

9-2016

# ENVIRONMENTAL INGREDIENTS FOR DISASTER: DEVELOPING AND VALIDATING THE ALVARADO WORK ENVIRONMENT SCALE OF TOXICITY

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AND VALIDATING THE ALVARADO WORK ENVIRONMENT  
SCALE OF TOXICITY

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A Thesis  
Presented to the  
Faculty of  
California State University,  
San Bernardino

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In Partial Fulfillment  
of the Requirements for the Degree  
Master of Science  
in  
Psychology:  
Industrial/Organizational

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by  
Claudia Kailani Alvarado  
September 2016

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## ABSTRACT

Leadership has been a much studied area within industrial and organizational psychology. Recently, scholars have begun to focus on the negative side of leadership; however, a lack of research has limited our understanding of toxic leadership. One step forward in this domain has been the development of the toxic triangle, which posits that toxic leaders are aided by toxic followers with a toxic environment. Although the leader has been studied within this triangle, relatively little has been researched regarding the follower or the environment. Specifically, that there has been a lack of research in the organizational environment that allows the rise of toxic leaders is concerning. In this study, a toxic work environment scale was developed to help capture pieces of organizational environments that contribute to the rise of toxic leadership. A refined scale was used along with a qualitative piece. Four other scales were used to establish convergent and divergent validity. From the results of this study, although refinement is needed, support for three of the dimensions was found: favoritism, perceived threat, and overall organizational climate. Additionally, through the qualitative portion, additional themes that emerged (e.g., bullying) could be utilized in future use of measures to help assess toxic work environment features. Finally, I recommend that researchers interested in the toxic triangle endeavor to conduct studies that examine all elements simultaneously.

## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I would like to thank my thesis advisor, Dr. Jan Kottke for all of her hard work and dedication to this thesis and numerous other projects. I would also like to thank my thesis committee members, Dr. Pelletier and Dr. Diaz, for their interest in this project. I hope we will continue to break barriers together in the area of toxic leadership. A special thanks is also due to Dr. Shultz, Dr. Gilbert, Dr. Agars, and Dr. Riggs. Thank you for all of your passion in the classroom. Lastly, I would like to thank my family and friends for their support through graduate school. A special thank you to Jung Jung, Rachel, and Eric, I would have not enjoyed graduate school without you guys. Jeremiah 29:11.

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## CHAPTER ONE

### INTRODUCTION

It is not uncommon to turn on our televisions and see a segment on toxic bacteria found in our food, toxic gases caused by accidental spills, or warnings against drinking toxic or contaminated water. However, it is rare that we see comparable stories about the human toxicity of our workplaces. Toxicity is defined as the “extent or degree of being toxic or the state/quality of being poisonous or harmful” (Merriam-Webster). For many years, we have studied environmental elements in our organizations with an aim toward creating good culture, family balanced and friendly workplaces (Greenhouse & Powell, 2006), and having physically safe work environments (Clarke, 2006). However, we rarely talk about the aspects in our organizations that allow toxic behavior to occur. Especially understudied are the types of environments that are permissive of toxic leaders. Unfortunately, we usually think about these issues only after an ethical scandal or destructive event has occurred. Dissecting how Enron came to its collapse is one example of many in which we think about these issues too little and too late.

Leadership has been intensely studied, with many different theories that have emerged. Scholars have pushed forward many theories that have proved beneficial in the field. However, nearly all of these models tap into positive qualities of leaders and what attributes make for a good leader. For example, transformational leadership, the charismatic and inspiring type of leader, has

gotten much attention in the area of leadership for these leaders' ability to identify with followers, stimulate creativity, and pay attention to subordinate's needs (Bass, 1991; Bass, 1999; Judge & Piccolo, 2004).

While the approach of understanding the attributes that define a good leader and identify who has those characteristics has substantially strengthened the field of leadership, we must also accept that where there is good, there can be bad or negative impacts as well. Pelletier (2010) pointed out that although positive leadership has been studied for a long time, the darker side of leadership is still evolving. "Bad" leaders are not clearly defined in the literature, but some common themes do emerge. Bad leaders are abusive, undermining, unethical, corrupt, and hostile (Kellerman, 2004; Allio, 2007; Einersen, Aasland, & Skogstad, 2007; Pynnone & Takala, 2013). As history has shown us, it is too often that unethical or unqualified people rise into organizational leadership positions. The magnitude of their destructiveness can range from hurting subordinates' feelings to literally driving an organization to the ground, as we saw in Enron.

It is imperative to contribute to this area not only to identify bad leaders, but to understand how these types of people rise to power. Is it possible for toxic leaders to infiltrate stable organizations and simply convince constituents to follow them? Do employees agree to their requests because they feel they cannot say no? Or, is it that all of the good people leave and only the employees with intentions similar to the leader stay to help? Are there no rules

in place to prevent the leader from putting his or her agenda in front of the organization? The answers to these questions are still unknown, although now more than ever we have a good idea of what causes leaders to derail, as well as how to hire promising leaders, and what types of attributes make for an ineffective leader. Yet, we often fail to prevent toxic leaders from rising to power in organizations (Hogan, Curphy, & Hogan, 1994; Kellerman, 2004; Lipman-Blumen, 2006). Although the leader does matter, looking only at the leader does not help us understand within what contexts these toxic leaders are able to thrive. (Padilla & Lunsford, 2013).

### Defining the Triangle

In an attempt to move the literature on destructive leadership forward, scholars have begun evaluating components of the workplace and explaining how they interact. The toxic triangle, as proposed by Padilla, Hogan, and Kaiser, has three components: a toxic leader, a conducive environment, and susceptible followers (2007). Chandler (2009) compares this toxic triangle with the conceptual framework of a perfect storm. Within a perfect storm, ethical problems appear with leaders when followers, leaders, and the environment are triggered by a catalyst.

The three components in the toxic triangle interweave and influence one another. A mix of a toxic leader, willing followers, and a permissive environment, can ultimately result in destructive leadership. Although destructive leadership has not been well defined in past literature, common

themes occur: destructive leadership usually affects both individuals and the organization, the leader puts selfish needs before constituents' needs, bullying of constituents is a norm, and supervisors undermine their constituents (Conger, 1990; Einarsen, Aasland, & Skogstad, 2007; Tepper, 2007). Additionally, destructive leadership is usually systematic and repetitive (Einarsen et al., 2007). Scholars have not agreed that the construct should be defined with the intention to cause harm. Einarsen argues that intention to cause harm should not be included in the definition of destructive leadership because we should be focused on outcomes of behavior, rather than the intention (Einarsen et al., 2007). One can cause harm without intention; therefore, I agree that the outcomes of destructive leadership should be considered when defining destructive leadership.

When only the leader is taken into account, a simple solution might be to fire the leader and hire a new one. However, leadership is not a bubble, and the outcomes, contexts, as well as the antecedents of it, should be considered (Walton, 2007). As Padilla, Hogan, and Kaiser (2007) explain, it appears to be an interaction of the environment, the followers, and the leader that allow for the existence of destructive leadership. A destructive leader in the right environment with the right type of followers can rise again, leading to another problem. Thus, we must take a closer look at what is included in each of these components that may contribute to toxic and destructive leadership.

Toxic leaders inflict harm on followers and in extreme cases, on the organization (Lipman-Blumen, 2005). It is not difficult to find examples of such leaders as they appear in the media often, from corrupted local politicians to large company CEOs who take their well-known companies down. Conger (1990) has explained that these leaders can thrive because they are usually good at manipulating people and managing impressions to make it seem as though their grand illusions are realistic, a good idea, or attainable. Also, through coercion and impression management, they are good at luring followers (Lipman-Blumen, 2005).

#### The Leader

Toxic leaders have a negative impact on both their organizations and their followers. In one study, Pelletier found that most people had a good sense of what toxic leaders did and people either had experienced similar behaviors or had witnessed other people experiencing toxic behaviors in the workplace (Pelletier, 2010). More shockingly, Pelletier reported that over 90% of the people in the study had been exposed to the manifestation of the toxicity of a leader (Pelletier, 2010). Similarly, Aasland, Skogstad, Notelaers, Nielsen, and Einarsen (2010) found that between 30 to 60% of people in their study felt that they had been exposed to destructive leadership.

A toxic/destructive leader as defined by Padilla et al. (2007) has the following elements: ideology of hate, negative life themes, a personalized use of power, narcissism, and charisma. Narcissistic individuals, who are usually

hostile with a fragile self-esteem, are likely to rise into leadership positions when an attempt to restore or start fresh is on order (Rosenthal & Pittinsky, 2006). Additionally, narcissistic individuals usually have a high need for attention and power (Rosenthal & Pittinsky, 2006). In addition to a high need for power, toxic leaders usually have a personalized need for power rather than a socialized one. Kirkpatrick and Locke (1991) explain that individuals with a socialized need for power use power to meet goals that benefit the organization while individuals with a personalized need for power are more likely to be impulsive and see power as domination. Individuals who are filled with hate use personalized power to carry out that hate (Strange & Mumford, 2002). An example of using personalized power to carry out hate can be seen in someone like Hitler who sought to eliminate races that he did not feel were worthy of life (Padilla et al., 2007).

In addition to their ideology of hate, toxic leaders usually had negative things happen to them early in life, which contributes to the hate for others that they carry (Padilla et al., 2007; Strange & Mumford, 2002). As they are typically charismatic, they are usually able to push their agenda forward. Although charismatic leadership is not all toxic, Yukl (1999) points out that followers may feel that they have a strong identification with the leader and are less likely to disagree with them. Drawing on research on leader member exchange theory, Pelletier (2012) found that people who were in the leaders'

in-group were less likely to view them as toxic and less likely to challenge them than people who were in the out-group.

There is little debate that toxic leaders can cause great havoc in their organizations and on their followers. As Padilla et al. (2007) point out, however, one dimension of the toxic triangle is not enough to make a successful toxic leader, but rather a mix of the characteristics is needed. Nonetheless, even in knowing how to define toxic leaders, it is important to know who is likely to follow them.

### Followers

Followers are also a very important piece of this triangle. Once people began realizing that we should consider more than the leaders in organizations, research on followers and followership grew. Kelley (2008), one of the first and emerging scholars in followership, notes that to move forward in this field, some factors must be taken into consideration: world events, culture, leadership, qualities of followers, roles of followers, language of followership, and courageous conscience. Although some of these concepts are outside the scope of this discussion of the toxic triangle, some are strongly of interest, particularly the role of the follower and the courage of followers. Kelley (2008) points out that there are inarguably different types of followers and argues that we should include being conscious and speaking up as part of a followership role.



As Kellerman (2004) points out, we cannot get rid of bad leaders until we also get rid of bad followers. In the follower literature, many different types of followers are discussed, although the typologies seem to converge around key characteristics of the followers. There are both psychological and pragmatic reasons for our fears and both contribute to why followers end up following toxic leaders (Riggio, Chaleff, & Lipman-Blumen, 2008). Kelley (2008) writes about five styles: sheep, yes-people, alienated followers, pragmatic followers, and star followers; Thoroughgood et al. (2012) write about lost souls, bystanders, authoritarians, acolytes, and opportunists. Although different frameworks for types of followers exist in the literature, some definitions are similar and overlap. In the toxic triangle framework, which forms the basis for this thesis, there are two types of followers that aid toxic leaders: conformers and colluders (Padilla et al., 2007).

Colluders may actually have similar beliefs as their toxic leader and follow them for that very reason while conformers follow (or do not challenge) out of fear (Padilla et al., 2007). In a qualitative study, researchers found that people identified as proactive, passive, and active followers, suggesting that followership is not a one-size-fits all (Carsten, Uhl-Bien, West, Patera, & McGregor, 2010). These researchers found that active and proactive followers had a say in working with a highly structured hierarchy, while passive followers had hardly any say about context and how it affected their role as followers (Carsten et al., 2010). The literature on colluders and conformers notes,

importantly, that while both of these types of followers are susceptible to helping a toxic leader thrive, their reasons are very different.

Conformers usually have unmet needs, low self-evaluations, and/or are immature. When an individual has unmet basic needs, he is likely to look for safety anywhere he can find it. Maslow (1954) argued that from an early age, we seek safety from parents, stability, and an organized and predictable world. When we feel threatened, we are more likely to accept dictatorship (Maslow, 1954). Additionally, people who deviate from norms, and are seen as outsiders, are also more likely to accept dictators. Atchison and Heide (2011) give an example of how Charles Manson's followers were deviants, willing to accept orders to commit heinous crimes.

