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A Phenomenological Analysis of Military Personnel's Experiences of Toxic Leadership

Nikeisha Sewell Johnson
Walden University

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Walden University

College of Social and Behavioral Sciences

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Nikeisha S. Johnson

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Walden University
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Abstract

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by

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MS, Walden University, 2016

MS, California Coast University, 2014

BS, Park University, 2010

AS, Park University, 2010

Dissertation Submitted in Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

Clinical Psychology

Walden University

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Abstract

The existing quantitative literature on toxic leadership in the military has primarily explored negative outcomes, gendered military experience, and toxic leadership separately; however, relatively few studies have included all 3. The unidentified connection was critical in determining how toxic leadership varied and left a gap for further research to be conducted from a qualitative, phenomenological perspective. Therefore, this study addressed the manner in which encounters with toxic leadership differed across gender and military rank according to those experiencing it. Using a convenience sampling method, data were gathered through semi structured interviews with 12 Army veterans. Thematic analysis of the data revealed 63 meaningful statements and 3 emergent themes. Results affirmed that for both men and women, the higher the rank the more exposure to toxic leadership they encountered. Results also introduced race as a key factor for both genders because it was reported as the leading cause of participants' toxic encounters across rank and gender. The findings of this study also suggested that females were more susceptible to negative mental health outcomes after toxic leadership exposure versus their male counterparts. The results of this study contribute to positive social change by providing a thorough understanding of the qualities characteristic of experiences with toxic leadership to clarify the specific ways in which toxic leadership leads to negative outcomes. Results from this study will be useful for practitioners, military officials, and researchers seeking to better understand the leadership needs of contemporary military personnel.

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Dedication

I would like to first dedicate this accomplishment back to God because I know without a doubt that this would not have been possible without him. I am most grateful for his unfailing strength and unwavering faithfulness to me as his child. At moments when I felt I could not go on the scripture God would always place in my heart was; “the race is not given to the swift nor the strong but the one who endures until the end” (Ecclesiastes 9:11). At other times I would hear him say, “To whom much is given much is required” (Luke 12:48). Trusting him throughout this process was the key to my success and is the key to every other step that I shall soon take to fulfill the purpose in which God has set before me.

I would also like to dedicate this accomplishment to my wonderful husband, our two daughters, my parents, my siblings, my grandmother, and every Soldier in and out of the uniform. Especially, my brother, Sergeant (retired) Emanuel Sewell, who is now my Angel.

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Chapter 1: Introduction

Introduction

The military is an inherently stressful profession, which makes its negative outcomes mark the complex intersection of many different types of military experiences. Military personnel's description of the experiences associated with toxic leadership requires a thorough exploration of encounters with it and, ultimately, enquiry into the specific ways in which toxic leadership may contribute to negative physical, psychological, and reintegrative conditions. The existing literature on this topic has specifically emphasized the effects of military deployment and, in some cases, toxic leadership on women. As a result of the unique effects of stress on military personnel, thorough qualitative exploration of the relationship between toxic leadership and its negative outcomes requires the consideration of many different demographic and circumstantial variables (Demers, 2013). The female experiences of sexual harassment and assault from military peers and leaders as well as studies concerning the effects of leadership on women in the military clearly depict that gender serves as a strong variable which can be used to analyze the ways different experiences with toxic leadership lead to negative outcomes among different people (LeardMann, Pietrucha, Magruder & Smith, 2013; Segal, Smith, Segal, & Canuso, 2016). Currently, the extant literature lacks information on the nature of toxic leadership, the way it influences women differently from men, and further, the way this influence varies depending on the rank of the person experiencing it.

Background

Given the intersectional nature of this topic, existing literature primarily concerns negative military outcomes, gendered military experience, *or* toxic leadership and relatively little research has been conducted that directly concerns all three. Therefore, in the background section of this study, I will provide an introduction to toxic leadership, the relationship between the toxic leadership and negative outcomes, and the relevance of gender by discussing the literature available on these topics.

Toxic Leadership

Toxic leadership is a style of leadership characterized by, “1. An apparent lack of concern for the well-being of subordinates; 2. A personality or interpersonal technique that negatively affects organizational climate; 3. A conviction by subordinates that the leader is motivated primarily by self-interest” (Reed, 2004, p. 67). Studies have indicated that toxic leadership can exist in any organization; in the context of military service, it can also have critical effects such as negative job outcomes (Bullis, 2009). Researchers have found that a correlation exists between toxic leadership and negative job outcomes among military personnel, including job satisfaction, work group productivity, organizational trust, work engagement, and organizational commitment (Gallus, Walsh, van Driel, Gouge, & Antolic, 2013; Reed & Bullis, 2009; Schmidt, 2011). In addition to negative job outcomes, Steele (2011) reported that toxic leadership in the military can also create toxic relationships among peers, in which military personnel mirror the toxic behaviors of their superiors.

Mehta and Maheshwari (2014) attempted to explore the theoretical framework of toxic leadership and, more specifically, trace the origin of toxic behavior. However, Reed (2004) was the first to conduct an in-depth study of toxic leadership in the military services, in which the author defined toxic leadership, explained the role that toxic leaders played in the military, and suggested ways to combat toxic leadership. Since then, Reed has remained at the forefront of the discourse concerning toxic leadership in the military and has even contributed to the discourse surrounding toxic leadership in general. Reed and Olsen (2010) revisited the critical points from Reed's study in a follow-up article and presented new insights based on the contemporary developments in toxic leadership in the time between the two articles. Further, Reed and Bullis (2009) studied toxic leadership in the military and emphasized its negative effects on the military personnel, concluding that people who had experienced toxic leadership were overall less satisfied with the job. Similarly, Gallus et al. (2013) found that encounters with toxic leadership could result in toxic relationships between peers, lower job satisfaction, and lower organizational commitment among service members. Elle (2012) also proposed an in-depth, multidimensional strategy for combating toxic leadership in the army.

Toxic Leadership and Negative Military Outcomes

Toxic leadership and negative outcomes have been explored by many researchers but not from the perspective of the military. Steele (2011) reviewed the antecedents and outcomes of toxic leadership within the U.S. Army for 2 years and found that 1 in every 5 personnel had negative perceptions of their leaders; the majority believed that their leaders exhibited toxic behaviors. The findings of the study also suggested that toxic

leadership had a negative impact on turnover intention, which reduced the morale of the military personnel. This not only lead to negative outcomes for the military personnel, but also resulted in severe negative outcomes for the others correlated to them. Steele also stated that there is a paucity of literature that has investigated the impact of toxic leadership on women. Schmidt (2014) also found that practices of toxic leadership are associated with job satisfaction, work group productivity, organizational trust, and organizational commitment, which are further related to negative military outcomes. In the most recent and explicitly conclusive study, Johansen and Platek (2017) discovered that destructive leadership explains the negative outcomes, such as early career burnout syndrome and health concerns.

In their study, Larsson, Johansson, Jansson, and Grönlund (2001) established that leadership under severe stress is characterized by a combination of everyday leadership activities, characteristics of the leader, and characteristics of the organization. According to their study, the stress experienced under toxic leadership in a combat, which is an integral component of military service, can have negative effects on soldiers. Though I did not emphasize the component of stress in this study, its implications support the claim for toxic leadership's lasting effects on military personnel.

Gender

Currently, the extant literature lacks research that examines the role played by gender in the relationship between toxic leadership and negative military outcomes. The literature on the gendered experience of military personnel provided a theoretical framework through which I analyzed the data in this study. For instance, the unequal rate

at which women in the military experience sexual assault and harassment was taken into consideration while interviewing the female participants who reported their experiences with toxic leadership (see LeardMann et al., 2013). Variations in the way participants of different genders have been treated by their superiors may coincide with certain toxic behaviors; therefore, gendered inequalities or differences that exist independent of toxic leadership may play an important role in the way experiences with toxic leadership contribute to adverse military outcomes. Further, other relevant findings include the ways that female soldiers respond to leadership along with emphasis on the role played by leadership in their military experience (Segal et al., 2016) and the effects of stress on women reintegrating into society (Demers, 2013; Mohammed, 2012).

A myriad of research indicates that military service is a gendered experience, and the results of the studies concerning the effects of leadership and stress on women's health outcomes are similar. Demers (2013) performed a qualitative investigation of the challenges faced by female veterans while reestablishing a place in the society following the time spent in combat and demonstrated that higher levels of relational distress experienced during the time devoted to military life lead to greater difficulties while incorporating into the society along with increased familial and societal alienation for women. LeardMann et al. (2013) found that toxic leadership was significantly related to higher rates of sexual stressors in female soldiers. The results of recent studies have shown that leadership is particularly important for females in combat and can mitigate problems faced by women owing to lack of support (Segal et al., 2016). Many scholars have argued that these effects are not because of the ways in which women inherently

experience military service, but rather a consequence of sexism and toxic leadership that are a fundamental part of military culture (Branam Lee et al., 2014; Egnell, 2013; Hunter, 2007). In this study, I analyzed the intersection between sexism in the military, which is either condoned, ignored, or enforced by military leaders, and the concept of toxic leadership.

Problem Statement

In any professional field, or generally in any sector of work, production is contingent largely on the active engagement of the laborers employed. The organizations in different sectors, such as private, state, and public, go to great lengths in a similar manner to ensure the relative well-being of their employees. In the military, the degree of an individual's involvement in the work assigned or the lack of sufficient intentness is evident in their lives. Despite the gravity of this assertion, researchers have indicated that military personnel develop a wide range of adverse psychological conditions, including burnout syndrome that is engendered not only by combat, but also by their experiences and relationships within the military (Mohammad, 2012). More specifically, researchers have found a correlation between toxic leadership and negative military outcomes (Johansen, 2017; Schmidt, 2014; Steele, 2011), but little research has been devoted to the characteristic qualities of that relationship. Furthermore, the existing literature is concerned primarily with negative military outcomes, gendered military experience, or toxic leadership; however, relatively little research has been conducted which directly includes all the three. For an armed force that is both effective and ethical, there is a requirement for definitive measures to ensure that the military personnel are not subjected

to toxic leadership. To achieve the aim of this study, it was essential for me to develop a comprehensive and credible model of toxic leadership in the military that incorporated insights from detailed accounts of victims' experiences with toxicity.

Purpose

The purpose of this study was to develop a more comprehensive understanding of the qualities characteristic of experiences with toxic leadership to elucidate the specific ways that toxic leadership induces negative effects on military personnel. Furthermore, my focus was to analyze the manner in which the experiences with toxic leadership vary across gender. I analyzed the particular variables that significantly affect the character of toxic leadership and also the extent of its negative effects. I fulfilled the purpose of this study by studying the detailed descriptions of soldiers' actual experiences with toxic leadership based on their perspectives, including the experiences that occurred, how frequently they occurred, what was said or done, how participants responded, how they felt, how they coped with their experiences, their reasons for not reenlisting, etc. Participants were asked to define toxic leadership in their own terms, their answers were considered alongside the term's clinical definition and how it is defined by the military. Results from this study will be useful for practitioners, military officials, and researchers seeking to better understand the leadership needs of contemporary military personnel. Findings from this study can be used to help officials adjust their leadership policies and strategies in order to avoid the adverse outcomes that may occur as a result of toxic leadership as a preventative measure and to develop policies for swiftly and effectively dealing with toxic leadership events as a reactive measure.

Research Questions

I developed the following questions to guide this study:

RQ1: How does the experience of toxic leadership in the military differ across gender?

RQ2: How does the experience of toxic leadership differ depending on the rank of those experiencing it?

Framework

The theoretical foundation of this study was drawn from a model suggested in the existing literature, known as the toxic leadership triangle. The toxic leadership triangle is a model of toxic leadership that describes three factors that form the foundation of the toxic leadership style and the outcomes of those exposed to it. The three factors are destructive leaders, susceptible followers, and conducive environments (Padilla, Hogan, & Kaiser, 2007). Padilla et al., (2009) explored the factors of toxic leadership using the toxic leadership triangle and found that toxic leaders are described as narcissistic, autocratic, intimidating, and manipulative rather than competitive and discriminatory in nature. The authors also reported that the individual serving under the leadership of a toxic leader is a susceptible follower known as a conformer or colluder. Padilla et al. also stated that a conducive environment is a setting that has questionable values and standards, instability, and absence of governance.

The model of the toxic leadership triangle works by adopting a qualitative research design that aims to describe and depict a novel research phenomenon. The model helped me explore the theoretical aspect of the relationship between toxic

leadership and negative outcomes. Toxic leadership manifests itself, at least in part, through negative military outcomes; therefore, I measured negative outcomes as an indicator of having experienced toxic leadership. Gender was an important intervening variable in this theory because the role of gender has not been explored in this context. In the model, emphasis is placed on the experiential aspects of soldiers' exposure to toxic leadership, which ideally yielded practical solutions to components like the effects of this type of leadership and ways in which it can be prevented. This model was appropriate for this study because it explains the correlation existing between toxic leadership and negative outcome. Using the model as a base, I was able to answer the research questions and analyze the participants' interview responses.

Nature of the Study

This study contributes to the discourse in the field as the first study to offer a characteristically qualitative account of toxic leadership and negative outcomes, analyzed in the context of toxic leadership, gender, and rank. The study contributes in various ways to the individual bodies of literature concerning toxic leadership and negative military outcomes. My emphasis on the way gender affects the relationship between toxic leadership and negative military outcomes in the study offers dimension to the discourse surrounding toxic leadership and negative outcomes, gender and toxic leadership, and gender and negative military outcomes, which also adds to the literature on gender equality.

In this study, I asked participants a series of semi structured interview questions to encourage them to provide a descriptive personal narration of their experiences with toxic

leadership and relationships in the military. The Toxic Leadership Triangle Model used in this study to address the research questions was associated with the problem statement because it allowed for the collection of a large body of primary data from an expert population group who had experienced the phenomena in question. In the study, I used the coding of responses to identify the themes related to the actual experiences of soldiers with toxic leadership, its definition, and gender differences.

I explored and analyzed the concept of toxic leadership, toxic relationships, and the ways in which soldiers experienced it through phenomenological interpretation in this study. This process included gathering data through an individual interview of each participant, in which I asked a set of semi structured and open-ended questions pertaining to the topic of interest. This research paradigm has an idiographic focus, which was used to generate insight from individuals with specific experience regarding the phenomenon (see Smith, 2015). I used the phenomenological design to explore the concept of toxic leadership, its relationship to negative military effects, and gendered differences among those exposed to it. Following the interviews, transcripts of the interviews were developed, and the responses were coded based on the frequency of phrases or responses and the indication of a theoretically distinct concept. The codes were then used to identify overarching themes representing distinct dimensions of experiences with toxic leadership (see Glaser & Strauss, 2009).

Definitions

Army Field Manual 6-22: A leadership manual that provides a doctrinal methodology for Army leaders to build cohesiveness in the organization and offers

professional development for leaders in all ranks including military and civilian (Army Field Manual, 2015).

Army leadership: According to the Army's *Field Manual 6-22 (2015)*, leadership is the ability to influence others through purpose, direction, and motivation to ensure accomplishment of the organization's mission.

Burnout: According to Freudenberger (1970), burnout is a state of physical, mental, and emotional exhaustion caused by an overwhelming amount of stress experienced over a period of time.

Colluder: Someone who is typically ambitious, deprived of values, and imitates the behavior of the toxic leader, that is, he or she typically begins to respond and react similar to the exposed behavior (Padilla et. al., 2007).

Conformer: A susceptible follower is an individual who lacks confidence, authority, and a sense of belongingness. The individual typically conforms to the behavior of the toxic leader (Padilla et. al., 2007).

Conducive environment: An environment that a toxic leader seeks to create in order to thrive; an environment that has questionable values and standards, instability, and absence of governance (Padilla et. al., 2007).

