also called “generational finger-pointing” (Sipocz et al., 2021, p. 172). To illustrate, younger generations used stereotypes toward Baby Boomers, and older generations used stereotypes against younger generations (Sipocz et al., 2021). In other words, chaotic environments may promote generational stereotyping such as finger-pointing amplification.

In an additional study, Gabrielova and Buchko (2021) examined four areas that may cause conflict between superiors and subordinates: leadership style, motivation, teamwork, and social interactions. Specifically, Gabrielova and Buchko (2021) examined Millennials and Generation Zers and work-related characteristics such as intrinsic work values (e.g., achievement and development), extrinsic work values (e.g., job security, salary, and feedback), and social work values (e.g., teamwork, social interaction, and work-life balance). Gabrielova and Buchko’s (2021) contextual overview demonstrated that perceived differences result from different defining moments throughout generational cohorts. For example, while both Millennials and Generation Zers had similar beliefs regarding achievement and desire for ongoing professional development, some differences between these two generations emerged. For instance, Millennials are optimistic risk-takers, whereas Generation Zers are pragmatic risk-aversive. What is more, Millennials viewed teamwork collaboratively; in contrast, Generation Zers were competitive. In addition, Gabrielova and Buchko (2021) found all four areas examined (i.e., leadership style, motivation, teamwork, and social interactions) increase workplace conflict

(Gabrielova & Buchko, 2021). In other words, these different ideologies held among generations may promote conflict.

Perceptions of Generational Differences. Understanding perceptions is crucial in attempting to understand the diverse generational workforce. In one attempt, Lester et al. (2012) investigated the difference between actual and perceived generational differences in the workplace. In this study, researchers compared actual and perceived workplace preferences among Baby Boomers, Generation Xers, and Millennials to understand what beliefs and assumptions each generation held and valued. In this study, researchers opted to ask their age and place them in a generational label versus having the participants self-select their generation (Lester et al., 2012). One reason for not using generational labels in surveys comes from generational misconceptions (Lester et al., 2012). In another study, Costanza and Finkelstein (2015) argue that the key to managing the multigenerational workforce is to see everyone as individuals and not place them in these generational labels in which stereotypes may occur. Rauvola et al. (2019) agree and suggest that recognizing and removing generational labels will facilitate the removal of generational assumptions in the workplace. Conversely, this current study does not agree that removing generational labels will remove generational assumptions. For example, if they perceive themselves as belonging to a group, it may be more challenging to change their minds regarding their group membership.

In fact, Lester et al. (2012) further confirmed that *perceived* generational differences at work outnumbered the *actual* generational differences. If perceptions of differences outnumber actual differences, how can we handle perceived generational differences within the workplace? This current study will not be looking at perceptions of generational differences but rather, this current study will be looking at generational differences in terms of perceptions of toxic

leadership. It is important to include perceptions of generational differences as this provides a nuanced dimension for understanding participant characteristics. One explanation to address generational differences in the workplace is to minimize group conflict to change individual perceptions (Costanza & Finkelstein, 2017). However, to change individual perceptions, one must first understand those perceptions. To date, research is still unclear as to whether generational differences exist or not. While differences among generations are ambiguous, this study will not answer this question. Instead, this study will first investigate employee perceptions regarding their typical behaviors, thoughts, and reactions when navigating a toxic work environment specific to toxic leadership. Second, this study will understand to what extent participant characteristics, such as perceived and actual generational identity, inform differing viewpoints. Finally, this study will also contribute to the growing body of generational literature by including the latest generation into the workforce, Generation Z. If we can understand individual perceptions, this may shed light on the commonalities of their opinions.

Investigating individual perceptions are critical in the multigenerational workforce. First, research shows that individuals use cognitive shortcuts to classify others based on their age (Costanza & Finkelstein, 2015). In fact, in an ever-growing busy world that is becoming more rapid, the use of heuristics saves us time to place people into stereotyped groupings. Second, Weeks et al. (2017) found that generational stereotypes exist. In this research, Weeks et al. (2017) examined generational stereotypes, work ethic, work-life balance, and technology among Baby Boomers, Generation Xers, and Millennials. Consequently, these perceptions of stereotypes are problematic as stereotypes can generate certain expectations and beliefs that can lead to self-fulfilling prophecies. Therefore, this study will be the beginning stage in understanding the array of perceptions that exist among the four generations. More specifically,

this study will illustrate their subjective viewpoints of agreement and disagreement on responses regarding toxic leadership. In that case, the current study may be the first step in understanding the existing views to bring about change across the toxic leadership scenarios.

Conclusion

In conclusion, toxic leadership is not a new problem. Because we have not adequately addressed workplace bullying, consequently, and because we have not addressed the roots of toxic leadership, it continues to engulf victims in unnecessary stress that leads to organizational and individual hazards. While the financial problems that permeate from toxic leadership are concerning, even more concerning are the behaviors that impact employees' mental and physical health and result in depression and high blood pressure to name just two. Moreover, each generational cohort has unique ideologies and experiences that have shaped how that generation views the world. Sometimes these generational ideologies and priorities clash. As a result of these generational differences, individuals may work against each other, incivility can take over, and unnecessary workplace stress becomes the norm (Milligan, 2016; Tran et al., 2020). Therefore, we must understand the multigenerational workforce and their perceptions of toxic leadership to begin the conversations of diminishing the toxic triangle to disrupt the ongoing cycles of toxic leaders and the overall phenomenon of toxic leadership.

What is more, followership is considered a fundamental, if not most essential, component of the toxic triangle. However, the available literature is inadequate for describing the range of views held by employees and their responses regarding toxic leadership. Therefore, this current study's framework is developed on several foundational scholars to identify susceptible and unsusceptible follower responses. To illustrate, initially, this study adopted and built upon Padilla et al.'s (2007) toxic triangle framework. Following, Thoroughgood's (2013) work on

susceptible follower constructs provided the underlying dimensions of conformers and colluders. After that, this study adapted Knoll and van Dick's (2013) ideology surrounding forms of employee silence. Next, this study examined Van Dyne et al.'s (2003) research on voice to illuminate passive and active voice typologies. Finally, this study implemented Park et al.'s (2008) work on whistleblowing.

The present study has two goals: first, to demonstrate employee perceptions regarding their typical behaviors, thoughts, and reactions when navigating a toxic work environment like toxic leadership, and second, to understand to what extent participant characteristics inform differing viewpoints. The above literature assisted in identifying and understanding reaction responses regarding toxic leaders. In addition, this study seeks to illustrate how participant characteristics inform those viewpoints. To achieve these goals, the study applied Q methodology. Chapter 3 provides more details into Q methodology's research design.

CHAPTER 3. METHOD

Chapter 3 will discuss the methodological approach utilized to investigate the range of perceptions regarding responses to toxic leadership in the modern workplace. More specifically, the study will employ the methods and technique of Q methodology to illustrate subjective viewpoints of employees regarding responses to toxic leadership in the modern workplace. Here, I will examine quantitative and qualitative methods that capture the perspectives of research participants from their Q sorts (Watts & Stenner, 2012). Further, this study intends to investigate whether participant characteristics such as toxic leadership exposure, generational identity, education, gender, race, and English as a first language, inform differing viewpoints. First, I will provide an overview of the research design giving insight into Q methodology (hereafter referred to as Q). Second, I will show how the present study uses Q. Next, I discuss the elements of Q to illustrate data collection and data analysis. Finally, the chapter closes with my positionality statement. The following research questions informed the research design:

RQ_1: What are employee perceptions regarding their typical behaviors, thoughts, and reactions when navigating a toxic work environment?

RQ_2: To what extent do participant characteristics inform differing viewpoints?

Research Design

This study will use Q to demonstrate the range of employee perceptions regarding responses to toxic leaders in the modern workplace. Namely, Q uses quantitative and qualitative methods to understand subjective viewpoints (Watts & Stenner, 2012). What is more, Q is different from other mixed-method research by two specific characteristics. First, quantitative Q data is collected in the form of Q sorts by sorting statements according to a *condition of instruction* using anchoring statements. During the sorting process, participants provide

qualitative justification for their anchoring statements. Second, the statistical software performs correlations and by-person factor analysis on the Q sorts collected first. Thus, Q aims to provide a systematic approach that examines and understands participants' opinions, attitudes, and beliefs through qualitative and quantitative research (McKeown & Thomas, 2013; Stephenson, 1935). Q is appropriate for this current study because it quantifies subjective perceptions and identifies patterns of characteristics among beliefs. Most noteworthy, this study's design expands the toxic triangle as a lens to understand the ecosystem of workplace conflict (Padilla et al., 2007) and, more explicitly, investigates individuals who experience toxic leadership as *agents* and *co-creators* of toxic leaders (Mergen & Ozbilgin, 2021). Typically, Q research is carried out systematically in six steps (*see* Figure 7).

Figure 7

Q Methodology Steps

The first step in Q is *concourse development*. This step defines and collects the *concourse* (Watts & Stenner, 2012). A concourse is a collective discourse representing participants' beliefs in which statements derive from literature, pictures, interviews, and opinions (Stephenson, 1986, 1993). In other words, these declarative statements are the impressions individuals make regarding social experiences (Stephenson, 1986, 1992). Specifically, the concourse is "the flow of communicability surrounding any topic" (Brown, 1993, p. 94). In this first step, a sample from the study's topic determines all potential statements in which it is relevant to the study.

The second step in Q is the *Q set construction*. Here, the *Q set* emerges. In other words, this is the collective set of statements that is reduced from the concourse (McKeown & Thomas, 2013). Simply put, the Q set consists of statements that participants rank during the Q sort activity.

Third, participants partake in the *Q sorting activity*. Here, the researcher selects the *P set,* which refers to research participants who sort statements (i.e., the Q set) (McKeown & Thomas, 2013). The P set is determined based on the theoretical goals of the study. This means that participants are selected to help assist in answering the research questions. In Q, each participant serves as a variable (Watts & Stenner, 2012). Next, the *condition of instruction* presents itself to participants. The condition of instruction serves as a guide for instructing participants on how to sort the statements. There are no right or wrong ways to sort the statements. The Q sort activity allows the P set to describe an event regarding participant beliefs using a forced sort from polar anchoring statements (McKeown & Thomas, 2013). In this study, the phrases *most uncharacteristic* and *most characteristic* are the anchoring statements. In sum, *Q sorting* is how the participants decide the order of statements based on their beliefs from most uncharacteristic to most characteristic.

In the fourth step, participants provide qualitative responses for justifying the anchoring statements in the *post-sorting activity* (Watts & Stenner, 2012). Q collects qualitative responses in two ways. First, through an online questionnaire after the Q sorting activity. And, second, through a follow-up interview after the Q sorting activity. Two primary purposes of obtaining qualitative and quantitative responses exist. The first is to enrich the Q sorting activity's interpretation and justify the emergent viewpoints' factor arrays. Second, participants may respond to demographic questions in this stage to analyze participant characteristics that inform

differing views. As a result, both qualitative responses and participant characteristics provide robust information for factor interpretation.

Fifth is the *Q factor analysis*. In this step, Q sort data analysis allows researchers to see the varying viewpoints that emerge from the Q sorting activity (McKeown & Thomas, 2013). This step draws out shared perspectives on a topic using a correlation matrix and factoring individual Q sorts with every other Q sort. Then, factor extraction determines how many unique perspectives to retain. Next, factor rotation rotates the viewpoints retained to provide clarity in the viewpoints. Lastly, the factor scores are populated to produce factor arrays that exemplify the emergent viewpoints.

Lastly, the sixth step is *factor interpretation*. The purpose of factor interpretation is to uncover the meaning behind each emergent viewpoint from the Q factor analysis step (McKeown & Thomas, 2013). Here, similarities and differences emerge among the views. In other words, areas of consensus, disagreement, extremes, and distinguishing statements emerge from participants to begin to tell a story of each emergent viewpoint. To assist in interpretation, researchers reexamine the post-sort questions and follow-up interviews as these two methods provide robust techniques for interpretation.

Q Methodology: Background

William Stephenson (1935) first developed Q when he wrote a letter to Nature's Journal. In this letter, Stephenson introduced a technique to study human personality. In fact, Stephenson postulated that Q would aid psychology, general, social, or individual research. What is more, Q is an adaptation of Dr. Charles Spearman's factor analysis (Stephenson, 1935). Q's purpose is to address subjectivity in research. In other words, Q draws on qualitative and quantitative methods in a systematic approach to study the complexity of human behavior (Stephenson, 1935).

Specifically, subjectivity is "a person's communication of a point of view on any matter of personal or social importance" (McKeown & Thomas, 2013, p. ix). Examples of subjectivity include experiences, beliefs, and views of certain groups of individuals. Stephenson's (1935) letter presented factor analysis that factored people instead of traits. In this letter, Stephenson argued that Q gives participants the ability to prioritize what is most important to them and reveals their beliefs, motivations, perspectives, and attitudes of a specific issue.

Q is like exploratory factor analysis, which is also commonly referred to as R methodology. However, key differences exist between the Q and R methodologies. First, Q has a much smaller sample than R. Q's basis is on theoretical sampling in which the sample is purposeful and not representative. In fact, in Q, only enough participants are needed to establish factor comparisons with one another (Brown, 1980). Typically, one participant for every two Q statements is suitable (Watts & Stenner, 2012). Furthermore, since participants are the variables in Q, each empirical study is also limited to the number of variables. In R, however, the more participants, the better, as the study's goal is to generalize the empirical findings to a larger population of people (Watts & Stenner, 2012). In other words, two differences in R and Q research are the sample size and variables selected.

What is more, generalization in empirical literature typically suggests that findings can be generalized to a wider population. While generalizing results to a broader population is true in R, Q is not concerned with the wider population (Watts & Stenner, 2012). In fact, Q only demonstrates viewpoints that exist regarding some phenomena. For instance, generalization in Q inspects "*concepts or categories, theoretical propositions* and *models of practice*" (Watts & Stenner, 2012, p. 73). This means that in Q, the research looks to establish factors and viewpoints that emerge from participants. After the factors are established, those factors and

perspectives that transpire from participants are analyzed and compared with preexisting recognized findings "to realign and redefine how we understand and operate in general" (Watts & Stenner, 2012, p. 73). As a result, Q findings can correct false generalizations that emerge from R research.

Another key difference is that Q correlates among participants, as people are the variables. Alternatively, R correlates among variables such as traits or characteristics, not people (Watts & Stenner, 2012). Thus, in Q, participants' viewpoints are subject to factor analysis to reduce the data. Resultingly, Q draws out areas of agreement and disagreement among perspectives to assist in understanding, explicating, and comparing and contrasting emergent viewpoints on a topic.

Q Methodology: Uses

Q research is gaining empirical interest. For example, Q's research is found in the workplace (Bartlett & DeWeese, 2015), generations (Sorensen & Johnson Jorgensen, 2019), and healthcare (Lim et al., 2021), just to name a few. In the workplace, Q studies exist in human resources (Bartlett & DeWeese, 2015). In Bartlett and DeWeese's (2015) study, Q offers an understanding of similarities and differences in human resource development to help understand varying viewpoints. Additionally, Q has been studied within generational research, looking at Generation Z and the workplace environment (Leslie et al., 2021). In this study, researchers looked at Generation Z to understand intra-generational differences regarding subjective workplace perceptions. Further, Q has helped understand Millennials' viewpoints (Sorensen & Johnson Jorgensen, 2019). In Sorensen and Johnson Jorgensen's (2019) study, they looked at patterns of perceptions among Millennials to understand clothing preferences. Sorensen and Johnson Jorgensen's (2019) found that perceptions varied among the Millennial generation when

discussing fashion and second-hand apparel. To date, Q has not examined the perceptions regarding responses to toxic leadership in the modern-day workplace concerning participant characteristics, such as the multigenerational workforce. Furthermore, Q has not investigated perceptions of followers within toxic leadership. Thus, this study will contribute to Q by investigating participant characteristics, like generational perspectives, and treating followers as agents and co-creators of toxic leadership. Further, this study will assist in understanding areas of consensus and disagreement among participants' viewpoints. The value of identifying areas of consensus and disagreement among employees who experience toxic leadership is useful for determining the diverse landscape of beliefs that exist, particularly in developing organizational policies such as reporting unethical behavior (e.g., like toxic leaders). Overall, demonstrating the range of viewpoints will assist in anticipating any likely barriers for reporting toxic leaders.

Q Methodology: Benefits

Q studies offer several benefits. First, Q allows a limited number of participants to be sampled (McKeown & Thomas, 2013; Rieber, 2020). In other words, since participants are the variables and inevitably variables are limited in research, a limited number of participants is necessary. Second, Q enables participants to freely express their subjectivity about a topic from a collective standpoint while also identifying potential differences among emergent viewpoints (Coogan & Herrington, 2011). This subjectivity sheds light on one's internal frame of reference that allows individuals to express their point of view (McKeown & Thomas, 2013). Finally, examining subjectivity is beneficial because no other quantitative research method allows the subtle differences of similarities and preferences among viewpoints to emerge. Namely, only correlations between items or constructs are examined in other correlation research, whereas, in

Q, individuals' similarities, preferences, and viewpoints on a specific topic provide robust information (Brown, 1993).

Furthermore, this study may be beneficial to employers to understand and meet the needs of employees. For example, research shows that Q can examine friction, consensus, and conflict (Bartlett & DeWeese, 2015). Because toxic leadership is an area that perpetuates disagreement and conflict, implementing Q in toxic leadership scenarios is promising. As previously mentioned, differentiating perspectives helps employers with policy development and implementation. What is more, empirical research has shown that the four generations in the workforce all hold different values and beliefs, which may promote conflict. Thus, Q is ideal for demonstrating to what extent participant characteristics, like generational identity, inform differing viewpoints regarding responses to toxic leadership.

The Present Study

The rationale for selecting Q is that it is a valuable tool for exploring employee perceptions regarding responses to toxic leadership in the modern workplace. As previously mentioned, Q is an ideal method to uncover the similarities or differences in the multigenerational workforce and their view on responding to toxic leadership. Specifically, this research study will increase the understanding of various perspectives and opinions and participants' reaction types for established concepts relative to susceptible followers and unsusceptible followers. Chapter 2 argues that research lacks investigating followership within the toxic triangle (*see* Porter & McLaughlin, 2006; Thoroughgood, 2013; Thoroughgood et al., 2018), explicitly examining followers as agents and co-creators in toxic environments (*see* Mergen & Ozbilgin, 2021). This research will investigate employees' subjective points of view concerning responding to toxic leadership. According to Rieber (2020), Q is helpful when

attempting to understand the diversity of individuals who experience similar topics. Because the modern-day workplace encompasses a diverse generational workforce, this study is needed to illustrate the subjective viewpoints of Baby Boomers, Generation Xers, Millennials, and Generation Zers regarding their views of responses to toxic leadership. Namely, these responses will treat followers as agents and co-creators of the toxic phenomenon. In other words, responses from those who experience toxic leaders enable (e.g., conformers, colluders, remain silent, passive voice) or disable (e.g., active, prosocial voice such as whistleblowing) toxic leadership. Hence, this present study will concentrate on the empirical need to investigate the subjective viewpoints of individuals (i.e., agents and co-creators). In the survey portion of the study, participants were asked about their previous work history and supervisor experience to understand their salient exposure to toxic leadership. Then, participants provided their perceptions of responses *if they were* to experience toxic leadership. The language "if they were" was selected to encapsulate individuals who *have not* (i.e., forward-thinking about toxic leader experiences) and *have* experienced toxic leadership (i.e., reporting on past experiences). Finally, participants answered open-ended and closed-ended questions to compare differences among participants. In the qualitative part of the follow-up study, I examined participants' perceptions to understand their responses in greater detail. Through my interpretation, perceptions of responses regarding toxic leadership emerged.

Instrumentation

Q encompasses several steps to ensure that the instrumentation design considers all participants' perceptions regarding this study's purpose (Rieber, 2020). In other words, the concourse helps develop the instruments for this study. Here, I present the Q set design and content, post-sort questionnaire, and follow-up interview questions. The goal of these three

dimensions for the instruments was to answer the study's two research questions. The first research question was: *What are employee perceptions regarding their typical behaviors, thoughts, and reactions when navigating a toxic work environment?* The second research question was: *To what extent do participant characteristics inform differing viewpoints?*

Q Set Design and Content

Designing the Q set aims to identify items relevant to a study's research question (Watts & Stenner, 2012). To create the Q set, I first developed a concourse to isolate all potential statements relevant to this study regarding responses to toxic leaders. The purpose of structuring a concourse based on a conceptual framework is ideal because it allows a representative sample from the concourse to showcase how participants may perceive the presented topic. For instance: *How do employees respond to toxic leaders?* In other words, the concourse studies employees' behavior and intentions or perceptions. Therefore, this study's concourse emerged from using the toxic triangle as a lens (Padilla et al., 2007). According to Farrimond et al. (2010), the concourse "can never be fully known, of course, but the sample of items (usually written statements) should give a workable estimate of it" (p. 983). In fact, Watts and Stenner (2012) agree that the perfect Q set does not exist. Although lacking a picture-perfect collection of items in the scale may pose a problem in traditional survey research, this does not pose a methodological problem in Q. The lack of concern is mitigated through the sorting process as participants will impose their meanings onto the Q set items through ranking. In fact, Watts and Stenner (2012) refer to ranking the Q set "as suggestions rather than as statements with determinate meaning" (p. 64). In other words, statements are methods of expression about how one feels about a particular topic. What is more, meaning is "attributed *a posteriori* through interpretation rather than through *a priori* postulation" (Brown, 1980, p. 54). In other words, a thorough literature review is essential

in developing the Q set to assist in reasoning made from past events (e.g., after the participant has sorted the statements) rather than by making predictions.

For instance, I reviewed background literature on toxic leaders, conducive environments, and followership to develop the concourse of statements. I used a variety of search terms, including “toxic leader,” “environment,” “followers,” “followership,” “workplace conflict,” “whistleblowing,” “voice,” “silence,” “intergenerational conflict,” “intrageneration conflict,” “Baby Boomers,” “generational differences,” “Generation X,” “Millennials,” and “Generation Z.” Using a variety of search terms is essential to mitigate researcher bias when creating the concourse in Q (Bartlett & DeWeese, 2015). Additionally, since the sample of statements attempts to be exhaustive of all potential responses, several resources were consulted, including my experience, literature reviews, popular culture resources such as Facebook and Twitter hashtags, online newspapers, and opinions. As a result of a thorough examination of the concourse, that is, the communication about the study’s topic, I initially collected 163 statements. The goal of the statements was to represent the breadth of opinions regarding responses to toxic leaders.

Vetting of the Q Set. Vetting the Q set took place in three stages. First, I holistically examined all the initial 163 statements developed from the concourse by reading each statement. While reading all initial statements, I followed McKeown and Thomas’s (2013) recommendation of vetting the statements. Initially, I ensured that the composition of statements was precise and double-barreled meanings did not exist. If statements have two meanings, participants may agree with one and disagree with the other. As a result, conflicting views may emerge and be highly challenging to sort on a continuum. After that, I analyzed the length and complexity of each initial Q statement. Long, technical, and complex statements would require respondents a longer

time to complete the Q sort activity and may be more challenging for participants. Therefore, I shortened statements. Finally, I approached each statement by looking at its semantics. In other words, I read each statement inspecting its meanings and words for optimal clarity.

Secondly, after examining all initial statements, I designed guidelines to reduce the number of statements. First, statements would not refer to generational differences or any mention of generational-related information. This was done because I wanted the sorting process and questionnaires to focus on the complex dyadic process between the toxic leader and subordinate. I opted to collect any generational-related information and demographic information through follow-up questions. Next, I identified 16 specific areas of coverage (*see* Table 4). After that, I created an initial pool of candidate statements with roughly four to six statements per specific content area. As a result of this phase, I reduced this initial pool to 50 statements.

Table 4

Relevant Domain, Constructs, and Subconstructs

Domain	Construct	Subconstruct
Reaction types	Conformer	Low core self-evaluations Personal life distress Low self-concept clarity Unmet needs
	Colluder	Personal ambition Greed Low impulse control Machiavellianism
	Remain Silent	Acquiescent silence Quiescent silence Prosocial silence Opportunistic silence
	Voice	Acquiescent voice Defensive voice Prosocial voice Whistleblowing

Lastly, in the third stage of vetting the Q set, faculty at my university examined the Q set through a Q statement evaluation form. This vetting technique aligns with Brown's (1993) recommendation to have the Q set reviewed by experts. First, reviewers received vetting instructions along with the research questions. The vetting instructions informed reviewers that this study seeks to identify common attitudes, views, and opinions of employee responses regarding toxic leadership. Reviewers' tasks were to read the statements and then rate each statement's relevance regarding the focus of this investigation. Next, reviewers included comments or questions for any of these statements. Subsequently, reviewers provided thoughts on any essential themes, ideas, or concepts omitted from this list of statements. These vetting guidelines align with Watts and Stenner's (2012) recommendations. The feedback aided in narrowing and increasing clarity in the final Q set. Therefore, the input received from the reviewers informed the final Q set before data collection began.

Relevant Domains and Reaction Types. Four constructs emerged from the literature review, and 16 subconstructs emerged in response to toxic leaders. The four constructs are *conformer*, *colluder*, *remain silent*, and *voice*. Table 4 illustrates all 16 subconstructs. From each of the 16 subconstructs, I selected statements relevant to the study's purpose, ensuring that each statement served a purpose for answering this study's two research questions. As a result, the final Q set consisted of 41 statements (*see* Appendix A). According to Watts and Stenner (2012), a Q set consists of anywhere between 40 and 80 items. Therefore, this final Q set is appropriate. Appendix A showcases the final Q set along with the relevant dimensions.

Conformer. Q statements reflective of conformer viewpoints were related to four subconstructs emergent from the literature (Thoroughgood, 2013). These Q set statements were based on the subconstructs of *low core self-evaluations*, *high personal life distress*, *low self-*

concept clarity, and *unmet basic needs* (Padilla et al., 2007; Thoroughgood, 2013). For the final Q set, I modified all four subconstructs statements based on Thoroughgood's (2013) research on the development and validation of conformer and colluder scales. Thoroughgood's (2013) research provides preliminary insights into the role of factors that make up followers' susceptibilities to toxic leaders. Sample statements related to these constructs included "Follow a toxic leader because I have trouble handling most of the problems I face," "Follow a toxic leader because I feel emotionally vulnerable," "Follow a toxic leader because I don't have a clear sense of who I am and what I stand for as a person," and "Follow a toxic leader because they provide me with some stability in life."

Colluder. Statements that represented colluder viewpoints focused on four areas; these four areas included *personal ambition*, *greed*, *low self-impulse control*, and *Machiavellianism* (Kellerman, 2004; Padilla et al., 2007; Thoroughgood, 2013; Thoroughgood & Padilla, 2013; Thoroughgood et al., 2012). I modified all four subconstructs statements based on Thoroughgood's (2013) research on the development and validation of conformer and colluder scales. Thoroughgood's (2013) research provides preliminary insights into the role of factors that make up followers' susceptibilities to toxic leaders and Padilla et al.'s (2007) toxic triangle theory of destructive leadership. Sample statements related to these constructs included "Support a toxic leader because I want to be better than everyone else at what I do," "Support a toxic leader because that allows for me to get ahead without contributing anything in return," "Support a toxic leader so that I don't have to express my emotions," and "Support a toxic leader because if I show any weakness at work, I will get taken advantage of."

Remain Silent. Q statements related to remaining silent viewpoints focused on workplace silence as a multidimensional construct (Knoll & van Dick, 2013). Silence is the "state in which

employees refrain from calling attention to issues at work such as illegal or immoral practices or developments that violate personal, moral, or legal standards" (Knoll & van Dick, 2013, p. 1). Based on Knoll and van Dick's (2013) research, Q statements focused on four forms of employee silence that are conceptualized and utilized as subconstructs for this study: *acquiescent silence*, *quiescent silence*, *prosocial silence*, and *opportunistic silence*. Sample statements related to these constructs included "Remain silent at work because my toxic leader is not open to proposals, concerns, or the like," "Remain silent at work because of fear of negative consequences from my toxic leader," "Remain silent when faced with a toxic leader because I do not want to embarrass others," and "Remain silent in front of a toxic leader because of concerns that the toxic leader could take advantage of my ideas."

Voice. Q statements related to viewpoints of voice emerged from the literature surrounding passive voice and active voice. For this study, Q statements relative to voice responded to dissatisfaction (Withey & Cooper, 1989). Namely, this response means that voice focuses solely on dissatisfying conditions such as toxic leaders. In addition, Q statements relative to voice included voice as a prosocial organizational behavior (Brief & Motowidlo, 1986). In other words, these prosocial organizational behaviors are voluntary workplace acts that help others without needing anything in return. Likewise, prosocial organization behaviors are commonly referred to as whistleblowing (Near & Miceli, 1985). As a result, three subconstructs emerged from Van Dyne et al.'s (2003) empirical findings, and an additional subconstruct of whistleblowing (Park et al., 2008) comprise the final Q statements. The subconstructs that the Q statements focused on included *acquiescent voice*, *defensive voice*, and *prosocial voice*. In addition, the three dimensions of *whistleblowing* are *internal-external*, *formal-informal*, *identified-anonymous*. Sample statements related to these constructs included "Voice agreement

with a toxic leader because disagreeing with them is pointless," "Voice ideas that try to shift the toxic leader's attention to others because I am afraid of voicing my true concerns to a toxic leader," "Voice my concerns to a toxic leader about workplace issues because I want what's best for the organization," and "Voice my concerns about a toxic leader to upper management, even if that means suffering from reprisals because I want what's best for the organization." Appendix A provides the final Q set and relevant dimensions.

Post-Sort Questions

Questions related to participant demographics provided insights into participant differences that inform differing viewpoints. These questions consisted of both open-ended and closed-ended questions. The open-ended questions asked participants to reflect on their responses to the Q sort activity on the most extreme statements of *most uncharacteristic* (+1) and *most characteristic* (+9) of their beliefs regarding responses to toxic leadership. The closed-ended questions collected participants' birth year to calculate their generational cohort using chronological age, gender, race, English as a first language, educational level, and perceived generational cohort. Appendix D consists of a comprehensive list of post-sort questions.

Post-Sort Interviews

Gallagher and Porock (2010) argue interviews increase the validity of Q research by providing participant rationale for the factor array. Furthermore, interviews link previous research to new theory generation by using abduction. The goal of the post-sort interview is for participants to provide the rationale to the factor array in which participant sorts loaded significantly. In other words, participants' completed Q sorts have already illuminated what participants think of responses regarding toxic leadership. Thus, the post-sort interview contributes to the robust interpretation of the emergent viewpoints by revealing "the underlying

beliefs and values that lead to a particular stance on the issue" (Gallagher & Porock, 2010, p. 297). In sum, the interviews justify the factor arrays that emerge in the data analysis process.

Based on the aims of the post-sort interviews, the post-sort interviews were not completed until after the initial Q sort analysis, and I identified the beginning stages of factor interpretation. After I had an initial understanding of the three factors, I reached out to participants for follow-up interviews to clarify responses and ensure that I had begun interpreting each viewpoint correctly. Next, I selected two participants from each factor to perform member checking and generated additional data to answer this study's two research questions. I purposefully chose participants that represented a diverse pool of the 31 sorts represented by their demographics collected via the post-sort follow-up questionnaire. Table 6 illustrates the participants who participated in the follow-up interview.

Additionally, the qualitative component further analyzes the factors that emerged from the quantitative portion of the Q sort data analysis. In other words, semi-structured interviews aid the interpretation of perspectives. During the interview, I provided examples of how I had interpreted each viewpoint. In addition, I presented participants the factor array that they loaded onto, and interviewees reflected on the statements that they ranked on the two opposites (+1) and +9). Moreover, participants provided their thoughts on the other two emergent perspectives that resulted from data analysis. Finally, all questions were open-ended to invite comments about the placement of the cards in the Q sort. Appendix D contains a complete list of post-sort questions, and Appendix E illustrates the interview discussion guide.

Data Collection

Data collection is "a series of interrelated activities aimed to gather good information to answer emerging research questions" (Creswell, 1998, p. 110). In Q, data collection can take

place face-to-face or online (Jacobsen & Linnell, 2016). The Q sort activity is the process in which respondents rank statements to model their opinions. This study collected data from individuals over 18 years of age employed in the United States to obtain their viewpoints regarding responses to toxic leadership. I submitted this study to the Institutional Review Board (IRB) for approval to comply with North Dakota State University and federal guidelines. After IRB approval, data collection began in September 2021 and ended in October 2021.

Study Participants

P sets are the participants in Q (Watts & Stenner, 2012). In Q, participants are selected based on the theoretical goals of the study (McKeown & Thomas, 2013). To illustrate, van Exel and de Graaf (2005) demonstrate that the P set is not a random selection of participants but "rather it is a structured sample of respondents who are theoretically relevant to the problem under consideration" (p. 6). The P set encompassed employed individuals within the United States to understand views regarding responses to toxic leadership. Furthermore, aligned with Q, I attempted to become familiar with participants' ideologies beforehand with empirical literature surrounding the toxic triangle and participant characteristics, such as generations. Becoming familiar with participants' beliefs beforehand aligns with Jacobsen and Linnell's (2016) Q research guidelines.

As previously mentioned, one benefit of Q is that this methodological approach requires few participants. Brown (1980) recommends that Q only needs "Enough subjects [or participants] to establish the existence of a factor for the purpose of comparing one factor with another. What proportion of the population belongs in one factor rather than another is a wholly different matter and one about which Q technique…is not concerned" (p. 192). One objective recommendation for Q participant numbers suggests there should be roughly half as many

participants as Q statements (Watts & Stenner, 2012). Therefore, since this study had 41 Q statements, I aimed to sample approximately 20 participants. However, since this study aimed to recruit participants from each generation currently in the workforce, I had to ensure participants represented each of the four generations.

Recruitment. Participant recruitment occurred from social media channels. I posted information about the study on two social media platforms: Facebook and LinkedIn (*see* Appendix B). I encouraged viewers on these social media pages to share the study's information with others who may meet the criteria to attract participants further. Since Q requires few participants, I opted not to recruit participants through the school's ListServ. Furthermore, I reached out to participants I thought fit the sampling frame (*see* Table 5). During data collection, I tracked respondents based on their birth year to ensure that each generational cohort had sufficient participants to compare viewpoints. Because the majority of my social media following identifies as Millennials, this may provide one explanation for the large number of participants who fit in the Millennial generational cohort. Another explanation may be because Millennials are the largest generation in the United States Labor Force and make up almost half of the workforce (Desilver, 2019; Fry, 2018).

Table 5

Sampling Frame Based on Birth Year

Generation	
Baby Boomer	n = 4
Generation X	n = 7
Millennial	n = 15
Generation Z	n = 5

Sampling. Sampling is a technique that systematically selects individuals to include in the study (Sharma, 2017). In Q, these individuals are the variables (Watts & Stenner, 2012). Two types of sampling techniques exist, including *probability sampling* and *non-probability sampling*. *Probability sampling* is a sampling structure in which each person has an equal chance of being selected for the research study (Sharma, 2017). *Non-probability sampling* is a sample scheme where a researcher selects participants based on their judgment (Sharma, 2017).

Non-Probability Sampling. This study's recruitment methods are congruent with non-probability sampling (Acharya et al., 2013; Groenewald, 2004). One benefit of utilizing non-probability sampling is that it is low cost (Yang & Banamah, 2014). This study used three non-probability sampling techniques: *purposeful sampling*, *quota sampling*, and *snowball sampling*. One limitation of non-probability sampling is that it lacks generalizability. However, this sampling technique is ideal using Q research since the goal of Q is not for the results to be generalizable but to showcase the range of subjective viewpoints about a specific topic instead.

Purposeful Sampling. First, *purposeful sampling* is also known as *convenience sampling* and is one of the most used sampling methods because it is convenient to the researcher (Acharya et al., 2013). Further, this sampling is for those who have relevant experience in the study's topic. To illustrate purposeful sampling, I reached out to my network to see if anyone met the study's recruitment criteria. This study selected this sampling technique based on the research's purpose to ensure that the participants sampled have been employed within the United States and have held a position where they had to report to at least one supervisor. Sampling purposefully ensured that participants were able to reflect on superior and subordinate relationships.

Quota Sampling. Second, *quota sampling* selects participants who fit specific characteristics that the researcher aims to study (Acharya et al., 2013). For example, this study collected demographic questions from invited participants to investigate the extent to which participant characteristics inform differing viewpoints. One participant characteristic that this study was interested in was generational identity. As a result, I monitored submitted data throughout the recruitment process to ensure that completed surveys represented each generation. Here, I attempted to collect at least four participants from each generation. This data included participants' perceived generation and actual generation calculated using birth year. Thus, quota sampling was appropriate since this study examined differences between the groups.

Snowball Sampling. Lastly, this study employed *snowball sampling*. Snowball sampling is a "sample through referrals made among people who share or know of others who possess some characteristics that are of research interest" (Biernacki & Waldorf, 1981, p. 141). To illustrate snowball sampling, I asked my network to share any names and contact information for those who may fit this study's criteria. Furthermore, I asked my network to share my study's recruitment notice on their Facebook and LinkedIn pages. These recruitment efforts are compatible with toxic triangle research (*see* Magwenzi, 2018).

Inclusion Criterion. This study set three inclusion criteria: a minimum age, employment experience within the United States, and experience working for a supervisor. These inclusion criteria were needed to answer the two research questions. As previously mentioned, the first research question examined employee responses regarding toxic leadership within the modern workplace in the United States. The second research question investigated to what extent participant characteristics inform differing viewpoints.

First, all participants were at least 18 years old. Furthermore, participants had to consent to the research study for themselves. Second, the toxic triangle has shown that cultural values make up part of the conducive environment for toxic leadership to permeate. Cultural values vary from country to country, and research suggests that cultural values affect how victims of bullying make sense of that experience (Salin, 2021). As a result, this study chose to recruit employees specifically within the United States. Finally, participants had to hold a job where they had to report to at least one supervisor. This last criterion was necessary to ensure participants had some context and experience working for a supervisor to answer the Toxic Leadership Scale (Schmidt, 2008). Furthermore, the Toxic Leadership Scale provided context for participants' experience with toxic leadership.

Description of Participants. Of the 31 participants who began the survey, only one participant (3%) did not complete the Toxic Leadership Scale. Therefore, understanding this participant's prior experience with toxic leadership remained unclear. I attempted to reach out to this one participant to see if they would take the Toxic Leadership Scale. However, I did not receive a response. The remaining 30 participants (97%) completed the entire survey, including the Toxic Leadership Scale, Q sorting activity, and post-sort questions.

As previously mentioned, the purpose of Q research is not to generalize but rather to understand a set of particular viewpoints. Therefore, Brown (1980) argues very few participants are needed. For instance, Kline (1994) suggests approximately two Q statements per variable (i.e., participant). Therefore, this study aimed to recruit a minimum of 20 participants. However, during recruitment, I attempted to obtain participants from each of the four generations, along with various degrees of toxic leadership exposure. Monitoring this information was necessary to analyze to what extent participant characteristics inform differing viewpoints in research

question two. As a result, it became required to recruit 31 participants to ensure this study met both of these criteria.

Participant demographics varied among the 31 participants. Table 6 illustrates a complete listing of demographics obtained in this study. First, participants reported a wide range of perceived experiences with toxic leadership answering “yes” or “no” to identify if they had ever experienced toxic leadership. Twenty-six participants (84%) indicated that they had experienced some degree of toxic leadership throughout their work history. Alternatively, four participants (13%) reported that they had not experienced some degree of toxic leadership throughout their work history. One participant (3%) did not respond to this question.

Second, the Toxic Leadership Scale measured actual toxic leadership (Schmidt, 2008). The Toxic Leadership Scale still measured perceptions, just operationalized rather than a yes or no question participants responded to earlier in the survey. Since one participant did not complete the Toxic Leadership Scale, I calculated 30 scores to find the mean scores of actual toxic leadership. Scores could range from 0.0 to 5.0. Scores were categorized between low, medium, or high levels of toxic leadership. I decided the ranges for each level based on the five-point Likert rankings. For instance, rankings one and two indicated “Strongly Disagree” and “Disagree,” respectively. Therefore, low scores ranged from 0.0 to 2.9. In addition, ranking three stated a “Neutral” stance. Thus, medium scores ranged from 3.0 to 3.9. Lastly, rankings four and five indicated “Agree” and “Strongly Agree,” respectively. As a result, high scores ranged from 4.0 to 5.0. The average score of toxic leadership from the Toxic Leadership Scale for the 30 participants was 3.72, indicating a relatively medium and high experience with toxic leadership. Scores from the 30 participants ranged from 1.1 to 4.8 on the Toxic Leadership Scale.

Third, regarding perceived generation versus actual generation, participants were asked to indicate which generation (if any) they identified with, along with their birth year. All 31 participants responded to this question. Participant birth years ranged from 1958 to 2002. The average birth year was 1983. One participant (3%) identified as belonging to more than one generation. Nine participants (29%) indicated that they do not consider themselves as identifying as any generation. Twenty-two participants (71%) identified as belonging to generation. Of those 22 participants, only two participants (9%) identified as a different generation than what their chronological age placed them as.

Fourth, regarding gender, seven participants (23%) identified as males, and 24 participants (77%) identified as females. Concerning ethnicity, one participant (3%) identified as belonging to "other," and the remaining 30 participants (97%) identified as "white." After that, all 31 participants (100%) identified English as their first language.

Lastly, regarding the highest degree earned, two participants (6%) held Doctorates (e.g., Ph.D., Ed.D.), no participants (0%) held Professional degrees (e.g., MD, DDS, DVM), nine participants (29%) had Master's degrees (e.g., MA, MS, MEd), eight participants (26%) held Bachelor's degrees (e.g., BA, BS), six participants (19%) held Associates degrees (e.g., AA, AS), two participants (6%) identified as having some college and no degree, four participants (13%) held a High School degree or equivalent (e.g., GED), and no participants (0%) had less than a high school diploma. Percentages do not equal 100% due to rounding.

Eighteen out of the 31 participants (58%) agreed to follow-up interviews. Of the eighteen participants who agreed to an interview, two (11%) were Baby Boomers, four (22%) were Generation Xers, ten (56%) were Millennials, and two (11%) were Generation Zers. Accordingly, thirteen participants (42%) did not agree to follow-up interviews. Table 6 illustrates

the number of respondents by perceived generation, actual generation, birth year, gender, race, and education.

Table 6

Participants' Demographic Information

Participant	Toxic Leadership			Generational Cohort		Birth Year	Gender	Race	Education
#	Perceived	Actual	Degree	Perceived	Actual				
1*	Yes	4.1	High	Gen X	Gen X	1976	Male	White	Doctorate
2	Yes	4.6	High	None	Gen X	1969	Female	White	Bachelor's
3	Yes	4.8	High	Gen Y	Gen Z	1996	Female	Other	Master's
4*	Yes	4.6	High	Gen Y	Gen Y	1985	Female	White	Master's
5	Yes	3.7	Medium	BB	BB	1961	Female	White	High School
6*	Yes	2.0	Low	None	BB	1963	Female	White	Associates
7	Yes	3.9	Medium	BB	BB	1958	Male	White	High School
8*	Yes	4.6	High	None	Gen X	1966	Female	White	Some college, no degree
9	Yes	4.3	High	None	BB	1963	Female	White	High School
10	Yes	4.7	High	Gen Y	Gen Y	1990	Male	White	Associates
11	Yes	4.0	High	Gen X	Gen X	1974	Female	White	Master's
12	Yes	4.3	High	Gen X	Gen X	1979	Female	White	Master's
13	No	1.1	Low	Gen Y	Gen Y	1986	Male	White	Bachelor's
14*	No	2.5	Low	Gen Z	Gen Z	2000	Female	White	Bachelor's
15	Yes	4.0	High	Gen Y	Gen Y	1993	Female	White	Bachelor's
16*	Yes	4.0	High	None	Gen Y	1990	Female	White	Master's
17	NA	NA	NA	Gen X	Gen X	1968	Female	White	Some college, no degree
18	Yes	3.7	Medium	Gen Y	Gen Y	1994	Female	White	Bachelor's
19	Yes	4.5	High	Gen Y	Gen Y	1989	Female	White	Doctorate
20	Yes	4.1	High	None	Gen Y	1993	Female	White	Bachelor's
21	Yes	3.8	Medium	Gen Y	Gen Y	1993	Female	White	Bachelor's
22	Yes	4.6	High	Gen Y	Gen Y	1995	Female	White	Master's
23	No	1.5	Low	Gen Y	Gen Z	1996	Male	White	Associates
24	No	2.0	Low	None	Gen Y	1985	Male	White	Associates
25	Yes	4.2	High	Gen Y	Gen Y	1995	Female	White	Associates
26	Yes	3.8	Medium	Gen X & Gen Y	Gen Y	1980	Female	White	Master's
27	Yes	4.7	High	Gen Y	Gen Y	1987	Female	White	Master's
28	No	1.3	Low	None	Gen X	1965	Female	White	Associates
29	Yes	3.3	Medium	Gen Z	Gen Z	2002	Female	White	High School
30	Yes	4.2	High	Gen Y	Gen Y	1990	Female	White	Master's
31	Yes	4.7	High	None	Gen Z	1996	Male	White	Bachelor's

Note. n=31. NA signifies one participant who did not respond to the toxic leadership assessment. An asterisk (*) illustrates the participants who completed a follow-up interview with the researcher. All 31 participants identified as speaking English as their first language.

Q Sort Data Collection

Data collection took place in the stages Watts and Stenner (2012) recommended. First, participants received information about the study and consent forms to sign. Second, participant screening questions ensured they were a good fit for the study. Then, participants created a Subject-Generated Identification Code (SGIC). Next, the survey presented Schmidt's (2014) Toxic Leadership Scale to participants. After that, the survey showcased materials for completing the Q sorting task, including all statements, the condition of instruction, and a blank sorting distribution matrix. Afterward, participants received a post-sorting questionnaire to obtain demographics and other relevant information. Finally, I selected two participants from each emergent factor with diverse participant characteristics (e.g., varying degrees of toxic leadership exposure and varying generational cohorts) to participate in a post-sort interview that concluded data collection.

