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# The phenomenology of principal mistreatment: teachers' perspectives



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***Abstract*** *This article, the first empirical study of its kind, presents findings from a larger qualitative study of principal mistreatment of teachers. A grounded theory method was used to study a sample of 50 US teachers who were subjected to long-term mistreatment from school principals. The authors discuss descriptive, conceptual, and theoretical findings about principals' actions that teachers define as mistreatment. In addition, the inductively derived model briefly looks at the harmful effects of principal mistreatment and abuse on teachers, psychologically/emotionally and physically/physiologically. Implications of study findings are discussed for administrator and teacher preparation, for school district offices, and for further research.*

> When his novels were criticized for their portrayal of darkness and immorality in human relations – in today's parlance they would be called "negative" – Thomas Hardy replied that "to know the best, we must first regard the worst". It is that unwillingness to look at the dark side of the human condition that prevents administrative science from dealing with the heart of administrative problems and also from ascending to the height of human possibility and accomplishment (Thomas Greenfield, cited in Hodgkinson, 1991, p. 7).

During the last decade and a half, researchers have produced a strong stream of "bright side" empirical studies in the field of educational administration focusing on the considerable contribution of exemplary school principals to schools in general (e.g. Blase and Blase, 2001; Blase and Kirby, 2000; Good and Brophy, 1986; Hallinger and Heck, 1996; Leithwood, 1994; Leithwood *et al.*, 1996; Murphy and Louis, 1994a, b) and teacher development and student learning in particular (e.g. Blase and Blase, 1999; Heck *et al.*, 1990; Heck and Marcoulides, 1993; Joyce and Showers, 1995; Sheppard, 1996). In stark contrast, no empirical studies have systematically examined the "dark side" of school leadership and the extremely harmful consequences such forms of leadership have on life in schools. This article is based on a larger qualitative study of school principals' mistreatment/abuse of teachers and the subsequent destructive effects on them, from the perspectives of teachers themselves. It focuses on types of principal behavior that teachers define as "abusive" or "mistreatment" (teachers in our study used both terms synonymously), that is, behaviors teachers experienced as seriously harmful when repeated over the long run. The effects such patterns of behavior have on the

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psychological/emotional and physical wellbeing of teachers are also briefly described.

To date, two long-standing avenues of research in education (i.e. teacher stress studies and micropolitical studies of the school principal-teacher relationship) have produced only glimpses of how principals mistreat teachers. A number of stress studies have linked elements of principals' leadership style and behavior (e.g. nonsupport, assertiveness) to significant stress and burnout in teachers (Adams, 1988; Barnette, 1990; Blase, 1984; Blase *et al.*, 1986; Diehl, 1993; Dunham, 1984; Dworkin *et al.*, 1990). Micropolitical studies have yielded richer descriptions of some aspects of principal mistreatment; these studies describe, among other things, principal favoritism with regard to appointments, promotions, enforcement of rules, evaluation, and recognition and rewards (Blase, 1988). Other micropolitical studies have examined principal behaviors including sanctions, harassment, lack of accessibility, and manipulation as well as teachers' response to such behaviors (Ball, 1987; Blase, 1990, 1991; Blase and Anderson, 1995). Taken together, these two areas of research provide provocative clues to the principal mistreatment problem and its destructive outcomes for teachers; however, such studies are few in number and have generated only limited understandings of the range of abusive principal behaviors, how such behaviors interact to form a "pattern" of abuse in a given situation, and the damaging effects such behaviors have on teachers, teaching, and schools.

It should be mentioned that some empirical work on sexual harassment of students by teachers and other professional staff has been published in the field of education (Shakeshaft and Cohan, 1995). A more substantial collection of studies on peer harassment among school children focuses on verbal bullying – threatening, degrading, teasing, sarcasm, name calling, put downs, humiliating, and silent treatment – and its devastating effects on victims (Ma, 2001; Clarke and Kiselica, 1997; Olweus, 1993; Shakeshaft *et al.*, 1997). The Dylan Klebold and Eric Harris murders of 13 people at Columbine High School in Colorado in 1999 raised the nation's consciousness about peer mistreatment among students.

Undoubtedly, the failure of both academic and professional educators to study principal mistreatment of teachers, applying the same rigorous research protocols we use to investigate other educational problems, has resulted in incomplete, naïve, and even false understandings of how some, perhaps a noteworthy percentage of, school leaders and teachers experience their work (Hodgkinson, 1991). Moreover, this failure allows mistreatment to continue without challenge and without hope of improvement (Keashly *et al.*, 1994; Robinson and Bennett, 1995. As a first step, this study provides an inductively derived knowledge base and initiates an area of inquiry essential to developing a constructive approach to a deeply disturbing problem in American public education.

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At faculty meetings, he believed that there was only one voice that should be heard, his. He thinks that he is a people person because he can make almost 70 people sit there and face him. His faculty meetings usually go on over an hour and no one else speaks. Now, occasionally, he will ask if there are any questions. We have one or two people who will ask questions and he is brutal with them. He will say, "I am not going to talk about that with you now", and "That is not what I wanted to hear", or "I don't like that". He would say, "I told you what we are going to do. Were you listening to me, were you listening to me?" He would say, "If you have anything to say during the faculty meeting, don't!" One time, he pulled out the teacher notebook of rules and went through almost a 100 pages of "You don't do this ... don't you ever ... I mean it!". He was ranting and raving. "I don't want to hear a damn word out of any of you! You don't understand what I am trying to do". We "aren't professional". He said he had no idea what "louses" we were, and he would never blah, blah, blah. Somebody asked him a question and he went into full ballistic mode about how we were awful and how we all betrayed him. He was walking back and forth in front of the group ... you know, like Captain Queeg. He yelled and cursed. By now we were all just kind of blown back against our chairs and watching him rage on. No one was asking any questions and everyone was afraid to move. We felt that if we stood up or said anything that it would all be targeted at us ... After, we all ran out like rats off a sinking ship (victim of principal mistreatment).

*Terms and constructs*

Internationally, systematic research on the problem of workplace abuse, notably nonphysical forms of abuse, has increased significantly during the last two decades in countries such as Sweden, Norway, Germany, Austria, Australia, and Britain. Several of these countries have also enacted legislation against workplace abuse and private organizations have been created to help victims of abuse (Björkvist *et al.*, 1994; Davenport *et al.*, 1999; Keashly, 1998; Namie and Namie, 2000). For most of this same period, organizational scholars in the USA have largely ignored the problem of work abuse. In recent years, however, scholars have begun to address the problem; indeed, the emerging national literature suggests that workplace abuse may lead to serious deleterious consequences for both employees and organizations (Baron and Neuman, 1996; Davenport *et al.*, 1999; Hornstein *et al.*, 1995, Hornstein, 1996; Keashly, 1998; Keashly *et al.*, 1994).

Using a variety of methods, researchers have used a number of terms in the conceptual, theoretical, and empirical literature to describe the workplace mistreatment/abuse phenomenon including incivility (Andersson and Pearson, 1999), mobbing (Davenport *et al.*, 1999; Leymann, 1990), bullying (Einarsen and Skogstad, 1996; Namie and Namie, 2000), harassment (Björkvist *et al.*, 1994); petty tyranny (Ashforth, 1994), abusive disrespect (Hornstein, 1996), interactional injustice (Harlos and Pinder, 2000), emotional abuse (Keashly, 1998), mistreatment (Folger, 1993; Price Spratlen, 1995), abuse (Bassman, 1992), aggression (Neuman and Baron, 1998), deviance (Robinson and Bennett, 1995) and victimization (Swedish National Board of Occupational Safety and Health, 1993).

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In addition, organizational scholars have developed a variety of empirically grounded constructs to define the workplace mistreatment/abuse phenomenon. To illustrate:

- Andersson and Pearson (1999, p. 457) conceptualize workplace incivility as "low-intensity deviant behavior with ambiguous intent to harm the target, in violation of workplace norms for mutual respect. Uncivil behaviors are characteristically rude and discourteous, displaying a lack of regard for others".
- The construct of mobbing (or psychical terror), the most common term used in Europe, refers to "hostile and unethical communication that is directed in a systematic way by one or a number of persons toward one individual ... These actions take place often ... and over a long period (at least six months) and, because of this frequency and duration, result in considerable psychic, psychosomatic, and social misery" (Leymann, 1990, p. 120). Mobbing consists of humiliating, intimidating, and abusive communication, committed directly or indirectly, to confuse, discredit, intimidate, and isolate an individual, to force the individual into submission or out of the workplace (Davenport *et al.*, 1999).
- Einarsen and Skogstad (1996, p. 191) define bullying, a term commonly used in the USA and Europe, as "... harassment, badgering, niggling, freezing out, offending someone ... repeatedly over a period of time, and the person confronted ... [has] difficulties defending him/herself. It is not bullying if two parties of approximately equal strength are in conflict or the incident is an isolated event".
- Work harassment is defined as "repeated activities, with the aim of bringing mental (but sometimes also physical) pain, and directed toward one or more individuals, who for one reason or another, are not able to defend themselves ...". (Björkvist *et al.*, 1994, p. 173).
- Ashforth (1994) developed a measure of tyrannical behavior that consists of six dimensions. He defined a petty tyrant as "an individual who lords his or her power over others ... acts in an arbitrary and self-aggrandizing manner, belittles subordinates, evidences lack of consideration, forces conflict resolution, discourages initiative, and utilizes noncontingent punishment" (Ashforth, 1994, p. 772).
- Abusive disrespect, a concept developed by Hornstein *et al.* (1995), is comprised of eight behavioral dimensions of disrespectful supervisory behavior and specifically refers to "transgressions" by bosses that include deceit (i.e. lying), constraint (i.e. controlling subordinates' actions outside of work), coercion (i.e. threatening excessive or inappropriate harm), selfishness (i.e. blaming and scapegoating subordinates), inequity (i.e. favoritism), cruelty (i.e. harming subordinates through name calling, personal attacks), disregard (i.e. being unfair and unkind, displaying an

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obvious lack of consideration), and deification (i.e. conduct that communicates a "master-servant" relationship to subordinates).

- Interactional injustice is defined as "mistreatment that occurs in the course of workplace relations between employees and one or two authority figures with whom a reporting relationship exists" (Harlos and Pinder, 2000, p. 258). It occurs in relationships characterized by asymmetrical hierarchical positions and unequal power relationships. Patterns of injustice include racial, religious, and sexual discrimination as well as other forms of harassment, such as bullying and coercion. Harlos and Pinder identified eight substantive behavioral domains identified with hierarchical bosses that subordinates defined as unjust: intimidation, degradation, criticism, abandonment, inconsistency, inaccessibility, surveillance, and manipulation.

From a comprehensive review of the workplace mistreatment/abuse literature, Keashly (1998) developed the concept of emotional abuse that subsumes elements of the constructs defined above. Emotional abuse emphasizes the "hostile verbal and nonverbal behaviors ... directed at gaining compliance from others" (Keashly, 1998, p. 85). Keashly identified emotional abuse with the following: a pattern of abuse (not a single event), behaviors that are unwanted by the target, behaviors that violate norms for appropriate conduct or an individual's rights, behaviors that are intended to harm the target, behaviors that result in harm to the target, and power differences between the abuser and the target of abuse.

In addition, empirical research has generated a handful of models of mistreatment in the work setting. Baron and Neuman (1996) constructed the three-factor model of workplace aggression, which includes expressions of hostility, obstructionism, and overt aggression. Expressions of hostility include verbal and symbolic behaviors such as facial expressions, gestures, and verbal attacks like staring, dirty looks, silent treatment, ridicule, unfair evaluations, and gossip. Obstructionism refers to actions that are often passive aggressive in nature, such as withholding a resource or behavior. Some examples are not returning phone calls, refusing to provide needed resources or equipment, and failing to warn an individual of imminent danger. Overt aggression, the third factor, refers to threats or acts of physical violence and theft or destruction of an individual's work equipment.

Ryan and Oestreich (1991) produced a model of abrasive (i.e. less harmful) and abusive (i.e. more harmful) categories of boss behavior, with behaviors (listed from less to more harmful) including silence, glaring eye contact, abruptness, snubbing or ignoring, insults, blaming, discrediting and discounting, controlling others aggressively, making threats about the job, yelling and shouting, making angry outbursts, and threatening physical harm. Ryan and Oestreich contend that any behavior may have greater impact on individuals depending on timing, place of occurrence, and level of repetition.

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Finally, a typology of workplace deviance, developed by Robinson and Bennett (1995), indicates that workplace behavior varies across two dimensions, minor versus serious and interpersonal versus organizational. Minor forms of deviance were classified into two quadrants including productive deviance (e.g. leaving early, taking excessive breaks) and political deviance (e.g. favoritism, gossiping, and blaming subordinates). More serious forms of deviance were classified as property deviance (e.g. sabotaging equipment, lying about hours worked) and personal aggression (e.g. verbal abuse, sexual harassment, stealing from subordinates, and endangering subordinates).

*Theoretical work*

Theoretical work in the general area of workplace mistreatment/abuse is very limited. Existing theories discuss the causes and consequences of mistreatment as well as relationships among personal factors (e.g. type A behavior pattern, hostile attributional bias), interpersonal factors (e.g. provocation, frustrating events), and environmental (i.e. situational) factors (e.g. restructuring, organizational culture) (e.g. Neuman and Baron, 1998; Hoel *et al.*, 1999). Andersson and Pearson's (1999) theoretical ideas are particularly useful in understanding how aggression could evolve between individuals in nonhierarchical relationships in organizational contexts. Using an interactionist perspective, they argue that the escalation of aggression is a process (not an event) in which situational factors "constrain" individuals involved in aggressive exchanges. Andersson and Pearson contend that incivility (i.e. low intensity mistreatment), in which the intent to harm is ambiguous, is a precursor to coercive action (i.e. actions that intend to harm an individual, such as maligning insults). The "starting point" in an aggression cycle frequently begins when an individual perceives that a norm related to mutual respect has been violated (i.e. interactional injustice). This tends to generate negative affect and a desire to reciprocate. A "tipping point" in the exchange process occurs when the exchange of incivilities escalates into an exchange of coercive actions. At this point, exchanges become increasingly counterproductive (a "deviation amplifying spiral"; see Andersson and Pearson (1999, p. 462), each with the intent to harm.

In addition to general theories of workplace mistreatment/abuse, several scholars have specifically developed theories of boss abuse of subordinates. Hornstein *et al.* (1995) constructed a theory of supervisory disrespect that draws heavily on symbolic interaction, organizational justice, and the psychological and stress literature. These authors argue that people's feelings of both self-worth and -security are affected by how respectfully others treat them; and feelings of self-worth and -security, in turn, affect one's mental health and wellbeing. Hornstein *et al.* (1995) established validity and reliability for the boss behavior questionnaire (BBQ), which uses measurable

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constructs of respect and disrespect to examine eight domains of supervisory disrespectful behavior described above. Among other things, these researchers differentiated between a "demanding boss", that is, a boss who is rigorously task-oriented (i.e. focused on production), and a disrespectful boss. As well, Hornstein *et al.* demonstrated that disrespectful behavior is always inappropriate, regardless of conceivable circumstances that exist in organizations, because it violates a person's dignity and generates loss of self-esteem and generalized distress (i.e. anxiety and depression).