Susceptible follower: This individual is either a colluder or conformer in the toxic triangle (Padilla et. al., 2007).

Toxic leadership: The Army's *Doctrine Publication 6-22 (2012)* defined toxic leadership as a combination of egotistical attitudes, enthusiasms, and actions that particularly lead to negative outcomes for the subordinates, the leadership as a whole, and

accomplishment of the mission. The toxic leaders exhibit concern for no individual besides themselves and function with an exaggerated sense of self-worth. This form of leadership displays dysfunctional behaviors of manipulation, bullying, terrorizing or unethically reprimanding others for personal gain.

Assumptions

Initially, I assumed that the soldiers participating in the study would have experienced toxic leadership based on the definition of the Army and would be able to fully articulate their experiences. The soldiers' toxic encounters with their leadership were determined and validated during the initial discussion. My second assumption was that each participant would affirm the manner in which toxic leadership varied across gender. Another assumption was that participants would affirm their experiences of toxic leadership depending on their rank and the outcome. Lastly, I assumed that the soldiers being interviewed would have the liberty to share their stories in a way that would bring awareness to the issue and would offer recommendations for identifying and controlling the progress of toxic leadership.

Scope and Delimitations

This study included 12 Army veterans, both male and female. The data were developed through the collection of participant responses through a semi structured interview. The participants selected for this study ranged from the rank of staff sergeant to major and were of different ages. I selected participants based on their military status from among the discharged soldiers who responded to the flyer posted by a retired military connect and founder of a veteran association on the organization's website. The

participants interviewed served in the Army and reported their experiences of the toxic leadership they encountered during their time of service. Based on each participant's response to the flyer, I sent an official e-mail thanking them for their willingness to participate in the study. The e-mail precisely defined confidentiality, termination of rights if they chose to withdraw, and the possible risks and benefits of the study. After receiving consent from each participant to proceed, I assigned each participant a color (e.g., Participant Blue) as a means to maintain confidentiality throughout the study. The color code assisted in ensuring their safety and anonymity. This phase of the process was followed by the interviews. I conducted an in-depth interview with each participant via phone, and the interviews ranged from 45 minutes to 1 hour in length. The interviews were recorded and then transcribed verbatim.

I analyzed the data collected from the interview responses according to a process of interpretive phenomenological analysis. In the next step, I read each transcript for overall meaning and then began the process of coding the data using open codes, based on frequency of phrases or responses, or the indication of theoretically relevant concepts. These codes were then used to identify the overarching themes representing distinct dimensions of experiences with toxic leadership. I also compared the data across the two genders to analyze the general differences in mainly three aspects: the nature of the experience, recurrent themes, and trends in responses.

Limitations

One of the potential limitations of this study was the small sample size that consisted of 12 participants. The participants were identified based on their response to

the flyer posted on a veteran association website. The flyer was posted by a retired military contact who is also the founder of the organization. Another limitation was the geographical barriers of the participants. Each participant was located in multiple states in the west, east, and southern regions of the United States; therefore, planning a time to conduct the interviews did create challenges for some due to the time zone differences. Lastly, this study failed to represent the entire Army because I only included individuals in a discharged status in the rank of staff sergeant or above.

Significance

Though minimal research had been conducted examining the role played by gender in the relationship between toxic leadership and rank, the existing literature regarding gendered differences in the experience of the military provided me with a theoretical framework from which to analyze the data in this study on the grounds of gender. For example, the unequal rate at which women in the military experience sexual assault and harassment was taken into consideration when female participants report their experiences with toxic leadership (LeardMann et al., 2013). Gendered differences in the way that participants have been treated by their superiors in leadership may potentially coincide with certain toxic behaviors; therefore, gender inequalities or differences that exist independent of toxic leadership played an important role in the ways that military personnel experience toxic leadership and rank affects the individuals. More specifically, this study is significant because there is a lack of qualitative research on the relationship between toxic leadership, gender differences, and rank, which would otherwise allow us

to understand these aspects and, consequently, prevent this leadership or mitigate its effects.

The results of this study addressed the gap in the literature by generating insights from participants with specific experience in this area. Detailed reports of experiences with toxic leadership across gender and participants' attitudes towards their experiences with toxic leadership created a map of the participants' actual experiences, beginning at a toxic leadership experience of soldiers in the ranks of staff sergeant to major and ending with gendered differences. Interviews of the Army personnel regarding their experiences with leadership generated themes that categorized and summarized these responses. Through the presentation of these themes, I created a conceptual model of experiences with toxic leadership in the military that will be useful for future research and also for predicting how the personnel will react to the authority of leaders in the military. Researchers have increasingly found that psychosocial well-being is an important predictor of military success, and this well-being is largely obstructed by the styles of leadership to which the military personnel are exposed each day (Bullis, 2009).

Chapter Summary

The results of this interpretive phenomenological study of 12 Army personnel of both genders bring awareness to and further assist in determining how the experiences of toxic leadership in the military vary across gender and rank. The acquired information contributes to reducing the gap in the literature and in determining the impact of toxic leadership on soldiers employed in the Army. The results of this research also initiate positive social change by allowing the unspoken toxins in the Army instigated by toxic

leadership to be identified and acknowledged in an effort to control the ongoing phenomenon in a better way. The results serve as a voice for the unspoken soldiers in the Army that still have not been heard. Additionally, the results serve as a guide for further exploration of toxicity through the experiences of each participant. In Chapter 2, I will provide an in-depth review of literature on toxic leadership in the army, while Chapter 3 will include a discussion of the methodology adopted for this study. In Chapters 4 and 5, I will conclude the study by presenting the data analysis, results, limitations, and recommendations for future research.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

Chapter Introduction

In any professional field, the effects of toxic leadership can be overwhelming. Toxic leaders have an outstanding capacity to inhibit the organization's potential for success by damaging an organization's reputation with the public and creating toxic environments in which strong, effective leaders and employees become fatigued (Mohammad, 2012). In the military, performance and morale may constitute the difference between life and death; furthermore, the effects of toxic environments can be measured in human lives. Despite the significance of these assertions, some researchers have indicated that military personnel develop a wide range of adverse psychological conditions, including burnout syndrome that is engendered not only by the combat but also by their experiences and relationships within the military (Mohammad, 2012). More specifically, research has indicated a correlation between toxic leadership and negative military outcomes (Johansen & Platek, 2017; Schmidt, 2014; Steele, 2011); however, there is a lack of research that is devoted to the characteristic qualities of this relationship.

Similarly, a myriad of research has been conducted on the gendered military experience, but only a few researchers have explicitly studied toxic leadership. In context of the ways that the phenomenon of toxic leadership coincides with oppressive power structures, it can be asserted that gender represents a strong variable by which toxic leadership is experienced in the military and the manner that toxic encounters contribute to adverse military outcomes can be characterized. In this study, I collected interview data from military personnel concerning their experiences with toxic leadership. I

analyzed these data to create a map of the participants' lived experiences and generate themes that categorized and summarized these responses, ultimately developing a conceptual model of experiences with toxic leadership.

In the second chapter, I will explore the strategies I took to locate and review the literature regarding toxic leadership, negative military outcomes, and gender. Then, the theoretical foundation and conceptual framework of the study will be explained. Finally, I will provide an exhaustive review on the current literature concerning toxic leadership, negative military outcomes, and gendered military experience, both independently and within the context of the ways in which these phenomenon intersect.

Literature Search Strategy

I collected the literature used to frame this study from a variety of databases and search engines. The study was originally designed to develop a qualitative model for the relationship between toxic leadership and early career burnout syndrome (BOS) in military personnel. Therefore, my initial searches were made in Google Scholar, Elsevier, and Sage Journals.

The strategy I employed included the collection of the maximum amount of information available on the relationship between toxic leadership, BOS, and gendered military to effectively identify the gap in the literature. I planned on conducting research on each phenomenon independently to build a sound, comprehensive foundation for this study. My search results indicated that the lack of enquiry into the relationship between the three concerned aspects was less of a gap and more of a complete absence. The extent of the research conducted on the intersection of these phenomenon was limited to the

identification of a statistically significant positive correlation between experiences with toxic leadership and BOS (Johansen & Platek, 2017; Mohammed, 2012). Eventually, after conducting further literature searches and review, I shifted the emphasis of the study from BOS to negative military outcomes for the following reasons: (a) the highly specific and relatively small bodies of literature concerning either toxic leadership in the military or BOS in the military were rarely intersected; (b) the highly specific nature of each phenomena made it difficult to direct the study towards one or the other; and (c) the few useful sources that did address the relationship between toxic leadership and BOS along with many that did not, included a myriad of useful information concerning negative military outcomes, though in a general context.

Once I narrowed the focus of the study, I employed the same search strategy as before that included collecting as much information as possible on the relationship between toxic leadership and negative military outcomes, toxic leadership and soldiers in military, women and negative military outcomes, and toxic leadership and negative military outcome men. The process included collecting the most relevant sources and exploring their reference pages for more valuable sources on the relationships between the phenomena, rather than varying the search terms. The next step included searching each phenomena independently using primarily Google Scholar, Walden Dissertations, Psyc INFO, Psyc ARTICLES, and the Walden University Library. The keyword search terms used were *toxic leadership*, *effects of military deployment*, and *gendered military experience*. The other search terms were *gender differences*, *female soldier transitions*, *toxic leadership theories*, *colluder*, *susceptible follower*, *conformer*, *toxic environment*,

toxic leader attributes, toxic leader attitude, command climate, characteristics of a toxic leader, destructive leader, toxic leadership models, toxicity in the ranks, toxic leadership difference across rank, bullying in the Army, bad leader, bad bosses, abusive leadership, culture of a toxic organization, fear of toxic leadership, fear of the outcome of toxic leadership, and toxic leadership triangle model.

Conceptual Framework

Padilla et al. (2007) explored the factors of toxic leadership in the toxic triangle and further described the characteristics of a toxic leader as narcissistic, autocratic, intimidating, manipulative, over competitive, and discriminatory in nature. Those who follow the leadership of the toxic leader are considered susceptible followers, characterized in two categories known as conformer or colluder, as I described in Figure 1 and earlier in Chapter 1. Padilla, et al. described the conformer as willing to follow the toxic leader without question, while a colluder is someone who sees potential opportunities that could benefit him or her. Conformers particularly suffer from low self-esteem and unmet needs, with meager faith in their own ability. Conformers are seen as more vulnerable than the colluder because they need reassurance and a sense of belongingness in order to be accepted. The colluders, on the other hand, are the total opposite and share the same values as the toxic leader. They are ambitious and seek to promote themselves over time through their personal association with the toxic leader (Padilla et al., (2007). In the third category of the triangle, Padilla et al. described the conducive environment for a toxic leader as dysfunctional; it is an environment that lacks

governance and the behavior of a toxic leader goes unnoticed by the individuals holding the position of leaders. A toxic leader can comfortably thrive in this environment.



Figure 1: Toxic Leadership Triangle Model

In this study, I explored the theoretical relationship between toxic leadership and negative conditions. Toxic leadership manifests itself, at least in part, through negative military conditions; therefore, negative conditions can be considered as an indicator of having experienced toxic leadership. Gender was also an important intervening variable because the role of gender had not been fully researched in the presented context until now. The meaning that the participants brought to their experiences played a critical part of the relationship shared by the three variables. Therefore, the theoretical framework for this study greatly reflected theories with behavioral, social, and cognitive categorizations.

I drew this framework from a qualitative research design, in which the aim was to describe and depict the novel research phenomenon. Emphasis was placed on the experiential aspects of soldiers' exposure to toxic leadership, which yielded practical

solutions to components like the effects of this type of leadership and ways in which it can be prevented. These findings offered the basis for a conceptual and predictive model of toxic leadership in the military.

Toxic Leadership

Characteristics of Toxic Leaders

The primary phenomenon that I studied was toxic leadership, a term that was coined by Whicker (1996) to describe the leaders who are driven more by ego and self-centeredness than by organizational prosperity and integrity. Toxic leaders often misuse and even abuse their power for personal gain, while ignoring or, at the very least, undermining shared goals (Padilla et al, 2007). The leading theorists evade assigning toxic leadership a specific definition, rather it is categorized by the behaviors and types of toxic leaders. While acknowledging the difficulty of developing a functional definition, Lipman-Blumen (2005) defined toxic leaders as “individuals who, by virtue of their destructive behaviors 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). Kellerman (2007) identified seven characteristics of toxic leadership: incompetence, rigidity, lack of self-control, callousness, corruption, insularity, and evil. Price (2006) extended the discourse on toxic leadership by arguing that toxic leaders generally believe their toxic behavior is justified in the environment they function in; in other words, unlike their contemporaries the toxic leaders do not recognize the toxicity of their behavior or their leadership styles. The leading theorists on toxic leadership, Whicker, Lipman-Blumen, Kellerman and Price have developed a

comprehensive framework for toxic leadership and analyzed the ways that it affects organizations and their employees.

Characteristics of toxic leadership in the military. Fortunately, a relatively large body of literature exists in specific relation to toxic leadership in the military, dominated by retired Army Colonel, George E. Reed. Since then, Reed has remained at the forefront of discourse concerning toxic leadership in the military and has even contributed to the discourse surrounding toxic leadership in general. In a follow-up article, Reed and Olsen (2010) revisited key points from Reed's 2004 article and expanded on them based on contemporary developments from research conducted on toxic leadership in the time between the two articles. Reed and Bullis (2009) emphasized the negative effects of toxic leadership in the military on personnel, finding—among other things—that people who experienced toxic leadership were overall less satisfied with their job.

Effects of Toxic Leadership

By nature, toxic leadership can exist in any organization. Research has indicated that toxic leadership can have both direct and indirect effects on employee performance and organizational efficacy (Green, 2014). Schyns and Schilling (2013) conducted a meta-analysis of existing literature on the characteristics and severity of the effects of toxic leadership, finding that this type of leadership is universally associated with poor productivity and increased level of leader resistance. More specifically, they found that on one hand toxic leadership is negatively correlated with employee well-being and employee performance, and on the other hand, it is positively related with turnover intention and counterproductive work behavior. The methodology adopted by Schyns and

Schilling is valuable because they were able to identify consistent trends in the relationship between toxic leadership and employee performance across 57 studies with different methodologies and nuanced conceptions of what constitutes destructive (toxic) leadership.

Effects of toxic leadership in the military. Several scholars have followed in the footsteps of Reed and associates and have researched toxic leadership and its effects in and out of the military. Steele (2011) conducted a 2-year review of the antecedents and outcomes of toxic leadership within the U.S. Army, finding that 1 in every 5 personnel had negative perceptions of their leaders, and the majority felt their leaders exhibited toxic behaviors. Steele also found that toxic leadership negatively impacted turnover intention and reduced morale, which are associated with negative outcomes but also correlated with other, more severe negative outcomes. Schmidt (2014) found that experiences with toxic leadership correlated with job satisfaction, work group productivity, organizational trust, and organizational commitment—all of which are associated with and are, in themselves, negative military outcomes. In the most recent and explicitly conclusive study, Johansen and Platek (2017) found that destructive leadership significantly explained for the variance in negative outcomes, such as BOS. The studies I reviewed are significant because they benefited this study by establishing correlation between toxic leadership and negative military outcomes, creating a context in which a more qualitative representation of that relationship becomes valuable.