Information and Consent Forms. First, interested participants clicked on a Qualtrics web link. This web link provided participants with information about the study and informed consent (*see* Appendix C). Next, potential participants read through the informed consent and clicked "continue" if they consented to participate in the research project. If participants did not agree to take the survey, they were not allowed to continue and thanked for their time.

Screening Questions. After consenting to participate, participants were screened with three required questions. Screening questions ensured that participants were 18 years of age and older, are currently or have been employed in the United States, and have held a job where they had to report to at least one supervisor. If participants answered yes to all three of these screening questions, they continued the survey. However, if participants answered no to any of these three

questions, they were redirected to a "thank you for your interest" page and could not complete the remaining survey.

Subject-Generated Identification Code. After the screening questions, participants created a Subject-Generated Identification Code (SGIC) introduced by Yurek et al. (2008). SGICs allow anonymous tracking of the same respondents over time. Thus, one key benefit of SGIC's is that it facilitates anonymous participant survey completion. Participants' SGIC is self-created by answering questions that focus on their characteristics. An example of an SGIC question set is in Table 7.

Table 7

Subject-Generated Identification Code (SGIC) and Question Set

Question Set Stem: What is the…	Example Answer	Code Element	SGIC
First letter of your mother's first name?	L-Linda	**L**	
Number of older brothers (living and deceased)?	00-zero	**00**	
Number representing the month you were born?	03-March	**03**	
First letter of middle name (if none, use X)	M-Marie	**M**	
Subject-Generated Identification Code			**L0003M**

Note. Adapted from "The Use of Self-Generated Identification Codes in Longitudinal Research," by L. A. Yurek, J. Vasey, and D. Sullivan Havens, 2008, *SAGE Publications*, p. 3 (https://doi.org/10.1177/0193841X08316676).

Toxic Leadership Exposure. Before introducing the Toxic Leadership Scale, participants read a paragraph to provide context around toxic leadership and informed participants that toxic leadership was the central focus of the study. This paragraph included Schmidt's (2008) toxic leadership definition. For instance, participants were told that toxic leaders are "narcissistic, self-promoters who engage in an unpredictable pattern of abusive and authoritarian supervision" (Schmidt, 2008, p. 57). After that, participants responded to a question asking if they had ever been in any position where they experienced this phenomenon.

Participants did *not* have to have experienced toxic leadership to participate in this study. Thus, a hypothetical toxic leader scenario allowed responses from those who *have* and those who *have not* experienced toxic leadership to share their subjective beliefs regarding responses to toxic leaders. The goal of this question allowed a comparison to differentiate between the difference between having experience and not having experienced toxic leadership (i.e., responding to hypothetical) using the Toxic Leadership Scale.

Toxic Leadership Scale. In 2008, Schmidt developed the Toxic Leadership Scale, which consists of 30 statements to measure toxic leadership. In 2014, Schmidt condensed the original Toxic Leadership Scale, resulting in 15 statements. This study adopted Schmidt's (2014) Toxic Leadership Scale to assess the salient exposure to toxic leadership throughout participants' work history. Understanding salient experience with toxic leadership is imperative when examining generations. This recommendation comes from Geeraerts et al. (2021), as they argue the importance of studying both age and experience with the study's topic (i.e., experience with the research problem). Further, for consistency with past research, I wanted to categorize groups of people and ages allowed this study to place people in a group and look at participant characteristics informing differing viewpoints.

This study modified Schmidt's (2014) scale in two steps. First, this study modified participant instructions. In Schmidt's (2008) research, participants focused on any single supervisor they identified as destructive. In Schmidt's (2014) research, participants reflected on their current supervisor. For this study, participants thought about their collective previous and current experience with supervisors. For instance, the instructions read, "To begin, please think about your previous and current experience with work and supervisors. Indicate the extent to which you agree or disagree with each of the following statements regarding your previous or

current work history with supervisors." This collective reflection allowed this study to understand their prior exposure and experience with toxic leadership. After that, respondents indicated the extent to which they agreed or disagreed with each of the 15 statements regarding their previous or current work history with supervisors using a 5-point Likert type scale ranging from *Strongly Disagree* (1) to *Strongly Agree* (5). Cronbach's alphas for the five sub-scales are as followed: abusive supervision = 0.79, authoritarian leadership = 0.84, narcissism = 0.81, self-promotion = 0.85, and unpredictability = 0.85 (Schmidt, 2014).

Second, I modified language from Schmidt's (2014) Toxic Leadership Scale to reflect work outside the military sector. The revised wording was necessary since Schmidt developed both versions of the Toxic Leadership Scale for the military rather than the civilian sector. For example, "Determines all decisions in the *unit* whether they are important or not" was changed to "Determines all decisions in the *workplace* whether they are important or not." This change is necessary since this study is not limited to only the military sector and included the civilian sector.

After completing the Toxic Leadership Scale, participants were directed from Qualtrics to the Q platform and presented with the Q sorting task. This transition was necessary because the Qualtrics platform does not allow Q sorting data collection or analysis.

Materials for Q Sorting Task. Next, the survey presented respondents with the Q sort activity and instructions for completing the activity. First, the Q platform presented respondents with a welcome page, thanked the participants for their time, and gave instructions for completing the online Q sort. Then, to match respondents with the Q sort and the previous Qualtrics survey, participants were again instructed to create their same unique respondent

identifier (i.e., SGIC) so that data could be anonymously linked. Appendix D shows a complete outline for the Q sorting task.

After creating an SGIC, respondents read the *condition of instruction*. According to Brown (1993), the condition of instruction is the statement of specific instructions on how to complete the sorting activity. In addition, the condition of instruction places attribution and concentration on the meaning (McKeown & Thomas, 2013). In this study, participants ranked each of the statements across a continuum according to the degree they believe is the *most uncharacteristic* (+1) to the *most characteristic* (+9) of how they would respond and react if they were to experience toxic leadership. The condition of instruction for this study read: *How closely does this statement reflect your personal views and opinions regarding both how and why you would respond if you were to experience toxic leadership?* In other words, participants responded to a hypothetical event in the future or were able to reference a previous experience.

Step 1: Preliminary Rough Sort. First, participants read each of the 41 individual statements on a card randomly displayed at once. Additional instructions included information that each statement offered a different response to the research question. Next, participants began to sort the statements into three categorical piles. These provisional ranking categories included statements they feel *most characteristic* (positive +9), *most uncharacteristic* (negative +1), and *relatively moderate* (middling +5). Initially, statement items sorted in the *most characteristic* pile are statements that participants feel are *most like* their personal views and opinions regarding their response if they were to experience toxic leadership. Statement items sorted in the *most uncharacteristic* pile are statements that participants feel are most *unlike* their viewpoints regarding their reaction if they were to experience toxic leadership. Finally, statements sorted in

the third pile are statements that participants feel *relatively moderate*. Initially, there is no set number of statements that each of the three categories may have (Watts & Stenner, 2012).

Step 2: Card Placement. In this step, participants began to sort their statements onto the Q sort grid. Participants placed all 41 items eventually into the Q sort grid. Figure 8 exemplifies a Q plot distribution matrix. This process in Q is known as a forced-choice distribution for all the statements (Watts & Stenner, 2012). In other words, this means that participants will translate their feelings into rankings on the distribution. For example, statements placed on the far right of the grid will illustrate that participants believe that it is *most like* their beliefs, whereas statements placed on the far left of the grid will illustrate that it is *most unlike* their beliefs.

Figure 8

Q Plot Distribution Matrix

How closely does this statement reflect your personal views and opinions regarding both how and why you would respond if you were to experience toxic leadership?

Most uncharacteristic | Most characteristic

1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9

Note. Distribution markers are placed at the top of the Q plot distribution matrix to guide sorting. At the top is the condition of instruction's abridged statement. This figure illustrates a steep or near-normal fixed (+1 to +9) distribution designed for use with a 41-item Q set.

First, participants read the cards in their *most characteristic* pile again. Then, they selected the two cards from this pile that they felt were the two *most characteristic*. After choosing these two cards, they placed them in the two boxes on the far-right side of the table (i.e., in the last column on the right side). Participants were instructed that the vertical (stacked) order of cards within a column did not matter when beginning to sort.

After that, participants read the cards in their *most uncharacteristic* pile. Then, they selected the two cards from this pile that they felt were the two *most uncharacteristic*.

Subsequently, they placed these two cards in the two boxes on the far-left side of the table (i.e., in the first column on the left side). Again, participants were reminded that the order of the cards within a column did not matter.

Then, participants revisited the *most characteristic* pile on the right. They selected the cards from those remaining in this pile that were the *next most characteristic* in their view and placed them in the next-to-last column on the right side of the table. Likewise, participants went back to the *most uncharacteristic* pile on the left, selected the cards from those remaining that are the *next most uncharacteristic*, and then placed those in the second column on the left side of the table. Working back and forth in this fashion, participants continued putting cards into the table until all the cards from the *most uncharacteristic* and *most characteristic* piles were on the table.

Finally, they re-read the cards in the *relatively moderate* pile and arranged them in the remaining open boxes of the table. Non-extreme statements placed in the middle of the grid can help assist in the data interpretation process and serve as a "fulcrum" to the most extreme statements (Watts & Stenner, 2012, p. 154). Additionally, the "middle sort" may have different meanings to different people, and terms such as "relatively moderate," "middling," or "non-extreme" are also used to refer to these middle statements. These recommended steps for the Q sort activity are in line with past Q research studies (Rieber, 2020).

Step 3: Fine-Tuning. Next, participants received instructions that they may come back to the grid and make changes at any time. The purpose of this was to ensure that participants initially did not get caught up in their responses. In the fine-tuning stage, participants reviewed their placement of the cards once more and rearranged them if they wished. Once satisfied with the final arrangement of the cards, participants began the next step.

Step 4: Details About Extreme Sorts. After sorting the items into the Q plot distribution matrix, participants had the opportunity to respond to open-ended responses justifying the placement of statements at the different two ends of the grid. First, participants explained the two most characteristic statements. Then, finally, participants justified the two least characteristic statements. These qualitative responses become useful in factor analysis and allow for a richer and more detailed understanding of participants' Q sorts (Watts & Stenner, 2012).

Step 5: Post-Sort Questionnaire. In this final step, a combination of open-ended responses and demographic questions improved the quality of the overall viewpoint that emerged (Watts & Stenner, 2012). In this fifth step, participants indicated if any specific statements were challenging to place. Additionally, respondents provided feedback if any statements were missing from the Q sort. After the comment portion of the Q sort activity, participants responded to a demographic questionnaire. According to Watts and Stenner (2012), obtaining any personal and demographic information that may have a chance of influencing research participants' viewpoints should be collected. Collecting demographic information provides additional clues during data analysis and interpretation, thus contributing to one of Q methodology's strengths of holism, ensuring that the data captured encapsulates the whole viewpoint (Watts & Stenner, 2012). In other words, this information was needed to look at demographic patterns (e.g., toxic leadership exposure, generational identity, education, gender, race, and English as a first language) that inform each emergent viewpoint. Appendix D illustrates a complete list of demographic questions collected.

Post-Sort Interview. According to Brown (1980), interviews in Q are often overlooked; however, they are deemed essential. Thus, after the Q sort activity and initial factor analysis and interpretation, I contacted participants who provided contact information for a follow-up

interview to clarify participant responses. Initially, my goal was to select at least one participant from each factor that emerged. However, I opted to interview two participants from each factor to ensure diversified demographics relative to toxic leadership exposure and generational identity were represented. Specifically, three interviews took place on Zoom, and three interviews took place face-to-face. The qualitative component allowed a deeper examination of how employees perceive responses regarding toxic leadership. In addition, these interviews ensured that I interpreted the emerging factors correctly. In other words, the qualitative interviews served as a form of member checking. These interviews aimed to study each research participant more extensively to illustrate the items they sorted. This means that they helped create a narrative around each factor by justifying why they sorted the items the way they have. Interview questions focus on understanding essential and salient items from the extremes of *most uncharacteristic* (+1) to *most characteristic* (+9) meanings and significance of items that participants attributed to their viewpoints (Watts & Stenner, 2012). Additionally, qualitative interviews allowed them to share their perspectives from the other two emergent viewpoints. Lastly, qualitative interviews examined anomalies, such as statements within the factor array that did not make sense. More specifically, I clarified questions concerning generational identity and experience with toxic leadership. For example, "You indicated that you didn't think of yourself belonging to any generation. Can you elaborate on that?" In another instance, "How, if at all, do you see generational identity relating to viewpoints regarding responding to toxic leaders?" Lastly, "How, if at all, do you see exposure to toxic leadership relating to viewpoints regarding responding to toxic leaders?" In sum, the post-sort interviews captured a robust, rich, and more detailed understanding of the research participants' Q sort and refined factor interpretation. Appendix E demonstrates the interview discussion guide.

Data Analysis

Q Sort Data Analysis and Interpretation

In Q data analysis, persons are correlated and factored. The analysis reveals shared views and perspectives about employee responses regarding toxic leadership. Participants with similar views will significantly load on the same factor. Here, this method is abductive. Abductive approaches are "logic designed for *discovery* and *theory generation*, not for testing and theory verification" (Watts & Stenner, 2012, p. 38). Abduction allows exploration and discovery among participants' shared viewpoints to generalize their views (Watts & Stenner, 2012). In Q, each factor "will potentially identify a group of persons who share a similar perspective, viewpoint or attitude about a particular topic, or who seem to be, in this context at least, of a similar *type*" (Watts & Stenner, 2012, p. 18). In abduction, the research attempts to explain why something is happening in a particular way using clues to make guesses or hypotheses and provide explanations (Watts & Stenner, 2012). This abductive process moves back and forth by holistically examining the factor array and viewpoint to provide a complete rationale for that viewpoint regarding a specific group of people. Then, researchers can use those likely theories or guesses as inferences for future research based on those hypotheses.

Data analysis and interpretation took place in several steps based on the recommendations of Watts and Stenner (2012). First, I stored all participant data on a password-protected computer accessible to the primary investigator and co-investigator. Initially, I entered the scores of the 41 Q statements into Ken-Q Analysis and Desktop Edition (KADE) (version 1.2.1.). KADE is an open-source package for Q data analysis (Banasick, 2019). KADE was selected because it provided several features not available in other Q software. Next, the software coded the 31 individual participant Q sorts. Here, KADE analyzed each Q statement and

provided a score ranging from "1," signifying *most uncharacteristic of my belief*, to "9," illustrating *most characteristic of my belief* if I were to experience toxic leadership, depending upon where the participant placed each Q statement within the 9-column Q plot distribution matrix. Subsequently, the software extracted eight principal component factors via principal components analysis (PCA). Next, the software applied varimax rotation. As a result of this, three factors emerged. After that, I analyzed the three factors looking at consensus statements, distinguishing statements, extreme statements, and disagreement statements within each factor array. Afterward, I used participant demographic information to examine participants' characteristics and how they informed each viewpoint.

After KADE identified the three factors, I examined the open-ended post sort questionnaire data. Of the 18 participants (58%) who agreed to a follow-up interview, three had sorts that loaded positively on Factor 1, and no participants had a sort that loaded negatively on Factor 1. Of the 18 participants who agreed to a follow-up interview, eight had sorts that loaded positively on Factor 2, and no participants had a sort that loaded negatively on Factor 2. In addition, one participant was a confounding variable in Factor 2. In other words, this means that the participant's Q sort loaded significantly on more than one factor. Of the 18 participants who agreed to a follow-up interview, seven had sorts that loaded positively on Factor 3, and no participants had a sort that loaded negatively on Factor 3. One participant was identified as a confounding variable in Factor 3, suggesting a relationship with multiple factors.

After determining the factors and examining each factor's score, I reached out to interviewees following two criteria. First, I wanted to interview participants whose sorts loaded most strongly on each factor. Second, I sought to interview participants from each of the four generations and diverse toxic leadership exposure. Interviewing participants with diverse

characteristics was important for answering the research questions. That is, to understand to what extent do participant characteristics inform differing viewpoints. As a result, I completed six participant interviews that helped provide more significant insights into understanding participants' viewpoints. In other words, two interviews from each of the three factors were conducted.

Interview Analysis and Interpretation

First, I recorded all interviews. Then, I transcribed all recorded interviews. After that, I read through the transcript entirely. After the initial read-through, I read through the transcript for a second time to analyze themes and used thematic analysis to code interviews. In the first cycle of coding, I used values coding. Values coding is an appropriate method because it is a type of affective coding method. Affective coding approaches "investigate subjective qualities of human experience (e.g., emotions, values, conflicts, judgments) by directly acknowledging and naming those experiences" (Saldaña, 2016, p. 124). Since Q research is the study of subjectivity, this first cycle coding approach was the best fit. In the second cycle of coding, I used pattern coding. I employed both coding processes to analyze and interpret the qualitative data.

First Cycle of Coding. First, I implemented values coding. Values Coding is ideal for this study because it helped uncover what participants *valued* and their *attitudes* and *beliefs* (Saldaña, 2016). In other words, it is the participants' beliefs and how they view the world. According to Saldaña (2016), uncovering attitudes may shed light on how we think and feel about ourselves or another person, thing, or idea. In other words, this is illustrated through the beliefs that illicit "a system that includes values and attitudes, plus personal knowledge, experiences, opinions, prejudices, morals, and other interpretive perceptions of the social world" (Saldaña, 2016, p. 298). This coding approach helped answer research question two by

uncovering to what extent participant characteristics inform differing viewpoints. In other words, values coding helped to account for values related to generational and cultural values that appeared in the qualitative post-sort questionnaire along with participant interviews. In other words, values coding helped to account for values related to generational and cultural values that appeared in the qualitative post-sort questionnaire along with participant interviews. In doing so, I simultaneously examined post-sort open-ended responses and transcripts from participant interviews as they provided illustrations of the three distinct viewpoints. The codes were illustrated in the coding process by "V" for values, "B" for beliefs, and "A" for attitudes. After I coded all text for values, beliefs, and attitudes, I categorized them into three groups: values, beliefs, and attitudes. After that, I spent time reflecting on their meaning collectively to see how they contributed to the narrative storytelling of each of the three factors. Namely, I asked myself: *How did they contribute to the storytelling among the viewpoints?* This first round of values coding resulted in themes related to the toxic triangle, specifically, susceptible follower and unsusceptible follower beliefs such as concerns about negative consequences that may arise from speaking up, concerns about not speaking up to toxic leaders, feelings of generational identity (or lack thereof), tenure within the company, and prior toxic leadership exposure.

Second Cycle of Coding. After the first coding cycle, I completed the second cycle of coding. In the second cycle, pattern coding assisted in analyzing the data. I waited to begin this second coding cycle until I had collected all qualitative data. This waiting period ensured that I could account for patterns and differences between individuals. Pattern coding is ideal to use when the researcher's goal is to condense copious amounts of data, searching for rules, causes, and explanations in the data (Miles et al., 2014). Furthermore, this coding method allowed for examining patterns of human relationships and the social network that occurred to generate

common “categories, themes, or concepts” (Saldaña, 2016, p. 236). To effectively code the data in the second cycle, I went back to the first cycle codes and assigned them various pattern codes (Saldaña, 2016). For example, I searched for words such as “if,” “and then,” and “because” to help develop major themes, patterns, and relationships from participants to capture their beliefs regarding responses to toxic leaders. The themes that emerged from the coding process included: safety, perceptions of whistleblowing, emotions, and regard toward others and the environment. Ultimately, these themes assisted with interpreting the three emergent factors: “Suffer in Silence,” “Confront and Advocate,” and “Quiet yet Concerned.” In sum, the coding approaches of values and pattern coding helped clarify the viewpoints that emerged.

Positionality Statement

This discussion of my positionality as a researcher is essential given my personal experience with toxic leadership. It is no doubt that I have preconceived biases about employee responses regarding toxic leadership in addition to participants’ characteristics, such as generational identity, related to differing viewpoints. For instance, I identify as a Millennial. Therefore, I assumed that Millennials experience toxic leadership in the workplace. Furthermore, I thought that those experiences with toxic leadership typically come from Baby Boomers who hold high authority positions, which was true in my personal experiences. These biases made it imperative to ensure that my study’s design did not include these preconceived biases. Therefore, I ensured that procedures and processes were in place. For instance, I developed this positionality statement and had my committee review this current research project to identify any biases that I may have. As a result of these assumptions, my readers must understand my experiences with the topic. In addition, my positionality shapes this study. Therefore, it is vital to disclose my positionality to assist readers in seeing the truth. This next section will demonstrate my

experience with toxic leadership and inform readers how my thinking has informed this research study.

At the time of data collection and analysis for this research project, I no longer taught or worked in academia. Instead, I worked for a nonprofit and enjoyed my job. Consequently, because of the COVID-19 pandemic, my job became increasingly challenging. However, I had the opportunity to work with a great team. What is more, I had a supportive leader to guide and support my efforts amidst the pandemic and the chaos that it caused our organization. Before my work in the nonprofit sector, I was working in academia. Here, I expand on my experiences with workplace toxicity in academia.

Workplace Toxicity

Toxic Co-Workers. My first toxic experience in the workplace occurred when I began a new teaching position. In this role, I was taking over for an older gentleman who was retiring. I remember walking in the hallway with a leader of the school. Here, the leader of this institution warned me to be "cautious" of this individual because "no one could do it as well as he could." Here, she told me that he was holding off on retirement for many years, and this was finally the year that he was planning on retiring. As I was escorted to my classroom and shown my office, she instructed me to take whatever materials he had and say that I would use them even if I had my materials and was not planning on using them. I appreciated the honesty and kindness that she had shown me as a newcomer in this organization. At this time, I was young and taught various communication courses for several years at numerous colleges. Therefore, I had felt that I was well-versed and well-equipped to teach the communication course.

A few weeks later, the gentleman who had retired decided to stay as an adjunct instructor into the first semester of this new teaching role. One day early in the semester, he approached

me, and he wanted to set up a meeting to discuss the course and share his materials. I obliged his request for two reasons. First, I was new to this organization. As a result of being new, I wanted to make an excellent first impression on the other instructors and staff. I believed that meeting with him would set a good first impression. Second, I enjoy engaging in scholarly discourse with other educators. Since my early years of teaching, I have always enjoyed seeing what other teachers are doing in their classrooms to see if I can apply what they use to my classroom. As an educator, it was my duty to make the classroom environment more conducive for learning. After accepting his meeting request, I told myself that I would go into this meeting with an open mind to see what I could learn from him.

During this meeting, he began to question me, asking me about specific communication course terms. I wondered: *Was this a job interview?* Thankfully, my training and education had equipped me well, and I aced the answers to his questions. At first, his questions about course concepts caught me off guard. Then, I joked with him by asking if this was a job interview. In all seriousness, he replied by stating that he wanted to make sure I was "teaching the right stuff." After this experience, I began to see the connections with what the individual had warned me about in one of our first conversations.

Over the next several weeks after this conversation of him quizzing me about basic communication terms, I began to ask myself several questions: *Do gender and age have anything to do with my experience? Does my education pose a threat? How, if at all, do generational differences play a role?* I had prior knowledge of this individual as I had a family member go to school with him. This family member did not have very kind words about this gentleman and described him as "odd" throughout the school. While I had a family member with insider

knowledge about him, I knew of several individuals, like friends and colleagues, who had him as a teacher. What is more, my co-workers had informed me of the numerous student complaints.

After encountering this man, I did whatever I could to avoid him like the plague. I became disgusted and disengaged with this organization to allow such a toxic co-worker to walk all over other co-workers. During this disengagement period, I kept to myself, no longer spoke with this individual, and ignored his presence. I kept to myself, worked hard teaching, and hoped that this would pass, and he would eventually retire. Furthermore, while at this job, I stayed busy teaching anywhere from eight to nine – three-credit courses in a single semester. Fast forward to the present day, and he still teaches at this organization. Therefore, he never fully retired from teaching because "no one could do it as well as he could."

Toxic Leadership. Shortly after I had first experienced my first toxic co-worker, I soon realized that I was working with a second toxic co-worker, my leader. Thus, I realized that I was working in an organization that promoted toxicity. As a result of this realization, I asked myself two questions: *Why am I still working here? How can I get out of this situation?* This experience of working for a toxic organization resulted in my research interest and inquiry, and my dissertation topic began to emerge.

At the beginning of my toxic leadership experience, I did not know that the term toxic leadership existed. I heard of the "Dark Side of Leadership" in an interpersonal course from previous communication courses but have never explored this concept further. My first experience with Karen (*all names changed to ensure confidentiality) occurred in my first semester teaching at this school. I first felt something that I had never experienced while working when a trusted co-worker told me Karen had asked another instructor to "watch me" for two reasons. First, to make sure that I was doing my job in the classroom and ensuring that I was

teaching everything I should. Second, the instructor would watch me making sure that I did not leave work too early. As a result, I became baffled. My course syllabi were rather long (around ten pages) and included all the content discussed throughout the semester. I put together long syllabi to protect myself and used them as a contract between students and myself. If Karen had a problem with me, I could not understand why she would not come directly. With my background in communication, perhaps I am more sensitive to communicating. From this experience, I learned to avoid Karen and avoid the instructor who was watching me. As a result, I limited all contact with these two individuals and became cold towards them. In sum, I felt more disengaged.

Every day that I would walk into work, I felt that I was walking on eggshells. I had already had enough challenges in the classroom with students and their parents, coupled with additional administration challenges, adding more stress and anxiety. I would continuously ask myself: *Is it worth it? Should I just quit?* I knew that I could not quit as I had bills to pay. Maintaining financial security was an important dimension when making decisions. Therefore, I found myself browsing online job postings while continuously showing up at my toxic job.

After leaving the toxic leadership experience, I realized that Karen displayed multiple specific behaviors from Schmidt's (2008) toxic leader behaviors of all five dimensions of toxic leadership: *abusive supervision*, *authoritarian leadership*, *narcissism*, *self-promotion*, and *unpredictability*. This development of making connections between Schmidt's (2008) toxic leader behaviors and Karen comes years after reflecting on my experience. This connection was further enhanced when Karen was promoted professionally, ultimately landing another position within academia. Her promotion throughout her career made me ask: *What was this individual*

willing to do to get ahead of others? In addition, her display of narcissism and self-promotion over my tenure working for this organization was ghastly unsettling.

One of the courses I took while enrolled in my Ph.D. program was an instructional technology and adult learning course. One day, a co-worker asked me to give a formal presentation to other faculty members regarding technology in the classroom. I obliged, and I began thoughtfully preparing for this presentation. While preparing, I wanted to ensure that I shared the most adept technology integrating into the classroom. While presenting, I noticed Karen in the front row on her phone during the entire duration of the presentation. This social behavior made me ask: *Why was she doing this? Did I threaten her because my training and schooling were in the process of surpassing hers?* Responding to these questions would be a multi-year long process. The mental capacity that this experience brought to me was an overwhelming and exhausting process that, to this day, I continue to search for answers. While I am still trying to answer these questions, I do not let my experience with toxic leadership take an emotional toll on me.

What is more, at the end of the first semester, our students filled out teacher evaluations. When I received the results, I received a letter and information that I was in the top 10% of teachers throughout the state. This accolade was quite exciting, and I was elated. But, unfortunately, I received no recognition from my toxic leader or toxic co-workers. Perhaps Karen felt threatened by this accolade I received, thus further enhancing the toxic leadership opportunities.

Susceptible Follower

In this research project, I identify myself as a *susceptible follower* to the toxic triangle. However, I have learned to respond and cope with toxic leadership throughout my toxic

leadership experience in several ways to be more vocal in my work. I have realized that I am an *agent* and *co-creator* within the toxic triangle. Thus, how I respond to toxic leadership impacts toxic leaders and their opportunities to be more or less toxic. Below are my experiences with how I responded to my toxic leadership situation and the feelings that I have experienced.

Coping with Toxic Leadership. While working at this toxic organization, I became close with two teacher confidants, trying to understand my experience with others who worked firsthand for Karen. One confidant was a Millennial like me. This confidant's toxic leadership experiences were like mine, and we frequently confided in each other to help make sense of what we went through. One day, Karen called one of my confidants into the office and began yelling at her. This instructor started crying, and Karen shouted, "stop crying!" Unfortunately, Karen disregarded this teacher's feelings, and the abuse continued throughout the semester for this individual and me.

Silence. I had remained silent throughout my short time following Karen and the toxic organization. While I searched for an understanding of responding to toxic leadership with silence, I often wondered: *What happens when individuals who experience toxic leadership are silenced?* I aim to see the good in people and follow the golden rule "do unto others as you would want to have them do to you." In fact, I realized that following this elementary principle is critical as new generations take over leadership positions. Thus, my purpose for this research project is to investigate employee responses regarding toxic leadership to help add to the slowly growing conversation of this costly and detrimental social phenomenon.

Voice. Another response mechanism that I faced with my toxic leader was being vocal. I did not become vocal with my concerns until I felt safe to do so. Safety meant that I had known that I would have all my basic needs met if I needed to quit quickly. I had bills to pay, and my

top priority was holding onto a paycheck and health insurance. At the start of my second year of teaching, I acted and joined the teacher's union. A trusted co-worker told me that Karen "leaves people alone" in the teacher's union. At this point, I was willing to try anything. This teacher's union gives voice to members through member advocacy, offers protection to unjust treatment, provides legal assistance in employment areas, and brings concerns to the legislature. One coping mechanism of my experience with toxic leadership forced me to join the teacher's union, which was an added cost. Here, I was looking for someone to be on my side and give me a voice. Unfortunately for me, the teacher's union did not help the toxic leadership experience.

Leaving the Organization. Finally, after a year and a half under the toxic leadership regime, I found the courage to stand up and quit mid-year at the end of the semester. At this time, I did have another job lined up. I was not in love with the new job as I would be working nights and weekends, but I was willing to do whatever I needed to get out of that toxic environment. According to Brené Brown (2012), "The brain wants a pattern to keep us safe, and it wants a story to make sense of what's happening" (p. 5). In other words, safety was a top priority of mine, and I needed to get out. According to Brown (2012), my actions of speaking up, standing alone, and finding courage are our true selves. Deep down, the toxic organization's values did not align with my personal beliefs, and removing myself from that toxic situation became a top priority.

Scarcity. Since first experiencing workplace toxicity, I have tried to make sense of my experience by reading literature and books that discuss destructive workplaces, trying to understand my experience with toxic leadership. One of the books that I came across was the work of Brené Brown (2012). In Brown's (2012) books, she discusses the term scarcity. *Scarcity* consists of three components to include shame, comparison, and disengagement. Thinking back

to one of my first days of teaching at this college and my experience with the older gentleman I was taking over, I felt shame. Brown (2012) defines shame as "the feeling that washes over us and makes us feel so flawed that we question whether we're worthy of love, belonging, and connection" (p. 73). In other words, I was worried about being put down and ridiculed as I was much younger than the rest of the instructors. Namely, I began to question my belonging and connection to that toxic workplace.

Along with a sense of shame, I was always nervous about being compared to this toxic co-worker's teaching style. Yes, I did teach significantly differently from him. My background and previous research focused on teacher immediacy. Immediacy is a term coined in communication and education literature that showcases closeness between two individuals (Mehrabian, 1969, 1981). Immediacy in the classroom is a sense of closeness between the student and teacher utilizing positive teaching traits such as eye contact, smiling, asking for student input, and other nonverbal and verbal communication. As a result, I was in tune with classroom connections.

Power. While attempting to make sense of my toxic leadership experience, I discovered that power had been a constant appearing theme. At first, I believed that power is an unfavorable term that is restraining. However, my self-dialogue and self-inquiry over the years have allowed me to be reflexive throughout this research project. As a result, power has become an opportunity to evolve from restraining to empowerment. On the one hand, it may be true that supervisors hold a higher position within a hierarchy than their subordinates. However, on the other hand, I have found that this self-dialogue with my toxic leadership experience has allowed me to mentally shift my power dynamics and voice my experience of toxic leadership. If I still worked at this toxic place, I am not sure I would have felt safe sharing my experiences. Quitting

this job has allowed me to feel empowered in two ways. First, I feel able to take control of my actions. My toxic leadership experience has made me realize that I am the only one responsible for my journey. Second, I will share my voice and research regarding toxic leadership. This freeness has allowed me to write my dissertation. I have turned a negative experience of toxicity into a positive experience of moving toward the finish line of earning my doctorate.

Conducive Environment

Baby Boomer Generational Values. Interestingly, Karen was well-versed in generational research. She had given the same talk on generational differences more times than a person had fingers and toes. However, I could not help but notice that her words did not match her actions. She had given the presentation so often that the faculty would mock and roll their eyes when she would begin to bring up generational differences within the workplace. At least once a year at faculty development, Karen would present the generational differences. She had many followers. For instance, one follower was her assistant. This assistant would stand next to her with the PowerPoint clicker advancing the slides during presentations almost puppet-like. Moreover, she would self-identify as a Baby Boomer and talk about her generation's values. When she would begin talking about Millennials, we would emphasize how this is a unique generation as they are more adept at technology than previous generations. While she was well-versed in generational research, her actions against other generations were apparent that future generations threatened her.

Millennial Generational Values. While further combing through the literature, I came upon a reading suggesting that current generations' loyalty and commitment to the workplace are obsolete. As I read this, I felt this held some truthfulness. As mentioned previously, I currently work for a nonprofit. I have been in my current role for almost two years. I began working for

this nonprofit at the beginning of the pandemic. Throughout my first year, I experienced three different job cuts. As a result of these job cuts, we lost almost half of our employees. Thankfully, I still have a job. As I have watched colleagues come and go within the organization, I feel that this experience of these job cuts has resulted in my view of how I see work. I believe that there is no such thing as job security. I think that there is life beyond working. I believe that this is a contributing factor in individuals for "job-hopping." Simply put, this view of how I view work further enhances my belief that we go to work primarily for a paycheck to meet our most basic needs.

Absence of Checks and Balances and Institutionalizations. During my experience of toxic leadership, cross-checking organizational policies became a weekly occurrence. I realized that even though written policies exist to protect workers, these policies remain overlooked. To illustrate, the toxic organization gave me ten days of sick time, and Karen told me that I could not use them in the middle of the semester. I was so confused, and I knew that she was lying. Then, in the second semester of my first year of teaching, I needed surgery. When I first told Karen that I would be having surgery, she played games with my head. To my face, she would say to me what sounded good. For example, she sent a sympathy card and well wishes and even told me to take as much time off as needed.

Furthermore, Karen told me I could work from home or do whatever I needed to recover, but just keep her posted. A few days after recovering from surgery, I asked her about teaching from home by emailing her. Spring break was quickly approaching for the students, so I thought it would be a good time to recover. She stated that I could not teach from home in her email response. Her spoken words did not match her written words. I further became confused. In her email, she went on to tell me that the toxic retired man who was now an adjunct would come and

in and substitute for me. My first thought was: *Who has substitute teachers in college for missing two classes?* My second thought was: *Why was she backtracking her word?* I had often wondered why she was trying to keep me guessing what she was thinking. According to Schmidt's (2008, 2014) research, these were classic behaviors of an authoritarian leader. Precisely, she needed to control how I completed my tasks.

Moreover, she was inflexible regarding organizational policies, such as taking off sick time. To illustrate, after putting in my resignation two and a half months in advance to allow ample time for the organization to find another instructor, I realized that I had some sick time to use. The sick time was either "use it or lose it." Here, I decided to use my sick time for doctor's appointments and care from the past surgery I had put on hold for so long. After asking to use my sick days, Karen approached me and stated that I could not use them because I quit mid-year. I smiled and said, "okay." I knew that this was not true. As a result of this, I made a phone call to human resources. The benefits coordinator told me that what Karen had said was not true and could use them at my discretion. Karen was delusional, thinking that her way was correct, and illustrated toxic leader behaviors disregard policies to promote their agenda.

Gender Differences. Throughout my experience with toxic leadership, I became aware of contextual factors, and I wondered how these played a role in my experiences. At the end of my first year of teaching, this workplace presented me with a new contract. After that, I accepted the contract. Within a few days of accepting this contract, I was stopped in the hallway by another one of my supervisors, only for her to let me know that they "calculated" the salary wrong and that I would be receiving a significantly lower number. This supervisor's position of power and inequalities was visible here. Naturally, everyone compares their salary to their co-workers. Each July, every worker within the school district's salary was printed in the local

newspaper as this was public knowledge. Most individuals who worked in the school district kept a copy of this newspaper in their desk drawer for "quick reference."

That same year, we had a new, young male instructor fulfill a teaching position in our department. When salaries came out that July, I noticed that he made over $5,000 more than me. I had more experience and formal education, yet he made more than me. When I confronted my other supervisor asking for the formula used in calculating my salary, she would delay or avoid talking about money and never give me a clear answer as to what this "magic formula" was in figuring out my salary. This formula consisted of experience and education when calculating compensation. To this date, the "magic formula" for calculating wages remains unknown. This behavior of withholding information is another toxic trait identified by Schmidt.

Learning Process

I combed through hundreds of research articles and books throughout my coursework and this multi-year-long dilemma of what I would identify as toxic leadership. During this time, I cited quotes that resonated with me or were essential and wrote various papers for courses on toxicity, workplace dysfunction, employee retention, and psychological contracts in the workplace. Furthermore, I have developed this positionality statement over four years. Through my writing these papers for doctoral coursework, I discovered perhaps this issue of toxic leadership lies within my identity. My experience with toxic leadership has informed my research design of utilizing Q methodology along with the toxic triangle. Using these two components, I have better understood the various perspectives and opinions of employee reaction types regarding toxic leadership. Initially, while my experience with a toxic leader was a Baby Boomer, the Q methodology design allowed me to understand a pattern relative to individuals' characteristics, like generational cohort and exposure to toxic leadership, and demonstrate how

people typically think they deal with toxic leadership. In other words, this has challenged my belief that generational differences drive toxic leadership responses.

Additionally, I am writing this because I have felt significant silence while working for a toxic leader. I am writing this to give voice to others who have experienced toxic leadership. My academic duty is to use my voice within research to those marginalized groups and overlooked workers. Their stories and how they make meaning of this experience are important to share for future generations in the workplace. I am writing to show that toxic leaders cannot get ahead of their subordinates, who they bully. This research is empowering, and I am attempting to give voice to those who have been silenced by toxic leaders.

Throughout this process, I discovered two things. First, I found little research to conceptualize employee responses regarding toxic leadership and how employees view those toxic environments. Second, the writing process and speaking about my experience have led to the discovery of empowerment. True to Sir Francis Bacon, knowledge is power.

Empowerment. While writing about my toxic leadership experience, I have felt vulnerable. At first, writing about these painful and hurtful experiences opened wounds. However, I have found that this journey that talks about my experiences has led to empowerment. This is because writing exposes the truth and specific vulnerabilities. According to Brené Brown (2012), vulnerability makes one authentic and allows an individual to feel a sense of belongingness, love, and happiness. Brené Brown (2012) believes in the importance of standing up for oneself, asking for help, saying no, and sharing unpopular opinions. When we make ourselves vulnerable, we see a sense of authenticity that ultimately lets us feel emotions and experiences that lead to happiness.

Resiliency. Brown's (2012) philosophy has helped me build resiliency relative to my toxic leadership experience. To illustrate, it was a yoga class during the holidays in which the class focused on self-compassion, gratitude, and joy by letting go of perfectionism and scarcity. So often, setting intentions is foundational in the practice of yoga. To demonstrate, setting an intention in yoga start with the phrase "I am…" and ends with a simple word designed to be non-judgmental where the goal is to find love and respect for yourself. Some examples include "I am joyful," "I am enough," and "I am happy with my life." In sum, developing intentions has allowed me to build resiliency.

The Lotus Flower as a Metaphor. In another example, my yoga class used the lotus flower as a metaphor to promote healing. The lotus flower is an ancient flower that dates to the Egyptian tomb depictions (Poklis et al., 2017). In addition, the lotus flower is known to be sacred and provides healing (Emboden, 1989). For instance, lotus flowers begin their growth journey by starting in the dark underneath the mud. While on their growth journey, they grow toward the sun while ultimately growing into beautiful flowers. My beliefs about my journey of toxic leadership are like the journey of the lotus flower. At first, my toxic leadership experiences were dark and unsettling. However, as time went on, I have learned to see the positivity in my toxic leadership experience and have used this experience as a learning opportunity. As a result, this reflection allows me to use the lotus flower as a healing tool. For example, as I externalize this experience, I interpret and find a meaning-making process throughout this phenomenon of a stressful life event, that of toxic leadership. In other words, this meaning-making allowed me to reflect on the social interactions and events that have led me into dynamic storytelling.

Progressive Philosophy. Finally, my beliefs regarding the workplace are rooted in a progressive philosophy (*see* Dewey, 1938). In other words, education should emphasize

experiences, purposeful learning, and the ability to have freedom. Based on a progressive adult education philosophy, I believe that the purposes of adult education are to promote societal well-being while enhancing individual efficiency in society and learners with practical knowledge and problem-solving skills. For instance, organizations should provide a safe space with educational opportunities for employees to explore different interest areas without failing. Furthermore, I believe individuals should have the freedom to choose paths of interest to them. In fact, andragogical research shows we are more willing to learn when we have a connection or a strong desire to connect with the material (*see* Knowles, 1980).

Conclusion

As I conclude writing my positionality for this research project, I have found that this retrospective analysis is the beginning conversation for advocacy within the workplace. Individuals who experience toxic leaders are *agents* and *co-creators* in the toxic triangle. In other words, I have attempted to be an agent by speaking out against toxic leadership with the hopes of decreasing toxic leadership opportunities and ultimately destroying the toxic triangle. Writing these paragraphs and pages has helped me understand and make sense of my own toxic leadership experience. These words have shown me that I have remained resilient. The writings of my positionality have brought on a sense of empowerment. They have shown me how important this research is to the scholarship in understanding toxic leadership in the workplace among individuals who feel oppressed and do not have the voice to speak up to toxic leadership. The research project is the beginning work of advocacy that must occur within organizations. Leaders must remain vigilant to educate themselves on toxic leadership to prohibit and mitigate these dysfunctional behaviors. In our vehicles, the windshield is much larger than the rearview mirror. In other words, we confront adversity and emerge in greater prosperity rather than

looking at what is behind us. With this research, there is promise in our future leaders to support their employees even further. As a result of this research project, I have emerged more robust in speaking on these dysfunctional workplace behaviors of toxic leadership. Moving forward in my professional career, it is my responsibility to share this research to ensure that our organizational structures and systems provide empowered support to their employees.

Summary

In summary, Chapter 3 discussed the methodological approach utilized to demonstrate the range of perceptions regarding toxic leadership in the modern workplace. First, I provided an overview of the research design giving insight into Q. Then, I presented how the present study uses Q. Next, I discussed the instrumentation to illustrate data collection and briefly data analysis. Finally, the chapter closed with my positionality statement that informed readers of potential influences for this research study.

CHAPTER 4. RESULTS

The purpose of this study was to demonstrate the range of perceptions of responses from those currently in the workforce regarding toxic leadership in the modern workplace. This was accomplished by using the toxic triangle as a lens (Padilla et al., 2007). Further, this study investigated whether participant characteristics, such as toxic leadership exposure, generational identity, education, gender, race, and English as a first language, inform differing viewpoints. This study's purpose was achieved by investigating the following two research questions.

RQ$_1$: What are employee perceptions regarding their typical behaviors, thoughts, and reactions when navigating a toxic work environment?

RQ$_2$: To what extent do participant characteristics inform differing viewpoints?

Participants (n = 31) sorted 41 Q statements developed from a concourse of 163 statements regarding responses to toxic leadership in the modern workplace. After the sorting activity, participants responded to post-sort questions explaining their reasoning for statements that they believe were the most extreme of *uncharacteristic* (+1) to *characteristic* (+9) of their beliefs regarding responses to toxic leadership. Additionally, participants responded to demographic questions. Finally, follow-up qualitative interviews were completed with six participants to clarify the three emergent viewpoints.

First, this section will provide a detailed description for data analysis, including the correlation matrix for the Q sorts, factor analysis, factor extraction, factor rotation, and factor scores. Then, I will present the beginning stages of factor interpretation by elucidating the crib sheet method for each of the three factors. Next, I will provide details on the qualitative data analysis and interpretation, including the Card Content Analysis technique. Finally, I will present the results for each of the two research questions and the interpretations of the three factors.

Data Analysis

Data were analyzed using Ken-Q Analysis and Desktop Edition (KADE) version 1.2.1 (Banasick, 2019). As previously mentioned, KADE is software explicitly designed for Q research. After I collected data, the data were analyzed using statistics carried out by Watts and Stenner (2012) through three transitions. First, I *calculated a correlation matrix* and *factor analysis*—this step transitions *Q sorts to factors*. Second, *factor rotations* determine how many Q sorts are different and provide *factor scores*, thus transitioning *factors to factor arrays* (Brown, 1993). Here, the 31 completed Q sorts fell "into natural groupings by virtue of being similar or dissimilar to one another" (Brown, 1980, p. 208). As indicated in Brown (1980), "if two persons are like-minded on a topic, their Q sorts will be similar, and they will both end up on the same factor" (p. 208). Lastly, *factor arrays* transition to *factor interpretations*.

Correlation Matrix for Q Sorts

First, KADE calculated the correlation matrix. In other words, a total of 31 Q sorts were intercorrelated using a 31 by 31 correlation matrix. While the correlation matrix itself is not very useful in the data analysis, it provides the preliminary first step to get to the next phase of factor analysis. The purpose of factor analysis is to reduce the data (Watts & Stenner, 2012). Thus, the correlation matrix serves as a grounding in which each participant's Q sort correlates with every other Q sort. Furthermore, the purpose of the correlation matrix is to show pair by pair the similarity of the ranking between completed Q sorts. In other words, correlations help identify Q sort pairings that are highly and lowly correlated. As a result, correlations serve as sites for factors to emerge. In simpler terms, *Q sorts* begin to transition to *factors*. In addition, correlation matrices can be a helpful first step in drawing out the shared perspectives of participant responses regarding toxic leadership. What is more, the correlation matrix represents 100% of

the meaning and variability in the study (Watts & Stenner, 2012). In other words, all participant Q sorts remain present in the analysis as removing participants from data analysis would alter the variance.