Ashforth (1994) developed a model of the antecedents and effects of tyranny on subordinates. He contends that petty tyranny is an interaction between superordinates' predispositions (i.e. beliefs about organizations, subordinates, and self and preferences for action) and situational facilitators (i.e. institutionalized values and norms, power, and stressors). Ashforth argued that tyrannical management causes low leader endorsement and high frustration, stress, and resistance; high helplessness and work alienation; low self-esteem and poor work performance; and low work unit cohesiveness. He emphasized that such affects could trigger a vicious circle that sustains the tyrannical behavior. For example, the exercise of power may induce a manager to do the following: attribute subordinates' success to him or herself, develop an inflated sense of self-worth, create greater psychological distance from subordinates, and view subordinates as objects of manipulation (Kipnis, 1972). Likewise, subordinates' responses to tyrannical behavior, such as helplessness and low commitment, may contribute to managers' already negative stereotypes toward subordinates (e.g. lazy, untrustworthy), which further justifies coercion. To the extent that such tyrannical behaviors reduce leader endorsement and incite resistance, the vicious circle becomes complete. Ashforth explains that this is why managers may persist with an ineffective management style, supported by defensive attributions and self-fulfilling attitudes and behaviors. They may not recognize the role their attitudes play in the genesis of the very behaviors they are presently trying to prevent. Also, tyrannical behavior may produce short-term subordinate compliance, which may seduce a manager to discount longer-term, more serious disruptive effects of tyrannical behavior. Ashforth (1994, p. 771) noted that this vicious circle results in the "tyrant's paradox" – the means used to gain control undermine the viability of that control.

Folger's (1993) work, based on exchange theory and, in particular, referent cognitive theory (RCT), explains how employees come to feel mistreated by management. This theory conceptualizes employment as both economic and social processes involving the exchange of material things (e.g. wages for work) as well as the character of "relations" of people (e.g. how management treats employees on interpersonal dimensions, such as politeness and respect). Folger argues that in addition to fair treatment (i.e. in regard to wages and salary) and implementation of policies and procedures (a means obligation), management

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has a moral obligation to treat employees fairly and with sufficient respect and dignity, and as ends in themselves. During an exchange, respectful conduct by managers reinforces feelings of self-respect, dignity, and worth that are essential to the belief that one has been treated as a person, not a thing; in essence, employees will feel mistreated when they do not receive fair and dignified treatment.

Leymann (1990) conceptualized the phases of mobbing that may occur in organizational settings as four critical incidents. Phase 1 usually consists of a triggering incident and tends to be very short. Phase 2 includes mobbing and stigmatizing an individual; such actions are used consistently and systematically over a long period of time with the intention to "get" the person and to punish the person. The abuser manipulates the victim's reputation (e.g. via rumors, slandering, ridicule), social circumstances (e.g. victim is isolated), and ability of victim to perform his or her job. In phase 3 of mobbing, management tends to take over the prejudices of an individual abuser. The targeted person becomes a "marked individual" and others assume that the cause of the trouble lies with the victim. In phase 4, the targeted individual is expelled from work. This frequently results in social isolation, stigmatizing, loss of coping resources, and feelings of desperation and total helplessness.

*Studies of workplace mistreatment/abuse*

Studies disclose a wide range of nonverbal and verbal/behavioral forms of workplace abuse. To illustrate, nonverbal behaviors include aggressive eye contact (e.g. staring, "dirty looks", snubbing or ignoring, "the silent treatment") and physical gestures (e.g. violations of physical space, finger pointing, slamming objects, and throwing objects). Some examples of verbal behaviors are sexual harassment, angry outbursts, yelling and screaming, put downs, lying, public humiliation, threats of job loss, physical harm, name calling, excessive or unfounded criticism of work abilities or personal life, unreasonable job demands, stealing credit for another's work, blaming, exclusion or isolation, initiating malicious rumors and gossip, withholding resources or obstructing opportunities, favoritism, dismissing an individual's feelings or thoughts, unfriendly behavior, not returning phone calls, and behavior that implies a master-servant relationship (Björkvist *et al.*, 1994; Davenport *et al.*,1991; Harlos and Pinder, 2000; Hornstein, 1996; Keashly *et al.*, 1994; Leymann, 1990, Lombardo and McCall, 1984; Namie and Namie, 2000; Namie, 2000; Neuman and Baron, 1998, Robinson and Bennett, 1995; Ryan and Oestreich, 1991).

Furthermore, according to the research, abuse in the workplace is associated with a host of serious adverse effects on an individual's physical wellbeing, psychological/emotional wellbeing, work performance, and social relationships. Examples of effects on physical wellbeing include sleep disorders (e.g. nightmares or insufficient rest), headaches, backaches,

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fatigue/exhaustion, illness, hyperactivity, weight changes (e.g. significant increases or decreases), irritable bowel syndrome, heart arrhythmia, skin changes, ulcers, substance abuse (first time use), and suicide. Some psychological/emotional effects of abusive workplace behavior are depression, anger, rage, helplessness, powerlessness, cynicism and distrust, self-doubt, guilt, shame, embarrassment, insecurity, disillusionment, poor concentration, lowered self-esteem, aggression or revenge, hypervigilance, panic attacks, and posttraumatic stress disorder (PTSD). Negative effects of abusive behavior on work performance include reductions in job effort, extra effort, commitment, and satisfaction and morale plus increases in absenteeism, turnover, and attrition. Social effects noted in the literature are isolation and loss of friendships (Björkvist *et al.*, 1994; Davenport *et al.*, 1999; Harlos and Pinder, 2000; Hornstein, 1996; Keashly *et al.*, 1994; Leymann, 1990; Lombardo and McCall, 1984; Namie and Namie, 2000; Namie, 2000; Northwestern National Life Insurance Company (NNLI), 1993; Ryan and Oestreich, 1991).

Examination of the research on abusive bosses (versus coworker abuse, for example) has revealed a number of disturbing findings. First, abusive conduct by bosses is commonplace in a wide range of both profit and nonprofit organizational settings. Second, studies indicate that bosses (e.g. superiors, managers) are more frequently workplace abusers rather than an individual's coworkers; in various studies, bosses have been identified as engaging in abusive conduct toward subordinates between 54 percent of the time and 90 percent of the time (Björkvist *et al.*, 1994; Einarsen and Skogstad, 1996; Hornstein, 1996; Keashly *et al.*, 1994; Namie and Namie, 2000; Namie, 2000; NNLI, 1993; Rayner, 1998). Several scholars have persuasively argued that they expect abusive conduct by superiors to increase given organizational changes such as the growth in diversity, a decline in unionization (Yamada, 2000), and increases in electronic monitoring (Hornstein, 1996).

Third, studies of workplace mistreatment have demonstrated that male and female bosses are equally likely to engage in abusive conduct (Keashly *et al.*, 1994; Harlos and Pinder, 2000), although abusive male bosses tend to use explosive behaviors more frequently than female bosses (e.g. Harlos and Pinder, 2000). In addition, both men and women are victimized by such behavior; however, men are abused primarily by men, and women are abused by both men and women (The Campaign Against Workplace Bullying (CAWB), 2000; Leymann, 1990). Research has also demonstrated that women experience significantly more harassment than males (Björkvist *et al.*, 1994, CAWB, 2000). Finally, Keashly (1998) found that gender does not influence a victim's perception of the degree of abusive behavior.

Fourth, the research on abusive bosses indicates that victims of this type of abuse seldom have viable opportunities for recourse. Studies emphasize that because of organizational culture (e.g. a "macho culture") and off-putting

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management practices (e.g. a cavalier attitude about abuse, attempts to justify abusive conduct), victims' complaints about abusive bosses usually result in:

- no action (i.e. no response) from upper-level management/administration and departments of human resources;
- efforts to protect an abusive boss; and/or
- reprisals against the victim for registering complaints (Bassman, 1992; Davenport *et al.*, 1999; Hornstein, 1996; Keashly, 1998; Keashly *et al.*, 1994; Leymann, 1990; Namie, 2000; Namie and Namie, 2000; Rayner, 1998).

*Theoretical framework: symbolic interactionism*

Although there is some significant scholarly work on the problem of workplace mistreatment/abuse, there is no conceptual, theoretical, or empirical work on the school principal mistreatment/abuse problem, and, in particular, none drawn from the perspectives of victimized teachers themselves. Symbolic interactionism served as the theoretical framework for the present study. This perspective on social inquiry rests on three major premises:

(1) individuals act toward things and people on the basis of the meanings that things have for them;

(2) the meaning of such things are derived from, or arise out of, the social interaction that individuals have with one another; and

(3) these meanings are handled in, and modified through, an interpretive process used by individuals to deal with the things and other people they encounter (Blumer, 1969).

This theoretical perspective recognizes that although structural factors (e.g. organizational, cultural) influence action, the interpretations and meanings that people attach to such factors account for action. In other words, people's capacity for reflexivity has more influence on action than structural factors. The symbolic interaction perspective views the individual as a social product who is influenced by others but also maintains distance from others and is able to initiate individual action (Blumer, 1969; Mead, 1934).

In contrast to some qualitative applications, the Blumer-Mead perspective (Blumer, 1969; Mead, 1934) on symbolic interactionism emphasizes the examination of human subjectivity. In short, it examines perceptions and meanings that people construct in their social settings (Bogdan and Biklen, 1982; Lofland, 1971; Morse, 1991; Schwandt, 1994; Taylor and Bogdan, 1998; Tesch, 1988). According to Meltzer *et al.* (1975, p. 55), symbolic interactionists who employ this approach study "what goes on inside the heads of humans". They state:

> [H]uman beings are defined as self-reflective beings ... The behavior of men and women is "caused" not so much by forces within themselves [e.g. instincts] ... or by external forces impinging upon them ... but [by] what lies in between, a reflective and socially derived interpretation of the internal and external stimuli that are present (Meltzer *et al.*, 1975, p. 2).

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> Perception functions as a meditative experience for the individual in the relationship between himself/herself and the social environment (Meltzer *et al.*, 1975, p. 52).

Consistent with the Blumer-Mead approach (Blumer, 1969; Mead, 1934), the present study employed an open-ended theoretical and methodological perspective designed to focus on the meanings teachers constructed from long-term mistreatment/abuse experiences with school principals. The purpose was to create a substantive model of principal mistreatment/abuse behaviors, that is, an inductively derived model constructed entirely from the empirical world under investigation. Therefore, the model we present contains no concepts from the relevant extant literature and no logical elaboration (Glaser and Strauss, 1967; Glaser, 1978, 1992, 1998).

## Research method and procedures

Clearly, the study discussed in this article is extremely sensitive and even incendiary in nature. To actually conduct our study in a variety of school settings, we would normally be required to identify principals responsible for longstanding abusive conduct as well as the teachers they have targeted. However, we assumed that school districts would neither grant permission to conduct on-site interviews with teachers victimized by principals, nor would teachers volunteer to participate in a research project of this nature (even if it were authorized) given the potential risks of doing so. In fact, we consulted about these matters with over 100 full-time teachers and administrators in our university classes, which confirmed our assumptions. Therefore, we proceeded in a way in which we could be successful, given the special set of considerations surrounding our study topic (Silverman, 2000).

We employed a snowball sampling technique that requires others – in our case, teachers and professors throughout the USA – to recommend individuals who they believe have experienced long-term, significant abuse by a school principal. Snowball sampling techniques are especially useful in grounded theory research that attempts to draw samples from a variety of settings. This technique maximizes variation in the database to generate a large number of categories that describe the phenomenon under study (Bogdan and Biklen, 1982; Glaser, 1978, 1998; Strauss and Corbin, 1998; Taylor and Bogdan, 1998). In this way, we identified over 50 teachers in the USA and Canada who had experienced significant long-term principal mistreatment/abuse. We explained the nature of our study to such individuals and asked them to discuss participation in our study with a victimized teacher.

At this point, we contacted (by telephone) teachers who had expressed an interest in participation, explained our study, addressed questions and concerns, discussed our backgrounds, and generally got to know the teacher. Only teachers who had experienced long-term and significant abuse (i.e. six months to nine years) by their school principal were included in our study. As expected, teachers were very fearful of possible disclosure; therefore, several

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safeguards seemed to alleviate their fears and promote trust and rapport. We explained to teachers that their identities would remain anonymous. Teachers were informed, per our agreement with the Human Subjects Committee at our university, that our entire database (i.e. audiotapes, typed transcripts, official and personal documents, and other related materials) would be destroyed upon completion of our analysis. We also indicated that all identifiers (including teachers' gender and grade level) would be redacted from any materials used in any presentation of our findings. This, of course, required using pseudonyms for the names of people and places. Finally, we shared our general research questions and asked teachers to think about their abuse experience in preparation for the next interview.

As noted, trust and rapport are essential to conducting successful interviews with research participants (Bogdan and Biklen, 1982; Fontana and Frey, 2000, Taylor and Bogdan, 1998). Because we were primarily using telephone interviews, we expected that achieving both rapport and trust would be uniquely challenging. Surprisingly, this was not the case; in fact, teachers spoke quite freely and in detail about their abuse experiences, despite the deeply disturbing nature of their experiences. (In about 25 percent of our interviews, teachers were so emotionally overcome during the retelling of their experiences that the interview had to be stopped briefly or rescheduled.)

Discussions with participants indicated that several factors account for the rapport and trust developed. These factors extend beyond our promises of anonymity and destruction of raw data: By asking meaningful questions, listening attentively, expressing our deep-felt empathy for their suffering, and, in general, treating participants respectfully, we were able to gain their trust and thus openness about their experiences. Indeed, we found that "... to learn about people, we must remember to treat them as people, and they will uncover their lives to us" (Fontana and Frey, 1994, p. 374).

Three additional factors enhanced teachers' trust and willingness to share their experiences. First, our initial contact occurred through a trusted friend or colleague or both. Second, and perhaps most important, our study held special significance for teachers who participated; as painful as the interviews were, they strongly believed that the problem of principal mistreatment should be made public and, as one put it, "This study might crack open the door of hope and eventually change the world of education". Third, teachers indicated that telephone interviews, conducted in the safety of their homes over an extended period of time, added to their sense of comfort, security, and trust in the researchers.

In total, 50 ($n = 50$) teachers participated in our study over a one and one-half year time period. The sample consisted of male ($n = 5$) and female ($n = 45$) teachers from rural ($n = 14$), suburban ($n = 25$), and urban ($n = 11$) school locations. Elementary ($n = 26$), middle/junior high ($n = 10$), and high school ($n = 14$) teachers participated. The average age of teachers was 42; the

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average number of years in teaching was 16. The sample included tenured ($n = 44$) and nontenured ($n = 6$); married ($n = 34$) and single ($n = 16$) teachers. Degrees earned by these teachers included BA/BSc ($n = 7$), MED/MA ($n = 31$), EdS ($n = 11$) and PhD ($n = 1$). The mean number of years working with the abusive principal was four. A total of 49 ($n = 49$) teachers resided in the USA and one ($n = 1$) resided in Canada. A total of 15 ($n = 15$) of the teachers we studied were with an abusive principal at the time of this study; most others had experienced abuse in recent years. Teachers described both male ($n = 28$) and female ($n = 22$) principals.

It was noted earlier that the research question, interview guide, data collection, and analyses were based on the Blumer-Mead approach (Blumer, 1969; Mead, 1934) to symbolic interaction theory. Consistent with this perspective, priori concepts from the literature were not used to control data collection. Instead, we used only a few sensitizing concepts such as principal mistreatment/abuse to focus our study. Sensitizing concepts provide "a general sense of reference and guidance ... [and] merely suggest directions along which to look" (Blumer, 1969, p. 148). Teachers ascribed meanings to these concepts and these meanings represent the core of our findings, as presented in this book. Thus, teachers are less likely to be influenced by researchers' preconceived ideas about a topic of study (Bogdan and Biklen, 1982; Glaser and Strauss, 1967; Glaser, 1978, 1992, 1998; Taylor and Bogdan, 1998).