As mentioned previously, the studies conducted on the effects of toxic leadership are framed within a military context. In his book, *Tarnished: Toxic Leadership in the US*

Military, Reed (2015) used a cross reference of both empirical research and theory to explore comprehensively, the effects of toxic military leadership. He concluded that toxic leadership is correlated with several negative military conditions, such as burnout, attrition, reduction in satisfaction of employees and retaliation against leaders via poor motivation, poor work ethic or insubordination. Reed (2015) further argued that leaders must be cognizant of the impact, their behaviors and leadership styles had on a diverse population of military personnel, which is now increasingly female; he also made recommendations to mitigate such behavior. His primary recommendation is the 360 degree assessment tool. As stated by Reed (2015), toxic behavior is often disguised by the toxic leader through manipulation, susceptible followers and the environment; but the recently developed tool, such as 360 degree assessment tool, helps to identify the actual leaders. It has also been acknowledged in his study that the military should conduct a more thorough observation of the leadership development process, evaluation and promotion systems, and conditions of the environment to implement strategies that would assist in an improved control over toxic leadership behaviors across the ranks and gender.

Conditions in a Toxic Leadership Environment

Gallus et al. (2013) found that experiences with toxic leadership can lead to toxic relationships between peers, lower job satisfaction, and lower organizational commitment among service members. In their study, using the Defense Equal Opportunity Management Institute's Organizational Climate Survey, they analyzed responses accounted during the survey in order to assess experiences with toxic leadership; they evaluated the experience by first assessing whether and to what degree, the participants'

leader exhibited officially toxic behaviors and, then, by measuring the participants' degree of job satisfaction, organizational commitment, etc. (Gallus et al., 2013). The authors then measured these responses against the presence and extremity of their leaders' toxic behaviors, identifying the correlation between them. This particular methodology was not only strong in its sample size, but also particularly in its use of multilevel examination, relying on individual accounts of leader behavior, and assessing the reliability of individual accounts by grouping responses of participants who were in the same unit with the same leaders (Gallus et al., 2013).

Indradevi (2016) also conducted a study of toxic leadership, its causes, and its effects. Among other things, Indradevi found that toxic behaviors are inherently human; the author argued through the results that work environments prompt leaders toward toxicity all by saying that human beings as leaders in positions of power, are inclined towards this type of behavior. This argument supports Vreja, Bălan and Bosca's (2016) evolutionary perspective of toxic leadership. Human beings, inherently driven by natural selection toward power and status, become corrupted in work environments that allow or encourage toxic behaviors. Indradevi (2016) also found that, even outside the military, toxic leadership is associated with the negative physiological and psychological effects on employees. These negative outcomes include high blood pressure, high cholesterol, and muscle tension, and irritability, anxiety, and memory loss, respectively. The difficulty in identifying and removing toxic leaders concerns the fact that "organizations with toxicity may appear normal from outside, but have a serious problem inside" (Indradevi, 2016, p. 108). It can also be argued that to an extent toxic leadership, types of

which include common negative qualities such as manipulative, intimidating, and discriminatory (Yapp, 2016), is simply the application of toxic behaviors which are basically a part of the society and culture in positions of organizational power. In this context, toxic leadership is difficult to combat because it is constituted by ordinary people who are ordinarily behaving in egregious manner.

In order to thoroughly understand how experiences with toxic leadership affect military personnel's vulnerability to negative military outcomes, it is valuable to explore the negative outcomes in their own right; this included analyzing the difference between short-term and long term negative outcomes, and what is generally understood to back such consequences. As the people in military encounter vastly complex nexus of stressors, there is an equally vast range of potential negative outcomes that vary in nature and severity. A significant fact emphasized by studies exploring the effects of toxic leadership is that many of the negative job outcomes refer to more short-term effects such as, job satisfaction, productivity, etc., while many of the more commonly discussed negative outcomes for soldiers tend to refer to more severe, long-term effects such as, post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), difficulty re-entering society, etc.

Hosek, Kavanagh & Miller (2006) set out to examine the stress and benefits involved with military deployment by using several focus groups including a total of 324 people. The participants reported they faced a number of challenges, including difficulty readjusting and reintegrating into society, being separated from their families, and more generally, physical challenges and exposure to danger, among others (Hosek, Kavanagh & Miller, 2006). They further discussed in their study that though these impacts are by no

means the most extreme among the various impacts faced by the people in military, they often contributed to a soldier's decision not to re-enlist; this is a reflection of job satisfaction. Similarly, Burrell, Adams, Durand and Castro (2006) analyzed 346 questionnaire responses of military members, concluding that military deployment was negatively correlated with job satisfaction, marital satisfaction, and lastly, physical and psychological well-being. While both studies explore specific stressors inherent of military service and their relationships to the outcomes discussed therein, the primary relevance of the results concerns the relatively short-term effects that military service can have without the additional stress of toxic leadership.

Most of the existing literature regarding negative military outcomes concerns health behaviors and mental health. Pietrzak, Pullman, Cotea, and Nasveld (2013) found that exposure to the combat instigated increased drinking habits, smoking, obesity, and among women, disordered eating. These results suggest that the stress of combat significantly encouraged poor health behaviors, an ultimately long-term effect that further lead to negative health outcomes. Several studies emphasize the psychological effects of military deployment and, specifically, combat. These studies conclude that deployment and/or combat are associated with post-traumatic stress disorder, major depression, and common mental disorder (Pietrzak, Pullman, Cotea, & Nasveld, 2012; Kline et al., 2010; Harvey et al., 2012). Although no evidence conclusively indicates that toxic leadership is connected to some of the more extreme negative outcomes, it is important for the present study to understand the effects of military experiences which inevitably coincide with toxic leadership; thus, a clearer image of the ways in which all types of military

experiences interact to produce different outcomes for people in military is created. All of the aforementioned studies analyzed responses gathered from the survey conducted on people in service, comparing the scores of negative outcomes against those who never deployed, those who did, those who enlisted multiple times, and those who had witnessed the combat.

Toxic leadership is one of many stressors that contribute to negative military outcomes. It was critical for the present study to address some of the stressors that coincide with toxic leadership experiences. Watkins (2014) explores prominent military stressors, emphasizing a lack of unit cohesion, harassment, demanding workload, difficult living situation, killing and war atrocities. According to Watkins, harassment falls within the category of toxic. Further, Burrell, et al., (2006) while exploring the effects of deployment on job satisfaction, marital satisfaction, physical and psychological well-being, pay specific attention to the effects of perceived risk of injury or death, frequent relocations, periodic separations, and foreign residence. Hosek et al. (2006) emphasize the effects of workload, pace of work, physical challenges, exposure to danger, and operational tempo. While many of these stressors overlap, the list represents some of the many challenges faced by people in military that potentially leads to varying negative outcomes as well as a negative depiction of the Army culture. Being that all soldiers upon entering the military are expected to maintain discipline, to be accountable for their own actions and maintain self-control at all times, the absence of the listed expectations not only opens the door for toxic behavior to occur but it also dilutes the overall military morale and culture (Understanding the Military: The Institution, the Culture, and the

People, 2010). While the research conducted by (Johansen & Platek, 2017; Schmidt, 2014; Steele, 2011; Vugt & Ahuja, 2011; Fitzpatrick, 2000; Hunter & Sawyer, 2011; Padilla, Hogan., & Kaiser, 2007; Gottschalk, 2014) have all identified the diminished morale and culture of the environment caused by toxic leadership, a research is yet to be conducted on how the encounters actually impact the individuals exposed to it and how the encounters vary across rank and gender in the military. The need to determine the answer to how based on the experiences of the soldiers in a qualitative approach, further supported the need for the current study. The study based on the shared experiences of those exposed to it, would manifest a change within the culture of the military as well as bring awareness to the silent but deadly toxin within the ranks.

The Role of Culture in Toxic Leadership

In the past years, studies have shown that it can be extremely hard to change the culture in a mature organization however, Gerras, Wong and Allen (2008) present suggestions to bring changes in a hybrid model such as; the researcher used this research as a base for the present study and further contribute to it. The researcher then applied Cameron and Quinn's competing values framework, Schein's organizational culture model, the Hofstede model and the Global Leadership and Organizational Behavior Effectiveness Research Program (GLOBE) to assess Army culture in order to bring a change in it. The competing values framework uses two dimensions, including flexibility/discretion vs. control/stability, internal maintenance and integration vs. external positioning and differentiation, to assess "what members value about an organization's performance and the army's position within the context of it" (Gerras,

Wong & Allen, 2008, p. 3). Schein's organizational model attributes three levels to culture: artifacts, norms and values, and underlying assumptions—which Gerras, Wong and Allen (2008) argue is largely ignored in the Army's application of Schein's model. According to Gerras, Wong and Allen (2008), the Hofstede model can be used to assess the army's position across power distance, collectivism versus individualism, femininity versus masculinity, and uncertainty avoidance; they further say that the GLOBE study uses nine dimensions to qualify culture. In their study, Gerras, Wong & Allen use the GLOBE study as their framework, wherein they suggest using Schein's embedding and reinforcing techniques to change the army's underlying assumptions, using competing values model for supplementary analysis.

Overall, although, the three models listed above are not a part of the selected framework, each of them play an integral role in description of military culture in Gerras, Wong and Allen's study the connection between toxic leadership, gender differences and rank is determined. These models contribute to the presented study in two ways; firstly, each model helps to further define the environment described in the toxic leadership triangle and the role played by it for the soldiers; secondly, the listed models helped in determining the implications of toxic behavior and the manner in which it differs across genders and its associated characteristics. These implications as described by Gerras, Wong & Allen (2008) differ from male to female due to the societal norms and stereotypes. The overall implications that are identified have been described and defined in the next section.

Implications of Toxic Leadership

The overall implications of toxic leadership in any organization can be damaging, as described by Vugt & Ahuja, (2011). Several references to the studies related to implications and consequences of toxic leadership in general, have concluded that toxic leadership has lasting effects on not only the individuals exposed to it but also on the organization (Vugt & Ahuja, 2011; Fitzpatrick, 2000; Hunter & Sawyer, 2011; Padilla, Hogan., & Kaiser, 2007; Gottschalk, 2014). Some of the implications and consequences described by the listed references are:

1. Depression and decreased interest in performing at their full potential
2. Employees may begin to feel high stress that could result in job burn-out,
3. Experience low morale depending upon the type of follower they are
4. Lack of effective communication
5. Team leads will intentionally diminish the reputation of the organization
6. Employees will begin to feel unappreciated and dread going to work
7. The trust will be broken between the organization and the employee
8. Employees will eventually seek employment elsewhere

The consequences described above are best summarized by Kusy and Holloway (2009), who say that the negative behaviors displayed by toxic leaders encourage negative reactions of those exposed to it; however, the negative reactions feeds the toxic leader's ego. Feeding the toxic behavior of the leader by responding negatively to negative consequences causes the toxic leader to feel validated or justified in their negative behavior. These implications hold true for any organization but are only the tip

of the iceberg for the military, due to male dominance of the organization, with a 10:1 ratio of males to females in the military (Army Demographics, 2015). This section has looked at the literature regarding toxic leadership in general. The next section turns to the specific implications in the military to provide some of the consequences of toxic leadership encounters and how the experiences vary across rank and gender.

Specific Implications in the Military Ranks

Padilla et al. (2007) stated that toxic leaders are primarily in positions that have minimal supervision, if any at all. These positions place them in primary roles of leadership as supervisors, such as commanders, 1st Sergeants, officers in charge, and non-commission officers in charge in the ranks of Master Sergeant and above. The level of power given in these positions make it easier for toxic leaders to thrive undetected for a period of time but causes severe implications that often harm the individual soldier as well as the command as a whole (Steele, 2011; Padilla et al., 2009). Steele (2011), in a two-year study conducted on the consequences of toxic leadership in the U.S. Army, found that toxic leadership encounters can lead to very detrimental outcomes, such as death by suicide, severe stress, career burnout, and in some cases early release from the military. Padilla (2007), Steele (2011), and Sutton (2007) determined that the overall outcome of toxic leadership is poisonous and damages morale, enthusiasm, and the culture of the organization across ranks by disseminating their venom and by being overly controlling, as they create an environment in which they can thrive comfortably.

The Role of Gender in Military Experience

Gender and Toxic Leadership

Overall, little research has been dedicated to examining the role played by gender in toxic leadership and negative experiences in general. As stated by Padilla et al. (2007), toxic leadership requires followers to follow as they lead but the values of the leader and followers must be congruent. Avolio et al. (2004) further expounded on the incongruence of the leader and followers, concluding that a leader must negotiate and/or persuade followers to achieve a greater reception. Moreover, to further support these findings, Eagly, Makhijani, and Klonsky (1992) conducted a meta-analysis on the overall devaluation of females in leadership roles in the workplace as compared to males in similar roles and also, bad leadership encounters. This meta-analysis conducted by Eagly et al, concluded that males assumed the majority of leadership roles, they asserted that women suffered and endured negative leadership effects as well as diminished outcomes when made to perform more masculine roles. Additionally, Eagly et al, explained the manner in which gender affects leader effectiveness by using strategies to win followers within the organization. Some of the strategies presented include manipulation, intimidation, overly competitiveness, and discrimination towards those following their lead (Eagly et al., 1992). Moreover, Feingold (1994) and Jaffee and Hyde (2000) suggested that men have a greater tolerance level and are more accepting than women in unethical business practices such as toxic leadership behaviors. A major finding by Feingold and Jaffee and Hyde is that the unethical business practices typically lead to

high stress levels, suicide, decreased desire to go to work, restricted communication, and further other negative effects due to the negative encounters.

Generally, toxic leadership places unfair and unnecessary pressure on those exposed to it. Aubrey (2012) explored the effects of toxic behaviors, providing a perspective that becomes particularly relevant when introducing gender into the context of toxic leadership,—emphasizing the role of organizational culture and the ways in which it may allow and even promote toxic leadership. Aubrey adopted Reed’s theoretical approach without conducting an actual study, by drawing conclusions based on existing literature within the context of his own military experience. Aubrey argued that a more abstract effect of toxic leadership is that it damages an organization’s culture; the organization’s too-common failure to address and combat toxic leadership inadvertently then, absorbs toxic behaviors into its own fundamental values, norms, and behaviors, which encourages future instances of toxic leadership (Aubrey, 2012). This claim is further supported by Gallus et al.’s (2013) conclusion that toxic leadership is correlated with toxic relationships between subordinates. Military personnel mirror the destructive behaviors of their toxic leaders, in turn corrupting military culture and normalizing toxic behaviors. Aubrey’s argument also supports Padilla et al toxic triangle model (see introduction).

As stated previously, there is a lack of research examining the role that gender plays in the relationship between toxic leadership and negative military outcomes. For example, Steele (2011) noted that a paucity of literature has investigated the impacts of toxic leadership on women. However, existing literature regarding gendered differences

in the experience of military provides a theoretical framework by which the present study considered how to analyze data by gender. For example, the unequal rate at which women in military experience sexual assault and harassment (LeardMann et al, 2013; Jackson, Lindsay, and Matteson, 2013; Williams and Bernstein, 2011; Osborne, Gage and Rolbiecki, 2012) was taken into consideration when female participants reported their experiences with toxic leadership. Gendered differences in the way participants have been treated by their superiors coincided with certain toxic behaviors. Therefore, gender inequalities or differences that exist independently of toxic leadership played an important role in the ways that experiences with toxic leadership contribute to adverse military outcomes. Other relevant findings concerned the ways in which female soldiers respond to leadership and the role it plays in their military experience. For example, Segal et al (2016) explain that sexism displayed by leaders, varying from subtle forms of sexism to overt misogyny can have significant negative effects on the performance and well-being of women in the military. While the intersection between sexism and toxic leadership is ambiguous, these results framed the context in which the researcher analyzed participants' experiences with toxic leadership.

A myriad of research indicates that military service is a gendered experience; the results are no different concerning leadership and stress and women's health outcomes. Demers (2013) performed a qualitative investigation of the challenges female veterans face reintegrating into society following combat experience, which demonstrated that higher levels of relational distress experienced in military life lead to greater difficulties integrating into society and higher levels of familial and societal alienation for women.

