

1 The Problem of Principal Mistreatment of Teachers

Truth is not only violated by falsehood; it may be equally outraged by silence.

— Henri Frédéric Amiel (*Webster's Book of Quotations*, 1992)

PROLOGUE: A PERSONAL NOTE

This book is written for all concerned with the improvement of public education in the United States, especially public educators themselves, prospective and practicing school principals and teachers, superintendents, district office supervisors, staff developers, boards of education, and state department officials as well as professors of educational leadership and teacher education. *Breaking the Silence* addresses a problem that has heretofore been neglected in the scholarly and professional literature in the areas of both educational leadership and teacher education. It deals with a situation that has not been exposed to light, whose silence has been without challenge, and for which public and professional awareness, scrutiny, and improvement efforts have not been forthcoming. This information exposes what may be a surprisingly common problem that has alarmingly destructive effects on teachers as professionals and as people, one that reaches directly into classrooms to drastically undermine and even destroy opportunities for effective instruction and student learning. The powerholders who create this problem and those who collude by permitting it to continue are participating in a phenomenon that has the potential to devastate an entire school, even an entire school system, by relentlessly and unconscionably crushing its spirit and destroying educators' morale, commitment, trust, caring, hope, and basic human rights, including the right to respectful and dignified treatment.

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Breaking the Silence is about long-term patterns of principal mistreatment of public school teachers.

As public school teachers, school administrators, and for the past two decades as professors of educational leadership, both of us have career-long commitments to the improvement of public school education. Throughout our careers, we have heard heartbreaking stories from exemplary teachers, stories about principals who bully teachers, and we have listened in disbelief and shock to descriptions of the profoundly devastating consequences such mistreatment has for teachers professionally and personally, psychologically, and physically. Principal mistreatment of teachers is surely a dark topic, one that has undoubtedly been a part of the legacy of public education in the United States for some time; it is also a problem for which there exists literally no research base. Three years ago we commenced the study that yielded the findings we reveal to you throughout this book. As strange as it may sound, *Breaking the Silence* has been our labor of love. In many respects, the study was the most difficult we ever conducted. However, as we examined each painful experience encountered in our database, we became convinced of the incredible significance of our topic.

We believe that this is the right time to break the silence, as it were, that has surrounded and concealed the reality of principal mistreatment of teachers from professional and public scrutiny. We also believe that all of us, especially educators, must recognize our own role, directly and indirectly, in keeping this behavior from view. Principal mistreatment of teachers is an insidious and elusive problem. Even if confronted by people of integrity and courage, the issue is potentially explosive, requiring special attention. We are taking the first step to break the silence by providing the opportunity for people to speak of these awful secrets. It is our hope that our work will help in creating the awareness and compassionate understanding required to design and implement preventative and corrective programs and policies; by doing so, we hope to begin to overcome this problem constructively and systemically. We expect this will include, among other things, serious reconsideration of administrator hiring practices, evaluation procedures, and professional development opportunities as well as development of sound mediation and grievance processes for victims of mistreatment. Put differently, these chapters are more than an exposé; they were written to encourage those responsible for public education at all levels as they provide practical support structures for both the victims of mistreatment and the purveyors of such mistreatment.

Our study of teacher mistreatment is based on a qualitative research protocol designed specifically to describe and conceptualize the mistreatment problem under investigation. This is the first study of its kind. However, a study of this nature does not produce statistical generalizations; therefore, we offer no conclusions about the pervasiveness of the mistreatment problem. Our next study will attempt to answer that question. Having said this, it is important to note that other researchers who have used survey protocols to study large samples of the general population estimate that between 10 and 20% of all American employees work for an abusive boss. Perhaps more important, these same researchers have found that victims of boss abuse seldom have viable sources of help available to ameliorate

their situations. Given this, we suggest that there may be significant numbers of school principals who routinely mistreat teachers and much larger numbers of teachers who, if the estimates are correct, find they have little or no recourse available to redress their dreadful fates.

As professors of educational leadership, 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 & Louis, 1994a). 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 & 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 success and are capable of achieving it. All principals need to work toward such ends, and all educational scholars need to willingly confront the kinds of administrative mistreatment that, most assuredly, undermine such possibilities.

We wish to offer a cautionary note. Feedback from teachers, administrators, and researchers who reviewed an earlier draft of this manuscript recommended we advise readers that this book may be upsetting: Some reviewers experienced strong feelings of sadness, anger, and anxiety about the many forms of principal mistreatment reported by teachers and the life-altering effects of such treatment.