Specifically, we used an open-ended format to investigate the following broad question: How do teachers experience significant long-term mistreatment/abuse by school principals? Interviews are required in qualitative research that focuses on the determination of meanings from the participant's perspective (Bogdan and Biklen, 1982; Glaser and Strauss, 1967; Glaser, 1978, 1992, 1998). Accordingly, we developed an interview guide rather than a predetermined schedule, consisting of a set of topics to be explored, a "checklist of sorts" relevant to the topic at hand (Lofland, 1971, p. 85; Taylor and Bogdan, 1998).

Between two and four interviews were conducted with each of our research participants; these interviews consisted of unstructured and semi-structured questions. To avoid premature theoretical analyses and to produce full descriptions of each teacher's experience of mistreatment/abuse, we used the same initial set of questions with all 50 teachers who participated (Lofland, 1971; Noblit and Hare, 1983). Our initial set of questions included the broad question identified above, followed by additional questions designed to explore basic dimensions of the mistreatment/abuse experience including types of principal behavior/conduct teachers defined as abusive, and the effects of such behavior/conduct on teachers' psychological/emotional wellbeing, physical/physiological wellbeing, involvement/performance in the classroom, and involvement/performance in the school. We spent about 135 hours

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interviewing teachers; this procedure generated about 4,000 pages of transcription for analysis.

We discovered that, in conducting in-depth telephone interviews with each participant, we could efficiently and unobtrusively make notes and draw diagrams that identified emergent categories and relationships among categories; we were also able to probe categories in great depth during each interview (Fontana and Frey, 2000). This generated a level of descriptive detail beyond what we had ever achieved in other studies using face-to-face interviews (Fontana and Frey, 2000). Put differently, emergent categories saturated quickly and efficiently.

Given the limitations of using computer software for grounded theory research, especially for conceptual and theoretical work (Charmaz, 2000; Glaser, 1998; Taylor and Bogdan, 1998), we analyzed all of our data line-by-line and by hand. This is consistent with a Blumerian emphasis on meaning in symbolic interaction studies (Charmaz, 2000). This procedure, although very time consuming, allowed us to keep teachers' perspectives on mistreatment/abuse at the center of our research and to generate robust descriptions of each participant's experience (Fontana and Frey, 2000). Subsequent interviews with our participants were used to "fill out" emergent categories, clarify areas of ambiguity, and explore relationships between and among emergent categories (Bogdan and Biklen, 1982; Glaser, 1978, 1992, 1998; Strauss and Corbin, 1998; Taylor and Bogdan, 1998).

We also requested personal documents from teachers (e.g. letters, diaries, journal entries) and official documents (e.g. administrators' letters, law briefs, faculty meeting minutes) relevant to their mistreatment/abuse experiences. Personal documents were especially useful in deepening our understanding of the meaning of teachers' mistreatment/abuse experiences (Bogdan and Biklen, 1982; Glaser and Strauss, 1967; Glaser, 1978, 1992, 1998; Taylor and Bogdan, 1998). It should be mentioned that examination of the personal and official documents submitted to us and reports from those who had worked with and referred us to the veteran teachers we studied suggest that they were highly accomplished, creative, and dedicated individuals. In most cases, such teachers had been consistently, formally recognized by their school and district not simply as effective teachers but also as superior teachers; in many cases, such recognition for their exceptional achievements as public educators extended to state levels.

As noted above, our primary interest in conducting this study was to describe and conceptualize the teachers' perspectives on reality, that is, the "meanings" teachers associated with being mistreated/abused by school principals. Thus, the present study conformed to general guidelines for inductive exploratory research that emphasizes meanings as well as descriptive and conceptual results. Constant comparative analysis was used to analyze our data. This approach to analysis requires a comparison of each

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new incident found in the data with those coded previously for emergent categories and subcategories (Bogdan and Biklen, 1982; Charmaz, 2000, Lofland, 1971; Strauss and Corbin, 1998, Glaser, 1978, 1992, 1998; Glaser and Strauss, 1967; Taylor and Bogdan, 1998).

Specifically, data gathered from each teacher involved in our study were analyzed in terms of five primary codes: (1) abusive principal behavior/conduct and effects of this conduct on teachers (2) psychologically/emotionally, (3) physically/physiologically, (4) involvement/performance in the classroom and, (5) involvement/performance in the school. We used constant comparative analysis to produce descriptive categories and conceptual and thematic analyses from our data. One of us analyzed the entire data set independently, and the other examined the results of this analysis independently. Both researchers met to resolve questions that arose. Upon completion of numerous cycles of analysis, we also made comparisons with the extant empirical and theoretical literature on workplace abuse as a check on the viability of our descriptive and conceptual findings. However, we made no changes in our analysis at any level as a result of this last procedure. To be sure, careful collection and line-by-line comparative analyses of the data reduce the probability of inappropriate borrowing of concepts from the literature (Charmaz, 2000).

Although interview-based protocols are essential to qualitative studies that focus on meanings (Bogdan and Biklen, 1982; Glaser, 1978, 1992, 1998; Glaser and Strauss, 1967; Strauss and Corbin, 1998; Taylor and Bogdan, 1998), interviewees may present idealized versions of themselves and their situations. To address this and other issues related to trustworthiness and reliability of our findings, we used an inductive-generative approach to data collection and analysis. Specifically, we used no a priori concepts to control data collection, developed rapport and trust with our participants, conducted multiple interviews with each participant, audio-taped and transcribed all interviews, probed for detailed responses, examined data for inconsistencies and contradictions within and between interviews for each participant as well as across participants, compared interview data with available personal and official documents, searched for negative or disconfirming evidence, generated low-inference descriptors, and checked for researcher effects. Finally, as a supplemental validation of our findings, we made comparisons with the existing literature on workplace abuse (Bogdan and Biklen, 1982; Glaser, 1978, 1992, 1998; Glaser and Strauss, 1967; Strauss and Corbin, 1998; Taylor and Bogdan, 1998).

In accordance with guidelines for inductive analyses, all of the categories of findings discussed herein were derived directly from our data. This article focuses on teachers' perspectives of principal mistreatment/abuse and, in particular, principal behavior that teachers define as abusive, that is, harmful to them. Given space limitations, effects on teachers are only briefly described. By and large, our database consists of victimized teachers' experience of

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mistreatment/abuse. However, at times teachers also discussed the mistreatment/abuse experiences of others in their schools. Occasionally, these data are presented as well. Relevant theoretical and empirical literature are presented in the discussion section of this article for interpretive and comparative purposes and for supplemental validation of emergent findings (Bogdan and Biklen, 1982; Charmaz, 2000; Glaser, 1978, 1992, 1998; Strauss and Corbin, 1998; Taylor and Bogdan, 1998). Additional descriptive, conceptual, and theoretical findings, particularly with regard to the effects of mistreatment, will be presented elsewhere. Excerpts from the database are included to illustrate selected ideas.

## Findings: a model of principal mistreatment

In essence, we have organized the principal behaviors derived from our database according to level of aggression: level 1 principal mistreatment (indirect, moderately aggressive, e.g. discounting teachers' needs, isolating teachers, and withholding resources); level 2 principal mistreatment (direct, escalating aggression, e.g. spying on, overloading, and criticizing teachers); and level 3 principal mistreatment (direct, severely aggressive, e.g. threatening teachers, giving unfair evaluations, preventing teacher advancement):

(1) *Level 1 principal mistreatment behaviors (indirect, moderately aggressive):*
- discounting teachers' thoughts, needs, and feelings;
- isolating and abandoning teachers;
- withholding resources and denying approval, opportunities, and credit;
- favoring "select" teachers; and
- offensive personal conduct.

(2) *Level 2 principal mistreatment behaviors (direct, escalating aggression):*
- spying;
- sabotaging;
- stealing;
- destroying teacher instructional aids;
- making unreasonable demands;
- criticism: the ubiquitous form of level 2 mistreatment;
- private criticism; and
- public criticism.

(3) *Level 3 principal mistreatment behaviors (direct, severely aggressive):*
- lying;
- being explosive;

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- threats;
- unwarranted written reprimands;
- unfair evaluations;
- mistreating students;
- forcing teachers out of their jobs (reassigning, transferring unilaterally, terminating);
- preventing teachers from leaving/advancing;
- sexual harassment; and
- racism.

Please note, this model does not imply that individual level 1 principal mistreatment behaviors always resulted in less harm to teachers when compared to level 2 or level 3 behaviors; to the contrary, the degree of harm related to any single aggressive behavior varied from one victimized teacher to another, as one would expect. In addition, our study focused on long-term mistreatment (six months to nine years); therefore, teachers discussed the "cumulative effects" of a multiplicity of principals' continued, systematic mistreatment/abuse.

*Level l principal mistreatment: indirect and moderately aggressive*

In general, mistreated teachers experience strong feelings including shock, disorientation, confusion, humiliation, self-doubt, low self-esteem, chronic fear, anger (especially indignation), and depression in an atmosphere of coercion and domination by their principals. Indirect forms of principal mistreatment, as described by teachers in our study, included nonverbal and verbal principal behaviors. This category of principal behaviors was considered generally less abusive as compared to level 2 and level 3 behaviors, and this finding is consistent with studies conducted with the general population (e.g. Keashly *et al.*, 1994; Neuman and Baron, 1998; Ryan and Oestreich, 1991). At the same time, the frequency of occurrence, timing, amount of negative affect, and the nature of the location in which mistreatment occurred (e.g. public versus private) contributed significantly to the degree of harm teachers incurred from level 1 behaviors. Level 1 principal mistreatment behaviors include: discounting teachers' thoughts, needs, and feelings; isolating and abandoning teachers; withholding resources and denying approval, opportunities, and credit to teachers; favoring "select" teachers; and offensive personal conduct. Such behaviors were always a part of a more extensive pattern of mistreatment/abuse.

*Discounting teachers' thoughts, needs, and feelings (including verbal and nonverbal behaviors).* Mistreated teachers frequently found themselves ignored or snubbed by their principals; principals were also insensitive to teachers'

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personal needs. Moreover, abusive principals stonewalled and avoided responding to teachers' direct questions. For example:

> I went to introduce the principal to my husband. She looked at me, turned around, and just walked off. If we passed in the hall she would turn and walk the other way or she would give me a dirty look. She even snubbed me in the store. I feel like I am dealing with a middle schooler.

> Even if I walked into the office, she would turn her back to me. She would speak to another teacher who was with me, but she never spoke to me. In meetings she would give me the evil eye. After I resigned as department chair, she gave me a smirk like "I got you".

> I had a respiratory infection for years and my internist wrote a letter to the principal about taking the [moldy] carpet out. The principal completely ignored me. I wrote several letters to the superintendent. Finally the superintendent had it taken out. I haven't been sick since.

> He just never got our names right. When you work for someone for five years they should be able to call you by name!

> He never responded to my memos. I asked him about getting a substitute for the Jewish holidays ... about going to the gifted convention ... about getting reimbursed for what I spent on items I use in my classroom. He didn't respond.

*Isolating and abandoning teachers.* Abusive principals frequently attempted to isolate teachers by preventing their contact with others, especially colleagues:

> She threatened all of us from day one not to talk during our planning period with other teachers. She didn't even want us in the lounge during our planning period. She would say, "You don't need to say anything to your friends".

Teachers also indicated that abusive principals frequently failed to support them in confrontations with problematic students:

> A child slapped a teacher in the face. The principal wanted just a discussion and told the teacher to take the child back to class. As they were walking out, the child slapped [the principal] on the butt.

> I was bitten, kicked and hit by a five-year-old child on a daily basis. After trying everything including calling parents, counselor involvement, etc. ... I went to my principal. She would keep her for 15 minutes, letting her color, play, and do play dough; rewarding her instead of punishing her.

In all cases of nonsupport with students, teachers reported that abusive principals were "shamelessly unfair"; they failed to properly investigate problems, often blamed teachers for the problems, and verbally mistreated teachers in front of students. Teachers recounted:

> She told me a student's father reported that I had slammed the student against the wall and grabbed him. All that had happened was that I had kind of got between some students and put my hand up so that nobody got hit, just one of those things that happens a hundred times a day. The principal said, "It would be perfectly understandable if you lost it with the kids. It wouldn't surprise me if you did something like this. Why don't you admit that you did?" The next day the principal called me into her office and again said, "It would just be a whole lot easier if you just admitted it". When I met with the father I explained. He believed me and it was no big deal. That kind of thing happened to many teachers.

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> One time I was fussing at two girls who were arguing in the hall and the principal came in and jumped on me. He corrected us [me and another teacher] in front of students.

In addition, we found that abusive principals typically failed to support teachers in situations with parents, who, in the teachers' view, were clearly at fault; blamed teachers for problems with parents, and reprimanded teachers in the presence of parents. For example:

> A father who had recently been released from a mental hospital entered my classroom carrying a bag with what appeared to be a machete handle sticking out. He began to thump his son on the chest with such force that the child fell backwards, pinned against the wall. He was screaming so loudly other teachers came. One went to get the principal. The principal simply laughed, did not come to my room, and made no pretense later that he had misunderstood. He did not accompany me when I had to go to court. I felt unsafe, alone and abandoned.

> She didn't care to listen to what teachers said. If you had a problem with a child and you tried to solve it on your own or with the parent, the parent got upset and blamed you, not the child, she would take the parent's side against you.

> He would call me to his office for the weekly harassment meeting. He would tell me any and every parent complaint that happened that week. I don't believe hardly any of them ever took place. I said, "Give me a break, you call me in here and rake me over the coals and you aren't going to give me a chance to defend myself or correct the problem".

> She would say that you were the person with the problem and not the child. She would ask, "What exactly is it that you were doing to her child?" She accused me in front of the parents without even investigating. When the parents left. She said, "I know that you didn't do anything wrong".

*Withholding resources and denying approval, opportunities, and credit.* Abusive principals mistreated teachers by withholding necessary (and available) resources and denying approval (e.g. a work crew, student projects, planning time, access to telephones, and field trips). The experiences of a music teacher who had resources withheld and approval denied over a number of years were particularly destructive:

> She moved me and my classes into the gym lobby with no place to store my students' instruments. The bathrooms had that old urine smell, the heat didn't work, and there was no air conditioning. She denied all my requests to play at the hospital or to go to the symphony, and all requests for funds for the music program. She wouldn't repair instruments. She denied my requests to create a fund-raiser. She cut rehearsal time. She did this to let me know that she was the boss, she was in charge of the school and I jolly well had better learn that. It gets worse. I was placed in a closet, eight feet wide and thirty feet long. This storage closet was my orchestra classroom. The parents said, "Look, this situation is just awful". I was in the closet for five months.

Abusive principals at times undermined teachers' efforts to initiate and involve themselves in professional development opportunities:

> I had this idea to initiate professional growth plans that focused on trying to discover ways in which teachers can help each other grow. It was meaningful professional growth. She said,

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> "Forget it". She hid behind saying that people were too burdened. This was abusive because she is the one who told me to try it. She criticized what I was doing to make sure it became an unacceptable and undesirable thing for teachers to do.

Finally, all of the teachers we studied indicated that their principals, some of whom never even learned the teachers' names ("The principal took a full academic year to learn my name"), withheld or took credit for work-related achievements. In fact, principals were often seen as "conspicuously" withholding recognition and praise:

> She never thanked or even acknowledged my extensive efforts on big projects. I also organized the technology inservice, but was never thanked; in fact, she thanked someone else!