In addition, conformers usually have lower self-evaluations than others. In reviewing the literature on core self-evaluations, Johnson, Rosen, and Levy (2008) explained that core self-evaluations can be thought of as the feelings we have about oneself including self-esteem, self-efficacy, emotional stability, and locus of control. In a meta-analysis, Judge and Bono (2001) found that these characteristics were good predictors of both job satisfaction and performance. As Padilla et al. (2007) have pointed out, individuals with low self-evaluations (e.g. low self-esteem) are more susceptible to destructive leaders. As Lipman-Blumen (2005) has noted, as individuals, we yearn to fit into our culture, therefore, when we fail to do so, it affects our self-esteem. We may then rely on someone else to protect us, make us feel worthy, and safe

(Lipman-Blumen, 2005). Thus, this is where toxic leaders may come in, to give followers something to believe in and to feel valued. Last, conformers also tend to have low maturity. Theories and experiments that help us make sense of human behavior help explain the behavior of those with lower maturity and the likelihood of their obeying authority (Kohlberg, 1971; Milgram 1965).

Colluders, on the other hand, are usually selfish, have similar views as the toxic leader, and are ambitious (Padilla et al., 2007). Using as an example of how John Kennedy was pressured by his advisors, Offerman (2004) explained that toxicity is not found only in leaders but in followers as well. In fact, some colluders may not only share views with the leaders, they may even influence the leader toward toxic behavior. Barbuto (2000) explained that goal identification triggers are utilized when a follower complies with a leader when they share an organization's vision. As self-concept motivation theory proposes, it is not usual for charismatic leaders to instill new values into their followers, but rather followers follow a charismatic leader because they already have similar beliefs (Shamir, House, & Arthur, 1993). Thus, colluders may have more influence on toxic leaders than has been previously discussed in the literature. Specifically, there may be a form of reciprocal reinforcement that takes place between colluders and their toxic leaders. If so, it would make sense why colluders appear to be more motivated to aid leaders than conformers.

Colluders lend themselves in aiding toxic leaders because they share similar beliefs while conformers aid toxic leaders by avoiding conflict or not challenging the leader. Nevertheless, both colluders and conformers aid toxic leaders, even if they do so for different reasons. The environment, the leader, and followers all interact in the workplace. For example, colluders may be quite willing to exploit (as do toxic leaders) dimensions of the work environment. Consequently, these different types of followers are essential to understand because they contribute to a permissive setting, and thus, allow for the rise of a toxic environment in which toxic leaders can rise.

### The Environment

Environments in organizations include circumstances, contexts, settings, and conditions in which the leaders and the followers interact (Padilla, 2012). Padilla (2012) further suggests that environments have three major elements: institutional, environmental, and cultural. The institutional element contains societal factors, including government, which impact organizations (Padilla, 2012). The environmental context includes technology, the economy, and other factors that may pose a threat to the organization (Padilla, 2012). The third element, culture, includes the practices, experiences, and beliefs shared at an organization (Padilla, 2012). Schein (2010) explained that this third element, culture, could exist at many different levels: national, organization, department, and so on. Although work environments and how permissive they are of toxic behavior play a crucial role in the understanding of

the prevalence of toxic leadership and its outcomes, it is, unfortunately, the most understudied dimension of the toxic triangle. A conducive environment is an environment in which a toxic leader may thrive.

Padilla (2012) has argued that the environment may be the most important element, yet least acknowledged. Supporting this supposition, Walton (2007) suggested that conditions of the environment can restrain or aid a toxic leader. Padilla et al. (2007) realized that the context matters. Toxic leaders have a hard time thriving in environments that have stable systems, with checks and balances, and organizations that have strong followers who speak up for themselves. Usually, the environment in which they can thrive is unstable, contains perceived threats, bad culture, and a lack of checks and balances. Additionally, when there is uncertainty and fear within an environment, followers are likely to turn to a leader for guidance and order. Thus, the mix of uncertainty within an environment, a toxic leader, and susceptible followers can brew an especially harmful cocktail (Lipman-Blumen, 2005; Padilla et al., 2007). Taken together, these characteristics are what I consider constitute a “bad” culture for the purpose of this thesis.

#### Absence of Checks and Balances

Padilla, Hogan, and Kaiser (2007) have argued that nations and organizations that have centralized power are at risk for absolute power and corruption. They point out that balanced governments work best and organizations should at the very least have board oversight. In organizations,

managerial discretion is an important piece to help balance, or 'check' organizational policies. Managerial discretion, as defined by Hambrick and Finkelstein (1987), can be described as the extent of leverage that top management possesses. Management discretion can range from high to low. When management discretion is high, leaders influence more heavily what happens within the organization or department, as they have more autonomy when it comes to decision-making. When managerial discretion is low, management influence is more constrained. Kaiser and Hogan (2007) argue that when discretion is high, organizations tend to become like their leaders. With the leaders having more influence and fewer constraints, this is definitely possible. Padilla (2012) has pointed out that although managerial discretion is needed for leaders to be effective, it can also allow for abuse of power. Interestingly, Crossland and Hambrick (2011) found that managerial discretion varies by country and that within country, managerial discretion is associated with the impact of CEOs on their firm. They found that in collectivist cultures, CEOs had less discretion and less power relative to CEOs working in countries like the United States where CEOs typically have considerable discretion and power.

The founding fathers of the United States recognized that a separation of powers was necessary to prevent too much executive control. Additionally, they acknowledged that disagreement would arise between the different powers, but that there should be channels to resolve them (Levi, 1976).

Scholars have argued that these same types of separation principles should exist in organizations. Vrendenburgh and Bender (1998) point out that when power is central to one person, abuse is definitely possible. Padilla et al. (2007) pointed out that centralized power is especially harmful when one person has little to no supervision when radical organizational changing decisions are being made. If other parties are involved in decision-making (e.g. board of directors, human resources), the extent of the abuse of power is limited (or should be) (Vrendenburgh & Brender, 1998). Lubit (2002) proposed that work processes that rely on teamwork decision making also prevent abusive leaders from succeeding. Padilla et al. (2013) suggest that abuse of power is more likely with leaders as well as more likely in organizations with centralized power. Centralized organizations are those where top executives have the most (or only) control (Blau, 1968). Decentralized organizations have a small hierarchy with authority at multiple and across levels (Blau, 1968).

Another option to prevent abuse of power is instituting and actually utilizing a board of directors. A board of directors can act as a check to a leader when it comes to making decisions. Because boards of directors should keep the interest of shareholders and the organization in mind, their oversight should prevent the toxicity from infiltrating into the organization (Padilla, 2012). Unfortunately, boards of directors in the United States do not always work in the best interests of the organization. Padilla (2012) has noted that members are sometimes handpicked by the CEO, are switched out too often (e.g. the

CEO outlasts a great number of them), and often lack meaningful independence from the CEO.

Lessing (2009) talks about the importance of corporate governance and why good corporate governance requires an installment of proper checks and balances in organizations. Corporate governance is not only a relationship between shareholders and an organization, but more like a web of relationships between top management, employees, customers, and others (Solomon, 2007). In describing what can be considered “good” corporate governance, Lessing (2009) explained that issues are likely to arise when the interests of top management differ from the overall interests of the organization and its stakeholders. Lessing (2009) gave examples of what could act as barriers, or mechanisms to forestall or prevent issues. These mechanisms include auditors, independent directors, and laws (2009). Padilla explains that checks and balances can also come from outside of the organization, such as government agencies (e.g. EEOC), or even the media. However, it is not the mere existence of barriers that will help prevent issues but also the implementation and acceptance of them. In a field study, McCabe, Trevino, and Butterfield (1996) found that there was a negative relationship between reported unethical behavior and the existence of ethical codes. Further, they argue that perception of the implementation of the codes in the organization also mattered (McCabe et al., 1996). Comparably, the perception



that checks and balances exist in the culture should contribute to an organizational culture less likely to turn toxic.

### Instability

Padilla and his colleagues (2012) mention instability in the work environment as a factor that can contribute to the success of a toxic leader in an organization. Similarly, Walton (2007) offers instability as a dimension that contributes to leader and workplace toxicity. He also offers his belief that an increase in toxic behavior and internal organizational instability are more likely to occur when a leader with toxic characteristics steps in, the culture is affected, and external environmental instabilities result.

Although the toxic triangle definition of what constitutes an unstable environment is not well defined, there are a few points of common agreement. First, in the case of instability, it is easier for leaders to take power (Walton, 2007). When organizations are going through substantial changes, such as downsizing, employees are more likely to feel uncertain about their jobs and more stressed (DeCuyper, Witte, Elst, & Handaja, 2010). When people feel threatened or lack security, they are more likely to have the kind of need as mentioned previously in describing susceptible followers. Also, Padilla and his colleagues (2012) ask that we take into consideration the stability of the organization over time. In their example with Fidel Castro and Cuba, one can see that the government at the time lacked stability which better allowed for Castro to use his power.

Organizations constantly go through change, but how they handle it definitely has consequences on the organization and its future. Sometimes, change is positive, planned organizational development, but other times, it is unexpected, such as a shortage of resources or downsizing due to economic downturn. Uncertainty is a common feeling when organizations are going through change (Bordia, Jones, Gallois, & Callan, 2004). During changes, leaders may be given more authority and more decision making power (Chandler, 2009). But, as mentioned earlier, once we give power to one central person, it is hard to take it back. Another reason for instability is rapid market changes and competition. Lambsdorff (1999) observed that competition and corruption are positively correlated. Corruption is more likely to occur when organizations are in markets or fields with fast paced environments with high competition, such as what we saw with Enron.

Organizations are also at risk when they are going through changes. Boyne and Meier (2009) define turbulence as unpredictable organizational change. They add that the greater this change is, the greater the negative reactions or results to the organization. When organizations face turbulence, they usually have two choices: they can either keep their current structure or change it (Boyne & Meier, 2009). In their study, these scholars found that a buffer against the negative impact of turbulence is to maintain structure stability. When faced with turbulence, maintaining structure stability appears to be a better strategy when compared to changing the structure of the

organization, which may cause the organization to perform more poorly (Boyne & Meier, 2009).

Job insecurity can also be seen as a mechanism of an unstable environment. DeCuyper and his colleagues found that perceived job insecurity and an objective threat were positively correlated (Cuyper, Witte, Elst, & Handaja, 2010). When an organization is unstable, one fears for the loss of her job, or for the future of the organization. As mentioned earlier, fear can make followers susceptible to following toxic leaders as they are now perceiving that fear as a concrete threat.

#### Perceived Threat

Another characteristic of a toxic environment is a perceived threat. In the toxic triangle framework, perceived threat is described as anything from a sense of mistreatment from the organization to an overarching organizational economic and/or social situation that may pose a threat to the individuals within it (Padilla et al., 2007). Padilla et al. (2007) point out that the threat does not need to be factual, a perception of a threat is enough. They also note that leaders may use this threat to their advantage to instill fear in the followers and compel more obedience.

Terror management theory helps explain why fear may make followers more susceptible to toxic leaders in these types of environments. For example, when researchers reminded participants of their mortality, the participants had positive things to say about people who were similar to them and had more

negative evaluations about people who were different from them (Greenberg et al., 1990). Additionally, in a different study, researchers found salience mortality contributed to participants preferring charismatic political candidates and diminished their preference for relationship-oriented leaders (Cohen, Solomon, Maxfield, Pyszczynski, & Greenberg, 2004).

When leaders instill fear into their followers and remind them of an economic crisis or a poor job market, followers may become more vulnerable which may lead them to support the leader (and illustrating another interplay of the follower with the environment). As Cohen and his colleagues demonstrated, followers are more likely to conform when they have a heightened mortality salience, as we have seen throughout history, such as when people became attracted to Hitler despite his proposed, terrifying actions (2004).

Last, although perceived threat is usually studied as a negative concept, Schmid and Muldoon (2015) noted that research also found that threat makes identification stronger with others who are also feeling threatened. The threat may be directed or felt by a whole country, or a group within an organization.

### Cultural Values

In their definition of cultural values, Padilla and his colleagues (2007) posited that toxic leaders are more likely to rise to power in particular cultures. One of these types of cultures is a culture with high power distance. Power

distance refers to how societies accept the unequal distribution of power (Hofstede, 1980). When power distance is high, there are hierarchical structures, people are dependent on the top leadership, and there are obvious divisions between those at the top and those at the bottom (Hofstede, 1980). Further, dark or toxic leaders are also more likely to rise in cultures that are collectivist, where participation and shared decision making may not be instilled into work culture or national culture (Luthans, Peterson, & Ibrayeva, 1998).