INTRODUCTION

The “Bright Side” of School Leadership

In 1916, John Dewey eloquently explicated the notion of democracy with respect to educational leadership:

A democracy is more than a form of government; it is primarily a mode of associated living, of conjoint communicated experience. The extension

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in space of the number of individuals who participate in an interest so that each has to refer his own action to that of others, and to consider the actions of others to give point and direction to his own, is equivalent to the breaking down of those barriers of class, race, and national territory which kept men from perceiving the full impact of their activity. (p. 87)

Three decades later, Tyler (1949) advised educational leaders to use teachers' perspectives and experiences when developing curriculum, instruction, and educational policy. Indeed, for the past half a century, effective educational leadership, having been repeatedly examined with respect to functions, roles, personal attributes, and culture (Ogawa & Bossert, 1995), and with respect to principles, behaviors, and organizational outcomes (Davis, 1998), remains significantly contingent upon notions such as democracy, empowerment, the creation of learning communities, and supportive school culture (Blase & Blase, 1996; Leithwood, Thomlinson, & Genge, 1996; Murphy & Louis, 1994b). For example, Foster (1986) stated,

Leadership is not manipulating a group in order to achieve a preset goal; rather it is empowering individuals in order to evaluate what goals are important and what conditions are helpful. The educative use of leadership results in the empowerment of followers. The leader here is truly concerned with the development of followers, with the realization of followers' potential to become leaders themselves. (pp. 185-186)

More dramatically, Albrecht (1988) wrote the following:

[Effective educational leaders] believe teachers are their professional allies and colleagues. . . . Encourage teachers to spend time in thoughtful reflection about what we are doing in this educational business . . . [and] seize every opportunity to help teachers broaden and elevate their vision about the nature of education, the mission of schools, the obligation of public education to every student and the importance of helping kids be successful. . . . The obstacles to overcome are the siren songs of the traditional rewards system. . . . Real leaders know that educational leadership begins and ends with proper regard for the integrity and professionalism of teachers. . . . (p. 30)

In essence, principals' work involves "getting things done through people" via participation, communication, team building, and motivation (Friedkin & Slater, 1994; Krug, Ahadi, & Scott, 1991, p. 242; Leithwood, Jantzi, Ryan, & Steinbach, 1997). Further, school principals' influence on instruction, effected through support of teachers' efforts to improve instruction, is critical to students' academic performance (Heck & Hallinger, 1999). Leithwood et al. (1996) found that such transformational leadership is positively related to student participation in school, to student learning, and to teachers' professional commitment, job satisfaction, collective professional learning, and productive school culture.

Blase and Blase (2001) found that exemplary transformational principals significantly affected teachers' behavior, thinking, and attitudes; a principal's

encouragement of autonomy and innovation, for example, enhances teachers' self-esteem, confidence, professional satisfaction, creativity, sense of classroom efficacy, and ability to reflect on instructional issues. Generally, the leadership approaches used by effective transformational principals positively influence all major aspects of teachers' work:

- The *affective* dimension: teachers' satisfaction, motivation, esteem, confidence, security, sense of inclusion, identification with the group and its work
- The *classroom* dimension: teachers' innovation, creativity, reflection, autonomy, individualization of instruction, professional growth, classroom efficacy
- The *schoolwide* dimension: teachers' expression, ownership, commitment, and schoolwide efficacy

The following comments from teachers illustrate the significant positive outcomes of exemplary transformational leadership:

Our principal involves every faculty member in educational decisions and believes that we are capable of making intelligent decisions. Shared decision making makes me feel empowered. I am more involved in school matters and feel the need to keep abreast of current educational issues. I communicate more with my colleagues and find myself eager to attend meetings because I know I will be actively participating rather than passively listening. (Blase & Blase, 2001, pp. 42-43)

The principal is very receptive to new ideas and ways of doing things. She values the opinions of all her staff members. She realizes that our school and our students are unique and welcomes suggestions and ideas for improving instruction. We have an instructional task force that continually teaches new methods of instruction and we are encouraged to try new techniques. (Blase & Blase, 2001, p. 90)

Anybody who knows our principal can sense her love for what she does; she loves people, and kids especially. And her enthusiasm is contagious. She can make me feel that I'm capable of accomplishing almost anything that I tackle. I feel motivated and I keep working, planning, and trying to be better. (Blase & Blase, 2001, p. 96)

Specifically, Blase and Blase (2001) found that exemplary transformational principals contribute to teachers' growth and development by

- Modeling, building, and persistently supporting an environment of trust and openness among teachers, whom they consider professionals and experts
- Systematically structuring schools to encourage authentic collaboration by establishing readiness and common goals and by responding to the school's unique characteristics

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- Supporting shared decision-making efforts by providing basic resources for teachers' professional development
- Maintaining the school's focus on teaching and learning
- Supporting teacher experimentation and innovation, granting professional autonomy, and viewing failure as an opportunity to learn
- Modeling professional behavior, especially by exhibiting a sense of caring, optimism, honesty, friendliness, and enthusiasm
- Encouraging risk taking and minimizing threat (or constraints on teacher discretion and growth)
- Praising teachers and using other symbolic rewards (e.g., valuing and respecting teachers)
- Setting the stage for confronting the metaproblems of the school through effective communication, action research, and exemplary procedural methods for solving problems

To be sure, a strong stream of “bright side” empirical research focuses on the considerable contribution of exemplary school principals to schools in general and to teacher development and student learning in particular. In stark contrast, no empirical studies have systematically examined the “dark side” of school leadership and the resulting harmful consequences. *Breaking the Silence* describes types of principal behavior that teachers define as “abuse” or “mistreatment” (teachers who participated in our study used both terms synonymously) and how such behavior undermines teachers, classroom instruction, and student learning.