Factor Analysis

The next step in data analysis is factor analysis. As previously mentioned, factor analysis is a data reduction technique used to identify common viewpoints among groups (Watts & Stenner, 2012). In other words, factor analysis reduces data into a smaller number of factors which explains the relationship between variables (i.e., the participants). In the factor analysis, two choices for factor extraction exist to include *centroid factor analysis* (CFA) and *principal component analysis* (PCA) (*see* Kline, 1994). CFA was the method of choice for many years before more advanced statistical software (Brown, 1980). However, because of advancements, PCA is one of Q methodology's most common extraction methods (McKeown & Thomas, 1988). In fact, in the Q community, PCA is the extraction method of choice (Akhtar-Danesh, 2017). PCA extracts uncorrelated linear combinations of the Q sorts and analyzes the variance of all the variables (i.e., the individual Q sorts) (Akhtar-Danesh, 2017). To illustrate, the first factor extracted will explain the highest variance level, and the second factor will explain the second highest variance. This process of factor extraction continues until 100% of the variance is explained by the factors (Akhtar-Danesh, 2017). Regardless of the rotation method, the results produce similar results (Watts & Stenner, 2012).

Most recently, Banasick (2020) argues that "the most appropriate extraction method will depend on the structure of the data and theoretical concerns of the research" (p. 16). Following Banasick's (2020) recommendations of examining the data structure, I tested both CFA and PCA to determine which rotation method was best to demonstrate my Q knowledge. This statistical

analysis comparison was analyzed using KADE. In doing so, I ran 14 different combinations. To illustrate, I analyzed both CFA and PCA for Factors 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, and 8. I set the significance level at $p < .01$, and a majority of common variance was required. The two-factor CFA and the two-factor, three-factor, and four-factor PCA extraction methods yielded similar results with a high number of defining sorts and low-level of confounded sorts. However, the CFA two-factor solution only accounted for 40% of the variance explained. Likewise, the PCA two-factor solution did not explain high variance and only accounted for 44% of explained variance. While the PCA four-factor solution provided the most explained variance at 57%, the PCA four-factor solution did not have the minimum number of four sorts (i.e., four participants loaded onto the factor) to define the fourth factor. This recommendation of four sorts at minimum to define a factor comes from Brown (1980). Thus, the three-factor PCA solution was proven to be the best fit as it accounted for 51% of the variance. Additionally, it had a high number of defining sorts and a low level of confounded sorts while ensuring that each of the three defined factors had well over the four defining sorts as Brown (1980) recommended. Appendix G illustrates the results from the comparison of extraction and rotation combination output.

Factor Extraction

Initial Factor Extraction. This step searches for a shared pattern or portion of common variance. In other words, this step searches for common viewpoints among the completed Q sorts. In this step, KADE extracted three factors. The factor loadings provide context for each Q sort and how well each Q sort illustrated each factor (Watts & Stenner, 2012). In other words, the factor loadings suggest how highly associated each person is with each unique perspective. Each factor’s variance derives from the eigenvalues (EV) with the following equation (Brown, 1980, p. 222):

$$\% \text{ Variance for Factor } 1 = 100\frac{\text{EV}}{n}$$

$$\% \text{ Variance for Factor } 1 = 100\frac{9.36}{31}$$

$$\% \text{ Variance for Factor } 1 = 30\%$$

EVs are the preliminary first stage for identifying factor loadings. EVs' purpose is to illustrate the similarity between each factor rather than the similarity between each Q sort (Watts & Stenner, 2012). In other words, EVs represent the similarities between the individual columns rather than the rows. Furthermore, it will demonstrate the variability among the factors. Thus, EVs become helpful when determining which factors to retain for factor rotation and factor scores. Table 8 illustrates the first eight EVs from the correlation matrix. Appendix F represents the complete initial factor loading matrix among the 31 Q sorts and eight factors.

Table 8

First Eight Eigenvalues from the Correlation Matrix

Factor	Eigenvalue	Proportion of variance extracted	Cumulative proportion of variance
1	9.364407	30	30
2	4.40574106	14	44
3	2.08372694	7	51
4	1.72959349	6	57
5	1.56860992	5	62
6	1.37468053	4	66
7	1.33376736	4	70
8	1.24375705	4	74

Note. Principal components analysis was used for these EVs calculations.

Determining Factors to Retain. The first eight EVs determine how many factors to extract from the data set. This recommendation comes from Watts and Stenner's (2012) guidelines for deciding how many factors to extract from the data set. Based on these recommendations, I used five approaches: the Kaiser-Guttman criterion, Watts and Stenner's guidelines, Humprey's rule, scree test, and parallel analysis.

Kaiser-Guttman Criterion. First, I examined the Kaiser-Guttman criterion. This method comes from Guttman (1954) and Kaiser (1960, 1970). Specifically, it suggests that factors should be retained if the EVs are 1.00 or above. Based on the Guttman-Kaiser approach, all eight factors were over 1.000 and did not reduce the number of factors. One explanation for all factors containing an EV over 1.000 may be due to the larger P set (*see* Kline, 1994). Yet, other scholars have concerns that the Kaiser-Guttman method may extract too many factors and does not help in the data reduction process (Watts & Stenner, 2012). While Kaiser-Guttman's method of objective data criteria was not helpful for this study, I utilized four other approaches for determining which factors to keep.

Watts and Stenner Guidelines. Next, Watts and Stenner (2012) provided two useful criteria for determining how many factors to retain. First, they argue that subjectivity such as experience is useful when determining how many factors to include. However, Watts and Stenner (2012) acknowledge that experience with Q research designs may not always be feasible for novice researchers. Since this was my first time using the Q research design, I needed more objective parameters to decide how many factors to retain. Second, Watts and Stenner (2012) provide additional objective direction for determining how many factors to include. In fact, they recommend extracting one factor for every six to eight participants. This study had a total of 31 participants. Based on this advice from Watts and Stenner (2012), I would need to extract anywhere from 3-5 factors. This advice was helpful when examining how many factors to retain by comparing this objective number to alternative methods.

Humphrey's Rule. Fourth, I applied Humphrey's rule. Humphrey's rule "states that a factor is significant if the cross-product of its two highest loadings (ignoring the sign) exceeds

twice the standard error (Brown, 1980, p. 223). Using Brown's (1980, p. 223) standard error equation:

$$\text{Standard Error } (\text{SE}_\text{r}) = \frac{1}{\sqrt{\text{N}}} = \frac{1}{\sqrt{41}}$$

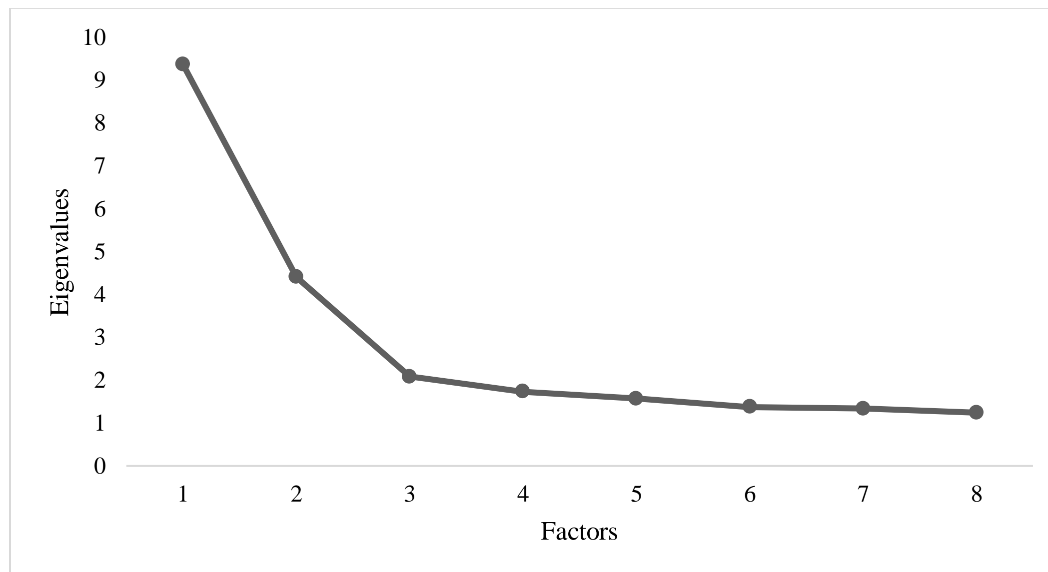
$$\text{Standard Error } (\text{SE}_\text{r}) = 0.16$$

Thus, two times the standard error for this study is 0.32. Using Humphrey's rule, I calculated cross-products for all eight factors. The cross-product for Factor 1 was 0.59 (0.7686 X 0.771). For Factor 2, the cross-product was 0.53 (0.6985 X 0.7618). The cross-product for Factor 3 was 0.25 (0.5958 X 0.4375). For Factor 4, the cross-product was 0.29 (0.4888 X 0.5899). The cross-product for Factor 5 was 0.24 (0.4972 X 0.4861). For Factor 6, the cross-product was 0.21 (0.5026 X 0.4173). For Factor 7, the cross-product was 0.19 (0.4712 X 0.4054). Finally, for Factor 8, the cross-product was 0.18 (0.4608 X 0.3966). Results showed that not one of the eight factors was over twice the standard error of 0.32. Consequently, according to Humphrey's rule, this study would retain no factors. Retaining no factors for this study would be problematic because this would suggest that no distinct viewpoints exist, despite this being untrue.

Scree Test. After that, I conducted a scree test (Cattell, 1966). Based on Watts and Stenner's (2012) recommendations, PCA is the only factor extraction method to use the scree test. Since this study determined PCA as a good fit, this was an appropriate test to run. In a scree test, the line graph plots EVs. Figure 9 demonstrates the scree test. To illustrate, a line runs through Factor 1 and Factor 2, and the slope would remain the same. However, after Factor 2, the slope changes dramatically. Thus, this study should retain two factors.

Figure 9

The Scree Test



Note. The scree test for this study shows eight principal components for the first eight Eigenvalues from the correlation matrix.

Parallel Analysis. Parallel analysis is analyzed by "extracting eigenvalues from random data sets that parallel the actual data set with regard to the number of cases and variables" (O'Connor, 2000, p. 397). In other words, the number of cases refers to the number of items in the Q set, and the variable refers to the number of participants. Therefore, software extracted eigenvalues from 41 cases and 31 participants. In other words, a series of 100 random (i.e., no meaningful correlations) data matrices following a 41 by 31 size was generated using Stata (StataCorp, 2015). As a result of the parallel analysis for this study, two factors should be retained.

Summary. Table 9 illustrates an overview of the recommended number of factors regarding the above tests. Thus, based on the above guidelines for making decisions on for deciding how many factors to extract from the data set in addition to exploring both CFA and PCA for Factors 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, and 8, the PCA three-factor solution provided to be the best fit

for this study. In sum, the three factors in the unrotated factor matrix that this study selected account for 51% (Factor 1, 30%; Factor 2, 14%; Factor 3, 7%) of the study's total variance. This percentage indicates the proportion of extracted variance. According to Kline (1994), percentages above 35% to 40% are considered appropriate for identifying common factors. In addition, the three-factor solution gave the best groupings and provided the most meaning across the three groups of Q sort loadings on each factor.

Table 9

Summary of Factor Tests

Test	Number of factors indicated
Guttman-Kaiser Method	8
Watts and Stenner	3*-5
Humphrey's Rule	0
Scree Test	2
Parallel Analysis	2

Note. An asterisk (*) signifies that the three-factor solution was most meaningful.

Factor Rotation

The next step in Q research is factor rotation. Factor rotation assists in interpreting factors by rotating factors and their viewpoints across a point to ensure the most meaningful view emerges (Watts & Stenner, 2012). In simple terms, factor rotations reposition each factor to clarify the viewpoints of a certain group of Q sorts. For example, the goals of factor rotation are to maximize explained variance and increase the number of significant sorts for each factor. Another goal of factor rotation is to minimize confounded sorts and non-significant factors. In other words, it is essential to minimize Q sorts that load onto more than one factor (Watts & Stenner, 2012). Q sorts are confounded when they possess a significant factor loading onto more than one of the study's identified factors (Watts & Stenner, 2012). Q sorts that are non-

significant do not exemplify any of the study's factors (Watts & Stenner, 2012). Thus, this study's goal of factor rotation is to provide increased clarity and focus on participants' viewpoints regarding toxic leadership.

Two types of factor rotation exist in Q: *varimax* and *hand rotation*. First, the *hand rotation* technique rotates the factors by hand. Thus, the researcher is responsible for deciding where each factor should be positioned (Watts & Stenner, 2012). As a result, hand rotation is a more subjective statistical approach. Watts and Stenner (2012) suggest that the hand rotation technique may be best suited when you have some piece of knowledge about the Q sort data that would require a manual rotation. This piece of knowledge may include having some insider knowledge about your participants, such as someone with a high level of influence in an environment that may "hold sway" (Watts & Stenner, 2012, p. 123). In other words, certain individuals within particular institutions may have more power than others. Manual rotation provides the ability to rotate these sorts that may "sway." Thus, a strength of hand rotation is for the researcher to provide manual movement.

Second, *varimax rotation* is an automatic rotation in which the statistical software considers the maximum amount of the study's variance (Watts & Stenner, 2012). In other words, this rotation technique minimizes Q sorts with high loadings on each factor to simplify interpretation. As a result, varimax rotation focuses on most viewpoints holistically rather than selecting one or two perspectives that may carry the most weight (Watts & Stenner, 2012). Thus, varimax rotation is a more objective statistical approach, which may benefit some researchers (Watts & Stenner, 2012). In addition, Watts and Stenner (2012) recommend that varimax rotation be used in larger data sets as it is a reliable factor rotation method. Hence, varimax will illuminate the essential viewpoints from everyone regarding responses to toxic leadership.

Watts and Stenner (2012) argue that there is no right or wrong way to rotate factors and that it is a matter of researcher preference. However, Watts and Stenner (2012) also indicate that some journals view hand rotation as an immediate red flag to the research study as it appears to be subjective and thus appears to be unreliable even though this is not true. In addition, Watts and Stenner (2012) suggest that hand rotation is a skill developed over time. Consequently, novice Q researchers should caution using the hand rotation method as a first-time approach because of its complexity. Another challenge with hand rotation is that complexity increases with a larger P set in Q studies (Watts & Stenner, 2012). Thus, KADE extracted three factors using varimax rotation.

Factor Scores

After rotation, the software identifies participants as Q sorts who exemplify each of the three factors. More specifically, *defining sorts* refers to individual Q sorts that load onto a specific factor. This step in defining sorts is known in Q as *flagging*. Flagging factors refer to using Q sorts to create factor estimates (Watts & Stenner, 2012). In other words, flagging factors generate an estimate of the factor's viewpoint. Q sorts that belong to each factor are referred to as *flagged*. This indicates that flagged Q sorts exemplify a certain factor. While statistical software performs this process, it can also be done by hand using an equation derived from Spearman (1927).

Table 10 illustrates the Q sorts (i.e., individuals) that loaded significantly onto each of the three factors. These significant Q sorts are denoted by "X." That is, this table illustrates how closely each Q sort approximates to each factor (i.e., viewpoint). In other words, the factor matrix with significance showcases similar individuals (i.e., Q sorts) to represent factors in which the factor represents similar views, feelings, or preferences about responses regarding

toxic leadership. Furthermore, these individuals load onto the factor if the factor loading is $p < 0.01$, indicating a statistically significant loading.

Table 10

Factor Matrix with Significance Denoted by X

Q Sort	Factor 1	Factor 2	Factor 3	
22	**0.7554X**	-0.093	-0.0679	
10	**0.7404X**	-0.3355	0.1566	
6	**0.7304X**	-0.0884	0.3581	
26	**0.6989X**	0.5241	0.0253	
1	**0.6869X**	0.0605	-0.0116	
17	**0.6671X**	0.1675	0.4178	
30	**0.6451X**	0.1368	0.4023	
9	**0.6021X**	0.4296	0.2561	
19	**0.6016X**	0.2881	0.1708	
8	**0.5455X**	0.3062	0.427	
5	**0.5191X**	0.2438	-0.073	
3	0.2017	**0.7769X**	0.284	
24	-0.2787	**0.7527X**	0.0733	
27	0.2059	**0.7287X**	0.1529	
7	-0.0704	**0.7115X**	-0.0428	
4	0.1606	**0.694X**	-0.0381	
12	-0.0333	**0.6342X**	0.4744	
15	0.3158	**0.6151X**	-0.0398	
21	0.2553	**0.596X**	0.3583	
25	-0.2936	**0.5958X**	-0.117	
18	0.2989	0.4789	0.4197	(confounded sort)
11	0.1705	**0.386X**	0.0809	
2	0.5673	0.0125	**0.6345X**	
28	0.1032	0.1635	**0.6026X**	
13	0.3223	0.2789	**0.5803X**	
31	0.2789	-0.2744	**0.5637X**	
20	-0.2274	-0.0277	**0.5605X**	
29	0.3764	0.1798	**0.5015X**	
14	0.2565	0.3318	**0.5001X**	
16	0.201	-0.1167	**0.4819X**	
23	0.0718	-0.0484	-0.1626	(confounded sort)
% expl. Var.	20	19	13	

Note. X indicates significant loading at $p < 0.01$.

All three factors selected for this study explain 52% of the study's variance, which is over half of the total variance. Thus, this variance is a respectable number for this study (Watts & Stenner, 2012). This study's three factors account for 29 of the 31 completed Q sorts. Brown (1980) recommends at least four Q sorts to define each factor (i.e., view). To illustrate, Factor 1

had 11 defining sorts. Factor 2 had ten defining sorts. Finally, Factor 3 had eight defining sorts. Thus, each factor meets Brown's (1980) recommendations for defining factors. Before factor rotation, the variance of this study was 51%. This suggests that the study's factor loadings have slightly changed but the communality (i.e., a single Q sort has in common with other Q sorts) of the participants Q sorts have not (Watts & Stenner, 2012). Simply put, this factor rotation shifts the researcher's viewpoint, not the participant views captured with the Q sorts, enhancing the researcher's understanding of the distinct viewpoints.

The term "correlation coefficient" was coined by Karl Pearson (1896). Correlation coefficients describe the strength of relationships between two variables (Ratner, 2009). Correlations can range from -1.00 to 1.00 and are often categorized in one of three categories including weak (0 to 0.3 or -0.3 to 0), moderate (0.3 to 0.7 or -0.3 or -0.7), or strong (0.7 to 1.0 or -0.7 to -1.0) (Ratner, 2009). In Q, Watts and Stenner (2012) caution that strong correlations between factors suggest that they are too alike to interpret. Consequently, this would make interpreting the factor arrays between highly correlated factors difficult. Therefore, Q recommends that factors retained have low to moderate correlations. In fact, if any one of the correlations is strong, the researcher extracted too many factors. If this is the case, the researcher must go back and reevaluate how many factors should be determined.

This study's correlation matrix reflects the participants as variables in which each Q sort correlates with every other Q sort. The correlation scores for the three factors ranged from 0.26 to 0.59, suggesting weak to moderate relationships. To illustrate this further, for this study's three factors, Factors 1 and Factor 2 are weak with a 0.26 relationship. In addition, the correlation between Factor 2 and Factor 3 is weak at 0.28. Finally, the correction between Factor 1 and Factor 3 is moderate at 0.59. Based on Watts and Stenner's (2012) recommendations, this

study's correlations provide evidence that three unique perspectives exist. Table 11 illustrates the correlation scores for the three factors.

Table 11

Correlation Matrix between Factor Scores

	1	2	3
1	1.0000		
2	0.264	1.000	
3	0.5874	0.2828	1.0000

Next, standardized z-scores were calculated for each factor to create a factor array. This transition from *factor* to the *factor arrays* emerges from the significantly loading Q sorts. The purpose of z-scores is to help create the factor array for each emergent factor. Z-scores allow comparisons across each of the three factors (Watts & Stenner, 2012). For example, Factor 1 has 11 loading sorts, whereas Factor 2 has ten loading sorts, and Factor 3 has eight loading sorts. Hence, z-scores create equality among the factors. Q sorts with the high z-scores indicate a higher position in the factor array (+9). Simply put, high z-scores will indicate which statements are *most characteristic* (+9) of a specific viewpoint. On the other hand, Q sorts with low z-scores indicate that they will hold a lower position in the factor array (+1). Thus, low z-scores will indicate which statements are *most uncharacteristic* of participants' viewpoints regarding responses to toxic leadership. Appendix H contains the factor z-scores and ranking for each of these items for all three emergent factors. As a result, based on the z-scores, the factor array is assembled.

The factor array illustrates how a prototypical participant in a factor would rank the statements. Ultimately, factor arrays contribute to understanding relationships that exist (Watts & Stenner, 2012). In this study, I began with the individual viewpoints of 31 participants captured

by 31 Q sorts. After factor extraction and rotation, 31 Q sorts have been reduced to three distinct viewpoints. In sum, these three distinct viewpoints represented by factor arrays assist in the third transition of Q data analysis, from *factor arrays* to *factor interpretations*.

Beginning Stages of Factor Interpretation

Correlation matrixes, factor analysis, factor extraction, factor rotation, and factor scores provide one piece of the puzzle when determining differences among each of the three factors. However, in this next stage of data analysis, the purpose of the factor interpretation is to go beyond the statistical procedures to further enrich the understanding between each identified factor. More specifically, the aim of factor interpretation "is to uncover, understand and fully explain the viewpoint captured by the factor and shared by significantly loading participants" (Watts & Stenner, 2012, p. 181). To elucidate each factor, Watts and Stenner (2012) recommend using the "crib sheet" as a systematic and methodological approach for helping with interpretation. Thus, I utilized the "crib sheet" method for each factor.

Factor 1 Crib Sheet Draft 1. First, I created the first draft of the crib sheet for Factor 1. In this first stage, I sorted all 41 statements into four categories. These categories include "Items ranked at +9," "Items ranked higher in Factor 1 array than in other factor arrays," "Items ranked lower in Factor 1 array than in other factor arrays," and "Items ranked at +1." Table 12 illustrates the factor interpretation for crib sheet Factor 1 (draft one). Next, I put aside statements that were situated between Factor 2 and Factor 3 for draft two. These guidelines for placing statements align with Watts and Stenner (2012). The goal of the crib sheet is to quickly and objectively sort through each statement to begin to develop an understanding of the viewpoints regarding Factor 1.

Table 12

Factor Interpretation for Crib Sheet Factor 1 (Draft 1)

Items Ranked at +9
22. [AS] Remain silent at work because nothing will change, anyway. +9
23. [QS] Remain silent at work because of fear of negative consequences from my toxic leader. +9
Items Ranked Higher in Factor 1 Array than in Other Factor Arrays
1. [LCSE] Follow a toxic leader because I have trouble handling most of the problems I face. +5
3. [LCSE] Follow a toxic leader because I feel like my success in my career is outside of my control. +4
4. [HPLD] Follow a toxic leader because I feel emotionally vulnerable. +6
8. [UN] Follow a toxic leader because they provide feelings of acceptance. +5
9. [UN] Follow a toxic leader because I want to ensure financial stability for my practical needs to be met – such as shelter, food, and doctor's bills. +7
11. [PA] Support a toxic leader because I want to advance in my career. +4
12. [G] Support a toxic leader because that allows for me to get ahead without contributing anything in return. +3
14. [G] Support a toxic leader because that will allow me to get ahead in my career without working harder. +4
15. [LSIC] Support a toxic leader so that I don't have to express my emotions. +7
20. [AS] Remain silent at work because my toxic leader is not open to proposals, concerns, or the like. +8
21. [AS] Remain silent at work because I will not find a sympathetic ear, anyway. +7
24. [QS] Remain silent at work to not make me vulnerable in front of colleagues. +8
25. [QS] Suffer in silence when faced with a toxic leader because that's what is in my best interest. +8
30. [OS] Remain silent in front of a toxic leader because I want to avoid additional work. +8
32. [AV] Voice agreement and go along with a toxic leader because I prefer to go with the status quo. +6
41. [ANOW] Anonymously voice my concerns about a toxic leader because I don't feel safe reporting wrongdoing within my organization. +7
Items Ranked Lower in Factor 1 Array than in Other Factor Arrays
2. [LCSE] Follow a toxic leader because I don't have control over the events in my life. +2
7. [UN] Follow a toxic leader because they provide me with some stability in life. +3
13. [G] Support a toxic leader because they will help me get more money. +3
18. [MACH] Support a toxic leader because they can help me achieve a higher status. +2
26. [PS] Remain silent when faced with a toxic leader because I do not want to embarrass others. +6
27. [PS] Remain silent when faced with a toxic leader because I do not want others to get in trouble. +6
28. [PS] Remain silent because if I speak up, this may reveal information that results in the organization's stability to suffer. +6
33. [DV] Voice ideas that try to shift the toxic leader's attention to others because I am afraid of voicing my true concerns to a toxic leader. +4
34. [DV] Voice support for a toxic leader because I want to protect myself from the toxic leader. +4
35. [PV] Voice my concerns to a toxic leader about workplace issues because I want what's best for the organization. +5
36. [INTW] Voice my concerns about a toxic leader to upper management, even if that means suffering from reprisals because I want what's best for the organization. +2
37. [EXTW] Voice my concerns about a toxic leader to an outside party (i.e., authorities, the media) who has the power to correct the toxic leader because I want what's best for the organization. +3
38. [FORW] Voice my concerns about a toxic leader because the organization has formal procedures in place for reporting a toxic leader. +5
39. [INFW] Voice my concerns about a toxic leader with someone I trust within our organization who could advocate for me because I don't feel safe expressing my concerns to someone else. +7
40. [IDEW] Publicly voice my concerns about a toxic leader because I feel safe reporting wrongdoing within my organization. +2
Items Ranked at +1
10. [PA] Support a toxic leader because I want to be better than everyone else at what I do. +1
19. [MACH] Support a toxic leader's unethical behaviors because it will help me succeed. +1

The next stage in developing the crib sheet is to examine the Factor 1 array for a second time. I inspected the crib sheet from top to bottom, beginning at items ranked at +9. These items suggest that these statements are very important to individuals with this viewpoint. As I passed through the crib sheet, I put myself in the participants' shoes to understand the perspective of the factor itself. This recommendation comes from Watts and Stenner (2012). I asked myself two questions: *What story are participants trying to tell? How do the item rankings contribute to the story?* As I went through each statement one by one, I adjusted the initial storytelling narrative. After I had gone through each statement, I examined demographic information for individuals who loaded onto Factor 1. Watts and Stenner (2012) recommend that researchers wait to analyze demographics and factors until this stage in the crib sheet method. The purpose of delaying demographic information is to ensure that each factor array is considered independently and that preconceived expectations are nonexistent. Table 13 illustrates relevant demographic information for Factor 1.

Table 13

Relevant Demographic Information for Factor 1

Participant #	Toxic Leadership			Generational Cohort		Birth Year	Gender	Race	Education
	Perceived	Actual	Degree	Perceived	Actual				
1*	Yes	4.1	High	Gen X	Gen X	1976	Male	White	Doctorate
5	Yes	3.7	Medium	BB	BB	1961	Female	White	High School
6*	Yes	2.0	Low	None	BB	1963	Female	White	Associates
8	Yes	4.6	High	None	Gen X	1966	Female	White	Some college, no degree
9	Yes	4.3	High	None	BB	1963	Female	White	High School
10	Yes	4.7	High	Gen Y	Gen Y	1990	Male	White	Associates
17	NA	NA	NA	Gen X	Gen X	1968	Female	White	Some college, no degree
19	Yes	4.5	High	Gen Y	Gen Y	1989	Female	White	Doctorate
22*	Yes	4.6	High	Gen Y	Gen Y	1995	Female	White	Master’s
26	Yes	3.8	Medium	Gen X & Gen Y	Gen Y	1980	Female	White	Master’s
30	Yes	4.2	High	Gen Y	Gen Y	1990	Female	White	Master’s

Note. This table indicates the 11 participants who loaded positively on Factor 1. An asterisk (*) denotes that the participant agreed to a follow-up interview. NA indicates that the participant did not complete the first part of the survey to obtain the Toxic Leadership Scale.

Factor 1 Crib Sheet Draft 2. Next, I examined the second draft of the crib sheet (*see* Table 12). In this second draft, I added additional statements to enhance the storytelling narrative for Factor 1. Here, I reexamined the Factor 1 array. During this second pass at Factor 1 array, I examined statements that the four categories previously omitted. In this case, those omitted statements were items between Factor 2 and Factor 3. As I went through each of these previously omitted statements, I looked at them holistically and in the overall context of Factor 1. I asked myself two additional questions: *What is the statement's relevance in the context of the overall viewpoint of Factor 1? Do these statements confirm or change the story that is being told?* By asking myself these two questions, I included a brief rationale for justifying the Q statement's inclusion into the initial factor interpretation to consider as I attempted to interpret the viewpoint for Factor 1 (*see* Table 14). In the first draft of the Factor 1 crib sheet, I identified 35 items. The second pass through the factor array resulted in four additional potential interest and importance statements to enhance factor interpretation. The four additional potential interest Q statements are bolded. The Q statements without parenthetical commentary mean that those statements are of less interest in factor interpretation (i.e., non-extreme statements).

Table 14

Additional Items Included in Factor 1 Crib Sheet (Draft 2)

Statement #	Statement	Array Position
5	[HPLD] Follow a toxic leader because that provides some stability in my life.	+4
6	[LSCC] Follow a toxic leader because I don't have a clear sense of who I am and what I stand for as a person. **(Suggests perceived personal attributes may be clearly defined)**	+3
16	[MACH] Support a toxic leader because if I show any weakness at work, I will get taken advantage of. **(Relatively moderate feelings towards Machiavellianism and weakness)**	+5
17	[MACH] Support a toxic leader because I like to have control within the workplace. **(Relatively moderate feelings towards Machiavellianism and control)**	+5
29	[OS] Remain silent in front of a toxic leader because of concerns that the toxic leader could take advantage of my ideas.	+6
31	[AV] Voice agreement with a toxic leader because disagreeing with them is pointless. **(Relatively moderate feelings towards passively supporting toxic leaders)**	+5

Factor 2 Crib Sheet Draft 1. After I developed the Factor 1 crib sheet, I moved on to Factor 2. I followed the same systematic process for Factor 2 as I did in Factor 1, including examining all 41 statements and quickly sorting the items into four categories. Table 15 illustrates the factor interpretation for the crib sheet for Factor 2 (draft one). After that, I completed a second pass through the Factor 2 array. I asked myself: *What other items help clarify the viewpoint of Factor 2?* After that, I examined demographic information for individuals who loaded onto Factor 2. Table 16 illustrates relevant demographic data for Factor 2.

Table 15

Factor Interpretation for Crib Sheet Factor 2 (Draft 1)

Items Ranked at +9
36. [INTW] Voice my concerns about a toxic leader to upper management, even if that means suffering from reprisals because I want what's best for the organization. +9
37. [EXTW] Voice my concerns about a toxic leader to an outside party (i.e., authorities, the media) who has the power to correct the toxic leader because I want what's best for the organization. +9
Items Ranked Higher in Factor 2 Array than in Other Factor Arrays
2. [LCSE] Follow a toxic leader because I don't have control over the events in my life. +3
5. [HPLD] Follow a toxic leader because that provides some stability in my life. +5
6. [LSCC] Follow a toxic leader because I don't have a clear sense of who I am and what I stand for as a person. +4
8. [UN] Follow a toxic leader because they provide feelings of acceptance. +5
9. [UN] Follow a toxic leader because I want to ensure financial stability for my practical needs to be met – such as shelter, food, and doctor's bills. +7
10. [PA] Support a toxic leader because I want to be better than everyone else at what I do. +3
13. [G] Support a toxic leader because they will help me get more money. +5
29. [OS] Remain silent in front of a toxic leader because of concerns that the toxic leader could take advantage of my ideas. +7
34. [DV] Voice support for a toxic leader because I want to protect myself from the toxic leader. +5
35. [PV] Voice my concerns to a toxic leader about workplace issues because I want what's best for the organization. +8
38. [FORW] Voice my concerns about a toxic leader because the organization has formal procedures in place for reporting a toxic leader. +8
39. [INFW] Voice my concerns about a toxic leader with someone I trust within our organization who could advocate for me because I don't feel safe expressing my concerns to someone else. +8
40. [IDEW] Publicly voice my concerns about a toxic leader because I feel safe reporting wrongdoing within my organization. +8
41. [ANOW] Anonymously voice my concerns about a toxic leader because I don't feel safe reporting wrongdoing within my organization. +7
Items Ranked Lower in Factor 2 Array than in Other Factor Arrays
1. [LCSE] Follow a toxic leader because I have trouble handling most of the problems I face. +2
4. [HPLD] Follow a toxic leader because I feel emotionally vulnerable. +3
11. [PA] Support a toxic leader because I want to advance in my career. +3
12. [G] Support a toxic leader because that allows for me to get ahead without contributing anything in return. +2
14. [G] Support a toxic leader because that will allow me to get ahead in my career without working harder. +2
15. [LSIC] Support a toxic leader so that I don't have to express my emotions. +4
16. [MACH] Support a toxic leader because if I show any weakness at work, I will get taken advantage of. +4
17. [MACH] Support a toxic leader because I like to have control within the workplace. +3
18. [MACH] Support a toxic leader because they can help me achieve a higher status. +2
22. [AS] Remain silent at work because nothing will change, anyway. +7
23. [QS] Remain silent at work because of fear of negative consequences from my toxic leader. +6
25. [QS] Suffer in silence when faced with a toxic leader because that's what is in my best interest. +4
26. [PS] Remain silent when faced with a toxic leader because I do not want to embarrass others. +6
27. [PS] Remain silent when faced with a toxic leader because I do not want others to get in trouble. +6
28. [PS] Remain silent because if I speak up, this may reveal information that results in the organization's stability to suffer. +6
30. [OS] Remain silent in front of a toxic leader because I want to avoid additional work. +4
32. [AV] Voice agreement and go along with a toxic leader because I prefer to go with the status quo. +5
33. [DV] Voice ideas that try to shift the toxic leader's attention to others because I am afraid of voicing my true concerns to a toxic leader. +4
Items Ranked at +1
3. [LCSE] Follow a toxic leader because I feel like my success in my career is outside of my control. +1
19. [MACH] Support a toxic leader's unethical behaviors because it will help me succeed. +1

Table 16

Relevant Demographic Information for Factor 2

Participant #	Toxic Leadership			Generational Cohort		Birth Year	Gender	Race	Education
	Perceived	Actual	Degree	Perceived	Actual				
3	Yes	4.8	High	Gen Y	Gen Z	1996	Female	Other	Master's
4*	Yes	4.6	High	Gen Y	Gen Y	1985	Female	White	Master's
7*	Yes	3.9	Medium	BB	BB	1958	Male	White	High School
11	Yes	4.0	High	Gen X	Gen X	1974	Female	White	Master's
12*	Yes	4.3	High	Gen X	Gen X	1979	Female	White	Master's
15*	Yes	4.0	High	Gen Y	Gen Y	1993	Female	White	Bachelor's
21*	Yes	3.8	Medium	Gen Y	Gen Y	1993	Female	White	Bachelor's
24*	No	2.0	Low	None	Gen Y	1985	Male	White	Associates
25*	Yes	4.2	High	Gen Y	Gen Y	1995	Female	White	Associates
27*	Yes	4.7	High	Gen Y	Gen Y	1987	Female	White	Master's

Note. This table indicates the ten participants who loaded positively on Factor 2. An asterisk (*) denotes that the participant agreed to a follow-up interview.

Factor 2 Crib Sheet Draft 2. Next, I examined additional statements in the Factor 2 crib sheet. Table 17 showcases the previously omitted items from the initial crib sheet in draft one as these items were between Factor 1 and Factor 3. Here, I asked myself two questions regarding the five statements listed below: *What is their relevance in the context of the overall viewpoint of Factor 2? How do these statements contribute to Factor 2's viewpoint?* In the first draft of the Factor 2 crib sheet, I identified 36 items. The second pass through the Factor 2 theoretical array resulted in the additional five potential interest and importance items.

Table 17

Additional Items Included in Factor 2 Crib Sheet (Draft 2)

Statement #	Statement	Array Position
7	[UN] Follow a toxic leader because they provide me with some stability in life. **(Identified as distinguishing, and bears on the issue of relatively moderate feelings toward unmet basic needs)**	+5
20	[AS] Remain silent at work because my toxic leader is not open to proposals, concerns, or the like. **(Identified as distinguishing, and suggests silence is characteristic because toxic leaders are closed off)**	+7
21	[AS] Remain silent at work because I will not find a sympathetic ear, anyway. **(Suggests relatively moderate feelings based on resignation)**	+6
24	[QS] Remain silent at work to not make me vulnerable in front of colleagues. **(Indicates relatively moderate feelings towards suffering in silence)**	+5
31	[AV] Voice agreement with a toxic leader because disagreeing with them is pointless. **(Suggests relatively moderate feelings towards agreeing with a toxic leader for status quo)**	+6

Factor 3 Crib Sheet Draft 1. Next, I examined Factor 3 using the same processes as Factor 1 and Factor 2. Once again, I sorted all 41 statements into four categories. Table 18 represents the factor interpretation for the crib sheet for Factor 3 (draft one). After that, I examined the Factor 3 array. I asked myself: *What other items help clarify the viewpoint of Factor 3?* After that, I looked at demographics for individuals who loaded onto Factor 3. Table 19 illustrates relevant demographic information for Factor 3.

Table 18

Factor Interpretation for Crib Sheet Factor 3 (Draft 1)

Items Ranked at +9
23. [QS] Remain silent at work because of fear of negative consequences from my toxic leader. +9
27. [PS] Remain silent when faced with a toxic leader because I do not want others to get in trouble. +9
Items Ranked Higher in Factor 3 Array than in Other Factor Arrays
2. [LCSE] Follow a toxic leader because I don't have control over the events in my life. +3
7. [UN] Follow a toxic leader because they provide me with some stability in life. +6
9. [UN] Follow a toxic leader because I want to ensure financial stability for my practical needs to be met – such as shelter, food, and doctor's bills. +7
10. [PA] Support a toxic leader because I want to be better than everyone else at what I do. +3
11. [PA] Support a toxic leader because I want to advance in my career. +4
13. [G] Support a toxic leader because they will help me get more money. +5
16. [MACH] Support a toxic leader because if I show any weakness at work, I will get taken advantage of. +7
17. [MACH] Support a toxic leader because I like to have control within the workplace. +6
18. [MACH] Support a toxic leader because they can help me achieve a higher status. +5
19. [MACH] Support a toxic leader's unethical behaviors because it will help me succeed. +2
26. [PS] Remain silent when faced with a toxic leader because I do not want to embarrass others. +8
28. [PS] Remain silent because if I speak up, this may reveal information that results in the organization's stability to suffer. +7
31. [AV] Voice agreement with a toxic leader because disagreeing with them is pointless. +8
32. [AV] Voice agreement and go along with a toxic leader because I prefer to go with the status quo. +6
33. [DV] Voice ideas that try to shift the toxic leader's attention to others because I am afraid of voicing my true concerns to a toxic leader. +7
34. [DV] Voice support for a toxic leader because I want to protect myself from the toxic leader. +5
39. [INFW] Voice my concerns about a toxic leader with someone I trust within our organization who could advocate for me because I don't feel safe expressing my concerns to someone else. +8
Items Ranked Lower in Factor 3 Array than in Other Factor Arrays
1. [LCSE] Follow a toxic leader because I have trouble handling most of the problems I face. +2
4. [HPLD] Follow a toxic leader because I feel emotionally vulnerable. +3
5. [HPLD] Follow a toxic leader because that provides some stability in my life. +3
8. [UN] Follow a toxic leader because they provide feelings of acceptance. +4
12. [G] Support a toxic leader because that allows for me to get ahead without contributing anything in return. +2
14. [G] Support a toxic leader because that will allow me to get ahead in my career without working harder. +2
15. [LSIC] Support a toxic leader so that I don't have to express my emotions. +4
24. [QS] Remain silent at work to not make me vulnerable in front of colleagues. +4
35. [PV] Voice my concerns to a toxic leader about workplace issues because I want what's best for the organization. +5
38. [FORW] Voice my concerns about a toxic leader because the organization has formal procedures in place for reporting a toxic leader. +5
41. [ANOW] Anonymously voice my concerns about a toxic leader because I don't feel safe reporting wrongdoing within my organization. +4
Items Ranked at +1
6. [LSCC] Follow a toxic leader because I don't have a clear sense of who I am and what I stand for as a person. +1
37. [EXTW] Voice my concerns about a toxic leader to an outside party (i.e., authorities, the media) who has the power to correct the toxic leader because I want what's best for the organization. +1

Table 19

Relevant Demographic Information for Factor 3

Participant #	Toxic Leadership			Generational Cohort		Birth Year	Gender	Race	Education
	Perceived	Actual	Degree	Perceived	Actual				
2*	Yes	4.6	High	None	Gen X	1969	Female	White	Bachelor's
13*	No	1.1	Low	Gen Y	Gen Y	1986	Male	White	Bachelor's
14*	No	2.5	Low	Gen Z	Gen Z	2000	Female	White	Bachelor's
16*	Yes	4.0	High	None	Gen Y	1990	Female	White	Master's
20*	Yes	4.1	High	None	Gen Y	1993	Female	White	Bachelor's
28*	No	1.3	Low	None	Gen X	1965	Female	White	Associates
29*	Yes	3.3	Medium	Gen Z	Gen Z	2002	Female	White	High School
31	Yes	4.7	High	None	Gen Z	1996	Male	White	Bachelor's

Note. This table indicates the eight participants who loaded positively on Factor 3. An asterisk (*) denotes that the participant agreed to a follow-up interview.

Factor 3 Crib Sheet Draft 2. Next, I examined additional items in the Factor 3 crib sheet. Table 20 showcases the previously omitted statements as factor arrays positioning in between Factor 1 and Factor 2. Again, I asked myself this guiding question: *What is their relevance in the context of the overall viewpoint of Factor 3?* In the first draft of the Factor 3 crib sheet, I identified 32 items. The second pass through the Factor 3 array resulted in eight additional statements of potential interest and importance.

Table 20

Additional Items Included in Factor 3 Crib Sheet (Draft 2)

Statement #	Statement	Array Position
3	[LCSE] Follow a toxic leader because I feel like my success in my career is outside of my control. **(Indicates relatively low/moderate feelings toward control and success)**	+3
20	[AS] Remain silent at work because my toxic leader is not open to proposals, concerns, or the like. **(Distinguishing statement that suggests a passive, silent approach)**	+6
21	[AS] Remain silent at work because I will not find a sympathetic ear, anyway. **(Suggests a relatively moderate feeling toward silence because of resignation)**	+5
22	[AS] Remain silent at work because nothing will change, anyway. **(Supports silence while bearing on the issue of feeling hopeless)**	+8
25	[QS] Suffer in silence when faced with a toxic leader because that's what is in my best interest. **(Distinguishing statement that suggests relatively moderate feelings toward passive suffering)**	+6
29	[OS] Remain silent in front of a toxic leader because of concerns that the toxic leader could take advantage of my ideas.	+5
30	[OS] Remain silent in front of a toxic leader because I want to avoid additional work. **(Suggests remaining silence based on avoidance)**	+7
36	[INTW] Voice my concerns about a toxic leader to upper management, even if that means suffering from reprisals because I want what's best for the organization. **(Distinguishing statement that has relatively moderate feelings towards internal whistleblowing)**	+6
40	[IDEW] Publicly voice my concerns about a toxic leader because I feel safe reporting wrongdoing within my organization. **(Distinguishing statement that holds relatively moderate positions toward feelings of safety and reporting issues)**	+4

Qualitative Analysis and Interpretation

After I went through and developed a crib sheet for each of the three factors, I conducted the qualitative interviews. After the interviews were over, I began the qualitative analysis and

interpretation stage. First, I transcribed the six participant qualitative interviews. Then, as previously mentioned, I used first cycle coding and second cycle coding to identify values and patterns among transcripts. After completing the first and second coding cycles, I began to paint a story between the three distinct factors. I utilized the Card Content Analysis (CCA) approach Gallagher and Porock (2010) recommended to create this narrative. CCA is a step-by-step method in analyzing consensus and distinguishing statements among all qualitative text in Q research. Thus, CCA identifies areas of agreement and statements ranked differently among the three emergent viewpoints. I used qualitative text derived from post-sort open-ended questionnaire responses and transcriptions from the follow-up qualitative interviews for this study.

In the first step of CCA, I searched for the six consensus statements first identified in factor analysis among participant transcripts for each of the three factors. In other words, I searched all text that was among agreement in the three factors. The purpose of searching for consensus statements among the three factors is to ensure that consensus text does not define the attitudes and beliefs of the three of the individual viewpoints that emerged. Simply put, the six consensus statements identified in factor analysis suggest that all three factors placed these statements similarly within the Q sorting process. Thus, these six statements do not contribute to the differences among each of the three factors.

After identifying all six consensus statements among the text, I proceeded to the second step in CCA. In this second step, I utilized distinguishing CCA, which focuses on the items ranked differently in each factor compared to the other emergent factors. In other words, distinguishing statements were the statements that had a statically significant z-score different among other factors. Here, I examined participant transcripts for distinguishing statements that

emerged from text through each of the three factors. In other words, I aimed to look for statements that defined the beliefs of the individuals who loaded onto each factor (i.e., statements that were statistically significantly different from the positioning in other factors). These distinguishing statements define the uniqueness of each factor and what sets each factor apart from the other factors. Thus, this systematic approach ensured that individuals loaded onto the specific factor were defined by a particular perspective rather than a consensus statement.

Finally, I interpreted each factor holistically while working through a thorough and systematic process. The factor interpretation stage investigated each factor array's distinguishing statements, low factor scores (+1, +2, +3), relatively moderate factor scores (+4, +5, +6), and high factor scores (+7, +8, +9). Specifically, I analyzed statements in the text for the three factor arrays for similarities (i.e., consensus statements) and differences (i.e., distinguishing statements). In doing that, the qualitative text justified the ranking of the items in the factor array. Resultingly, the CCA approach contributes to the factor analysis by enhancing a robust interpretation between the three factors.

Research Question 1: Employee Perceptions

The first research question this study sought to answer was: What are employee perceptions regarding their typical behaviors, thoughts, and reactions when navigating a toxic work environment? The data analysis revealed three distinct viewpoints regarding responses to toxic leadership: Suffer in Silence (Viewpoint 1), Confront and Advocate (Viewpoint 2), and Quiet yet Concerned (Viewpoint 3).