Kellerman (2004) has suggested that it is sometimes the environment that fosters bad behavior. She argued that if an organization is known to tolerate unethical or bad behavior, bad leaders are more likely to thrive (Kellerman, 2004). Similarly, Padilla et al. (2007), as well as other researchers, have suggested that environments in which hierarchical systems exist and competitiveness exists are more likely to foster a tolerance for toxic and unethical leaders (Thoroughgood, Hunter, & Sawyer, 2011). Because organizations sometimes foster cultures in which leaders are focused on short-term profits, the means to get there are often overlooked (Lubit, 2002). Work cultures give employees the ability to have a shared experience and set a standard for what they perceive as normal. Thus, employees may not see some behavior that is toxic or unethical as harmful, but rather perceive it as normal (Thoroughgood et al., 2011).

## Other Factors of Organizational Environments that Support Toxicity

Ethics can be defined as “a systematic set of codes and rules intended to govern morals” (Parker, 1998, p. 1). The Ethics Officer Association (EOA) surveyed organizations and found that over half of the organizations believed guidelines and compliance programs heavily impacted the organizations’ commitment to being ethical (Murphy, 2002). Therefore, organizations should foster cultures that have guidelines for ethics to help guide ethical decisions. Cultures that foster ethical behaviors do so through enacted authentic leadership and reward systems (Trevino, Weaver, Gibson, & Toffler, 1999).

Another component of an organizational culture that may be important to define is the act of favoritism within organizations. Over time and through theory, we have learned that different relationships form between different subordinates and supervisors (e.g., LMX; Liden, Sparrow, & Wayne, 1997). Some of this work is thoroughly explained in the leader member exchange theory literature (Graen & Uhl-Bien, 1995). Although a full treatment of LMX is outside of the scope of this review, some aspects of LMX may be important to consider. The relationship that members or followers have with their supervisors can impact the access to resources and rewards within their organizations (Sparrowe & Liden, 1997). In a lab study, members were less likely to perceive a leader as toxic when they were in the in-group (Pelletier, 2012). Another study found that people who encountered favoritism, nepotism,

and cronyism in their workplace, experienced more stress and dissatisfaction with their jobs (Arasli & Tumer, 2008).

Although a full review of the literature on destructive and toxic leadership is outside of the intended scope of this paper, key points have been explained for a foundation. In an attempt to move the literature forward on destructive leadership, Padilla et al. (2007) have shared their conceptual framework for a toxic triangle. The toxic triangle, which includes the leaders, the followers, and the work environment, has helped researchers approach toxic leadership in a more holistic way.

### The Toxic Triangle

As already noted, Padilla, Hogan, and Kaiser (2007) encourage research on the three pieces of their toxic triangle. They propose that researchers consider looking at relationships within the domains and between the domains (Padilla et al., 2007). However, there is currently a big gap in the literature with regard to toxic environments, so examining it with other contexts would provide both applied and theoretical value. To date, there are currently no scales to assess the toxicity of an individual's work environment in the industrial-organizational psychology or management literature. While this three-piece conceptual model that considers the interplay among environment, leaders, and their followers has been a leap forward, in reviewing the literature for research on the toxic triangle, it is readily apparent that most of the articles on the toxic triangle are case studies, such as applying the elements of the

toxic triangle to explain current or past behavior in organizations (e.g. Fraher, 2014; Thoroughgood & Padilla, 2013). As Padilla (2012) has explained, the work environment appears to be a very important factor in the prevalence and existence of toxic leadership, yet we often overlook it and focus on the leaders and/or their followers. For this reason, the purpose of this study is to develop an empirically and theoretically valid scale that captures the essential domains of a toxic work environment.

### Study One

Based on the reviewed literature on situational factors that are permissive of toxic leaders, specifically the ones identified by Padilla, Hogan, and Kaiser (2007), a first attempt to develop and validate the Alvarado Work Environment Scale of Toxicity (AWEST) was made. Utilizing the measurement class (Psychology 644) in the Fall quarter of 2015, a first attempt to write items to develop a toxic work environment was made in a group context that included other second year students interested in the topic: Jung-Jung Lee, Rachel Bravo, and Eric Cazares.

First, we developed and elaborated upon definitions of the four dimensions identified by Padilla, Hogan, and Kaiser (2007): lacks of checks and balances, perceived threat, instability, and cultural values. Given that the literature on toxic leadership and toxic work environments is fairly new and not exclusively empirical, additional organizational literature was reviewed for each dimension. After reviewing the literature, the definitions were refined to



better fit an organizational context (e.g. cultural values was ultimately changed to general organizational culture). A table with the refined dimensions and their definitions can be found in Appendix A.

After definitions were written and refined, group members met on multiple occasions to write an item pool. Think-out-louds were utilized to better write items, agree on definitions, rewrite items, and eliminate items. Using the final definitions, and with the input of two subject matter experts (SMEs), we decided to include subscales in two of the dimensions: ethics and favoritism were encompassed in general organizational culture, and monitoring and lawfulness was encompassed in lacks of checks and balances.

Industrial-organizational psychology students in their second year of their master's program as well as one additional SME who is an expert in the toxic leadership field, were asked to categorize the items into the dimensions they felt they belonged to. All of the items were kept as people categorized them were they belonged and only some rewording was done to a few items.

We developed an item pool of 72 items (instability: 17 items; perceived threat: 12 items; general organizational culture: 13 items; favoritism: 4 items; ethics: 11 items; lack of checks and balances: 9 items; monitoring and lawfulness: 6 items). The items can be found in Appendix B. We then collected data using the psychology department's SONA system to examine the factor structure of the items. A total of 394 participants responded to the survey. Participants were students from a Southern California University who had

previous or current work experience. Three hundred forty-five participants were kept after screening and checks for careless responding. The sample consisted mostly of women (88%) and Hispanics (65%). The remaining sample consisted of 12% men, 17% Caucasian, 6% African American, 5% Asian American, and 8% of an “other” ethnicity.

Missing data did not appear to be a problem, as we were missing no more than five percent of the data (Tabachnick & Fidell, 2013). After screening for outliers and recoding reverse scored items, the 72 items were analyzed using principle axis factoring with an oblimin rotation. Given the lack of existing measures or literature to guide the process, exploring a few different solutions were utilized. After exploring with three forced solutions (five, six, and seven), we concluded that the five factor solution had the best, most meaningful interpretability. The five factor solution loadings and the total amount of variance explained can be found in Appendix C.

From the results of this pilot, we decided to remove a total of 21 items that did not contribute to the factor structure because they had either a low loading ( $<.30$ ) or cross loaded at  $.10$  or more. A total of 46 items contributed to the factor structure and loaded well (as defined by a factor loading of  $.40$  or above). A total of five items were identified to be revised. They were kept because they contributed to the proposed factor structure and had primary loadings of  $.30$  and above and did not cross load heavily. (Thus, a total of 51 items were planned to be used in the next study.)

The 46 items loaded on five different factors as followed: perceived threat (9 items), positive perceptions of my organizations (19 items), instability (11 items), ethics (3 items), and favoritism (4 items). Considering the original dimensions that were originally proposed, the subscales instability, perceived threat, the ethics subscale, and the favoritism subscale remained. Reliability analyses were conducted for the final factors. Perceived threat (9 items) had a reliability of .90 (Cronbach's alpha). Positive perceptions of my organization (19 items) had a reliability of .91. Instability (11 items) had a reliability of .87. Ethics (3 items) had a reliability of .80. Favoritism (4 items) had a reliability of .83. Although the pilot study did not result in the expected factors, the four scales that were intended to be used for convergent and divergent validity were analyzed against the four factors that were included as original dimensions. The fifth factor, named positive perceptions of my organization, was not used in subsequent correlational analyses as it was not expected, nor was it relevant to the original dimensions. Additionally, there were some sample specific concerns with why that factor loaded as it did (i.e. items with the same word stem and reverse coded items loaded on similar factors).

### Convergent Analyses

The scales planned for use were the Propensity for Participative Decision Making Scale (PPDM) (reliability of .88, 7 items), Scale of Centralization (reliability of .81, 5 items), Perceived Firm Transparency (reliability of .91, 7 items), and the Law and Code Ethical Climate (subscale)

(reliability of .75, 4 items). The Law and Ethics subscale was ultimately not utilized due to its low reliability (the cutoff was set at equal to .80 or higher). The three scales that were utilized along with their correlations with the AWEST scale can be found in Appendix D.

As mentioned earlier, although the pilot study did not provide the expected results, there were some limitations and possible sample-specific issues. As a group, we discussed and decided to eliminate the lowest loading items. Items that loaded moderately (.35) but had cross loadings (cross loaded at .10 or more) were also not kept. For the thesis portion of this project, we recommended that the AWEST be deployed with its original dimensions but without those items that had extremely low factor loadings or heavy cross loadings. Additionally, the items that loaded on the second factor were reworded and some items reverse coded as all of the items on factor two were positively worded which may have contributed to them clustering together.

We argue that because this scale taps into toxicity in the workplace, it might be possible that students may not have been exposed to these dynamics at work that we believe capture work toxicity. Students are usually part time and possibly not interested in the “politics” or future of their organizations, as their positions are often a temporary situation for them. Additionally, it is possible that because many students are in entry-level positions, even if they were interested in these dynamics, they might not be exposed to them. Therefore, it is of interest to deploy the AWEST scale on

another sample with individuals who are in a more diverse set of positions, spend more time at work, and have accrued more years of work experience.

### Retranslation Task

Because there had been some items that had not loaded on their intended constructs, a retranslation task was undertaken in an effort to identify items that might not have been clearly worded, relative to their intended constructs. Then, three subject matter experts reviewed the items developed and refined after the pilot to identify poorly worded or unclear items and to reduce the amount of items in the scale. The results of the retranslation task were reviewed for agreement between SMEs and from the results, a total of 17 items were kept as is, 20 items were reworded, and six new items were added to the scale.

## CHAPTER TWO

### METHOD

#### Sample

Participants in this study were adults over the age of 18 with prior or current work experience of over two years. A total of 357 participants completed the survey. A total of 311 participants were kept after screening and checking for careless responding. Only 280 participants were used for the factor analysis because they answered that overall they had over two years of work experience. Of the 280 participants that were kept for the analysis, 202 participants were from the snowball sample and 78 were from the SONA system. This sample size satisfies Shultz, Whitney, and Zickar's (2014) recommended sample size that is relative to the number of items using a 5:1 ratio (five participants per item) and at least 100 participants. Additionally, Velicer and Fava (1998) suggest that this sample size is adequate for factor reproducibility given the average magnitude of the factor loadings in study 1.

Of the final 280 kept for analyses, 41% were Hispanic/Latino, 33% Caucasian, 14% Asian American, 6% African American, and 6% identified as other. Of those who answered, the average age of participants was 32 years old and 72% of the sample was female.

## Procedure

Participants were recruited via SONA, the CSUSB psychology department research management system, social media (Linked In, Facebook, Instagram, I/O Subreddit), and email lists. The study was deployed through Qualtrics. Participants, who agreed to participate in the study after reading the consent form, were sent to the survey. The items were randomized within specific scales (e.g. participants saw all items within the dimensions in random order). To identify careless responders, two inattentive check questions were asked. Participants then answered a short demographic page that included items to capture work industry, position, and other variables to summarize the sample. After completing the measures and demographics, participants responded to one of two open-ended questions. Upon completion of all measures, open-ended questions, and demographics, participants were thanked, given more information on the study, and then given the option to be taken to a survey which allowed them to be entered into a raffle to win one of four gift cards. If participants participated in the pilot project, they were screened out of participating in this study. If participants were recruited through SONA, extra credit points may have been awarded at their professors' discretion.

## Measures

A total of five self-report measures were utilized in the study: the AWEST, and four additional measures for discriminant and convergent

validation (as described below). The measures along with demographics and two open-ended questions were administered between March and May of 2016. All of the measures that were used in this study are attached in Appendices E.

#### Alvarado Work Environment Scale of Toxicity

The AWEST scale is the measure currently under development. It consisted of 43 items and uses a 7-point Likert scale, anchored with 1 'strongly disagree' to 7 'strongly agree'.

#### Centralization (Hierarchy of Authority)

Centralization (HOA) can be seen as how power is distributed and the degree to which "employees depend on authority and/or the degree of participation in decision making" (Dewar, Whetten, & Boje, 1980). The hierarchy of authority subscale was utilized because it was expected that this construct would be related to the constructs in the AWEST. If employees felt they had decision making authority in the workplace, we might expect that they would rate the environment as less toxic on the AWEST; in particular, we would expect that if employees saw their respective organizational hierarchies as rigid, they would be likely to rate the general organizational culture as more toxic. It is measured with a 4-point Likert scale from 1 'definitely false' to 4 'definitely true'. A moderate relationship with the AWEST scale was expected. For this study, alpha was found to be .86.



