THE LIVED EXPERIENCES OF PUBLIC SCHOOL EDUCATORS BULLIED BY SCHOOL ADMINISTRATORS: A TRANSCENDENTAL PHENOMENOLOGICAL STUDY

by

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Liberty University

A Dissertation Presented in Partial Fulfillment Of the Requirements for the Degree Doctor of Education

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**ABSTRACT**

This transcendental phenomenological study discovered and explored the lived experiences of public school educators bullied by school administrators. Student bullying has been a problem, however, there has been much less attention given to educators who are bullied by their superiors. The research question guiding this study asked what are the lived experiences of public school educators who have experienced administrator bullying? The theory guiding this study was social cognitive theory by Albert Bandura. The study was conducted with 10 educators (former and current) in public school districts across the United States obtained by professional referrals and/or selected from identified cases of administrator bullying from state and national professional education associations, as documented proof of an incident was required. Data was collected through in-depth individual interviews that were conducted either in-person or via electronic means. Participants were required to keep journals containing entries from both before and after their interview with the researcher, along with any additional documentation pertaining to the perceived incidents. Data analysis involved examination of textural and structural descriptions to arrive at the essence of the phenomenon, with further analysis from journaling of experiences. The results revealed that the responsibility for action against workplace bullying from school administrators was not only a problem with the bully, but also an organizational issue. Incidents of bullying were brought to the attention of district officials and union representatives, but victims often had to endure changing locations or even leaving the field of education to get relief. The outcome of this study should provide attention to the problem of administrator bullying so school districts can address this crucial issue.

**Keywords:** abuse, administrator bullying, bullying, incivility, mobbing, workplace bullying
Dedication

This work is dedicated to my sons, Bradley and Jacob, to show them that hard work pays off and nothing is impossible if you put your mind to it.
Table of Contents

ABSTRACT..................................................................................................................................................3
Dedication ..................................................................................................................................................4
List of Tables .............................................................................................................................................10
List of Abbreviations .................................................................................................................................11
CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION ...........................................................................................................12
  Overview .................................................................................................................................................12
  Background ...........................................................................................................................................12
    Historical Context .................................................................................................................................14
    Social Context ....................................................................................................................................15
  Situation to Self .....................................................................................................................................17
  Problem Statement .................................................................................................................................20
  Purpose Statement .................................................................................................................................22
  Significance of the Study .........................................................................................................................23
  Research Questions .................................................................................................................................25
  Definitions .............................................................................................................................................27
  Summary ...............................................................................................................................................28
CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW ....................................................................................................30
  Overview ...............................................................................................................................................30
  Theoretical Framework ..........................................................................................................................30
  Related Literature .................................................................................................................................34
    Types of Bullying .................................................................................................................................37
    Mobbing .............................................................................................................................................39
Characteristics of Bullies .................................................................40
Effects of Being Bullied .................................................................42
School Administrator Bullying .........................................................45
Additional Concerns of Bullying ......................................................47
Legal Aspects of Bullying .................................................................48
Victimology ......................................................................................50
Mitigating Workplace Bullying .........................................................52
Teaching Profession .......................................................................56
Leadership and Power .....................................................................57
Organizational Climate .................................................................59
Future Directions ...........................................................................62
Summary .........................................................................................64
CHAPTER THREE: METHODS ..........................................................66
Overview .........................................................................................66
Design .............................................................................................67
Research Questions .......................................................................69
Setting ............................................................................................69
Participants .....................................................................................70
Procedures ......................................................................................72
The Researcher’s Role .................................................................73
Data Collection ..............................................................................74
Stage 1 Referrals and/or Documented Cases .................................74
Stage 2 Individual Interviews ..........................................................75
Stage 3 Guided Journal Reflection Activity .................................................. 81
Journal Instructions .......................................................................................... 82
Data Analysis ...................................................................................................... 86
Trustworthiness ................................................................................................. 88
Credibility ........................................................................................................... 89
Dependability and Confirmability .................................................................... 89
Transferability .................................................................................................... 90
Ethical Considerations ...................................................................................... 91
Summary ............................................................................................................ 92
CHAPTER FOUR: FINDINGS ................................................................................. 94
Overview ........................................................................................................... 94
Participants ........................................................................................................ 94
  Julie: 37-Year-Old Female from the Midwest ................................................. 95
  Natalie: 42-Year-Old Female from the South ............................................... 98
  Erica: 26-Year-Old Female from the Northwest ......................................... 102
  Sarah: 28-Year-Old Female from the Midwest ........................................... 108
  Amanda: 32-Year-Old Female from the Northeast ..................................... 113
  Hanna: 33-Year-Old Female from the South .............................................. 119
  George: 39-Year-Old Male from the Midwest ............................................ 126
  David: 51-Year-Old Male from the Northeast ............................................ 129
  Michael: 41-Year-Old Male from the South .............................................. 135
  Bethany: 51-Year-Old Female from the West ............................................. 138
Results .............................................................................................................. 145
CHAPTER FIVE: CONCLUSION