> I asked him, "Why did you sign the grant that I wrote?" He said, "As long as you are my employee your work is my work and I get the recognition".

> He always claimed credit for new ideas that I brought to him. He stated in front of others that I worked for him, not with him.

*Favoring "select" teachers.* All teachers we interviewed attributed the practice of favoritism to their principals. According to our findings, favoritism refers to "inequitable" treatment of faculty; "select" individuals are rewarded while others are punished and/or neglected. Directly and indirectly, principal favoritism appeared to reinforce domination of mistreated teachers. Some examples of rewards to "favored" teachers include being released from attendance at meetings, being assigned better students and classrooms, receiving positive evaluations, receiving support for advancement, being placed on "good" committees, and receiving public recognition. Clearly favoritism toward others exacerbated teachers' feelings of mistreatment:

> Certain teachers got gifted children, double-size classrooms, opportunities to see guest speakers, things like that. She would buy things for certain people and not others, and she would never pick on the favored people.

> It is important to her that people realize that if they don't play ball they will get hurt . . . have their favorite classes taken away, be put in rooms all over the school, have permission to go to a conference denied, and not be allowed to teach courses they wanted to teach.

Moreover, as noted, "favored" teachers supported abusive principals in a number of ways that reinforced the principal's domination of targeted teachers and intensified their sense of mistreatment; they encouraged others to comport with the principal's agenda, demonstrated their appreciation for the principal publicly, criticized other faculty, represented the school with external evaluation agencies, and colluded with the principal on decision making. To illustrate:

> The favored group of teachers are wise to the game, cynical, superficial, don't work very hard, report to her on other faculty, and are willing to carry out brutal orders and say hurtful things to people. They are willing to help the principal exercise her authority by extension.

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> If a teacher comes in and has something to say or disagrees – even in a nice, tactful way – that is a threat to his authority, and he gets very defensive. The outspoken people are the targeted people. The others are always chatting with him, bending over backwards to get along, and bringing in baked goods and coffee on his birthday.

> I became one of his pets, which I didn't like. He would call me at home and talk to me about the school, or I would end up staying a full day to talk with him but only get paid half time. I would go to all these meetings and take on different committees because I felt like I had to give the extra time. More and more was expected of me. He gave me more of the academically advanced children and children whose parents would be involved in school, and that continued as long as I pleased him. As long as you were the "yes man" he did you favors. But, you felt guilty and you would see the way he treated the other teachers that didn't conform. When I went to him and told him that I didn't want to be a pet anymore, that's when he started abusing me.

*Offensive personal conduct.* Two mistreated teachers complained that their abusive principals displayed offensive personal habits and several discussed unprofessional conduct; far from being considered merely silly, such habits and conduct compounded the effects of teacher mistreatment by negatively affecting school morale and school climate. One teacher said, "He'd always corner me and give me mean, really mean looks. I was very intimidated. He was my principal, my boss, my superior. He would shrug a lot, blow, and like just breathe heavily. He would stand real close to me". One principal's personal habits were especially repulsive:

> He had disgusting personal habits. He would walk around the school building or around you, at faculty meetings, or anywhere, and he had uninhibited flatulence. He was always burping and blowing his nose between his thumb and his forefinger in front of everybody; he never used a handkerchief. Other bodily sounds were emitted as well. He was a gross individual and this reflected on our school as a whole.

Several teachers reported that their abusive principals were also generally unprofessional in their conduct:

> He spent a lot of time doing personal things during the day. He had some kind of machine in his office where he polished rocks. It was his hobby. He also had old cars that he would work on; he would pull them up to the front and spend time during the day working on his cars.

Other teachers noted that several abusive principals had "affairs" with their colleagues ("There was one teacher in particular who spent so much time with him, like hours in his office. She would just leave her classroom unmanned".).

*Level 2 principal mistreatment: direct and escalating aggression*

This section describes some of the direct and escalating aggressive forms of mistreatment analyzed from our data. Level 2 principal mistreatment behaviors include spying, sabotaging, stealing, destroying teacher instructional aids, and making unreasonable work demands – as well as one of the more serious and most prevalent mistreatment behaviors, unfair and harsh criticism of teachers' work and abilities.

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*Spying.* Most of the teachers who participated in our study accused their principals of personally spying on them. Some abusive principals ominously situated themselves in hallways near teachers' classroom doors, surreptitiously used the intercom to listen to classroom activity, or monitored phone conversations; teachers reported that such "lurking" was unrelated to classroom observation:

> I would be lecturing and he would come and stand in the doorway behind me, where I couldn't see him. The kids later asked, "Why does Mr Blake give you a hard time? . . . I felt like the warden is walking by looking in my prison cell!".

> One blatant way she abused power was by listening in on the intercom. We were unable to discern when it was on. We were told that our classroom teaching became the entertainment for her and select friends in the office.

> He would listen in on a personal phone call. Like, if you made a medical appointment you would have to describe your symptoms to him.

Most of the teachers we interviewed indicated that abusive principals also solicited the services of other, favored teachers or parents to spy on them:

> She had some pets, who were her stoolies, and you knew right fast who they were. Any little thing that would happen on a hall would go through the pipeline straight up to her.

> She had a group of crony parents who were up at the school every day. They were always looking around the school and going back and telling her about teachers. Then the teachers were getting called in on this and on that.

*Sabotaging.* Teachers disclosed that principals manipulated other faculty to sabotage efforts designed to benefit students or colleagues:

> When I was awarded a grant for a project she did everything she could to sabotage the project. Word got back to me that the principal said no one was supposed to help me and she made sure that no one did.

> When she got wind of [my idea for a teacher development project], she went around to her inner group and said, "This was a lame brain idea, a very flaky and stupid thing, and anybody who would get involved would be a real loser and would be seen as working against the administration".

*Stealing.* Several abusive principals were accused of stealing food, personal property, or project funds from teachers:

> If you happened to have a drink or coffee . . . biscuits or pastries . . . on your desk he would take the food into his office and come back and take your drink to wash it down with. If we ever confronted him about stealing our lunches and snacks, he would just deny he knew anything about it. But, you had just seen him take it! There was never a word like, "Oh, I am sorry. Was that your lunch?" He would raid the refrigerator in the teacher's lounge, too.

> The principal said, "I hope you didn't mind but I sold my pickup truck yesterday afternoon and the only way that I could sell it is was if I threw your air conditioner [that I was transporting for you] in with it". I was shocked. My husband had a fit.

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*Destroying teacher instructional aids.* Some abusive principals literally destroyed classroom instructional aids and/or ordered teachers to remove them from their rooms. The experience of one highly recognized veteran was especially poignant:

> I had a beautiful loft in my room with pillows and a huge bookshelf that you could convert into a stage. It was great. The principal ordered it [and other things in my room] destroyed. [Reading from her journal:] "He stripped away everything that made my room unique, that makes teachers special, sets one teacher apart from another. A package that says to children here I am, examine me, question me, shake, rattle, and roll me and I will open up for you and reveal everything. What happens when a teacher is stripped of her style, when, year after year, her brightly colored package is picked at? Off come the ribbons, the bows, the brightly colored paper. What is left is a shell, an empty box. I was a teacher who had a special style of teaching. But everything that made me special has been done away with. Circle meetings were stopped. The Friday workshops were ceased. I have lost so much of myself. The more bookwork, page work, and blackboard work that I do, the less alive the students seem; I can see a change. The light went out of their eyes. I was told I needed to control them rather than making learning a joint venture. I became a teaching box – filling up heads with information so that they could pass the test. I want to work in an atmosphere of ease and acceptance, not constant anxiety. I want to work where teachers, all teachers, are appreciated, not just a chosen few. I was Teacher-of-the-Year, sponsored the educational fair, won first place in other competitions, and was nominated for teacher of excellence. But all that was me is gone now. I want out".

*Making unreasonable work demands.* In conjunction with a larger pattern of mistreatment, teachers were also subjected to mistreatment with regard to work standards (i.e. nitpicking about time or micromanaging) and unreasonable work demands (i.e. overloading a teacher with "difficult and excessive work" for several years):

> At eight o'clock every morning he was in the parking lot with a sign in sheet. As people pulled in he would write down their time. If they got there at 8:02 or 8:03, at the end of the day, he would announce over the intercom, Ms. So-and-So needs to stay until 4:10, Ms. So-and-So needs to stay until 4:07. I had a fish tank in my room and one of the fish died. I wanted to replace the fish during lunch, and it took me 25 minutes. I had to stay 25 minutes later that afternoon because I left during the day to go get the fish.

> I certainly was expected to do more than the average staff member. I was pressured to volunteer, to go to meetings, to [serve] on committees, to [conduct] workshops for seven years. I was grade level chair for five years (which was supposed to be rotated). I was not getting paid extra . . . Once I said, "Working with some of the faculty is really pretty tough". She said, "I know that so-and-so will never get this done and you will". When I had a problem with two teachers she just said, "You are wasting my time and I am sure that you will be able to handle this". I feel like I am getting it from all ends.

*Criticism: the ubiquitous form of level 2 principal mistreatment.* All the teachers we studied indicated that their principals unfairly and routinely criticized them. Teachers reported several types of private criticism, such as direct criticism, stigmatizing and pejorative labeling, intentionally vague criticism, use of an informant's information, gossiping, soliciting others, and public criticism.

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*Private criticism.* Teachers explained that they were privately and routinely criticized for a range of issues surrounding classroom teaching, plan books, classrooms, conduct of department meetings, dress, getting pregnant, ink color, and behavior at faculty meetings. Principals' criticism was usually conveyed with strong negative affect, both verbal (e.g. yelling) and nonverbal (e.g. pounding the desk); it was also considered unfounded and therefore "unjustified". For example:

> He would bring teachers into his office and intimidate them. You could hear him pound on his desk and yell at them for all kinds of things. He took my plan books every week and graded them in red ink. He'd write ugly comments. He would leave little notes in teachers' boxes about things that weren't true, like "your class was noisy". He would sit in your classroom and later leave a note that would say, "I was disappointed in your English lesson today". He would just make things up!
>
> The new principal came into my room and said, "This is a mess!" With incredible force, he ripped a stray piece of paper off the bookcase and said, "I want this room cleaned up, everything thrown away". I said, "Mr Wilson, this is a discovery room, an art room. All of these supplies are things that we need to create projects". I almost got hysterical because I had never been harassed like this before. I have been here 28 years and I have never had a problem. I have been Teacher-of-the-Year and I was the Honor Teacher of the County. It is not like I don't know what I'm doing.
>
> My colleague was ridiculed and berated by the principal because she didn't get permission from the principal to wear jeans to school one day. The principal pulled her in the office and ripped her apart, told her that she was immature and she still belonged at college, she didn't have any business being in a school, and she needed to grow up. A very dear friend who happened to be teacher of the year was told by this same principal that she has a reputation for being lazy. She called another teacher all kinds of unprofessional names.
>
> A teacher said she was thinking about starting her family but she wanted to wait and see if the principal would retire, because the principal had previously confronted people about being pregnant. That's against the law! The principal would say, "What poor timing. How dare you think you can have a baby at the beginning of September!"
>
> One morning I found a note in my box that said I had signed my report cards with the wrong color ink, blue instead of black. The principal pulled me out of class into the hallway and said, "You were told this was the way it was to be done and you have not followed those directions!" I apologized twice but he kept berating me. The next day I got a reprimand in my box. I was totally humiliated as a professional.
>
> He called me into his office with the assistant principal and chewed me out. He told me that my attitude was unacceptable, that I sit in faculty meetings and stare out into space. I said, "You have pushed me into a corner and I live in fear every day of what you might do to me, like you have done to others. I don't like this feeling and the way you treat me, and I am angry".

One new principal unfairly criticized a teacher for securing a coaching position by going to the superintendent supposedly "behind his back":

> He said very loudly, "I see you have gone behind my back". I thought, "Who is he talking to?" I didn't have a clue as to what the problem was. I asked what he was referring to, and he said,

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> "We don't need to get into that". Then he started on another tirade. He kept repeating "You have gone behind my back, and if I am going to run the ship, I have to have a tight ship and everyone has to be loyal". I had never been chewed out before. I had always been told by administrators that we are really glad you are here. This was foreign to me. The chair that he had for me to sit in was very low. This guy has set up this little room for these kinds of interrogations. He was yelling and red in the face. I finally got that he was upset about my appointment prior to his arrival as wrestling coach ... Then he started off on another tirade about the chain of command.

Needless to say, principals' criticisms of teachers included countless other issues (e.g. failure to complete tasks, unprofessional conduct toward students, matters of delegation, a teachers' acceptance of a new position in the district, and general incompetence). And most important, criticism was, according to our data, based on false or "manufactured" information and was thus considered grossly "unfair". In most cases, principals were accused of failing to conduct proper investigations (or any investigation) of the issue at hand before "attacking" the teacher; in other words, "accusations without investigation" were commonplace. For example:

> I work out of the district office during pre-planning. Well, my coordinator got an e-mail from this principal about my performance, saying that after talking with faculty members at his school, he found out that I had done nothing for the special ed. program all last year. Both my coordinator and I were shocked! I went over to the school to ask the teachers if they had any complaints against me. They all went "What? Get out of here!" because they really do like me.

Not infrequently, unjustified principal criticism of teachers was nonspecific; it consisted of pejorative labeling (e.g. accusing individuals of being "negative", giving intentionally vague criticism, using information from a "snitch" or informant – often a teacher or student – to criticize, and gossiping):

> As the union representative, I wrote a letter to the principal saying there was no educational substance behind his approach and that my students weren't learning anything. He wrote back, "You are just being negative and unwilling to change. Your attitude is the problem and you are undermining the staff and morale". He circulated the letter to the whole staff. I filed a grievance that forced him to back down. After that, it's been a cold war.

> I asked him what else was I doing wrong. He said, "I have concerns". I said, "Okay, what are those concerns?" He said, "No, I just have concerns". He was sitting at his desk. He had me sit down and just kind of stared at me. I said, "Is there a problem?" He said, "No, there is not a problem", and just maintained his silence ... I felt he was trying to intimidate me.

> I was called into her office about the fourth or fifth week of the first year. She said another teacher had told her that I had referred to a child as "stupid". I said to her as calmly as I could, "I did not say that. I did not do that. I would never do that. That is not a word that I allow the children to use. I certainly would not say that". "You are the most negative person on my staff", she said. That was the last straw for me. I walked out

> He lied. He said five parents had complained about me. The whole thing was made up except for one parent who had actually complained. When I walked out of the office I heard him say to the assistant principal, "Good job", as in "we intimidated her, really scared her".

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> We caught the principal all the time telling one teacher what another teacher had said, and it was always something derogatory. He was trying to pit teachers against each other, and I think he enjoyed knowing that he made someone upset or seeing someone cry. He used to call me to his office and make me listen to him talk about other teachers. I felt very uncomfortable.

One teacher disclosed that a principal tried to solicit her help in disparaging a vice principal who had gained popularity during the principal's absence from the school:

> The vice principal wrote me a bad letter of reference. When I confronted him he admitted that it was based on hearsay. I said, "You have cost me a job, cost me a promotion, and cost me a chance to get ahead in another setting!" Then the principal, who was threatened and dethroned by the assistant principal's popularity as acting principal during her illness, asked me to grieve the assistant principal for having done this. Now she is going to exercise some muscle, and one of the things she would like to do is nail the vice principal.