LeardMann et al. (2013) found that women who deployed and saw combat saw significantly higher rates of sexual stressors. Many scholars argue that these effects are not due to the ways in which women inherently experience military service, but rather due to sexism as fundamentally a part of military culture (Branam Lee et al., 2014; Egnell, 2013; Hunter, 2007; Holley, 2017). This study sought, in part, to analyze the intersection between sexism in the military—which is either condoned, ignored, or enforced by military leaders—and the concept of toxic leadership.

Some studies have been devoted to analyzing some of the negative military outcomes discussed above and how they differ in male and female military personnel. One study found that, while gender itself did not explain greater post-deployment PTSD or other mental illness symptoms, these elevated symptoms were explained by relatively gendered factors such as prior interpersonal victimization and pre-deployment concerns about life and family disruptions (Polusny et al., 2014). Another found that women *did* have a higher risk for post deployment PTSD (Crum-Cianflone & Jacobson, 2014). A third study conducted by Vogt et al. (2011) determined that gender did not have a significant effect on the relationship between combat related stressors and post deployment mental health, while Adler, Huffman, Bliese and Castro (2005) found that deployment duration was more strongly associated with post deployment mental health for man than it was for women. Although the first two studies emphasize the relationship between gender and post-deployment mental health more directly and the latter two slightly more complex analyzes the relationship between gender, combat stressors or deployment length, and post deployment mental health, the conflicting conclusions of

each highlights the lack of consensus regarding how exactly gender relates to post-deployment mental health.

As militaries continue to move towards full gender inclusion (Woodruff & Kelty, 2017), research concerning women in military is growing in popularity. In 2011, Bean-Mayberry et al., identified the need for more focused, well-conducted research into women veterans' mental health. The historical context of women in society and, consequently, women in the military creates a context in which toxic leadership may also be considered from a sociological framework. Winslow (2010) explores women in military in great detail from a sociological perspective. Winslow begins by addressing gender and sociology, exploring briefly sexism and its role in society; gender specifically within the context of the military is also discussed. Recounting a history of female integration into the military, Winslow contextualizes military as a social institution, adjacent to gender. In this sense, she demonstrates the logic of sexism in the military. While she does not discuss toxic leadership directly, the ways in which she discusses military culture recalls Branam Lee et al.'s (2014) arguments—offering parallels between toxic military leadership and sexism in the military, allowing us to examine the ways in which they intersect and, consequently, the ways in which women experience toxic leadership. Finally, Winslow argues against gender mainstreaming, which assimilates military women into the expectations of their traditionally male counterparts. This practice, in itself, may be considered toxic leadership, as it places unfair and unnecessary pressure on women in military to embrace their role in ways that do not accommodate their needs.

While the studies conducted by Bean-Mayberry et al. (2011), Winslow (2010), Branam Lee et al. (2014) brought exposure to toxic leadership, gender difference, and military leadership, the need for further exploration is still necessary. A more recent study conducted by Segal (2016) identified the manner in which sexism displayed by leadership, varied from indirect or elusive to unconcealed or obvious. The study further discussed the significantly negative effects of the identified behavior on women in the military, their well-being and performance, however, questions of the connection between toxic leadership, gender differences, and rank still remain. While each variable explored the topics separately, the connection and relation between the three- toxic leadership, gender differences, and military leadership was not explored. This unidentified connection was critical in determining how toxic leadership varied and left a gap for further research to be conducted as well as provide a basis for this study. An even more relevant study conducted by Demers (2013) and Mohammand (2012) investigated female veterans and the difficulties faced by them while integrating in the society after the experiencing rational distress from leadership but the question still remains which further supports the need for this study. The closest, however, is a grounded theory study which consisted of interviewing 16 Scandinavian military officers whose responses were used to develop a theoretical model for leadership under severe stress (Larsson et al., 2001). They concluded that leadership under severe stress is characterized by a combination of everyday leadership, characteristics of the leader, and the characteristics of the organization. Since combat constitutes a severe-stress experience and is a relatively integral component of military service, their findings suggest that toxic leadership can

have negative effects on soldiers during the battle (Larsson et al., 2001). While this context is not as heavily emphasized in this study, its implications support the claim for toxic leadership's lasting effects on military personnel. Furthermore, its methodology successfully applied, bears the closest resemblance to the methodology adopted for the present study, than any research discussed till now.

Methodology of the Studies Surveyed

Some researchers have been devoted to combatting toxic leadership in the military, relevant here in its extrapolation of data that highlights and, to some degree, describes the iniquitousness of toxic military culture, while also representing the mode of discourse to which the present study is designed to contribute. For example, Elle (2012) cites Reed, explaining that "Virtually every student surveyed during their project indicated they had served under a toxic leader sometime during their career" (p. 4), and argues that the most fundamental step in combatting the viral spread of toxic leadership is identifying the toxic leaders. Elle also emphasizes the value of identifying the origins of toxic behaviors, to proactively prevent toxic leadership by arguing that self-awareness is a strong indicator of anti-toxic behaviors. This claim is supported by Sewell (2009), who emphasizes emotional intelligence, which is closely associated with self-awareness.

Using a variety of methodologies, researchers have been able to identify many effects of toxic leadership, in and out of military environment. The studies mentioned above used relatively large sample sizes and well documented procedures which included numerous credible resources including, primarily surveys. The most commonly adopted methodologies either utilized Likert scales, assessing toxic leadership experiences against

conditions like job satisfaction, BOS, productivity, etc., here referred to as ‘negative military outcomes’, or literature reviews based on a myriad of empirical studies. Thus, it is evident that toxic leadership in the military leads to negative military outcomes.

The studies discussed here with respect to their own research goals, are all credible, strong, and statistically significant. As these studies are primarily quantitative, the discourse surrounding the effects of toxic leadership lack a descriptive model for how toxic leadership contributes to negative military outcomes. In other words, existing literature adequately reaches its own goals, but its goals do not explore the phenomenon of toxic leadership thoroughly. This study contributed to the idea that descriptive model is necessary to prevent and mitigate the effects of toxic leadership by utilizing a phenomenological approach, drawing from military personnel’s experience with toxic leadership, and their experiences and feelings associated with their own negative military outcomes,.

Chapter Summary and Conclusions

Military service is an inherently stressful profession. Soldiers, especially those in a deployment experience a massive variety of circumstances every day which may ultimately lead to short-term and long-term negative outcomes. Some of these outcomes include early career burnout syndrome, low job satisfaction, lasting psychological damage, difficulty reintegrating into society, and many more that are varying in degrees of severity. While many military personnel might aptly be expected to endure many horrors of the war and the experiences associated with it, they should not be expected to endure toxic interactions and relationships with their own leaders. The existing literature

thus, affirms that toxic leadership is not only present in the military, but quite prevalence. Furthermore, research consistently indicates that experiences with this kind of leadership contributes to the negative military outcomes expressed above. The moment gender is introduced in this context, it is found that female military personnel face a variety of challenges and threats, often from their own leadership which in contrast is not faced by their male counterparts.

Together, existing literature confidently concludes that toxic leadership is prevalent in the military and that it is positively correlated with negative military outcomes. It is known that these outcomes range from personnel's perception of the military and work ethic therein to lasting, psychologically damaging effects. Given the parallels between toxic leadership and oppressive power imbalance studied in different, often sociological contexts, it can be hypothesized that women experience toxic leadership more often, more severely, and characteristically differently than their male counterparts. However, the conclusion was not sure if this was the case. Further, how exactly experiences with toxic leadership manifest as negative military outcomes is also not known.

The present study addressed these gaps in the literature by compiling qualitative accounts of experiences with toxic leadership from retired military personnel who exhibited negative military outcomes. Participants provided detailed accounts of their experiences with toxic leadership, the transformation of their military experience since the occurrence(s) (or lack thereof), and the thoughts and feelings associated with their negative military outcomes. Participants was asked to draw connections between their

experience and their outcomes, which was compared with our analyses, which consisted of trends identified across numerous participant responses. Responses were contrasted by gender, with specific attention to the variance in toxic leadership behaviors that were experienced and the frequency with which they were experienced. This methodology and style of analysis allowed me to create a descriptive model for how experiences with toxic leadership can lead to negative military outcomes and what other factors are relevant—representing the first qualitative, descriptive exploration into the effects of toxic leadership in the military based on the foundation of literature which established negative military outcomes as a subcategory of those effects.

Chapter 3: Research Method

Introduction

The purpose of this study was to develop a more thorough understanding of the qualities characteristic of experiences with toxic leadership to clarify the specific ways that toxic leadership leads to negative effects. In this chapter, I will provide an overview of the methodology I adopted to conduct this study. First, the research design and rationale will be discussed, followed by a description of the role of the researcher. The methodology will then be presented, which will include a discussion of ethical procedures and data analysis.

Research Design and Rationale

Research Questions

I developed the following research questions to guide this study:

RQ1: How does the experience of toxic leadership in the military differ across gender?

RQ2: How does the experience of toxic leadership differ depending on the rank of those experiencing it?

The two research questions were derived from a myriad of studies conducted on the topics of toxic leadership, gender differences, and rank separately but failed to identify the connection between the three based on the experiences of those exposed to it. The central concept of this study was grounded in the toxic leadership triangle model that I described in chapter 2. The toxic leadership triangle helps to describe the impact of toxic leadership, not only on the organization, but on the individuals exposed to it. The model

supported this study by providing the dynamic relationship between the toxic leaders, the susceptible followers (i.e., colluders and conformers), and the environment created to house this behavior. The toxic triangle model puts a face to toxic leadership, the culture, the victims, and the environment. The results of this study offer what previous studies have not, which is the connection between toxic leadership and how it varied across gender and rank. The toxic leadership triangle model helped to present the connection between the three variables to fill the gap in the literature by answering the research questions through the experiences of those exposed to toxic leadership and determining the variance across gender and rank.

Research Tradition

The research tradition that was adopted in this study was qualitative in nature. Specifically, I used an interpretive phenomenological analysis to describe and categorize the experiences of military personnel with toxic leadership and the other concepts under study. Data collected from a series of semi structured interviews was transcribed and then coded to generate themes and sub themes pertaining to the concept of toxic leadership within the military. I presented and annotated the results to provide new insights into the manner that military personnel experienced toxic leadership.

The reason I chose this research tradition was because there was a lack of previous research on the subject of toxic leadership in the military. Qualitative research is beneficial when previous research on a phenomenon of interest is insufficient, and an inductive strategy is needed to generate new knowledge (Smith, 2015). Through interpretive phenomenological analysis, I described and grouped data on the current

research topic according to central and frequently occurring themes that increased insight into how individuals experience the phenomenon of toxic leadership in the military (see Smith, 2015).

Role of the Researcher

My role as the researcher in this study was as of observer-participant. I performed both the roles of collecting the data and observing the phenomenon of interest. I also engaged with participants and guided the semi structured interviews with the military personnel. There were no personal and/or professional relationships that were identified between me and the participants that would have resulted in power imbalances.

As a qualitative investigation that depended heavily on my interpretations, there are several sources of bias that impacted the outcome of this study (see Taylor, Bogdan, & DeVault, 2015). First, there was a selection bias because the 12 participants that I recruited to begin this study were obtained through nonrandom sampling (see Taylor et al., 2015). Secondly, there were performance biases because of the fact that the participants were made aware of the purpose and scope of the study, which may have impacted some of their responses to the interview questions (see Taylor et al., 2015). These assumptions produced expectancy effects on the part of the researcher (see Taylor et al., 2015). To manage any biases or power imbalances that could have impacted the results of this study, I protected the anonymity and confidentiality of participants and no personally revealing information was used to match participants with their data at any point in the study.

This assurance of confidentiality increased the likelihood that participants responded authentically and truthfully to questions that were presented. Additionally, I used an interview guide to structure all of the interviews. This was intended to improve the consistency and reliability of participant responses. No other steps were taken to eliminate other sources of bias or potential power relationships. I believed there to be no additional ethical concerns that required consideration in this investigation.

Methodology

Participant Selection Logic

The sample that I selected for this study included Army personnel with the rank of staff sergeant or higher. Participants consisted of 12 retired, chaptered, and estimated term of service (ETS) Army soldiers, including males and females of various ages and ethnicities. Participants were recruited through the use of a flyer posted on a veteran organization website by a retired military connect and founder of the veterans association. Though this sampling strategy lended itself to several potential sources of bias, it was deemed appropriate due to the qualitative nature of this study and the need to ensure that participants matched the inclusion criteria for the investigation (see Taylor et al., 2015).

Participants met the inclusion criteria based on my knowledge as the researcher of their involvement in the Army veteran association, staff rank, and availability. I recruited a total of 12 former military soldiers. No explicit rationale was provided for the amount of respondents elected, except for the fact that I believed this number to be a manageable

number of datasets for me to evaluate and also ensured that sufficiently rich and diverse data were obtained from the semi structured interviews.

As I described in Chapter 1, participants had served in the Army in the ranks of staff sergeants to major and had been exposed to toxic leadership while serving. Each participant was first contacted via e-mail after expressing their interest through their response to the posted flyer. The call expressed appreciation for their interest in participating and provided each volunteer with what to expect next in an e-mail detailing the guidelines of the study. After having been given the opportunity to review a debriefing of the scope of the study and their rights as human participants, each recruited participant was provided a consent form to take part in the investigation. Once the consent form was completed and returned back to me, I scheduled semi structured interviews with each participant at a particular time that was convenient for both the participant and me.

Data saturation was an important aspect that required consideration in this qualitative study (see Taylor et al., 2015). Qualitative analyses typically require smaller sample sizes to achieve saturation of the data and artificial skewing toward particular themes or trends (Smith, 2015). For phenomenological analyses, such as this investigation, previous literature had suggested that a desirable number of participants in order to achieve saturation is between 5 and 25 (Morse, 1994). Therefore, the 12 former Army soldiers that were identified for this study was believed to be an acceptable number to yield sufficient data to generate themes and meaningful statements pertaining to the present phenomenon, while also achieving data saturation.

Ethical Procedures

Participant consent (consent letter). After gaining Institutional Review Board approval and receiving an IRB approval number 05-18-18-0378996 to conduct the study each participant was required to complete a consent form. According to Taylor et al., informed consent plays a critical role in any study because it protects the participants and helps to ensure the ethical guidelines are maintained. It is also a key element in ensuring that the research conducted is in compliance with the Institutional Review Board (IRB). Subsequently, each participant was required to complete a consent form before participating. The consent form was a brief summary of the purpose and intent of the present study as well as the data collection method to be used, along with any other information associated to the study. I e-mailed the consent form to each participant prior to the interview date. The form was reviewed by the participant prior to the interview process telephonically, and a signature was required on the consent form as well as the date and time. I generated this form using Walden University guidelines and the outline provided.

Compensation. I informed participants that there was no monetary compensation for participating in this study. Participants were informed of the value of their participation as social change agents. I confirmed the participants' awareness of that they were not being compensated before the interview process began to ensure that this was communicated clearly to each participant.

Confidentiality. Confidentiality is also an important part of the study because the researcher has an obligation to protect the privacy of the participants (Creswell, 2013).

Therefore, each participant received a color by which they were identified during the interview process and throughout the period of the research. This strategy ensured that each participant's identity was kept confidential.