Overview.................................................................................................................159

Summary of Findings...............................................................................................159

Central Question .................................................................................................160

Sub-Question 1........................................................................................................160

Sub-Question 2........................................................................................................161

Sub-Question 3........................................................................................................161

Sub-Question 4........................................................................................................162

Discussion..............................................................................................................162

Theoretical Literature.............................................................................................163

Empirical Literature...............................................................................................165

Implications.............................................................................................................170

Theoretical Implications.........................................................................................170

Empirical Implications..........................................................................................171

Practical Implications............................................................................................172
Delimitations and Limitations.................................................................173
Delimitations.............................................................................................174
Limitations.................................................................................................175
Recommendations for Future Research.....................................................176
Summary......................................................................................................177
REFERENCES ............................................................................................179
APPENDIX A..............................................................................................194
APPENDIX B..............................................................................................195
APPENDIX C..............................................................................................198
APPENDIX D..............................................................................................199
List of Tables

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Participant List</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Outcomes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Theme Statements</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
List of Abbreviations

Employee Emotional Abuse (EEA)

Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD)

Social Dominance Orientation (SDO)
CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

Overview

Most people tend to associate bullying with the antics of school-aged children who put others down in a vain attempt to make themselves feel better; however, bullying in the workplace has gained increased attention in the mainstream media (Olive & Cangemi, 2015). The purpose of my transcendental phenomenological study was to explore and discover the lived experiences of public school educators who were bullied by school administrators. Olive and Cangemi (2015) explained that bullying has reached epidemic proportions in the workplace and not only impacts the health and well-being of its victims, but it also impacts the organization. Chapter One introduces the topic of administrator bullying of educators with a background that includes the historical, social, and theoretical contexts. The motivation for this research is explained in the section entitled Situation to Self. I have included the problem statement, purpose statement, and significance of the study in my discussion along with the research questions that guided the research. This study sought to answer the questions as to what lived experiences are of public school educators who have experienced bullying by an administrator. During this study, I also looked at the impact bullying had on the educator and his or her overall well-being. The issues of resolving the problem as well as how the problem is brought to the attention of school district officials was covered and whether the educator’s perception of the field of education has changed. Definitions are also included for proper clarification and understanding.

Background

Bullying is an abusive behavior that has had a long history and is quite pervasive in contemporary society (King & Piotrowski, 2015). A disturbingly high fraction of American workers are exposed to hostile and/or threatening behaviors at work (Mullen & Wenger, 2017).
Parker (2014) explained that the bullying phenomenon impacts more than targets of the bullying as the harmful effects of bullying send shockwaves throughout organizations, impacting targets, bystanders, and ultimately the American workforce and society. Bullying is not about the actual targets, it is more about the climate in which they work (Sorrell, 2015). Although, targets tend to believe that workplace bullying is unique to them (Workplace Bullying Institute, 2021). While the targets have few options for managing these situations, they are rendered powerless by their abusive supervisors, complicit organizations, and their need to stay employed (Parker, 2014).