*Public criticism.* Our data indicate that teachers were also publicly criticized and humiliated by principals and that such criticism was based on fallacious or distorted information and was accompanied by strong negative affect and offensive nonverbal behavior. Principals criticized teachers in the presence of others in the school's front office area, at faculty meetings, in classrooms, over the intercom, in cafeterias, hallways, and other places:

> I sent an abused child with blisters on his back to the principal, but he sent the child back and told me that, "This needs to be ignored because it is not good for school-community relations". So, I ended up going to our juvenile court judge who called the principal and had the principal report it to Family and Children Services. I was in the office and happened to be down on my knees filling out something and he said, "Ms Jackson, that's where you belong, on your knees". He said it really mean, like I should be subservient. Then he walked into his office and slammed his door.

> When I told the principal I was waiting for paperwork before servicing a special child, his face turned all beet red and he started shouting. He wanted to know if I knew who he was. He was furious and screaming and hollering: "Do you know who I am? I am in charge here!" People were staring. I was shocked. I just couldn't believe that a person who was in a position of authority was behaving in such an unprofessional manner.

Many teachers' mistreatment experiences included frequent public ridicule of themselves and colleagues during faculty meetings:

> At one of the first faculty meetings he told us he was locking the supply closet. We took it as an affront to our professional status. We weren't used to being treated this way. Some teachers went to talk to him but he blew it up into an argument. He had gotten red in the face in that meeting, just a hateful look on his face. He slammed his fist down on the table and we all just kind of jumped back. He said, "Things are going to be the way I say they are going to be! You are not going to tell me how to run my school. Things are not going to be done the way they were in the past. I am here to straighten you teachers out!"

> No matter what you did, you were criticized. I would come in early and work late, and he said, "If you have to come in early and stay late, you are not organized! You don't know what you are doing!" He said this at a faculty meeting. At another faculty meeting he said the same thing about teachers who come in on the weekend and work. These teachers are so

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conscientious they want to work during off time. They want to get things ready for the kids to be prepared, and he criticized them for it.

While I was speaking during a faculty meeting and offering to help get a gift for our visiting review people, the principal was whispering and mouthing my words to the group. She was mocking me in front of the staff . . . the faculty were laughing. She'll do that kind of thing with anyone who would dare speak up.

It was not uncommon for abusive principals to criticize teachers with students and others present:

All of a sudden my door is opened and pushed very hard, enough that it slams into my desk. I was shocked. This immediately got the attention of my student teacher and the children who are in the classroom. I explained I had inquired about borrowing the media bookshelf and was told I could. But he said in a hateful, loud tone that he wanted those things in the library exactly where he had placed them. I thought, "This behavior is not appropriate". Meanwhile there are 20 eight year olds that are looking at him with their mouths open. The student teacher is sitting there scared to death.

During one fire drill one of my students left a rock inside a door so that we would come back in that door later, but we actually went around to the front. Somehow, the principal found that rock and came around asking who did it. This one little guy was going to raise his hand and admit that he did it. But, I didn't want him to suffer any kind of abuse, so I said, "I did it". She started to yell and holler on and on, to take me down in front of the students. Her voice was on fire.

She got on the intercom to argue with me in front of the kids about our different views of the way children should behave in the classroom.

I had a suggestion I shared with other teachers and wrote a memo to the principal. She called me over the intercom and publicly criticized my idea in front of other teachers and students. She was loud and very impolite.

She would yell at teachers quite often on the PA as well as in person, and in the lunchroom lobby in front of all the students . . . She pointed her finger about three inches from one teacher's nose and was just blasting him right there in front of the entire lobby. She said he was not being professional, he should not joke around with students and he should keep his voice down because he was irritating.

This is so typical of him. He walked in and we were all eating lunch. He said, "What are we having?" We named the two entrees, and I said, "Listen, try the fish". Very rudely he said, "You don't have to tell me what to eat! I'll try whatever I want!"

*Level 3 principal mistreatment: direct and severely aggressive*

From the foregoing, it is apparent that principals who abuse teachers do so in a variety of verbal and nonverbal ways and that such abuse includes level 1 (indirect, moderately aggressive) and level 2 (direct, escalating aggression) principal mistreatment behaviors. As devastating as these levels of mistreatment are for teachers, principal mistreatment includes even more aggressive and severe forms of abuse: Level 3 principal mistreatment behaviors, glimpses of which have been foreshadowed in level 2 behaviors.

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According to our data, victimized teachers believed that most of the principals they described "intended to harm" and even "destroy" them and that many such principals were quite aware of the damage they caused. For instance, most principals failed to investigate issues before "attacking" the teacher. And, when teachers confronted abusive principals about their conduct and its destructive effects on them, such principals typically denied all allegations, blamed the teacher, and engaged in further reprisals against them. Most level 3 forms of principal mistreatment were strongly associated with various forms of deception and included lying, explosive behavior, threats, unwarranted reprimands, unfair evaluations, mistreating students, forcing teachers out of their jobs, preventing teachers from leaving/advancing, sexual harassment, and racism.

Lying. Most of the teachers we studied identified principal deception, in particular "blatant lying" (i.e. intentionally false statements) as a common form of principal mistreatment. Lying was attributed to principals when they repeatedly made statements that conflicted with the teachers' direct personal experience regarding an issue. Lying was associated with other forms of abusive behavior already discussed, such as nonsupport of teachers in conflict with parents and students, unfounded criticism as well as behaviors to be discussed (e.g. unfair formal evaluations), and forcing teachers out. ("You can expect principals who do bad things to lie to protect themselves".). Lying was also associated with countless issues including placement of children, faculty voting outcomes, teacher termination, reimbursement for inservice, library responsibility, authorization, and stealing funds. To illustrate:

> During a faculty meeting, I made a comment about placements and the principal looked at me and became very, very defensive. Her neck turned bright red and she said. "I have never changed a child's placement over the summer because of a parent's request!" The room got really quiet, and I was really embarrassed. She had taken it as a personal attack. She overreacted and became very defensive. Everybody was just stunned. I apologized and said, "I didn't mean to insult you, I was talking in general". I tried to explain my remark and tried to pacify her. After the meeting a couple of teachers said that they couldn't believe her reaction. Everybody knew perfectly well that she changed the placement of children, that it was a real problem.

> I was unwed and pregnant and the principal was trying to establish grounds for firing me legally. So, he sent me this letter that had nothing indicating that their reason for termination was because I was pregnant and unwed. It indicated that there was something wrong with my teaching ability. He wanted me to sign it. My students were even being taken out of my classroom, one by one, and encouraged to say that I cursed them, which I didn't. They got a couple of students to say that I cursed all the time and that I used the Lord's name in vain and I used the word that rhymes with duck. I never did. It's not even part of my vocabulary. One time I did tell a child to sit down in his damn seat. One student told them, "I never heard Ms. Atkins curse and I am not going to lie!" Others said the same.

> When I got to the new school I started getting these calls from my former principal, asking, "Where is the check for $3,000 for the yearbook profits?" I had to go back over to that school and show him where I had entered it into the books. He still claimed he could not find the

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check and that I had never given it to him. He kept calling me at my job and harassing me to the point that the principal at my new school finally told him "This is no longer this teacher's problem. You are going to have to deal with this yourself". He was trying to set me up for stealing that money and he had probably done it. But there were lots and lots of situations with other faculty members who resigned from extra-curricular activities because money was missing, and they thought he was taking it.

*Being explosive.* When principal mistreatment occurred through face-to-face interaction, principals frequently escalated and became explosive and engaged in particularly nasty behaviors:

From the beginning, he singled me out for criticism. He criticized me publicly and loudly. He criticized my dress as too casual and told me that I couldn't wear Birkenstocks [shoes] because they were gang-related. He would mock me in front of other teachers in his "in" group with whom he ate lunch. After a fellow teacher and I pointed out a possible solution to a duty problem, he called me into his office and berated me for over an hour on the proper way to show respect to a principal. He called me a troublemaker and told me that I needed to stop changing things and stop being so smart. He ridiculed me in a faculty meeting as someone who was "too smart for my own good". He said that he would never believe a word that I said; he would always take the word of a parent or student against me anytime.

He gets very stiff in the neck. He points his finger in your face, and he often swears heavily. When you get locked into his office and he slams the door, you know he is going for you. I have heard from several coaches that when it is man-to-man, he has threatened to strike them and it has ended in, "You son-of-a-bitch, if you ever . . .!" This makes me so upset. I just want to kill him. He seems to hit when you are most vulnerable.

He would address us at meetings by yelling, pounding his fist, and carrying on at length until his face was scarlet and the veins stood out on his neck. No meeting with this man was complete without our usual verbal beating. I believe this man thought that it actually helped us. Quote, "the beatings will continue until morale improves".

*Threats.* Not surprisingly, teachers defined all abusive actions by principals as implicitly or explicitly "threatening". That is, teachers experienced such conduct as putting them "at risk", in "danger", and in a state of fear. In addition, teachers reported that abusive principals, with few exceptions, directly threatened groups of teachers as well as individual teachers. Out data indicate that threats were usually overt, but at times they were implied. Teachers explained that principals threatened groups of teachers to stop the spread of rumors about the principal, for making negative statements about the school to a review committee, for losing games, and for numerous other issues:

I dropped a hint to the school accreditation reviewer that all is not well in Camelot. The next day at a faculty meeting, the principal said that something had occurred that was a cloud on our whole school. She said that the reviewer heard that everything they would see at the school was a sham. She reminded us that if we dared to speak up about anything that was negative about the school, it was grounds for dismissal . . . The principal said, "How can a Judas betray us like this!" She said she would contact the three teachers on the review committee and get them to tell her who it was. Her final words were, "I want all of you to work to find out who this traitor is!" The next day she called an emergency faculty meeting,

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> expecting someone is going to cave in and confess ... At the beginning and at the end of every faculty meeting, she said she did not get mad, she got even. People learned real quick that if you did talk, there were repercussions. I am a single mom and I have got to put three kids through college. I don't want to lose my job. I thought, "That can be the groundwork for her to try and get rid of me".

> She came to a staff meeting one time with a pack of transfers and said, "Anybody that doesn't like it here, you can just get one of these. I have got plenty of them". Everybody shut up ... She would talk about people's clothes, the way they dressed. She said, "I am here to tell you folks if I don't think you look professional, you will be going home and you will be docked for this time" ... She said, "The thing that I want to get straight is I am here for the children. I am not here for you, meaning the teachers. I am going to support the children". She is going to blame you, cut you loose, or not support you. She also said, "It is going to upset your evaluation".

Individual teachers were threatened for a wide range of reasons; for instance, to coerce a teacher to change a student's grade, for conduct toward a student, for expressing opinions that disagreed with the principal's, for confronting a principal for his conduct, for making a request to central office for needed resources, for use of personal days, and for having to miss PTA meetings:

> I had a senior [student] who in the last nine weeks of school decided he wasn't going to do a notebook. He flat didn't turn one in. He was an athlete and he went whining to the assistant principal who was our football coach. He [the coach] called me in and said you have to pass him. I said, "He didn't do the work. I gave him extensions. I told him I would take his notebook late. I gave him every possibility. It's not my fault and I am not changing my grade". The next day the principal threatened me. He said if I wanted a job, I would change this kid's grade. He was furious. I caved in under the pressure, and I regret it to this day.

> There was a parent who disagreed with a teacher who had taken a child out of the classroom to speak to him about not completing his homework assignments. With the parent there, the principal ordered the teacher to go back in front of the class and apologize to the child. He said that the parent would sit in and hear the apology. He also threatened to write her up and said to remember that she was not tenured, that he would be watching her every move and if she stepped out of line, she would pay for that. He said all this in front of the parent. She came to my room sobbing uncontrollably, like she could not get her breath, she was so upset. She felt threatened. She said she felt scared and intimidated and humiliated.

Teachers had similar feelings, however to a lesser extent, when they were not the target of abuse but had observed or learned about abusive conduct from others ("If he does this to others, he would do it to me"):

> When my teammate was seven minutes late, the principal came in with kindergarten students in the room, scolded my teammate, telling her that the next time she was late, for whatever reason, she would write her up and a copy would be placed in her personnel file. Two other adults were in the room at the time. I was fearful of being late. I would dream about oversleeping. I rushed around in the morning like a crazy person afraid I would be late.

In addition, teachers reported that principals wrote unwarranted reprimands, gave unfair evaluations, mistreated teachers' students, attempted to force teachers out of work, prevented teachers from leaving or advancing, and engaged in sexual harassment and racism:

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*Unwarranted written reprimands.* Abusive principals constantly threatened teachers with unwarranted written reprimands. Teachers described the use of reprimands as "grossly unfair", "irrational", and based on false accusations. Principals "wrote teachers up" for almost anything, for example, for being in a storage closet during class, a stolen video camera, use of the intercom, turning in a budget three hours late, and conduct towards students. One teacher disclosed:

> I was constantly intimidated and harassed. He sent me letters of reprimand, delivered during class, and filled with false accusations. My students witnessed my reaction. I was not able to teach effectively. Once he cornered me in a closet and discussed inappropriate [sexual] topics to which I would not respond. I then received a letter of reprimand for being in the storage closet.

*Unfair evaluations.* In all cases, teachers worked in school districts that required principals to complete "objective" teacher evaluations. These consisted of classroom observations, usually several per year, as well as conferences with the teacher. Such evaluations were described as important to the school district as well as to the teacher; in fact, most of the teachers in our study defined one negative evaluation as "seriously damaging" or "career ending" in their respective districts.

Our data show that teachers who were victimized by principals worked in a constant state of fear about unfair evaluations ("She would come in at any time and decide that she didn't like things. She did it to me, and I saw her do it to others", "We are always in a state of fear, and I am the bread winner in my family"). Teachers' fear of unfair evaluations were exacerbated by their belief that no viable recourse existed to overturn such evaluations ("As far as evaluations go, there is really nothing you can do. It doesn't matter what you say; it is there on paper, and you just sign it", "I was afraid of writing comments on the evaluation ... he would think he was lying, which of course, he was ... He would become even more vindictive"). It is important to mention that with the exception of beginning teachers who had not worked with other principals, all but one experienced teacher reported that they had, before mistreatment began, consistently received superior evaluations from former principals and even from their abusive principals.

In all cases teachers stated that principals included flagrantly false information on their evaluations:

> She lowered the boom and gave me the worst rating that I ever had in all my years of teaching. This had been coming on because I disagreed with her once. She had done this in the past to others. You name it, she criticized it. It was shocking. I had never had anything like that done to me, and in such a vindictive manner ... In the conference I said, "What you've written, it's not true". I was shaking like a leaf ... I went home that night and put together my version of the lesson, and some union people supported me. It was a very bad experience for me, awful. I am shaking as I am telling you this now. I stood up for myself because I wanted the truth to be known. I didn't care if I lost my job because I felt like everything was gone anyway.

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> The principal said he saw a student put his head down in class but I did not see it. It didn't happen. Before he left my room, he said that I was not paying attention and that he would be back. He looked very hostile. On my teacher evaluation he checked two areas that needed improvement, and he wrote comments about things that never occurred. But I felt that there was nothing that I could do about it. I felt that if I wrote a comment at the end of the form it would just make him angry because he would think that I was saying he was lying, which, of course, he was.