### Propensity for Participative Decision Making

Propensity for participative decision making (PPDM) is the idea that managers have different inclinations to utilize participative decision making (Parnell & Crandall, 2001). A subscale of the refined scale, organizational effectiveness, will be used to establish divergent validity. The organizational effectiveness sub dimension taps into beliefs about the relationship between participation and six organizational variables. This scale was chosen because it was expected that organizational variables associated with the effectiveness of the organization would differ from feelings of experiencing toxicity. The subscale consisted of seven items using a 7-point Likert scale. It was expected to exhibit a weak correlation with the AWEST scale. Alpha for this study for this scale was .87.

### Perceived Organizational Support

Perceived organizational support (POS) taps into whether individuals feel their organization values their contributions (Eisenberger, Huntington, Hutchinson, & Sowa, 1986). A short scale of the measure will be utilized using a 7-point Likert scale resulting in the construct being measured with eight items rather than 36. The POS scale was expected to be moderately, negatively correlated to the overall AWEST scale. The construct of perceived organizational support and how people feel they are valued for their contributions should be inversely related to toxic work environments. Alpha for the POS short scale was .94 in this study.

### Global Work Safety Climate:

Global work safety climate (GWSC) taps into general safety concerns in organizations. When this perception is high, organizations tend to have fewer employee injuries and more employees adhering to safety rules (Hanh and Murphy, 2008). Taking DeJoy, Searcy, Murphy, and Gerson's (2000) 16 items from a factor analysis, Hanh and Murphy (2008) developed a short scale. The short scale consisted of six items and uses a 7-point Likert scale. The authors report acceptable reliability coefficients for the short scale (.71 to .85 across different samples) (Hanh and Murphy, 2008). This construct was not expected to correlate with toxic work environments as it is intended to capture physical safety perceptions, which may not be a concern all across industries, nor expected to relate to toxic climate. Thus, a near zero correlation with the AWEST was expected. Reliability estimate for the GWSC was .88 in this study.

### Data Screening and Cleaning

Data were collected using a snowball sampling method and the psychology department's SONA system. A total of 357 participants completed the survey. 311 participants were kept after screening and checking for careless responding. Of the 311 participants, data from 280 were used for the factor analysis because they answered that, overall, they had over two years of work experience. Of the 280 participants' data that were retained for the analysis, 202 participants were from the snowball sample and 78 were from

the SONA system. Missing data did not appear to be a problem; no more than five percent of the data were missing (Tabachnick & Fidell, 2013). No univariate outliers were found. One person's datum was removed due to being a multivariate outlier as defined by being a discontinuous case when looking at a histogram (Fields, 2013), which brought the total number of participants usable for analyses to 279.

## CHAPTER THREE

### RESULTS

#### Factor Analysis of the Alvarado Work Environment Scale of Toxicity

After recoding reverse scored items, the 43 items were analyzed using principle axis factoring with an oblimin rotation. The first solution that was analyzed was the expected six-factor solution. After exploring three forced solutions (five, six, and seven), we concluded that the five-factor solution had the best, most meaningful interpretability. From the five-factor solution, the Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin measure-sampling adequacy was .946, well above the recommended .60. Bartlett's test of sphericity was significant ( $\chi^2(903) = 8277.460, p < .05$ ). The communalities were all above .30, further indicating that the items shared common variance. The five factor solution loadings and the total amount of variance explained can be found in Appendix F (Table 1).

After inspection of the factor structure, a total of 11 items were removed; these items were removed because they either had a loading of less than .40 or cross loaded at .10 or more. A total of 32 items had a factor loading of .40 or above. Thirty-two items loaded on five different factors as follows: favoritism (6 items), perceived threat (11 items), general organizational culture (7 items), monitoring (formerly called ethics;3 items), and instability (5 items).

## Reliability Analysis of the Alvarado Work Environment Scale of Toxicity

Reliability analyses were conducted for the final factors using the items that contributed to the five-factor structure. Overall, the composite AWEST scale had a reliability of .95. The factors, treated as subscales, had generally good indices of internal consistency, using Cronbach's alpha. Favoritism, which consisted of a total of six items, had a reliability of .94. Perceived threat, which consisted of 11 items, had a reliability of .93. General organizational culture, which consisted of seven items, had a reliability of .85. Instability, which consisted of five items, had a reliability of .80. Monitoring, which consisted of 3 items, had a reliability of .74.

### Convergent and Divergent Validity

Additionally, to establish convergent and divergent validity, bivariate correlations were run between the AWEST scale and four scales, Propensity for Participative Decision Making (PPDM), Centralization (Hierarchy of Authority), Global Safety Climate Scale, and Perceived Organizational Support. See Appendix F for these correlations (Table 2) and descriptives for these scales (Table 3).

PPDM. The PPDM was expected to have a small negative correlation with the AWEST. The PPDM scale did not correlate with the AWEST,  $r = .00$ .

Centralization (Hierarchy of Authority). The Centralization Hierarchy of Authority scale was expected to have a moderate positive correlation with the

AWEST. The Hierarchy of Authority Scale correlated with the AWEST scale at  $r = .52$ .

POS. The POS scale was expected to have a moderate negative correlation with the AWEST scale. The Perceived Organizational Support Scale highly negatively correlated with the AWEST scale at  $r = -.83$ .

Global Work Safety Climate Scale (GWSC). The Global Work Safety Climate scale was expected to have a small (near zero correlation) with the AWEST scale. The safety climate scale with the AWEST at  $r = .62$ .

#### Qualitative Coding

Responses to two open-ended questions were analyzed and content coded. Data were coded for respondents who answered the open-ended items, even if they did not complete the quantitative section or had less than two years of work experience. Thus, the qualitative data were analyzed without respect to work experience. After all data had been coded, a comparison of the qualitative data did not appear to demonstrate any meaningful differences in the responses of those who had less than two years of experience, relative to those who had two or more. The data were coded using the hermeneutic method. The responses were first read at the sentence level to understand the writer's meaning and then was examined in parts (Patterson & Williams, 2004). Data were then analyzed across writers and clustered based on patterns (meaning units) that emerged and key phrases. Thematic labels were then created. Two subject matter experts were then

asked to independently review the data. Raters marked the items that they did not agree on and the items that were marked by each rater were discussed among the raters until an agreement was reached. Overall, the final interrater agreement was 97%.

### Positive Themes

Participants were only asked one of the two open-ended questions. If participants answered “yes” for the question “Would you describe your current work environment as a good place to work?” they then were asked to answer the open ended question that asked, “If it is, what makes it a good place to work?” Six themes emerged from the responses. A total of 184 responses were coded. The six themes that emerged were benefits, engagement, flexibility and liberty, work meaningfulness, psychological safety, and positive workplace environment. Example subthemes for all six can be found in Appendix F (Table 4).

Positive work environment (140 respondents). The largest of the themes as gauged by number of respondents, was having a positive work environment. Having a positive work environment was defined as having good relationships with other people within the workplace and overall satisfaction and contentment with the work environment in which one is working. Of these, the largest numbers of referents were to satisfaction with coworkers and enjoying their coworkers and peers’ presence in the workplace. Responses

included statements such as, “employees are kind” and “I love everyone I work with and we all seem to get along.”

Benefits (98 respondents). Another prevalent theme was benefits. Benefits were defined as including formal, informal, and physical benefits that are perceived as advantageous to have access to in the workplace. Of the three subthemes for benefits, the largest number of referents was to informal benefits and made reference to enjoying the opportunities for schedule flexibility and opportunities for growth and development within their companies. The most common in this theme were opportunities for growth and development and included answers such as, “they offer classes to help promoting” and “there is a lot of room to grow, fast!”

Engagement (40 respondents) The third theme that emerged was engagement. Engagement is the emotional involvement one feels at work and it involves concepts such as trust and confidence, appreciation, and care and support. The largest numbers of referents were to feelings of care and collegial support. Illustrative statements included answers such as, “They make you feel needed, wanted and important as part of the county” and feelings of “valued through support.”

Work meaning (20 respondents) The fourth theme that emerged was work meaning. Work meaning can be defined as enjoying one’s work and finding importance in the work one does. Responses included comments such



as “enjoying what I do” and “assisting the elderly into having a better quality of life.”

Flexibility (19 respondents) The fifth theme that emerged was flexibility, which can be defined as the freedom and liberty people experience in the workplace. The most commonly referenced theme here was autonomy and responses included statements such as, “I feel a sense of autonomy at work.”

Psychological security (11 respondents) The sixth theme that emerged was psychological security, which was defined as feeling safe in one’s work environment and not fearful of what tomorrow may bring in the context of one’s employment. The most commonly referenced subtheme, stability, included responses such as “steady, stable employment” and “stability of my organization.”

### Negative Themes

If participants answered “no” for the question, “Would you describe your current work environment as a good place to work?” they were then asked to answer the open ended question that asked, “If it is not a good place to work, explain why it is not a good place to work. What would you change if you could?” A total of 67 people provided a response to the question. Not surprisingly, themes similar to the positive themes emerged, but with complementary responses such as lack of teamwork, lack of autonomy, and so forth. The six themes that emerged were (lack of) engagement, (lack of) benefits, (lack of) flexibility and liberty, negative work environment, (lack of)

psychological safety, and bad leadership. Example subthemes for these can be found in Appendix F (Table 5).

Engagement (35 respondents). The first theme that emerged was lack of engagement. As mentioned earlier, engagement is the emotional involvement one feels at work and it involves ideals such as trust and confidence, appreciation, and care and support. The subtheme with the largest referents here was lack of collaboration and teamwork. The responses included comments like “it is not collaborative” and “if I could change anything, it would be the lack of teamwork...”

Bad leadership (29 respondents). The second theme that emerged was bad leadership, which was defined as feelings that their leadership was unprofessional, inadequate, or unable to successfully fill their roles as leaders. Key subthemes that represented bad leadership were problematic management, unprofessional management, and toxic leadership. If these, the largest number of referents were to problematic management and included such statements as “management is the problem,” and “hypocritical actions by management.”

The third theme that emerged was the nature of the environment. Having a negative work environment was defined as being dissatisfied with the work environment due to people and events one sees transpire in the workplace. The commonly referenced subtheme here was favoritism. Representative responses are “There is favoritism in the workplace.” and

“certain individuals are favored and therefore are not reprimanded when they fail to do their work...”

Flexibility (19 respondents). The fourth theme that emerged was lack of flexibility. Flexibility was defined as the autonomy people experience in the workplace. The most common referent subtheme here was micromanaged. Responses included comments such as, “the environment is micromanaged at the store level.”

Benefits (12 respondents). The fifth theme that emerged was benefits. Benefits were defined as including formal, informal, and physical benefits that are perceived as advantageous in the workplace. The most referent subtheme was lack of opportunities for growth and development. A representative response is “I would create opportunities to be cross-trained to switch to another unit.”

Psychological security (15 respondents). The sixth and final theme that emerged was psychological security, which is defined as feeling safe in one’s work environment and not fearful of what tomorrow may bring. The most referent subtheme was fear. Responses included comments like “too many managers are unwilling to make key decisions...stating they are “too close to retirement” and are afraid of getting fired.”

## CHAPTER FOUR

### DISCUSSION

Toxic work environments and toxic leadership are understudied areas that require further research, especially now that the negative side of leadership is being studied and there is more interest in how toxic leaders infiltrate and affect organizations (Padilla & Lunsford 2013; Pelletier, 2010). As mentioned earlier, unfortunately, a lack of literature, research, and measures in the area strongly limits our ability to explore these topics.

The purpose of this study was to develop a scale to assess toxic work environments. The study examined the factor structure for the Alvarado Work Environment Scale of Toxicity (AWEST). Further, this study aimed to understand the properties of the AWEST scale by establishing construct validity. Due to the limited amount of research in the field of toxic leadership, qualitative data were collected to further understand what makes for good and bad work environments and to better understand the topic in general.

#### Alvarado Work Environment Scale of Toxicity Scale

The AWEST scale was developed as a first attempt to explore the dimensions discussed by Padilla, Hogan, and Kaiser (2007) on what makes a toxic work environment as defined by their dimensions in the toxic triangle. Padilla et al. (2007) talk about the environment, but do not go into specifics on what the dimensions include, and most of their background lacks guidance on

how this may apply in the workplace. In their description of an allowing environment, Padilla et al. (2007) suggest that it is one that lacks checks and balances, is unstable, contains perceived threats, and lacks good culture. Taking SME input and previous exploratory findings together, the AWEST scale attempted to identify key constructs and develop a scale to further understand what constitutes a toxic work environment.