Workplace bullying involves actions or activities that include specific negative behaviors aimed at an individual which are persistent and escalating over time, are perceived by the target to be intentional and deliberate, and against what they themselves cannot defend (Hodgins & McNamara, 2019).

Moss (2016) explained the behavior of a bully boss can include various forms of non-physical aggression, such as ridiculing employees, putting them down in front of others, accusing them of incompetence, blaming them, lying to them, or not giving them credit for their work. Such bullying can result in a whole set of negative consequences for employees such as psychological distress, job dissatisfaction, and emotional exhaustion (Moss, 2016). In extreme cases, they can result in suicide, homicide, and post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) (Olive & Cangemi, 2015). Namie (2003) indicated that bullying resembles the phenomenon of domestic violence, but the difference between domestic and workplace psychological violence is that the latter finds the abuser on the employer’s payroll.

Lumby (2013) stated that workers operate within complex structures of power that create and constrain their opportunities. What is not fully acknowledged or theorized is the relationship between power and inequalities, and the degree of tension that may lie submerged (Lumby,
2013). This study will look at power and inequalities by listening to teachers who felt they had been bullied by administrators. There is no legitimacy for the power relations of bullying since bullies only exert negative and damaging control in the long run (Dzurec, Kennison, & Albataineh, 2014). Previous research indicated that what was common to all the bullying practices was the intent to wear down the victim psychologically, enough to get them to leave (Sorrell, 2020). Therefore, bullying should concern everyone.

Overall, workplace bullying can be treated as a complex phenomenon with individual differences between workers, deficiencies in the work environment, or an interaction between individual and situational factors (Pilch & Turska, 2015). Bullying ultimately creates feelings of defenselessness in the target and undermines an individual’s right to dignity at work (Jilles-Thibordeaux, 2019). Research into workplace bullying has continued to grow and mature, but there is still much that requires attention, especially the key aspects of the definition itself, the development of a guiding theory, investigation of the impacts of various workplace levels and structures, and the efficacy of interventions (Branch, Ramsay, & Barker, 2013).

**Historical Context**

Throughout history, people have had power over one another; therefore, workplace bullying is not a new phenomenon (Murphy, 2013). Organizations often esteem profit and productivity overall and worker treatment is often a secondary consideration, therefore not given attention when it affects productivity that contributes to an organization’s economic advantage (Namie at al., 2009). Interest in workplace bullying emerged over three decades ago, and considerable research has been conducted by scholars throughout the world in the past 20 years (Branch et al., 2013). Even with such a strong historical imprint, there is still a great deal to be studied to better understand and remedy the issue of workplace bullying.
Although bullying is an abusive behavior with a long history and is quite pervasive in contemporary society, researchers have largely neglected the study of this phenomenon in educational settings, which is a major work milieu in modern society where teachers, administrators, and staff interact (King & Piotrowski, 2015). A 2013 Workplace Bullying Institute Research report supported the notion that healthcare and education are the prime industries most prone to bullying, as these two fields attract workers motivated to help others and, while they are focused on their work, bring a vulnerability to attack by having their backs figuratively turned to the politics and abusers in the workplace (Workplace Bullying Institute, 2013). Teacher abuse is highly prevalent but remains undetected and, therefore, under reported (Bhatia, 2013).

Historically, there had been more interest in preventing sexual harassment than general work harassment in the United States, but social psychologists Gary and Ruth Namie introduced the term workplace bullying to the United States and advocated for the rights of American workers in 2003 (Sorrell, 2015). Given the long history of workplace bullying, it is intriguing that it took until 2003 for advocates to take a stand to end the issue. The objective when conducting research on potential organizational problems, such as workplace bullying, must be to contribute to the prevention and constructive management of the problem by providing descriptive information on the phenomenon itself, information on the causes and consequences of the problem, and information about the actions that may be taken to resolve or prevent the problem (Zapf & Einarsen, 2001).