Consensus Statements

Before presenting the differences among the three viewpoints, it is central to illustrate the similarities between them. In Q, these similarities are consensus statements. According to Brown

(1980), consensus statements do not distinguish between any of the factors. In other words, all participants placed these statements in like positions in the Q sort response grid. What is more, the agreement can be negative (*most uncharacteristic* +1*)*, relatively moderate (*non-extreme* +4, +5, +6), or positive (*most characteristic* +9*)*. It should be acknowledged that the relatively moderate (i.e., "middle sort") may have different meanings to different people. Thus, regardless of position on the factor array, the purpose of consensus statements showcases the agreement among differing views (van Exel & de Graaf, 2005). Table 21 demonstrates the consensus statements with array positions. Furthermore, Table 21 illustrates the level to which participants loaded onto all three factors feel the statements are *most uncharacteristic* (+1) or *most characteristic* (+9) of their beliefs regarding responses if they were to experience toxic leadership. Thus, results demonstrate that agreement existed across the three different views about responses regarding toxic leadership for six statements.

Table 21

Consensus Statements with Array Positions

Statement	Array Position		
	1	2	3
19. [MACH] Support a toxic leader's unethical behaviors because it will help me succeed.*	1	1	2
9. [UN] Follow a toxic leader because I want to ensure financial stability for my practical needs to be met – such as shelter, food, and doctor's bills.*	7	7	7
8. [UN] Follow a toxic leader because they provide feelings of acceptance.*	5	5	4
5. [HPLD] Follow a toxic leader because that provides some stability in my life.*	4	5	3
29. [OS] Remain silent in front of a toxic leader because of concerns that the toxic leader could take advantage of my ideas.	6	7	5
2. [LCSE] Follow a toxic leader because I don't have control over the events in my life.	2	3	3

Note. These statements do not distinguish between any pair of factors. All statements are nonsignificant at $p < .01$. Those with an asterisk (*) are also non-significant at $p < .05$.

Importance of Job Security. Most interesting is the relatively high ranking of statement 9, "Follow a toxic leader because I want to ensure financial stability for my practical needs to be met – such as shelter, food, and doctor's bills." In other words, all three viewpoints ranked statement nine equally at +7. This array position indicated that participants whose Q sorts loaded positively on any of the three viewpoints believed having one's most basic needs met are *characteristic* of their response regarding toxic leadership. This belief was consistent among the three emergent factors. Respondents illustrated this perspective:

a) *"I am very risk-averse, so tend to approach things like paying rent and buying food pragmatically."*

b) *"I can see where you might want to remain quiet or not say something because of job security. Especially if you're younger."*

c) *"It's the thought of getting fired and not having a job."*

d) *"I continue to work for the toxic leader (in the best way possible) to provide for my family and our needs."*

e) *"I think when someone has the power to affect your family, finances, and life, it takes a lot to make you want to interfere with that."*

f) *"I'm assuming that at first, I would not do anything out of fear of losing the ability to provide for my family…in general, I'd say I naturally don't like to make waves, especially in regards to making a living."*

The placement of statement nine regarding job security is insightful because it relates to Maslow's hierarchy which suggested that we must have our most basic needs met (e.g., food and shelter) when navigating toxic leaders. Thus, this consensus statement highlighted the importance of ensuring that individuals may have to *conform*, *remain silent*, or engage in *passive voice* under a toxic leader's wrath to ensure financial security even in toxic leadership situations.

Strong Morals and Beliefs of Self Success. While job security is vital among all perspectives to ensure basic needs are met yet, participants are not willing to support a toxic leader to get ahead. More specifically, of notice is the low ranking of statement 19, "Support a toxic leader's unethical behaviors because it will help me succeed." This statement portrayed Machiavellianism characteristics like weak morals and personal success. This array position indicated that participants' Q sorts who loaded positively on any of the three viewpoints believed that supporting a toxic leader for success is more *uncharacteristic* of their response regarding toxic leadership. Participant post-sort questionnaires and interviews elucidated this perspective surrounding their strong morals by the following statements:

a) *"I would never support a toxic leader to better myself because, again, it wouldn't be fair to everybody else that I worked with…I feel like my work ethic should support itself, and I don't need to follow a toxic leader."*

b) *"I definitely don't want to support anything unethical or immoral."*

c) *"I refuse to let anything I do or follow be unethical. I would simply quit and not approach my boss."*

One interviewee provided clarity for why one might support a toxic leader's unethical behaviors. In fact, they felt colluding is not conducive to anything besides staying on the good side of a toxic leader. In addition, they believed that success comes from within an individual. The participant's response to this effect included:

> *"Supporting a toxic leader might help in the political game, within the politics of the organization, but that doesn't make me better at what I do, though. You get better at what you do by working at it, by being reflective and reflexive about it, and putting in the work. Kissing somebody's a** does nothing except help you stay in their good graces."*

Thus, this perspective would suggest that if job security is important, individuals may feel pressured to follow toxic leaders to "stay in their good graces" to ensure those basic needs are met.

Opportunistic Silence. Participants across all three viewpoints agreed with statement 29, "Remain silent in front of a toxic leader because of concerns that the toxic leader could take advantage of my ideas" as moderately non-extreme to relatively characteristic in positions +6 (Factor 1), +7 (Factor 2), +5 (Factor 3) in the theoretical array. Some participants shared that they would withhold information for their self-interest. Specifically, this concern stemmed from

participants who had prior experience with toxic leadership. One participant justified withholding information:

> *"My supervisor began to give me duties that were her responsibility. But she would make it look like she completed the work. I never told anyone because she was doing her boss's work. It was a trickle-down effect."*

Hence, this statement provided insights into why an individual who experiences toxic leadership may have relatively moderate feelings towards withholding information from their boss. Perhaps, individuals felt taken advantage of and wanted to avoid additional workload. If that is the case, they may find it best to remain silent.

Relatively Moderate Feelings Towards Acceptance, Control, and Stability. The three remaining consensus statements were relatively moderately positioned within each of the three factor arrays. Relative to all the other statements, the placement of these consensus statements among the factor array indicated these items hold relatively low levels of influence on participants' views regarding their responses to toxic leaders. For example, the relatively moderate placement of statement 8, "Follow a toxic leader because they provide feelings of acceptance," suggested that participants are relatively moderate with their feelings towards following toxic leaders to feel accepted. In addition, the relatively low to moderate ranking of statement 2, "Follow a toxic leader because I don't have control over the events in my life," suggested that individuals may have control over their lives. Additionally, the relatively low to moderate ranking of statement 5, "Follow a toxic leader because that provides some stability in my life," suggested that they may have stability already in life as this was on the lower end of the Q sort distribution matrix. Participants elaborated on these feelings in the following statements:

a) *"I have control over the events in my life." (Control)*

b) *"Change is hard. Especially in today's world." (Stability)*

c) *"I would much rather be in a nice happy workplace." (Stability)*

In other words, these quotations provided evidence that current stability is important. Thus, feelings of acceptance, control, and stability are areas of agreement among each viewpoint. Commonalities suggested that individuals have non-extreme views regarding control of their lives and seek stability in the workplace and everyday life.

Summary. While the three factors may be similar with their ranking regarding job security, strong morals and beliefs of self-success, opportunistic silence, and feelings towards acceptance, control, and stability, they may have different reasons for agreement. For instance, Factor 1, "Suffer in Silence," believed that speaking up is pointless and too much work. Additionally, Factor 2, "Confront and Advocate," believed that while utilizing prosocial voice and whistleblowing is more characteristic of them, they also believed that speaking up is taxing. Lastly, Factor 3, "Quiet yet Concerned," believed that it was best to withhold ideas for the good of others.

Disagreement Statements

In Q, disagreement statements reflect the most discrepancy among the three viewpoints. According to Watts and Stenner (2012), disagreeing statements are the most significant debate among participants. The array position of all three disagreeing statements suggested that the three viewpoints have very different and relatively strong beliefs regarding whistleblowing as a response regarding toxic leaders. Table 22 illustrates disagreement statements among the three viewpoints.

Table 22

Disagreement Statements with Array Positions

Statement	Array Position		
	1	2	3
40. [IDEW] Publicly voice my concerns about a toxic leader because I feel safe reporting wrongdoing within my organization.	2	8	4
36. [INTW] Voice my concerns about a toxic leader to upper management, even if that means suffering from reprisals because I want what's best for the organization.	2	9	6
37. [EXTW] Voice my concerns about a toxic leader to an outside party (i.e., authorities, the media) who has the power to correct the toxic leader because I want what's best for the organization.	3	9	1

In short, the three statements with the most disagreement refer to whistleblowing typologies. More specifically, these statements revolved around how one should go about voicing their concerns about toxic leaders and included: *identified whistleblowing*, *internal whistleblowing*, and *external whistleblowing*. These different beliefs suggested that there is the most debate (i.e., disagreement) about how to voice concerns regarding toxic leadership, and thus, one must be very thoughtful when voicing concerns. For example, if policies and procedures are not in place to blow the whistle, then that responsibility of reporting unethical behavior automatically becomes an informal whistleblowing report (i.e., reporting unethical behavior to someone they trust).

The statement with the most disagreement, statement 37, is of interest, "Voice my concerns about a toxic leader to an outside party (i.e., authorities, media) who has the power to correct the toxic leader because I want what's best for the organization." Each of the three viewpoints had very different beliefs about this statement. Specifically, individuals in Factor 2, "Confront and Advocate," and Factor 3, "Quiet yet Concerned," had the greatest disagreement. Individuals in Factor 3, "Quiet yet Concerned," believed this to be the *most uncharacteristic*

(+1). In contrast, individuals in Factor 2, "Confront and Advocate," viewed *external whistleblowing* as the *most characteristic* (+9) of their beliefs in response to toxic leaders. This difference in beliefs is confirmed by examining the correlation matrix between factors. For instance, Factor 2, "Confront and Advocate," and Factor 3, "Quiet yet Concerned," had the weakest relationship of 0.28, indicating the largest differences among their beliefs.

On the other hand, while Factor 1, "Suffer in Silence," and Factor 3, "Quiet yet Concerned," have different viewpoints, their position in statement 37 is similar. Individuals in Factor 1, "Suffer in Silence," believed this statement to be *more uncharacteristic* (+3). In contrast, individuals in Factor 3, "Quiet yet Concerned," believed this statement as *most uncharacteristic* (+1). Thus, while these viewpoints slightly differed, they were more similar than different. For example, this is indicated in the correlation matrix between factors as Factor 1, "Suffer in Silence," and Factor 3, "Quiet yet Concerned," had a relationship of 0.59, indicating a moderate relationship between the two factors.

Factor 1: "Suffer in Silence"

Factor 1, "Suffer in Silence," is defined by 11 positively-loaded sorts, as shown in Table 10. Thus, Factor 1 explains 20% of the study's variance. Figure 10 represents the theoretical factor array for participants whose sorts loaded on Factor 1. The theoretical factor array aims to create an ideal hypothetical story that symbolizes the general perspectives. In other words, it is "a single Q sort configured to represent the viewpoint of a particular factor" (Watts & Stenner, 2012, p. 139). Distinguishing statements are bolded, and consensus statements are italicized. Additionally, Table 23 presents the extreme statements for Factor 1. The extreme statements for Factor 1 include the six *most characteristic* and *most uncharacteristic* statements in the array. Finally, Table 24 lists distinguishing statements.

Figure 10

Factor 1 Theoretical Array

Most uncharacteristic | | | | | | | | Most characteristic

1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
10	*2*	**37**	11	16	**27**	39	**20**	23
19	**36**	**12**	33	31	26	**21**	**24**	22
	18	6	*5*	*8*	28	*9*	**25**	
	40	**7**	**14**	35	*29*	**15**	30	
		13	3	**1**	**4**	41		
			34	**38**	32			
				17				

Note. Distinguishing statements are bolded, and consensus statements are italicized.

Table 23

Factor 1 Extreme Statements

"Most Characteristic" Statements	Array Position	Z-score
23. [QS] Remain silent at work because of fear of negative consequences from my toxic leader.	9	2.155
22. [AS] Remain silent at work because nothing will change, anyway.	9	1.869
20. [AS] Remain silent at work because my toxic leader is not open to proposals, concerns, or the like.	8	1.741*
24. [QS] Remain silent at work to not make me vulnerable in front of colleagues.	8	1.426*
25. [QS] Suffer in silence when faced with a toxic leader because that's what is in my best interest.	8	1.341*
30. [OS] Remain silent in front of a toxic leader because I want to avoid additional work.	8	0.957
"Most Uncharacteristic" Statements	**Array Position**	**Z-score**
2. [LCSE] Follow a toxic leader because I don't have control over the events in my life.	2	-1.034
36. [INTW] Voice my concerns about a toxic leader to upper management, even if that means suffering from reprisals because I want what's best for the organization.	2	-1.169*
18. [MACH] Support a toxic leader because they can help me achieve a higher status.	2	-1.212
40. [IDEW] Publicly voice my concerns about a toxic leader because I feel safe reporting wrongdoing within my organization.	2	-1.329*
10. [PA] Support a toxic leader because I want to be better than everyone else at what I do.	1	-1.462*
19. [MACH] Support a toxic leader's unethical behaviors because it will help me succeed.	1	-1.61

Note. An asterisk symbol (*) denotes a distinguishing statement.

Table 24

Distinguishing Statements for Factor 1

Statement	Array Position		
	1	2	3
20. [AS] Remain silent at work because my toxic leader is not open to proposals, concerns, or the like.	8	7	6
24. [QS] Remain silent at work to not make me vulnerable in front of colleagues.	8	5	4
25. [QS] Suffer in silence when faced with a toxic leader because that's what is in my best interest.	8	4	6
21. [AS] Remain silent at work because I will not find a sympathetic ear, anyway.	7	6	5
15. [LSIC] Support a toxic leader so that I don't have to express my emotions.	7	4	4
27. [PS] Remain silent when faced with a toxic leader because I do not want others to get in trouble.	6	6	9
4. [HPLD] Follow a toxic leader because I feel emotionally vulnerable.	6	3	3
1. [LCSE] Follow a toxic leader because I have trouble handling most of the problems I face.	5	2	2
38. [FORW] Voice my concerns about a toxic leader because the organization has formal procedures in place for reporting a toxic leader.	5	8	5
14. [G] Support a toxic leader because that will allow me to get ahead in my career without working harder.	4	2	2
34. [DV] Voice support for a toxic leader because I want to protect myself from the toxic leader.	4	5	5
37. [EXTW] Voice my concerns about a toxic leader to an outside party (i.e., authorities, the media) who has the power to correct the toxic leader because I want what's best for the organization.	3	9	1
12. [G] Support a toxic leader because that allows for me to get ahead without contributing anything in return.	3	2	2
7. [UN] Follow a toxic leader because they provide me with some stability in life.	3	5	6
13. [G] Support a toxic leader because they will help me get more money.	3	5	5
36. [INTW] Voice my concerns about a toxic leader to upper management, even if that means suffering from reprisals because I want what's best for the organization.	2	9	6
40. [IDEW] Publicly voice my concerns about a toxic leader because I feel safe reporting wrongdoing within my organization.	2	8	4
10. [PA] Support a toxic leader because I want to be better than everyone else at what I do.	1	3	3

Note. The standardized factor scores for the distinguishing statements from Factor 1 are all significant ($p < .05$).

Suffering in Silence is Safer. It is reasonable to assume that the 11 participants of Factor 1 shared a distinct understanding of employee perceptions regarding their typical behaviors, thoughts, and reactions when navigating a toxic work environment. Specifically, those whose sorts loaded positively on Factor 1 feel intense fear in toxic leadership situations (23: +9). Ten out of the 11 respondents in this viewpoint have had firsthand direct experience with toxic leadership ranging from medium to high levels of toxic leadership (one participant did not respond to this question). Moreover, this fear stemmed from reprisals (36: +2). Participant responses elucidating anxiety and fear from repercussions stemming from firsthand experience and hypothetical scenarios with toxic leadership included:

a) *"Defiance against my toxic leader resulted in disciplinary actions against me. Remaining silent was safer for my career."*
b) *"If you're too open about things you don't feel are right, then you might get singled out as a way for them to get back at you."*
c) *"If you did say anything, I feel they would never forget and hold it against you."*
d) *"If you don't stay silent, the toxic leader will call you out and ostracize you from the group."*

What is more is that individuals in this group held intense fear and believed that nothing would change (22: +9). In fact, individuals have expressed that toxic leaders are closed off and not open to other ideas (20: +8). Consequently, speaking up is too much work and resulted in feelings of hopelessness. Participant responses to this effect included:

a) *"It's their view, and only their view."*
b) *"It is easiest to just remain silent and go with the flow so that the toxic leader won't come after you for anything you say or do that they think is wrong or can nitpick."*

c) *"Suggestions were always ignored, so there was no point. Just agreeing with her was easier."*

d) *"I have complained over the years, and things don't change, so it is best to stay quiet."*

e) *"If they constantly act like your ideas won't work, you sometimes just give up."*

f) *"I have always suffered along with toxic leaders."*

Notice the intersection between perceived thoughts that illustrate that nothing will change and participants' personal experience with toxic leadership. This personal experience with toxic leadership suggested that while individuals are fearful, feelings of realism from past toxic leadership experiences forced people to *remain silent* and *conform* to toxic leaders. Another explanation may be because this group is pragmatic. In other words, they believed it was reasonable and logical to assume that nothing would change. This statement illustrated this practical perspective:

> *"I am very risk-averse, so tend to approach things like paying rent and buying food pragmatically. That said, when faced with toxic leadership, I immediately (1) look for avenues to move away from toxic leadership within the organization or (2) leave the organization. I recognize how unhealthy toxic leadership is. The particular example I have in mind while doing this study is of a local radio station I worked at, owned by an angry recovering alcoholic and his enabling (and yet toxic in her own way) wife. Their son oversaw the day-to-day and had his own issues. I'd often comment to outsiders that the owner's a controlling a-hole about A, B, and C; his wife is psychotic about L, M, and N, and their son was a control freak about X, Y, and Z. It was the most miserable seven*

months of my professional life. So, yes, I followed toxic leadership—went along to get along—and kept my paycheck while simultaneously seeking non-toxic options."

In sum, individuals who experienced toxic leadership recognized the devastating toll toxic leaders took on individuals. Yet, these individuals who experienced toxic leaders were reluctant to speak up based on the belief that nothing would change anyway. Therefore, they find it best to *remain silent* and *conform* to toxic leaders while looking out for themselves. In other words, they may seek alternatives and remove themselves from the toxic leader situation, such as finding a new job.

Perceptions about Whistleblowing. While not distinguishing statements, 39 and 41 conveyed a specific type of whistleblowing response and were rated *more characteristic* than other types of whistleblowing for Factor 1. For example, statement 39 (+7), "Voice my concerns about a toxic leader with someone I trust within our organization who could advocate for me because I don't feel safe expressing my concerns to someone else," deals with *informal whistleblowing*. Whereas statement 41 (+7), "Anonymously voice my concerns about a toxic leader because I don't feel safe reporting wrongdoing within my organization," deals with *anonymity* when reporting concerns. In fact, informal and anonymous whistleblowing are the two safest whistleblowing typologies out of the six types. Thus, the placement of these statements would support the idea that this group is nonconfrontational and values their safety within toxic leadership. One comment that proved further illustration for preference towards informal whistleblowing over external whistleblowing perceptions included:

"I wouldn't put anything on Facebook, but I would talk to co-workers discreetly that I can trust."

Of further interest is that the remaining four whistleblowing statements were distinguishing statements. In other words, those in Factor 1 sorted these four whistleblowing statements differently than those in Factor 2 or Factor 3. For instance, three of the remaining whistleblowing statements were relatively *uncharacteristic* to their beliefs if they were responding to toxic leadership (36: +2; 40: +2; 37: +3). What is more, these three whistleblowing statements reflected *internal*, *identified*, and *external whistleblowing* and are riskier than *formal*, *informal*, and *anonymous whistleblowing*. Thus, it further enhanced their strong characteristic of *remaining silent* when responding to toxic leaders. One perspective regarding voicing concerns expressed hesitancy around the potential risks involved:

> *"If I were to voice my concerns with upper management, I am pretty positive nothing would happen. They would then look at me differently, and I would be unsure of the consequences to this."*

In short, one thing is clear with this viewpoint. Individuals in this viewpoint believed that risky whistleblowing statements (36: +2; 40: +2; 37: +3) are more *uncharacteristic* of themselves than safer whistleblowing statements (39: +7; 41: +7). In addition, participants expressed concerns regarding the risks that would result from voicing concerns. Namely, participants expressed concerns about internal whistleblowing and how that would affect perceptions between the superior and subordinate, which may hinder relationships. Thus, it is easier to "blend in" rather than voice concerns and have the attention put on oneself. The following statements elucidated these beliefs:

a) "*I don't want any spotlight or attention on me. I like to blend in the background.*"
b) *"I have learned to just stay quiet. It keeps me out of the limelight and out of trouble."*

What is more, individuals have attempted to use *voices* within the workplace to advocate for change regarding workplace problems. While *remaining silent* may be characteristic of this viewpoint, these individuals remain silent because they feel defeated after failed attempts to voice their concerns. The following statement suggested to what extent employees will go to avoid their toxic leaders:

> *"Starting out, I would voice my opinion, but in the end, I would never win even if I was correct on the issue. After a few times of that, I just decided I would be quiet and get my work done without saying anything. The negative consequences of saying something would be being degraded and even laughed at. The last few years before he retired, I would try to avoid him at all costs. Even taking my lunch breaks at separate times than him just so I wouldn't have to interact with him."*

In fact, the only way this group would voice their concerns is to remain anonymous when reporting the wrongdoing (41: +7) or by someone, they trust informally (39: +7). Participant responses to this effect included:

a) *"My current organization has a whistleblower policy of non-reprisal, so I would feel safer voicing concerns [anonymously]."*
b) *"If I feel I have someone in the organization I can trust, I would sound things out with them or seek advice. I probably wouldn't ask someone to advocate for me, especially not if they were also vulnerable, but sometimes there was another leader to whom I could go to for clarification or explain something that baffled me."*
c) *"I would talk to co-workers discreetly that I can trust."*

Hence, participants in this viewpoint are concerned about their safety. Furthermore, this illustration suggested that if individuals who experience toxic leadership do not have access to

safe whistleblowing channels, such as anonymous or informal means, increased toxic leadership opportunities may result from remaining silent. In fact, the follow-up interviews increased clarity on employees' roles in voicing concerns. Participants agreed that they would support advocators who speak up to toxic leaders. However, respondents made it clear that they would not join in the whistleblowing efforts. Statements by participants provided further clarity on these perspectives:

a) *"Based on your internal beliefs and some core level, you understand what is important or relevant or whatever you need to have if you sense that is lacking. Trust that. Go find it. Whatever that looks like, if you want to join the crusade and try to get so and so in the corner office bounced out and sign onto a whistleblower, that's great. That's where you need the crusaders to take up the cause, you know, but that's not me."*

b) *"Deep down, I'd be happy that at least somebody is doing something about it and that maybe something will change, and it wouldn't be because of me. It will be because of them."*

In short, while voicing concerns is important to decreasing toxic leadership opportunities, individuals in this viewpoint would no longer speak out and express concerns. What is more, sometimes, the size of the organization may make it challenging to express concerns. For example, one participant who had worked in both a small family medical practice and a large healthcare system found blowing the whistle more difficult in larger organizations. This statement illustrated this perspective on organizational size:

> *"Sometimes big companies have their beliefs, and you have to run it on how it is. They're not open to change."*

Yet, on the other hand, this same participant suggested that small companies may be just as challenging for voicing concerns because of the personal relationship all employees have and the proximity to others. This statement illustrated this belief:

> *"If the company is small, and the company I worked for is so small, then you didn't ever want to try to voice your concerns because it's such a small workplace, and that would make going to work very uncomfortable."*

While the organization's size remains mixed whether voicing concerns are more challenging, sometimes voicing concerns within the workplace is not always an option (36: +2). This belief held especially true when toxic leaders existed on multiple levels of the hierarchy. For example, one participant recognized the relationship between hierarchy and power and the impact that those two concepts had on their decision to remain silent. This participant illustrated this viewpoint:

> *"In my instance, my toxic leader also had a toxic leader. Voicing concerns about one to the other was not helpful as they wholeheartedly supported one another."*

This exemplar suggested that when more than one toxic leader exists within the organization, that will silence individuals in the workplace and limit voicing concerns because toxic leadership exists among multiple levels, suggesting toxic leadership opportunities may increase.

Statement 36, "Voice my concerns about a toxic leader to upper management, even if that means suffering from reprisals because I want what's best for the organization," and statement 37, "Voice my concerns about a toxic leader to an outside party (i.e., authorities, the media) who has the power to correct the toxic leader because I want what's best for the organization," were both distinguishing statements that reflected whistleblowing typologies. Specifically, these whistleblowing statements echoed wanting what was best for the organization. However,

participants in Factor 1 rated these relatively *uncharacteristic* of themselves (36: +2; 37: +3). One explanation for the placement of uncharacteristic feelings towards wanting what is best for the organization and whistleblowing as more *uncharacteristic* may have stemmed from their perspectives that work is a transactional relationship. One respondent exemplified transactional relationship beliefs:

> *"Work is a transactional relationship. It's between myself and the organization that employs you. I don't want it, and I don't need it to be anything beyond that [transactional relationship]. You're paying me to do a job, and I do the job. That's it. I'm not going to be the model employee."*

There may be a relationship between the belief in transactional relationships and lack of desire for calling attention to toxic leadership (i.e., whistleblowing). For example, even when formal whistleblowing procedures are in place (38: +5), individuals held relatively moderate beliefs about reporting whistleblowing. Perhaps this is justified by their belief that the employee should show up to work, complete the job, and receive a paycheck. Participants who further elucidated the transactional relationship belief and lack of whistleblowing suggested:

a) *"Where I work, we have a whistleblower policy that precludes allegedly—never tested it—retribution."*

b) *"I think you should mind your own business, do your job, be a good worker, and show up. Get that paycheck. Ignore all the bullsh*t."*

Note the recognition from participants that the purpose of going to work is purely transactional. Perhaps, this is why participants in Viewpoint 1 will not speak up. In other words, individuals in Viewpoint 1 believed that it was not their job to bring about change. Simply put, these individuals have no desire beyond the transactional relationship of performing a service and

receiving a financial reward. In other words, individuals believed that employees provided service and the organization paid for that work.

High Regards Toward Their Self-Protected Self-Interest. While this group was fearful and held relatively moderate views regarding whistleblowing, they focused on a very specific type of self-interest. In other words, they focused on self-protection rather than self-advancement. In other words, these individuals had fewer concerns with others, such as their co-workers, and they were primarily worried about themselves (25: +8). The concern stemmed from an end goal of protecting themselves rather than succeeding in their careers (19: +1). One participant provided clarity surrounding this perspective:

> *"I would be fearful of saying something because they [the toxic leader] might come back sometime down the road, and they might come after you because they don't like you because you snitched on them. I feel like it could come back to haunt you."*

Thus, these individuals believed it was easier to stay uninvolved with voicing concerns regarding toxic leadership because they believed nothing would change anyway (22: +9). As previously mentioned, they thought it was more *characteristic* of them to suffer in silence because they felt that it was in their best interest (25: +8). While self-interest is representative of these individuals, their self-interest is for self-protection rather than self-advancement. To illustrate, all three statements designed around greed were distinguishing statements and placed in relatively *uncharacteristic* to *moderate* placement (12: +3; 13: +3; 14: +4). The interviews further refined the clarity of the viewpoints. To illustrate, in the two interviews, I read my initial interpretation of this emergent theme to the participants, which read, "These individuals have high regards towards themselves more than their co-workers." Initially, both interviewees were taken back and shocked by this statement as they did not believe this to be true. However, participant

interviews provided more rich detail into refining these perceptions of self-interest. Both interviewees agreed that they were more concerned for themselves than others when responding to toxic leaders. The following statements further substantiated participants' perspectives:

a) *"There was a piece in there about wanting to make the workplace better for everybody. Okay, that wouldn't necessarily occur to me. Be you know, again, I would have concern for the folks that I work directly with, that I have you know, that we have bonded over our shared misery with, certainty, but in terms of the organization, overall, I would be more apt to leave the organization than I would be to try to change it."*
b) *"Well, maybe there is some truth to that. You are worried more about yourself than the other guy. When you first said that, I said no, no, no, no, but it's like I suppose, it is. I would have to say yeah, you are concerned about what's going to happen to you."*

As a result of the completed Q sorts and interviews for those in Viewpoint 1, this group viewed self-interest as more aligned with their beliefs than in the interest of others. What is more, individuals expressed non-extreme placement for three statements of prosocial silence (35: +5; 26: +6; 27: +6; 28: +6) and prosocial voice (35: +5). Thus, they suggested that they held relatively moderate feelings about others. Participant interviews indicated that individuals in this viewpoint do care about co-workers; however, co-workers are not the most critical person in their beliefs when navigating toxic leaders. For instance, one example of this perspective included:

"In my experience, in some of those toxic environments, that camaraderie is built among the rank and file. We all recognized that leadership is toxic and that belief was very

strong. You know, if I could get out, great, and I need to take care of myself, and I get that, but then there is a sense that I am leaving my compadres in a bad spot, and I feel guilty about that. In hearing that, looking out for me, yes, but I've always had a definite sense of concern for the people that would still be there. Like, I gotta get a new job, I gotta do this, but what about everybody else that I'd be putting in a bad spot?"

Overall, individuals represented in Viewpoint 1, "Suffer in Silence," held fewer concerns with others, such as their co-workers, because they were primarily worried about themselves.

Lack of Organizational Loyalty. Perceptions that lack organizational loyalty may explain individuals' high regard toward self-interest rather than the workplace. The following statement illustrated this outlook:

"I cannot fathom having that level of organizational loyalty where I would want to suffer from reprisals. I think having satisfied employees, effective management, and visionary leadership is what's best for the organization, so the idea that I'd suffer reprisals for voicing concerns over toxic leadership indicates a flawed organization in my eyes and one that I'm probably better off disassociating from."

What is more, participants believed that thinking of yourself and your well-being in toxic leadership situations should remain a top priority. One participant perspective suggested:

"Thinking about yourself is not selfish because when you're not stressed out about that kind of thing, then you are a better human, easier to be around, a better parent, better co-worker, or better spouse."

Notice here how this participant's priorities are focused on wanting to demolish the toxic leader situation for the good of others. In fact, it may not necessarily be for the good of others like their colleagues, but for the good of themselves and their family's well-being. As a result, they would

rather seek a new job than voice their concerns about toxic leadership. Yet, they would rather remain silent and seek a new job instead of voicing their concerns.

Vulnerability and Emotions Co-occurring. Vulnerability and emotions co-occurred for those in Factor 1. For instance, statement 4 (+6), "Follow a toxic leader because I have trouble handling most of the problems I face," and statement 24 (+8), "Remain silent at work because I will not find a sympathetic ear, anyway" both echoed feelings of vulnerability and emotions as co-occurring. What is more, they are both distinguishing statements. The vulnerability felt among these individuals who loaded onto Factor 1 is related to one's emotions. Specifically, emotions such as being put in an awkward spot are something that this group wanted to avoid. Therefore, they do not wish to experience vulnerable situations (24: +8). One participant's perceptions of this effect included:

> *"If I encounter an extremely frustrating situation, I sometimes tear up and find it hard to speak. I don't like to be vulnerable."*

Individual vulnerability aligned with this group of individuals' feelings that expressing their emotions is difficult in toxic leadership environments (15: +7). One participant enriched this view:

> *"I am not confrontational, and I would probably cry and be emotional about making anyone upset."*

While emotions remained at the forefront, so did feelings of hopelessness. To illustrate, feelings of hopelessness emerged from statement 22 (+9), "Remain silent at work because nothing will change, anyway," as participants indicated that it is characteristic of their responses to toxic leaders. Furthermore, to illustrate hopelessness, they also experienced feelings of defeat:

> *"I remember feeling very defeated at times in that [toxic] job."*

Individuals indicated moderate agreement that they would support a toxic leader not to express their emotions (15: +7). Perhaps this is because most of these individuals have experienced toxic leadership and are reliving their toxic leadership experience. As a result of that experience, they may be hesitant to bring up those emotions again, suggesting it may be easier to hide their feelings.

Feelings of Rumination. What is more, individuals experienced rumination. This perspective may be attributed to their strong agreement to *remaining silent* to toxic leaders (23: +9; 22: +9; 20: +8; 24: +8; 25: +8; 30: +8). The following statements illuminated feelings of rumination:

a) *"I would go home and stew about it in my head. I wouldn't be able to sleep at night because I'd be thinking about it [the toxic leader]. Then, I'd go to work in quiet and do my job. I'd come home at night, and it'd be the same. I'd probably stew and have more time to think about it [rumination]."*

b) *"Toxic leadership is incredibly frustrating, and it is hard not to feel stuck [referencing rumination of constant negative thoughts]."*

What is more, low core self-evaluations may help explain feelings of ruminations experienced by participants. In fact, respondents in Factor 1 held relatively moderate feelings about statement 1, "Follow a toxic leader because I have trouble handling most of the problems I face" (1: +5). While relatively moderately located within the factor array, this is a distinguishing statement. Relatively speaking, the middling placement of the low core self-evaluation statement suggested non-extreme beliefs. In fact, respondents may not clearly understand their self-worth and capabilities, including self-esteem, self-efficacy, locus of control, and emotional stability. If individuals in this viewpoint cannot determine their basic conclusions about themselves, they

may not be confident to confront a toxic leader or bring the toxic leader to the attention of others, resulting in *follower susceptibility* and increased toxic leadership opportunities.

Summary. In summary, the 11 participants positively associated with Factor 1 experienced high levels of suffering in silence. Individuals believed it was safer to *remain silent,* drawing on *acquiescent silence* and *quiescent silence* rather than voicing their concerns about toxic leadership. What is more, vulnerability and emotions co-occurred as they experienced feelings of rumination. That is the constant thought about the toxic leadership phenomenon. In addition, while they are concerned about their co-workers, they are more concerned about what is in their best interest. Overall, their views seemed to appear from their prior experience with toxic leadership.

Factor 2: "Confront and Advocate"

Factor 2, "Confront and Advocate," is defined by ten positively-loaded sorts, as shown in Table 10. Thus, Factor 2 explains 19% of the study's variance. Figure 11 illustrates the full theoretical factor array for participants whose sorts were loaded onto Factor 2. Distinguishing statements are bolded, and consensus statements are italicized. Additionally, Table 25 shows the extreme statements for Factor 2. Namely, the extreme statements for Factor 2 include the six *most characteristic* and *most uncharacteristic* statements in the array. Finally, Table 26 presents distinguishing statements.

Figure 11

Factor 2 Theoretical Array

Most uncharacteristic   Most characteristic

1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
3	14	*2*	**30**	32	21	**20**	**39**	**37**
19	18	4	15	24	26	**22**	**35**	**36**
	1	11	6	13	**23**	41	**38**	
	12	17	33	34	31	*9*	**40**	
		10	**25**	*5*	28	*29*		
			16	**7**	**27**			
				8				

Note. Distinguishing statements are bolded, and consensus statements are italicized.

Table 25

Factor 2 Extreme Statements

"Most Characteristic" Statements	Array Position	Z-score
37. [EXTW] Voice my concerns about a toxic leader to an outside party (i.e., authorities, the media) who has the power to correct the toxic leader because I want what's best for the organization.	9	2.146*
36. [INTW] Voice my concerns about a toxic leader to upper management, even if that means suffering from reprisals because I want what's best for the organization.	9	2.107*
39. [INFW] Voice my concerns about a toxic leader with someone I trust within our organization who could advocate for me because I don't feel safe expressing my concerns to someone else.	8	1.971*
35. [PV] Voice my concerns to a toxic leader about workplace issues because I want what's best for the organization.	8	1.785*
38. [FORW] Voice my concerns about a toxic leader because the organization has formal procedures in place for reporting a toxic leader.	8	1.448*
40. [IDEW] Publicly voice my concerns about a toxic leader because I feel safe reporting wrongdoing within my organization.	8	1.344*
"Most Uncharacteristic" Statements	**Array Position**	**Z-score**
14. [G] Support a toxic leader because that will allow me to get ahead in my career without working harder.	2	-1.125
18. [MACH] Support a toxic leader because they can help me achieve a higher status.	2	-1.172
1. [LCSE] Follow a toxic leader because I have trouble handling most of the problems I face.	2	-1.21*
12. [G] Support a toxic leader because that allows for me to get ahead without contributing anything in return.	2	-1.305
3. [LCSE] Follow a toxic leader because I feel like my success in my career is outside of my control.	1	-1.378*
19. [MACH] Support a toxic leader's unethical behaviors because it will help me succeed.	1	-1.388

Note. An asterisk symbol (*) denotes a distinguishing statement.

Table 26

Distinguishing Statements for Factor 2

Statement	Array Position		
	1	2	3
37. [EXTW] Voice my concerns about a toxic leader to an outside party (i.e., authorities, the media) who has the power to correct the toxic leader because I want what's best for the organization.	3	9	1
36. [INTW] Voice my concerns about a toxic leader to upper management, even if that means suffering from reprisals because I want what's best for the organization.	2	9	6
39. [INFW] Voice my concerns about a toxic leader with someone I trust within our organization who could advocate for me because I don't feel safe expressing my concerns to someone else.	7	8	8
35. [PV] Voice my concerns to a toxic leader about workplace issues because I want what's best for the organization.	5	8	5
38. [FORW] Voice my concerns about a toxic leader because the organization has formal procedures in place for reporting a toxic leader.	5	8	5
40. [IDEW] Publicly voice my concerns about a toxic leader because I feel safe reporting wrongdoing within my organization.	2	8	4
20. [AS] Remain silent at work because my toxic leader is not open to proposals, concerns, or the like.	8	7	6
22. [AS] Remain silent at work because nothing will change, anyway.	9	7	8
23. [QS] Remain silent at work because of fear of negative consequences from my toxic leader.	9	6	9
27. [PS] Remain silent when faced with a toxic leader because I do not want others to get in trouble.	6	6	9
7. [UN] Follow a toxic leader because they provide me with some stability in life.	3	5	6
30. [OS] Remain silent in front of a toxic leader because I want to avoid additional work.	8	4	7
25. [QS] Suffer in silence when faced with a toxic leader because that's what is in my best interest.	8	4	6
16. [MACH] Support a toxic leader because if I show any weakness at work, I will get taken advantage of.	5	4	7
1. [LCSE] Follow a toxic leader because I have trouble handling most of the problems I face.	5	2	2
3. [LCSE] Follow a toxic leader because I feel like my success in my career is outside of my control.	4	1	3

Note. The standardized factor scores for the distinguishing statements from Factor 2 are all significant ($p < .05$).

Factor 2, “Confront and Advocate,” is significantly different than the previous view, Factor 1, “Suffer in Silence.” To illustrate, the correlation matrix between Factor 1, “Suffer in Silence,” and Factor 2, “Confront and Advocate,” shows a 0.26 relationship, indicating a weak relationship. Out of all of the factors, Factor 1, “Suffer in Silence,” and Factor 2, “Confront and Advocate,” have the weakest relationship, suggesting that they are the most different. It is reasonable to assume that the ten exemplars of Factor 2, “Confront and Advocate,” shared a distinct understanding of employee perceptions regarding their typical behaviors, thoughts, and reactions when navigating a toxic work environment. In fact, nine out of the ten participants loaded onto Factor 2, “Confront and Advocate,” experience relatively medium and high degrees of toxic leadership—suggesting that most individuals in this viewpoint have experienced toxic leadership.

Individuals in Factor 2 confronted the problem of toxic leadership head-on and voiced their concerns. In addition, these individuals served as advocators for themselves and others who experienced toxic leadership. Specifically, those whose sorts loaded positively on Factor 2 held strong feelings about *voicing concerns* (36: +9: 37: +9; 38: +8; 39: +8; 40+8). In other words, whistleblowing responses were *more characteristic* of this view. In fact, five out of the six whistleblowing statements were distinguished, and all *whistleblowing* typologies are more typical of their beliefs, +8 and +9, respectively. Accordingly, individuals with opinions that fall in Factor 2 engaged in the riskiest behaviors when responding to toxic leaders.

Engaging in Riskier Whistleblowing Acts. Findings indicated that the *anonymous whistleblowing* statement ranked the lowest yet still moderately characteristic of this group (41: +7). The placement of the anonymous whistleblowing statement is interesting because anonymous whistleblowing is the least risky of the six types of whistleblowing. This placement

suggested that these individuals are more likely to engage in the more dangerous types of whistleblowing, such as reporting behaviors to outside authorities (37: +9) or upper management (36: +9). Perhaps individuals in this viewpoint viewed that taking a risk is vital for change when navigating toxic leaders, supported by qualitative data. In fact, it may not be voicing concerns and advocating directly to the toxic leader themselves, but rather, it may perhaps be speaking to the toxic leader's boss or other individuals who could advocate. The following statements illustrated this perspective:

a) *"Most of the time, toxic leaders aren't going to change, so you have to go above them to get change."*

b) *"I did not trust speaking directly with the toxic leader because I had seen what happened when someone else did that. However, I knew it was not fair to an entire department of people to have to work under such conditions, and I wanted to fight for our department so it would not fail under the pressure of the toxic leadership and environment. I started reaching out to any entity on campus that was there to help people in my exact situation, [and] I was not going to be complacent with sitting back and letting this person ruin our excellent department that had had such a good reputation for helping students. Ultimately, I knew the students would suffer from all of this, and I did not want that to happen."*

Engaging in riskier whistleblowing acts may be easier for individuals with beliefs in Factor 2. In fact, individuals believed that they were an asset to the organization, and some participants indicated that they were not fearful about finding a replacement job. Thus, these individuals feel safer in calling attention to workplace problems such as toxic leadership. For instance, one participant provided insights into their beliefs:

"Even though employees are routinely told they are replaceable, I believe my skills and abilities allow me the privilege of finding a new job."

What is more, voicing their concerns is a top priority. For instance, *formal whistleblowing,* like formally voicing concerns about toxic leaders, is significantly easier when policies and procedures are in place (38: +8). In other words, these formal procedures provided an outlet for individuals who experienced toxic leadership to report wrongdoings. Participant responses elucidated their perspectives regarding formal policies included:

a) *"There were a couple [of] things I knew were put in place to help people report harassment or bullying behavior in the workplace, and also a "whistleblowing" hotline was put in place so unethical use of funds could be reported. I did both things because I did not want to see the toxic leader get away with his behavior and abuse of student funds."*

b) *"I would go through proper channels when reporting a toxic leader."*

While not yet absent of fear of repercussions from individuals in Viewpoint 2, the risk of whistleblowing still concerned some individuals in this group. Examples that illustrated these beliefs regarding concerns with using voice in toxic leadership included:

a) *"If I feel that I would be listened to without retaliation, I would do what I could to help the company."*

b) *"I'm a non-confrontational person. If I think a leader would use something against me, I'd be less likely to say something because I would be uncomfortable."*

In sum, *anonymous* or *informal* means of whistleblowing may be ideal to avoid potential repercussions. This statement illustrated this perspective:

"If I had someone I trusted [informal whistleblowing] within the organization, I would feel safe expressing my concerns to them knowing that I could either remain anonymous [anonymous whistleblowing] or have someone that would back me up."

Of notice is this respondent's ideology of ensuring it is safe to report the wrongdoing and having a confidant. In other words, another co-worker to support their speaking up is critical. In sum, those in Viewpoint 2 are concerned about their safety when reporting wrongdoings about toxic leadership. However, what set this group apart from Viewpoints 1 and 3 is that Viewpoint 2 was willing to risk their safety with the hopes of decreasing toxic leadership opportunities.

Presence of Core-Self Evaluations. One distinguishing statement from this group revealed that those represented by Viewpoint 2 also hold a relatively moderate position about following a toxic leader because toxic leaders provide stability (7: +5). This non-extreme belief regarding life stability may coincide with the presence of core-self evaluations. For example, the presence of core-self evaluations in toxic leadership situations (3: +1; 1: +2) may explain the group's ability to confront, advocate, and engage in riskier whistleblowing acts. To illustrate, this group held strong beliefs that they were in control of their self-worth and capabilities as they indicated low core-self evaluations were most *uncharacteristic* of their beliefs. This would suggest that those in Viewpoint 2 recognize their self-worth, understand they can be successful, have control of their lives, and have confidence. In other words, these bottom-line conclusions may assist in confronting and advocating against toxic leadership. To this effect, respondents indicated perceptions of having control in their lives:

a) *"I do have control over events in my life, [and] if it was really bad, I would do something to change it. Whether that is quitting or finding someone I trust within the organization to tell."*

b) *"I have control of what I do in the work environment. I will not follow in the footsteps of a leader moving in the wrong direction but do my best to get them going the right way."*

In addition, having a clear understanding of one's capabilities may explain the relatively moderate placement on withholding information in their self-interest (30: +4) and suffering from adverse consequences (25: +4; 23: +6). Furthermore, the placement of these statements relative to all the other statements seemed to coincide with their non-extreme stance on remaining silent in fear of getting taken advantage of (16: +4). Thus, the non-extreme placement of these statements suggested a relatively moderate belief regarding using silence to protect themselves. In fact, this non-extreme placement aligned with their strong beliefs regarding voicing concerns and indicated that they are more likely to speak out against a toxic leader for the organization's greater good rather than looking out in their self-interest (37: +9; 36: +9). Thus, these individuals perpetuated the confidence needed to bring about change when navigating toxic leadership situations.