Data Collection Procedures

Methods. After receiving consent from each participant to proceed, I assigned each participant a color (e.g., Participant Blue) as a means to maintain confidentiality throughout the study. The color code helped to ensure the participants' safety and anonymity. After I completed this phase of the process, I then called each participant to verbally introduce the study and show gratitude for their participation. During the call, my initial screening process determined if the participant understood what was expected and also the meaning of toxic leadership as described in the definition provided in Chapter 1. Once participants confirmed their understanding of the meaning of toxic leadership and their exposure to it, I scheduled interviews with the participants. Each participant and I agreed on a date and time that worked best for the us; the participants also determined if the interview would be face-to-face or conducted over Skype and were provided with the protocol questionnaire.

Prior to the interview date, I required participants to complete a data collection form and review the termination and confidentiality rights, which were e-mailed to the participant and returned back to me before the scheduled time of the interview, if not already completed. In the e-mail, I precisely defined confidentiality, their ability to terminate their participation in the study at any time if they should so chose to do so, and the possible risks and benefits. I then began the interview process by reviewing the data

collection sheet with the participant to ensure that no changes occurred. Next, I conducted an in-depth interview with each participant individually via phone which lasted from 45 minutes to an hour. Each interview was recorded and transcribed verbatim. Additionally, prior to the interview, I provided each participant with contact information for veteran services to assist with any negative responses or reactions towards their encounters during the interview process.

Interview protocol. I conducted in-depth interviews with each participant individually via phone using both an open-ended questioning method and tell me your story method. I produced the questions to guide the participant. The two methods allowed the participants to narrate their story in their own words and describe their personal experiences. This strategy also helped provide answers to the two research questions guiding the study. To ensure that the participant's experience was fully captured and documented, I audio recorded and transcribed the interviews.

Transcription. After the data was collected through these interviews, the interviews were transcribed verbatim. The interview data was analyzed according to a process of interpretive phenomenological analysis. I read each transcript for overall meaning, then began a process of coding the data based on frequency of phrases or responses or the indication of theoretically relevant concepts. Data was coded using open codes with NVivo software. These codes were then used to identify overarching themes representing distinct dimensions of experiences with toxic leadership. Data was compared across the genders to analyze the general differences in the nature of their experiences and also between the recurrent themes and trends recorded in the responses.

Member Checking

According to Creswell (2013) member checking was used to validate the researcher's results and interpretation of data with the participants. Member checking was used throughout the study to help ensure that the researcher correctly captured the participant's contributions and to ensure that the researcher transcribed correctly based on the information received. I confirmed the participant's story by restating during the interview process and by summarizing the participants input at the end of the call to ensure accuracy. This ensured that the participant's contribution was captured in the manner which they intended.

Research Trustworthiness

To ensure reliability and validity I took an extensive notes and maintained a reflexive journal to refer to during this process. According to Creswell (2013), there are some primary differences in conducting qualitative research. Creswell describes the researcher as the primary instrument in a qualitative research. Since the researcher is the instrument and does not use instruments, it was imperative for me to establish credibility, transferability, confirmability and dependability to help ensure the reliability of the research. The way in which I established reliability of this study was by using a reflective journal and notes as described below. Further, ensuring that any and all bias were identified so that the researcher is not jeopardized is also the role of the researcher. In the effort to ensure that biases are controlled, I conducted peer debriefing. The benefit of utilizing peer debriefing and member checking is that it brought awareness of any biases identified in within me. This helped me to remain as open as possible and avoid any

habitual thinking that could have hindered the results of the study being conducted (Creswell, 2013).

Reflective journal and notes. As stated by Creswell (2013), the researcher can organize the thoughts, impressions, and ideas efficiently by documenting reflective notes. This allowed transparency and also served as a guide for me while writing the findings. This journal served as my personal research diary and played an integral role in the completion of the writing process as the findings were concluded.

Participant comments. This process consisted of me contacting the participants via phone about the experience of the participant, which provided the participant the opportunity to express their experience of the interview process. During this call I also asked the participants to offer some suggestions from their point of view on ways to mitigate toxic leadership within the ranks. The feedback provided by the participants was used in Chapter 5, to assist me in determining recommendations for future research. The call also was used for me to express appreciation and conclude the study process.

Triangulation. To capture the true phenomenon Creswell (2009) recommends more than one method should be utilized to fully capture the phenomenon and gather a better understanding as well as assist the researcher in determining the consistency of the research being conducted. To further ensure the credibility of the research conducted, I the researcher used observation, interview guide, protocol, and the interviews. This approach assisted the researcher in mapping out and fully explaining the behavior described in this study from multiple views (Cohen & Manion, 2000). Triangulation also validated the research through cross verification of the data collected as well as minimize

any possible inadequacies found in a single source of data by confirming the validity through multiple sources of confirmation of the same thing.

Peer debriefing. To ensure credibility and real value of the study, I recruited one Master's level clinician. This recruitment was responsible for providing feedback concerning truthfulness of the data collection procedures. As stated by Lincoln and Guba (1985), this person was responsible for enhancing the study by helping the researcher clearly understand their contribution as the primary instrument of the research study, whether it be virtues or drawbacks. The Master's level clinician also had some knowledge about the research topic but will not be an immediate stakeholder as to the outcome of the research. Additionally, the person recruited signed a confidentiality letter to protect the privacy of the participants in this study. This recruitment assisted in the reduction of bias and assisted in the corroboration of findings.

Data Collection Instruments

As described by Delamont (2004) the primary instrument for conducting qualitative research is the researcher through observation, taking reflective notes, identifying and interviewing participants for the research being presented. Other instruments that were employed include the data collection form of the participant, participant comment call and interview protocol. The listed instruments will help ensure the reliability and validity of the study. I ensured that participants received ample guidance and assistance on all of the instruments presented for the study.

Participant data form. After the personnel had been identified and given their consent to participate in the study, they were then classified as participants. At that point,

the participant was given a color to use in place of their name. This is to ensure the autonomy of the participant. Each participant was emailed a data form, which was used to document the participant's demographics such as:

- Name
- Rank
- Years of Service (YOS)
- Gender
- Marital Status
- Ethnic Background
- Duty Assignments
- Level of Education

This form also covered the definition of toxic leadership and background of the study at the top of the page that will require the initials of the participant. This assisted me in ensuring that everyone thoroughly understood the expectation that had been set.

Summary

This chapter provided the plan for the presented research study by defining the research design, role of the researcher, setting and sample, instruments that was used, adopted methodology, trustworthiness, and ethical standards, coupled with the detailed process of data collection procedures and processes. This chapter provided the foundation for chapter 4, which will describe the results of this study. Chapter 4 will also provide the process of data collection as well as the analysis of the process.

Chapter 4: Results

Introduction

The purpose of this phenomenological analysis was to examine the actual experiences of former U.S. Army soldiers' exposure to toxic leadership and the manner that toxic leadership differed between male and female soldiers. In this analysis, I also examined the manner that toxic leadership differed depending on the rank of the personnel exposed. In an effort to determine the gap identified in the literature, I provided first-hand accounts of toxic leadership through the perspective of those exposed and the manner that the encounters impacted the soldiers' well-being in this study. The results of this study contribute to current and future research by providing an in-depth understanding of the exposure to toxic leadership, not only in the military but in any organization or workplace. The research questions that guided this study were:

RQ1: How does the experience of toxic leadership in the military differ across gender?

RQ2: How does the experience of toxic leadership differ depending on the rank of those experiencing it?

In Chapter 4, I will discuss the sampling strategies used in this study, the participant demographics, data collection, and the overall process that led to the results. In this chapter, I will present the themes that emerged from the data collected using two rounds of coding. The first round of coding was conducted to summarize the primary topics of the interviews, and the second round of coding was used to look at the patterns in the data which provided the results that are presented in this chapter.

Setting

I identified the participants by their response to a flyer that I created and posted on organization's website and veterans association Facebook page. Each participant contacted me by phone or via e-mail to express their interest in the study. After the initial contact, each participant received a welcome e-mail which contained an outline to the study, a copy of the consent form, and a copy of the data collection form. After each participant reviewed and signed the consent form and completed the data sheet, I scheduled an interview date and time with them. While a total of 13 candidates showed interest in the study, only 12 candidates completed the process which included completing the required documents and appearing for the interview. One candidate failed to complete the consent form, which eliminated them as a potential participant. As a result of the geographical disbursement of the participants, the interviews were conducted by telephone, audio recorded, and later transcribed. Each telephone interview took place in the privacy of my home and lasted approximately for an hour. The interview process took a period of 1 week to be completed, and the interviews were transcribed daily by me.

Demographics

As stated previously, according to Creswell (2009), a sample size of five to 30 participants is recommended for a phenomenological analysis to adequately address the research questions. This analysis consisted of 12 participants, who were both male and female Army veterans. Each participant had served in the Army in the rank ranging from

staff sergeant to higher. Each participant had been exposed to toxic leadership during their service, and at the time of their interview was either retired, ETS, or chapter discharged early out of the military. The sample consisted of five male and seven female veterans. Their YOS ranged from 10 years to 35 years, while their ages ranged from 34 to 58 years old. The demographics for the participants are outlined in Table 1.

I e-mailed each participant a data collection form, which was used to document the following participant demographics:

- Name,
- Rank,
- YOS,
- Gender,
- Marital status,
- Ethnic background,
- Duty assignments, and
- Level of education.

My e-mail also outlined the definition of toxic leadership and provided a background of the study at the top of the page which required the initials and signature of each participant. This helped me ensure that everyone understood all that was expected of them as a participant. In regards to marital status, ethnic background, and level of education, all of the participants held a Bachelor's degree or higher; 50% of them were married; all of the participants identified themselves as Black Americans ($N = 12$); and

three of the 12 participants were still affiliated with the military in some way, while the other nine participants made it clear that after their encounters they did not want to have anything else to do with the military. I will discuss this aspect of participant responses later in the study.

Table 1
Participants' Demographic Data

Pseudonym	Rank	Gender	Race	Assignment	Service	Status
Participant Red	Commission- Officer	Female	African American	Logistics	20	Retired
Participant Black	Non-Commission Officer	Male	African American	Human Resources	20	Retired
Participant Green	Warrant Officer	Female	African American	Property Book Officer	31	Retired
Participant Pink	Non-Commission Officer	Female	African American	Drill Sergeant	10	Expired Term of Service
Participant Yellow	Non-Commission Officer	Male	African American	Quartermaster	36	Retired
Participant Grey	Commission-Officer	Male	African American	Combat Arm	21	Retired
Participant Purple	Non-Commission Officer	Female	African American	Human Resources	25	Retired
Participant Violet	Commission-Officer	Female	African American	Signal Officer	12	Chaptered
Participant Lime	Commission-Officer	Male	African American	Infantry	20	Retired
Participant Silver	Commission-Officer	Female	African American	Logistics	15	Medically Retired
Participant Gold	Commission-Officer	Male	African American	Human Resources	22	Retired
Participant Orange	Non-Commission Officer	Female	African American	Military Police	11	Expired Term of Service

Data Collection

In an attempt to capture the actual specific experiences of the participants, I engaged each participant in a semi structured 30 to 60 minute long interview. Each participant was also required to read and sign a consent form prior to their participation to ensure that they understood the process of the study as well as give me permission as the

researcher to proceed. Due to the sensitive nature of the encounters shared by the participants, I reiterated the available services offered by Army OneSource, if he or she required further attention or support. This was provided in an e-mail format prior to the interview and vocally at the start of the actual interview process. Each interview was voice recorded on my iPhone using the iRec app and transcribed verbatim from the voice recording. The interview process was scripted with 15 open ended semi structured questions and took 7 days to complete and transcribe. The questions aided the participants in sharing their experiences specifically related to their toxic encounters as a female or male soldier. After conducting and transcribing the interviews, the data were secured on a thumb drive, which was locked and stored in a key lock, fire-proof safe in the privacy of my home. All the information related to identity of the participants was removed and replaced with a pseudonym (e.g., Participant Blue) prior to the interview process to ensure the privacy of the participant and maintain autonomy.

Data Analysis

I transcribed each participant's interview verbatim and reviewed the transcripts to identify meaningful phrases and statements. During the first phase of coding, a series of passes was conducted using Nvivo software to identify and extract relevant themes. In the second phase, I used the identified themes to analyze the transcript material, thereby generating qualitative information from the qualitative data. As a part of this phase, the broader themes of the qualitative material also emerged. My research analysis further used thick description in an effort to gain validity by providing sufficient details of the

lived experiences of male and female soldier's exposure to toxic leadership in the Army, which will allow the reader to bring clarity to the behavior (see Halloway, 1997).

Data Verification and Trustworthiness

Accuracy is very important while conducting a study; therefore, I used member checking of the transcripts to ensure the accuracy of the data collected from each participant. During this phase of the study, an e-mail was sent to each participant individually with the transcription of their interview attached. This method helped to ensure the true intent of the participants' encounters in detail.

To further ensure the validity of the information collected, I also used peer debriefing. This process included the help of a licensed Master's level clinician who held a degree in clinical psychology and was currently a practicing therapist in Arizona. The clinician assisted me in confirming the general methodology of the study and my interpretation and analysis of the data collected. This clinician provided verbal feedback and confirmed the validity and credibility of the study. Since I was the instrument and did not use other instruments in the study, it was imperative for me to establish credibility, transferability, confirmability, and dependability to help ensure the credibility of the research. I established dependability in this study by using reflective journals and notes that were taken throughout the interview process, participant consent form, participant comment call, and participant data form.

The participant comment call consisted of me contacting the participants via phone to discuss their experience as part of the study and present them with the opportunity to express their experience of the interview process. During this call I also

asked the participants to offer suggestions from their point of view on ways to mitigate toxic leadership within the ranks.

I developed the participant data form to collect the participants' demographic information. After the participant gave their consent to participate in the study, they were assigned a color in place of their actual name to ensure the autonomy of the participant. This form also provided me with background information about the participants' rank, gender, and duty assignments, which played an integral role in this study.

I also used the participants to ensure the trustworthiness of the research. During this phase, I sent the major findings of the research and the themes and meaningful statements that I identified to each participant via e-mail. In the e-mail, I also asked each participant to share any suggestions and comments on the results.

Results

To explore the specific experiences of the participants, I conducted 12 interviews and then transcribed and coded the responses. In the coding process, I identified 63 meaningful statements and three emergent themes: conducive environment, dimensions of toxic leadership, and response to toxic leadership. The resulting themes were derived from participant responses provided to 15 semi structured interview questions (see Appendix A). In other words, the interview questions were open-ended and allowed the participants to share their experiences of toxic leadership encounters. I coded, analyzed, and organized the participant responses using the four steps described by Saldana (2009). Saldana described the first step as *epoche*; this step includes the researcher recording the predispositions and biases to minimize the possibility of day-to-day influences that could

lead to biases, potentially hindering the research being conducted. The second step, known as the phenomenological reduction step, involves the researcher ensuring that all preconceived views are eliminated to allow equality across each statement as well as the removal of all irrelevant or unconnected statements. This is also the step where the common statements made by each participant are grouped and analyzed for repetition regarding their negative encounters and similarities described based on their experiences. The imaginative variation, the third step is the stage, produced the meaning of the toxic leadership encounters by constructing structural themes. The final step, according to Saldana, revealed all the structural and textural descriptions pertaining to the actual experiences of the participants' exposure to toxic leadership. The research process was guided by two research questions in an effort to fill the identified gap in the literature.