To accomplish this objective, literature on the dimensions mentioned by Padilla, Hogan, and Kaiser (2007) was reviewed along with additional organizational literature such as instability in organizations and turbulence (Boyne, & Meier, 2009). Items were constructed based on the review. A pilot was deployed and from the results of it, items were rewritten to better capture their intended constructs. In addition, a retranslation task was undertaken in an effort to identify items that might not have been clearly worded, relative to their proposed constructs. Finally, for this particular study, a qualitative piece was added to capture additional constructs of negative leadership that might have emerged.

Overall, it appears that the AWEST scale needs to be further modified before confirming its factor structure. A six-factor solution was expected, but a five-factor solution was more interpretable. Three usable items from dimensions other than their intended dimensions were retained after careful consideration because their revised placement made theoretical sense. For example, item four for general organizational culture, “not all employees are

treated fairly,” loaded highly on favoritism. Thus, this item might have rightly belonged there in the first place. Two items originally in checks and balances loaded highly on the fifth dimension, along with “unethical behavior is tolerated from employees,” an original ethics item. Thus, for the purpose of meaningful interpretation, it was decided that they better fit together as a monitoring dimension since the two items included the words “correctly, monitored, and integrity,” which may be perceived as related to monitoring.

Many items that were originally designated to belong to the lack of checks and balances, ethics, and instability dimensions did not contribute to the expected factor structure. Specifically, five checks and balances items, three ethics items, and three instability items either loaded less than the .40 criterion or cross-loaded. Checks and balances items such as “there are no policies in place to prevent managers from having total decision-making power” cross-loaded in either the original ethics or the favoritism dimensions. Items that belonged in the original ethics dimension (e.g. unethical behavior is a norm in my organization) loaded onto perceived threat and general organizational culture. Items that originally were written for instability did not load on any factor. Thus, some items that were expected to contribute to a specific dimension were not seen by the respondents as originally conceptualized by the researcher based on the prior literature. It is possible that some of these items need revision or it may be that the concepts as originally proposed in the toxic triangle may have different meanings to

employees. Therefore, these dimensions may need some modification; the qualitative portion of this study may assist with writing items for these sections.

Additionally, the items in these dimensions may not have loaded because they may require deep knowledge of the organization and access to knowing what upper management is up to. For example, items like “members of top management in my organization frequently change” and “my organization has multiple people in charge of making decisions” may require that the respondents have access to upper management (e.g. attend meetings, receive emails from them) and may require that the respondent understands who top management is. For example, respondents may believe their supervisors are top management when in fact they are at a lower level of management and receive direction from the top. Some of the qualitative data support this interpretation as some people who reported that their work environment was not good, also mentioned that their direct managers were poor leaders or specifically described their direct supervisors. Only a few respondents mentioned top management or questioned the structure of their organization.

In favor of the proposed factor structure, the favoritism and perceived threat dimensions emerged very cleanly. Additionally, the general organizational culture dimension also emerged fairly clearly. These dimensions included items that tapped into whether people feel that their work

place favors some people over others, contains intimidation and fear, and how much collaboration exists.

These three dimensions give us insight into what may be most apparent to people when they feel that their work environment is toxic. Favoritism may be felt strongly because of the outcomes (e.g. loss of opportunities) that come with it (Sparrow & Liden, 1997). Lack of access to resources and opportunities may be keenly felt because in the long run, there may be serious employment consequences for the employee (e.g. not getting a promotion). Additionally, perceived threat may also be exceptionally salient as this feeling threatens our safety and security, which are strong factors to us as individuals, and are necessary as explained long ago by Maslow (1943). As scholars point out in the literature, when we feel threatened and mortality is salient, we become attracted to charismatic leaders (Cohen et al., 2004). Supporting this notion, Lipman-Blumen has stated that a disorganized environment can install fear within ourselves and that fear can encourage us to follow leaders that offer us illusions of certainty and promises of control (2005). Nevertheless, perceived threats in the work environment do seem to contribute to this assemblage of toxic contexts that contribute to a toxic environment.

The items that tapped into the general organizational culture also gave insight on what people value in their work environments, such as collaboration in the workplace. Given the themes that emerged in the qualitative data, I feel that these dimensions are well captured by the existing items on the AWEST.



## Reliability

Overall, the AWEST scale had good reliability (.95); the individual dimensions, when formed into subscales, all also had acceptable reliability scores, ranging from .74 to .94. Not surprisingly, the favoritism subscale had the highest reliability, alpha equaled .94, and perceived threat had the second highest reliability (.93). General organizational culture followed (.84), instability (.80), and last, monitoring (.74). Some item refinement might also improve the reliability of the subscales, general organizational culture and instability. As mentioned earlier, favoritism and perceived threat may be strong factors in understanding what makes for toxic work environments. The monitoring dimension reliability could be improved (to .80), by dropping the item, “unethical behavior is tolerated from employees” However, doing so would leave two items to capture this dimension of monitoring. Rather, it would be useful to further explore the nature of this unexpected dimension in future research. Another aspect that may be included in this dimension and should be explored is one related to managerial discretion and monitoring by managers. When discretion is high, managers have more autonomy in their decisions and although this is needed for effective leadership, too much allows for abuse of power (Hambrick & Finkelstein, 1987; Padilla, 2012). Thus, monitoring of their work and decisions may be a good fit in this dimension.

## Convergent and Divergent Validity

The AWEST scale was expected to have a small negative correlation with the PPDM subscale. The AWEST had no correlation with the PPDM, which is supportive of the prediction. The PPDM subscale is intended to capture participation variables within organizations that managers stimulate in their employees (Parnell, Koseoglu, & Dent, 2012). We expected, and found, the PPDM subscale to be unrelated to the AWEST scale. Additionally, the PPDM also had near zero correlations with the AWEST subscales (See Appendix F, Table 6). These results may be explained by the fact that the PPDM captures one's beliefs about organizational effectiveness and participation (Parnell, Koseoglu, & Dent, 2012) whereas the AWEST is related to one's experiences. A personal belief may not always mirror one's actual experience within one's workplace.

The AWEST was expected to have a small correlation with the GWSC. Surprisingly, the AWEST had a large correlation with the GWSC. The highest correlation was found with the AWEST General Organizational Culture subscale ( $r = -.65$ ), but all subscales had meaningful correlations with the GWSC. The global work safety climate scale captures the presence and adherence to safety practices and an overall safety climate in the workplace (Hahn & Murphy, 2008). This scale has been found to be related to scales of feedback and communication (Hahn & Murphy, 2008). Additionally, Nahrgang, Morgeson, and Hofmann (2011) suggest that social support, safety climate,

and leadership explained variance for outcomes such as burnout and engagement. Also of note, not all items used in the safety scale explicitly make reference to physical safety and health. Thus, these results suggest that responses to this safety scale may represent more than simple physical safety, but psychological safety as well, which would logically be associated (negatively) with people's perception of the toxicity of their work environment. Additionally, as terror management theory helps explain, both psychological and physical safety may be related to a toxic work environment, how we act as followers, and our embracement of a leader we believe can restore order (Cohen et al., 2004).

A moderate correlation was expected with the Centralization–Hierarchy of Authority Scale. A moderately large positive correlation ( $r = .52$ ) was found. The highest correlation with an AWEST subscale was found between this scale and the AWEST perceived threat subscale (Appendix F, Table 6), but all correlations were meaningfully high. As some of the qualitative responses showed, collaboration and participation are important to employees. Thus, this could be why a scale that captures power distribution and dependency on authority for decision-making (Dewar, Whetten, & Boje, 1980). would correlate highly with the AWEST scale. Items in the Centralization scale ask how much decision making one can do in the workplace without having to ask for permission. The scale includes questions such as, “I have to ask my boss before I do almost anything” and “any decision I make has to have my boss’

approval.” As noted with reference to the qualitative results, the high correlations could exist because many participants responded that they especially disliked a lack of autonomy in the workplace, and the Centralization scale emphasizes a lack of autonomy.

A moderately large negative correlation was expected with the POS scale. A negative large correlation was found between the POS short scale and the AWEST. When correlated with the AWEST subscales, the largest correlations were with perceived threat ( $r = .73$ ) and general organizational culture ( $r = -.74$ ). The POS captures perceived organizational support and value of contributions (Rhoades & Eisenberg, 2002). Thus, this should be explored further as we expected to be measuring not only the lack of organizational support, but also other aspects of organizational environmental qualities that make up a toxic work environment. However, lack of organizational support may be closely related to feelings of a toxic work environment as feelings of support and being valued by an organization did emerge in the qualitative piece of the study, and therefore, this large correlation would make sense. A review of the pattern of correlations notes some meaningful patterns. For example, POS and favoritism, perceived threat, and GOC had statistically different correlations from instability and ethics, which one would expect given what is encompassed in POS. For example, if an employee believes that favoritism is present in her workplace, she is not likely to feel supported by the organization as a whole. Further, there is some

evidence that some employees view their organization through their relationships with their supervisors, who could be the very people playing favorites. Similarly, an inspection of the AWEST perceived threat scale shows that many sources of threat come from management or supervision, so again, this may partially explain the large correlation. The AWEST GOC also contains a number of items that make reference to management. Additionally, outcomes of organizational support include reductions of strains such as stress and anxiety (Rhoades & Eisenberg, 2002), which may be related to toxic work environments. Additionally, through the perspective of organizational support theory, perceived support, people perceive their organizations as supportive based on norms, culture, and climate, which would be expected to be highly related to what is captured in the general organizational culture sub dimension of the AWEST, thus contributing to the large correlation.

### Qualitative Analysis

The qualitative portion of this study aimed to capture themes or dimensions that may need to be included in further scale modifications and/or to gain support for having captured and assessed, comprehensively, the dimensions of toxic environment. The positive themes that emerged were benefits, engagement, flexibility, work meaning, psychological security, and positive work environment. The negative themes that emerged were (lack of)

engagement, (lack of) benefits, (lack of) flexibility, (lack of) psychological security, negative work environment, and bad leadership.

The qualitative portion captured similar themes to what was assessed in the AWEST scale and provided evidence for some of the scale's dimensions. Specifically, the qualitative data provided evidence for experiences of favoritism, perceived threat, and general organizational culture. However, comments about unprofessional management, bullying, and lack of communication also emerged and were not captured in items in this version of the AWEST.

The positive themes that emerged in the qualitative portion of the study really give insight into the elements that people enjoy in their workplaces. Benefits seem to be very important to people, and not just pay and health benefits, but also informal benefits such as flexibility, autonomy, scheduling, and opportunities to grow and develop. Other ideas that seem to be very important to people are getting along with coworkers and peers as well as teamwork and collaboration. As explained in the literature, collaboration creates a supportive environment, which underpins positive feelings in the workplace and is correlated to job satisfaction (Griffin, Patterson, & West, 2001; Henneman, Lee, & Cohen, 1995). Thus, these results are consistent with literature about healthy workplaces.

The negative themes that emerged in the qualitative portion of the study also give insight into what people dislike about their workplace as well as what

they would change, if given the chance. People dislike favoritism, bullying, fear, and not having an environment that fosters teamwork and collaboration. Not surprisingly, bullying is associated with lowered job satisfaction (Salin, 2003). Since teamwork and culture are predictors of job satisfaction (Korner, Wirtz, Bengel, & Goritz, 2015), these findings make sense. Understanding these factors is crucial because as mentioned earlier, there are environmental conditions and organizations that allow these factors contribute to the rise of a toxic leader (Kellerman, 2004; Walton, 2007).

Some themes that emerged that were not included in the AWEST initially include perceptions of opportunities for growth and development, (dis)satisfaction with colleagues, micromanagement, fear, bullying, and perceptions of management's (lack of) professionalism. Fear is worrisome as instilling fear in followers can lead to obedience from followers, which would contribute to the components of destructive leadership (Padilla et al., 2007). Fear also diminishes our psychological safety and we may seek a toxic leader to meet our psychological needs (Lipman-Blumen, 2005). In all, this fear may also link our individual needs and the instability within an environment, making us more likely to follow a toxic leader (Lipman-Blumen, 2005). Additionally, bullying was a theme that emerged as well. Bullying has harmful effects on job satisfaction (Salin, 2003). Additionally, inadequate leadership increases the likelihood of workplace bullying (Salin, 2003). Thus, these may be things to explore further.