Why This Book?

It is widely acknowledged that power is a fundamental dimension of all human relationships (Muth, 1989; Russell, 1938) and is central to understanding relationships between administrators and subordinates in organizational settings (Burns, 1978; Gardner, 1990; Gibb, 1954; Kets de Vries, 1989). Likewise, administrators, in general, exercise power in both constructive and destructive ways; in both cases, the exercise of power has considerable effects on individuals and organizations (Kreisberg, 1992; Muth, 1989; Pfeffer, 1992). In fact, prominent power theorists have demonstrated that power itself may have a corrupting effect on a powerholder and even those over whom power is exercised (e.g., Kets de Vries, 1989; Kipnis, 1972; Nyberg, 1981). Kipnis, for example, has described the potential *metamorphic* (or corrupting) effects of power on powerholders. Lord Acton's (1948) famous aphorism, “Power tends to corrupt and absolute power corrupts absolutely,” speaks directly to the problematic nature of power; it also describes in a nutshell one aspect of the findings from our study, as the reader shall see.

To date, two long-standing avenues of research in education (teacher stress studies and micropolitical studies of the school principal-teacher relationship) have produced only glimpses of how principals misuse power and, specifically, how principals mistreat (abuse) teachers. For example, a number of stress studies have linked elements of principals' leadership style and behavior (e.g., non-support, assertiveness) to significant stress and burnout in teachers (Adams, 1988;

Barnette, 1990; Blase, Strathe, & Dedrick, 1986; Diehl, 1993; Dunham, 1984; Dworkin, Haney, Dworkin, & Telschow, 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, evaluations, and recognition and rewards (Blase, 1988a). 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, 1991a; Blase & Anderson, 1995).

Taken together, these two research directions 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, for example, the range of abusive principal behaviors; how such behaviors interact to form a pattern of abuse in a given situation; and their damaging effects on teachers, teaching, and schools.

It should be mentioned that, in education, some empirical work has been published on sexual harassment of students by teachers and other professional staff (Shakeshaft & Cohan, 1995). A more substantial collection of studies on peer harassment among schoolchildren focuses on verbal bullying—threatening, degrading, teasing, humiliating, name calling, sarcasm, put downs, and silent treatment—and its devastating effects on victims (Clarke & Kiselica, 1997; Ma, 2001; Olweus, 1993; Shakeshaft, Mandel, Johnson, Sawyer, Hergenrother, & Barber, 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. Responses to such events include the following:

- The National Educational Service published *The Bullying Prevention Handbook* (1996) and produced a video to help educators and families understand and prevent bullying.
- The Bully Doctors of Benicia, California, designed an online blueprint for students and adults dealing with the dilemma of school bullying (see www.bullybusters.org).
- The Conflict Resolution Education Network (CREnet) provided information on states' programs to teach K-12 students conflict management skills, including how to deal with a bully and how to refrain from engaging in bullying behaviors (see www.crenet.org).

Undoubtedly, our failure to study this dimension of the dark side of school leadership, to apply 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 the problem of mistreatment to continue without challenge and without hope of improvement (Keashly, Trott, & MacLean, 1994; Robinson & Bennett, 1995).

This book is a first attempt to bring to light a problem that has heretofore been ignored by both the academic and the professional educational community in the United States. As a first step it provides a knowledge base and understanding

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essential to developing a constructive approach to a deeply disturbing problem in American public education:

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, in Hodgkinson, 1991, Foreword, p. 7)

WORKPLACE ABUSE: A REVIEW OF RESEARCH

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 your 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. (Victim of principal mistreatment)

Internationally, systematic research on the problem of workplace abuse, notably nonphysical forms of abuse, has increased significantly during the past 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, Österman, & Hjelt-Bäck, 1994; Davenport, Distler-Schwartz, & Pursell-Elliott, 1999; Keashly, 1998; Namie & Namie, 2000b). For most of this same period, organizational scholars in the United States 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 be a pervasive problem with serious deleterious consequences for both employees and organizations (Baron & Neumann, 1996; Davenport et al., 1999; Hornstein, 1996; Keashly, 1998; Keashly et al., 1994).