Results from Data

Research Question 1

Differential treatment of genders. The data for RQ1 revealed that there is a difference in toxic leadership encounters based on gender but it also introduced race as being more significant than gender. However, during the interview process, all seven female participants reported that they conformed to the toxic behavior for a short time, thus assisting with supporting. The conformity by the female soldiers was reported as being trapped in an environment with no way out which resulted in short tenures of service. Male soldiers on the other hand, reported difficulty with thriving in a toxic environment as a challenge which they would eventually overcome. In fact, all of the male participants reported that conforming and adapting to the environment was the best

way to not get eliminated before reaching retirement. Therefore, the data suggests that toxic leadership differs across gender, based on the level of conformity between males and females. While male soldiers conformed and adapted to the environment enough to reach retirement, female soldiers conformed and adapted to the environment temporarily until they were able to chapter or ETS. The data further revealed that both genders help create and sustain a toxic environment that is deemed conducive for the toxic leadership thrive based on their compliance. Research conducted by Reed (2010) revealed that toxic leaders can only thrive if the environment itself is toxic; similar idea is described in the interview of many participants in this study. Participant Gold described the environment as a war state, with the enemy in the bunker with him wearing the same uniform. He stated:

In those environments sometimes you had no choice but to conform because toxic leaders eliminate those who they feel are a threat to them or what they're trying to do and unfortunately when they are in position of authority their work is valuable to the powers that be, you don't have a lot of room to mess with them. I was influenced in a way that caused me to be aware, you know, when I came into the military.

Participant Grey expressed similar concerns such as presented by Participant Gold:

The few times that I've seen it, it was nothing but gender. The background I originally came from was an all-male environment so when they originally introduced females to the organization it was definitely low numbers, so once

again it was a part of that spectrum or environment. If they were not attracted to her, she was treated horribly but if they were attracted to her then she wasn't treated like a soldier at all. I feel that the chain of command encouraged it because they were definitely a part of it. Toxic leadership slowly contaminates the environment and before you know wrong begins to look right and right begins to look wrong. At that point, soldiers only have two options, to accept it or decline it but either way you are doomed.

Participant Pink expressed a very similar viewpoint. She stated:

I feel that the toxic behavior will not be resolved because they continued to replace the toxic leaders with other toxic leaders in the same toxic environment by putting their friends in place which are just like they are. I conformed for a while before making up in my mind to just let it go. It came to a point where I just was over it all so I let it go.

Many participants expressed the daunting feeling of being trapped with no way out and no one to turn to because they felt as though, those who have the power to bring a change, supported the behavior simply because many of those in leadership roles were the initiators of toxic behavior. Participants Red, Blue, Green, Yellow and Pink also made similar statements, referencing the number of toxic leaders that continued to thrive because the environment itself was toxic and the toxic leader was proficient at his or her job and got the job done therefore, not much was done to rectify the toxic environment. In turn they were not reprimanded for their behavior but rather appreciated while ignoring the toxic behavior they displayed.

In fact, during the interview process both male and female participants described many organizations as less suitable for female soldiers as compared to male soldiers. Many of them described the environments as all male environments not suitable for females. Participants described these environments as organizations that primarily housed specific jobs and positions that only male soldiers were allowed to pursue and serve, until the recent change over the past years which allowed female soldiers to also serve in the same capacities. With the new change being one that would take some major adjustments on the part of both the genders, some of the female participants reported being sexually harassed and/or assaulted during their service as the initiator of toxic leadership. Therefore, this theme helps in demonstrating the differences in the characteristic qualities, based on the experiences of those exposed to this leadership. It also revealed that there is a difference in the way sexual harassment and gender bias are categorized as well as the manner in which they both are reflected in toxic leadership differently, based on the responses of the participants' encounters.

Markers of toxic leadership. The data for RQ1 revealed a difference in the description and views of toxic leadership qualities based on gender. While male participants reported characteristic qualities as manipulative and competitive, female participants reported the identified qualities as: sexist, racist, self-centered, narcissistic, manipulative, discriminatory, disrespectful, and selfish. In the effort to further explore the dimension of toxic leadership, defining the characteristic qualities of a toxic leader is very important.

While all the participants were required to define toxic leadership in their own words, each participant's definition was different based on which gender was responding. The descriptors described by the participants were very similar characteristic qualities, with parallel effects resulting from their toxic encounters. However, to further clarify the perspectives of the participant's based on their lived experiences, the research revealed the manner in which the exposure to toxic leadership impacted the organization, based on rank, based on race, and based on gender. Participant Gold along with many others stated:

“They are self-contained. They are self-focused, self-driven and their goals their aspirations, their opinions way more heavily than those around them or the values of the United States Armed Forces”.

Participant Green reported a very similar statement:

What a toxic leader is willing to do to get their way is just destructive to the lives of others and he didn't care how much pain he caused me and others that he had done the same thing to, he did not care about my career, he didn't care about my family, all he wanted was what he wanted. They were very manipulative they are very self-centered but more so they had a confidence about them that believe that no one could correct them or would correct them. They are selfish, racist, rude, arrogant, self-centered and afraid at the same time just to name a few.

As each participant shared their toxic encounters, each participant described one of the characteristic qualities as racism. Therefore, the data suggests that based on the encounters described by the participants, there are all forms of toxic leadership, and they

are not mutually exclusive. However, there is a difference in the way a racist toxic leader would operate in comparison to a toxic leader that is gender biased. Consequently, during the coding process the data revealed that race exacerbated gender. This revelation was revealed through the interviews of the participants and their exposure to toxic leadership because each participant reported that race was a primary contributor to their toxic encounters and therefore became one of the characteristic qualities observed by the participants in the study. Participant Green reported:

Many of the leaders that I particularly encountered and I've heard many stories but they tend to speak openly about race, they like to make comments and use pet names for individuals of color. I am primarily speaking of Caucasian officers. I mostly feel that it is race more than rank and gender. I feel that the leaders that I've encountered feel that African-American females are idiots and do not belong in the roles of leadership. They feel that African American female soldiers are dumb. I've actually had a Caucasian male to ask me in front of everyone in a meeting "are you dumb?" so I feel that not male and female but race. I endured a lot in the ranks because I was black.

Participant Gold stated:

Unfortunately the only difference in my encounters was race. The color of my skin. In fact, I found out that some people did not believe in equality and that they would make us meaning people of color understand that they were not at all connected to us and if they could they would eliminate us. The color of my skin played a huge part in that and it was sad.

Views of Command/Unit Differences of TL Experiences across Genders.

Based on the data collected, there was no difference in the unit based on gender but rather race exacerbated the gender concerns of the participants in this study in their commands. All 12 participants reported that they often ignored the behavior of those displaying toxic leadership traits due to their relationship with the perpetrator. They further reported that gender did not play a role in the environment as the leadership did not pertain to gender; but rather all of the participants expressed their frustration based on their personal encounters and of the encounters in which they witnessed people of the same race facing toxic leadership. They often described it as behaviors that were unacknowledged due to many of the toxic leaders being liked and supported by higher officials within the command, with no respect of gender. According to the participants, the lack of acknowledgment of the toxic behavior in the environment made room for their behaviors to be overlooked and caused the environment to become hostile for some and unbearable for the others. Based on the interviews extracted from the participants, two major topics derived:

1. There is an institutional environment where this work culture is condoned and protected and is non-gender specific.
2. Those who are practicing TL often were indoctrinated in a culture that operates within the organization in this manner as described below both male and female.

Participant Gold described the culture of the environment as a belief system that has been woven into the fabric of the environment, thus, housing toxic leadership while

creating an environment of the expectation of adaptability on the part of the soldiers being exposed to it. Participant Gold explained:

Toxic leadership was not at all hidden; they did not do it undercover, they did a blatant and upfront. I was on active duty with the reserves unfortunately, when there is toxicity it is woven into the fabric of that unit and that organization because the turnover is so rare the same people stay and therefore their opinions prevail and they make that culture what it is and soldiers we come and go in three or four year increments and that tour of duty is up and you move on but the reserve soldiers stayed in the same environment and a lot of those federal employees they are not going anywhere either so that environment has little chance of hope for change in the toxic environment it just continue to persist.

Participant Violet explained that many of the encounters which she encountered were a result of the leadership itself because the command recycled toxic leaders, making the environment a hub for toxic leaders to thrive comfortably while making the environment uncomfortable for Black American females and males. Participant Violet explained:

I feel that the toxic behavior did not get resolved because they continued to replace the toxic leaders with other toxic leaders, putting their friends in place which are just like they are. Therefore there hasn't been any change because the meaning commander, is the head of the toxic behavior and I feel as though because the toxic leader is proficient at their job and get the job done, not much is

done to them so they are not reprimanded for their behavior because they are producing and getting the job done on the backs of others.

Attitudes towards Well-being. The participants described their response to the toxic exposure as one of the most emotionally challenging encounters of their life. Many of the female soldiers reported that narrating the encounters was emotionally and mentally unhealthy while most of the males reported that compartmentalizing their encounters was their response. The research thus, revealed that both genders did respond differently to their encounters. While male soldiers conformed, female soldiers conformed but with mental health issues as a consequence. This is a clear explanation of ‘susceptible followers’ described in the theoretical model used in this study known as the Toxic Leadership Triangle, as well as the answer to RQ1. This theme outlines the impact that toxic leadership had on mental well-being of female soldiers’ in comparison to the male soldiers. All of the female participants in this study reported some form of mental health issues after encountering toxic leadership. Some of the mental health illnesses reported were depression, PTSD, burnout, anxiety and paranoia, to name a few. Female participants reported that they exited the military at the first opportunity and still seek medical attention for their health issue; while the male participants did report the numbness they felt during the process but no health issues were reported as such. The male participants also reported that they retired after spending 20 years or more in military and are still associated with the military in some form or another. Participant Purple reported:

I currently have depression, anxiety and PTSD even outside the military. I often get very emotional about it and I often try to drink my pain away and smoke and sometimes I drink to the point that I cannot remember.

Participant Orange stated:

I don't like remembering anything about my encounters in the military. I sometimes feel as though it was the worst decision that I could've made. Toxic encounters I feel have stripped me down to the point where I am now. Where do I go? This is so heart-wrenching because now I only rely on myself.

Participant Gold stated:

The encounters I described previously really woke me up and made me alert to my environment and as much as I wanted to believe that the Army was as an environment of equality, I learned that people are individuals that you have to handle every person by what personality they show you and you can't be the same around every person you have to make sure that you are very conscious of your environment and you have to spot allies and enemies and understand that not all of our enemies in the military are across the waters, not all of our enemies wear the uniform that we look for when we train in spotting our enemies, sometimes the enemy is in the bunker with you, sometimes the enemy is leading you and you just need to keep your eyes open and stay alert and learn how to not take everything personally. If you make things too personal you often end up getting swept away with the tide because unfortunately sexism and racism they are

emotions that carry big waves and they will take you under with the tide and there is nothing that you can do to change people and what their opinions are.

Research Question 2

Complexity of rank. RQ2 sought to determine whether or not there was a difference in the experience of toxic leadership based on the rank of the military personnel exposed. The data revealed that rank exacerbates the toxic leadership experience each participant reported; the higher they went in rank the more exposure to toxic leadership they encountered and described the environment as top heavy, which refers to more senior ranking staff in one command. Due to the nature of the command's staff, each participant reported toxic leadership as more common than uncommon in such environment. Some also reported that having higher rank made them more accessible whereas a lower rank provided them with some coverage. On the other hand one participant reported that adapting to the environment coupled with assuming higher ranking roles allowed him to gain privileges that allowed him to protect lower ranking soldiers from some of the encounters which he had encountered with toxic leadership. Others revealed that adapting to the toxicity within the environment helped them see more of the toxic leadership as they went higher in rank, because they were allowed to coexist in an environment and units in which they would not have had the opportunity to otherwise. Participant Grey stated:

Contrary to what people may think, I had more leeway and less toxicity as a (NCO) enlisted because when you look at the typical Army leadership board what you will notice is group of Caucasian men and at the bottom you going to get

everything else weather its female or male African-American and Hispanic enlisted personnel. It is typically Caucasian and male. It's almost like they are afraid if you do well at anything it's almost like you're going to devalue any of their accomplishments.

Participant Gold reported:

In the later courses of my career a lot of the toxic leadership being directed towards me was because of my rank. I felt that if I had a lesser rank and I was no threat I would not then have been treated as poorly as I had been treated. It actually became more severe the higher rank that I went up because as a leader with higher rank the responsibilities that you have and the control that you have unfortunately make you have more say which causes you to be more directly exposed to the toxic leaders as I tried to intervene to correct toxic leadership it often put me in a position where I became a victim.

Participant Violet stated:

It got a lot worse as I moved up in rank. Before as a junior leader you had a buffer in between you and the leadership and now I'm getting it directly so it definitely got worse for sure but because I had enough rank I could be in meetings and conversations that those of the lower rank would not be privy to therefore, I can see and witness the toxicity and different leadership styles invested by me being in a higher rank so rank does have its privileges but with a price. The higher rank you get a higher in the hierarchy of the type of units you go to. As I moved up in

the command that's when I begin to really see all of the crap and that's where the majority of the toxicity is in the higher echelon environments.

The data shows that commission officers viewed the organization as more toxic for commission officers than the non-commission officers. During the interview process, all six commission officers described their exposure to toxic leadership as becoming more severe as they went higher in rank, in every organization as described in the interview statements. They also reported that there was a lack of support from the organization because the organization itself was toxic; the individuals assuming the roles that could potentially impact the career progression of those exposed made the organization toxic. Therefore, each participant described their experience as one in which they eventually grew numb and eventually conformed to the behaviors of the toxic leader within the organization as they honed the skills to adapt and survive, which will also be reflected in the participants interviews later in the chapter.

Attitudes towards the military following exposure to Toxic Leadership?.

The data revealed that the manner in which participants reacted to their exposure to toxic leadership was different based on their rank; their attitudes were also reflected through their ability to conform as they went higher in rank. Some of the differences in the impact of toxic leadership included their attitudes towards the military, their attitude towards the command, and their attitude towards their personal lives outside the uniform. It was suggested in the previous researches that conformers primarily those in lower ranks, particularly suffered from low self-esteem and unmet needs with very little faith in their own ability. Due to the conformer's need for reassurance and longing to belong, in order

to be accepted, they are seen as more vulnerable than the colluder (Padilla et al., 2007).

The colluder is the complete opposite and shares the same values as the toxic leader, thus also adopting the toxic behavior witnessed and practicing the behavior as they progress in rank. During the course of the interview process many participants identified themselves as becoming numb over a period of time as they went higher in rank, while others described their coping mechanism as adapting or conforming to what they did not have the power to change. Participant Orange expressed her attitude and outlook after toxic exposure as a loss of self. She stated:

Initially when I joined the military I loved it and I was a different person that had a lot to offer and now I'm just trained fill in as though I have nothing and I lost everything including myself.

Participant Gold stated:

People could not focus people cannot do their work they cannot focus because they were more concerned about protecting themselves or trying to get fair treatment so the effectiveness and the productivity of the office was diminished by the type of leadership that they had to serve and work under.

Toxic leadership in any environment destroys, tears the relationships apart, hinders the effectiveness and the productivity of the unit, and the organization. There is nothing positive about toxic leadership; it takes away the focus of the individuals that are involved in the relationship and turns it away from what is requirement for progress of the Army. Toxic leadership is only damaging and destroys on every level; if toxic leaders are not stopped and if the work that they are doing is not hindered, then it can lead to

destruction of the effectiveness of our force. Participant Grey became very emotional as he spoke of his service and the lack of appreciation he received in the uniform. He stated:

Toxic leadership exacerbated my medical conditions. I started off battling PTSD 2005 after returning back to Afghanistan and I was able to manage it well enough to earn a degree, to complete officer training, field artillery basic training, (which is the second hardest in any officer branches) and I was even a successful company commander. I was successful and functioning before my longest encounter of toxic leadership. I lost a lot of respect for the leadership, I lost the love for the military because exposure to a toxic leadership, if exposed to that person long enough it will make you angry, it will make you numb, it's almost like fighting a war that you cannot escape from even at home. It definitely changed me as a person even outside the military. I am less trusting now. With PTSD I'm always looking for physical threat but with toxic leadership I am looking for friendly threats. If I do perform well I'm going to be isolated and I feel that someone will try to keep me from performing so now I tread very lightly and very seldom perform at my best. I'm now very suspicious of people because of their race because of the things that I've encountered while serving under toxic Caucasian service members.