Relating to one's core-self evaluations, these individuals felt like they had control in their lives and career (3: +1). The presence of perceived control may explain why they strongly believed that supporting unethical behaviors are not crucial for their self-success (19: +1). If they feel like they have firm control, they do not need to follow a toxic leader to meet their basic needs (9: +7). While statement 19, "Support a toxic leader's unethical behaviors because it will help me succeed," was not distinguished and identified as consensus statements among all three viewpoints, it is essential to acknowledge the placement of this statement when relating it to one's core-self evaluations. Participant responses illustrated they would not support a toxic leader in order to achieve that success:

a) *"I don't care about being better than everyone else when it comes to toxic leaders."*

b) *"I wouldn't want to support anything that made a workplace toxic for me or others."*

c) *"I have a strong moral compass and will challenge leaders, even toxic ones, to lead with moral fortitude."*

d) *"I would rather earn the positions I have than support a toxic leader to get a better position."*

e) *"I have a clear sense of who I am and will fight when faced with something against my morals/values."*

f) *"I don't need to support a toxic leader to advance. I would find other ways or new opportunities elsewhere."*

g) *"I will always do what is right. I will not follow in someone's wrong ways to better myself."*

h) *"Supporting a toxic leader to advance yourself makes you just as toxic as the leader you are following."*

i) *"I am interested in achievement in my work and getting ahead through hard work, but I would NEVER try to get ahead in work by sucking up to anyone, let alone someone whose toxic leadership was causing such hardship for our department."*

Moreover, greedy tendencies, such as gaining money, played a relatively moderate role in their beliefs of getting ahead (13: +5). Yet, they viewed financial stability, such as meeting one's basic needs, as necessary (9: +7). Perhaps this dissonance in beliefs is due to their firm belief that they controlled their professional success (3: +1) and personal success (2: +3). Perhaps their core-self evaluations and perceived control explain why individuals in Viewpoint 2 viewed professional and personal success as the most uncharacteristic when responding to toxic leaders. But, on the

other hand, suppose they believed they were in control of their environment. In that case, that may make them take charge and want to resolve the issue if they know that they can cultivate an environment that fosters productivity, inclusiveness, and culture.

A Strong Desire for Change. These beliefs regarding confrontation and whistleblowing suggested that solving the problem of toxic leadership remains a top priority. While remaining silent may be the easy way to go in toxic leadership, being confrontational, advocating, and *voicing concerns* regarding wrongdoings are *characteristic* of this group. This statement reflected the problem-solving perspective:

> *"Remaining silent is the easy thing to do. I am not confrontational, and I don't like to rock the boat. [I] just want to go to work, do my job, and go home. I've experienced this [toxic leadership]. Once I did finally open up and express my feelings and concerns, the situation was taken care of, and the toxic leader was let go from the company."*

This last part of this quotation brings into question how much prior experience with speaking up influences one's beliefs regarding responses to toxic leaders. For instance, individuals in Factor 1 tried to speak up, and nothing happened. Yet, this individual in Factor 2 spoke up and succeeded. So, it makes sense that these two groups (i.e., those in Factor 1 and Factor 2) would have different orientations to speaking up. Further statements provided insights into beliefs regarding problem-solving:

a) *"I was never interested in supporting the toxic leader's behavior or being complicit or turning a blind eye - it's simply not in my nature to do this when I feel injustice is occurring. I have been in situations before with poor leadership where it's easier to just ignore or keep your head down and just do your work, but this particular*

situation was too blatant and egregious that I had to speak out and try to seek justice."

b) *"I'm not one to remain silent and will find a way to make toxic leadership known in an organization - both as an advocate for myself and others."*

c) *"I will go directly to the source. If there is an issue or situation, it will be handled, then and there."*

d) *"I tend to tackle problems head-on in an organized, thought-out manner."*

While this group desired change and spoke out against toxic leadership, this group expressed beliefs that *remaining silent* is easier when navigating toxic leaders than *speaking up*. In other words, they recognized that speaking up was challenging. What sets Viewpoint 2 apart from other viewpoints is that voice is an *agent* to *co-create* change in toxic leadership situations. Hence, individuals in this viewpoint believed that change would occur when individuals speak up about the wrongdoings of toxic leadership. The following statement illustrated this perspective:

> *"I feel like if you hold in your thoughts or your feelings or frustrations, it just makes it worse. For me, in my role, it was the idea that voicing my concerns may actually lead to change."*

Another participant clarified this perspective, suggesting that if individuals do not speak up over toxic leadership, the toxicity will continue to transpire throughout the organization, and negative consequences will permeate the environment. The following statement added clarity to this belief:

> *"If you don't bring up the problem of toxic leadership, nothing's going to change. It's just going to keep going down on the path you're going on."*

In other words, this statement suggested that speaking up may decrease toxic leadership opportunities.

High Regard for the Environment and Workplace Culture. Additionally, individuals in Factor 2 are less concerned about repercussions that emerged when raising concerns about toxic leadership because they wanted what is best for the workplace (36: +9), including the environment and workplace culture. Respondents spoke about this perspective by the following statements:

a) *"The organization and future workplace culture are more important than me as an individual."*

b) *"I want the work environment to [be] a place of comfort for all who are in it. If someone is taking away from that, then they should be dealt with."*

c) *"I want the workplace to be a fun environment or a growing environment, and when it's under toxic leadership, it is anything but fun and growing."*

A commonality among all the above responses included care outside of oneself. Hence, this may explain the motivation for voicing their concerns about toxic leaders. The following statements from respondents exemplified this perspective:

a) *"I feel like I don't just look out for myself. I look out for everybody in the whole work environment collectively."*

b) *"I feel having a toxic leader and not saying something isn't fair to everybody else within the organization."*

In addition to cooperative efforts within the workplace, they viewed speaking up as their selfless duty to protect others from the toxic leader's wrath. Therefore, individuals in Viewpoint 2 believed that they must use their voices to help others. This suggests that individuals in

Viewpoint 2 should be the ones who are leading the organizations. To clarify, speaking up is not necessarily confronting the toxic leader, as facing the toxic leader can be risky and ineffective. But instead, voicing concerns about a toxic leader to upper management, such as the toxic leader's boss, may be safer. The following statements clarified this perspective:

a) *"Voicing concerns directly to upper management can help protect yourself from the toxic leader. If suffering a consequence because of speaking to direct management only allows one individual to suffer rather than multiple employees."*
b) *"I know you should try to talk to the person that you have an issue with, but also, I'm not personally a fan of conflict, and I don't think toxic leaders are really great at listening. So, I think you'd be wasting your time, and I think you'd get further to solve the issue by going above the toxic leader by voicing concerns to their leader."*

The above statements suggested that the end goal in Viewpoint 2 is to solve toxic leadership, and they are motivated to do this. They also indicated feeling high levels of personal responsibility when protecting others from toxic leadership in the workplace. The following perspective illustrated feelings of responsibility:

> *"In my role, I was a leader of others who were affected by the toxic leader. So then, like obviously, the ones below me aren't going to say anything about it. So, I felt like it was my responsibility to bring up my concern. In my role, I had to go above to corporate and outside of the four walls of my workplace."*

Hence, this group's primary workplace belief in responding to toxic leaders is selflessness rather than selfish tendencies, like a toxic leader. They believed in doing what was best for the organization (36: +9; 37: +9). What is more, they agreed that toxic leadership is an organizational misbehavior that needs resolving. In fact, they thought that workplace

environments should foster a positive and productive culture rather than *colluding*. One perspective illustrated these views on colluding:

> *"I do not believe one bit that supporting a toxic leader will help me get ahead. Also, I like to work to get to where I am, so I would rather speak up against the toxic leader than take an easy route to the top."*

While this group had strong feelings for voicing their concerns and wanting what was best for the workplace (36: +9; 37: +9), they also experienced defeat after failed attempts to blow the whistle. Participants illustrated these feelings suggesting they have exhausted their effort to blow the whistle:

a) *"Originally, my concerns with the actions of toxic leadership did stem from a desire to make my work environment better for students and employees. But, now, I don't care."*

b) *"After numerous reports, both public and anonymous, the leadership, the college's Ethics and Compliance, direct supervisors and colleagues did nothing to change the health and safety concerns. Nothing has changed. No one believes the people who speak up."*

It is surprising that the above statement from line "A" loaded onto Factor 2 since they expressed current feelings of remaining silent. On the other hand, participant perspectives described their success with *voicing their concerns* about toxic leadership. The following statement demonstrates this perspective:

a) *"I was on my way out the door of leaving this organization. I voiced my concern to my other co-workers. My co-workers told upper management that I was leaving if you didn't do anything about the toxic leadership. So, in that case, upper management*

reached out to me and asked more questions. After that, they didn't question me, and they fired the toxic leader in a matter of days."

b) *"Once I did finally open up and express my feelings and concerns, the situation was taken care of, and the toxic leader was let go from the company."*

Both above scenarios illustrated the complexity behind systemic hierarchical organizations in which multiple leadership levels existed. As presented in participants' qualitative text, cultivating change and voicing concerns becomes more challenging when more than one toxic leader is present. Consequently, individuals who feel defeated from prior attempts to advocate in toxic leadership situations may choose to *remain silent* instead of *voicing their concerns*. This belief aligned with their view regarding participants who indicated relatively moderate levels of *remaining silent* because toxic leaders were not open to concerns (20: +7), and nothing would change anyway (22: +7).

What is more, while individuals in this viewpoint believed toxic leaders were not great at listening, they also perceived toxic leaders to be rigid and concerned for themselves. The following participant statements illustrated toxic leaders' destruction and chaos that they caused to the organization:

a) *"Toxic leaders are usually confident and believe they know it all."*

b) *"Toxic leaders don't take employees' experience to heart. They are always looking for the next great adventure. They seem to make decisions based on what's best for them and not the company."*

c) *"Toxic leaders destroy the workplace. I think nothing very good is ever accomplished."*

Thus, these statements confirm Schmidt's (2008) research on specific toxic leader behaviors that cause destruction to both the organization and the subordinate impacted by the toxic leader. In other words, if the leader believes that they know it all, they may identify as a narcissistic, self-promoter toxic leader (*see* Schmidt, 2008, p. 116).

Regardless, for change to occur and the potential for decreased toxic leadership opportunities, it will take individuals in Viewpoint 2 to be *agents* and *co-creators* by confronting and advocating in toxic leadership situations. Participants in this group articulated this perspective:

> *"I think it's very important that people in other viewpoints learn how to follow group two because if they don't, and they continue to work within a toxic workplace, it will make their lives miserable until they finally get the nerve to speak up."*

Here is an example of how critical those in Viewpoint 2 believed it was to speak up rather than remain silent or engage in passive voice. In other words, while those in Viewpoint 2 understood the inherent risks associated with voicing their concerns, they stressed their vital role in speaking up to toxic leaders. Additionally, it may be more precarious for others to speak up.

Summary. In summary, the ten participants positively associated with Factor 2 experienced strong beliefs surrounding advocating for change. In fact, they believed in *voicing their concerns* as more characteristic than remaining silent to navigate toxic leadership. While these individuals find it characteristic of themselves to engage in riskier *whistleblowing* acts, such as *internally* voicing their concerns to upper management or *externally* voicing their concerns to an outside source, they believed they should speak out for the good of the organization. One explanation for their belief in what is best for the workplace may be that individuals in Viewpoint 2 have high regard for the environment and workplace culture. Hence,

utilizing a *prosocial voice* is characteristic of this group, coupled with their self-regard and confidence in being able to get a new position also seems to set them apart.

Factor 3: "Quiet yet Concerned"

Factor 3, "Quiet yet Concerned," is defined by eight positively-loaded sorts and no negatively-loaded sorts. Thus, Factor 3 explains 13% of the study's variance. The entire theoretical factor array for participants whose sorts were loaded onto Factor 3 is shown in Figure 12. Distinguishing statements are bolded, and consensus statements are italicized. Table 27 shows the extreme statements for Factor 3. The extreme statements for Factor 3 include the six *most characteristic* and *most uncharacteristic* statements in the array. In addition, Table 28 illustrates all distinguishing statements for Factor 3.

Figure 12

Factor 3 Theoretical Array

Most uncharacteristic								Most characteristic
1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
6	14	*5*	**11**	*29*	**36**	28	22	**27**
37	*19*	10	**41**	**18**	**17**	16	**26**	23
	12	3	15	34	**20**	30	**31**	
	1	4	24	21	**25**	**33**	39	
		2	*8*	**38**	32	*9*		
			40	35	**7**			
				13				

Note. Distinguishing statements are bolded, and consensus statements are italicized.

Table 27

Factor 3 Extreme Statements

"Most Characteristic" Statements	Array Position	Z-score
27. [PS] Remain silent when faced with a toxic leader because I do not want others to get in trouble.	9	1.765*
23. [QS] Remain silent at work because of fear of negative consequences from my toxic leader.	9	1.743
22. [AS] Remain silent at work because nothing will change, anyway.	8	1.673
26. [PS] Remain silent when faced with a toxic leader because I do not want to embarrass others.	8	1.236*
31. [AV] Voice agreement with a toxic leader because disagreeing with them is pointless.	8	1.207*
39. [INFW] Voice my concerns about a toxic leader with someone I trust within our organization who could advocate for me because I don't feel safe expressing my concerns to someone else.	8	0.998
"Most Uncharacteristic" Statements	**Array Position**	**Z-score**
14. [G] Support a toxic leader because that will allow me to get ahead in my career without working harder.	2	-1.31
19. [MACH] Support a toxic leader's unethical behaviors because it will help me succeed.	2	-1.424
12. [G] Support a toxic leader because that allows for me to get ahead without contributing anything in return.	2	-1.54
1. [LCSE] Follow a toxic leader because I have trouble handling most of the problems I face.	2	-1.685*
6. [LSCC] Follow a toxic leader because I don't have a clear sense of who I am and what I stand for as a person.	1	-1.758*
37. [EXTW] Voice my concerns about a toxic leader to an outside party (i.e., authorities, the media) who has the power to correct the toxic leader because I want what's best for the organization.	1	-2.598*

Note. An asterisk symbol (*) denotes a distinguishing statement.

Table 28

Distinguishing Statements for Factor 3

Statement	Array Position		
	1	2	3
27. [PS] Remain silent when faced with a toxic leader because I do not want others to get in trouble.	6	6	9
26. [PS] Remain silent when faced with a toxic leader because I do not want to embarrass others.	6	6	8
31. [AV] Voice agreement with a toxic leader because disagreeing with them is pointless.	5	6	8
33. [DV] Voice ideas that try to shift the toxic leader's attention to others because I am afraid of voicing my true concerns to a toxic leader.	4	4	7
36. [INTW] Voice my concerns about a toxic leader to upper management, even if that means suffering from reprisals because I want what's best for the organization.	2	9	6
17. [MACH] Support a toxic leader because I like to have control within the workplace.	5	3	6
20. [AS] Remain silent at work because my toxic leader is not open to proposals, concerns, or the like.	8	7	6
25. [QS] Suffer in silence when faced with a toxic leader because that's what is in my best interest.	8	4	6
7. [UN] Follow a toxic leader because they provide me with some stability in life.	3	5	6
18. [MACH] Support a toxic leader because they can help me achieve a higher status.	2	2	5
38. [FORW] Voice my concerns about a toxic leader because the organization has formal procedures in place for reporting a toxic leader.	5	8	5
11. [PA] Support a toxic leader because I want to advance in my career.	4	3	4
41. [ANOW] Anonymously voice my concerns about a toxic leader because I don't feel safe reporting wrongdoing within my organization.	7	7	4
40. [IDEW] Publicly voice my concerns about a toxic leader because I feel safe reporting wrongdoing within my organization.	2	8	4
1. [LCSE] Follow a toxic leader because I have trouble handling most of the problems I face.	5	2	2
6. [LSCC] Follow a toxic leader because I don't have a clear sense of who I am and what I stand for as a person.	3	4	1
37. [EXTW] Voice my concerns about a toxic leader to an outside party (i.e., authorities, the media) who has the power to correct the toxic leader because I want what's best for the organization.	3	9	1

Note. The standardized factor scores for the distinguishing statements from Factor 3 are significant ($p < .05$).

Like those who held the viewpoint associated with Factor 1, "Suffer in Silence," participants who Q sorts loaded onto Factor 3, "Quiet yet Concerned," indicated that they responded to toxic leadership by *remaining silent* and that both views are not keen on confronting toxic leaders. Individuals who loaded onto Factor 3, "Quiet yet Concerned," are vastly different from Factor 2. To illustrate, the correlation matrix between Factor 2, "Advocate and Change," and Factor 3, "Quiet yet Concerned," showed a 0.28 relationship. Furthermore, Factor 3, "Quiet yet Concerned," has more distinguished differences from Factor 1, "Suffer in Silence," as the correlation matrix illustrated a 0.59 relationship. This suggested that Factor 3, "Quiet yet Concerned," is more similar to Factor 1, "Suffer in Silence" than Factor 3, "Quiet yet Concerned" is with Factor 2, "Confront and Advocate." It is reasonable to assume that the eight exemplars of Factor 3, "Quiet yet Concerned," shared a distinct understanding of employee perceptions regarding their typical behaviors, thoughts, and reactions when navigating a toxic work environment to include a more passive approach. Of additional importance, most individuals (i.e., five out of eight participants) who loaded onto this factor have not experienced toxic leadership. As a result of not experiencing toxic leadership, they may not know precisely how they might respond in an actual toxic leadership situation.

Silence is Golden. Specifically, Q sorts loaded on Factor 3 held strong feelings about remaining silent for various reasons, including the safety of others (27: +9) and fearing negative consequences, such as losing their job, that would stem from speaking out (23: +9). Participant responses illustrated their beliefs that silence is golden:

a) *"I feel most people would remain silent because of the negative consequences from the toxic leader. Most individuals do not want to cause problems or lose their job."*

b) *"I fear that I wouldn't be able to get another job or have a bad reputation from the organization if I were to speak up."*

c) *"I chose remaining silent due to seeing people get retaliated in the past for bringing up concerns."*

d) *"I have found silence is golden. Keeping my head down and doing the best I can to avoid negative consequences of the toxic behavior."*

e) "*I think it is easier to let things go than to stand up and cause waves; so, theoretically, I think I'd probably remain silent for a time unless things get really bad or abusive. I think it is a natural thing to be afraid of [the] repercussions of reporting on your boss if you aren't confident things will be handled well."*

Consequently, these individuals believed it was easier to "go with the flow" and wanted to avoid attention directed at them. One participant who commented on this ideology that it was more characteristic of them to remain silent included:

> *"I'm not one to speak up. I'm much more likely to just do my work and try not to draw attention (good or bad) to myself."*

This quotation from the respondent is an example of engaging in passive approaches when navigating toxic leaders. In other words, they believed that it was better to remain out of the limelight. Simply put, individuals in Viewpoint 3 wanted to blend in at work.

Prosocial Silence and High Regards Towards Others. One of the themes that emerged from this viewpoint was their ability to navigate toxic leadership by utilizing *prosocial silence*. Prosocial silence exemplifies individuals that have high regard for others. In fact, this group believed in having a high regard for others in toxic leadership situations as most characteristic (27: +9). What is more, this group will take it upon themselves to *remain silent* for regards

toward others because they do not want to embarrass anyone else (26: +8). Two comments made by respondents further supported these perspectives:

a) *"I'm a really go with the flow type of person, which may be the reason I do not always voice my opinions about different situations. I also feel like I pay attention to the best interest of others as well as myself in the workplace and would not want anyone [i.e., their colleagues] to feel embarrassed."*

b) *"I might ignore it [toxic leadership] if it didn't directly affect me as we are all adults, and other people can stand up for themselves, but I also wouldn't support or help a leader be unethical. I would not jump in on name-calling or putting people down or lie to hurt someone."*

To further elucidate prosocial silence, individuals with this viewpoint held altruistic ideas that displayed selfless concern for the well-being of others to ensure that attention was not drawn to them or other co-workers. In addition, individuals in this viewpoint expressed affirmation that they would support other co-workers by safeguarding them and validating their feelings. The following responses clarified participant ideologies:

a) *"Even though I don't want to confront the toxic leader and have a confrontation, I also am like ooohh, I don't want to get anybody else involved in it."*

b) *"I would affirm my co-workers' feelings who are feeling toxic leadership. I would tell that they're not crazy and that we are all feeling that way."*

Specific to having deep concerns for others in the workplace, one individual expressed interest in coaching other employees instead of tattling when things go wrong. Perhaps the goal may be to protect their co-workers instead of avoiding the act of tattling. This comment explained this perspective:

"If someone does something wrong in the workplace, I go talk to them first before the toxic leader because my co-worker can have the chance at fixing their mistake in certain situations before the toxic leader would need to be told."

This example ensured that their co-workers did not get in trouble with a toxic leader. Thus, those in Viewpoint 3 wanted to protect others. Hence, this further validated Viewpoint 3 and their high regard toward others. On the contrary, suppose those with colluder views (i.e., susceptible followers) see a co-worker do something wrong in the workplace. In this case, the colluder would turn in their co-worker to the toxic leader. In other words, the colluder may tattle-tell to get on the good side of the toxic leader. As a result of these colluder behaviors, increased toxic leadership opportunities would exist.

High Self-Concept Clarity. Individuals in this viewpoint felt they had a heightened understanding of their self-concept. More precisely, they understood themselves, and their perceived personal attributes were clearly defined and internally consistent. These participants indicated that low self-concept clarity was most *uncharacteristic* of their responses regarding toxic leadership (6: +1). Thus, while they would not speak up, these individuals held strong feelings about not following a toxic leader because they understood who they stood for as a person (6: +1). Hence, the placement of this statement suggested that these individuals believed they had control over their life. Several participants elucidated this perspective:

a) *"I feel I have control over the events in my life."*

b) *"I know who I am. I don't necessarily know what I would do to fix a situation with [a] toxic leader, but I definitely know what I wouldn't do to be liked or promoted or to fit in. I'd be willing to be punished for not playing along to get along with a bad*

person. And then I'd either complain to HR/manager or leave if it got bad enough. I know who I am and what I stand for. I also know where to choose my battles."

c) *"I have a hard time believing I would support anyone's unethical behavior. I know who I am and what I do."*

These statements suggested that individuals in this group understand their self-concept and have goals aligned with their interests. As a result, they would not follow (i.e., collude) a toxic leader's unethical behavior. In addition, having a defined self-concept clarity may support their belief of having relatively firm core self-evaluation beliefs. For example, individuals with this perspective believed that they would not follow a toxic leader because they could handle most of the problems they faced (1: +2). Suppose individuals in this viewpoint had a clear sense of who they are and a strong feeling that they can handle problems. In that case, they may perpetuate a sense of optimism (e.g., leaving the organization) in toxic leadership situations and not require them to seek out formal help with voicing their concerns. One respondent alluded to having an optimistic outlook by "finding a way" out of toxic leadership situations by leaving the organization:

"I have control over my life. Following a toxic leader is temporary until I can find a way out."

Consequently, this statement suggested that turnover in toxic leadership situations is evident, contributing to organizational consequences like increased employee turnover.

Feelings Towards Whistleblowing. Another emergent theme from this group of individuals revolves around the middling placement of whistleblowing statements. To illustrate, four out of the six types of whistleblowing statements are identified as distinguishing statements with a relatively moderate placement in the factor array (40: +4; 41: +4; 36: +6; and 38: +5). The

non-extreme arrangement of these statements may serve as the fulcrum for the remaining statements in the factor array. In fact, the placement of these whistleblowing statements is relatively moderate regarding the other statements. Thus, recognizing the role that these statements provide must be investigated to understand this viewpoint holistically. In examining these four statements, many individuals who loaded onto this factor have not experienced toxic leadership. As a result of not experiencing toxic leadership, they may not know precisely how they might respond in an actual toxic leadership situation. One participant from Factor 3 shared their thoughts regarding having had experienced actual toxic leadership:

> *"I think until people have experienced toxic leaders and truly work with a toxic leader, can you really even know what you would do? I don't know. It's almost like until you experience it, I think you're like, oh like it's maybe not that big of a deal, like, I would just kind of go with the flow, but if somebody has experienced a toxic leader, they're probably like no, it's terrible."*

In addition, one participant with this viewpoint elucidated this perspective. This perspective suggests that Factor 3 will support others when advocating and speaking out against toxic leadership, but they do not want to voice concerns. While individuals in this viewpoint understand that toxic leadership is wrong, they are looking for others to call attention to and voice concern with toxic leadership. The following passage represented this unique perspective:

> *"If people are going to advocate against toxic leadership, I would really encourage them to advocate because I probably feel the same way as them. I know that this person's toxic, but I don't want to be the one to have to say it. But if I see that you think the same thing as me, and you want to go fight for what's right, then I'm going to really push you to do that because then I don't have to do it."*

The above perspective may explain the relatively moderate placement of four out of the six whistleblowing statements. Yet, on the other hand, participants felt strongly about whether they will voice their concerns about toxic leadership. Therefore, voicing concerns must be with a trusted individual inside the organization *informally* who could advocate for them because they are concerned about their safety (39: +8). This text illustrated participant beliefs:

a) *"In my previous experience, I had many co-workers who also noticed and could not take the toxic behavior, so I felt that I had many people I could voice my concerns with."*

b) *"If change could be made, but it couldn't be traced back to me, I'd be more likely to report concerns, especially if there is [a] risk of backlash."*

The above quote from line "B" indicated that there was more support for anonymous channels than informal means of reporting. Additionally, what this group felt strongly about is that handling workplace issues should take place within the workplace. One reason for handling workplace issues inside the workplace is that it is more professional. Further, participants believed that voicing concerns should not be addressed to outside parties such as the authorities or media (37: +1). In fact, speaking to an outside party would only subject yourself to additional consequences. For instance, participants held strong negative feelings about reporting a toxic leader to an outside source. Respondents elucidated these beliefs with the following statements:

a) *"I would try to report concerns internally within the organization before an outside party."*

b) *"I wouldn't choose a public route which was draw[ing] attention to me."*

c) *"I would not go [to] an outside party to voice my concerns. It should be handled within the organization."*

d) *"I would never report to the media or authorities over toxic leadership, in fear of possibly getting in trouble or things getting blown out of proportion. I am just not that type of person who would want to make a conflict public; this is something that should be resolved within the workplace, I feel."*

e) *"I feel like voicing concerns to the outside would open a can of worms that shouldn't be opened. I feel like there is no need to do that unless it's very serious. Even then, I personally wouldn't but would have someone else at work do it."*

In other words, the statement from line "E" is one example of differentiation based on the severity of toxic leadership. Yet, if individuals reported a toxic leader, this group wanted to feel supported by other co-workers. Thus, contributing to this group's beliefs surrounding prosocial behaviors, such as *prosocial silence*, based on cooperative motives and altruism as more *characteristic* of their beliefs (26: +8; 27: +9).

Relatively moderate feelings toward whistleblowing in Factor 3 may suggest non-extreme feelings about voicing concerns. And perhaps, what is more, are two distinguishing statements. For example, individuals held relatively moderate feelings for supporting toxic leaders for career advancement (11: +4) and workplace status (18: +5). This non-extreme stance with the other statements on one's success and promotion may explain why this group did not "get worked up" and chose to remain silent when navigating a toxic leader. For example, the following statement illustrated these beliefs:

a) "*I also have a natural ability to let things go and not bother me too much, so it takes quite a bit to get me riled up."*

b) *"My career success is mostly my own. At times a break or two helps, but my career success is truly up to me."*

While searching all qualitative transcripts in Viewpoint 3 for themes that related to advancing one's career, I did not identify one participant who expanded on career advancement. However, there is a close connection between career advancement and greed. This study found that those in Viewpoint 3 are less likely to support a toxic leader because of greedy, selfish tendencies (12: +2; 14: +2). Perhaps this group's belief in hard work may have justified the lack of greedy, selfish tendencies. Respondents elucidated their perspectives on hard work:

a) *"I would never want opportunities to just be handed to me without working for them. Hard work allows for someone to get ahead the right way by contributing to the company and earning it instead of just trying to kiss up to the toxic leader to get better opportunities at work."*
b) *"I'm a natural[ly] hard worker, so that's not an option."*
c) *"I chose this one [statement] because I believe hard work should make you get ahead at work. I feel like you need to work hard to earn where you are."*

Here are examples that demonstrated that those in Viewpoint 3 perceived that getting ahead in the workplace was achieved through hard work rather than colluding. Additionally, perceptions concerning advancement indicated that getting ahead should be earned and not given.

Passive Approaches. What is more, individuals held relatively strong feelings toward using *passive voice* when responding to toxic leaders. More specifically, participants indicated that they do not want added attention on them. In fact, they believed it is easier to agree with toxic leaders because disagreeing with them is pointless (31: +8), and nothing will change anyway (22: +8), reflecting overlap with those individuals in Factor 1. Further, they believed that disagreeing with a toxic leader may make the toxic leader more upset, promoting toxic leadership opportunities. Example participant responses surrounding these beliefs included:

a) *"Toxic leaders aren't there to learn from subordinates or to listen. Speaking up will do nothing."*

b) *"Disagreeing with the toxic leader will only make them more upset usually, causing more toxic behavior; they never take a look at their own actions, especially when someone below them points it out."*

Accordingly, these statements reflected that Factor 3 responded to toxic leaders using a *passive acquiescent voice*. Which, consequently, promoted groupthink because individuals felt resignation. Individuals with these beliefs specifically commented on using *passive voice* and *passive silence* in toxic leadership situations. This statement illustrated this perspective:

"I'm just passive, and I would rather just put my head down and do my work and not draw attention to myself, and hopefully, the toxic leader just forgets I'm there."

Another form of *passiveness* surrounding their beliefs is a *defensive voice* (33: +7). One statement that demonstrated this perspective included:

"It's not good to be on the receiving end of a toxic leader. When facing a toxic leader, the best route is to stay in the back, so you don't get singled out."

This quote represents a defensive voice by suggesting that one may do whatever it takes so that they are not ostracized from the group. In other words, they may use defensive tactics like blaming others for problems, moving the attention away from themselves, or offering justification for their actions. One explanation for responding to toxic leaders using a *passive approach* may be their relatively newer experience in the workplace. As a result, newcomers may feel the need to observe the environment passively to learn the workplace culture before deciding how to navigate toxic leaders. For example, the following text illustrated a perspective from a newcomer within the workplace:

"With being new to the workplace, I do remain silent because I don't know everything yet. So, I just sit back and listen to see what others like my co-workers or supervisor does to try to get an understanding for the organization."

At the same time, individuals with this viewpoint believed that it was *characteristic* of them to *remain silent* so that others are not embarrassed (26: +8) or ensure that others do not get in trouble (27: +9). Thus, it is characteristic of this group to respond using *prosocial silence*. Yet, the relatively high placement of engaging in *defensive voice* and being willing to shift the attention to others as a form of safety for oneself (33: +7) suggested some disconnect between wanting to support co-workers and protecting themselves. Consequently, this created a paradox between *prosocial behaviors* of wishing to support co-workers and responding with a *defensive voice*, causing attention to shift to co-workers. One participant in the follow-up interview clarified this paradox, indicating that this participant did not engage in a defensive voice. For example, this response clarified the inconsistency between *prosocial behaviors* and *defensive voice*:

"I would feel terrible trying to direct their attention to another co-worker of mine. I'm not going to put it off on somebody else. I might try to diffuse the situation and be like, oh let's talk about something else, but I wouldn't try to get them [the toxic leader] to shift the attention to another co-worker."

In addition, individuals may navigate toxic leaders by utilizing safe responses, such as *remaining silent* and *passive voice*. Participants discussed the importance of feeling secure when deciding on how to proceed under toxic leadership. This perspective suggested that lacking trust in toxic leadership situations is one reason for withholding information:

"I feel like if there's a toxic leader, I don't trust them. So, if I don't trust them, I don't trust them to do anything good with that information. If I tell them something that's wrong, they're probably going to get me in trouble and not necessarily do good with whatever I share with you."

The above perspective illuminated how individuals who experienced toxic leadership desired safety, but perceived threats mitigated voicing genuine concern. Thus, if individuals expressed concerns to their toxic leader, they felt threatened by what the toxic leader does with that information. Therefore, this enhances increased opportunities for toxic leadership within the toxic triangle.

Relatively Moderate Emotions. On the one hand, individuals in Factor 1 experienced high emotions and rumination regarding toxic leadership. However, on the other hand, in Factor 3, these individuals do not necessarily experience feelings of suffering or rumination when *remaining silent* (25: +6). One participant in the follow-up interview justified their lack of emotions. What is more, the lack of emotions towards toxic leadership may explain the relatively moderate feelings towards most whistleblowing statements (40: +4; 41: +4; 38: +5; 36: +6), too. One participant illustrated their belief regarding relatively moderate feelings towards emotions:

"I don't feel like I suffer in silence. I just have no desire to confront a toxic leader. But I don't feel like it internally weighs on me. I feel like I'm able to put my head down, do my job, and move on with it."

Thus, the above statement suggested that individuals in Factor 3 did not experience an emotional investment in solving toxic leadership. In fact, it indicated that these individuals could carry on with their job without high feelings of rumination or being tied emotionally to the problem of toxic leadership.

Summary. In summary, eight participants positively associated with Factor 3 believed that it was most characteristic to *remain silent* (e.g., *quiescent silence* and *prosocial silence*) when navigating toxic leaders. While they highly regard others and self-concept clarity, they have relatively moderate feelings toward *whistleblowing* typologies. Indeed, they are concerned about toxic leaders. Yet, the *passive approach* (e.g., *acquiescent voice*) when navigating toxic leadership remains at the forefront. One explanation for their passive approach is that they are not as emotionally invested in toxic leadership and do not experience rumination to continue their work under toxic leadership.

Summary

What are employee perceptions regarding their typical behaviors, thoughts, and reactions when navigating a toxic work environment? In summary, the data analysis revealed three patterns of distinct viewpoints. First, one viewpoint stressed *Suffer in Silence* (Factor 1). Second, another perspective emphasized *Confront and Advocate* (Factor 2). Lastly, one view highlighted beliefs regarding *Quiet yet Concerned* (Factor 3). As previously mentioned, the Q data analysis is less concerned about where each participant fell. But instead, this study is concerned with the overall pattern of opinions that emerged from the three factors, contributing to the strength of Q research by revealing the dominant patterns and clusters of opinions that arise within each group based on holism.

Research Question 2: Participant Characteristics

The second research question this study sought to answer was: *To what extent do participant characteristics inform differing viewpoints?*

To answer the second research question, I examined participant characteristics related to various characteristics obtained from the post-sort questionnaire for each of the three emergent

viewpoints. These characteristics included toxic leadership exposure, generational identity, education, gender, race, and English as a first language. The follow-up interviews became crucial in answering research question two as participants discussed these characteristics. Table 29 provides an overview of the various participant characteristics that are associated with the three emergent viewpoints: *Suffer in Silence* (Factor 1), *Confront and Advocate* (Factor 2), and *Quiet yet Concerned* (Factor 3).

Table 29

Participant Characteristics and Emergent Viewpoints

Characteristic	Factor 1 (n = 11; 38%)	Factor 2 (n = 10; 34%)	Factor 3 (n = 8; 28%)	Total (n = 29; 100%)
Perceived Generation				
Baby Boomers	1 (9%)	1 (10%)	0 (0%)	2 (7%)
Generation X	2 (18%)	2 (20%)	0 (0%)	4 (14%)
Millennials	4 (36%)	6 (60%)	1 (13%)	11 (38%)
Generation Z	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	2 (25%)	2 (7%)
Identified with more than 1 generation	1 (9%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	1 (3%)
None	3 (27%)	1 (10%)	5 (63%)	9 (31%)
Actual Generation				
Baby Boomers	3 (27%)	1 (10%)	0 (0%)	4 (14%)
Generation X	3 (27%)	2 (20%)	2 (25%)	7 (24%)
Millennials	5 (45%)	6 (60%)	3 (38%)	14 (48%)
Generation Z	0 (0%)	1 (10%)	3 (38%)	4 (14%)
Gender				
Male	2 (18%)	2 (20%)	2 (25%)	6 (21%)
Female	9 (82%)	8 (80%)	6 (75%)	23 (79%)
Race				
Black/African American	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)
Asian	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)
American Indian/Alaskan Native	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)
Native Hawaiian/Pacific Islander	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)
White	11 (100%)	9 (90%)	8 (100%)	28 (97%)
Other	0 (0%)	1 (10%)	0 (0%)	1 (3%)
English as a First Language				
Yes	11 (100%)	10 (100%)	8 (100%)	29 (100%)
No	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)
Highest Degree Earned				
Less than a high school diploma	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)
High School degree or equivalent	2 (18%)	1 (10%)	1 (13%)	4 (14%)
Some college, no degree	2 (18%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	2 (7%)
Associates degree	2 (18%)	2 (20%)	1 (13%)	5 (17%)
Bachelor’s degree	0 (0%)	2 (20%)	5 (63%)	7 (24%)
Master’s degree	3 (27%)	5 (50%)	1 (13%)	9 (31%)
Professional degree	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)
Doctorate	2 (18%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	2 (7%)
Perceived Toxic Leadership				
Yes	10 (91%)	9 (90%)	5 (63%)	24 (83%)
No	0 (0%)	1 (10%)	3 (38%)	4 (14%)
Not reported	1 (9%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	1 (3%)
Actual Toxic Leadership Exposure				
High	7 (64%)	7 (70%)	4 (50%)	18 (62%)
Medium	2 (18%)	2 (20%)	1 (13%)	5 (17%)
Low	1 (9%)	1 (10%)	3 (38%)	5 (17%)
Not reported	1 (9%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	1 (3%)

Note. Percentages may not add up to 100% due to rounding.

Factor 1: "Suffer in Silence" Characteristics

The "Suffer in Silence" viewpoint, Factor 1, was defined by individuals that believed it is safer to *remain silent*. In addition to being fearful, their vulnerability and emotions co-occurred, which resulted in feelings of rumination. Furthermore, they believed remaining silent was in their best interest, making them less vulnerable in toxic leadership situations. In addition, they believed that nothing would change because toxic leaders are not open to hearing concerns. Finally, they are concerned with their self-interest. In other words, they wanted to protect themselves from a toxic leader or leave the situation and find a new job. Table 29 illustrates complete demographic information for the 11 participants in Factor 1. To investigate participant characteristics and the relationship between the first viewpoint, I examined all characteristics.

Toxic Leadership Exposure. First, the demographic information obtained from participants who loaded positively on Factor 1 provided evidence that participants in this viewpoint experience toxic leadership more than any other two factors. Of the 11 participants who identified with Factor 1, one participant did not respond. The remaining ten respondents indicated experiencing some degree of prior experience with toxic leadership. For example, using the Toxic Leadership Scale (Schmidt, 2008, 2014), participant scores ranged from 2.0 (i.e., low) to 4.7 (i.e., high). The average toxic leadership score for Viewpoint 1 was 4.05. As a result, participants in Factor 1 experience a relatively high score of toxic leadership, suggesting they have high degrees of prior toxic leadership experiences.

In fact, of the ten participants who identified as experiencing toxic leadership, seven (70%) reported high levels of toxic leaders, two (20%) reported medium levels, and one (10%) reported low levels of toxic leadership. In addition, one participant indicated as having experienced toxic leadership; however, their Toxic Leadership Scale score was relatively low,

totaling 2.0. The follow-up interview clarified this participant's belief, who had perceived themselves as having experienced toxic leadership yet scored low. This passage illustrated the participant's perspective:

> *"Anytime you're out in the world, there's going to be always some type of toxic leadership, no matter what you're doing, whether it's work or something. And so, it is like I have had a small amount. I can see anytime that you are around a group or other individuals, you are going to experience toxic leadership. Everybody has different views, and we're not all on the same page."*

In other words, this participant equated differences in views to toxic leadership. To determine how toxic leadership exposure impacted their beliefs, one participant indicated they were unsure how toxic exposure shaped their responses when navigating toxic leaders. The following text illustrated this perspective:

> *"I honestly don't know that my prior experiences have shaped my thoughts. I have never enjoyed being led by toxic leaders. I have always sort of suffered along with them. While I strategically planned my exit."*

Yet, prior experience with toxic leadership may shape participants' reactions to responding to toxic leaders. To illustrate, individuals who loaded onto this Factor have attempted to voice their concerns in the past. However, after failed attempts, they decided that *remaining silent* was in their best self-interest. These respondent perspectives illustrated their beliefs:

a) *"Starting out, I would voice my opinion. But in the end, I would never win, even if I was correct on the issue. After a few times of that, I just decided I would be quiet and get my work done without saying anything. The negative consequences of saying something would be being degraded and even laughed at. The last few years before*

he retired, I would try to avoid him at all costs. I would even take my lunch break at separate times so I wouldn't have to interact with him."

b) *"Defiance against my toxic leader resulted in disciplinary actions against me. Remaining silent was safer for my career."*

c) *"I have complained over the years, and things don't change, so it is best to stay quiet."*

Thus, the high levels of *perceived* and *actual* toxic leadership exposure provide context for how individuals who share the perspectives of Factor 1, suggesting that most individuals in Factor 1 have experienced toxic leadership. Moreover, these experiences may indicate that individuals in this viewpoint *have* experienced toxic leadership and responded to *actual* experiences rather than *hypothetical* scenarios. As a result, they have learned that their prior exposure to toxic leadership has shaped their responses by *remaining silent*.

Generational Identity. Using birth year, Viewpoint 1 participants were the oldest respondents out of all the three viewpoints. In fact, birth years ranged from 1961 to 1995, and the average birth year was 1976. In terms of generations, three (27%) out of the 11 participants were categorized as Baby Boomers. Furthermore, three participants (27%) were Generation Xers. The remaining five participants (45%) were Millennials. No participants in Factor 1 were Generation Zers.

In examining perceived generation, only one participant (9%) identified as a Baby Boomer. Furthermore, three participants (27%) in Factor 1 indicated that they did not view themselves as belonging to any generation. One participant (9%) considered themselves as belonging to more than one generation, both as Generation X and a Millennial. Out of the three

factors, this one participant was the only individual who identified with more than one generation.

Participants shared their perspectives as to how generational identity shaped their responses regarding toxic leadership. For example, one participant shared their beliefs regarding lack of generational identity:

> *"I don't even know what generation I belong to. Do you know the other thing? I don't feel like I'm that old. I forget that I'm pushing 60. I don't want to think about my age and aging. I think that's why. I'm not them [older generations]; I'm younger."*

Notice how the interviewee drew a parallel relationship between generational identity and chronological age, indicating that age relates to generational identity. What is more, respondents suggested that increasing age is an unfavorable characteristic. This statement enhanced this perception:

> *"When I think of age, they [people] seem to get more outspoken with age. It's their view and only their view, and that [outspokenness] sometimes gets worse with age."*

Yet, one participant also indicated that aging has its benefits. According to this participant, one benefit of aging is the ability to speak and make decisions from prior experience. This example is illustrated:

> *"I would view older individuals as being outspoken and always saying what was on their mind. If they didn't like it, you would know where you stand with them. Unlike me, I would suffer in silence. With them, you would know. And as you do get older, you could get a little bit more less tolerant of stupidity."*

In addition, qualitative data provided insights into toxic leadership and age. To this end, one individual statement reflected this perspective:

"I think as you get older, you probably have experienced more toxic leadership after you've been in the workforce for so long versus people who are just starting."

Yet, younger generations may find it more challenging to speak up to toxic leaders due to concerns about financial security. Whereas older generations may be more established and financially secure, suggesting that they may not be as concerned about consequences from toxic leadership. One respondent reflected on this belief:

"I feel like, at my age, I'm in a different situation than when I was in my 20s where I had student loans piling up."

In sum, ageing and generational stereotypes may explain how one responds to toxic leadership. As a result, these generational beliefs may have been attributed to their decision to be more interested in themselves rather than doing what is best for an organization. One respondent reflected on their thoughts regarding generational identity and their generation's role in their beliefs in the workplace. This statement demonstrated that belief:

"I am very quintessentially Gen X, in that I have zero loyalty to an organization. None."

The respondent here drew a parallel between generational identity and stereotypical behaviors associated with that generational label. Specifically, Generation Xers' cautious approach and perceived lack of loyalty are two characteristics related to the Generation Xer label. However, because of the interview data and participant characteristics, perhaps it is not the generational identity in which differing viewpoints emerged. Still, instead, it may be chronological age and experience with toxic leaders that contributed to views regarding responses to toxic leaders.

Education. Education levels varied in participants who loaded onto Factor 1. For example, two participants (18%) held doctorate degrees. What is more, three respondents (27%) had Master's degrees, two respondents (18%) indicated some college and no degree, two

respondents (18%) held Associates, and two respondents (18%) graduated from high school. No participants in this factor identified as holding a Bachelor's degree as their highest level of education. Further, one participant alluded to education as potentially being a contributing factor that may promote workplace conflict. This respondent's beliefs surrounding education and toxic leadership included:

> *"As you get older, you have a lot more experience under your belt in the workforce. You've been around a lot of different personalities over those years, and well, a lot of changes evolve from all those years. I think that all makes to where sometimes it's hard and can get more toxic as you age. And then them young whippersnappers come in and think they know it all because they have a big education compared to those who don't and have been there 30 years like the guy who didn't go to school. And that guy probably knows more about the company."*

This last statement highlighted a handful of interesting participant characteristics. Those participant characteristics included education, experience in the workplace, different personalities, and stereotypical attitudes towards other "younger" generations. As a result, these stereotypical attitudes perceived by older generations toward younger generations who graduate with higher degrees than others in the workplace may promote workplace conflict. In fact, increased education may be perceived as a threat in terms of generational differences, particularly a threat for older generations.

Factor 2: "Advocate and Change" Characteristics

The "Advocate and Change" viewpoint, Factor 2, is defined by individuals who believed it was best to advocate for change and voice their concerns about toxic leaders. Additionally, they engaged in riskier *whistleblowing* acts, held strong core-self evaluations, and had a strong

desire for change. Finally, they held high regard for the environment and workplace culture. As previously mentioned, ten participants loaded onto Factor 2. Table 29 demonstrates demographic information for participants. To investigate participants' characteristics and the relationship between the third viewpoint, I examined participant characteristics.

Toxic Leadership Exposure. The demographic information obtained from participants who loaded positively on Factor 2 provided strong evidence that most participants had experienced toxic leadership. For instance, nine (90%) out of the ten participants identified as experiencing perceived toxic leadership, whereas one participant (10%) did not identify as experiencing toxic leadership. Thus, these demographics begin to tell a story about participants' work history with toxic leadership.

Of the nine respondents who had perceived to have experienced toxic leadership, seven individuals (78%) reported high levels of toxicity, and two individuals (22%) indicated medium levels of toxic leadership. The one participant who identified as not having experienced toxic leadership reported a low level of toxicity. Thus, similar to individuals in Factor 1, the majority of respondents who loaded onto Factor 2 had experienced toxic leadership.