In addition, a number of popular books focusing on workplace abuse (e.g., *Work Abuse: How to Recognize and Survive It* by J. Wyatt & C. Hare, 1997) and articles in the popular media on workplace abuse (e.g., Judith Newman, “The Worst Boss I Ever Had,” *Mademoiselle*, July 1999) have already been published. Television programs have begun to address the topic as well. On November 24,

1998, for instance, the hugely popular show *Oprah* was devoted to the topic of “Bully Bosses.” Several websites have been established (e.g., Campaign Against Workplace Bullying¹ [CAWB] [<http://www.bullybusters.org>] run by Namie & Namie, 2001) that are devoted to stopping workplace abuse and providing assistance to victims of abuse. This website also includes related newspaper, television, radio, magazine, and newsletter coverage such as

- “When Your Boss Is a Bully” (*Harvard Management Newsletter*, July 2001)
- “Do You Work for a Bully Boss?” (*Industry Standard*, March 7, 2001)
- “Bullybusters Help in the Battle Against Workplace Browbeaters” (*Pittsburgh Post-Gazette*, November 26, 2000)
- “Boss or Coworker Downright Cruel?” (*Observer-Reporter*, Washington, PA, August 19, 2000)
- “Tyrant at the Top” (*Dallas Morning News*, June 13, 2000)
- “Working With Wolves” (*HR Executive Magazine*, August 1999)
- “When a Boss Turns Abusive” (*New York Times*, November 29, 1998)

Nevertheless, response by governmental agencies in the United States has been slow in coming. In February 2001, the Oregon Department of Environmental Quality was the first government agency, and among the first organizations in the United States, to adopt an antimobbing policy. Other government agencies in Oregon are considering similar policies (National Public Radio, Marketplace, February 2001)—wise decisions given the psychosocial and financial costs associated with workplace abuse.²

A variety of terms have been used in the theoretical and empirical literature to describe the workplace abuse phenomenon, including the following: bullying (Einarsen & Skogstad, 1996; Namie & Namie, 2000a), mobbing (Davenport et al., 1999; Leymann, 1990), incivility (Anderson & Pearson, 1999), petty tyranny (Ashforth, 1994), mistreatment (Folger, 1993; Price Spratlen, 1995), abuse (Bassman, 1992), harassment (Björkvist et al., 1994), aggression (Baron & Neumann, 1998), deviance (Robinson & Bennett, 1995), abusive disrespect (Hornstein, 1996), emotional abuse (Keashly, 1998), and victimization (Swedish National Board of Occupational Safety and Health, 1993).

Scholars have also defined workplace abuse in a variety of ways. *Mobbing* (or psychological 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 mainly toward one individual” (Leymann, 1990, p. 120). Einarsen and Skogstad (1996) define *bullying*, a term commonly used in the United States 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. (p. 191)

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Ashforth (1994) uses the term “petty tyrant” to discuss boss abuse, defining this 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” (p. 772). “Abusive disrespect,” a concept developed by Hornstein (1996), refers to “transgressions” by bosses that include deceit, constraint, coercion, selfishness, inequity, cruelty, disregard, and deification.

From a comprehensive review of the workplace abuse literature, Keashly (1998) developed the concept of “emotional abuse” to emphasize “hostile verbal and nonverbal behaviors . . . directed at gaining compliance from others” (p. 85). Keashly identified emotional abuse with 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 result in harm to the target, behaviors that *intend to harm* the target, and *power differences* between the abuser and the target of 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 such as violations of physical space, finger pointing, slamming objects, and throwing objects. Some examples of verbal-behavioral abuse discussed in the research literature 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 or 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., 1999; Hornstein, 1996; Keashly et al., 1994; Leymann, 1990; Lombardo & McCall, 1984; Namie, 2000; Namie & Namie, 2000a; Baron & Neumann, 1998; Robinson & Bennett, 1995; Ryan & 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 well-being, psychological or emotional well-being, work performance, and social relationships. Examples of effects on *physical* well-being include sleep disorders (e.g., nightmares, insufficient rest), headaches, backaches, fatigue or 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 or 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 and include increases in absenteeism and turnover or attrition. *Social effects* noted in the literature are isolation and loss of friendships (Björkvist, 1994; Davenport et al., 1999; Hornstein, 1996;

Keashly et al., 1994; Leymann, 1990; Lombardo & McCall, 1984; Namie, 2000; Namie & Namie, 2000a; Northwestern National Life Insurance Company, 1993; Pearson, 2000; Ryan & Oestreich, 1991).