Overall, the descriptions that many participants narrated revealed a shift or change in the attitudes and outlook of both female and male soldiers on the military after their exposure to toxic leadership. It also altered their views of people belonging to other races as well as transformed their character. Many suffered health issues (primarily females),

relationship problems, a decline in daily functioning, numb, resentment towards the military, lack of respect for both the uniform and the services, diminished pride for the sacrifice and a lack of respect for the military in general.

Summary

The purpose of this study was to develop a more thorough understanding of the qualities characteristic of experiences with toxic leadership in order to clarify the specific ways in which toxic leadership leads to negative effects. Its focus was to analyze how experiences with toxic leadership vary across gender and rank to initiate enquiry into which variables have significant effects on the character of toxic leadership and the extent of its negative effects. The study sought to fulfil its purpose through the collection of in depth descriptions of soldiers' lived experiences with toxic leadership from their perspectives. The 15 interview questions provided the information necessary to allow an in-depth description of the participants lived experiences which identified three emergent themes: conducive environment, dimensions of toxic leadership, and response to toxic leadership using the Nvivo software. The data collected for RQ1 revealed that there is a difference in toxic leadership encounters based on gender but also introduces race as being more significant than gender. Data collected for RQ2 revealed that rank exacerbates the toxic leadership experience. Each participant reported the higher they went in rank the more exposure to toxic leadership they encountered and the more severe the encounters became. Further discussion will be presented in Chapter 5 to discuss, analyze, interpret the findings, recommend future research, and provide implications for social change.

Chapter 5: Summary and Conclusions

Introduction

In Chapter 5, I will provide an overall summary of the research conducted along with my interpretation of the findings. The chapter also include a discussion of the purpose of the study and provide suggestions for future research and implications for social change. While some studies have been conducted to address toxic leadership using a quantitative research approach, very few studies have been completed addressing toxic leadership using a qualitative research approach, which adds to the literature through the specific experiences of those exposed. The results of this study transcend the established trajectories of research concerning military. My review of literature has already shown that research on military personnel focuses on negative military outcomes, gendered differences, and rank; however, little research has been conducted on issues resulting from an intersection of these three trajectories, namely toxic leadership, gender discrimination, and rank-related issues.

Previous researchers have indicated that military personnel develop a wide range of adverse psychological conditions, including BOS. The psychological effects are not only a result of combat but also caused by their experiences and relationships within the military, especially with their leadership (Harvey et al, 2012). Therefore, the purpose of this study was to provide a thorough understanding of the qualities characteristic of experiences with toxic leadership as it pertains to female soldiers in comparison to their male counterparts. With this study, I attempted to explore ways that toxic leadership experiences varied by gender and identify factors that accompany toxic leadership style

and its negative consequences for subordinates. I fulfilled the purpose of the study by collecting in-depth descriptions of soldiers' lived experiences with toxic leadership. Details they provided included how the experiences occurred, how frequently they occurred, what was said or done, how participants responded, how they felt, how they coped with their experiences, and their reasons for not reenlisting, etc.

Research Questions

The research questions that I developed to guide this study were:

RQ1: How does the experience of toxic leadership in the military differ across gender?

RQ2: How does the experience of toxic leadership differ depending on the rank of those experiencing it?

In this study, I used interpretative phenomenological analysis to explore the concept of toxic leadership, toxic relationships, and the manner in which soldiers experienced toxic leadership interaction and its after effects. This process consisted of gathering data through 12 individual participant interviews, in which I asked 15 open-ended, semi structured interview questions pertaining to toxic leadership. Following the interviews, transcripts of the interviews were created, and responses were coded based on the frequency of phrases or responses or the indication of a theoretically distinct concept, as previously described in Chapter 4. I conducted qualitative data analysis using Nvivo and identified three overarching themes in the data. The main findings of this study were that toxic leadership experiences were equally experienced by men and women. When race was considered, I found that Black American respondents who were female were the

worst affected by the experience of toxic leadership. In other words, race exacerbated gender differences and rank. Finally, I also identified that men were more willing to conform or adapt to the toxicity in the leadership environment, while women reported more health issues that were psychosomatic manifestations of the stress induced by toxic leadership they encountered at work, which affected their well-being and relationships at home.

Overall, this study revealed that gender differences were not clearly evident. On the other hand, race exacerbated the toxic leadership experienced by females. Male participants reported behavior that was consistent with conformity as a coping mechanism. Toxic leadership also caused health and personal repercussions. More women than men reported health challenges stemming from a toxic leadership experience.

Interpretation of the Findings

With this study, I sought to bring awareness and understanding to the toxic encounters of soldiers in the Army based on the perception of participants exposed to toxic leadership and the manifestation of negative impacts on the personal and professional lives of soldiers. Additionally, I adopted a gendered perspective in this study to compare the experiences of soldiers and create a narrative that demonstrated the similarities and differences of the effects of toxic leadership. Conclusions drawn from this study will serve to inform stakeholders, namely the army and government, to help identify and adequately respond to issues of toxic leadership. The findings of this study will also create awareness among soldiers and the organization to advocate for a process

and procedure that safeguards the interest of the soldiers when they are challenged by toxic leadership. The intent of my analysis was to advance knowledge that will amplify the awareness of toxic leadership. This contribution was developed through the specific experiences of 12 Army veterans, as they described their encounters of toxic leadership and the impact it had on them during and after their service.

Gender Differences in Effects of Toxic Leadership

The results revealed that gender differences are insignificant and rather race is more significant than gender in this context. In fact, race exacerbated gender experience, with women being more susceptible to encounter toxic leadership due to their race and gender than men. During the interview process, 11 of the 12 participants revealed race as a being a barrier in their career; however, more women than men reported having more mental health issues due to their exposure to toxic leadership. Of the 12 participants, seven were female veterans and they all reported their toxic encounters as being caused as a result of their gender and race. Subsequently, many of the female participants reported being negatively impacted by their encounters even as a civilian completely out of the uniform, while men reported being less impacted by their encounters and as still having some sort of affiliation with the military after exiting as a soldier. Both genders often referred to race as a primary contributor to their encounters.

According to the results, both genders responded differently to their encounters. Male soldiers conformed while female soldiers conformed but with mental health issues following. This is a clear explanation of susceptible followers, which was a term described in the theoretical model of the toxic leadership triangle which I used in this

study and will be discussed in greater detail later in this chapter. According to the data, the impact that toxic leadership had on female soldiers' mental well-being versus male soldiers' revealed that female participants experienced some form of mental health issues after encountering toxic leadership. Some of the mental health illnesses reported were depression, PTSD, anxiety, and paranoia, to name a few.

The data also showed the manner in which both male and female soldiers conformed to the toxic leadership and the magnitude of impact encountered by both genders. During the interview process, many male participants reported that conforming was the best way to manage their encounters and still be successful in their career, while women reported a feeling of becoming numb and present physically, but being absent spiritually, mentally, and emotionally. This feeling of absence led to majority of the female participants exiting the military early, while all of the male participants reported that they completed 20 years or more of service. However, some of the male participants reported having thoughts of exiting early but chose to complete their service obligation and retire.

Generally, the findings agreed with the results of Johansen and Platek (2017) who reported that toxic leadership significantly explained for variance in negative outcomes, such as BOS. The findings also confirmed Demers's (2013) results on the challenges female veterans face reintegrating into society following toxic leadership, which demonstrated that higher levels of relational distress experienced in military life lead to greater difficulties integrating into society and higher levels of familial and societal alienation for women.

Rank Differences in Effects of Toxic Leadership

The results revealed that rank is a factor that affects the manner in which the effects of toxic leadership are felt by an individual. In fact, those at higher ranks are more vulnerable to toxicity, whereas at the lower ranks, the toxic leadership experience is diluted. Many participants reported that their rank allowed them to shield other soldiers from experiencing toxic leadership. Many female participants reported that having a higher rank made them have to prove they deserved the position equal to their male counterparts, if not a position higher than them. The results also determined that toxic leadership varied by rank and that both males and females experienced an extensive amount of toxic leadership the higher they went in rank. The difference was reported by participants as being due to the increase in political aspects of the government. Some also reported that having more rank made them more accessible, whereas less rank gave them some coverage.

Overall, 11 of the 12 participants reported that rank did play a role in their toxic encounters as they progressed in rank. Both male and female participants expressed emotions towards their experiences, but the results revealed that the difference between male and female experiences with toxic leadership and rank is a combination of differences. These differences were due to the difference in leadership styles between males and females, health issues of females, rank, and race. Previous researchers revealed that the higher the rank a person held, the more exposure to toxic leadership they encountered whether they were male or female. However, female soldiers tend to have to prove themselves more than male soldiers but have almost equal exposure according to

the findings in this study. Many scholars argued that these effects are not due to the ways that women inherently experience military service, but rather due to sexism and toxic leadership that are fundamentally a part of military culture (Branam Lee et al., 2014; Egnell, 2013; Hunter, 2007).

Research Questions

The results were based on participants' actual experiences and the answers they provided to the interview questions. Their responses offer an understanding of toxic leadership across gender and rank in the Army. I will briefly address the answers to the research questions followed by an in-depth discussion of the finding and emergent themes. My discussion on the emergent themes will provide a thorough exploration of toxic leadership.

Research Question 1

As described by Anderson (2011), toxic leaders often hold the capacity for disruptive wonder. The author further expounded on this concept by defining it as an individual having the ability to decompose and interrupt the existing standards. Anderson continued by stating that a toxic leader can identify that which is broken and consequently, benefit from this by creating the illusion that the toxic leader has fixed what was broken. In actuality, the toxic leader has created a better way for the toxic leader to function all while cultivating a conducive environment to thrive (Anderson, 2011).

The results of this study revealed that those who are practicing toxic leadership often were indoctrinated in a culture that operates within the organization in a toxic

manner with no respect to gender. Therefore, the toxic leadership described by the participants did not show a difference across gender in the environment but did show a difference in race in all of the environments described by the participants. Race exacerbated the gender concerns of the participants in this study in their units. All 12 participants reported that if they had been of a different race, their toxic encounters would not have been as they were and the environments would not have been so hostile. In fact, many of the participants described their environment as a perpetual place because no matter what duty assignment they found themselves in, toxicity always seemed to arise. The experiences of many participants often included being the only African American in the organization, which made it all the more difficult. However, as I described in chapter 4, many of the coping mechanisms the participants used resulted in adapting to the environment, assisting in the cultivation of creating and maintaining a conducive environment for toxicity to thrive.

An analysis of theme 2, dimensions of toxic leadership, revealed that mere replicas of the description were used to describe the characteristic qualities of a toxic leader; it also revealed that the views of the characteristic qualities differed across genders. While the descriptors used to characterize toxic leaders were similar overall, female soldiers also added that they experienced harassment and abuse through a toxic leader. The experiences of female soldiers related to sexual harassment in an environment of toxic leadership revealed that there is a difference in gender experience of toxic leadership. While only 1 of the 5 male participants reported being sexually harassed, all seven female participants reported being sexual harassed and or assaulted by one or more

persons in their leadership chain, thus defining the characteristic qualities of toxic leadership as not only sexist, racist, self-centered, narcissistic, manipulative, discriminatory, disrespectful, and selfish but also deceptive in nature. This theme assisted in the answer to RQ1 based on the description of the characteristic qualities of a toxic leadership from the perspective of the male soldiers' descriptions versus the female soldiers' descriptions. While there were similarities in description of toxic leadership encounters, the encounters of sexual assault and harassment revealed a deeper context of toxic leadership.

As described in Chapter 4, many of the female soldiers reported their response as becoming emotionally and mentally unhealthy while most of the male soldiers reported that compartmentalizing their encounters and adapting to the toxicity with the command was their response. The research revealed that both genders did respond differently to toxic leadership encounters. While male soldiers adapted, female soldiers adapted but with mental health issues following. Many of the female soldiers reported ongoing mental health issues after exiting the military. Some of the issues described were depression, anxiety, PTSD and burnout. While many of them are still seeking medical attention for these issues, many of them reported a fear of never being back to their normal self. When asked to describe, many of them described normal as be happy again, being able to respect the uniform again, being able to trust that everyone is not their enemy and feeling secure within their skin. This theme emphasized that males and females react differently to toxic leadership and the results vary depending on the person exposed.

Overall, the research collected revealed that toxic leadership does differ across gender. Depending on the length of exposure coupled with the lack of familiarity of toxic leadership there can be lasting effects on the individual, primarily female soldiers. More importantly, RQ1 revealed that toxic leadership has different faces, as described above. Most people look for toxic leadership through harsh treatment, racism, or other forms of disrespect but this study revealed another category of toxic leadership to look for which are perpetrators of sexual misconduct as also described above. Conclusively, yes, there is a difference in toxic leadership across gender based on the results from the research collected from this study.

Research Question 2

Toxic leadership is enabled by a conducive environment. The data from this study shows that the higher participants went in rank, the more they were exposed to toxic leadership, as they were integrated into higher echelon environment. The participants described the leadership as those they could make or break their career due to the level of power they possessed. They described the environment as ‘top heavy’ which refers to senior ranking staff in one command. Many participants reported that the higher their rank the closer they were to the toxicity but with a little more leverage to that allowed them to shield lower ranking soldiers from encountering toxic leadership. Other participants’ revealed that adapting to the toxicity within the environment helped them in recognizing the toxic leadership as they went higher in rank because they were allowed to co-exist in environments and units in which they would not have had the opportunity to otherwise. While for some this was not the ideal way of thinking, many of them

described this way of thinking as making the best out of a bad situation. Many commission officers reported that prior to switching over from non-commission officer status, they did not encounter the level of toxicity they had as commission officers. However, research revealed that the high level of rank coupled with the race of the participants' presented challenges within environments that were predominantly White Americans based on the experiences of the participants in this study. This theme adds further clarity to the answer for RQ2 through the understanding that there is a difference in toxic leadership based on the rank of those exposed and the research revealed that the toxic encounters intensify the higher one goes in rank.

Theme 3, response to toxic leadership; the analysis revealed that the manner in which participants reacted to toxic leadership exposure was different based on their rank and their attitudes also reflected through their ability to conform as they went higher in rank. Some of the differences in the impact of toxic leadership include; their attitudes towards the military, their attitude towards the command, and their attitude towards their personal lives outside the uniform. Many of the participant reported that their level of adaptability improved as they grew in rank but they no longer enjoyed being a part of the Army. They reported the feelings of being in the foxhole with the enemy in your bunker but had to dismiss their feelings to convince themselves that it was not as bad as it actually appeared to be. In fact, many of them used the word conformed, when asked to describe their coping mechanism, which will be described later in the chapter.

Overall, the answer to RQ2 revealed that the experience of toxic leadership does differ depending on the rank. As described, the higher the rank the more intense the

encounters became for the participants in this study. While many of their expressions and responses were the same, the level of intensity as they moved up in rank resulted in female soldiers both commission and non-commission officer exiting the military by way of ETS, early form of discharge known as chapter, or early retirement. After exiting the military each of the female participants decided not to have any affiliation with the military. The male participants on the other hand exited the military by way of retirement of 22 years or more and continued to maintain some form of affiliation with the military such as working for the Department of Defense or the Army as a civilian.