Implications of the qualitative results for refinement of the AWEST. Now that we know that these concepts, or lack of, seem to converge across people's answers, we can consider including some additional scales to deploy along with the AWEST scale. For example, we can directly ask people about perceptions of their direct supervisor and bullying that occurs in their workplace. Bullying scales currently exist in the literature that may be used along with the AWEST (Escartin, Rodriguez-Carballeira, Zapf, Porrua, & Martin-Pena, 2009). Additionally, although opportunities, or, lack of, for growth and development may be related to favoritism, other items regarding limitations in organizations could be asked.

Though not explicitly explored in this thesis, it may be that the construct of a toxic workplace is a composite of a myriad of features (i.e., is a formative, not reflective construct) and most, if not all, elements must be present to capture an accurate constellation of toxicity. We have taken the reflective approach here as we believe that not all features described would be necessary for an employee to consider her workplace to be toxic, but if toxic environment is in fact a formative construct, then more theoretical and psychometric work will need to be done beyond the development of the AWEST (cf. MacKenzie, Podsakoff, & Jarvis, 2005).

The results of this study help further the small amount of research on toxic work environments. Even though the scale is not necessarily ready for deployment, considerable information was gained that will allow for revision of



items, writing new items, and understanding what items work for this scale. Even further, the qualitative piece of this study provided rich information to help further understand what individuals feel makes for a positive or toxic work environment. Although other pieces of culture emerged in the qualitative such as work-life family friendly workplaces (Greenhaus & Powell, 2006), it is evident that there is some rich evidence that came out of this study.

### Future Research

Future research is definitely needed to understand what makes for toxic work environments. As Padilla (2012) points out, although the environmental piece of organizations is crucial, and perhaps the most important, it is severely understudied. It would be useful to incorporate and modify items that better capture the themes in future use of the AWEST scale. One way this may be done is by utilizing SMEs again for a retranslation task after writing new items to capture themes revealed from the qualitative analysis.

Although some of the themes that emerged in the qualitative portion may be related to other pieces of the triangle, like the leader and followers, studying these pieces simultaneous may lead to a better understanding of toxic work environments. Padilla, Hogan, and Kaiser (2007) explained that they are not sure if the toxic triangle pieces are additive or interactive, but one important implication is that when feasible, the elements should be studied together to form a more complete picture of how destructive leadership emerges and thrives.

Future studies should also consider asking direct questions about how employees feel about their supervisors, their colleagues, and how one feels about the environment as a whole. As aforementioned, members in an in group are less likely to perceive someone as toxic than those in an out group (Pelletier, 2012). Thus, when asking about concepts such as how one feel's about the work environment, it may be interesting to also ask about whether one feels like they are liked by their management or not. It could also be that people's experiences with these features of their work environment are differentially perceived or that one positive environmental aspect can serve as a shield or buffer against other toxic factors. For example, teamwork has been studied as a moderator for supervisor support and thus, utilizing teamwork may buffer some of these negative element experienced in an otherwise toxic environment (Griffin, Patterson, & West, 2001). Further having a healthy work group and feeling supported by colleagues may shield people from a toxic environment outside of the immediate work group and a toxic leader. As Allio (2007) mentions, people in the organization are capable of regulating when the organization fails to self-regulate; people are also capable of building allies to create powers, which can alleviate these issues. Thus, when an environment turns toxic, employees may choose to build allies to buffer themselves against the worst features of the toxic work environment. This latter idea reminds us that the toxic triangle consists of an interplay of factors.

As representative of the interplay, colluders may in essence become part of the toxic environment for some employees. Indeed, as Barbuto (2000) explains, colluders may have a large effect on the environment. This may explain why people referenced their colleagues so often in the qualitative portion of the study. Additionally, people who experience nepotism and favoritism may be more dissatisfied and feel more stress at work (Arasli & Tumer, 2008)—and feel especially aggrieved if they see that the colluders are receiving the preferential treatment. Thus, it may explain why favoritism was so salient in the factor structure for the AWEST.

Last, for the AWEST, future refining of items is recommended. The AWEST has a lot of potential in helping to capture the salient aspects of toxic work environments. The next step in refining this scale would be to refine items, based on what we learned in the qualitative analysis as mentioned earlier. Additionally, if possible, it would be ideal to continue these studies and eventually move on to confirming the factor structure for the AWEST. As mentioned earlier, in conjunction to using the AWEST scale, it might be useful to deploy a bullying scale or other scales that may capture negative features of work environment. Finally, as noted earlier, it may be important theoretically, to consider if the toxic environment is truly a formative construct in which case the AWEST would be but one of several scales that would be necessary to fully capture the toxic environment (MacKenzie et al., 2005).

## Theoretical and Practical Implications

The work on toxic work environments and how they ultimately contribute to toxic leadership is far from over. Thus, properly developing, refining, and validating a scale to assess workplace environment toxicity could help shift the field forward, both theoretically and practically. Padilla, Hogan, and Kaiser (2007) developed a conceptual framework that has been widely accepted as to what may contribute and ultimately result in destructive leadership. However, as mentioned before, there are no known or published studies in the area of toxic work environments to assess whether the components in the toxic environment framework proposed by Padilla, Hogan, and Kaiser (2007) are the dimensions that are seen in the workplace. Additionally, little is known about any sub dimensions that may be derived from these elements.

Examining the factor structure of the AWEST has already given us insight into what people may feel makes work environments toxic, and what may not be as apparent to people in organizations. By expanding research in the area, the framework can be enhanced by having some evidence for the theory and expanding on what is already known in the area. Based on what we have found, there is a deeper understanding about what toxic work environments look like in organizational settings and what aspects of them are felt by people as most salient (e.g. favoritism), which were not included in Padilla, Hogan, and Kaiser's framework. Last, use of qualitative data has

produced support for some of the themes proposed by Padilla, Hogan, and Kaiser (2007) and support for the favoritism sub dimension we added to the framework.

Additionally, practical usefulness may come of proper development and use of the AWEST scale. By developing a refined final version of the AWEST scale, one can deploy it in workplaces. By utilizing a scale such as the AWEST scale in the workplace, practitioners and organizations could gain insight into the environment of an organization. Even further, by understanding which dimensions are dysfunctional (e.g. favoritism) in a workplace, one could fix them. Even if a practitioner may not be able to “fix” all toxic issues in the workplace, the AWEST could help with diagnosis so practitioners could take steps to alleviate toxicity and make work environments a better place for employees. The AWEST has already provided insight on what is most visibly toxic to people in their work environments and could continue to do so for practitioners’ use in the future.

### Limitations

There are some limitations with the study. A snowball sample method in which people gave the survey to friends and colleagues was used. The issue with this approach, although very convenient, is that colleagues may have shared experiences in the workplace, and thus, we may have been limited in reaching very different people across very different work environments. Seventy-two percent of participants responded that they had received the link

from a friend/colleague, by email, and social media (See Appendix F, Table 7). For future studies, it may be important to reach different people in different organizations that have very different work environments. It would be especially insightful to administer the AWEST to different organizations, some of which are known to have good climates and to other organizations that are known to be struggling with organizational cultural issues.

Another limitation to this study was that 72% of participants were female. It may be possible that women and men face different toxicity in the workplace and have different experiences with certain aspects of work. For example, we know that women's' experiences in the workplace come with myriad limitations in job growth (e.g. glass cliff, glass ceiling, lack of powerful mentors) and are more likely to experience harassment than men (Ragins & Cotton, 1999; Berdahl & Moore, 2006; Kottke & Pelletier, 2013). Although no direct questions were asked about harassment or job growth, it could be something to consider for future studies. For example, a question that might help uncover this possibility would be an open ended item that asks participants to expand on the reasons they believe their workplace may limit their potential job growth; an example response that would be consistent with the above assertion regarding women's' often differential treatment might be: "My boss doesn't offer me promotions because he thinks I might have more children." Such responses would shed light on to whether gender differences might with reference to toxic climates.

Additionally, not everyone who responded to the negative work environment open-ended question gave a response for both parts of the question. That is, there were two major dimensions to the question and the resulting respondents' comments that were to be assessed: what features made the workplace difficult for the respondent and second, what kinds of changes might the respondent make; that said, of the themes that did emerge, they appeared to be encompassed within the same dimensions (e.g. do not like boss, thus, would change my boss).

One final limitation in this study was that 67% of participants had completed at least a vocational/A.A degree. The sample consisted mostly of people with at least some higher education and therefore might have been working at white-collar jobs. Experiences for people with blue-collar jobs may be different than what we have found. The industries represented can be found in Appendix F (Table 8). Future research may be needed here.

### Conclusion

In conclusion, this study helped our understanding of toxic work environments. First, we were able to see what dimensions emerged clearly and which require some refinement. We noted, for example, that favoritism and perceived threat appear to very apparent to people in their work environments. Second, we were able to understand both negative and positive aspects of work environments that are important to employees by utilizing qualitative data. Last, we were able to take some of those themes and

consider utilizing them to write items for refining the AWEST. Future studies of the AWEST are crucial to assess toxic work environments in the workplace. Additionally, we propose that more research on toxic work environments be conducted to look at the big picture: studying the leader, the people, and the environment, all at one time.



APPENDIX A  
INITIAL DEFINITIONS FROM PILOT

## INITIAL DEFINITIONS FROM PILOT

**Instability:** Instability can be defined as radical and extensive organizational change that has an impact on the durability of the organization. Instability creates a sense of uncertainty within the organization. Can include scandals, workforce reduction, industry changes, policy changes, and organizational restructure.

**Perceived Threat:** The perception of imminent threat to an individual or group of people within an organization. The perception of threat can be embodied in feelings of mistreatment or a lack of security in one's job or position within the organization.

**General Organizational Culture:** Consists of what is embedded and therefore shared, valued, and deeply rooted within an organization. Organizational culture sets a standard within an organization of what constitutes normal work behavior and expectations. It can be captured in policies, communication, rules, structure, goals, and philosophies.

**Absence of Checks and Balances:** The absence of shared decision-making, absence of internal controls, absence of monitoring the integrity of work and limited shared governance. Power is central to one or very few people at the top of a hierarchical structure and one party undertakes decision-making. This dimension encompasses decision making and monitoring and lawfulness.

APPENDIX B  
INITIAL ALVARADO WORK ENVIRONMENT SCALE  
OF TOXICITY SCALE ITEMS

## Original AWEST Scale Items

### Instability:

1. Top management seems to make a lot of rushed decisions.
2. Members of top management in my organization frequently change.
3. My organization has been associated with scandals in the past.
4. My organization is always revising policies.
5. My organization is stable (R).
6. Employees in my organization tend to stay for a long time. (R)
7. I find it hard to know what policies to follow because they change often.
8. I feel that my position could be eliminated at any given moment.
9. Recently, the resources needed to do my job are harder to get.
10. Changes in my organization are often unpredictable.
11. Top management is able to handle unexpected changes (R).
12. My organization can quickly adapt to change (R).
13. My organization has a reputation for suddenly eliminating jobs.
14. Layoffs are common in my organization.
15. I worry about the future of my organization.
16. I have a secure job (R).
17. My organization makes an effort to keep employees during economic downturns (R).

### Perceived Threat:

1. My manager often reminds my coworkers and me that our jobs are replaceable.
2. I am afraid of making a mistake, because I know I will be punished.
3. I feel intimidated at work.
4. I am verbally threatened when mistakes are made.
5. I feel comfortable at work (R)
6. I am publically criticized when I make mistakes.
7. Upper management tells me that I am lucky to have my job.
8. My department is under a lot of pressure to get things done quickly.

9. My coworkers worry a lot about how management might reorganize them
10. In my organization, employees are punished for speaking up about wrongdoing.
11. I feel like I am mistreated in my organization.
12. I feel appreciated by my organization (R).

General Organizational Culture:

1. I believe my coworkers and I are a team (R).
2. Managers in my organization use an open door policy (R).
3. The reasons that employees get fired rarely have anything to do with poor work performance.
4. Qualified people are often passed up for promotions in my organization.
5. Decisions in my organization are usually made by people in groups (R).
6. People at all levels of my organization have common goals (R).
7. In my organization, promotions are based on performance (R).
8. My organization treats all employees fairly(R).
9. My organization encourages autonomy (R).
10. Regular meetings are held often to discuss organizational progress (R)
11. New organizational policies are reviewed before they are implemented (R).
12. My organization recognizes my contributions (R).
13. When people get to know how things are done here, they decide it is better to leave than to stay.

Subscale: Ethics

1. Speaking up about wrongdoing is encouraged in my organization (R).
2. My organization is tolerant of unethical behavior from employees.
3. My organization is tolerant of unethical behavior from top management.
4. My organization is concerned more with short term profits (outcomes) than long term goals.