For many teachers, abusive principals not only made false representations on their evaluations; they also violated district evaluation policies and procedures:

> Our principal never came into my classroom, but he told me one day that although he didn't know what was going on down in my classroom, he didn't like it. He gave me a fifty percent unsatisfactory evaluation. This came out of nowhere. I had a super reputation and was consulting with other teachers because my program was so successful. Suddenly, with the change in principals, I was incompetent and unprofessional – awful things. It hurt. It was devastating. He has never come to observe me, but he went directly for my throat.

> That man never stepped foot into my classroom for five years. My evaluations were fine, but then he began to become more critical and he gave me an awful evaluation. My [association] representative wrote to him saying, "When you are writing evaluations, you might want to have stopped in the teachers classroom". He said that he had evaluated me informally when he passed my room in the hall and that he had spoken with a student about what the students thought of me. He made it clear that there was nothing that I could do to make him change his mind.

Teachers also reported that principals failed to give legitimate reasons, or any reasons whatsoever, when requiring them to submit to extended or special evaluations:

> A group of us went to the board to complain about the principal. He [the principal] found out the names of every one of us and put all of us, every one of us, on extended evaluation, a form of probation or remediation. We never heard a word from the board about our complaints. We were all terminated that spring.

> If he doesn't like you he will have one of his administrators evaluate you almost every other day and all of your evaluations will be bad. He will literally hound you out of your job and make your life unpleasant. He had a central office supervisor come in and do a special evaluation of me. Afterwards, I asked if I could talk to the person. He said, "No, the central supervisor wrote you up". I thought, "Why is he saying it like that, he is trying to scare me". I never heard another word about this. I guess I did well.

Several teachers indicated that abusive principals intensified their use of unfair evaluations when they were consumed by personal life tragedies:

> When my father was dying, I shared the fact that we had just told the hospital to let him die. The next day I was sitting at my desk, the children were quiet and on task, and here he comes to do an evaluation. I felt like a whipped dog; I didn't have any energy to get up and dance. He wrote a bad evaluation, and within two days he came back for a second one. When I signed it, I put down (for what ever good it does for teachers) that I wanted it to be on record that no observations were made until it was known that my father was dying or had died. The third evaluation came right after Dad died in April. I probably was a basket case at that particular

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time, but for the rest of the year I was a great teacher, and that is what should matter. He was so unfair.

*Mistreating students.* Our data indicate that principal mistreatment of students had harmful effects on both students and teachers. Such treatment was considered an aspect of principals' general authoritarian-abusive approach to school leadership. Typically, students were mistreated for what a principal defined as "misbehavior". Many were special education/behaviorally disabled students:

> The principal and advisor of special education programs brought a child to my room fighting, struggling, kicking, and screaming. They held him down in the middle of the room by his arms and put their legs over his legs to restrain him. Both of them were white and he was a little African-American child. When his mother came, the child called her a bitch. I had been relatively quiet, but then I thought that I would give it a try, so I said [to the child], "I am really happy that you are in my class and I think that it will be a nice experience for you". He told me to suck his dick. The two male administrators snickered; they thought it was funny. I shut up. This principal was going to gain total control over this child, show him who was boss. Eventually, the child got angry and called the principal, who was white, a "cracker". Immediately, the principal called the child a "nigger". My stomach just turned over. They struggled and the principal wound up hitting him in the mouth. His hand slipped. His lip split open and he was all bloody. I was sick to my stomach. I thought, "This is child abuse". I stood there frozen. I feel that I compromised myself morally for not stopping it. The principal was ignorant, mean spirited, and small. He is in a category of abusers who are just insensitive and stupid; they don't get it, and they don't understand that yelling at people is harmful to them.

> I had sent an ill child to him and he wrote back two times, saying, "This child doesn't seem to be sick enough to go home. She will stay until it is time to be dismissed". The little girl was truly sick and had an emergency appendectomy that afternoon. Her parents went to the school board about it . . . His favorite thing to tell the children was, "I am going to be your best friend or your worst enemy" . . . Another time, he refused to deal with a child I thought was being abused. He told me that "This child needs to be ignored", so I ended up going to our juvenile court judge. He was a physically abused child.

At times, abusive principals undermined special education teachers and their students by engaging in actions that violated special education laws:

> The principal was always asking me to bypass special education procedures. Before every meeting, there had to be a school-based administrative meeting, without the parent, to decide what to do. Then, if a parent wanted something different – like a less restrictive environment – we had to stop the meeting until we could go back and talk to the principal again. The message was, "We [the administrators] don't trust you, and we are going to watchdog you and make sure that you don't put special kids into regular classrooms", which was supposed to be our goal!

> My six special education students disappeared from my classroom, one by one, into other programs, without my input. I told the principal that I was doing a self-contained program, but he merely said, "These are not special ed students". I said, "How do you know? The law says that you have to rule out learning problems and behavior problems". (I am tenured, so it would be difficult to fire me, plus I am good at what I do. I dot my "i"s and cross my "t"s.) He just didn't want my program on his campus. He did everything he could think of to get me fired, to find something wrong with my performance, to get rid of me, to make me quit. He

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eventually succeeded: I requested a transfer because he didn't afford these kids due process, and he refused to offer them special education services. Now, the person with the remaining students is not certified. These students should have been referred to my program.

*Forcing teachers out of their jobs* (reassigning, unilaterally transferring, terminating). Most of the teachers we interviewed stated that they were subjected to a variety of abusive actions by their principals such as unfair reassignments, forced transfers, and termination. In unilaterally reassigning teachers, principals changed their teaching locations and/or professional responsibilities:

> The principal said to this teacher, and I quote, "You have got yourself knocked up [pregnant] and you are out". She gave her a traveling remedial position between four classrooms. It was awful to watch somebody torture her, it wasn't physical, but it sure was mental. This teacher had been the principal's favorite. But the principal would turn on people unexpectedly and they would just fall apart. The principal would smile, be nice, and all of a sudden, attack. She is sadistic. My friend tried to transfer almost every year for eight years, but the principal wouldn't let her out. She had supreme control.

> A teacher came by my room and said, "I think you are moving, because it is posted in the office". This was before the children had even left the building, when the parents would be coming through. Sure enough, there it was. She had moved me to the fourth grade but I was not told. I was devastated. When I left school that day, I knew that I had to do something else. I definitely was not coming back to that building.

Teachers also described several principals who, unilaterally and without just cause and consultation, transferred them to other schools:

> At 8:00 am on the first day of post-planning she said, "You are being transferred to Wilson School and they expect you there by 10:00 am". I was totally stunned (I can't believe that I am getting upset now). I loved those kids. It was an inner-city school – I bought kids clothes, made home visits, helped kids study, was really involved. I felt like I was losing my family. Oh God, it did hurt! There is a process one goes through at the end of the year, in order to let go and relax for the summer. I didn't get a chance to go through it. There was no going out for drinks the very last day. I was uprooted all of a sudden. I started the next year at the new school embarrassed, afraid, and apprehensive about trusting people.

> I was a full-time teacher with 12 years of experience. I was a state Teacher-of-the-Year ... very accomplished. The principal called me into his office and said that I would, "no longer be working in that capacity". He decided that I would be used as a substitute for science teachers while they worked on projects. Then, I was relieved of my duties for the failure of someone else, a person who had not done her job. I had been set up. The principal said that, "It is my school, I can make that decision". I was told to clean out my desk. He also refused to meet with me. I reported to the other school the next day. That was the principal's way of washing his hands of me.

Abusive principals, again without just cause and without consultation, unilaterally attempted to terminate teachers:

> He got rid of many excellent teachers, teachers who were recognized by their peers as hard workers, creative, dedicated teachers who would always go beyond the curriculum. He put them on professional development plans and even told one of them he wanted to move her

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out. She said to me, "This is my school and my community, and I want to stay here. He can't run me off . . .". But, his abuse got to be a serious health problem for her, and she finally left.

In one case, ten teachers reported their abusive principal to the assistant superintendent, but never received a response. One teacher explained:

> In March, the principal said, "I am not renewing your contract". I had perfect evaluations. But, she said, "I am not required to give you an explanation about why. I am not renewing you". The next year, they installed her at central office, of all things, as personnel director . . . She was responsible for my not being able to get a job in the public schools for the next two years. It is like somebody has stamped your application with a big, black X.

*Preventing teachers from leaving/advancing.* Also frequently reported were principals' attempts to obstruct transfers of teachers, both within a teacher's district and to other districts. Typically, abusive principals wrote unjustified negative letters of reference to other school administrators in response to queries about teachers:

> At a union meeting, the president said that we didn't have to "do this parent-involvement thing. They can't force you". A young teacher spoke up and said, "But if we exercise our rights, we will be taken out of our subject area and we will never get a good job reference. You've got to be kidding!" Somebody told the principal what he said. When that teacher went for seven job interviews, he got seven defamatory references from the principal. On the eighth interview, he went to his old school and they chose not to even call her [his current principal]. He got the job and he got out. He was just sickened by the whole experience.

> He said that he would not recommend me for a teaching position. I said, "You've got to be kidding!" He said, "What I will say is that you are an excellent teacher and you are wonderful with children, but you are a troublemaker". He said, "I don't care if you think this is right or not". I didn't get the transfer. He wanted me to leave, but he didn't want me to leave for the school of my choice.

In several cases, principals assured teachers that they would give them positive references; however, their assurances proved false:

> The board office said that there was a problem with my references and that I better check them. I did. I was shocked. In her letter she said, "People have trouble getting along with [you]". That was the statement. She lied! The union said that it was a "wrongful reference".

> Five years in a row I tried to transfer, but the principal had been badmouthing me to other principals. I asked about it and he said, "I told that principal that you had made some mistakes as a young teacher".

Abusive principals also used negative letters of reference, even when prohibited from writing such letters, to undermine teachers attempts to obtain new teaching positions in other school districts, in some cases, for years:

> My principal defied a union agreement that prohibited him from giving job references about me; he gave reports for over two years. I had to take jobs outside education that were demeaning; they were far below my skill level because of him.

*Sexual harassment.* Several female teachers accused their principals of ongoing sexual harassment; in one case, the harassment occurred over a period of nine

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years. Teachers viewed the principal's sexual harassment as obvious assertions of power and control:

> It started my very first day on the job, when I was showing the children pottery. He came in and asked me to walk over to him, right in the middle of class. Then he said, "I just wanted to see you walk". He was smiling. Once I kneeled down to pick up the phone, and he said, "Don't bend down like that, my hormones are raging". I didn't make the call . . . I walked out. He was constantly telling me how pretty and sexy he thought I was . . . One day he told me that if I didn't go to this parade with him that I would be sorry. I did go. It was very crowded, and he had his hands all over me, on my shoulders and back and so forth. In the parking lot he took his shirt off and pumped his chest up and flexed his muscles. He said, "I don't want this to turn you on . . .". He made comments constantly. Then, at lunch he said, "I will never hire another fat teacher". He said he wanted them all good looking and built like I was, and that he would never hire a woman in particular with a big ass – he didn't care what her credentials were. I said, "Surely, you can't mean that", but he said that he did and I knew that he did. He is a male, chauvinist pig. When I was divorced he wanted to know about my new boyfriend and what kind of sex life we had. I knew that he would make life hell for me if I complained. There was nothing I could do. It went on for nine years, and I didn't tell anybody, ever, about any of this.
>
> I had problems with him calling me to his office. He would close the door and say, "Does this make you nervous to be in here with me by yourself?" Then he would tell me inappropriate jokes. He was very flirtatious and very controlling and he knew that he was making me nervous; the jokes were sexual. Once, he said, "I want you to come over here and stand behind the desk with me". He tickled the backs of my legs and said, "I have been wanting to do that all day". I got out of his office. The secretary was aware that he was harassing me and would look at me like, "I am so sorry". Once, he came by my classroom and poked me right under my arm, not a very good place to be poking a female. He just kind of laughed.
>
> He made flirtatious comments like, "You really look nice today", and, "I really like what you are wearing". It was the way that he said it and the way that he looked at me. He made me feel uncomfortable. He said things like that when nobody else was around . . . At a charity ball, he was there with his wife; he had been drinking way too much when he saw my date and me, he made a comment that my evening gown was kind of low cut and he would very much like to touch me in areas that it was low cut. I was so shocked that I walked off. It was an awful position to be in. I was embarrassed.

Several other teachers described isolated episodes of sexual harassment that, in conjunction with other forms of mistreatment, had profound effects on them over the long run:

> I asked him about leaving so I could go get a mammogram. He is over six feet, two hundred and fifty pounds. He said, "Well, I am a doctor. Come into my office and I'll do the exam". He sneered and did that deep-throat-kind-of-laugh-chuckle-kind-of-thing. He thought that it was funny. I said, "I don't think so. Can I leave early?" Once, he told one of the ladies that so-and-so had had a breast reduction and that the school counselor had been outside the doctor's office looking for the breast to put it on herself. It was so inappropriate.

Other teachers described incidents of sexual harassment that occurred at faculty meetings and other places:

> He has an IQ of about three. He and his wife had gone into Victoria's Secret and he started talking about these bikini panties at a faculty meeting. He said, "What do you call those?

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> Crotchless underwear?" That is exactly what he said! It had no point – no relation to anything.

> He has made sexual innuendoes and comments during staff meetings. He calls my coworker Sharon Stone and tells her how he likes her perfume. He touches her inappropriately.

*Racism.* Teachers defined six principals, three African Americans and three Caucasian, as racists; they reported that racism resulted in poor school morale and poor school climate:

> He was definitely a racist. He didn't want to hire black people. He said that he had been made to hire a black teacher before and he had to hire two this year but he didn't want to. He never put black teachers in charge of prestigious committees. We never had a black teacher-of-the-year. The black teachers were very strong, but didn't stay very long; the stress was too much for them.

> He said, "I don't particularly like you as a person, but I have been impressed with the fact that, even though you are white, you really seem to love these black kids".

> A teacher across the hall from me is alcoholic. She is sometimes drunk at school. Once, she threw up outside my classroom. [Her problem] was obvious, yet he [the principal] constantly put her as chair of various committees. She was black.

*Effects on teachers: a brief description.* Although the emphasis of this article has been on teachers' perspectives of principals' mistreatment behaviors, briefly described below are some of the major adverse psychological/emotional, and physical/physiological effects that such mistreatment has on teachers over the long term. In addition to feeling shocked and disoriented, humiliated, and beset by self-doubt and low self-esteem – and beyond the collateral damage mistreatment/abuse has on teachers' relationships in schools, their classroom work, their participation in decision making, and on their family life – mistreated teachers experienced a range of very severe and often chronic psychological/emotional effects.

Fear is considered a primary human emotion and as such has a "profoundly noxious quality" (Izard and Youngstrom, 1996, p. 35); it is essentially an awareness of psychological distress and is considered the most toxic of all human emotions (Tomkins, 1962). Our study revealed that intense and chronic fear and anxiety were among teachers' primary long-term responses to principal mistreatment. There were several reasons for this: First, teachers viewed the various forms and patterns of principal mistreatment as extremely threatening and punishing, and they perceived themselves to be particularly vulnerable. Second, teachers tended to internalize their fears and this provoked a chronic state of anxiety, of apprehension, obsessional thinking, and hypervigilance regarding the possibility of further mistreatment. Third, fear of mistreatment provoked an array of powerful secondary fears, such as fear of losing one's job, losing one's reputation, being ostracized by colleagues, expressing one's opinion, receiving poor evaluations, lack of support from the central office, and failing one's students instructionally and socially. Fourth,

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fear was experienced as pervasive: It permeated all aspects of a victimized teacher's work life; for many, it also profoundly and adversely affected the quality of their personal and family lives. Said differently, fear dominated teachers' entire "sense of being" for long periods of time ranging from several months to many years. Some terms that teachers used to denote chronic fear and anxiety states were "fear", "scared", "afraid", "dread", and "paranoid":

> He caused me to question my ability, to question myself. It is very scary. It depletes my confidence. It begins everyday just driving to work; I can feel myself tense up. I want to stay in my room and not socialize. Keep quiet. I feel subservient on my way to work. I immediately feel the stress in my neck. I feel myself sitting very straight and holding the steering wheel, concentrating intensely on getting where I am going, even though I have taken the same road for ten years. At work, I have a feeling of being watched. The first thing I do in the morning is close my door; I want to know if he comes in my classroom. I want to hear that door open, I don't want him to sneak in on me. I am guarded. I am careful about what I say. I don't go heavy into an issue and get all fired up about anything . . . Leaving at the end of the day, I immediately feel myself exhaling, I can feel the stress leaving me like, I am out! I am free until tomorrow!