In fact, the nine participants who had perceived to experience toxic leadership reported relatively medium to high levels of toxic leadership ranging from 3.8 to 4.8. The average score from the Toxic Leadership Scale (Schmidt, 2008, 2014) in this group was 4.03. This suggests that most individuals in this group have experienced high levels of toxic leadership. Follow-up interviews clarified participant perspectives on toxic leadership exposure concerning their views regarding responses to toxic leadership:

"I feel as if toxic leadership exposure has definitely affected the way I view toxic leadership. I mean, when you experience toxic leadership first-hand, it changes your view on how to deal with the toxic leader."

In another instance that resulted from prior toxic leadership experience that helped determine how to respond in those situations, one participant suggested that they felt "stuck" in their role and that the toxic leader felt threatened by the employee. This statement illustrated this perspective:

"The leader didn't want me to progress in my role, so I obviously didn't support that. I feel my success in my career is in my control. That's why I chose to be less likely to speak out because that leader felt threatened per se and didn't want to teach or grow myself in my new role."

In other words, the toxic leader chose not to train their employee. In this case, that employee was the respondent who felt they had success in their career. Yet, participants stated that regardless of exposure to toxic leadership, they would still *voice their concerns* as they had high regard toward others, including the workplace. One participant exemplified this reflection:

"I definitely would still voice my concerns if I had not experienced toxic leadership. Again, it goes back to advocating for a good work environment."

What is more, participants indicated that having experienced toxic leadership in real life made them take a stance and speak out against toxic leaders. This statement illustrated how their experience with toxic leadership had shaped their perspective:

"I am just a little more outspoken, or I definitely shouldn't say that I'm outspoken, but rather I have gotten to be that way through experiencing toxic leadership."

Here is an example of how this participant used their previous toxic leadership experience as a learning opportunity. In other words, based on that toxic leadership experience, they learned that speaking out and advocating in toxic leader scenarios remained best for decreased toxic leadership opportunities.

Generational Identity. Using birth year, Viewpoint 2 was the only factor that had at least one representative of each generation. In terms of generations, this viewpoint was the most diverse among the three perspectives. In fact, birth years ranged from 1958 to 1996, and the average birth year was 1985. In terms of perceived generational labels, one participant (10%) out of the ten participants were from the Baby Boomer generation. Two participants (20%) were Generation X, and six participants (60%) were Millennials. Lastly, one participant (10%) was from Generation Z. What is more, Factor 2 represented the most Millennials.

In addition, one participant (10%) in Factor 2 indicated that they did not view themselves as belonging to any generation. Out of the nine participants who identified with a generation, eight identified with a generation that matched perception and actual. One participant perceived themselves as a Millennial, but they were categorized into the Generation Z cohort using actual birth year. One participant who was vocal about belonging to the Baby Boomer generation indicated their beliefs as to what extent generational identity plays a role in responding to toxic leaders. This passage illustrated this perspective:

> *"I think Baby Boomers are more in tune [more knowledgeable about identifying] to toxic leaders. I think that it's probably because of our age, and we grew up in a time with respectful leaders. And then, as time went on, the newer, younger leaders because more toxic. They believe they know it all."*

Alternatively, another participant in Viewpoint 2, who identified as a Millennial, compared the Millennials to the Baby Boomer generation. This statement illustrated this perspective:

> *"I feel like the Millennial generation has a hard work ethic, like almost more than per se Baby Boomers. We are closer to our parents' generational mindset. Not all Millennials have those views, but I feel like we [Millennials] have the drive to work and succeed. We want to succeed, and we take a lot of pride in our jobs. Taking pride in our job means that we want to enjoy our work."*

These two perspectives from participants who identified as Baby Boomers and Millennials indicated discord between beliefs and generational identity. For instance, the Baby Boomer viewed younger generations as being toxic leaders who lack respect. In another example, the Millennial suggested that the Millennial generation perpetuated positive Baby Boomer characteristics such as hard work ethic. As a result, these differing perceptions offered conflicting views regarding generational identity and traits. Yet, both the Baby Boomer and Millennial participants were more similar as their beliefs aligned with Viewpoint 2. Therefore, they suggested they would react to toxic leaders by confronting and advocating. Hence, this would suggest there is more consensus, and perhaps generational identity does not play a significant role in differing perceptions regarding responding to toxic leaders.

The interviews signified that maybe it is not generational identity, but rather it may be related to age and professional experience. This statement exemplified this belief:

> *"I definitely was more like that [remaining silent, quiet], but then it's like as you grow in your role and grow professionally and get older, you realize that you don't have to deal with this [toxic leadership]."*

In other words, this statement illustrated that as one ages, they would likely hold more professional experience, and thus, they would learn to become more vocal in toxic leadership scenarios. On the contrary, there may be a peak in experience. For instance, past a certain age, it may not be worth putting in the effort or taking the risk to speak out. As a result of this culminating growth regarding professional experience, toxic leadership opportunities may decrease.

Education. Lastly, education levels varied in this group. Individuals in Factor 2 held the most Master's degrees out of the three emergent viewpoints. To illustrate, five participants (50%) held Master's degrees, two participants (20%) held Bachelor's degrees, two participants (20%) had Associate's degrees, and one participant (10%) graduated high school. No participants in this viewpoint identified as having a doctoral degree or some college, no degree as their highest level of education. While education levels varied in Viewpoint 2, one participant also indicated the role of learning and the relationship that education has on their response to toxic leadership. One respondent noted this perspective:

> *"My toxic leader was always one step ahead of me. They felt threatened that if I learned more things or became more knowledgeable about our department or whatever tasks, that I would take their position. Ultimately someday, you want to grow and advance, but that was not my intention."*

While learning on the job may not be equivalent to formal learning in school, this last statement highlights an interesting concept—those individuals want to grow within the organization, even in toxic leadership situations. There appears to be an interesting connection between this group's beliefs of wanting what is best for the workplace and wanting to grow within their place of

employment. Perhaps if they see themselves at an organization for the long term, this will increase their desire to speak up and advocate for change.

Factor 3: "Quiet yet Concerned" Characteristics

The "Quiet yet Concerned" viewpoint, Factor 3, was defined by eight individuals who believed it was best to *remain silent* and view silence as golden. These individuals have high regard for others, high self-concept clarity, and relatively moderate feelings towards whistleblowing. What is more, while they are concerned about toxic leadership, they tend to engage in *passive approaches* and have fairly moderate emotions regarding toxic leadership, unlike Viewpoint 1. Table 29 provides complete demographic information. To investigate participants' characteristics and the relationship between the third viewpoint, I examined participant characteristics.

Toxic Leadership Exposure. Interestingly, Factor 3 had the least number of loaded sorts. In other words, they had the least number of individuals who shared a similar viewpoint. This is attention-grabbing because out of the three perspectives, Factor 3 had the greatest percentage of participants with no toxic leadership experience. As such, three participants (38%) identified as not having a perceived experience with toxic leadership. However, the remaining five participants (62%) all identified as having experienced toxic leadership. As a result, these demographics begin to tell a story about participants' work history with toxic leadership experience.

In fact, of the five participants who identified as experiencing perceived toxic leadership, four (80%) reported high levels of toxic leaders, and one (20%) reported medium levels of toxic leadership. The average score of toxic leadership in this group was 3.2. This suggested relatively low to moderate levels of prior toxic leadership. Overall, participants' toxic leadership scores

ranged from 1.1 (i.e., low) to 4.7 (i.e., high), indicating a wide variety of toxic leadership exposure.

Participant perspectives on toxic leadership exposure suggested that it may be challenging for individuals to accurately describe how they may respond if they have not experienced toxic leadership before. One participant who identified as having a high level of toxic leadership exposure illustrated this perspective:

> *"I think until you have a toxic leader and like truly work with a toxic leader, then can you really even know what you would do? I don't know. It's almost like until you experience it, I think you're like, oh, like maybe it's not that big of a deal, like, I would just kind of go with the flow. But, if somebody has experienced a toxic leader, they're probably like, no, it's terrible. You have to stand up and say something."*

In another instance, one participant had difficulty imagining a toxic leadership situation when responding to toxic leadership scenarios. This participant noted:

> *"I was trying to imagine like if you're in a situation with a toxic leader. If you really like your job, but then it's kind of hard to like your job if you actually have to talk to leadership."*

In sum, toxic leadership exposure may clarify how one would respond to toxic leadership in *actual* situations. In other words, exposure to toxic leadership may clarify that *actual* experience with toxic leadership may represent more *accurate* results of perceptions of responses regarding toxic leaders.

Generational Identity. While examining actual birth years, this viewpoint consisted of the youngest group of participants. In fact, birth years ranged from 1965 to 2002, and the average birth year was 1988. Accordingly, no Baby Boomer individuals loaded onto this viewpoint. In

addition, two participants (25%) were from Generation X. Three participants (38%) were Millennials. Lastly, three participants (38%) were from Generation Z. In sum, Factor 3 had the most representation from the two youngest generations (i.e., Millennials and Generation Z).

Of important note, Factor 3 had the most participants who perceived themselves as not identifying with any generation. In fact, out of the eight participants who loaded onto this viewpoint, five participants (63%) reported as not identifying with a generation. Furthermore, these participants who viewed themselves as not belonging to any generation were represented by two participants from Generation X, two participants from Millennial, and one participant from Generation Z. Thus, out of the three remaining participants who identified with a generation, they all identified with a generation that matched perception and actual.

Responses regarding toxic leadership in relationship to generational identity suggested that generational beliefs remain mixed. To illustrate, one participant who identified as Generation Z emphasized intragenerational differences in responding to toxic leadership. The following statement described this belief:

> *"I feel like one part of my generation still respects their elders, like those in higher positions. So, they don't want to cause conflict or say anything much. But then, you have the other half of my generation who is like; I don't care and say anything. So, like those people don't have any respect for others."*

In addition, the lack of knowledge surrounding generations may explain the lack of identification with a generation. For example, the following participant reflection explained the lack of generational identity:

> *"I had to Google what the different generations were. I was like, if I don't know what these [generational groupings] mean, how am I supposed to be based on when I grew*

up? So I had to Google them to see where I was supposed to be. But, then, I read it, and I realized that if I had to use Google, then I clearly didn't know what they even stand for or where I belong."

Thus, this response would suggest that generational identity may not play a role in individuals' reactions regarding toxic leadership in Viewpoint 3. However, one participant also mentioned generational identity's role in beliefs and subjectivity for how one views the world. This participant noted a connection between generational identity, generational labels, and views:

"I know [generational identity] influences how I think. If you're in a generation, the things that happened during that generation, so like whether it's 9/11 or other events, those experiences impact the way I perceive events. So, I know they're impacting my thoughts and beliefs, even if I'm not calling it Generation Z or Millennials…So, I'm not giving it [generational identity] a title, but I know those [generational] experiences impact the way I think."

In other words, this participant felt those experiences impacted the way they perceived toxic leadership. Accordingly, this response implied that it is not generational labels that promoted how they responded to toxic leadership situations, but rather it may be different experiences throughout their lifetime. In other words, these diverse experiences throughout one's lifetime included things like toxic leadership exposure or tenure in the workplace. Thus, it is reasonable to assume that older generations will have more career experience. As a result, placing a label on generations may not be the most effective way to define how generational identity played a role in responses regarding toxic leadership. Instead, this study is hesitant to say that it is generational differences but rather culminating lifetime experience.

Education. Lastly, education levels varied in this group. The majority of participants who loaded onto this factor held a Bachelor's degree (63%). One participant (13%) had a Master's degree, one (13%) held an Associate's degree, and one (13%) graduated high school. No participants in this factor identified as having a doctoral degree or some college, no degree as their highest level of education. While this grouping of individuals with similar viewpoints was the youngest among the three factors, the significant representation of holding Bachelor's degrees makes sense to where individuals may be in their careers. In other words, they are relatively new in their professional careers and may lack professional experience. What is more, lack of experience may be a reason why this group stays silent in responding to toxic leadership. One participant elucidated their beliefs regarding professional expertise:

> *"I haven't really had much experience with toxic leadership since I'm new to the work field. I'm a really go with the flow person. With being new to the workplace, I do remain silent because I don't know everything yet. So, I kind of just sit back and listen to see what my co-workers and supervisor do to get an understanding for the organization."*

Yet, participants indicated they might become more vocal over time as they grow professionally with more experience in the workplace.

a) *"I feel like I'm so young, and I don't know as much as other people. So, I feel like as I get more experienced, I may become more vocal."*

b) *"Right now, my views could change in the future with more experience, like more experience in the work field. I might then become more comfortable with confrontation in the workplace, too. This is because of that coming with more experience and more confrontational."*

Here is an instance where participants indicated that they would be open to navigating toxic leadership in alternative ways, such as voicing their concerns as they gain more professional experience. They believed this despite their current belief that they navigated toxic leaders by *remaining silent* (i.e., *quiescent silence* and *prosocial silence*) and engaging in *passive voice* (i.e., *acquiescent voice*).

Other Participant Characteristics

In Q research, since participants are the variables, not many participants are needed. Thus, I had a limited sample when examining participant characteristics informing the three emergent responses. Accordingly, I did not have enough participant diversity for examining participant characteristics of gender, race, and English as a first language. Thus, I considered those three characteristics to be somewhat skewed. Therefore, while future studies should consider all three elements in toxic leadership, this study cannot conclusively say that participant characteristics like gender, race, and English as a first language informed differing viewpoints.

Gender. The percentages among males and females were consistent across all three viewpoints. For Factor 1, two participants (18%) were male, and nine (82%) were female. For Factor 2, two participants (20%) were male, and eight (80%) were female. Lastly, for Factor 3, two participants (25%) were male, and six (75%) were female.

Race. As previously mentioned, this study did not have enough diversity regarding race, and most participants identified as white. For Factor 1, all 11 participants (100%) with this viewpoint were white. For Factor 2, nine participants (90%) identified as white, and one (10%) identified as other. Finally, for Factor 3, all eight participants (100%) identified as white.

English as a First Language. In addition to gender and race not being significant participant characteristics among various viewpoints regarding responses to toxic leadership,

English as a first language was not significant. All 29 participants (100%) who loaded onto Factor 1, Factor 2, and Factor 3 indicated that English was their first language. As a reminder, the two confounding Q sorts are not included in the analysis, and thus, not all 31 participants are included in this write-up. Because all participants who loaded onto one of three factors indicated that English was their first language, participants' views regarding responses to toxic leaders may be related to privilege. This will be a discussion point in Chapter 5.

Summary

To what extent do participant characteristics inform differing viewpoints? In summary, toxic leadership exposure, generational identity, and education are three characteristics that *may* inform differing perspectives. First, prior experience with toxic leadership allowed individuals to provide real situations of responding to toxic leadership. Factor 1 and Factor 2 experienced high levels of toxic leadership, whereas Factor 3 had relatively little prior experience with toxic leadership. Second, in terms of generational identity, participants expressed mixed beliefs about the role of generational identity in their responses regarding toxic leaders. In sum, it may not be generational labels that dictate how individuals respond to toxic leadership. Instead, it may be different experiences throughout their lifetime, like toxic leadership exposure or tenure in the workplace. As a result, placing a label on generations may not be the most effective way to suggest that generational identity plays a role in responses regarding toxic leadership. Therefore, this study is hesitant to say that it is generational differences but a rather culminating experience associated with differing viewpoints throughout one's life. Finally, based on my data, education may be related to differing perceptions. Yet, again, participants held a variety of education levels. Due to a limited sample lacking diversity, this study cannot conclusively say that participant characteristics of gender, race, and English as a first language informed differing

viewpoints. Yet, relative to other participant characteristics, one's privilege may be related to differing views.

Summary

This chapter provided a detailed description of the data analysis. Furthermore, this chapter analyzed the findings to answer the study's two research questions. In summary, the data analysis revealed three distinct viewpoints: *Suffer in Silence* (Viewpoint 1), *Confront and Advocate* (Viewpoint 2), and *Quiet yet Concerned* (Viewpoint 3). Then, I analyzed participants' characteristics to determine differences among the three emergent viewpoints. Next, Chapter 5 will discuss these findings along with the study's limitations, future research recommendations, and a conclusion.

CHAPTER 5. DISCUSSION

Chapter 5 includes a summary of findings, a discussion, practical implications of these findings, the study's delimitations and limitations, future research recommendations, and a conclusion. The purpose of this study was to demonstrate the range of perceptions regarding responses to toxic leadership in the modern workplace. This was accomplished by using the toxic triangle as a lens (Padilla et al., 2007). Further, this study was intended to investigate whether characteristics (e.g., toxic leadership exposure, generational identity, education, gender, race, and English as a first language) inform differing viewpoints. To achieve this purpose, the following research questions were investigated.

RQ_1: What are employee perceptions regarding their typical behaviors, thoughts, and reactions when navigating a toxic work environment?

RQ_2: To what extent do participant characteristics inform differing viewpoints?

Summary of Findings

This study extended scholarship by focusing specifically on followership utilizing Q methodology. Participants (n = 31) sorted 41 Q statements based on their viewpoints of responses regarding toxic leadership. After completing the Q sort activity, participants responded to several open-ended and closed-ended questions. Data analysis revealed three distinct viewpoints related to responses regarding toxic leadership in the modern workplace. Those viewpoints included: *Suffer in Silence* (Factor 1), *Confront and Advocate* (Factor 2), and *Quiet yet Concerned* (Factor 3). Furthermore, examining participant characteristics in relation to each viewpoint revealed differences among toxic leadership exposure, generational identity, and education. Participant characteristics relative to gender, race, and English as a first language

were limited. The subsequent section summarizes each of the three viewpoints and participants' characteristics that informed each perspective.

Factor 1: "Suffer in Silence" Viewpoint and Participant Characteristics

The first view, Factor 1, "Suffer in Silence," was defined by 11 positively-loaded sorts. To illustrate their viewpoints, they believed that speaking out was too much work. Moreover, if individuals were to speak out against toxic leadership, they thought that nothing would change anyways. Specifically, *remaining silent* (e.g., acquiescent silence and quiescent silence) is characteristic of this group. More precisely, this group engaged in *acquiescent silence* and *quiescent silence*. While this group preferred to stay silent, *informal* or *anonymous whistleblowing* would be more likely if this group were to blow the whistle. What is more, the riskier types of whistleblowing, such as *internal*, *identified*, and *external whistleblowing* is *more uncharacteristic* of this group. In fact, they felt intense fear, which made them feel vulnerable, and as a result, emotional turmoil increased. Consequently, safety was a top concern when navigating toxic leaders. While these individuals are concerned about others, they hold higher regard for their self-interest. Thus, individuals in this viewpoint identified as *susceptible followers.* As a result, Viewpoint 1 promoted toxic leadership opportunities.

Regarding participant characteristics, individuals in this viewpoint had extensive exposure to toxic leadership. This claim is evidenced by most participants identifying both perceived toxic leadership and high scores on the Toxic Leadership Scale. In fact, most participants with the "Suffer in Silence" viewpoint have experienced toxic leadership firsthand, indicated by the high levels of toxic leadership exposure. To demonstrate, the evidence indicated that individuals in this viewpoint experienced toxic leadership more than any of the other viewpoints. While some individuals have attempted to blow the whistle, they felt defeated after

failed attempts and have experienced negative repercussions, such as being laughed at or degraded. This prior exposure to toxic leadership has informed their current decision to suffer in silence rather than bring up concerns again. Thus, this indicated previous toxic leadership exposure is related to their responses when navigating toxic leadership.

In terms of generational identity, this group reflected the oldest respondents out of the three viewpoints. This was evidenced by the majority of Baby Boomers and Generation Xers making up this group. Furthermore, this group lacked younger generations, such as Generation Zers. Moreover, given the variability, educational levels were mixed throughout this group. Additionally, this group held the highest two terminal degrees out of any of the three viewpoints.

Factor 2: "Confront and Advocate" Viewpoint and Participant Characteristics

The second view, Factor 2, "Confront and Advocate," was defined by ten positively-loaded sorts. Individuals in this viewpoint confronted the problem of toxic leadership head-on and *voiced concerns*. They also believed in engaging in riskier *whistleblowing* typologies, such as *internal*, *external*, *identified*, and *formal whistleblowing*. This ideology may connect with their perception of themselves having control of success in their career. Thus, they recognized their self-worth, understood they could be successful, perceived control in their lives, and were confident in speaking out. What is more, they acknowledged that remaining silent was an easier route to take. Still, they had a strong desire for change, thus explaining their willingness to take a more complex path. Therefore, this suggested they use their voice as an *agent* to navigate that change within the toxic triangle. This strong desire is coupled with their high regard for an optimal environment and workplace culture. Accordingly, their perceptions reflected the idea that care outside of oneself is crucial. As a result, they perceived themselves as responding to

toxic leaders as *unsusceptible followers.* Accordingly, it is reasonable to assume that toxic leadership opportunities decreased in the presence of Viewpoint 2.

The participants with this viewpoint represented a range of participant characteristics relative to high levels of toxic leadership exposure. Specifically, the majority reported experiencing high degrees of toxic leadership—suggesting that most individuals in this viewpoint have experienced toxic leadership. As a result, this firsthand exposure affected the way they viewed toxic leadership. In terms of generations, this group is the only group that had at least all four generations represented. Thus, Viewpoint 2 reflected a diverse generational perspective. Participants' beliefs regarding generational identity and its role in navigating toxic leadership suggested that perhaps it is age and professional experience rather than identifying with a generational identity that explains differences in perspectives. Furthermore, they typically held various educational levels. More specifically, this group had the most Master's degrees.

Factor 3: "Quiet yet Concerned" Viewpoint and Participant Characteristics

The last view, Factor 3, "Quiet yet Concerned," was defined by eight positively loaded sorts. Individuals in the viewpoint believed in the phrase "Silence is golden." They also engaged in *passive* beliefs consistent with *prosocial silence*, *quiescent silence*, and *acquiescent voice.* Thus, this group's perspective of remaining silent exemplified the importance of remaining silent for altruism and cooperative efforts, such as having high regard toward others and focusing on the best interest of others. While similar to Viewpoint 1, Viewpoint 3 also remained silent because they feared the negative repercussions of speaking up. While Viewpoint 1 experienced high emotions, Viewpoint 3 had relatively moderate emotions. Hence, Viewpoint 3 indicated less of an emotional investment in toxic leadership. What is more, these individuals had high self-concept clarity. In other words, they understood themselves, and their attributes were clearly

defined and internally consistent. In terms of *whistleblowing*, they had strong beliefs against *external whistleblowing*. This outside whistleblowing was viewed as unprofessional and would subject oneself to additional consequences from toxic leaders. Thus, this reflected their beliefs that it is most like them to *remain silent* when navigating toxic leaders. Consequently, their viewpoints aligned with *susceptible followers*, which suggested an increase in toxic leadership opportunities.

Participants with this viewpoint represented a range of participant characteristics that were different from the other two perspectives, despite the other two perspectives also having a range of characteristics. For instance, the majority of participants reported having not had previously experienced toxic leadership. In turn, it may make imaging how they would respond to a toxic leadership situation more challenging than someone who has already experienced toxic leadership. Perhaps having a toxic leadership experience may push them toward Factor 1 and Factor 2. Interestingly, this group was the youngest group of participants. For example, the majority of this group was Millennials and Generation Z. Of additional interest, most of this group did not perceive themselves as identifying with any generation. Characteristics relative to education were split among this group. Yet, the majority of participants held a Bachelor's degree.

Discussion

This study used Q to describe various perspectives to provide insights for responding to toxic leadership in the modern workplace. These unique perspectives are valuable because they illustrated the consensus and disagreement among the three distinct viewpoints that emerged regarding responding to toxic leaders. What is more, these findings reinforced the complexity of toxic leadership. To illustrate, these findings reiterated that the toxic triangle is a systemic

process that allows an interplay between toxic leaders, a conducive environment, and followers. The following sections discuss the findings to the study's two research questions and the resulting three emergent viewpoints.

Toxic Leadership Exposure

Of interest are toxic leadership exposure and its association with the three emergent viewpoints. To illustrate, Viewpoint 1 and Viewpoint 2 indicated having a majority of respondents with previous toxic leadership experience. Alternatively, Viewpoint 3 had the least amount of toxic leadership exposure. While all three viewpoints were distinct, one question emerged: *How accurate are attitudes toward hypothetical situations?* Past research investigated actual events versus hypothetical events to determine how accurate individuals are at making decisions for future events (Armor & Sackett, 2006; Buehler et al., 2002). Results indicated that individuals are *not* accurate at predicting future actions. In other words, making forecasts into hypothetical events tends to be excessive and produces unrealistic optimism.

Unrealistic optimism is pertinent to Viewpoint 3. For example, one participant interviewed in Viewpoint 3 commented on unrealistic optimism for those who have not experienced toxic leadership:

> *"I think until you have a toxic leader and like truly work with a toxic leader, then can you really even know what you would do? I don't know. It's almost like until you experience it, I think you're like, oh, like maybe it's not that big of a deal, like, I would just kind of go with the flow. But, if somebody has experienced a toxic leader, they're probably like, no, it's terrible. You have to stand up and say something."*

Another participant in Viewpoint 3 confirmed this belief by indicating it was challenging to imagine a toxic leadership situation because they had not experienced it themselves. Yet, they predicted they would speak up:

> *"I was trying to imagine like if you're in a situation with a toxic leader. If you really like your job, but then it's kind of hard to like your job if you actually have to talk to leadership…I suppose the first person I would go to is my supervisor so that they can provide clarity."*

What is more, the following passages from Viewpoint 3 reflected overly optimistic perceptions of hypothetical situations:

a) *"If I did have any concerns, I suppose the first person I would go to is my supervisor."*
b) *"I guess if things got really bad, then I'd talk to them [the supervisor]."*

In addition, both statements suggested it is as simple as voicing their concern. Yet, research continuously shows that negative repercussions such as workplace bullying, rejections, and resistance stem from speaking up (*see* Liang & Yeh, 2019). In fact, recent research argues being excessively optimistic can undermine one's motivation to take precautions against risky situations, such as the COVID-19 pandemic (Park et al., 2021). Both COVID-19 and toxic leaders are dangerous situations, thus providing a nuanced dimension to understanding optimism in hypothetical scenarios.

Again, those who have experienced toxic leadership indicated that speaking up is not easy. For example, based on their experiences, those in Viewpoint 1 felt defeated after failing to speak up. On the other hand, those in Viewpoint 2 suggested that, based on their past experiences, it is better to speak up and solve toxic leadership. Thus, individuals who have *not*

experienced toxic leadership may indeed be overly optimistic about how they predict their responses to possible future toxic leadership situations.

Another explanation for understanding overly optimistic beliefs revolved around one's proximity to toxic leadership. For example, Armor and Sackett (2006) argue that as people get closer to the event, they become more realistic and modest in responding to the event as it becomes "the moment of truth" (p. 584). Specific to this current study, respondents in Viewpoint 3 lacked closeness to toxic leadership, which may be why they were overly optimistic about solving toxic leadership issues. In other words, these individuals made claims about how they would react dependent on their current social context. Since they lacked exposure to toxic leadership, their need to engage in "the moment of truth" was unnecessary, reflecting an overly optimistic sense of their possible response to toxic leadership.

In addition, this explanation of proximity aligned with LaPiere's (1934) foundational study in sociology that investigated attitudes and intentions of actual behavior. While LaPiere's (1934) research investigated discrimination and prejudice, they provide a nuanced dimension to understanding the expression of attitudes and real-life situations. According to LaPiere, comparing attitudes with real-life scenarios in a social context should be cautioned because attitudes do not match actual behavior. Additionally, in hypothetical situations, people tend to make decisions based on how society expects them to behave (Woodzicka & LaFrance, 2001), indicating caution should be used in interpreting the data from hypothetical situations. This means that the validity of findings from the beliefs that emerged from Viewpoint 3 may be viewed with caution when compared to actual situations.

In sum, interviews from Viewpoint 3 reflected the challenge of responding to a hypothetical situation rather than an actual experience. Viewpoint 1 and Viewpoint 2 interviews

provided rich text regarding perspectives on responding to toxic leaders based upon prior toxic leadership exposure. To illustrate, all interviewees were confident in their responses when navigating toxic leadership. In contrast, those in Viewpoint 3 were hesitant to say with certainty how they would respond.

Influences of Generational Identity

This study examined patterns of subjective perceptions among generations to investigate how generational identity informs the varying emergent viewpoints related to responses regarding toxic leadership. This study found that all four generations sharing the modern-day workspace were represented among the three emergent views. These four generations included Baby Boomers, Generation Xers, Millennials, and Generation Zers. Thus, while examining generational identity, results indicated that each viewpoint encompasses various generations.

Before beginning a discussion on generational identity and how generational identity informed differing viewpoints, please note that unless indicated otherwise, this discussion regarding generational identity uses actual generation, which I calculated using birth year. Using chronological birth year allowed an objective approach when delineating the findings to ensure that individuals were categorized within the same historical and socio-cultural contexts. Following Lagacé et al.'s (2020) recommendations, age should be examined when studying workplace bullying. In addition, these generational labels help elucidate the social perspective that describes individual changes over time (Campbell et al., 2017; Rudolph & Zacher, 2017). This, in turn, also reflects generational assumptions about the world. Furthermore, generational labels are a convenient way to group participants and their defining life experiences. Following Costanza and Finkelstein's (2017), this study was cautious not to invoke causality when discussing generations. Instead, this discussion presents perceptions regarding responses to toxic

leadership and then compares, contrasts, and discusses key themes identified in the literature related to past generational cohort research.

Viewpoint 1 and Generational Identity. Viewpoint 1, “Suffer in Silence,” was comprised of Baby Boomers, Generation Xers, and Millennials. However, the majority of the “Suffer in Silence” viewpoint comprised the two older generations, Baby Boomers and Generation Xers.

Research has shown Baby Boomers grew up during a time of wars and the death of prominent leaders (Chaney et al., 2017; Christensen et al., 2018). Thus, it is not surprising that Baby Boomers are filled with fear (Puspita et al., 2021). In fact, Puspita et al. (2021) investigated Baby Boomers, Generation Xers, Millennials, and Generation Z and their level of fear during the pandemic. As a result, Puspita et al. (2021) found that Baby Boomers have more fear than any of the other three generations. In other words, in the presence of fear-evoking situations, Baby Boomers behave differently, such as using cautionary approaches, more than other generations. Namely, it may make sense that Baby Boomers would have the most fear because older people are much more vulnerable to severe illness and death during the pandemic. Thus, it is reasonable to assume that the representation of Baby Boomers in Viewpoint 1 may indicate that Baby Boomers have different behaviors when responding to toxic leadership than other generations.

In addition, research has also shown that events that have shaped Generation Xers include massive unemployment and several notable disasters, suggesting Generation Xers lived in a time of fear and were skeptical (Chaney et al., 2017; Christensen et al., 2018). In other words, Baby Boomers and Generation Xers have experienced similar fearful situations. These findings extended those of Chaney et al. (2017) and Christensen et al. (2018), confirming that individuals

in Viewpoint 1 agree with this research because they indicated consistent feelings of fear and thus, chose to *remain silent* when navigating toxic leaders.

Specific to Generational identity, one participant who identified as a Generation Xer spoke about how generational identity shaped their belief regarding responses to toxic leaders:

> *"It was the most miserable seven months of my professional life [referring to the toxic leader situation]. I am very quintessentially Gen X in that I have zero loyalty to an organization. None. So, yes, I followed toxic leadership. I went along [with it] to get along and kept my paycheck while simultaneously seeking non-toxic options."*

This quotation from Generation X in Viewpoint 1 illustrates that their prior experience that they reflected on during the interview may make them lack loyalty relative to the Generation Xers' characteristics associated with their generation. In this study, participants indicated that generational identity shaped how they responded to toxic leaders. This may indicate that generational identity may play a key role in how individuals respond to toxic leadership. Moreover, because Viewpoint 1 was primarily constituted by Baby Boomers and Generation Xers, these two generations may be more apt to this type of response to toxic leadership.

Furthermore, Baby Boomers and Generation Xers in Viewpoint 1 responded more *passively* in a toxic leadership situation. Baby Boomer and Generation X illustrated their passive approach in the follow-up interviews:

a) *"I might be happy that at least somebody is doing something about it [speaking out against a toxic leader]. So, I think that part would be good, but then I would think, oh, that's a little aggressive. But, I think deep down, I would be happy that maybe something would change, and it won't be because of me. It will be because of them [those who speak out against a toxic leader]." -Baby Boomer*

b) *“Whatever that looks like, if you want to join the crusade and try to get so and so in the corner office bounced out and sign onto a whistleblower, that’s great. That’s where you need the crusaders to take up the cause, you know, but that’s not me.” - Generation X*

Notice how these statements reflected respondents’ beliefs that taking a passive approach and letting someone else take a more active approach, such as voicing their concerns, is characteristic of them. This current study’s results corroborated previous beliefs reflecting Generation Xers’ approach to take a back seat instead of voicing concerns as voicing concerns is too taxing (Mazza, 2019). Additionally, this current study’s findings corroborated Christensen et al. (2018) that suggested Baby Boomers held a high level of job commitment and respect for leaders. Thus, they are more likely to engage passive approaches like going along with the status quo based on resignation (i.e., acquiescent silence) instead of voicing their concerns when navigating toxic leaders. In other words, those in Viewpoint 1 perceived themselves as sitting on the sidelines and waiting for someone else to raise concerns about the toxic leader.

Ageism and Reverse Ageism. Research regarding ageism provides some insight into beliefs that emerged among generations about other generations. For example, *ageism*, a stereotype against older adults, is prevalent in the United States (Butler & Lewis, 1973; Yaghoobzadeh et al., 2020). However, this study’s findings contradicted ageism beliefs. For instance, the results reflected the opposite of ageism to include *reverse ageism*. To illustrate, reverse ageism characterizes negative attitudes directed toward younger employees (Raymer et al., 2017). In addition, this study revealed conflict emerging with perceptions from older generations about younger generations. Along those lines, reverse ageism concerning younger generations was seen in Viewpoint 1 and Viewpoint 2.

Interestingly, both Viewpoint 1 and Viewpoint 2's reverse ageism perceptions transpired from Baby Boomers' "generational finger-pointing" (Sipocz et al., 2021, p. 172). In other words, in this study, Baby Boomers placed blame on younger generations. These findings are analogous to research showing that older generations blame younger generations and encompass overarching stereotypes based on one's demographics (Rudolph et al., 2020). For example, other generations accuse Millennials of less-than-ideal workplace changes (Rudolph et al., 2020). Even though individuals in Viewpoint 1 held similar beliefs to Baby Boomers in Viewpoint 1 when responding to toxic leaders, generational stereotypes existed.

Consequently, these reverse ageism ideologies engender stereotypical beliefs towards younger generations. This confirmed Raymer et al.'s (2017) findings that Baby Boomers and Generation Xers view younger generations more stereotypically. These stereotypical beliefs create negative workplace experiences for others. Specifically, bias and discrimination toward young adults lead to adverse effects on health and well-being, such as increased depression and anxiety (Bonnie et al., 2015). In addition, in the workplace, microaggressions can occur. In other words, microaggressions are discrimination that exists on an interpersonal level. To illustrate, microaggressions are every day "verbal, behavioral, and environmental indignities" that include a slight snub or insult toward an oppressed individual (Sue, 2010, p. 5). Subsequently, these stereotypical beliefs can have negative implications in the multigenerational workplace if individuals hold ageism or reverse-ageism attitudes and beliefs.

Viewpoint 2 and Generational Identity. Viewpoint 2, "Advocate and Change," was represented by each of the four generational cohorts. While most Millennials made up Viewpoint 2, Viewpoint 2 was the only viewpoint where all four generations were represented. One explanation for a large number of Millennials represented in Viewpoint 2 is that Millennials

comprised almost 50% of all participants sampled in the current study. In other words, there were more Millennials represented in this study than any other of the three generations. Further, Millennials make up almost half the current workforce (Desilver, 2019; Fry, 2018). Overall, this study concluded that Viewpoint 2 encompassed diverse generational cohorts and indicated that individuals who navigated toxic leadership voiced concerns and advocated for change. Therefore, because all four generations were represented in Viewpoint 2, in spite of the higher number of Millennials interviewed, these findings contradicted Emeagwali's (2011) belief that Millennials are more likely to find solutions than previous generations. These findings also contradict the assumption that Millennials are more likely than any other generation to question authority (Christensen et al., 2018). Contradictory to Emeagwali (2011) and Christensen et al., 2018), this current study demonstrated that all four generations represented in Viewpoint 2 spoke up and solved toxic leadership situations.

Furthermore, the findings from Viewpoint 2 extended Sohail and Rehman's (2015) research and thus confirmed that differing ideologies promoted workplace stress. For example, one participant in Viewpoint 2 indicated that differing ideologies between their toxic leader and themself created stress. As a result of this stress, they attempted to quit their job:

> *"I was on my way out the door of leaving this organization. I voiced my concern to my other co-workers. My co-workers told upper management that I was leaving if you didn't do anything about the toxic leadership. So, in that case, upper management reached out to me and asked more questions. After that, they didn't question me, and they fired the toxic leader in a matter of days."*

Notice here how the respondent voiced their concerns with co-workers whom they trusted. According to Park et al. (2008), voicing concerns with trusted co-workers is a type of *informal*

whistleblowing. In this scenario, the co-workers collectively advocated for the respondent because the respondent did not feel safe expressing their concerns to the toxic leader. The co-workers informed management that the respondent would quit because of the toxic leader. After that, management reached out to the respondent and addressed the toxic leader's behavior by firing the toxic leader. Going above and beyond a toxic leader's superior may not always be safe. Namely, this may be particularly dangerous and have increased risks if toxic leadership exists on multiple levels (Padilla et al., 2007). Specifically, suppose organizations lack checks and balances. In that case, a toxic leader's superior may do nothing with that information, or even worse repercussions, such as enhanced toxicity or getting fired, may exist for the whistleblower. Thus, individuals must be mindful of the inherent risks associated with whistleblowing.

This study's findings also contradicted previous research on Baby Boomer perception. For example, some research suggests that Baby Boomers may not speak up in toxic leadership situations because they prefer hierarchies and hold high levels of job commitment (Christensen et al., 2018). Yet, Baby Boomers' dedication to their work (Dawson, 2021) may make them more likely to respond to a toxic leader in the organization's best interest. The current study aligned with Dawson's (2021) research. Namely, Baby Boomers were represented in Viewpoint 2 and thus indicated that Baby Boomers would speak up and advocate for change because they wanted what was best for the workplace.

Furthermore, this study revealed that the majority of Millennials loaded onto Factor 2. Thus, this finding reflected the importance of Millennial beliefs for *voicing concerns* and advocating for change regarding toxic leadership. While Viewpoint 2 may have confirmed Howe and Strauss' (2000) views that Millennials are more "optimistic" than other generations, Viewpoint 1 and Viewpoint 3 indicated Millennials are more willing than previously thought to

accept toxic leadership and *remain silent*. An additional characteristic that Millennials have is that they are team-oriented (Galdames & Guihen, 2020). This current study concluded that individuals in Viewpoint 2 engaged in *prosocial voice*, such as using their voice to raise concerns because they wanted what was best for the organization and group. Thus, this finding corroborated Galdames and Guihen's (2020) research regarding Millennials' traits of being altruist and team-oriented. Specific to Millennials, the following text highlighted to what extent individuals will go to voice their concerns about toxic leaders:

> *"In my role, I was a leader of others who were affected by the toxic leader. So then, like obviously, the ones below me aren't going to say anything about it. So, I felt like it was my responsibility to bring up my concern. In my role, I had to go above to corporate and outside of the four walls of my workplace."*

Notice that the Millennial's concern for speaking out against a toxic leader stemmed from their desire for a team-oriented approach. In this scenario, the Millennial was a leader for other co-workers. For instance, the Millennial respondent felt responsibility for their subordinates, illustrating active voices and representing unsusceptible followers.

Ageism and Reverse Ageism. As previously discussed in Viewpoint 1, Viewpoint 2 also demonstrated reverse ageism beliefs. This finding aligned with Rudolph et al.'s (2020) Millennial research. For instance, this current study demonstrated that older generations blamed younger generations and espoused overarching stereotypes based on demographics. Namely, older generations believe that the workplace changes championed by Millennials are disruptive and unproductive (Rudolph et al., 2020). Even though individuals in Viewpoint 2 of different generations held similar beliefs about responding to toxic leaders, this study found that generational stereotypes still existed. For instance, the current study found that Baby Boomers

believed younger generations held more toxic leadership traits. In comparison, one Millennial participant suggested that the Millennial generation exhibited Baby Boomer positive characteristics such as a hard work ethic. Thus, this study found that Baby Boomer and Millennial perceptions resulted in different perceptions and conflicted views regarding generational identity.

In addition, in this study, perceptions of threat and generational identity were related. For instance, research shows that Millennials and Generation Zers are the first generations to hold higher educational levels than any previous generation (Goodman et al., 2015). This current research confirmed that education and knowledge were forms of power and created perceived threats in toxic situations. For example, a Millennial participant illustrated this belief:

> *"My toxic leader was always one step ahead of me. They felt threatened that if I learned more things or became more knowledgeable about our department or whatever tasks, that I would take their position. Ultimately someday, you want to grow and advance, but that was not my intention."*

While learning on the job may not be equivalent to formal learning in school, this last statement makes an interesting discussion. Notice here that the respondent felt the toxic leader was withholding information from them based on beliefs that the toxic leader felt threatened. Hence, the toxic leader's behavior of withholding information from the respondent was a way to remain in power and to create high power distance. What is more, perceived threats relate to a conducive environment to promote toxic leadership opportunities (Padilla et al., 2007). While both followers and toxic leaders can feel perceived threats, it is noteworthy that this respondent in Viewpoint 2 did not perceive threats from their toxic leader. Instead, they felt a strong desire to

confront and advocate against the toxic leader. This may be because those in Viewpoint 2 identified as unsusceptible followers.

Viewpoint 3 and Generational Identity. Viewpoint 3, "Quiet yet Concerned," was primarily made up of the younger generations of Millennials and Generation Zers. Yet, Generation Xers made up a quarter of those in Viewpoint 3. What is more, out of all the three emergent viewpoints, Viewpoint 3 had the most participants who perceived themselves as not identifying with a generation. Namely, over half of those in Viewpoint 3 did not view themselves as belonging to a generation. As a result of this current study's findings, two discussions are prompted regarding the perceived lack of generational identity.

First, the lack of knowledge surrounding generations that emerged from one interview may have explained the lack of generational identification. To illustrate, the qualitative interview with one participant in Viewpoint 3 implied that it was not generational labels that promoted how that participant responded to toxic leadership situations, but rather firsthand experience with toxic leadership in the workplace. In fact, although this was the smallest Viewpoint (e.g., eight participants in Viewpoint 3), five of the nine participants among all three distinct viewpoints that did not identify with a specific generation were in Viewpoint 3. Indeed, the majority of participants in Viewpoint 3 (e.g., 5/8 participants; 63%) did not identify with a specific generation. As a result, placing a label on generations may not be the most effective way to suggest that generational identity played a role in responses regarding toxic leadership. Instead, this study is hesitant to say that it is generational differences for those in Viewpoint 3 but rather culminating lifetime experience that influenced responses regarding toxic leadership.

Second, Social Identity Theory (SIT) (Tajfel, 1974, 1979; Tajfel & Turner, 1979) may provide a more nuanced dimension for understanding those in Viewpoint 3 who lacked a

generational identity. To illustrate, SIT argues that individuals view their personal groups as more favorable than outgroups, resulting in prejudices against outgroups (Tajfel, 1979). In other words, SIT suggests that identifying with a generational cohort place one in an *in-group*, and thus, individuals view their in-group generational cohort more favorably than co-workers in other generations. However, most individuals in Viewpoint 3 did not identify with a generational cohort, and therefore, according to SIT, they did not see themselves as belonging to an in-group, or the in-groups they did perceive were not generational in nature. As a result, those who lacked generational identity may be less likely to hold prejudices against *outgroups*. In fact, empirical research has shown that when biases exist among outgroups, a competition of resources takes effect, promoting perceived threats (Cooper & Fazio, 1986; Islam, 2014). This calls to mind Padilla et al.'s (2007) argument that a perceived threat promotes a conducive environment for toxic leaders and susceptible followers. In sum, not identifying with a generational cohort may be a desirable trait for decreasing toxic leadership opportunities.

Specific to Generation Z, this study's finding corroborated Taylor and Gao's (2014) research suggesting Generation Zers were more *passive* and went along with the status quo when responding to toxic leaders. One explanation for passively agreeing to leadership (toxic or otherwise) may be to promote Generation Zers' value for rapid career advancements (Chillakuri, 2020). Yet, this study found that beliefs about career promotion for Generation Zers remained unclear. To illustrate, this study found a relatively moderate placement of personal ambition, greed, low-impulse control, and Machiavellianism tendencies. In other words, these four dimensions are characteristics that promote colluder followership and remain non-extreme (i.e., middling statements).

What is more, research argues that young and less mature individuals are more susceptible to conformity (Padilla et al., 2007; Thoroughgood et al., 2012). Viewpoint 3 confirmed this finding and suggested that younger generations who worked for toxic leaders predicted they would respond by remaining silent (e.g., *quiescent silence* and *prosocial silence*) or passively agreed with a toxic leader (e.g., *acquiescent voice*). Thus, while this generation was beginning to mature into adulthood and because they were early on in their careers, they may have found speaking out against a toxic leader difficult. Yet, if they did speak out, this study found that they would use safe approaches; this also confirmed Christensen et al.'s (2018) findings along the same lines. Furthermore, this current study suggested that individuals in Viewpoint 3 viewed *external whistleblowing* as most uncharacteristic. Instead, those in Viewpoint 3 turned to safer whistleblowing approaches, such as *informal whistleblowing*.

Summary. In summary, there are generational patterns of perceptions and responses regarding toxic leadership among generational cohorts that informed differing viewpoints. The four generations were represented across three distinct emergent viewpoints. Overall, this study found that *susceptible followers* existed among Viewpoint 1 and Viewpoint 3, whereas *unsusceptible followers* were in Viewpoint 2. Therefore, this study corroborated Bastardoz and van Vugt's (2019) research indicating that toxic leaders are not just an organization's figurehead and that susceptible followers promote toxic leaders. In other words, unsusceptible followers are needed to stop toxic leaders.