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 hundred 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 had 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)

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 for profit and nonprofit organizational settings. Second, studies indicate that bosses (e.g., superiors, managers) are most 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 and 90% of the time (Björkvist et al., 1994; Einarsen & Skogstad, 1996; Hornstein, 1996; Keashly et al., 1994; Namie, 2000; Namie & Namie, 2000a; Northwestern National Life Insurance Company, 1993; Pearson, 2000; 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, 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 management practices (e.g., a cavalier attitude about abuse, attempts to justify abusive conduct), victims' complaints about abusive bosses usually result in (a) no action (i.e., no response) from upper-level management or administration and departments of human resources, (b) efforts to protect an abusive boss, or (c) reprisals against the

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victim for registering complaints (Bassman, 1992; Davenport et al., 1999; Hornstein, 1996; Keashly, 1998; Keashly et al., 1994; Leymann, 1990; Namie, 2000; Namie & Namie, 2000a; Pearson, 2000; Rayner, 1998). Unfortunately, efforts by victims of abuse and their colleagues to “blow the whistle” on workplace mistreatment and wrongdoing in general have not produced better results.³

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, 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 my 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.” (Victim of principal mistreatment)

Finally, David Yamada (2000), a Professor of Law at Suffolk University Law School, after examining existing legal possibilities for victims of workplace abuse—Intentional Infliction of Emotional Distress (IIED, Title VII of the Civil Rights Act of 1994), Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA), National Labor Relations Act (NLRA), and the Occupational Safety and Health Act (OSHA)—concluded that, despite the serious adverse consequences such conduct has on victims, existing laws are clearly inadequate in providing legal protection from the kinds of abusive boss conduct noted above. Put bluntly, most of this abusive conduct is simply not illegal and thus there are no legal remedies available to individuals who are not, for instance, victims of racial discrimination or sexual harassment. To remedy this, Yamada has developed a new legal theory—referred to as intentional infliction of hostile work environment—that would provide protection, self-help, and compensation to victims of a superior’s abusive conduct as well as punishment for the superior.

THE IMPORTANCE OF THIS BOOK

Practical Implications for Educational Practitioners

I have learned silence from the talkative, toleration from the intolerant, and kindness from the unkind; yet strange, I am ungrateful to those teachers. (Kahlil Gibran, in Bartlett, 1968, p. 976)

The leader has to . . . analyze and monitor his or her own affect, to “know thyself.” If the leader is volatile, labile, impulsive . . . [it] can lead untold organizational actors to uncalculated calamities. . . . It is especially important to be aware of the dark side of personality, which acts so as to weaken will and frustrate the commitment to values. (Hodgkinson, 1991, pp. 138-139)

We have noted that our purpose in writing about principal mistreatment is to contribute constructively to solutions at all levels. We believe our findings, as troubling as they are, have special significance for prospective and practicing administrators and teachers. To test this notion, we created a 2.5-hour presentation and discussion of our research findings about principal mistreatment for school administrators and teachers taking graduate coursework at a major research university. Following this presentation, participants were given 30 minutes to respond to a survey that included one open-ended question: *What importance, if any, does knowledge about principal mistreatment (abuse) of teachers have for your development as an educational leader?* Over 300 administrators and teachers responded to this survey between 1999 and 2001.⁴ The following quotes were drawn from the survey:

When people are mistreated at work, their focus of attention is diverted from completing their work to trying to understand and manage the mistreatment . . . in other words, to *surviving*. A fearful and stressed teacher will generally downshift to the lowest mode of functioning. Creativity and innovation suffer. Paths of communication change in the school as teachers either talk among themselves or shut down entirely. Mistreatment of teachers is especially damaging because such mistreatment is often clearly visible to students. Even when mistreatment is more subtle, the subliminal perception of it by students is certain to undermine teachers; in fact, in some cases a mistreated teacher may become angry and the anger may be directed back toward students. Students then resort to further aggressive behavior as they internalize the hostility that has been directed toward them. . . . Thus, not only do teachers suffer, but the bullying is passed down the line. The implication for my development as an educational leader is that . . . I must be very mindful of how I treat other people. What goes around comes around in many destructive ways. (Teacher)

Teachers often perceive abusive or harmful behavior as the status quo; they become socialized to accepting abusive behavior from administrators without realizing they have a right to fair and respectful treatment. (Teacher)

Without exception, those who responded affirmed the merits of studying the mistreatment problem and suggested a number of immediately practical uses for our findings. Respondents typically used phrases such as “very important,” “extremely useful,” “incredibly significant,” and “shocking but extremely significant” to characterize the importance of the topic for their professional development.

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They reported that knowledge of the “negatives,” that is, “what not to do as an educational leader,” is as important as just studying the positive, effective things. Specifically, respondents reported that such knowledge provoked in them a long-term commitment to a “truly reflective” orientation to school leadership, based on an understanding of how *personal factors* (e.g., one’s weaknesses, values, assumptions, attitudes, behavior) alone or in conjunction with *organizational conditions* (e.g., stress, accountability expectations, unreasonable expectations by superiors) can lead to the abuse of teachers:

These materials make me take a serious look at my weaknesses, examine myself, see if I say or do these things . . . things I am not aware of. I am better able to watch myself and won’t be taken over by power and become a bullying principal.