5. Generally, the people in my organization are trustworthy (R).
6. My organization only cares about getting good results.
7. My organization cares about its employees (R).
8. My organization has a good reputation in the field (industry) (R).
9. Employees often feel exploited in my organization.
10. I often see unethical behavior in my organization.
11. I often find myself in ethical dilemmas while at work.

Subscale: Favoritism

1. In my organization, there is (are) a favored group(s) of employees.
2. In my organization, promotions are based on friendships.
3. In my organization, you have to know someone to get hired.
4. I feel certain employees get better opportunities than others.

Checks and Balances:

1. People in top management positions make decisions without asking for input from anyone.
2. When decisions that affect the whole department need to be made, managers meet with their bosses to discuss them (R).
3. My manager has a lot of authority when it comes to making decisions.
4. There are policies in place that prevent management from having total decision making authority. (R).
5. My organization has a panel of people that makes decisions (R).
6. There is shared responsibility across levels in my organization (R).
7. Resources are held by one person in my organization.
8. Authority is delegated to many people in my organization (R).
12. Those in higher positions have all the decision-making authority.

Subtheme: Monitoring

1. Work in my organization is often reviewed to assure things are being done correctly (R).
2. My organization follows federal and state laws as they apply to my organization (R).
3. There is information sharing between upper and lower levels in my organization (R).

4. In my organization, there is one person who holds all of the power.
5. There are procedures in place to ensure the integrity of employee work in my organization (R).
6. Regulations are hardly followed in my organization.

APPENDIX C  
EXPLORATORY FACTOR ANALYSIS FOR PILOT STUDY



## EFA FOR PILOT STUDY

### Total Variance Explained by 5 Factors: 44.037%

#### Factor 1

##### 29% Variance

1. Members of top management in my organization frequently change. -.579
2. My organization has been associated with scandals in the past. -.489
3. Employees in my organization tend to stay for a long time. -.407
4. I find it hard to know what policies to follow because they change often. .500
5. I feel that my position could be eliminated at any given moment. -.527
6. Recently, the resources needed to do my job are harder to get. -.426
7. Changes in my organization are often unpredictable. -.529
8. My organization has a reputation for suddenly eliminating jobs. -.707
9. Layoffs are common in my organization. -.626
10. I have a secure job. -.505
11. My organization makes an effort to keep employees during economic downturns. -.507

#### Factor 2

##### 5% Variance

1. My organization can quickly adapt to change. -.437
2. I believe my coworkers and I are a team. -.451
3. Managers in my organization use an open door policy. -.416
4. Decisions in my organization are usually made by people in groups. -.416
5. People at all levels of my organization have common goals. -.478
6. In my organization, promotions are based on performance. -.440
7. My organization treats all employees fairly. -.487
8. My organization encourages autonomy. -.464

9. Regular meetings are held often to discuss organizational progress. -.537
10. New organizational policies are reviewed before they are implemented. -.566
11. My organization recognizes my contributions. -.515
12. Speaking up about wrongdoing is encouraged in my organization. -.419
13. Generally, the people in my organization are trustworthy. -.458
14. My organization has a panel of people that makes decisions. -.582
15. There is shared responsibility across levels in my organization. -.450
16. Authority is delegated to many people in my organization. -.405
17. Work in my organization is often reviewed to assure things are being done correctly. -.469
18. There is information sharing between upper and lower levels in my organization. -.449
19. There are procedures in place to ensure the integrity of employee work in my organization. -.501

### **Factor 3**

#### **4% Variance**

1. My manager often reminds my coworkers and me that our jobs are replaceable. .520
2. I am afraid of making a mistake, because I know I will be punished. .707
3. I feel intimidated at work. .744
4. I am verbally threatened when mistakes are made. .629
5. I am publically criticized when I make mistakes. .626
6. Upper management tells me that I am lucky to have my job. .533
7. My coworkers worry a lot about how management might reorganize them .423
8. In my organization, employees are punished for speaking up about wrongdoing. .596
9. I feel like I am mistreated in my organization. .589

#### **Factor 4**

##### **3% Variance**

1. My organization is tolerant of unethical behavior from employees. .737
2. My organization is tolerant of unethical behavior from top management. .706
3. My organization is concerned more with short-term profits (outcomes) than long-term goals. .476

#### **Factor 5**

##### **3% Variance**

1. In my organization, there is (are) a favored group(s) of employees. F5 -.636
2. In my organization, promotions are based on friendships. F5 -.524
3. I feel certain employees get better opportunities than others. F5 -.666
4. I often see unethical behavior in my organization. -.475 cross loading F4 .366 explain later

## APPENDIX D

### CONVERGENT AND DIVERGENT SCALES USED FOR PILOT

## CONVERGENT AND DIVERGENT SCALES USED FOR PILOT

Parnell and Crandall's (2001) refined PPDM scale

Organizational Effectiveness Dimension (7 point Likert scale used)

1. Many organizational problems disappear when everyone has a chance to participate in decision making.
2. Participative decision making usually results in effective decisions.
3. Group decisions are worth any extra time required.
4. Participative decision making stimulates feelings of self worth for subordinates.
5. Participative decision making is an effective communication tool.
6. Participative decision making promotes positive relationships at all levels of the organization.
7. When my boss allows me to participate in decisions I feel more important.

Parnell, J. A., & "Rick" Crandall, W. (2001). Rethinking participative decision making: A refinement of the propensity for participative decision making scale. *Personnel Review*, 30(5), 523-535.

## Aiken and Hage Scales of Centralization (1980)

Hierarchy of Authority 4 point Likert Scale used

1. There can be little action taken here until a supervisor approves a decision.
2. A person who wants to make his own decisions would be quickly discouraged.
3. Even small matters have to be referred to someone higher up for a final answer.
4. I have to ask my boss before I do almost anything.
5. Any decision I make has to have my boss' approval.

Dewar, R. D., Whetten, D. A., & Boje, D. (1980). An examination of the reliability and validity of the Aiken and Hage scales of centralization, formalization, and task routineness. *Administrative Science Quarterly*, 120-128

Perceived Firm Transparency: Scale and Model Development by Jennifer L. Depko (2012)

7 point Likert Scale used

1. This company is willing to share information with me even when it may make the company look bad.
2. This company provides me with a learning opportunity about itself.
3. This company enables me to know what it's doing.
4. This company is willing to explain its decisions to me.
5. This company is willing to share just about any information I request from it.
6. This company wants me to understand what it is doing.
7. This company is open with me.

Dapko, J. (2012). Perceived firm transparency: Scale and model development.

APPENDIX E  
SCALES FOR THESIS



## SCALES FOR THESIS

### Refined AWEST Scale

#### Instability

1. Members of top management in my organization frequently change.
2. My organization has been associated with scandals in the past.
3. I find it hard to know what policies to follow because they change often.
4. Position in my organization could be eliminated at any given moment.
5. Changes in my organization are often unpredictable.
6. My organization quickly eliminates jobs when the economy changes.
7. Layoffs are common in my organization.
8. My workplace may close in the near future.

#### General Organizational Culture

1. Adapting to change is something people easily do at my organization [R]
2. My workplace does not foster a collaborative environment.
3. In my organization, promotions are decided based on performance.
4. Not treat all employees fairly.
5. Teamwork is highly practiced in this organization.
6. My organization seems to value employees.
7. Our daily work matches our mission at my organization.

#### Perceived Threat

1. I am afraid of making a mistake, because I know I will be punished.
2. I feel intimidated at work.
3. I am verbally threatened when mistakes are made.
4. I am publically criticized when I make mistakes.
5. Upper management tells me that I am lucky to have my job.
6. I feel like I am mistreated in my organization.
7. People are afraid to speak up for fear that doing so could result in getting reprimanded.

8. Everyone I know here at work is just trying to find a way to survive without getting fired
9. Upper management reminds us that our jobs are replaceable.
10. Employees are penalized for speaking up about wrongdoing.
11. I do not feel that I could trust anyone at work.

#### Ethics

1. Unethical behavior is tolerated from employees.
2. Top management participates in unethical behavior.
3. Unethical behavior is a norm in my organization.
4. My organization often does not adhere to regulations.

#### Favoritism

1. In my organization, there is (are) a favored group(s) of employees.
2. In my organization, promotions are based on favoritism.
3. I feel as if some employees get better opportunities than others.
4. Favored employees get away with things others would not.
5. It is easier for favored employees to get resources.

#### Absence of Checks and Balances

1. Work is not reviewed to assure things are being done correctly.
2. There are no procedures in place to ensure the integrity of employee work.
3. There are no policies in place to prevent managers from having total decision-making power.
4. Meetings to discuss organizational progress are not common.
5. My organization has multiple people in charge of making decisions (R).
6. Authority is never passed down to employees in my organization.
7. There is no information sharing between upper and lower levels in my workplace.
8. There seems to be no check on the power of our managers here

Parnell and Crandall's (2001) refined PPDM scale

Organizational Effectiveness Dimension (7 point Likert scale used)

1. Many organizational problems disappear when everyone has a chance to participate in decision making.
2. Participative decision making usually results in effective decisions.
3. Group decisions are worth any extra time required.
4. Participative decision making stimulates feelings of self worth for subordinates.
5. Participative decision making is an effective communication tool.
6. Participative decision making promotes positive relationships at all levels of the organization.
7. When my boss allows me to participate in decisions I feel more important.

Parnell, J. A., & "Rick" Crandall, W. (2001). Rethinking participative decision making: A refinement of the propensity for participative decision making scale. *Personnel Review*, 30(5), 523-535.

## Aiken and Hage Scales of Centralization (1980)

Hierarchy of Authority 4 point Likert Scale used

1. There can be little action taken here until a supervisor approves a decision.
2. A person who wants to make his own decisions would be quickly discouraged.
3. Even small matters have to be referred to someone higher up for a final answer.
4. I have to ask my boss before I do almost anything.
5. Any decision I make has to have my boss' approval.

Dewar, R. D., Whetten, D. A., & Boje, D. (1980). An examination of the reliability and validity of the Aiken and Hage scales of centralization, formalization, and task routineness. *Administrative Science Quarterly*, 120-128.

## Short Format Perceived Organizational Support 1986

### 7 point Likert Scale

1. The organization values my contribution to its well-being.
2. The organization fails to appreciate any extra effort from me. (R)
3. The organization would ignore any complaint from me. (R)
4. The organization really cares about my well-being.
5. Even if I did the best job possible, the organization would fail to notice. (R)
6. The organization cares about my general satisfaction at work.
7. The organization shows very little concern for me. (R)
8. The organization takes pride in my accomplishments at work.

Eisenberger, R., Huntington, R., Hutchison, S., & Sowa, D. (1986). Perceived organizational support. *Journal of Applied Psychology*, 71, 500-507.

### Safety Climate Short Form

1. New employees learn quickly that they are expected to follow good health and safety practices.
2. Employees are told when they do not follow good health and safety practices.
3. Workers and management work together to ensure the safest possible conditions.
4. There are no major shortcuts taken when worker health and safety are at stake.
5. The health and safety of workers is a high priority with management where I work.
6. I feel free to report safety problems where I work.

Hahn, S., & Murphy, L. (2008). A short scale for measuring safety climate. *Safety Science*, 46(7), 1047-1066.

## DEMOGRAPHICS AND OPEN ENDED QUESTIONS

### Demographics

1. Please enter your age in full years (e.g. 27):
2. Gender (please select one) Male Female
3. Please select you ethnicity/race:  
African American    Asian American    Caucasian    Hispanic  
If other, please specify:
4. Please choose your education level:  
Less than high school  
Some high school (not completed)    Completed High School  
Some college (not completed)    Completed a vocational or AA degree  
Bachelor's Degree    Master's Degree  
PHD or equal
5. Do you have work experience? YES NO
6. How long have you worked at your current place of employment in years?

Scroll down (years will range from less than 1 year to 55 years)

6b. In what year did you begin working with your current employer? Drop down (years will range from 1961 to 2016).

6c. What is the longest time you have ever been with an employer?

(years will range from less than 1 year to 55 years)

6d. What is the highest position/job title you have attained? Enter?

7. What industry/business do you work in? Scroll down  
Architecture and/or Engineering    Legal  
Arts and/or Design    Life, Physical, and/or Social Science  
Building and/or Grounds Cleaning    Management  
Business and/or Financial    Math  
Community and/or Social Service    Media and/or Communication  
Computer and/or Information Technology    Military  
Construction and/or Extraction    Office and/or Administrative Support  
Education, Training, and/or Library    Personal Care and/or Service  
Entertainment and/or Sports    Production  
Farming, Fishing, and/or Forestry    Protective Service  
Food Preparation and/or Serving    Sales  
Healthcare    Transportation and Material Moving

Installation, Maintenance, and/or Repair



Open ended questions:

Would you describe your current work environment as a good place to work? YES NO

If it is, what makes it a good place to work? (Show if Yes)

If it is not a good place to work, explain why it is not a good place to work (Show if No)

What would you change if you could?