> It was a very depressing, stifling atmosphere. We were all paranoid, insecure, with low self-esteem. I felt mainly anxiety with occasional panic attacks. Can you imagine all of us eating lunch in silence? It was the same group of people who were laughing their heads off, joking and talking, the year before. My integrity and professionalism were under attack and that threatened me. I always felt I would lose my job. I was always afraid. I always felt a lot of distrust.

Many teachers we interviewed also indicated that principal mistreatment/abuse was sufficiently extensive among faculty at their schools to create what one described as a "culture of fear". Fear affected entire schools, fostering a situation in which most teachers were afraid to express their opinions and concerns under any circumstances; silence was the pervasive response.

Also considered a primary human emotion, anger is a more or less primitive response to "being either physically or psychologically restrained from doing what one intensely desires to do" (Izard, 1977, 329-30). Hence, anger motivates people to prepare their bodies for real or imagined battles and to defend themselves with vigor and strength. Ekman and Friesen (1975, p. 78) stated that the major provocation to anger is "frustration resulting from interference with [one's] activity or the pursuit of [one's] goals". They noted "your anger will be more likely and more intense if you believe that the agent of interference acted arbitrarily, unfairly, or spitefully" (Ekman and Friesen, 1975, p. 78). Indeed, Averill (1982) asserted (as did Aristotle) that anger involves an appraisal that another person has intentionally and unjustifiably wronged one.

All of the teachers we interviewed also expressed strong feelings of anger and rage, both explicitly and implicitly. For most teachers, anger was chronic; it was a dominant emotion throughout their mistreatment experiences and, for many, continued long after mistreatment ended. As mentioned, teachers' anger

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always included strong feelings of indignation, a form of anger due to the unjust and unfair nature of their victimization by principals. Teachers used many strong words such as "bitter", "hate", "furious", "angry", "enraged", "outraged", "appalled", "disgusted", "despise", "resent", and "hot" to convey the intensity of their anger.

As with fear, many teachers admitted that because of their victimization by principals, they harbored feelings of anger towards school administrators in general. Predictably, teachers felt compelled to suppress their anger, given the power differences between themselves and principals; the principals' inclination to use power in abusive ways; and the failure of school district offices, boards of education, and unions to provide help.

Depressive states refer to pervasive, absorbing, and chronic feelings of being out of control. As described above, anxiety is a kind of "mobilization" response to a future threat that may be developing or coming and that, one hopes, can be avoided. On the other hand, depression is a "demobilization" response to a loss, a "static or unlikely-to-vary situation that can no longer (with any hope) be avoided because it has already developed or come to pass" (Riskind, 1997, p. 687).

Most of the teachers who participated in our study also reported being chronically depressed throughout their mistreatment experience. In describing feelings, teachers used terms such as "depressed", "futile", "helpless", "hopeless", "devastated", "beaten down", "paralyzed", "broken", "worn out", "defeated", "disoriented", "distraught", "trapped", "isolated", "sad", "down", "humiliated", and "despair". Clearly, for most victimized teachers, going to work as well as being at work was a "constant struggle to survive each day". Many teachers' depression was so severe that they sought counseling or psychiatric care for therapy and medication. One teacher disclosed:

> I would go home every day and soak in the tub. I probably soaked my skin off those last four years. At home I would lose my temper over nothing. I lost the joy of teaching and I wasn't enjoying the journey. I didn't sleep. I tossed and turned in bed. I didn't eat. I was depressed and tried not to show it at school. That is probably what affected my marriage. I have been married for 23 years, but for four years things were very rocky. I don't know if we would have stayed together if we didn't have a son. I was totally wiped out every day. My sex life was nil. Other teachers were depressed too. If it had not been for having a child and loving my husband to death I would have split; I was at that point. To tell you the honest truth there was a time I would go to the grocery store at night and sit in the parking lot. I remember sitting in the parking lot wondering if I had enough money and could leave and not come back. It took me a year to recover from the nervousness after I left that school.

In addition, feeling isolated, trapped, and unmotivated was strongly associated with feelings of depression. For example, to avoid further mistreatment, teachers usually withdrew both emotionally and physically (when possible) from social and professional activities (e.g. faculty meetings, committee work, sponsorship of student activities, professional associations). They refused, for example, to volunteer for committee work and sponsorships; when required to

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attend certain events they did not participate. According to our findings, teachers' protective actions may have inadvertently exacerbated their feelings of isolation and depression. Other factors typically associated with principal mistreatment – showing favoritism, being ostracized by other teachers, and lack of viable opportunities for recourse (e.g. from central office, unions) – also contributed to a targeted teacher's sense of isolation.

Like psychological/emotional problems, physical and physiological problems were typically chronic; they began with the onset of mistreatment and usually ended when mistreatment terminated. In some cases, problems persisted for several months and even several years later. The seriousness of these problems appears to be related to the longevity of teachers' mistreatment, at least in part. Roughly two-thirds of the teachers we studied sought medical treatment for their problems. The most frequently identified physical/physiological problems were chronic sleep disorders (e.g. insomnia, nightmares, obsessive thinking), chronic fatigue, stomach aches, nausea, weight gain or loss, neck and back pain, and headaches or migraines. Examples of other severe physical/physiological problems teachers experienced included diarrhea, high blood pressure, blurred vision, nausea or vomiting, respiratory infections, hives, vertigo, heart palpitations, gum disease, auditory impairment, panic attacks, chest pains, and frequent colds and allergies. Our data indicate that in addition to the psychological/emotional problems discussed earlier, individual teachers simultaneously experienced, on average, at least four of the physical/physiological problems previously described throughout their mistreatment experience.

## Summary and discussion

This article has emphasized our findings related to what teachers define as "abusive" principal conduct. A review of our findings points out that abusive principals, like abusive bosses, in general, engage in similar behaviors; and like many thousands of workers represented in the extant literature – a number that has been extrapolated to be multimillions of workers – abused teachers experienced the same devastating effects. However, in contrast to the existing literature on boss abuse, we have conceptualized abusive conduct as a model comprised of three levels of aggression. Level 1 principal mistreatment behaviors (indirect and moderate aggression) include discounting teachers' thoughts, needs, and feelings and isolating and abandoning them; withholding or denying opportunities, resources, or credit; showing favoritism toward other teachers; and offensive personal conduct. As noted, this level is of mistreatment behaviors is considered somewhat less harmful by teachers as compared to level 2 and level 3 mistreatment behaviors. Level 2 principal mistreatment behaviors (direct and escalating aggression) include spying, sabotaging, stealing, destroying teacher instructional aids, making unreasonable work demands, and both public and private criticism of teachers. Level 3 principal

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mistreatment behaviors (direct and severe aggression) include lying, being explosive, threats, unwarranted reprimands, unfair evaluations, mistreating students, forcing teachers out of their jobs, preventing teachers from leaving or advancing, sexual harassment, and racism. Such behaviors and related patterns of conduct are consistent with studies of abusive bosses conducted throughout the world in both profit and nonprofit organizations (Björkvist *et al.*, 1994; Davenport *et al.*, 1999; Harlos and Pinder, 2000; Hornstein, 1996; Keashly *et al.*, 1994; Leymann, 1990; Lombardo and McCall, 1984; Namie and Namie, 2000; Namie, 2000; Neuman and Baron, 1998; Robinson and Bennett, 1995; Ryan and Oestreich, 1991).

We also found that the effects of such mistreatment are extremely harmful to teachers' professional and personal lives. Beyond the teachers' responses of shock and disorientation, humiliation, loneliness, and injured self-esteem, principal mistreatment seriously damaged in-school relationships, damaged classrooms, and frequently impaired all-school decision making. In addition, principals' mistreatment/abuse of teachers resulted in severe, chronic fear and anxiety, anger, depression, a range of physical/psychological and psychological/emotional problems and adverse personal and family outcomes also discussed in the general empirical literature on boss abuse (Björkvist *et al.*, 1994; Davenport *et al.*, 1999; Harlos and Pinder, 2000; Hornstein, 1996; Keashly *et al.*, 1994; Leymann, 1990; Lombardo and McCall, 1984; Namie and Namie, 2000; Namie, 2000; NNLI, 1993; Ryan and Oestreich, 1991).

Although we used no a priori concepts to control data collection (Blumer, 1969; Glaser and Strauss, 1967; Glaser, 1978, 1992, 1998; Taylor and Bogdan, 1998), a comparison of our findings with Keashly's (1998) definition of "emotional abuse" – constructed from a comprehensive review of the workplace abuse literature – indicates that teachers' experiences of abuse and, in particular, the conditions under which teachers define a principal's behavior as mistreatment or abusive are consistent with what appears in the available literature. According to Keashly, individuals will tend to define a superior's behavior as abusive if there is a pattern of verbal and nonverbal abuse, behaviors are unwanted, behaviors violate norms for appropriate conduct or an individual's rights, behaviors are intended to harm the target, behaviors result in harm, and there are power differences between the abuser and the target of abuse.

Several dimensions of Keashly's (1998) definition of workplace abuse require discussion in the context of the present study. First, the statement that abusive conduct constitutes a pattern of repeated actions against a targeted individual over the long term (six months to nine years in terms of our data base) is critical to understanding the degree of harm teachers incurred as a result of principal mistreatment/abuse. Taken together, such factors produced a set of internal dynamics that had devastating outcomes for teachers. For instance, although

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we found that one category of principal behaviors (i.e. level 1) was considered less abusive when compared to other categories (i.e. levels 2 and 3), and this finding is consistent with the results of other studies (Keashly, 1998; Neuman and Baron, 1998; Ryan and Oestreich, 1991), the individual behaviors contained in level 1 (e.g. ignoring) cannot be understood in isolation. First, less aggressive and less abusive principal behaviors were often accompanied by more aggressive and more abusive behaviors; thus, we found that through simple association, less abusive behaviors could ignite strong emotional responses in teachers. Moreover, a long-term pattern of mistreatment/abuse produced "chronic" emotions in teachers including fear, anger, and depression. Consequently, any abusive behavior by a school principal at any time had the potential to precipitate seriously adverse effects on teachers; strong human emotions such as fear have a particularly long half-life and have the capacity to defy the boundaries of time or place (Harlos and Pinder, 2000), and thus have the potential to reinforce preexisting adverse psychological, physical, and behavioral responses in teachers.

Our data also suggest that other factors such as location or timing account, in part, for the degree of harm teachers experience from principal mistreatment. We found, for example, that a single instance of public ridicule had long-lasting, harmful effects on teachers; such behavior generated additional considerations for the teacher including embarrassment, loss of professional reputation, and reactions of others that do not accompany other behaviors such as private criticism. We also found that timing could be an important factor in understanding the effects of mistreatment. For example, being targeted for repeated classroom observations and evaluations during personal life tragedies (e.g. death, divorce) significantly intensified the degree of harm teachers experienced as a result of such observations and evaluations.

In many respects, public education in the USA has been strongly influenced by the principles of equity and fairness (Cusick, 1983; Dreeben, 1970). Violations of norms of appropriate conduct and human rights, particularly by school principals, are taken very seriously by teachers (Blase, 1988; Lortie, 1975). Many researchers have pointed to the significance of fairness to productive school principal-teacher interaction in schools (Blase, 1988; Lightfoot, 1983). Thus, it was not surprising to discover that teachers victimized by abusive principals primarily experienced "moral outrage" (anger from indignation) in response to the unjust and unfair treatment they received; such forms of outrage were reinforced because classroom instruction and students in particular suffered as a result of principals' abusive conduct toward them.

Intentionality with regard to abusive conduct is considered the weakest aspect of Keashly's (1998) definition of emotional abuse (Hoel *et al.*, 1999). However, it should be mentioned that in the context of the present study, teachers' attributions of intent to harm were typically slow in coming.

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Teachers' responses to being mistreated/abused during the early stages of their experience included disorientation, confusion, self-doubt, and self-blame ("What's wrong with me? Or "What have I done?"). Teachers blamed principals directly and concluded that their actions were intentional only after "repeated attacks" and repeated attempts on their part to address the problem.

From the foregoing, it is clear that teachers' definitions of mistreatment/abuse are remarkably consistent with how abuse is defined by others in public and private organizations, nationally and internationally. Yet, the importance of power differences between teachers and school principals in accounting for the degree of harm experienced by teachers cannot be overstated. Keashly (1998) points out that administrators in organizations generally have both reward and coercive power; among other things, administrators control performance evaluations, professional development opportunities, and promotions. Indeed, our data demonstrate that abusive principals have access to these as well as other sources of formal and informal power. The wide range of different abusive behaviors exhibited by principals – both verbal and nonverbal – that emerged from our database, support this conclusion. Even in situations governed by union contracts, teachers reported significant mistreatment/abuse experiences by principals. In fact, we found that teachers rarely complained to district level administrators because they expected to receive "no help" and because they "feared" reprisals. This is consistent with other research that had demonstrated that victims' complaints about abusive bosses typically result in: no action (no response) from upper management; efforts to protect abusive bosses; reprisals against victims who complain (Bassman, 1992; Davenport *et al.*, 1999; Hornstein, 1996; Keashly, 1998; Keashly *et al.*, 1994; Leymann, 1990; Martin, 1986; Namie, 2000; Namie and Namie, 2000; Rayner, 1998). The lack of legal protections for most forms of workplace abuse (with the exception of racial discrimination, sexual harassment, and, in reference to the present data, stealing) (Yamada, 2000) may also explain teachers' reluctance to file formal complaints against abusive principals.

Further, our findings point out that teachers were often unable to leave a school in which they were mistreated/abused, at least not in a timely manner. Several factors of considerable importance frequently result in strong feelings of being "trapped", for example, district policies prohibiting transfers, the high probability of negative letters of reference (and blackballing), weak unions, need for a job and health insurance, and the chronic effects of long-term abuse itself; that is, chronic fear, depression (self-doubt, feelings of helplessness) and fatigue, all factors that diminish one's ability for proactive action, particularly in difficult circumstances (Izard and Youngstrom, 1996).

In addition to the above, analysis of our data indicated three gender differences related to abusive principals and two gender differences related to victimized teachers; these differences are consistent with those produced by the general research on workplace mistreatment. First, male principals tended to use explosive

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verbal and nonverbal behaviors (i.e. yelling in public and pounding their fists on tables) more often than female principals (Harlos and Pinder, 2000). Second, only male principals were accused of sexual harassment. Third, only male principals were identified with offensive personal conduct (e.g. having affairs).