I have some deep thoughts about abuse. I do feel that I have some characteristics that some would take as abusive, such as sarcasm and intimidating looks. I know that I am by no means abusive, but have bad days. I definitely worry about how others perceive me. The presentation today has allowed me to see myself in a different light. I think back to some of my days in the classroom and I know that there are things that I need to work on. . . . It is important to study principals’ mistreatment of teachers. We need to know the effects of our actions. In class, we have talked about communication and trust. These two factors can be destroyed by even a hint of abuse.

This information will help me be aware of my natural tendency to seize power and control my surroundings. In my classroom, at one time, I was a control monster. This happens to a lot of teachers.

This topic has made me do some real soul searching. I was an assistant to an abusive principal. I will always remember what this did to teachers, their families, and students. We must continually think about our values and never allow power to corrupt us.

Some respondents indicated that the “subtle cruelties” perpetuated by principals discussed during the presentation were intriguing; most, however, were deeply moved by the gamut of “crippling effects” principal abuse has on teachers and educational processes:

I have seen many teachers’ lives ruined by an abusive principal, but I never before realized the magnitude of the negative experiences that abused teachers can suffer at the hands of their principals.

Until you are a victim of that kind of abuse, you can’t understand the chain of fears that can result. They can stay with you forever.

My parents always taught me the importance of treating everyone with respect. They had experienced the devastation mistreatment can bring to others. Having lived through an abusive school regime, I saw the pitfalls

yet I never understood the effects, sometimes permanent, on teachers and students, until I read this material. I now doubly see the importance of mutual respect in the educational workplace. Anything else would be detrimental to the educational cause: that of instructing students.

Our presentation had special significance for teachers and principals who had been victimized by principals (and others) at some point in their careers:

During the presentation, I began to feel the exact same feelings I felt during a three-year period of emotional abuse by a principal. I compiled a journal during our discussion to relieve my physical reactions. All of us must work to understand this problem and take responsibility for it.

It is very powerful and affirming to hear Dr. Blase confirm some of the emotions I have had when I have felt mistreated by a principal and assistant principal. My principal is not an abusive boss, but by oversight or lack of communication, I have felt offended by some of his actions. My first reaction was, "What have I done?" or, "What's wrong with me?" Then you feel disoriented; this comes from erratic feedback. I have been used to praise, recognition, compliments, and respect. When that was withdrawn, I had reactions similar to abused teachers. If my reactions came after such small actions by my principal, just think how devastating regular, consistent, ongoing abuse would be! Awareness of these effects should help prepare me to avoid acting in inappropriate ways as an administrator. I am committing to at least a yearly evaluation of myself as a leader that offers an opportunity for teachers to anonymously give me feedback so I can respond and work on changing my behavior in a timely and public way.

The most important thing for me as I develop as an educational leader is to guard against behaving in an abusive way. After seeing the video and participating in class discussion, I reflect back to two years ago when I feel I was a victim of mistreatment by a varsity coach under whom I worked. I remember how vulnerable I was and how naïve I was going into the newly acquired, sought after position. My boss consistently snubbed me, called me out in front of the other players, and made me feel inferior and foolish. I feel like I am a very strong person but the effects of his position and his mistreatment had me questioning myself on a daily basis. I felt I was "asking" for the treatment I received; I constantly asked myself what on earth was I doing to upset this man so much that he would treat me in this fashion.

Clearly, individuals derive meaning from direct experience with and reflection on the problematic aspects of life (Bandura, 1977, 1982; Blumer, 1969). Vygotsky's (1978) theories of verbal self-regulation and internalization and Tharp and Gallimore's (1988) application of these theories to teacher education demonstrate that systematic and rigorous reflection (i.e., cognitive and metacognitive as well as cycles of inter- and intrapsychological processes) on social and linguistic

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life experiences contributes significantly to an individual's professional development. Put differently, prospective and practicing administrators and teachers can be expected to develop important insights about effective school leadership and teaching through systematic reflection on both its positive and its negative elements.

Lombardo and McCall (1984) studied successful executives who had been victimized by abusive bosses earlier in their careers. These researchers found that executives derived some of their most profound lessons about effective leadership from reflection on abusive experiences. Blase and Blase (1998) reported similar findings for teachers preparing for careers in educational leadership, as did Ginsberg and Davies (2001) for administrators generally. Clearly, these data strongly confirm the significance of knowledge of and reflection on the negative for professional growth as a leader (Butler, 1996). Without such reflection, administrators routinely fail to recognize and confront personal values, attitudes, and behaviors that contradict their own espoused theories of effective leadership, and this failure can produce substantial adverse outcomes for individuals and organizations (Argyris, 1982, 1990, 1994; Bass, 1981). This latter point is especially significant in light of countless studies that demonstrate that some school principals typically employ leadership approaches that adversely affect teachers as well as classroom instruction (e.g., Blase, 1986, 1990; Blase & Blase, 1998; Diehl, 1993; Farber, 1991; Malen & Ogawa, 1988; McNeil, 1988), and in many cases, they may not be aware of the consequences of their actions (Adams, 1988, Gunn & Holdaway, 1986; High & Achilles, 1986; Reitzug & Cross, 1994). Indeed, few people are without personality characteristics that, in positions of leadership and under various organizational conditions, could result in the mistreatment of others (Ashforth, 1994; Barreca, 1995; Kets de Vries, 1989). The role of reflection in vigilantly safeguarding one's leadership praxis from misuse of position and power cannot be overemphasized.