How did you receive the link to complete this survey? drop down list

Friend/Colleague

SONA

Social media

Email list serve

Other: enter

Careless response questions:

1. Select yes if you are not a computer Yes No
2. Please enter the number 8 below.

APPENDIX F

TABLES

Table 1  
*Factor Loading for the AWEST Scale*

Item	Factor Loading
<i>FACTOR 1</i>	
Favoritism 4: Favored employees get away with things others would not	.85
Favoritism 5: It is easier for favored employees to get resources	.80
Favoritism 3: I feel as if some employees get better opportunities than others	.76
Favoritism 1: In my organization, there is (are) a favored group(s) of employees	.75
Favoritism 2: In my organization, promotions are based on favoritism	.70
GOC4: Not all employees are treated fairly	.51
<i>FACTOR 2</i>	
Threat 2: I am verbally threatened when mistakes are made	.82
Threat 4: Upper management tells me that I am lucky to have my job	.66
Threat 8: Employees are penalized for speaking up about wrongdoing	.64
Threat 1: I feel intimidated at work	.64
Threat 10: I am afraid of making a mistake, because I know I will be punished	.63
Threat 5: I feel like I am mistreated in my organization	.62
Threat 11: Everyone I know here at work is just trying to find a way to survive without getting fired	.62
Threat 3: I am publically criticized when I make mistakes	.62
Threat 7: Upper management reminds us that our jobs are replaceable	.59
Threat 6: People are afraid to speak up for fear that doing so could result in getting reprimanded	.52

Item	Factor Loading
Threat 9: I do not feel that I could trust anyone at work	.52
<i>FACTOR 3</i>	
GOC7: Teamwork is highly practiced in my organization	.67
GOC5: My organization seems to value employees	.57
GOC1: Adapting to change is something people do easily at my organization	.53
GOC3: In my organization, promotions are decided based on performance	.49
GOC2: My workplace does not foster a collaborative environment	.46
GOC6: Our daily work matches our mission at my organization	.44
GOC7: Authority is never passed down to employees in my organization	.41
<i>FACTOR 4</i>	
Instability 4: Layoffs are common in my organization	.79
Instability 5: My organization quickly eliminates jobs when the economy changes	.73
Instability 3: Position in my organization could be eliminated at any given moment	.61
Instability 7: My workplace may close in the near future	.48
Instability 6: Changes in my organization are often unpredictable	.42
<i>FACTOR 5</i>	
Checks 4: There are no procedures in place to ensure the integrity of employee work	-.54
Checks 3: Work is not reviewed to assure things are being done correctly	-.48
Ethics 1: Unethical behavior is tolerated from employees	-.43

Table 2  
*Correlations Between AWEST and Scales for Validity*

	AWEST
PPDM	.00
HOA	.52
POS	-.83
SCC	-.62

Table 3  
*Means, Standard Deviations, Minimums, and Maximums for Scales*

	Mean	SD	Min.	Max.
AWEST	3.3	1.2	1.2	6.4
PPDM	5.5	.90	2.3	7.0
HAS	2.4	.76	1.0	4.0
POS	4.7	1.5	1.1	7.0
GWSC	5.2	1.3	1.2	7.0

Table 4  
Positive Work Themes

Theme	Example Subthemes	Representative Statements
Benefits n=98	Formal (n=26) Formal benefits were references to traditional employee benefits offered as part of the compensation for the job, e.g., healthcare insurance, retirement contributions.	<i>Great healthcare and retirement benefits</i>
	Informal (n=49) Informal benefits were references to employee benefits not necessarily on paper but of assistance to employees e.g., flexible scheduling, training.	<i>Opportunities for career advancement</i>
Engagement n=40	Feelings of care and support (n=11) References to feeling like people in the organization cared for them through their actions and words.	<i>They make you feel needed, wanted and important as part of the county</i>
	Recognition and appreciation (n=6) References to being recognized and feeling appreciated in the workplace e.g. by supervisors, directors, organization.	<i>Constant words of appreciation for the work done</i>

Theme	Example Subthemes	Representative Statements
Flexibility n=19	Autonomy (n=8) Autonomy included references to feeling independence and freedom in the work one does.	<i>I have quite a bit of autonomy in designing my course curriculum</i>
	Openness and creativity (n=5) References to being allowed to use creativity in the work one does and a workplace open to ideas.	<i>Allowed and encouraged to be creative and think bigger</i>
Work meaning n=20	Enjoy actual work (n=20) Work meaning responses referenced enjoying their work and feeling like their work had importance.	<i>Assist the elderly into having a better quality of life</i>
Psychological security n=11	Job security (n=5) Job security comments referenced having job security in the workplace.	<i>I have security</i>
	Stability (n=6) Stability comments referenced having job stability and steady employment.	<i>Work stability</i>



Theme	Example Subthemes	Representative Statements
Positive work environment n= 140	Environment (n=27) Environment comments simply referenced enjoying their overall environment e.g. positive, upbeat, good atmosphere.	<i>Positive workplace environment</i>
	Coworkers and peers (n=32) Comments about coworkers and peers referenced liking their coworkers e.g. they are friendly, get along.	<i>My fellow coworkers make work more enjoyable</i>

Table 5  
*Negative Work Themes*

Theme	Example Subthemes	Representative Statements
Bad leadership n=29	*Management (n=14) Management comments referenced problematic management.	<i>Management is the problem</i>
	Unprofessional management (n=7) Referenced improper acts and dialogues by management.	<i>Management is unprofessional</i>
Engagement n=35	*Lack of recognition (n=4) Lack of recognition comments referenced lack of acknowledgment and praise for good work.	<i>There is little to no acknowledgement or rewards for good performers</i>
	Lack of value (n=8) Lack of value comments referenced absence of appreciation and value.	<i>Employees feel expendable and unappreciated</i>
Benefits n=12	*Opportunities for growth & development (n=7) Comments here referenced a lack of opportunities for growth within the organization e.g. no training, promotions.	<i>Employees with specific talents are warehoused into routine tasks</i>
	*Pay (n=4) Referenced a desire for better pay/ pay dissatisfaction.	<i>Not enough pay for demand</i>
Flexibility n=19	*Micromanagement (n=5)	

Theme	Example Subthemes	Representative Statements
	Comments referenced a lack of autonomy.	<i>Lots of micromanagement</i>
	*Lack of rules and procedures (n=5) Comment referenced a deficiency of rules and regulation that bring order.	<i>The work environment is chaotic, not bound by regulations...</i>
Negative work environment n=28	* Environment (n=9) Comments here referenced an overall dislike of the work environment e.g. hostility, negativity.	<i>I would make the environment less hostile</i>
	*Favoritism (n=16) Comments here referenced a dislike for favoritism.	<i>The favoritism, advancement, job opportunities, and training a selected group receive is predictable...</i>
Psychological security n=15	Fear (n=5) Responses referenced fear and distress about their job.	<i>Employees are afraid of being terminated on a daily basis and do not try most days</i>
	*Bullying (n=8) References including bullying behavior in the workplace experienced by respondents.	<i>Bullying is rampant</i>

\* Indicates both references to dislikes and what one would change

Table 6  
*Subscale Correlations with Convergent and Divergent Validity Scales*

	Favoritism	PT	GOC	Instability	Ethics
PPDM	0.01	0.01	-0.04	0.01	-0.01
HOA	0.42	0.51 <sup>a</sup>	0.42	0.37 <sup>b</sup>	0.32 <sup>b</sup>
POS	-0.70 <sup>a</sup>	-0.73 <sup>a</sup>	-0.74 <sup>a</sup>	-0.55 <sup>b</sup>	-0.58 <sup>b</sup>
SCC	-0.47 <sup>a</sup>	-0.51 <sup>a</sup>	-0.65 <sup>ab</sup>	-0.35 <sup>b</sup>	-0.58

\*All subscript a's are significantly different than subscript b's per row

Table 7  
*Link Origination*

Link Origination	Percentage
Friend/colleague	52%
Social media	3%
SONA	28%
Email list serv	17%

Table 8  
*Top 5 Industries Represented*

Industry	Percentage
Education, training, and/or library	26%
Sales	11%
Food preparation and/or serving	9%
Office and/or administrative support	8%
Business and/or financial	8%

APPENDIX G  
INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD APPROVAL

**Human Subjects Review Board  
Department of Psychology  
California State University,  
San Bernardino**

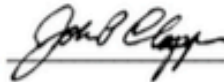
**PI:** Alvarado, Claudia; Kottke, Jan  
**From:** John P. Clapper  
**Project Title:** Assessing Employee Perceptions of their Workplace  
**Project ID:** H-26WI-32  
**Date:** 3/16/16

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**Disposition: Administrative Review**

Your IRB proposal is approved to include 285 participants. If you need additional participants, an addendum will be required. This approval is valid until 3/16/2017.

**Good luck with your research!**



John P. Clapper, Co-Chair  
Psychology IRB Sub-Committee



APPENDIX H  
INFORMED CONSENT AND DEBRIEFING



College of Social and Behavioral Sciences  
Department of Psychology

## INFORMED CONSENT

**Purpose:** The purpose of this research is to capture the realities of the employees’ workplace environment. This study is being conducted by Claudia Alvarado under the supervision of Dr. Kottke, Professor of Psychology at California State University, San Bernardino. This study has been approved by the Department of Psychology Institutional Review Board Sub-Committee of the California State University, San Bernardino, and a copy of the official Psychology IRB stamp of approval should appear on this consent form.

**Procedures:** If you choose to participate in this study, you will be asked to complete an online survey through Qualtrics. The study should take approximately 45 minutes to 1 hour to complete. If you chose to conduct this study through SONA, you will receive 3 units of extra credit as compensation at the end of the session, which you can apply to a selected Psychology class, at your instructor’s discretion.

**Anonymity:** The information you provide in this study will be anonymous. Your responses will not be in any way linked to your name and your name will not appear on any data reports. You will be asked to provide your name and SONA ID for extra credit points. Additionally, after completing the survey, if you would like to be entered in a raffle to win 1 of 4 gift cards to local merchants, a separate link will be provided where once directed you will enter your first name, phone number, and email. This information will be stored separately from your survey responses so as to protect the anonymity of your responses. All survey responses will be stored in a password protected computer and only the researchers will be able to access the data.

**Risks and Benefits:** Participation in this study does not pose any foreseeable risks beyond those of daily life or provide any benefits to you. Although there are no benefits for you directly, this research has the potential to provide important information for the workplace environment literature.

**Participant’s Rights:** Your participation in this study is voluntary. You have the right to refuse to participate in this study, not answer any question, or terminate your participation at any time and still receive the participation credit points.

**Dissemination:** The results from this study might be submitted for presentation at a scientific conference or in part of completion of a thesis. The data will appear in aggregated format, with no identifiers. If the research is published, the data will be destroyed 5 years after publication.

**Contact:** Results from this study will be available from Dr. Kottke after December 30, 2016. If you have any complaints or comments regarding this study, you can contact Dr. Kottke or the Psychology Institutional Review Board Sub-Committee at [psyc.irb@csusb.edu](mailto:psyc.irb@csusb.edu).

By clicking on the “I agree” below, I acknowledge that I have been informed of and understand the nature and purpose of this study, and I freely consent to participate. I also acknowledge that I am at least 18 years of age.

California State University Psychology Institutional Review Board Sub-Committee			
Approved	3/16/16	Void After	3/16/17
IRB #	11-16WI-32	Chair	

## DEBRIEFING STATEMENT



The purpose of this study was to assess what components might constitute a toxic work environment to better understand destructive leadership. These data will be used in a thesis study.

To ensure the validity of the study we ask that you not discuss this study with other potential participants. If you have any questions about the study or wish to obtain a copy of the group level results, please contact Dr. Kottke at [jkottke@csusb.edu](mailto:jkottke@csusb.edu) or 909.537.5585. Again, thank you for completing the survey.

Thank you for your participation. **If you would like to be entered in a drawing to win a 25 dollar gift card, please copy and paste the link below and follow the instructions. If you have any questions, please contact me at [alvac331@coyote.csusb.edu](mailto:alvac331@coyote.csusb.edu).**

[http://csusb.az1.qualtrics.com/SE/?SID=SV\\_82MZoUpt9V0n71z](http://csusb.az1.qualtrics.com/SE/?SID=SV_82MZoUpt9V0n71z)

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