Importance of Job Security and the COVID-19 Pandemic

One similarity among all three viewpoints ranked statement 9, "Follow a toxic leader because I want to ensure financial stability for my practical needs to be met – such as shelter, food, and doctor's bills," as relatively high. Thus, this placement suggested agreement among the

viewpoints to ensure meeting basic needs is characteristic of their response to toxic leadership. This finding is related to Maslow's hierarchy. To illustrate, Maslow demonstrates that job security falls under the safety and security dimensions of lower-order needs. In other words, individuals are concerned about being protected from danger, removing fear, and ensuring job security. Thus, this study's consensus statement highlighted the importance that even in toxic leadership situations, individuals might be *susceptible* and *conform*, *remain silent*, or engage in *passive voice* under a toxic leader's wrath to ensure meeting financial needs. Moreover, this current study's finding was consistent with Lipman-Blumen's (2005a, 2005b, 2010) beliefs that susceptible followers remain with toxic leaders because speaking out against a toxic leader is risky. Therefore, sitting on the sidelines and remaining silent is safer for individuals who experience toxic leadership.

What is more, in today's modern workplace, believing that job security is important may be an even more common concern. Specifically, the COVID-19 pandemic has inflicted havoc on individual well-being. In fact, this concern about job security is due to financial instability amid the COVID-19 pandemic (Pacheco et al., 2020; Villarreal, 2021). Thus, individuals may discern job security in today's economy as necessary when deciding how to respond to toxic leadership. On the contrary, we are also in the midst of the Great Resignation, where the demand for employees means that people have more options and are leaving their jobs in great numbers.

In fact, the COVID-19 pandemic provides a nuanced dimension in understanding conformity as a response regarding toxic leadership. In fact, both the COVID-19 pandemic and the toxic triangle are crises that perpetuate fear and propagate chaos and dysfunction. For example, in today's workplace, COVID-19 has caused individuals to be more fearful due to infectious outbreak (Parlapani et al., 2020). Similarly, this study found that toxic leadership

caused individuals to be afraid due to the negative repercussions of toxic leadership (Mergen & Ozbilgin, 2021; Padilla et al., 2007) and the disturbing, unpredictable behaviors that toxic leaders demonstrated (*see* Schmidt, 2008). Thus, individuals seek guidance to remain safe in the presence of fear (Park et al., 2021).

There is an interesting connection between COVID-19 compliance with authorities (i.e., health experts), such as health officials, and the toxic triangle where followers comply with toxic leaders. Compliance regarding COVID-19 refers to complying with health officials to wash hands, wear facemasks, avoid large crowds, and maintain six feet distance. In comparison, followers who comply with toxic leaders conform due to “unmet basic needs, negative self-evaluations, and psychological immaturity” (Padilla et al., 2007, p. 183). In fact, both types of compliance “change a person’s behavior in response to a direct request” (Parlapani et al., 2020, p. 12). This fear perpetuated by the pandemic and the fear that toxic leaders instill in their followers threaten to gain followers. Consequently, the fear results in follower compliance to remain safe.

Strong Morals and Colluder Perceptions

Another point of interest regarding the similarity between the three viewpoints is the presence of strong morals and lack of colluder followership characteristic statements. To illustrate, all three emergent viewpoints showed that participants were *unwilling* to support a toxic leader to get ahead. Thus, participants in all three viewpoints indicated high regard toward strong morals. Of additional interest was the placement of colluder statements among the three viewpoints. More specifically, participants placed most colluder statements as *relatively uncharacteristic* to *moderately uncharacteristic*. The four dimensions of the colluder statements

were personal ambition, greed, low self-impulse control, and Machiavellianism, demonstrating that all three viewpoints did *not* represent a *colluder* or *susceptible follower*.

One explanation for this lack of colluder characteristic statements may be social desirability. In fact, there may be a social bias as to how participants believed that they should place the Q statements when responding to toxic leadership. In other words, social desirability suggests that people tend to present a favorable image of themselves that reflects societal norms (Nederhof, 1985). Thus, while colluder statements with greed and/or Machiavellianism tendencies are less desirable than other altruistic or cooperative efforts, such as prosocial behaviors, participants may have been more apt to choose statements that aligned with prosocial behaviors rather than colluder statements. Yet, each viewpoint's strong morals confirmed that individuals with sturdy morals are less likely to carry Machiavellianism traits (Christie & Geis, 1970). Therefore, this finding of strong morals as characteristics of individuals' views and lack of characteristic statements regarding colluders aligned with past research.

Worthy of discussion is that the *lack* of colluder statements participants placed on the *most characteristic* side. For instance, most colluder statements were placed on the *most uncharacteristic* side, indicating that they did not hold colluder perceptions. This finding indicated that all three emergent viewpoints are consistent with *remaining silent* or *voicing concerns*. Moreover, these findings are illuminating in terms of followership within the toxic triangle because research has shown that colluder characteristics produce adverse effects. These adverse effects include promoting the toxic leader's agenda (Hoffman & Sergio, 2020), using manipulation, and betraying others (Christie & Geis, 1970; Kessler et al., 2010; Sekhar et al., 2020), and lack of regard for ethics (Thoroughgood, 2013). Yet, as previously mentioned, collusion may have been underreported in this study because of social desirability bias, making it

difficult to argue that this sample had no colluders. While Viewpoint 1 and Viewpoint 3 reflected *remaining silent*, this response is the lesser of the two evils when compared with *colluders* who follow toxic leaders. However, although speaking up, like Viewpoint 2, is ideal for decreasing toxic leadership opportunities, it is not always feasible or safe for individuals to do so.

Perceptions about Whistleblowing

Further, Q identifies areas of disagreement. To illustrate, this study found that all three perspectives had very different strong beliefs regarding *identified whistleblowing*, *internal whistleblowing*, and *external whistleblowing* as responses to toxic leadership. These responses are worthy of further attention because they focus on the riskiest types of whistleblowing. While *formal whistleblowing* is also dangerous, Viewpoint 1 and Viewpoint 3 were relatively moderate regarding *formal whistleblowing*. Alternatively, those in Viewpoint 2 indicated that *formal whistleblowing* was more characteristic of their beliefs. Thus, those in Viewpoint 2 strongly believed all four whistleblowing types were most characteristic of their beliefs. In contrast, those in Viewpoints 1 and 3 were more uncharacteristic or relatively moderate in their beliefs regarding these whistleblowing typologies.

This study confirmed research that argued repercussions, such as social isolation and retaliation, will stem from speaking up when engaging in whistleblowing (Liang & Yeh, 2019; Park & Lewis, 2018). For example, both Viewpoints 1 and 3 indicated beliefs of significant adverse consequences stemming from voicing concerns:

a) *"If I were to voice my concerns with upper management, I am pretty positive nothing would happen. They would then look at me differently, and I would be unsure of the consequences to this." -Viewpoint 1*

b) *"Starting out, I would voice my opinion, but in the end, I would never win even if I was correct on the issue. After a few times of that, I just decided I would be quiet and get my work done without saying anything. The negative consequences of saying something would be being degraded and even laughed at." -Viewpoint 1*

c) *"I chose remaining silent due to seeing people get retaliated in the past for bringing up concerns." -Viewpoint 3*

d) *"I have found silence is golden. Keeping my head down and doing the best I can to avoid negative consequences of the toxic behavior." -Viewpoint 3*

In other words, the perceptions of inherent risks associated with speaking up coupled with the beliefs that nothing would change are consist of remaining silent.

What is more, this study found that those in Viewpoints 1 and 3 sought out individuals from Viewpoint 2 to speak out for them. In fact, those in Viewpoints 1 and 3 supported those in Viewpoint 2 for speaking out against toxic leaders. Yet, both Viewpoints 1 and 3 were clear that they would not join Viewpoint 2's efforts to speak out against toxic leaders:

a) *"Whatever that looks like, if you want to join the crusade and try to get so and so in the corner office bounced out and sign onto a whistleblower, that's great. That's where you need the crusaders to take up the cause, you know, but that's not me." -Viewpoint 1*

b) *"Deep down, I'd be happy that at least somebody is doing something about it and that maybe something will change, and it wouldn't be because of me. It will be because of them." -Viewpoint 1*

c) *"If people are going to advocate against toxic leadership, I would really encourage them to advocate because I probably feel the same way as them. I know that this*

person's toxic, but I don't want to be the one to have to say it. But if I see that you think the same thing as me, and you want to go fight for what's right, then I'm going to really push you to do that because then I don't have to do it." -Viewpoint 3

These findings show that individuals in Viewpoints 1 and 3 perceived whistleblowing as risky. In other words, the risks outweighed the benefits. As a result, those in Viewpoints 1 and 3 remained silent, refraining from calling attention to issues at work despite toxic leaders who violated their personal or moral standards. Thus, this study's findings regarding silence corroborated Knoll and van Dick's (2013) research on employee silence. What is more, individuals in Viewpoint 2 are needed to speak up for those who are not likely to speak out. Consequently, without individuals in Viewpoint 2, toxic leader opportunities will continue to flourish.

Utilizing Power and Privilege to Navigate Toxic Situations

We know that inequities and disparities exist in almost all areas of life and can create many kinds of oppressive structures (Lavalley & Johnson, 2020). Yet, due to this study's limited sample and lack of participant diversity among participant gender, race, and language, this study cannot confirm nor deny that inequities shape viewpoints regarding responses to toxic leaders. Additionally, no post-sort, open-ended questions provided insights into gender, race, or language. However, one follow-up interview illuminated how privilege may affect responses to toxic leadership:

"Call it [a] privilege, call it dogged determination, I don't know. I seem to find myself kind of in the right place at the right time. To be able to make these shifts out of situations I don't like. I think it's worth paying attention to the fact that I am a straight white guy. I'm able to navigate some things that other folks can't probably. I'm trying to get better

at using that word. Because I've always just sort of, you know, it's like the fish who doesn't know what water is until you take it out. So, as I have navigated through these privileged spaces, I'm trying to keep myself more top of mind about how it is easier for me to navigate these things than it is for other folks."

Here, this participant from Viewpoint 1 articulated the belief that privilege played a role in the choice to *remain silent*, continue working, and find a different job. In this situation, the participant considered their privileged status as a straight, white male as empowering to make the choice to stay under or leave the toxic leadership; he effortlessly worked to find his way out of the toxic leadership situation due to his privilege. Specifically, this privilege revolved around three contextual factors, including sexual orientation, race, and gender. This ideology represented corroborated Salin's (2021) research that suggests social categories such as gender, ethnicity, age, and sexual orientation affect those impacted by workplace bullying and how they respond to workplace bullying. In other words, it may be easier for individuals who are not part of these oppressed structures to navigate toxic leaders. To demonstrate, this participant acknowledged that some individuals with less privilege might find themselves stuck in toxic leadership situations because of privilege. The following statement reflected these perceptions:

"I feel like I need to acknowledge that I'm in a spot where it is easier for me to entertain all of this and sort like pontificate about toxic leadership and how well if you don't like, just start working on the next thing. Well, for some people, maybe they can't do that."

This example illustrated that privilege interacted and informed this participant's response to toxic leadership. What is more, these examples exemplified the potential danger to oppressed individuals who experience toxic leadership because they may be forced to remain in the toxic situation. In sum, this participant provided insights into how privilege offers power to stay silent

and leave the toxic environment. In contrast, others may not have specific power or privilege to escape a toxic leadership situation.

Perceived Control

Empirical research shows that individuals who experience toxic leadership have reduced confidence and increased stress levels (Snow et al., 2021). Accordingly, how individuals assess the amount of control they have to either change or mitigate their circumstances may directly affect their choices as they cope with toxic leadership. In fact, internal and external locus of control provides a nuanced dimension in understanding employee perceived control in stressful situations, such as toxic leadership. To illustrate, this perceived control is relative to the locus of control, one trait of core-self evaluations (Judge & Bono, 2001). In other words, those with low-core self-evaluations are more susceptible to conformity as low core-self evaluations are one dimension of conformers. Specific to followership, research has shown that susceptible followers lack perceived control (Luthans et al., 1998; Padilla et al., 2007). Much of the research related to perceived control in susceptible followers has focused on external local of control, suggesting that these susceptible followers believe that their lives are contingent upon some outside source. This means that their perception of the control they personally have over the toxic leadership situation is very low or non-existent.

In contrast, this study found that those in Viewpoint 2 held high levels of perceived control, indicating they have a strong internal locus of control. This finding of a strong internal locus of control is compatible with Rotter's (1954) research in which individuals with a strong internal locus of control also had more confidence in challenging situations. In fact, individuals with perceived control may be able to adjust to stressful situations better. In addition, Rotter's (1954) finding was corroborated 66 years later by Lin et al. (2020) who argued that perceived

control moderates stressful situations. In other words, those in Viewpoint 2 have increased confidence when faced with a challenge, including the challenge of working with a toxic leader. For example, they recognized that control comes from themselves (i.e., internal locus of control). Therefore, if individuals believe they control their environment, they may take charge and address toxic leadership.

Additionally, this study's finding regarding Viewpoint 2 also supported Li et al.'s (2020) research that indicated followers who have high levels of internal locus of control approached work more *actively* because they believed that outcomes could change. Thus, these implications concerning toxic leaders suggested that those with perceived control, such as *unsusceptible followers*, would respond more actively by *voicing concerns*. In contrast, followers who have low levels of perceived internal locus of control will approach work more *passively*, as illustrated by this study's findings of Viewpoints 1 and 3, who approached responding to toxic leaders as *susceptible followers* by *remaining silent*.

Relative to perceived control, those in Viewpoint 3 also indicated that they felt like they controlled their lives more than those in Viewpoint 1. However, this perceived control in Viewpoint 3 is less than those in Viewpoint 2, suggesting that those in Viewpoint 3 had less an internal locus of control, which may have explained why those in Viewpoint 3 had less emotional investment (e.g.: experiencing rumination to toxic leadership) than those in Viewpoint 1. Perhaps the slight increase in an internal locus of control helped those in Viewpoint 3 believe that they can have some control over their life outcomes, such as navigating toxic leaders.

In contrast, those in Viewpoint 1 had relatively moderate beliefs regarding low core self-evaluations. Research helps make sense of the middling placement of these statements that deal with perceived control. For example, Viewpoint 1 indicated the presence of vulnerability and

emotions co-occurring. This confirmed prior research on the adverse effects of toxic leadership, such as emotional distress (Snow et al., 2021). Yet, other disciplines like psychology view perceived control similarly. In fact, in the field of psychology, this current study's findings converged to the ideas of perceived control as studied by Zheng et al. (2019), who revealed that rumination mediates the relationship between stress and lower life satisfaction. In other words, stressful situations cause rumination and lead to pessimistic thinking and deplete feelings of self-control. Consequently, these beliefs result in more negative emotions and feelings of less support by others (Zheng et al., 2019).

Furthermore, Viewpoint 1's beliefs regarding emotions and vulnerability confirm Lin et al.'s (2020) findings that those without perceived control are more vulnerable to stress. Thus, this may explain the placement of their statements that dealt with perceived control. As Lin et al. (2020) indicate, perceived control serves as a "buffering protection" to stress; thus, those without perceived control do not have that "buffering protection" and are more prone to stressors (p. 261). In other words, perceived control protects one from stressors. Conversely, if individuals lack perceived control, stressors will rise, resulting in emotions like anxiety and fear.

Dissonance Between Self-Concept Clarity and Conformity

This study found that Viewpoint 3's *high self-concept clarity* beliefs set it apart from Viewpoints 1 and 2. This finding is of interest for two reasons. First, this finding contradicted existing theory and research that suggested that those with high self-concept clarity are less susceptible as followers within the toxic triangle (Padilla et al., 2007; Thoroughgood, 2013). However, in this study, Viewpoint 3 held high self-concept clarity, yet their responses regarding toxic leaders indicated they were *susceptible followers* by *remaining silent*. Moreover, Viewpoint 3's responses included passive approaches such as *prosocial silence*, *quiescent*

silence, and *acquiescent voice*. Thus, these passive approaches suggested that those in Viewpoint 3 were, in fact, susceptible to following a toxic leader despite high self-concept clarity.

Second, this study found that most individuals in Viewpoint 3 were young, falling into the Millennial and Generation Z cohorts. Researchers have identified young and less mature individuals as particularly vulnerable to conformity due to low self-concept clarity and lack of psychological maturity (Padilla et al., 2007; Thoroughgood et al., 2012). In other words, particularly young individuals coupled with low self-concept clarity may be more compliant in their perceptions regarding responding to toxic leaders. Yet, this study's findings relative to age differed from Padilla et al. (2007) and Thoroughgood et al. (2012). In fact, conformity may not be due to low levels of self-concept clarity, because Viewpoint 3 had high self-concept clarity. As a result, these perceptions illustrated by Viewpoint 3 demonstrated that even in the presence of high self-concept clarity, complying with a toxic leader by *remaining silent* is more characteristic of younger individuals' actions in this current study's context.

Motivation for Responding to Toxic Leadership

This study found that the three viewpoints reflected overall different motivations regarding responses to toxic leaders, although in a few specifics the viewpoints had some similarities. First, Viewpoints 1 and 3 represented perceptions similar to *susceptible followers*. In fact, this study found that both viewpoints had similar motivations for responding to toxic leadership, for example both indicated fear as a prime motivation. In other words, they represented *quiescent silence*, consistent with Knoll and van Dick's (2013) research that suggested individuals suffer in silence out of fear.

Despite having some similar motivations for responding to toxic leaders as mentioned above, Viewpoints 1 and 3 may also have different motivations. For example, individuals in

Viewpoint 1 indicated that work is a transactional relationship. In other words, these individuals had no desire beyond working for a paycheck. As a result, they lacked the motivation to solve the problem of toxic leadership. Indeed, anything outside of their job was extra, and they preferred not to get involved. Consequently, they remained disengaged and represented *acquiescent silence*.

In addition, self-efficacy is related to employee disengagement and *acquiescent silence*. According to Van Dyne et al. (2003), those who engage in *acquiescent silence* have low self-efficacy. Furthermore, empirical research has linked low self-efficacy to low employee engagement (Chaudhary et al., 2013; Sandroto & Wijaya, 2020). Thus, the disengagement beliefs represented by those in Viewpoint 1 corroborated both Chaudhary et al. (2013) and Sandroto and Wijaya's (2020). We can see that because those in Viewpoint 1 were disengaged, they tended to remain silent when responding to toxic leaders, resulting in increased toxic leadership opportunities (*see* Figure 2).

As previously indicated, Viewpoint 3's motivation for responding to toxic leadership was different from that of Viewpoint 1. For example, in addition to being fearful (*quiescent silence*) like Viewpoint 1, Viewpoint 3 was motivated to remain silent to ensure that others did not get in trouble. Thus, Viewpoint 3 engaged in *prosocial silence*. This finding aligned with Van Dyne et al.'s (2003) research regarding prosocial silence. Additionally, remaining silent in the interest of co-workers aligned with Knoll and van Dick's (2013) research that suggests remaining silent is a way to protect relationships. For those in Viewpoint 3, those relationships included their co-workers.

Lastly, in contrast to Viewpoints 1 and 3, Viewpoint 2 represented *unsusceptible followers.* Those in Viewpoint 2 were motivated to voice their concerns about toxic leaders to

ensure cooperative efforts within the workplace took precedence. In other words, they were motivated by altruism and wanted what was best for the workplace. This finding supported Van Dyne et al.'s (2003) research regarding prosocial voice. Specifically, those who engage in prosocial voices express ideas based on cooperative motives. Further, Viewpoint 2 findings also aligned with Sherf et al. (2018) and Huang et al. (2018) that suggested raising concerns results in improved group outcomes. For example, those in Viewpoint 2 hoped that raising concerns would lead to a positive organizational outcome. In this case, the positive organizational effect would be decreased toxic leadership opportunities (*see* Figure 2).

Implications

The results of this study revealed both theoretical and practical implications. Thus, this discussion section includes an overview of how theory and practice can utilize these findings. This study answered the call for more research investigating followership through a holistic, systematic process using the toxic triangle as a lens.

Implications for Theory

This study developed several implications for advancing theory. These theoretical implications included illustrating an adapted toxic triangle framework, employing the toxic leadership measurement, and using the holism of Q research design to uncover employee perspectives regarding responses to toxic leadership. To date, most of the research has focused on toxic leaders rather than the interplay of the three components (i.e., leaders, followers, and the environment) within the toxic triangle (Mulvey & Padilla, 2010; Thoroughgood, 2013; Thoroughgood et al., 2018). However, a critical yet often overlooked dimension is followers within the toxic triangle (Mergen & Ozbilgin, 2021; Thoroughgood, 2013; Thoroughgood et al., 2018). For example, without followers, toxic leaders are simply figureheads (Bastardoz & van

Vugt, 2019). Hence, this study broadened the application of Padilla et al.'s (2007) toxic triangle by explicitly contributing to the literature on followership and the toxic triangle.

An Adapted Toxic Triangle Framework. First, this study extended the toxic triangle by introducing an adapted framework that focused on followers. The goal of the new framework was to introduce other responses regarding toxic leadership and to illustrate the important role that the unsusceptible follower plays in the toxic triangle, which is both in contrast and in addition to Padilla et al.'s (2007) susceptible followers (Thoroughgood, 2013; Thoroughgood et al., 2018). Specifically, this study presented two additional reaction responses for *susceptible followers*: *remain silent* and *passive voice*. In addition, this study also introduced *unsusceptible followers* to include *prosocial active voices* such as *prosocial voice* and *whistleblowing*. Then, this study allowed participants to communicate their subjective opinions on responses regarding toxic leaders and to demonstrate areas of agreement and disagreement when navigating toxic leadership. Finally, this study's findings revealed that three distinct viewpoints emerged that characterized susceptible followers and unsusceptible followers: Viewpoint 1: *Suffer in Silence* (susceptible follower); Viewpoint 2: *Confront and Advocate* (unsusceptible follower); and Viewpoint 3: *Quiet yet Concerned* (susceptible follower).

Employing the Toxic Leadership Scale. Previous research has used various terms to describe toxic leadership and has treated it as a "know it when you see it" type of phenomenon (Hodgins & McNamara, 2019; Mergen & Ozbilgin, 2021; Padilla et al., 2007, p. 177). Concerningly, toxic leadership is anything but that. Accordingly, this study advanced theory by employing Schmidt's (2014) operationalized term, toxic leadership, and measurement to quantify cumulative work history with toxic leadership. In fact, using this operationalized term increased clarity, utility, and usefulness for readers and future research. What is more, findings concluded

that it might be easier for individuals who have experienced an actual toxic leadership event to respond to the Toxic Leadership Scale rather than imagining a hypothetical scenario.

Relative to hypothetical scenarios, Thoroughgood et al. (2012) imply that future research should provide prescreening measurements to potential job candidates to assess their level of becoming a susceptible follower in the presence of toxic leaders. In fact, Thoroughgood et al. (2012) recommend placing job candidates in hypothetical leader and follower scenarios. In this case, potential candidates would be deemed hirable if they oppose a leader's unethical behaviors. This recommendation, however, rests on the assumption that those in hiring authority are not toxic leaders themselves. It would be fairly simple to justify not hiring a candidate that may oppose established leadership with the observation that that person may not be a "good team player." Moreover, given this information, coupled with this current study's findings regarding hypothetical scenarios, the prescreening measurements that Thoroughgood et al. (2012) recommended may not be an appropriate measurement if the potential job candidate has never experienced unethical leadership (e.g., toxic leadership) before. Thus, prescreening job candidates rests on the assumption that how applicants think they may act given a leader's unethical behavior will predict future applicant behavior; yet, those perceptions may not accurately reflect the applicant's actual behavior(s).

Q Research Design and Generational Perspectives. Padilla et al. (2007) argue that researchers should use a holistic and systematic approach to view all three components of the toxic triangle. Therefore, this study contributed by using the holism of Q research design that uncovered generational perspectives. In addition, Q showed the diversity of opinions that existed among participants (Rieber, 2020). In other words, Q does a better job with this element than differentiating by respondent characteristics. What is more, one barrier in today's modern

workplace is the diversity of generations and individuals' beliefs and values; today's general workforce has four, non-family generations working side-by-side (Geeraerts et al., 2021). Therefore, this study examined areas of generational agreement and disagreement while examining participant characteristics, such as generational identity, and illustrated the variety of perceptions that existed among each emergent viewpoint and generational beliefs.

Most importantly, this study used holism to capture participants' whole views, thus revealing dominant patterns and clusters of opinions raised within each group. This study also made a significant theoretical contribution by further demonstrating the various perceptions regarding responses to toxic leadership. The current study uncovered that all four generations represented the three emergent viewpoints. For Viewpoint 1, *Suffer in Silence*, most individuals were older and represented Baby Boomers and Generation Xers. Viewpoint 2, *Advocate and Change*, represented each of the four generations and thus, characterized diversity. Lastly, Viewpoint 3, *Quiet yet Concerned*, was comprised primarily of younger generations like Millennials and Generation Zers.

Implications for Practice

While this study provided theoretical contributions, it is helpful to address practical implications based on new insights derived from these research findings. In fact, these practical implications may be more critical now than ever as highly publicized toxic leadership in organizations, popular culture, and the media within recent years has prompted attention to understand those affected by toxic leadership. While toxic leadership exists beyond the scope of the three industries that this literature review discussed, these places have encompassed fraud, unethical behaviors, instilling a culture of fear, and intimidating those affected by toxic leadership (Arnold, 2016; Ellis, 2019; Gerstein, 2020; Gordon, 2011). Consequently, these

examples demonstrate that overlooking toxic leadership is detrimental to the organization's financial stability and damaging individuals' overall well-being. Here, I present three practical implications for organizations and individuals responsible for hiring management positions.

Demolishing a Conducive Environment. First, organizations need to create an environment that discourages toxic leadership from taking place, such as adopting and maintaining checks and balances. This study's findings demonstrated that the environment is the most important component in enabling toxic leader behavior. This finding is supported by Pelletier et al. (2019)'s research that indicates that the organizational climate allows all three components of the toxic triangle—a toxic leader, the environment, and followers—to converge. In addition, this current study's findings confirmed both Padilla et al. (2007) and Bierma (2008), who argued that toxic leaders thrive in unstable spaces, where perceived threats flourish, cultural values are not upheld, and checks and balances are ineffectual. On the contrary, workplaces need to have clear policies to promote healthy, fair stability (Padilla et al., 2007).

What is more, this present study found that workplaces should caution against significant power distance between superiors and subordinates. In fact, Behery et al.'s (2018) research support these findings, demonstrating that organizations that support the cultural values of a substantial power distance between superiors and subordinates are more susceptible to toxic leadership. Therefore, organizations that seek to guard against toxic leadership may want to avoid a steep hierarchy pyramid and adopt a more horizontal hierarchy structure that limits the power distances among all employees. Thus, supporting an equal power distance among superiors and subordinates is key to demolishing a conducive environment (Padilla et al., 2007).

Providing Safe Whistleblowing Opportunities. Second, organizations need to maintain safe whistleblowing channels for reporting unethical behavior. In other words, organizations

need to adopt clear policies for handling unethical behaviors, share those policies with all constituents within the organization, and probably most important, equitably and consistently abide by those policies (Thoroughgood et al., 2012). This current study's results provided compelling evidence that safety concerns about whistleblowing existed among those affected by toxic leadership when navigating these dangerous situations. For example, drawing on the recommendations of Park et al. (2008) and Putri (2018), organizations need to provide access to *formal*, *anonymous*, and *internal* methods of whistleblowing. In other words, organizations need formal policies and procedures to report wrongdoing and provide clear directions for reporting misconduct. Likewise, anonymous whistleblowing can ensure that an individual cannot be identified when making a report. On the contrary, anonymous whistleblowing will sometimes make follow up for additional details regarding unethical behavior difficult or impossible. Although internal whistleblowing (e.g., whistleblowing to upper management) is risky, if it is coupled with anonymity, internal whistleblowing risk becomes less risky.

Furthermore, this study identified actions and feelings of individuals towards toxic leaders. Specifically, this study demonstrated three emergent viewpoints regarding responses to toxic leaders. Interestingly, some of their responses underscored Pelletier et al.'s (2019) question: *How do the actions by individuals who challenge toxic leaders collapse the toxic triangle?* This study's participants articulated the first step in collapsing the toxic triangle. For instance, one perspective, Viewpoint 2, indicated that they believed in advocating and speaking up, which is one dimension to collapsing the toxic triangle. As shown in Viewpoint 2, they did not necessarily want to confront the toxic leader themselves. Still, they were willing to go to upper management, such as the toxic leader's boss because it could be perceived safer and more effective in decreasing toxic leadership opportunities. This finding suggested that speaking up

may be limited in the workplace and that providing safe whistleblowing opportunities, like *formal*, *anonymous*, and *internal* methods, may promote reporting misconduct (Park et al., 2008; Putri, 2018). Hence, these results could strengthen the impetus for leaders and human resources to ensure barriers to voicing concerns are lessened and that anonymous safeguards are in place and effect.

Proactive Hiring Measures. Lastly, organizations need to intentionally ensure they hire the best candidates to fill leadership positions. Hiring can be particularly challenging in today's modern workplace, especially with the COVID-19 pandemic, as it continues to cause havoc and destruction in our everyday lives. In fact, hiring for any position amidst the COVID-19 pandemic remains challenging due to the numerous job openings available (United States Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2021). Yet, individuals responsible for hiring need proactively and purposefully hire the best candidates, even though more jobs are available than workers.

For example, this current study provided compelling evidence that toxic leadership is widespread because most participants identified as having experienced toxic leadership. This corroborated other research that confirms the toxic leadership phenomenon extensiveness (Ariza-Montes et al., 2017; Berry et al., 2016; Hollis, 2017; Lester, 2013; Mergen & Ozbilgin, 2021; Mokgolo & Barnard, 2019; Peng et al., 2016; Salin et al., 2018; Schmidt, 2008, 2014; Walton-Robertson, 2019; Wolf et al., 2018; Workplace Bullying Institute, 2021). Thus, it is reasonable to assume that organizations must be *proactive* rather than *reactive* when hiring for leadership positions (Thoroughgood et al., 2012). Broadly speaking, if organizations could identify a toxic leader before onboarding, the organization may be able to avoid the damage done to employee productivity, turnover, and overall job satisfaction.

One recommendation based upon this research aligned with the suggestion that it may be beneficial for organizations to implement an external board of directors or committee group when hiring. The purpose of these groups, specifically a board of directors, is to uphold the organization's mission and ethics (Sellers, 2021). In addition, it may be beneficial to have external observers, internal management, and workplace employees assess the organization using a Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, and Threats (SWOT) analysis to identify internal and external organizational concerns (Lurati & Zamparini, 2018).

A SWOT analysis would allow both external observers and internal employees to assess strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and potential threats. Internal factors that stakeholders would evaluate include relationships and communication (Lurati & Zamparini, 2018). In contrast, external factors would include dimensions of society, culture, and environment (Lurati & Zamparini, 2018). While SWOT typically analyzes outside stakeholders, organizations could adjust this analysis to reflect the internal measures of social, cultural, and environment. To this end, the outside board of directors and organizational constituents (e.g., employees, supervisors) may ask themselves these questions such as:

a) What is the quality of *relationships* between employees?

b) To what extent is *communication* adequately executed effectively?

c) To what extent are *societal*, *cultural* values upheld in the *environment*?

d) Are there any inherent *risks* or *threats* to impending organizational effectiveness?

e) What *opportunities* exist to promote our organization's well-being?

In other words, these open-ended questions may serve as constructs to evaluate the organization's current health. As a result, these proactive measures would serve as checks and

balances and result in a more aligned, transparent, and cooperative relationship between constituents like superiors and subordinates.

Delimitations

Delimitations are the characteristics that occur from limitations when defining a study's boundaries (Theofanidis & Fountouki, 2018). In other words, the study's delimitations reflected the boundary decisions made in order to facilitate the research. This study had several delimitations. First, a careful literature review ensured that I included an extensive allotment of responses regarding toxic leadership in the research design. While developing the Q statements is often one of the most labor-intensive processes in Q research, its goal is to ensure that the statements cover all potential responses. However, I may have unintentionally missed some expressions. In fact, Watts and Stenner (2012) argue that a perfect Q set does not exist.

To offset this delimitation, respondents were given the opportunity in the post-sort questionnaire to provide any additional Q statements that may have been missing. In other words, participants provided feedback directly about the statements. For example, some feedback mentioned that the statements were "half true" and "half not" true for them. Thus, participant responses raised no substantial concern. Yet, one participant did note that it was hard to admit that personal gain is not the most characteristic card. This feedback suggested that *social desirability* may have influenced card sorting. In addition, three participants noted that it was challenging placing the cards because they had never experienced toxic leadership. Finally, three participants mentioned that they would have liked cards that focused on the choice to either stay or leave their job.

The second study delimitation stemmed from the purpose statement. To illustrate, the purpose of this study was to demonstrate the range of perceptions regarding employee responses

to toxic leadership in the modern workplace. Hence, this study intended to capture perceptions of all four generations currently in the United States workforce. Therefore, participants had to have worked in the United States to reflect those cultural values. Additionally, this study aimed to cover a broad range of toxic leadership exposure (i.e., low, medium, and high). As a result, respondents did not have to have experienced toxic leadership to participate. In addition, individuals had to have worked for a supervisor in their careers to ensure they understood the dynamics of a superior-subordinate relationship. In other words, self-employed individuals who do not have a supervisor may not understand the dyadic relationship.

Another example of exclusion criteria stemmed from Q statement development. For instance, my research team and I decided to exclude any language in the Q statements that referred to toxic leadership rather than a toxic leader. I explicitly excluded this language because I wanted to guide participants toward a single experience rather than an entire administration perpetuating toxic leadership. While the toxic triangle looks at the whole toxic leadership experience, it primarily focuses on the behaviors of a single toxic leader and a single follower. In addition, I wanted to ensure I was clear with what I was asking participants to do for this study. Thus, focusing on an entire destructive organization would be too problematic because of so many moving parts (i.e., hierarchy, multiple leaders, the environment, etc.). These many moving parts exist in the conducive environment dimensions of the toxic triangle. For this reason, the Q set language focused on the simplicity of the dyadic relationship between a single toxic leader and the individual who responded to the toxic leader (i.e., susceptible follower or unsusceptible follower).

Limitations

As with any empirical research, there are limitations to the current study. These limitations are the matters out of the researcher's control, typically those related to the research design (Theofanidis & Fountouki, 2018). First, critics may argue that generalizations cannot be made beyond the scope of the participants in this study due to the small sample size (Sorensen & Johnson Jorgensen, 2019; Watts & Stenner, 2012). However, the purpose of Q is to showcase viewpoints and then understand, explicate, and compare those viewpoints (Watts & Stenner, 2012). This purpose is further supported in Q because participants are the variables. As a result, this study showcased the perceptions of a purposefully sampled group of Baby Boomers, Generation Xers, Millennials, and Generation Zers in the modern workplace rather than generalizing to large groups of people. Thus, this study served to generalize differently and focused on "*concepts or categories*, *theoretical prepositions*, *and models of practice*" (Watts & Stenner, 2012, p. 73).

In fact, Thomas and Baas (1992/1993) provide a succinct paper responding to the heavily criticized Q research design, explicitly drawing on generalization and reliability issues. In this paper, Thomas and Baas (1992/1993) answer one question: "How, and how reliably, can we generalize findings from one Q study to outcomes from others address the *same* phenomenon?" (p. 19). To answer this question, Thomas and Baas (1992/1993) propose two kinds of generalizability in research: *statistical inference* and *substantive inference*. The first type, statistical inference, suggests that a random sample can be generalized *to* a larger population. The second type, substantive inference, is used in Q. Substantive inference means that the focus is a qualitative one *about* a phenomenon looking at the relations of and between factors (Brown, 1980). In Q, the Q factors that result from the study represent generalizations about how

individuals think *about* the investigative topic. Therefore, this current study allowed researchers and practitioners to understand employee viewpoints *about* responses regarding toxic leadership utilizing the toxic triangle as a lens.

In addition, the primary focus of this study was the perceptions of employees regarding their responses to toxic leadership. Thus, Q can only provide facts about each participant and their interactions (Stephenson, 1993). It cannot presume causes attributed to those participants. In other words, Q research design is limiting by showing the presence of factors and viewpoints that exist about a particular topic.

Next, given the hypothetical scenario of toxic leadership, I should caution that not all participants interpreted toxic leaders in the same way. Despite Schmidt's (2008) toxic leaders definition being provided in the survey, everyone's experiences with the phenomenon of toxic leadership are different. Those experiences shape their assumptions and how they view the world. Some participants drew on real-life experiences with toxic leadership, while others illustrated hypothetical toxic leadership situations.

Furthermore, this study relied on self-reported data. Consequently, this may result in some response bias. For instance, research has shown that self-report measures suffer from social desirability bias while responding to negative traits (Sekhar et al., 2020). However, as I previously indicated in the delimitation section, social desirability also relates to this study's limitations. In fact, since response options reflected negative traits such as personal ambition, greed, low self-impulse control, and Machiavellianism, participants may have chosen *not* to place these Q statements on the *most characteristic* side.

Lastly, there may be some inherent risk in my interpretation of this study's findings. To help offset this risk, I initially interpreted the three emergent factors based upon each factor array

and the placement of the statements. After my initial interpretation, I examined qualitative responses from the open-ended questionnaire. Then, I conducted qualitative interviews and shared my interpretations as member checking with each participant who participated in the interview. Furthermore, I utilized direct quotes to connect my understanding and the emergent viewpoints in presenting findings.

Recommendations for Future Research

Many questions remain relative to the toxic triangle and employee responses regarding toxic leadership. Thus, there are various areas that future research should address. First, one question that came up while conducting this study is: *How much does generational conflict play a role in toxic leadership?* Although the literature review was compiled with differing generations in view, nevertheless, the current literature could not answer this question. Therefore, I sifted through empirical research to look at generational traits and generational differences. While evidence suggests that conflict exists between generations (Urick et al., 2017), we do not know how much generational conflict contributes to the conflict within toxic leadership. Therefore, future research should investigate how much generational conflict contributes to toxic leadership.

Second, this study only looked at individuals employed in the United States. However, research has shown that cultural values vary throughout the workplace (Salin, 2021). In fact, cultures that support uncertainty avoidance, collectivism, and significant power distance are more susceptible to toxic leadership (Behery et al., 2018). Accordingly, people from different cultures may have different perceptions regarding how to respond to toxic leaders. Therefore, future research may benefit by replicating this study in other countries outside the United States to expand on the cultural values component of the toxic triangle.

Third, the yearly report from the Workplace Bullying Institute (2021) shows that 90% of respondents support a law to correct abusive workplace conduct. Yet, researchers have not followed this lead. Furthermore, we know that workplace bullying is a type of abuse. While many forms of abuse have laws condemning these abusive behaviors—such as child abuse and abusive relationships—workplace bullying rates continue to climb. More concerning is that no formal law extends beyond the discrimination laws. This study attempted to support the narrative of those who experienced toxic leadership and showed the ramifications that emerge from remaining silent. Hence, more research is needed to promote narratives that discuss workplace bullying.

Fourth, future research should look at Generation Z after they have acquired more work experience along with future generations and their perceptions about responses to toxic leaders. For instance, Generation Alpha, born in and after 2010, is of interest (Jha, 2020). As Generation Alpha enters the workforce, research should examine their viewpoints regarding responses to toxic leaders. This current study coins Generation Alpha as Generation-19 or Gen-19. This means that one of the defining moments of this generation is the COVID-19 pandemic that this generation has experienced. During this time, face-to-face events and interactions were moved to a virtual space. Consequently, once this generation moves into the workforce, based on their experience of the COVID-19 pandemic, they may have different viewpoints of responses to toxic leaders than previous generations. This significant event has impacted the socio-cultural aspect of dyadic relationships, and thus, more research is needed to investigate this generation's perceptions.

Fifth, future research should investigate other participant characteristics and organizational characteristics in employee responses regarding toxic leadership. For example,

this study's limited sample provided little understanding of the extent to which race, gender, and English as a first language informed differing viewpoints. Thus, future research could purposefully include these other participant characteristics. Furthermore, future research should examine organizational features such as workplace tenure and organizational size. For example, this study found that one participant who worked in both small and large organizations discussed barriers in large organizational settings and small organizational settings. Here, this participant described larger organizations as less unwilling to change their policies due to the policies being set at a corporate level. In contrast, in small organizations, close personal relationships may upset interpersonal dynamics if an employee voices concerns.

What is more, future research should examine the length of employment for subordinates who experience toxic leadership. For instance, the honeymoon-hangover effect provides one nuanced dimension to understanding participant characteristics like tenure and toxic leadership. For example, the honeymoon-hangover effect suggests that newcomers in the organization portray optimism, whereas someone who has been with the organization portrays the organization more negatively (Boswell et al., 2009; Garthe & Hasselhorn, 2021). In other words, newcomers are in the "honeymoon" phase, whereas those with more ample experience within the organization are in the "hangover" phase. Thus, the honeymoon-hangover effect may impact participant viewpoints regarding responses to toxic leadership.

In addition, future research should investigate toxic leadership from an actual experience rather than a hypothetical scenario. For example, this study determined that most individuals in Viewpoint 3 were relatively young with little actual toxic leadership exposure. As this study found, participants suggested that until one has experienced toxic leadership, it is challenging to determine how they would respond if they have not experienced an actual toxic leadership

scenario. Having participants draw on past toxic leadership experiences may provide a more robust understanding of responses regarding toxic leadership. Overall, this study's findings are promising and should explore other participant characteristics, such as actual experience with toxic leadership, tenure within the organization, and employee turnover intentions.

Relative to this, research argues that young and less mature individuals are more susceptible to conformity (Padilla et al., 2007; Thoroughgood et al., 2012). Viewpoint 3 confirmed this finding suggesting younger generations working for toxic leaders responded by remaining silent (e.g., *quiescent silence* and *prosocial silence*) or passively agreeing with a toxic leader (e.g., *acquiescent voice*). Thus, while this generation is beginning to mature into adulthood, they may be early on in their careers and find speaking out against a toxic leader challenging. Furthermore, if they do speak out, this current study found that they used safe approaches. To demonstrate, this study confirmed Christensen et al.'s (2018) findings and suggested that individuals in Factor 3 viewed *external whistleblowing* as most uncharacteristic. Instead, those in Viewpoint 3 turned to safer whistleblowing approaches, such as *informal whistleblowing*. Future research could investigate this finding of the younger, less experienced workers and then follow them as they gain more work experience. Perhaps, as they gain more experience, they will become more vocal.

Conclusion

Chapter 5 included a detailed summary of findings, a discussion, the practical implications of these findings, the study's delimitations and limitations, and finally, recommendations for future research. While the scope of this study was limited, the implications for the findings may serve as a starting place for theory advancement and practical implications

for ensuring that organizational environments have access to safe whistleblowing channels for their employees.

Previous studies have explored the toxic triangle and toxic leaders extensively. Yet, few have investigated followership from a holistic view. Thus, this study contributed to holism by implementing Q methodology. In addition, this study implemented an adapted version of Padilla et al.'s (2007) toxic triangle to focus specifically on *susceptible* and *unsusceptible followers*. Finally, this study investigated employee responses regarding toxic leadership, represented by three distinct factors that represented different viewpoints. This differentiation among perspectives highlighted what employees think regarding their reactions to navigating toxic leadership. In sum, the insights gained included three emergent viewpoints (i.e., Factors): Viewpoint 1, "Suffer in Silence," Viewpoint 2, "Confront and Advocate," and Viewpoint 3, "Quiet yet Concerned."

In addition, the Q research design revealed their viewpoints better than traditional surveys. In fact, McKeown (2001) argues that scales lose power because meaning is hidden. In other words, this study's insights advanced the knowledge of subjectivity in the applied field because Q's sorting activity revealed increased meaning among various perceptions regarding responses to toxic leaders. Furthermore, the emergent dialogue between the three distinct viewpoints highlighted areas of agreement, such as sharing concerns about job security. Further, Q provided insights into the differences between the three views, such as whistleblowing when navigating toxic leaders. Lastly, I hope these findings are helpful both theoretically by advancing the toxic triangle and practically for organizations to understand how employees may respond when navigating toxic leadership situations.

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APPENDIX A. Q STATEMENTS AND RELEVANT DIMENSIONS

Construct	Subconstruct	Q Statements
Conformer	Low Core Self-Evaluations	1. Follow a toxic leader because I have trouble handling most of the problems I face. 2. Follow a toxic leader because I don't have control over the events in my life. 3. Follow a toxic leader because I feel like my success in my career is outside of my control.
	High Personal Life Distress	4. Follow a toxic leader because I feel emotionally vulnerable. 5. Follow a toxic leader because that provides some stability in my life.
	Low Self-Concept Clarity	6. Follow a toxic leader because I don't have a clear sense of who I am and what I stand for as a person.
	Unmet Needs	7. Follow a toxic leader because they provide me with some stability in life. 8. Follow a toxic leader because they provide feelings of acceptance. 9. Follow a toxic leader because I want to ensure financial stability for my practical needs to be met – such as shelter, food, and doctor's bills.
Colluder	Personal Ambition	10. Support a toxic leader because I want to be better than everyone else at what I do. 11. Support a toxic leader because I want to advance in my career.
	Greed	12. Support a toxic leader because that allows for me to get ahead without contributing anything in return. 13. Support a toxic leader because they will help me get more money. 14. Support a toxic leader because that will allow me to get ahead in my career without working harder.
	Low Self-Impulse Control	15. Support a toxic leader so that I don't have to express my emotions.
	Machiavellianism	16. Support a toxic leader because if I show any weakness at work, I will get taken advantage of. 17. Support a toxic leader because I like to have control within the workplace. 18. Support a toxic leader because they can help me achieve a higher status. 19. Support a toxic leader's unethical behaviors because it will help me succeed.