Respondents to our questionnaire also reported that the topic of mistreatment should be directly addressed in administrator and teacher preparation programs; individuals should be equipped to deal with a variety of possible "work realities," both as administrators and as teachers:

Being forewarned is forearmed. Teachers who are aware of this study will better understand what is happening and what to do in an abusive situation.

Leaders of the future should be educated to know the temptations of power and that abusive behaviors only elicit aversive responses.

It is interesting to note that educational scholars have argued that power, both its effective use and particularly its misuse and abuse, is addressed inadequately, if at all, in most university-based administrator and teacher preparatory programs (Blase, 1991b; Blase & Anderson, 1995; Nyberg, 1981).

Finally, respondents emphasized that the topic of principal mistreatment of teachers "must be brought out into the open." One called it "educational leadership's dirty little secret" that must be given serious public attention by academic and professional educators. Without public and professional recognition of the problem, respondents asserted that administrators and teachers would be "afraid to

talk about this horrible problem candidly and honestly,” and without such dialogue, improvement would not result.

Practical Implications for District Office Personnel and Boards of Education

This book can be a valuable resource for central office personnel and boards of education throughout the United States. Individuals in these positions are legally, professionally, and ethically responsible for the general welfare and safety of teachers and the conduct of school administrators. Specifically, this book has implications for the recruitment, hiring, professional development, and termination of school-level administrators; it also has clear and compelling implications for developing viable policies (e.g., antiharassment policies, antimobbing policies) and procedures (e.g., mediation, grievance) to protect and provide relief for victims of 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 & Namie, 2000a; Yamada, 2000). The role of district offices and boards of education is 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. Moreover, they may inadvertently contribute to the problem through the attitudes they convey about teachers and the expectations they have for school-level administrators (Davenport et al., 1999; Keashly et al., 1994; Namie & Namie, 2000a). Implications of our findings about principal mistreatment for district office personnel and school boards are discussed fully in Chapter 7.

ABOUT THE STUDY

What types of principal conduct do teachers define as abusive? What effect does such conduct have on teachers, teaching, and learning? How does a principal's abusive conduct undermine teachers' performance in the classroom and in the school in general? These are some of the basic questions we used in our study to examine how teachers experience abusive conduct by school principals.

Over a 1.5-year period, we conducted several in-depth interviews with each of 50 teachers who had experienced long-term (6 months to 9 years) mistreatment by their principals. 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 or junior high ($n = 10$), and high school ($n = 14$) teachers participated. The average age of teachers was 42; the average number of years in teaching was 16. The sample included tenured ($n = 44$) and nontenured ($n = 6$), and married ($n = 34$) and single ($n = 16$) teachers. Degrees earned by these teachers included B.A. or B.S. ($n = 7$), M.Ed or M.A. ($n = 31$), Ed.S ($n = 11$), and Ph.D. ($n = 1$). The mean number of years working with the abusive principal was four. Forty-nine teachers resided in the United States and one resided in Canada. Fifteen of the teachers we studied were with an abusive principal at the time of this

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study; most others had experienced abuse in recent years. In total, these teachers described 28 male and 22 female abusive principals.

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 the teachers were highly respected, accomplished, creative, and dedicated individuals. In most cases, they had been consistently and 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.

Symbolic interaction theory was the methodological foundation of our study. This approach focuses on the perceptions and meanings that people construct in their social settings (Blumer, 1969; Mead, 1934), in other words, "What goes on inside the heads of humans" (Meltzer, Petras, & Reynolds, 1975, p. 55). Consistent with research of this nature, no a priori definitions of principal abuse were used to control data collection. Such an approach would have limited teachers' freedom to discuss their personal views and experiences of principal mistreatment (Bogdan & Biklen, 1982; Glaser, 1992, 1998; Strauss & Corbin, 1998; Taylor & Bogdan, 1998). Our study conformed to guidelines set forth for inductive, grounded theory research and therefore emphasizes meanings of participants and the generation of descriptive, conceptual, and theoretical results.

All the findings discussed herein, drawn directly from our data, focus on teachers' perspectives on principal abuse and, in particular, the conduct teachers define as abusive and its adverse effects on their psychological or emotional and physical or physiological well-being as well as their performance in the classroom and in the school. The relevant literature is included throughout this book in the context of specific findings of our study.