With respect to the victims of mistreatment, we found that female teachers engaged in severe self-doubt and self-blame during the initial stages of their mistreatment experience; males did so to a much lesser extent. Because experience and positive reinforcement in doing non-routine tasks are related to self-confidence and self-image for women (Dweck *et al.*, 1978), women may be doubly vulnerable to the lack of positive feedback, criticism, and negative feedback from abusive bosses; such mistreatment damages a woman's self-confidence and ability to perform public activities in addition to damaging her in ways directly related to the mistreatment/abuse. Second, no male teacher reported crying during his mistreatment experience, while most female teachers reported crying frequently during their mistreatment experiences; indeed, many of the female teachers cried during the interviews conducted for this study as they discussed the details of their mistreatment experiences.

Finally, our data suggest that most of the teachers in our study fit all three of Namie and Namie's (1999) profiles of bullies' targets: "nice people", possibly targeted because bosses consider them unlikely to confront the matter; vulnerable people, targeted because they are nonthreatening; and the "bold, best, and brightest", targeted because bullies, perhaps haunted by feelings of inferiority, strike at and try to undermine those who they perceive to threaten their presumed authority. Stated differently, abusive principals may seriously damage many of our very best veteran and beginning teachers; teachers who are not only highly respected, skilled professionals, but teachers who have also dedicated themselves to provide the compassion and caring frequently needed by America's school children.

### *Some theoretical ideas*

Theoretically speaking, our data indicate that principals employ a wide variety of indirect (i.e. passive aggressive) and direct verbal and nonverbal actions over the long term against targeted teachers that range from moderately to severely aggressive. For a given teacher, such actions constitute a unique pattern of mistreatment with regard to the types of actions (behaviors) employed and the frequency with which such actions (behaviors) are employed. In addition, teachers experienced all individual patterns of action (behavior) as intentional as well as seriously coercive, threatening, critical, deceptive, self-serving, and fundamentally unjust. Principal mistreatment is predictable inasmuch as teachers, once mistreated, believe that additional mistreatment is likely to occur; such actions are unpredictable in the sense that they could occur "anywhere, anytime ... for any reason".

Long-term patterns of principal mistreatment tend to dramatically, adversely, and comprehensively affect the teachers' professional life and, in

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many cases, the teachers' personal life. Regarding the former, principal mistreatment tends to result in substantial damage to teachers psychologically/emotionally and physically/psychologically, to classroom instruction, to relationships with colleagues, and to school-wide decision making. Regarding the latter, principal mistreatment tends to undermine a teachers' personal life (e.g. family life, friendships), although to a lesser extent as compared to one's professional life. Teachers' early responses to principal mistreatment (e.g. shock, disorientation, confusion, humiliation, self-doubt, and lowered self-esteem) seem to increase the teachers' vulnerability to additional mistreatment by an abusive principal by reducing her or his ability to cope with such mistreatment. These responses, in conjunction with the cumulative effects of long-term stress, tend to result in chronic fear and depression. Such psychological/emotional states, together with adverse physical/physiological states as well as adverse professional (e.g. poor classroom instruction) and social states (e.g. damaged relationships with colleagues and family), combine to create significant "life altering" experiences for teachers.

It has already been noted that the principal behaviors teachers define as abusive (i.e. harmful) are consistent with behaviors described in other research in the area of workplace mistreatment/abuse as well as in Keashly's (1998) description of six conceptual dimensions of emotional abuse. Comparisons with extant models and theories of workplace mistreatment also demonstrate noteworthy similarities with findings produced by our research; that is, other researchers have also categorized abusive behavior as verbal and nonverbal (Baron and Neuman, 1996; Keashly, 1998) and less abusive versus more abusive (Robinson and Bennett, 1995; Ryan and Oestreich, 1991).

Beyond this, the theoretical work focusing on boss abuse parallels findings from our study. To wit, both Hornstein *et al.* (1995) and Folger (1993) have argued that a failure by hierarchical administrators to treat subordinates in respectful and dignified ways (i.e. as "ends" in themselves) will result in subordinates feeling mistreated and will produce harmful effects on subordinates' mental and physical wellbeing. This notion is also central in the theoretical work of others who have discussed the problem of boss abuse (Ashforth, 1994; Harlos and Pinder, 2000). Moreover, Ashforth (1994) cautions that boss abuse of subordinates can trigger a "vicious circle" in which such bosses interpret the adverse effects of subordinates' actions (e.g. low motivation, helplessness, depression) as justification for using more coercive actions against them.

## Implications

### *Implications for administrator and teacher preparation*

All prospective administrators have been teachers and, as such, undoubtedly have experienced, observed, or heard about abusive conduct with regard to colleagues. Clearly, many are aware of its effects on victimized teachers and on

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schools as a whole. Nevertheless, university-based programs in educational leadership and teacher preparation programs typically emphasize only the positive aspects of and approaches to school leadership; they seldom directly address the "dark side" of school life and, as such, fail to equip students to understand or deal with this incredibly destructive problem (Hodgkinson, 1991).

Interestingly, however, a survey of over 300 school administrators and teachers about the practical value of studying the mistreatment problem (Blase and Blase, 2003) demonstrates the critical importance of this topic to prospective and practicing administrators' and teachers' development as school "leaders". Social learning theory (Bandura, 1977, 1982) and theories of self-regulations and -internalization (Vygotsky, 1978) point out that people often derive their most profound learning from a reflective understanding of social and linguistic life experiences (Tharp and Gallimore, 1988). This, of course, further supports the importance of studying such experiences in both leadership and teacher preparation programs. To this end, preparation programs for prospective teachers and administrators can examine the phenomenon of principal mistreatment of teachers and consider questions such as the following:

- What conduct by school principals do teachers define as abusive?
- What is it about the principal's role and those who occupy this role that can result in abusive conduct?
- What effect does such conduct have on teachers (e.g. what are the emotional and physical consequences for teachers, and how does such conduct affect teachers' classroom instruction and student learning)?
- What are the consequences of abusive conduct by principals on school climate and school culture?
- What coping strategies are efficacious for mistreated teachers?
- What actions can mistreated teachers take?
- What actions can administrators, school district office personnel, and school boards take?
- At what point should district office personnel move beyond counseling, guiding, and providing performance reviews of a principal who mistreats others, and move to disciplinary action or discharge?

University preparation programs should work to create awareness of factors potentially related to the problem of abuse through study of gender, power, work stress, crisis management, conflict resolution, labor laws, development of positive psychological and social work environments, development of mission/vision/values statements including how employees should be treated, development of norms conducive to respect and caring in the workplace, friendly and respectful collegial interaction, and effective

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administrator- and teacher-orientation programs (including standards of professional ethics and codes of conduct).

*Implications for school districts*

School district office personnel and boards of education throughout the USA are legally, professionally, and ethically responsible for the general welfare and safety of teachers and the conduct of school administrators. In addition, proponents of school reform/school restructuring – shared leadership, teacher empowerment, learning community – argue that schools must be caring and just communities (Beck, 1994; Bolman and Deal, 1995; Katz *et al.*, 1999; Glickman *et al.*, 2001; Noddings, 1992; Sizer, 1996). To overcome the problem of principal mistreatment of teachers, we strongly suggest addressing the problem at both the individual and the organizational levels.

First, school district office personnel and boards of education can develop understanding of the principal mistreatment problem and their role with respect to this problem. The roles of school district office personnel and boards of education are especially important in light of research on workplace abuse indicating that upper-level management in organizations usually ignores or colludes with abusive bosses when victims make formal complaints; these actors also contribute to the mistreatment problem through the attitudes they convey about teachers and the expectations they have for administrators (Davenport *et al.*, 1999; Keashly *et al.*, 1994; Namie and Namie, 2000). School district office personnel and boards of education should model and encourage a respectful and supportive climate in the school and create staff development programs that address the mistreatment problem for both administrators and teachers.

Further, it is assumed that although some principals may engage in abusive conduct toward teachers because of personality flaws (i.e. anger disorder, narcissistic personality, authoritarian personality), others may do so in part because of their inability to handle stress, faulty assumptions about power and its use, faulty assumptions about teachers, gender issues, threatened ego (especially when one's ego is based on inflated or ill-founded self-estimates), lack of awareness of the effects of their behavior, and a host of external-organizational conditions (e.g. central office mandates, administrative performance evaluations, insufficient resources). Such matters may be addressed in administrators' professional development plans and with the assistance of colleagues and specialists.

Second, school district office personnel and boards of education can help each principal improve awareness and understanding of his or her conduct and its impact on others. This can be accomplished, for example, through the use of 360° feedback mechanisms, the use of surveys, and awareness techniques and exercises.

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Third, school district office personnel and boards of education can develop enlightened employment policies and procedures. Our study has implications for the recruitment, hiring, professional development, and termination of school-level administrators. Well-publicized procedures and policies for recruitment, hiring (e.g. hiring people who are emotionally intelligent, who are capable of working with diverse people in teams, and who are adept at managing conflict), and termination as well as sophisticated professional development programs (e.g. training in interpersonal skills) can go a long way toward eradicating the mistreatment of teachers. Most importantly, district office personnel and boards of education must ensure that teacher evaluations and continuing employment are contingent solely on job performance and not used by principals to punish competent teachers. In the case of incompetent teachers, appropriate documentation, procedures (including opportunities and assistance to improve), and policies must be applied; such teachers must be afforded due process as well as respectful treatment.

Fourth, school district office personnel and boards of education can develop viable, comprehensive antiabuse policies to protect employees from and provide relief for mistreatment. Without protective policies and procedures, teachers subjected to mistreatment by school principals have little recourse (Davenport *et al.*, 1999; Keashly *et al.*, 1994; Namie and Namie, 2000; Yamada, 2000). Conflict resolution/mediation, grievance, and employee assistance mechanisms as well as antiabuse/harassment/mobbing policies and procedures should be unequivocal, broadly publicized, and fully resourced. A zero tolerance approach to the mistreatment of teachers must be taken.

*Implications for further research*

This study of principal mistreatment has generated new descriptive, conceptual, and theoretical knowledge in the general area of workplace mistreatment. It also contributes to the well-established micropolitical and leadership literature, for example, by describing in detail and for the first time the behaviors associated with abusive-authoritarian forms of school leadership as well as the serious adverse effects of such leadership on teachers and their work with students. In addition, our study contributes directly to the teacher stress literature by providing detailed descriptions of the effects of mistreatment on teachers.

This article is the first empirical report of the actual experiences of abused teachers, that is, what constitutes principal mistreatment and some of its common effects on teachers' work. Yet, although we have begun to illuminate this problem, it nevertheless requires much more investigation. For example, principals' mistreatment of teachers is contingent on a multitude of internal (i.e. personality) and external (i.e. organizational) factors (Hornstein, 1996). We would argue that as the call for educational reform and accountability becomes even more deliberate, the job of principal will become more complex,

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challenging, political, and stressful; this, in turn, may provide an even more fertile ground for the emergence of abusive conduct on the part of principals. (In fact, we have already heard numerous stories of principal mistreatment of teachers linked to new accountability measures.) Useful research could focus on the relationships among abusive principals' personalities, preparation, and school contexts. Studies focusing on race, gender, and ethnicity of school principals and victimized teachers would be valuable. Studies of school district office personnel and boards of education's perspectives and actions *vis-à-vis* the mistreatment problem would also be valuable.

In addition, studies of victimized teachers' coping skills would be helpful. Quantitative studies using random samples of teachers are critical to understanding the pervasiveness of the principal mistreatment problem; qualitative studies can provide descriptions beyond those provided here (i.e. beyond forms of abuse, effects, and how abuse is perceived by victims) to include the extent to which abusive principals recognize the effects of abuse, abusive principals' intentions, how and under what contextual conditions abusive relationships evolve, victims' interpretations of abusive principals' behaviors, the degree to which victims may contribute to the abuse, when and how victims are willing to challenge abuse, the effectiveness of district policies designed to stop abuse, and the exorbitant costs of abuse (e.g. related to investigations of complaints, teachers' time, legal fees, union representation, health insurance claims, hiring, training, and teachers' performance and productivity (Field, 1996)).

Knowledge of the principal mistreatment problem has special significance for the school reform and restructuring efforts. Recent studies have found that principals' use of manipulative and coercive types of power in school restructuring initiatives (designed along collegial/democratic lines) has drastically undermined such efforts (e.g. Blase and Blase, 2001; Malen and Ogawa, 1988; Murphy and Louis, 1994a, b; Reitzug and Cross, 1994). More research is necessary to fully understand how and under what circumstances school principals both consciously and unwittingly subvert school reform outcomes. Also, as noted above, our study is timely and useful in the field of education given recent research interest in schools as "caring" and "just" communities (Beck, 1994; Bolman and Deal, 1995; Glickman *et al.*, 2001; Katz *et al.*, 1999; Noddings, 1992) and the recent emergence of themes such as "organizational justice" in the general organizational literature (Bies, 1987; Cropanzano, 1993; Enomoto, 1997). Educational researchers should consider studies of schools grounded in such perspectives.

Finally, it should be mentioned that school districts will undoubtedly be reluctant to grant researchers access to conduct studies of the mistreatment problem; it is not surprising that the majority of studies on workplace mistreatment have been conducted outside the workplace (Hoel *et al.*, 1999). This may mean that for the foreseeable future and until educators recognize

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this problem, future research will have to be conducted in limited ways and in places outside of schools.

## Conclusion

As professors of educational administration, we have spent decades researching and teaching about school leadership. We are aware that school principals are confronted with what seem to be insurmountable challenges and pressures: Their work is characterized by long hours and inadequate compensation (Olson, 1999); and they now face an explosion of demands and pressures related to school safety and violence, drugs, diversity, inclusion, site budgeting, aging teaching staffs, and unresponsive bureaucracies (Rusch, 1999) as well as new responsibilities linked to school reform including new power arrangements, collaborative planning, evaluation, and accountability (Murphy and Louis, 1994a, b). We are also aware that principals are confronted with unique challenges associated with the retention of quality teachers, inadequate facilities and instructional materials, and discouraged, disillusioned faculties (Steinberg, 1999). Moreover, we recognize that such challenges can result in dramatic emotional experiences for principals (Ginsberg and Davies, 2001); feelings of anxiety, loss of control, disempowerment, insecurity, anger, and frustration are not uncommon (Beatty, 2000; Evans, 1996). Indeed, we cannot adequately express our appreciation and respect for the women and men who meet such challenges with professional integrity, courage, and ingenuity.

More than ever before, school reform efforts require that principals and teachers at the school level work together collaboratively to solve educational problems. Such collaboration is successful when school principals build trust in their schools; trust, in turn, serves as a foundation for open, honest, and reflective professional dialogue; problem solving; innovative initiatives; and, more directly, the development of the school as a powerful community of learners willing to take responsibility for and capable of success. All principals need to work toward such ends, and all educational scholars need to willingly to confront the kinds of administrative mistreatment that, most assuredly, undermine such possibilities:

> Schools run on love – of the kids, the subject, the work, the hope, the possibilities, the smiles of satisfaction, the looks of appreciation, the little things that keep teachers and students and leaders going. The principal whose interactions with staff undermine this all-important source of energy by creating a dissociation between teachers' self-confidence and their professional self-image is like the captain drilling a hole in her/his own ship. No matter how hard you bail, it's always sinking. Leaders who cause teachers emotional damage would be wise to reconsider the cost effectiveness, if nothing else, of dis-integrating a teacher's self, a precariously balanced entity that is already overtaxed. Leaders who are sensitive to teachers' needs for congruity and emotional understanding in their professional relationships with their leaders can provide invaluable support and catalyze creativity which can benefit exponentially, the whole school community (Beatty, 2000, p. 36)

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