Remain Silent	Acquiescent Silence	20. Remain silent at work because my toxic leader is not open to proposals, concerns, or the like. 21. Remain silent at work because I will not find a sympathetic ear, anyway. 22. Remain silent at work because nothing will change, anyway.
	Quiescent Silence	23. Remain silent at work because of fear of negative consequences from my toxic leader. 24. Remain silent at work to not make me vulnerable in front of colleagues. 25. Suffer in silence when faced with a toxic leader because that's what is in my best interest.
	Prosocial Silence	26. Remain silent when faced with a toxic leader because I do not want to embarrass others. 27. Remain silent when faced with a toxic leader because I do not want others to get in trouble. 28. Remain silent because if I speak up, this may reveal information that results in the organization's stability to suffer.
	Opportunistic Silence	29. Remain silent in front of a toxic leader because of concerns that the toxic leader could take advantage of my ideas. 30. Remain silent in front of a toxic leader because I want to avoid additional work.
Voice	Acquiescent Voice	31. Voice agreement with a toxic leader because disagreeing with them is pointless. 32. Voice agreement and go along with a toxic leader because I prefer to go with the status quo.
	Defensive Voice	33. Voice ideas that try to shift the toxic leader's attention to others because I am afraid of voicing my true concerns to a toxic leader. 34. Voice support for a toxic leader because I want to protect myself from the toxic leader.
	Prosocial Voice	35. Voice my concerns to a toxic leader about workplace issues because I want what's best for the organization.
	Internal Whistleblowing	36. Voice my concerns about a toxic leader to upper management, even if that means suffering from reprisals because I want what's best for the organization.
	External Whistleblowing	37. Voice my concerns about a toxic leader to an outside party (i.e., authorities, the media) who has the power to correct the toxic leader because I want what's best for the organization.
	Formal Whistleblowing	38. Voice my concerns about a toxic leader because the organization has formal procedures in place for reporting a toxic leader.
	Informal Whistleblowing	39. Voice my concerns about a toxic leader with someone I trust within our organization who could advocate for me because I don't feel safe expressing my concerns to someone else.

	Identified Whistleblowing	40. Publicly voice my concerns about a toxic leader because I feel safe reporting wrongdoing within my organization.
	Anonymous Whistleblowing	41. Anonymously voice my concerns about a toxic leader because I don’t feel safe reporting wrongdoing within my organization.

APPENDIX B. PARTICIPANT RECRUITMENT SOCIAL MEDIA POSTING

Are you at least 18 years old and held a job in the United States where you reported to at least one supervisor? If this is you, I want to talk to you!

My dissertation focuses on how employees view responses regarding toxic leadership. If you meet these criteria and would like to participate, please follow this link: https://ndstate.co1.qualtrics.com/jfe/form/SV_0CyOuEGL4RB2cfA.

If you are not sure if you meet these criteria, please reach out directly to me. If you choose to participate, you will complete a survey taking approximately 45 minutes. Finally, if you do not meet these criteria but know someone who does, please feel free to share this study's information. Thank you!

APPENDIX C. INFORMED CONSENT STATEMENT

North Dakota State University
Department of Education
PO Box 6050, Dept. 2625
Fargo, ND 58108-6050
(701) 231-7921

Title of Research Study: Investigating Perceptions of Responses Regarding Toxic Leadership in the Modern Workplace: A Q Methodological Study

This study is being conducted by: Dr. Brent Hill, Associate Professor, Department of Education at NDSU, and Emily Berg, a graduate student in the Department of Education at NDSU.

Why am I being asked to take part in this research study?
You are invited to participate in this research study because you are at least 18 years of age, have been employed in the United States, and have held a job where you have reported to at least one supervisor.

What is the reason for doing the study?
The purpose of this study is to explore the range of perceptions of responses regarding toxic leadership in the modern workplace. We hope that this study's outcome will contribute useful information regarding the complexities behind a diverse workforce and their viewpoints regarding leadership.

What will I be asked to do?
If you agree to participate in this study, you will be asked to complete a survey regarding your work history and experience with supervisors. Then, you will be asked to complete a sorting activity. This sorting activity will ask you to read through each statement card and rank them how you would respond if you were to experience toxic leadership. Then, the page will direct you to a questionnaire. The researcher may follow up with you after the sorting activity for follow-up interviews to clarify responses if you provide consent.

Where is the study going to take place, and how long will it take?
The survey will take place on the online survey distributor, Qualtrics, at a time of your choosing. The survey should take no more than 45 minutes to complete. If you choose to, a short follow-up interview will take place virtually via Zoom.

What are the risks and discomforts?
Given the nature of the study's topic of toxic leadership, some statements might be sensitive for some individuals if they have experienced toxic leadership. As a result, some research participants may feel some emotional distress. However, you do not need to experience toxic leadership to participate, as the study's goal is to obtain employee perceptions of responses if they were to experience toxic leadership. If, for any reason, you should become distressed during the sorting activity, you will have the option to stop the sorting research project at any point.

Furthermore, you will be assured confidentiality. Additionally, you may refuse to answer any question for any reason, or you may stop the survey and interview at any point.

What are the benefits to me?
There are no specific benefits to participating in this study. However, by participating in this study, you will have the opportunity to reflect on your experience with your work history. Also, sharing your beliefs about leadership will help examine the modern workplace. Finally, by participating in this study, you may get a sense of satisfaction by participating in a study that leads to increased knowledge regarding how employees view responses regarding toxic leadership.

What are the benefits to other people?
This study has the potential to reveal new information about the complexities behind the modern workplace. This information will contribute to how employees perceive responses regarding toxic workplace leadership. Your viewpoints will add to the body of research on organizational leadership.

Do I have to take part in the study?
Your participation in this research is voluntary. If you decide to participate in the study, you may change your mind and stop participating at any time before the publication of the results.

Who will have access to the information that I give?

- We will keep private all research records that identify you to the extent allowed by law.
- Video files will be stored in a password-protected file only accessible to the research team.
- Demographic survey responses and interview responses will be secured in the same fashion.
- Data and records created by this project are owned by NDSU and the researchers. You may view information collected from you by making a written request to the researchers. You may only view information collected from you and not information collected about others participating in the project.

Will I receive any compensation for taking part in this study?
Individuals who participate in this study will be entered into a drawing to receive one of two $25 Amazon gift cards.

What if I have questions?
If you have any questions about the study, you can contact the lead researcher, Dr. Brent Hill, at Brent.Hill@ndsu.edu.

What are my rights as a research participant?
You have rights as a participant in research. If you have questions about your rights or complaints about this research, you may talk to the researcher or contact the NDSU Human Research Protection Program at:

- Telephone: 701-231-8995 or 1-855-800-6717 (toll-free)
- Email: ndsu.irb@ndsu.edu

- Mail: NDSU HRPP, 1735 NDSU Research Park Dr., NDSU Dept. 4000, PO Box 6050, Fargo, ND 58108-6050

The Human Research Protection Program's role is to see that your rights are protected in this research; you can find more information about your rights at https://www.ndsu.edu/research/irb.

Documentation of Informed Consent:
You are freely deciding whether to be in this research study. By clicking "Next" below means that:

1. You have read and understood this consent form
2. You have had your questions answered, and
3. You have decided to be in the study.

You may print or request a copy of this consent form to keep if you so choose.

APPENDIX D. SURVEY AND Q SORT INSTRUMENT INSTRUCTIONS

Qualtrics	**Screening Questions** All items marked with an asterisk (*) are required. 1. Are you at least 18 years of age? * a. Yes: continues survey b. No: leave the survey 2. Have you ever been employed in the United States? * a. Yes: continues survey b. No: leave the survey 3. Have you ever held a job where you had to report to at least one supervisor? * a. Yes: continues survey b. No: leave the survey
Qualtrics	**Subject-Generated Identification Code (SGIC)** Before proceeding, you first need to create a special type of private identification code. This code is needed so that your responses to this part of the survey can be linked with the data collected later in a separate instrument while preserving your anonymity. To create your private code, you will need the following pieces of information: - First letter of the city in which you were born - Number representing the month you were born - Number of older siblings (living and deceased) - First letter of your middle name (if none, use X) **Example:** Let's say that someone was born in **Fargo (F)**, in the month of **September (9)**, with **two older siblings (2)**, and has the **middle name Elmer (E)**. This person's participant code would be **F92E**. Using this process, please enter your private identification code: *

Qualtrics	**Toxic Leadership Exposure** 4. This study will focus on ***toxic leadership***. Toxic leadership does **not** include simple mismanagement—naturally, great leaders sometimes make bad management decisions. Rather, toxic leadership is a distinct combination of negative leadership behaviors. Toxic leadership includes bosses who are narcissistic, self-promoters who engage in an unpredictable pattern of abusive and authoritarian supervision. In the past, were you in any position in which you experienced toxic leadership? a. Yes b. No
Qualtrics	**Toxic Leadership Scale** Instructions: To begin, please think about your previous and current experience with work and supervisors. Indicate the extent to which you agree or disagree with each of the following statements regarding your previous or current work history with supervisors. 1=Strongly Disagree, 2=Disagree, 3=Neutral, 4=Agree, 5=Strongly Agree **I have had a supervisor who:** 1. Drastically changes his/her demeanor when his/her supervisor is present 2. Will only offer assistance to people who can help him/her get ahead 3. Accepts credit for successes that do not belong to him/her 4. Holds subordinates responsible for things outside their job descriptions 5. Publicly belittles subordinates 6. Reminds subordinates of their past mistakes and failures 7. Allows his/her current mood to define the climate of the workplace 8. Expresses anger at subordinates for unknown reasons 9. Varies in his/her degree of approachability 10. Has a sense of personal entitlement 11. Thinks that he/she is more capable than others 12. Believes that he/she is an extraordinary person 13. Controls how subordinates complete their tasks 14. Does not permit subordinates to approach goals in new ways 15. Determines all decisions in the workplace, whether they are important or not

Qualtrics	**Online Q Sort** You are now finished with the initial portion of the survey. **Please click here to complete the second part of the survey.** It's very important that you complete both parts of the survey. You may save/bookmark this link if you wish to continue at a later time.
Q Platform	**Welcome**! I appreciate your participation in this research study! This study's goal is to understand employee viewpoints of responses regarding toxic leadership. In addition, this research study serves as the foundation for the research required for my dissertation. Below are instructions for completing the research. Don't hesitate to contact me for assistance at emily.bublitz@ndsu.edu if you have any questions or problems with the online instrument. Thank you again! - Emily **IMPORTANT:** You will need as much screen space as possible to use this questionnaire. If necessary, please **maximize** the size of your browser window, **reload** this web page, and click on the "Continue" button to start the survey.

<table>
<tr><td>Q Platform</td><td>Subject-Generated Identification Code (SGIC)

Before proceeding, you first need to create a special type of private identification code. This code is needed so that your responses to this part of the survey can be linked with the data collected in the previous instrument while preserving your anonymity.

To create your private code, you will need the following pieces of information:
- First letter of the city in which you were born
- Number representing the month you were born
- Number of older siblings (living and deceased)
- First letter of your middle name (if none, use X)

Example: Let’s say that someone was born in Fargo (F), in the month of September (9), with two older siblings (2), and has the middle name Elmer (E). This person’s participant code would be F92E.

Enter your code: *</td></tr>
<tr><td>Q Platform</td><td>Introduction

This research project deals with your opinions and perceptions regarding how you would respond and react if you were to experience toxic leadership in the workplace.

This is a special type of questionnaire known as a Q-sort. You will be presented with a series of 41 cards, each containing a statement regarding potential responses (along with a general motivating rationale) a person may have as a reaction to toxic leadership. You will be asked to rank each of these across a continuum according to the degree you believe it is the most uncharacteristic to the most characteristic of how you would respond and react if you were to experience toxic leadership. After completing the sorting task, you will have the opportunity to explain your reasoning for your MOST CHARACTERISTIC and MOST UNCHARACTERISTIC statements. There are also a few demographic questions at the end.

Don’t worry if this general overview seems a bit vague at this point; you will be guided through each step of this exercise by a detailed set of step-by-step instructions.

Before you begin, it will be helpful to maximize the size of your browser window.

Once you are ready, click the “Continue” button to begin.</td></tr>
</table>

<table>
<tr>
<td>Q Platform</td>
<td><u>STEP 1 of 5</u>: Preliminary Rough Sorting

Statements on 41 cards will appear on the screen, one at a time. Please read each card carefully, considering each one with the following guiding question:

How closely does this statement reflect your personal views and opinions regarding both how and why you would respond if you were to experience toxic leadership?

After carefully considering a statement, place it into one of three piles:
• A pile of cards that you tend to believe are MOST CHARACTERISTIC (right side)
• A pile of cards that you tend to think are MOST UNCHARACTERISTIC (left side)
• A pile for cards that you are undecided, uncertain, unsure, or otherwise NEUTRAL about (middle)

You can use your mouse to drag and drop the cards into one of the three piles.

Alternatively, you can press the 1, 2, or 3 keys on your keyboard to place a card into piles (1 = MOST UNCHARACTERISTIC, 2 = NEUTRAL/UNSURE, 3 = MOST CHARACTERISTIC).

This is a preliminary “rough” sorting of the cards. This step will facilitate the next step of the process, which is to finalize the arrangement of the cards in a table.

*** If you wish to re-read these instructions at any time, press the HELP button found in the bottom-right corner of the screen. ***</td>
</tr>
</table>

Q Platform	**<u>STEP 2 of 5</u>: Placing Statement Cards in the Table** Now read the cards in your MOST CHARACTERISTIC pile again. You can scroll through the cards by using the scroll bar. Select the two cards from this pile that you feel were the two MOST CHARACTERISTIC, then place these in the two boxes on the far-right side of the table (i.e., in the last column on the right side). The vertical (stacked) order of cards within a column does not matter. Next, read the cards in your MOST UNCHARACTERISTIC pile. Then, select the two cards from this pile that you feel were the two MOST UNCHARACTERISTIC. Place these in the two boxes on the far-left side of the table (i.e., in the first column on the left side). Again, the order of the cards within a column does not matter. Now go back to the MOST CHARACTERISTIC pile on the right. Select the cards from those remaining in this pile that are the *next* MOST CHARACTERISTIC in your view and place them in the next-to-last column on the right side of the table. Likewise, go back to the MOST UNCHARACTERISTIC pile on the left, select the cards from those remaining that are the *next* MOST UNCHARACTERISTIC, and then place those in the second column on the left side of the table. Working back and forth in this fashion, continue placing cards into the table until all of the cards from the MOST UNCHARACTERISTIC and MOST CHARACTERISTIC piles have been placed on the table. Finally, re-read the cards in the NEUTRAL pile and arrange them in the remaining open boxes of the table. Do not worry about making it perfect here; you can rearrange the cards in the next step before finalizing your arrangement.

Q Platform	**<u>STEP 3 of 5</u>: Fine Tuning** Now all 41 cards are on the table. You can now look over your placement of the cards once more and rearrange them if you wish. To swap positions between any two cards, just drag and drop one of the cards onto the other. *****NOTE:** If any of the statements are abbreviated when they are in the table, you can adjust the font size with the control buttons on this page. Alternatively, you can read the complete statement by simply holding your mouse over a card. *** Once you are satisfied with your final arrangement of the cards, click the "Continue" button below the table.
Q Platform	**<u>STEP 4 of 5</u>: Details About Your Extreme Sorts** Please explain why you placed the following statements in the table's extreme MOST UNCHARACTERISTIC (far-left) and extreme MOST CHARACTERISTIC (far-right) column positions. 1. [insert highest-ranked statement #1] 2. [insert highest-ranked statement #2] 3. [insert lowest-ranked statement #1] 4. [insert lowest-ranked statement #2]

Q Platform	**<u>STEP 5 of 5</u>: Post-Sort Questionnaire** Finally, please answer the following questions. This is the last part of the process. All items marked with an asterisk (*) are required. 1. Were there any specific statement(s) that you had difficulty placing? Please identify the statement(s) and describe your dilemma. 2. As you sorted the cards, did you feel that statements were missing? If so, what would the card have said, and where would you have placed it? 3. What year were you born? * 4. Please identify your gender. a. Male b. Female c. Other 5. How would you describe yourself? Please select all that apply. a. Black or African American b. Asian c. American Indian or Alaskan Native d. Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander e. White f. Other 6. Is English your first language? a. Yes b. No 7. Please identify the highest degree or level of school you have completed. *If currently enrolled, please identify your highest degree received.* a. Less than a high school diploma b. High School degree or equivalent (e.g., GED) c. Some college, no degree d. Associates degree (e.g., AA, AS) e. Bachelor's degree (e.g., BA, BS) f. Master's degree (e.g., MA, MS, MEd) g. Professional degree (e.g., MD, DDS, DVM) h. Doctorate (e.g., PhD, EdD) 8. What generational cohort do you identify? * Please select all that apply. a. Traditionalist (also known as the Silent Generation) b. Baby Boomer c. Generation X

	d. Millennial (also known as Generation Y) e. Generation Z f. I don’t think of myself as belonging to any generation. 9. If you would be willing to participate in a brief, follow-up interview (via telephone or Zoom) with the researcher, please provide your first name and email address or telephone number. 10. If you would like to be entered to win one of two $25 Amazon gift cards, please enter an email address.
Q Platform	**Thank You** Your responses have been successfully submitted. Thank you for participating in this study! You can now close this browser tab/window.

APPENDIX E. INTERVIEW DISCUSSION GUIDE

Introduction
Thank you so much for agreeing to participate in my dissertation study. I have a list of several questions to remind me of the general sorts of things I thought might give me insights into your beliefs. However, it is more important for me to hear what *you think* than get through my questions. So, if we don't go in order or don't get to all of them, that is perfectly fine. And if there are things you think are important for me to know, please feel free to bring them up even if I don't ask about them. But, again, what is most important is that I give you a chance to expand on your answers from the survey.

As I mentioned in the email message, our discussion will likely take approximately 20-30 minutes. As we talk, you may notice me making notes to remember what you tell me. However, to capture your thoughts as accurately and thoroughly as possible, I would like to record our conversation with this audio recorder. Is that still okay with you?

Do you have any questions before we get started?

Q1. After collecting data from all the research participants, I analyzed it to find similarities between various beliefs regarding responses to toxic leadership. Your responses were very similar to the views of participants in Viewpoint [X]. [Reference theoretical array of Viewpoint (X)]. As you can see, those with Viewpoint [X] typically indicated that the following statements were most *like* their beliefs in the two columns on the right (8 & 9).

- Statement #: Description
- Statement #: Description.

a. Can you share your thoughts on these particular statements and elaborate on what they mean to you?

Q2. Those with Viewpoint [X] indicated that the following statements were most *unlike* their beliefs in the two columns on the left (1 & 2).

- Statement #: Description
- Statement #: Description.

a. Please share your thoughts on these statements and elaborate on what they meant to you.

Q3. The key findings from this study regarding Viewpoint [X] indicate that individuals with this view [insert initial interpretation of Viewpoint (X)]. What are your thoughts about this theme?

Q4. Participants who shared this viewpoint with you indicated that they view responding to toxic leaders as [insert interpretation of views of responses to toxic leaders who loaded on Viewpoint (X)].

a. What are your thoughts about these views of responses regarding toxic leaders?
b. How, if at all, do you see these views relating to your viewpoint regarding responding to toxic leaders?

Q5. Elaboration on demographics that relate to Viewpoint (X).

a. [Skip if not relevant] You indicated that you didn't think of yourself belonging to any generation. Can you elaborate on that?
b. How, if at all, do you see generational identity relating to viewpoints regarding responding to toxic leaders?
c. How, if at all, do you see exposure to toxic leadership relating to viewpoints regarding responding to toxic leaders?

Q6. Two additional viewpoints emerged from the analysis. These viewpoints include:

- **Viewpoint [Y] : [insert initial interpretation of Viewpoint (Y)]**
- **Viewpoint [Z] : [insert initial interpretation of Viewpoint (Z)]**

a. How do you see these views as being similar to – or different from – your own?
b. How might you interact with someone who holds either of these viewpoints?

Q7. Out of all the things we've talked about today – or maybe some topics we've missed – what should I pay most attention to? What should I think about when I read your interview?

Conclusion

Thank you for taking the time to talk with me today and share your viewpoints. You provided some fascinating information on (a, b, or c) that I haven't received from others. As a reminder, I collected this data for my dissertation, and any information that might identify you or others will be edited from the transcript before I share the findings.

After this interview, I plan to transcribe the discussion. So please let me know if you have any questions about the project.

APPENDIX F. INITIAL UNROTATED FACTOR MATRIX FOR EIGHT FACTORS

Q Sort	Factor 1	Factor 2	Factor 3	Factor 4	Factor 5	Factor 6	Factor 7	Factor 8
1	0.4963	-0.3138	-0.3617	-0.2995	0.2169	-0.008	-0.169	0.3066
2	0.7093	-0.3947	0.2564	-0.0866	0.2131	-0.1408	-0.219	-0.0844
3	0.6947	0.4918	0.0225	-0.0599	-0.0457	-0.0837	-0.088	0.0514
4	0.4624	0.4971	-0.219	0.1144	0.3635	-0.028	0.0339	-0.3966
5	0.4492	-0.0622	-0.3585	0.4888	0.1063	-0.1797	0.0104	-0.0946
6	0.6297	-0.5206	-0.0452	-0.2367	-0.1072	0.29	0.1087	-0.0734
7	0.3116	0.6354	-0.1106	-0.1776	0.0274	0.422	0.0074	0.1712
8	0.7486	-0.1055	0.0452	-0.0392	-0.3225	-0.0702	0.0312	-0.2686
9	0.7686	-0.0055	-0.1477	0.0768	0.0232	0.3123	-0.3158	0.0773
10	0.4043	-0.7618	-0.1842	-0.1757	-0.0354	0.1915	0.1078	-0.0048
11	0.3633	0.2167	-0.0752	-0.18	-0.4972	-0.5026	-0.338	-0.0745
12	0.5521	0.4676	0.324	-0.2953	0.2803	-0.146	-0.0393	0.1505
13	0.6574	-0.0341	0.2915	0.0276	0.1781	-0.1277	0.1849	0.1002
14	0.6009	0.0579	0.2478	0.1979	-0.1093	-0.0682	0.3947	-0.2835
15	0.5254	0.3491	-0.2859	0.0418	-0.1601	-0.2216	0.4712	-0.0791
16	0.314	-0.282	0.3288	-0.3331	0.4184	-0.2138	0.3657	0.1128
17	0.753	-0.284	-0.002	0.1079	0.1013	-0.0117	-0.0541	-0.1318
18	0.6689	0.1705	0.1355	-0.1222	-0.1107	-0.1424	-0.0809	0.4608
19	0.6502	-0.1089	-0.1985	0.2102	0.0127	0.1578	-0.2783	0.0017
20	0.1076	0.0073	0.5958	0.2103	-0.1035	0.4173	0.0921	0.134
21	0.6713	0.3009	0.0869	-0.1518	0.0138	0.0038	-0.1139	0.0491
22	0.433	-0.4687	-0.4204	0.0851	0.0984	-0.0781	0.4054	0.3398
23	-0.0575	-0.0521	-0.1671	0.5899	0.4861	0.0721	-0.1243	0.0746
24	0.2488	0.7618	0.086	0.1295	0.2427	-0.0025	0.0815	0.0601
25	0.0602	0.6702	-0.0448	-0.3188	0.1363	0.3285	0.0361	-0.3543
26	0.771	0.0588	-0.4074	-0.0418	-0.1477	-0.009	0.0757	-0.0933
27	0.6066	0.4708	-0.084	0.2914	-0.1864	0.0204	-0.0731	0.3158
28	0.4569	-0.0168	0.4375	0.3935	-0.0052	-0.1449	-0.0028	0.0095
29	0.6023	-0.1325	0.2125	0.2076	-0.4216	0.3659	0.194	0.0531
30	0.7138	-0.2953	0.0005	-0.2424	0.2211	0.1348	-0.1108	-0.2911
31	0.3234	-0.4679	0.3839	0.1537	0.0463	-0.1071	-0.3246	-0.1642
EV	9.364407	4.405741	2.083727	1.729593	1.56861	1.374681	1.333767	1.243757
PVE	30	14	7	6	5	4	4	4
CPVE	30	44	51	57	62	66	70	74

Notes. EV represents the Eigenvalues. PVE represents the percentage of explained variance. CPVE represents the cumulative percentage explained variance.

APPENDIX G. COMPARISON OF EXTRACTION AND ROTATION COMBINATION OUTPUT

Extraction Method	Factors	Rotation	Variance Explained (%)	Defining Sorts (*n*/31)	Confounded Sorts
Centroid	8	Varimax	60%	19	10
Centroid	7	Varimax	57%	20	10
Centroid	6	Varimax	54%	20	11
Centroid	5	Varimax	50%	22	9
Centroid	4	Varimax	49%	25	6
Centroid	3	Varimax	45%	27	4
Centroid	2	Varimax	40%	29	2
PCA	8	Varimax	74%	18	13
PCA	7	Varimax	70%	19	12
PCA	6	Varimax	66%	21	10
PCA	5	Varimax	62%	18	13
PCA	4	Varimax	57%	29	2
PCA	3*	Varimax	51%	29	2
PCA	2	Varimax	44%	29	2

Note. An asterisk (*) represents the best solution that was based on the high percentages of variance explained, a high number of defining sorts, and low confounded sorts. PCA with a three-factor solution was preferred over PCA with a four-factor solution because the fourth factor only had two sorts that loaded onto this factor. Brown (1980) recommends that each defined sort should have a minimum of four defining sorts loaded onto the factor.

APPENDIX H. STATEMENT LIST WITH Z-SCORES AND RANK POSITIONS

Item #	Statement	Factor 1		Factor 2		Factor 3	
		Z-score	Rank	Z-score	Rank	Z-score	Rank
1	[LCSE] Follow a toxic leader because I have trouble handling most of the problems I face.	-0.432	5	-1.21	2	-1.685	2
2	[LCSE] Follow a toxic leader because I don't have control over the events in my life.	-1.034	2	-0.65	3	-1.147	3
3	[LCSE] Follow a toxic leader because I feel like my success in my career is outside of my control.	-0.696	4	-1.378	1	-0.85	3
4	[HPLD] Follow a toxic leader because I feel emotionally vulnerable.	0.59	6	-0.729	3	-0.952	3
5	[HPLD] Follow a toxic leader because that provides some stability in my life.	-0.67	4	-0.292	5	-0.501	3
6	[LSCC] Follow a toxic leader because I don't have a clear sense of who I am and what I stand for as a person.	-0.818	3	-0.518	4	-1.758	1
7	[UN] Follow a toxic leader because they provide me with some stability in life.	-0.956	3	-0.345	5	0.296	6
8	[UN] Follow a toxic leader because they provide feelings of acceptance.	-0.041	5	-0.383	5	-0.232	4
9	[UN] Follow a toxic leader because I want to ensure financial stability for my practical needs to be met – such as shelter, food, and doctor's bills.	0.818	7	0.795	7	0.594	7
10	[PA] Support a toxic leader because I want to be better than everyone else at what I do.	-1.462	1	-1.019	3	-0.791	3
11	[PA] Support a toxic leader because I want to advance in my career.	-0.62	4	-0.9	3	-0.039	4
12	[G] Support a toxic leader because that allows for me to get ahead without contributing anything in return.	-0.805	3	-1.305	2	-1.54	2
13	[G] Support a toxic leader because they will help me get more money.	-1.02	3	-0.225	5	-0.009	5
14	[G] Support a toxic leader because that will allow me to get ahead in my career without working harder.	-0.685	4	-1.125	2	-1.31	2
15	[LSIC] Support a toxic leader so that I don't have to express my emotions.	0.759	7	-0.491	4	-0.193	4
16	[MACH] Support a toxic leader because if I show any weakness at work, I will get taken advantage of.	0.55	5	-0.645	4	0.813	7
17	[MACH] Support a toxic leader because I like to have control within the workplace.	-0.608	5	-0.9	3	0.468	6
18	[MACH] Support a toxic leader because they can help me achieve a higher status.	-1.212	2	-1.172	2	0.228	5
19	[MACH] Support a toxic leader's unethical behaviors because it will help me succeed.	-1.61	1	-1.388	1	-1.424	2

20	[AS] Remain silent at work because my toxic leader is not open to proposals, concerns, or the like.	1.741	8	1.059	7	0.456	6
21	[AS] Remain silent at work because I will not find a sympathetic ear, anyway.	0.819	7	0.353	6	0.079	5
22	[AS] Remain silent at work because nothing will change, anyway.	1.869	9	0.947	7	1.673	8
23	[QS] Remain silent at work because of fear of negative consequences from my toxic leader.	2.155	9	0.266	6	1.743	9
24	[QS] Remain silent at work to not make me vulnerable in front of colleagues.	1.426	8	-0.138	5	-0.211	4
25	[QS] Suffer in silence when faced with a toxic leader because that's what is in my best interest.	1.341	8	-0.612	4	0.349	6
26	[PS] Remain silent when faced with a toxic leader because I do not want to embarrass others.	0.629	6	0.298	6	1.236	8
27	[PS] Remain silent when faced with a toxic leader because I do not want others to get in trouble.	0.697	6	0.174	6	1.765	9
28	[PS] Remain silent because if I speak up, this may reveal information that results in the organization's stability to suffer.	0.596	6	0.202	6	0.966	7
29	[OS] Remain silent in front of a toxic leader because of concerns that the toxic leader could take advantage of my ideas.	0.594	6	0.775	7	0.294	5
30	[OS] Remain silent in front of a toxic leader because I want to avoid additional work.	0.957	8	-0.42	4	0.78	7
31	[AV] Voice agreement with a toxic leader because disagreeing with them is pointless.	0.46	5	0.212	6	1.207	8
32	[AV] Voice agreement and go along with a toxic leader because I prefer to go with the status quo.	0.583	6	-0.102	5	0.308	6
33	[DV] Voice ideas that try to shift the toxic leader's attention to others because I am afraid of voicing my true concerns to a toxic leader.	-0.653	4	-0.589	4	0.702	7
34	[DV] Voice support for a toxic leader because I want to protect myself from the toxic leader.	-0.714	4	-0.232	5	0.123	5
35	[PV] Voice my concerns to a toxic leader about workplace issues because I want what's best for the organization.	-0.39	5	1.785	8	-0.003	5
36	[INTW] Voice my concerns about a toxic leader to upper management, even if that means suffering from reprisals because I want what's best for the organization.	-1.169	2	2.107	9	0.527	6
37	[EXTW] Voice my concerns about a toxic leader to an outside party (i.e., authorities, the media) who has the power to correct the toxic leader because I want what's best for the organization.	-0.735	3	2.146	9	-2.598	1

38	[FORW] Voice my concerns about a toxic leader because the organization has formal procedures in place for reporting a toxic leader.	-0.58	5	1.448	8	0.004	5
39	[INFW] Voice my concerns about a toxic leader with someone I trust within our organization who could advocate for me because I don’t feel safe expressing my concerns to someone else.	0.932	7	1.971	8	0.998	8
40	[IDEW] Publicly voice my concerns about a toxic leader because I feel safe reporting wrongdoing within my organization.	-1.329	2	1.344	8	-0.315	4
41	[ANOW] Anonymously voice my concerns about a toxic leader because I don’t feel safe reporting wrongdoing within my organization.	0.72	7	0.884	7	-0.051	4

APPENDIX I. DESCENDING ARRAY OF DIFFERENCES BETWEEN FACTOR 1 AND FACTOR 2

Item #	Statement	Factor 1	Factor 2	Difference
25	[QS] Suffer in silence when faced with a toxic leader because that's what is in my best interest.	1.341	-0.612	1.953
23	[QS] Remain silent at work because of fear of negative consequences from my toxic leader.	2.155	0.266	1.889
24	[QS] Remain silent at work to not make me vulnerable in front of colleagues.	1.426	-0.138	1.564
30	[OS] Remain silent in front of a toxic leader because I want to avoid additional work.	0.957	-0.42	1.377
4	[HPLD] Follow a toxic leader because I feel emotionally vulnerable.	0.59	-0.729	1.319
15	[LSIC] Support a toxic leader so that I don't have to express my emotions.	0.759	-0.491	1.25
16	[MACH] Support a toxic leader because if I show any weakness at work, I will get taken advantage of.	0.55	-0.645	1.195
22	[AS] Remain silent at work because nothing will change, anyway.	1.869	0.947	0.922
1	[LCSE] Follow a toxic leader because I have trouble handling most of the problems I face.	-0.432	-1.21	0.778
32	[AV] Voice agreement and go along with a toxic leader because I prefer to go with the status quo.	0.583	-0.102	0.685
3	[LCSE] Follow a toxic leader because I feel like my success in my career is outside of my control.	-0.696	-1.378	0.682
20	[AS] Remain silent at work because my toxic leader is not open to proposals, concerns, or the like.	1.741	1.059	0.682
27	[PS] Remain silent when faced with a toxic leader because I do not want others to get in trouble.	0.697	0.174	0.523
12	[G] Support a toxic leader because that allows for me to get ahead without contributing anything in return.	-0.805	-1.305	0.5
21	[AS] Remain silent at work because I will not find a sympathetic ear, anyway.	0.819	0.353	0.466
14	[G] Support a toxic leader because that will allow me to get ahead in my career without working harder.	-0.685	-1.125	0.44
28	[PS] Remain silent because if I speak up, this may reveal information that results in the organization's stability to suffer.	0.596	0.202	0.394

8	[UN] Follow a toxic leader because they provide feelings of acceptance.	-0.041	-0.383	0.342
26	[PS] Remain silent when faced with a toxic leader because I do not want to embarrass others.	0.629	0.298	0.331
17	[MACH] Support a toxic leader because I like to have control within the workplace.	-0.608	-0.9	0.292
11	[PA] Support a toxic leader because I want to advance in my career.	-0.62	-0.9	0.28
31	[AV] Voice agreement with a toxic leader because disagreeing with them is pointless.	0.46	0.212	0.248
9	[UN] Follow a toxic leader because I want to ensure financial stability for my practical needs to be met – such as shelter, food, and doctor's bills.	0.818	0.795	0.023
18	[MACH] Support a toxic leader because they can help me achieve a higher status.	-1.212	-1.172	-0.04
33	[DV] Voice ideas that try to shift the toxic leader's attention to others because I am afraid of voicing my true concerns to a toxic leader.	-0.653	-0.589	-0.064
41	[ANOW] Anonymously voice my concerns about a toxic leader because I don't feel safe reporting wrongdoing within my organization.	0.72	0.884	-0.164
29	[OS] Remain silent in front of a toxic leader because of concerns that the toxic leader could take advantage of my ideas.	0.594	0.775	-0.181
19	[MACH] Support a toxic leader's unethical behaviors because it will help me succeed.	-1.61	-1.388	-0.222
6	[LSCC] Follow a toxic leader because I don't have a clear sense of who I am and what I stand for as a person.	-0.818	-0.518	-0.3
5	[HPLD] Follow a toxic leader because that provides some stability in my life.	-0.67	-0.292	-0.378
2	[LCSE] Follow a toxic leader because I don't have control over the events in my life.	-1.034	-0.65	-0.384
10	[PA] Support a toxic leader because I want to be better than everyone else at what I do.	-1.462	-1.019	-0.443
34	[DV] Voice support for a toxic leader because I want to protect myself from the toxic leader.	-0.714	-0.232	-0.482
7	[UN] Follow a toxic leader because they provide me with some stability in life.	-0.956	-0.345	-0.611
13	[G] Support a toxic leader because they will help me get more money.	-1.02	-0.225	-0.795
39	[INFW] Voice my concerns about a toxic leader with someone I trust within our organization who could advocate for me because I don't feel safe expressing my concerns to someone else.	0.932	1.971	-1.039

38	[FORW] Voice my concerns about a toxic leader because the organization has formal procedures in place for reporting a toxic leader.	-0.58	1.448	-2.028
35	[PV] Voice my concerns to a toxic leader about workplace issues because I want what's best for the organization.	-0.39	1.785	-2.175
40	[IDEW] Publicly voice my concerns about a toxic leader because I feel safe reporting wrongdoing within my organization.	-1.329	1.344	-2.673
37	[EXTW] Voice my concerns about a toxic leader to an outside party (i.e., authorities, the media) who has the power to correct the toxic leader because I want what's best for the organization.	-0.735	2.146	-2.881
36	[INTW] Voice my concerns about a toxic leader to upper management, even if that means suffering from reprisals because I want what's best for the organization.	-1.169	2.107	-3.276

APPENDIX J. DESCENDING ARRAY OF DIFFERENCES BETWEEN FACTOR 1 AND FACTOR 3

Item #	Statement	Factor 1	Factor 3	Difference
37	[EXTW] Voice my concerns about a toxic leader to an outside party (i.e., authorities, the media) who has the power to correct the toxic leader because I want what's best for the organization.	-0.735	-2.598	1.863
24	[QS] Remain silent at work to not make me vulnerable in front of colleagues.	1.426	-0.211	1.637
4	[HPLD] Follow a toxic leader because I feel emotionally vulnerable.	0.59	-0.952	1.542
20	[AS] Remain silent at work because my toxic leader is not open to proposals, concerns, or the like.	1.741	0.456	1.285
1	[LCSE] Follow a toxic leader because I have trouble handling most of the problems I face.	-0.432	-1.685	1.253
25	[QS] Suffer in silence when faced with a toxic leader because that's what is in my best interest.	1.341	0.349	0.992
15	[LSIC] Support a toxic leader so that I don't have to express my emotions.	0.759	-0.193	0.952
6	[LSCC] Follow a toxic leader because I don't have a clear sense of who I am and what I stand for as a person.	-0.818	-1.758	0.94
41	[ANOW] Anonymously voice my concerns about a toxic leader because I don't feel safe reporting wrongdoing within my organization.	0.72	-0.051	0.771
21	[AS] Remain silent at work because I will not find a sympathetic ear, anyway.	0.819	0.079	0.74
12	[G] Support a toxic leader because that allows for me to get ahead without contributing anything in return.	-0.805	-1.54	0.735
14	[G] Support a toxic leader because that will allow me to get ahead in my career without working harder.	-0.685	-1.31	0.625
23	[QS] Remain silent at work because of fear of negative consequences from my toxic leader.	2.155	1.743	0.412
29	[OS] Remain silent in front of a toxic leader because of concerns that the toxic leader could take advantage of my ideas.	0.594	0.294	0.3
32	[AV] Voice agreement and go along with a toxic leader because I prefer to go with the status quo.	0.583	0.308	0.275
9	[UN] Follow a toxic leader because I want to ensure financial stability for my	0.818	0.594	0.224

	practical needs to be met – such as shelter, food, and doctor's bills.			
22	[AS] Remain silent at work because nothing will change, anyway.	1.869	1.673	0.196
8	[UN] Follow a toxic leader because they provide feelings of acceptance.	-0.041	-0.232	0.191
30	[OS] Remain silent in front of a toxic leader because I want to avoid additional work.	0.957	0.78	0.177
3	[LCSE] Follow a toxic leader because I feel like my success in my career is outside of my control.	-0.696	-0.85	0.154
2	[LCSE] Follow a toxic leader because I don't have control over the events in my life.	-1.034	-1.147	0.113
39	[INFW] Voice my concerns about a toxic leader with someone I trust within our organization who could advocate for me because I don't feel safe expressing my concerns to someone else.	0.932	0.998	-0.066
5	[HPLD] Follow a toxic leader because that provides some stability in my life.	-0.67	-0.501	-0.169
19	[MACH] Support a toxic leader's unethical behaviors because it will help me succeed.	-1.61	-1.424	-0.186
16	[MACH] Support a toxic leader because if I show any weakness at work, I will get taken advantage of.	0.55	0.813	-0.263
28	[PS] Remain silent because if I speak up, this may reveal information that results in the organization's stability to suffer.	0.596	0.966	-0.37
35	[PV] Voice my concerns to a toxic leader about workplace issues because I want what's best for the organization.	-0.39	-0.003	-0.387
11	[PA] Support a toxic leader because I want to advance in my career.	-0.62	-0.039	-0.581
38	[FORW] Voice my concerns about a toxic leader because the organization has formal procedures in place for reporting a toxic leader.	-0.58	0.004	-0.584
26	[PS] Remain silent when faced with a toxic leader because I do not want to embarrass others.	0.629	1.236	-0.607
10	[PA] Support a toxic leader because I want to be better than everyone else at what I do.	-1.462	-0.791	-0.671
31	[AV] Voice agreement with a toxic leader because disagreeing with them is pointless.	0.46	1.207	-0.747
34	[DV] Voice support for a toxic leader because I want to protect myself from the toxic leader.	-0.714	0.123	-0.837
13	[G] Support a toxic leader because they will help me get more money.	-1.02	-0.009	-1.011

40	[IDEW] Publicly voice my concerns about a toxic leader because I feel safe reporting wrongdoing within my organization.	-1.329	-0.315	-1.014
27	[PS] Remain silent when faced with a toxic leader because I do not want others to get in trouble.	0.697	1.765	-1.068
17	[MACH] Support a toxic leader because I like to have control within the workplace.	-0.608	0.468	-1.076
7	[UN] Follow a toxic leader because they provide me with some stability in life.	-0.956	0.296	-1.252
33	[DV] Voice ideas that try to shift the toxic leader's attention to others because I am afraid of voicing my true concerns to a toxic leader.	-0.653	0.702	-1.355
18	[MACH] Support a toxic leader because they can help me achieve a higher status.	-1.212	0.228	-1.44
36	[INTW] Voice my concerns about a toxic leader to upper management, even if that means suffering from reprisals because I want what's best for the organization.	-1.169	0.527	-1.696

APPENDIX K. DESCENDING ARRAY OF DIFFERENCES BETWEEN FACTOR 2 AND FACTOR 3

Item #	Statement	Factor 2	Factor 3	Difference
37	[EXTW] Voice my concerns about a toxic leader to an outside party (i.e., authorities, the media) who has the power to correct the toxic leader because I want what's best for the organization.	2.146	-2.598	4.744
35	[PV] Voice my concerns to a toxic leader about workplace issues because I want what's best for the organization.	1.785	-0.003	1.788
40	[IDEW] Publicly voice my concerns about a toxic leader because I feel safe reporting wrongdoing within my organization.	1.344	-0.315	1.659
36	[INTW] Voice my concerns about a toxic leader to upper management, even if that means suffering from reprisals because I want what's best for the organization.	2.107	0.527	1.58
38	[FORW] Voice my concerns about a toxic leader because the organization has formal procedures in place for reporting a toxic leader.	1.448	0.004	1.444
6	[LSCC] Follow a toxic leader because I don't have a clear sense of who I am and what I stand for as a person.	-0.518	-1.758	1.24
39	[INFW] Voice my concerns about a toxic leader with someone I trust within our organization who could advocate for me because I don't feel safe expressing my concerns to someone else.	1.971	0.998	0.973
41	[ANOW] Anonymously voice my concerns about a toxic leader because I don't feel safe reporting wrongdoing within my organization.	0.884	-0.051	0.935
20	[AS] Remain silent at work because my toxic leader is not open to proposals, concerns, or the like.	1.059	0.456	0.603
2	[LCSE] Follow a toxic leader because I don't have control over the events in my life.	-0.65	-1.147	0.497
29	[OS] Remain silent in front of a toxic leader because of concerns that the toxic leader could take advantage of my ideas.	0.775	0.294	0.481
1	[LCSE] Follow a toxic leader because I have trouble handling most of the problems I face.	-1.21	-1.685	0.475
21	[AS] Remain silent at work because I will not find a sympathetic ear, anyway.	0.353	0.079	0.274

12	[G] Support a toxic leader because that allows for me to get ahead without contributing anything in return.	-1.305	-1.54	0.235
4	[HPLD] Follow a toxic leader because I feel emotionally vulnerable.	-0.729	-0.952	0.223
5	[HPLD] Follow a toxic leader because that provides some stability in my life.	-0.292	-0.501	0.209
9	[UN] Follow a toxic leader because I want to ensure financial stability for my practical needs to be met – such as shelter, food, and doctor's bills.	0.795	0.594	0.201
14	[G] Support a toxic leader because that will allow me to get ahead in my career without working harder.	-1.125	-1.31	0.185
24	[QS] Remain silent at work to not make me vulnerable in front of colleagues.	-0.138	-0.211	0.073
19	[MACH] Support a toxic leader's unethical behaviors because it will help me succeed.	-1.388	-1.424	0.036
8	[UN] Follow a toxic leader because they provide feelings of acceptance.	-0.383	-0.232	-0.151
13	[G] Support a toxic leader because they will help me get more money.	-0.225	-0.009	-0.216
10	[PA] Support a toxic leader because I want to be better than everyone else at what I do.	-1.019	-0.791	-0.228
15	[LSIC] Support a toxic leader so that I don't have to express my emotions.	-0.491	-0.193	-0.298
34	[DV] Voice support for a toxic leader because I want to protect myself from the toxic leader.	-0.232	0.123	-0.355
32	[AV] Voice agreement and go along with a toxic leader because I prefer to go with the status quo.	-0.102	0.308	-0.41
3	[LCSE] Follow a toxic leader because I feel like my success in my career is outside of my control.	-1.378	-0.85	-0.528
7	[UN] Follow a toxic leader because they provide me with some stability in life.	-0.345	0.296	-0.641
22	[AS] Remain silent at work because nothing will change, anyway.	0.947	1.673	-0.726
28	[PS] Remain silent because if I speak up, this may reveal information that results in the organization's stability to suffer.	0.202	0.966	-0.764
11	[PA] Support a toxic leader because I want to advance in my career.	-0.9	-0.039	-0.861
26	[PS] Remain silent when faced with a toxic leader because I do not want to embarrass others.	0.298	1.236	-0.938
25	[QS] Suffer in silence when faced with a toxic leader because that's what is in my best interest.	-0.612	0.349	-0.961
31	[AV] Voice agreement with a toxic leader because disagreeing with them is pointless.	0.212	1.207	-0.995

30	[OS] Remain silent in front of a toxic leader because I want to avoid additional work.	-0.42	0.78	-1.2
33	[DV] Voice ideas that try to shift the toxic leader's attention to others because I am afraid of voicing my true concerns to a toxic leader.	-0.589	0.702	-1.291
17	[MACH] Support a toxic leader because I like to have control within the workplace.	-0.9	0.468	-1.368
18	[MACH] Support a toxic leader because they can help me achieve a higher status.	-1.172	0.228	-1.4
16	[MACH] Support a toxic leader because if I show any weakness at work, I will get taken advantage of.	-0.645	0.813	-1.458
23	[QS] Remain silent at work because of fear of negative consequences from my toxic leader.	0.266	1.743	-1.477
27	[PS] Remain silent when faced with a toxic leader because I do not want others to get in trouble.	0.174	1.765	-1.591