We present here categories of abusive conduct and effects for the group of teachers we investigated; individual profiles of principals and teachers are not presented. *Thus, it is important to note that each principal identified by individual teachers engaged in a range of abusive behaviors described in the following pages, and each teacher, supervised by such a principal, experienced most of the major categories of deleterious effects we describe.* It is also important to reiterate that our study, being exploratory in nature, did not indicate the pervasiveness of the mistreatment problem in the United States.

To investigate the broad question, "How do teachers experience significant long-term abuse by a school principal?" we used a snowball sampling technique to identify teachers who had been victimized by school principals (Bogdan & Biklen, 1982; Taylor & Bogdan, 1998). Between two and four in-depth structured and semistructured telephone interviews were conducted with each of our research participants. In total, 135 hours of interviews were completed. The personal and official documents we collected were used, in part, to confirm the credibility of teachers' interview data as well as their overall effectiveness as teachers. In addition, we used a variety of techniques to determine the trustworthiness and reliability of teachers' reports. Given the sensitive nature of this study, however, no identifiers (e.g., a teacher's gender, school level, and subject matter specialization) appear alongside verbatim quotes presented throughout the chapters. And, of

course, pseudonyms are used. (See the Research Method and Procedures section for protocol details.)

AN OVERVIEW OF THE BOOK

What does principal mistreatment of teachers look like? In this chapter, we have presented a brief overview of the professional literature on the problem of workplace abuse in general, a summary of findings from a survey regarding the practical value of our study, a discussion of the importance of this book for district office personnel and boards of education, and a description of the study upon which this book is based. Chapters 2 through 6 discuss findings drawn from our study. Chapters 2, 3, and 4, respectively, describe increasing levels of mistreatment: *Level 1 (indirect aggression—moderate)*, *Level 2 (direct aggression—escalating)*, and *Level 3 (direct aggression—severe)*. In reading these chapters, readers will see that mistreatment takes many forms including verbal and nonverbal, indirect and direct principal behaviors. Mistreatment also ranges from behaviors such as denying resources to teachers to sabotage and public criticism, and, in its most aggressive forms, from explosive and threatening acts to forcing teachers out of their jobs.⁵ What effect does principal mistreatment have on teachers, teaching, and learning? In Chapters 5 and 6 we describe effects on teachers, ranging from humiliation and lowered self-esteem to pervasive fear, severe depression, physical problems, and effects on one's home life, as well as effects on classroom instruction and the school as a whole.⁶

What can be done to overcome this serious problem? Chapter 7 summarizes our findings and conclusions and presents suggestions for overcoming the mistreatment problem including individual, organizational, and legal remedies.

Finally, we provide a detailed discussion of the research methodology employed in our study in the Research Method and Procedures section at the end of the book.

NOTES

1 The Campaign Against Workplace Bullying. P.O. Box 1886, Benicia, CA 94510. 888-FIX-WORK.

2 Davenport et al. (1999, p. 191) describe myriad psychosocial and financial costs associated with workplace abuse. One notable example is described by Pfaffenbach (2000): In a 2000 decision that included a strong statement against workplace bullying, Chief U.S. Magistrate Judge Robert B. Collings upheld a jury's award of \$130,000 (for interference with advantageous relations) and \$400,000 (in punitive damages) against Direct Federal Credit Union and its president, who had retaliated against employee Celia Zimmerman for her gender-bias claim. Although her gender-bias claim had been rejected by a jury, Judge Collings noted that the president "acted with a vindictive motive and . . . undertook a deliberate, calculated, systematic campaign to humiliate and degrade [Ms. Zimmerman] both professionally and personally" (p. 1). Pfaffenbach also noted that Ms. Zimmerman had been awarded \$200,000 for her uncontested claim of retaliation.

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3 In the past several decades, people have blown the whistle on a range of wrongdoings including environmental protection violations, racial and gender discrimination, and government fraud (e.g., toxic waste buried at Love Canal, Space Shuttle safety problems, and blocked career advancement for African Americans at Texaco). Approximately 60% of whistleblowers are fired or forced to resign. Despite the risks inherent in whistle-blowing, experts report a steady rise in the number of suits filed with the U.S. Justice Department, as well as a jump in the proportion of females initiating such lawsuits (from 25 to 50%) (Kiger, 2001). This latter indicates a growing, gender-free consciousness and concern for the tragic consequences of wrongdoing despite the possibility of reprisals and other negative effects.

4 The 300 prospective and practicing administrators and teachers who completed the questionnaire were between 22 and 51 years of age; 41% were male and 59% were female. Virtually all disciplines in education were represented.

5 Levels of mistreatment are not correlated with the degree of harm to the victim; this varied from one teacher to another.

6 Pseudonyms are used throughout.