Implications of Theory

The theoretical foundation that grounded this analysis was drawn from the toxic leadership triangle model. The toxic leadership triangle is a model of toxic leadership that describes three factors that form the foundation of the toxic leadership style and the outcomes of those exposed to it: toxic leaders, susceptible followers, and conducive environments (Padilla et al., 2007). Padilla et al., explored the factors of toxic leadership in the toxic triangle and described the characteristics of a toxic leader as narcissistic, autocratic, intimidating, manipulative, over competitive and discriminatory in nature. According to the research, the data identified three emergent themes: conducive environment, dimensions of toxic leadership, and response to toxic leadership representing distinct dimensions of experiences with toxic leadership and 63 meaningful statements that further support the three categories that make up the toxic leadership model as well as support the definition of the characteristic qualities described in the toxic leadership triangle model as defined by Padilla et. al. The toxic triangle model has

been useful in generating an explanation for what was observed in the study and may be adapted based on the findings of this research. According to the present study, the three themes that emerged further support the three categories outlined in the toxic triangle model described in detail below.

The conducive environment. Padilla et al. (2007) described the conducive environment as dysfunctional and one that lacks governance or where the behavior of a toxic leader goes unnoticed by higher leadership. This environment is one that the toxic leader can comfortably thrive in while creating a hostile environment for those exposed to such behavior as described in this study. This study explored the theoretical relationship between toxic leadership and negative conditions. This study revealed that toxic leadership manifests itself, at least in part, through negative military conditions, an environment in which the toxic leader can thrive. This study adds further clarity to Padilla et al. description based on the descriptions provided by the participants exposed to such toxic environment. Many of the participants reported that in their experience the command/organization actually supporting the toxic behavior. Often ignoring the behavior of those displaying toxic leadership traits due to their relationship with the perpetrator. The model described the characteristics of a conducive environment as having questionable values and standard, absence of governance, perceived threat, and instability as described by each of the participants in the study. In fact, each participants expressed their frustration of witnessing many of the toxic leadership being liked and supported by higher officials within the command which made room for their behaviors to be overlooked. Conducive environment plays an integral role in the theoretical aspect

of the study as it provides a foundation for the manner in which toxic leaders thrive effectively and are protected or hidden in plain sight. Theme 2 on the other hand will provide the dimensions of toxic leadership as one seek to understand the extent in which toxic leadership exists and how to identify when one is exposed, which is described in Theme 2.

The dimensions of toxic leadership. This theme emerged in the study as the participants described and defined the characteristic qualities of toxic leadership in their own words which connects with the theoretical model used in this study. Padilla et al. (2007) explored the dimensions of toxic leadership in the toxic triangle model and described the characteristics of a toxic leader as narcissistic, autocratic, intimidating, manipulative, over competitive and discriminatory in nature. The characteristic qualities described are mere replicas of the definitions and description in which the participants provided in this study. All 12 participants used the words: self-centered, narcissistic, manipulative, competitive, discriminatory, disrespectful, and selfish in their descriptions of the toxic leadership they encountered during their service. However, during the interview process, each participant shared a similarity that introduced another category that had not previously been considered for this study, which was race. Each participant reported racism as a characteristic quality in which they witnessed in their toxic leadership exposure. This study revealed that there are different forms of toxic leadership, and they are not mutually exclusive, as mentioned previously. Though, there is a difference in the way a racist toxic leader would operate than one that is gender biased, according to the interviews of the participants. The intent for this theme is to make a conceptual difference

because these distinctions are rare to find, or differ according to the personal experiences of those exposed, which is describe in Theme 3.

Response to Toxic Leadership. This theme emerged based on the responses of each participant responses as he/she described their response to toxic leadership which further supported the toxic leadership model category of susceptible followers (colluder or conformer). Padilla et al. (2007) described the conformer as willing to follow the toxic leader without question, and colluder on the other hand, as seeing potential opportunities that could benefit them. It was suggested in the research that conformers particularly suffered from low self-esteem and unmet needs with very little faith in their own ability. Due to the conformer's need for reassurance and longing to belong, in order to be accepted, they are seen as more vulnerable than the colluder. The colluder on the other hand is the total opposite and shares the same values as the toxic leader. The colluder is ambitious and seek to promote themselves over time through their personal association with the toxic leader. However, this study introduces a third category to the literature. This category is referred to as 'termed susceptible follower', which means one who conforms but only for a period of time, as described in the participant's interviews and throughout this study. The period of time is usually until they exit the military, in some cases, prematurely. This category was determined based on the survival techniques reported by the participants as a means of survival. While many of the male participant reported that they conformed because they had no other choice, many of the female participants reported that they conformed but for only a short time until they exited the military which was prematurely in some cases.

The theoretical relationship in this study between toxic leadership and negative conditions revealed that toxic leadership manifests itself, at least in part, through negative military conditions. Therefore, the negative conditions were considered an indicator of having experienced toxic leadership. Gender was also an important intervening variable, because the role of gender has not been fully researched in the presented context until now. The meaning that participants brought to this study through their experiences were a critical part of the interrelationships of the three variables. Therefore, the theoretical framework for this study greatly reflect the identified theory that has fully supported this study through behavioral, social, and cognitive categorizations.

Limitations of the Study

Some limitations regarding this study began with the small sample size consisting of 12 participants. With such a small sample size, this study is not a complete representative of the Army. The population was relatively limited to veterans who were no longer serving but had served in the ranks of Staff Sergeant and above during their service in the past. The participants had exited the military both voluntarily and involuntarily due to retirement, ETS, or chapter. The participant's status or affiliation plays an integral role in this study and serves as a limitation due to the limited experiences shared by only a very small portion of the Army. Another limitation was the geographical disbursement of all the participants (Texas, Indiana, Alabama, Virginia, Kentucky, Tennessee, North Carolina, and Louisiana). This served as a limitation because none of the participants were willing to travel and the researcher could not travel to the location of each participant due to time constraints and limited funds. Therefore,

each interview was conducted via Facetime, recorded and transcribed verbatim over a 14 day period. The Facetime interviews was a limitation because it limited the opportunity of observing the participant's body language and emotions during the interview process, which could have assisted in the overall presentation of the participant's lived experiences and the manner in which it impacted them.

The third limitation was unexpected, which was the lack of diversity presented in the study. Although, when soliciting for participants, the flyer posted was an open invitation to all Army veterans who had served in the ranks of staff sergeant and above and exited by way of retirement, chapter, or ETS however, all participants identified themselves as African American. This is a limitation because this study only captured the lived experiences of one population. While this did introduced a third category to this study to add to the literature (as described previously) in a perspective that had not formerly been introduced, the lack of diversity of different cultures races being integrated to capture a bigger picture still limited the scope of this study greatly.

While the three limitations described above did limit some aspects of the study, they also served as a benefit in other aspects of the study. Overall, the primary purpose of this study was fulfilled even with the presented limitations. In fact, each limitation served a purpose in this study in one form or another therefore, the gap identified in the literature to produce this study has been filled.

Recommendations

The results from this study confirm that toxic leadership does impact male and female soldiers differently based on rank, gender, and race; therefore, this confirmation

would serve the Army and other services greatly if a continuation or replica of this study was conducted. The continuation or replica of this study should include different races. Most studies have probably focused on one race such as African Americans or White, but there are other minority groups such as Hispanics, Asians, Pacific Islanders who have not been studied in detail in their career path within the Army, so this study can be replicated with a large sample that includes other racial groups. Since actual experiences are collected best through qualitative methodology. It is true that for a large scale study, a mixed method including anonymous surveys would be good, but that would still bind your response categories and not afford the exploratory nature of inquiry like the present study.

Secondly, a great contribution to the literature and recommendation would be to conduct a continuation of this study and explore the manner in which the exposure to toxic leadership leads to mental health issues in both males and females. It is important to explore the issue of mental health in soldiers, outside the experience of war. At present research on soldiers and mental health is limited to their exposure to war (PTSD), but hardly any research tackles the issues of toxic leadership and harassment within the army. The findings from this study support that an inquiry into mental health effects of toxic leadership are warranted due to the extent of personal cost reported by the participants in this study.

Another recommendation would be to explore the different facets of toxic leadership and the manner in which they each impact such as; there is a difference in the way a racist toxic leader would operate than one that is gender biased. This was identified

as a need based on the participant's interviews in this study. Lastly, another recommendation would be to increase the amount of participants used in the studies recommended and solicit participants from other branches of the services. This will allow the researcher to explore toxicity in a more broad aspect as well as explore toxic leadership through the lived experiences from different levels and echelons of leadership based on the different variations of exposure to what is classified as toxic leadership from branch to branch. Primary question would thus, be: Is toxic leadership the same across all branches? In exploring toxic leadership across all branches will allow one to explore the magnitude in which toxic leadership thrives amongst the different cultures of the services.

Generally, all the recommendations listed will greatly contribute to the literature and help in offering some solutions to change this behavior. Moreover, this study replicated would help advance knowledge that will amplify awareness of toxic leadership. The additional contribution will perhaps articulate a deeper understanding of ways to not only identify toxic leadership, but to also bring awareness to the manner in which the environment of toxicity thrives according to the victims exposed to toxic leadership.

Implications for Social Change

Multiple implications for social change can be drawn from the results of this study that will serve as a great benefit to not only the Army but to all branches of service and to civilian organizations as well. While this study served to illuminate the voices, unspoken or unacknowledged in prior studies for Army soldiers, it also served as a

platform for soldiers to share their tools of survival. This study also provided key identifiers that will help all to gain awareness of toxicity as it exist today. This study further offered a seminal attempt to identify the behavior and character of a toxic leader as well as the environment in which toxic leaders thrive in order to bring awareness to toxic behaviors and provide advocacy for soldiers exposed to toxic leadership.

Awareness and advocacy for soldiers. This study impacts the lives of others through advocacy, bringing awareness and through pushing for change in the leadership styles of those responsible for leading others. This analysis brings understanding to the toxic encounters of all soldiers in the Army based on the perception of those exposed to toxic leadership encounters and the magnitude in which impacts. In turn will help others who are unsure of what they have experienced in the past or are currently experiencing to better identify the characteristic qualities of a toxic leader. The ability to put a face to the behavior allows preparation for the behavior once they identify it in a better manner. Additionally, this study offers knowledge of the impact of toxic leadership exposure through the lenses of those exposed. This will assist the Army and other services in better identifying not only the toxic leadership but those exposed to it as well. As a social change contribution, this study offers identifiers for victims of toxic leadership exposure. Being that toxic leadership is so prevalent and can potentially occur in any organization, it is very important for individuals to understand the damage in which toxicity causes when it is not properly identified and monitored.

Essentially, through this research, I brought understanding to the effects that toxic leadership have on male and female soldiers in the Army and the manner in which toxic

leadership exist amongst the ranks. The solution is to bring awareness about the issue and build understanding within the military community that this behavior is rampant and is a deterrent to the men and women in armed forces. The second goal is to start a discussion about how to make sure this does not happen.

Mental Health Services access to all soldiers, especially female soldiers. The third implication is to try and leverage the results of this study to start an advocacy movement regarding soldiers' access to mental health services and how more support can be offered to the soldiers throughout their career within army. Moreover, through this study, the intent was to advance knowledge that will amplify awareness of toxic leadership and the support that is available to soldiers' encountering any hardship. This contribution was developed through the actual experiences of soldiers as they described their encounters of toxic leadership and the impact in which it had on them during their service. Many of the participants reported experiencing mental health issues and a lack of support from mental health services. Therefore, training is suggested for all soldiers centering not only leadership but also the services offered to soldiers in and out of the military. The services offered should also be addressed during the out-processing stage of the soldiers' transition, as recommended by the participants.

Soldier training and policy changes. The results from this study showed a consistency with the participants' description of toxic leaders and the positions in which the leaders held. The positions held by toxic leaders greatly influenced the outcomes with the command and/or the soldiers' career progression. A study conducted by Uhl-Bien and Marion (2009) suggested that toxic leaders are very impactful and often very influential

to those in higher and lower rank, therefore, this research suggested a triadic model to adequately explain the full dimension of mediating toxic leadership encounters. Additionally, many of the participants in this study recalled participating in different forms of training addressing toxicity but reported the training as being problematic and a conflict of interest. When asked to expound on the problem, only then the problem was reported as toxic leaders being responsible for conducting the required to provide training to the soldiers centering on toxicity. The policies within the command placed the responsibility of coaching, teaching, and training those who were often violated rules, regulations and policies which made it difficult for those exposed to toxic leadership to receive protection from the perpetrators. Therefore, to realize the full application of effective leadership according to the U.S. Army the following recommendation best suits the interest of this study and would greatly impact all the services. The military would greatly benefit from modifying the U.S. Code Title X legislation on archetypical leadership (10 U.S.C. §§ 101 to 2926). This legislation would also include authorities for other leadership forms and mandatory training for all soldiers in the uniform on leadership.

Overall, the findings from this study contribute to social change by providing a voice to veterans exposed to toxic leadership and further brings awareness as well as understanding to the toxic encounters of soldiers in the Army based on the perception of those exposed to toxic leadership encounters and the magnitude in which impacts. Additionally, this study's contribution offered knowledge of the impact of toxic

leadership exposure through the lenses of those exposed. This will assist the Army in better identifying not only the toxic leadership but the personnel exposed to it as well.

Conclusion

In the previous researches, it has been indicated that toxic leadership in the military can create toxic relationships among soldiers, in which military personnel will mirror the toxic behaviors of their superiors as susceptible follower or conform until they can find other means to exit (Steele, 2011). In fact, (Vugt and Ahuja, 2011; Fitzpatrick, 2000; Hunter and Sawyer, 2011; Padilla et al., 2007; Gottschalk, 2014) have all presented compelling arguments that exposure to toxic leadership does have some implications; and that it is a very serious problem that has a negative impact not only on the person exposed to it but also on the organization as a whole. According to the Army's *Doctrine Publication* (2012), toxic leaders seek to damage the subordinates' initiative, which further causes a decline in the overall morale of the organization.

The purpose of the study was to examine toxic leadership experiences through the lived experiences of twelve former Army veterans in the effort to determine the difference of toxic leadership across gender and rank. Therefore, a set of questions were developed to guide the research. The two research questions were; firstly, how does the experience of toxic leadership in the military differ across gender?; and secondly, how does the experience of toxic leadership differ depending on the rank of those experiencing it? These two research questions produced three emergent themes and sixty-three meaningful statements, which were gathered through a phenomenological approach of first-hand accounts. This portion of the research process was achieved by gathering

data through 12 individual participant interviews, in which a semi structured guide consisting of 15 open ended interview questions pertaining to their personal toxic leadership encounters was presented. The interview process yielded results that contributed to the literature as well as identified an additional category for potential research, thus, contributing to the gap identified in the literature.

Essentially, this research provides a thorough understanding of the qualities characteristic of experiences with toxic leadership to clarify the specific ways in which toxic leadership leads to negative outcomes. Results from this study are intended to be useful for practitioners, officials in the military and researchers seeking to better understand the leadership needs of contemporary military personnel. Findings from this study will be used as a preventative measure ideally assist higher officials in readjusting their leadership policies and strategies to avoid adverse outcomes that may occur as a result of toxic leadership and further, to design policies for swiftly and effectively dealing with toxic leadership events as a reactive measure. Therefore, the results from this study should be reviewed thoroughly with caution.

This research study contributes to the literature by adding new findings and providing new insights to the damaging encounters of toxic leadership and the level of impact in which it causes to both the individuals exposed and the organization, in this case, the Army. It is very critical for everyone to understand the manner in which toxic leadership effects along with becoming aware of how to actively identify this leadership and take steps towards transforming, exposing, and minimizing the toxic leaders around us. While these steps may appear to be easier said than done, each step one takes in the

right direction will eventually get the attention of those who have the power and influence to effectively impact the ranks in order for change to begin to manifest. With that, the key is to not be afraid to expose toxic leaders for yourself or for the people suffering around you.

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