Social Context

Workplace bullying has been recognized as a main source of distress that is associated with subsequent poorer health, decreased well-being, lowered job satisfaction and performance,
reduced commitment, and higher levels of sickness absenteeism; workplace bullying may also cause mental health problems (Verkuil, Atasayi, & Molendijk, 2015). King and Piotrowski (2015) explained that the impact of incivility in academic settings can have onerous repercussions both for employees (in the form of humiliation, resentment, demoralization) and on the institutional climate (productivity, collegiality, faculty retention), and in escalated form, groups of individuals can conspire and coordinate attacks on a specific victim. With all the physical and emotional distress caused by workplace bullying, it is no wonder why so many are leaving the profession of teaching.

Workplace bullying has become rampant due to a breakdown in four levels of accountability: personal (the victim), peer (witness to the behavior), supervisory (team leaders), and formal discipline (human resources), and therefore, it will never be reduced if there is a lack of support (Ryan, 2016). Support and communication are key when it comes to preventing a hostile work environment. Unethical issues in the current American society have influenced the professional environment, and when organizations move away from what is considered professional behavior, when there is a lack of policy for behavior, and when tough management is preferred, an environment of workplace bullying may result (Sorrell, 2015).

Ryan (2016) explained that experts suggest that today’s bullying is much more complex, more lethal, and considerably different in many ways from bullying in the past and falls into distinct types of behavior: physical, emotional (including verbal abuse and sexual harassment), and cyber, which can undermine workplace dynamics. With the addition of technology in the workplace, cyber bullying has become much more apparent and prevalent in the workplace than it once was. Sorrell (2015) explained that the perfect environment for workplace bullying contains a dysfunctional organizational structure which thrives on ineffective leadership, poor
communication, little recognition of achievement, heavy workloads, and lack of manager support. Examples of poorly-organized institutions that report the most workplace bullying are hospitals, religious organizations, and schools (Sorrell, 2015). Lutgen-Sandvik, Tracy, and Alberts (2007) indicated that workplace bullying is considered to be a global phenomenon with more prevalence in the United States because of its individualistic culture. Although, no workplace can be immune from the impacts of such bullying (Smith & Coel, 2018). Gray and Gardiner (2013) stressed that adult incivility is embedded in the competitive nature of school culture and dominating others is considered an artifact of success in American culture.

**Situation to Self**

In a previous position as an elementary school counselor, I not only witnessed the abuse of power from an elementary principal, I was the recipient of that abuse. A student reported what seemed to be child neglect or abuse. As a school employee, it is mandated that concerns of this nature be reported. After notifying this concern to my administrator, the school principal did not want any of the information to be reported to the children services agency, and I was instructed to “keep quiet” regarding this situation. I reported the incident, which did result in an investigation, and it was determined there was concern for the student involved. The principal exhibited retaliation by assigning duties to me that were clearly not in my job description, took away all previously assigned duties as a school counselor, and became verbally abusive towards me. The treatment I received forced me to resign my position.

While working at a different school district, I witnessed an administrator who was both bullying staff members and students. There were occasions in which staff members were threatened with their employment if they did not adhere to what the administrator wanted them to do. The requests made by the administrator ranged from falsifying district materials, requiring
staff members to look over state test materials, or use their planning period time for duties outside of their assigned job description. Those who failed to comply with the administrator’s directives were threatened with their employment being immediately terminated through falsified documentation or not offering a renewal of their position for the following school year. I was informed that several of these situations had been brought to the attention of the board of education, where little or no remediation was offered. There was high teacher and staff turnover under this principal’s tenure, as each was terminated at the administrator’s request or presented with such unbearable working conditions he or she resigned under duress.

Identification of a researcher’s worldview is essential in establishing the framework for the study (Davenport, 2014). In examining my situations and my Christian faith, the proper guide to this research is the constructivist paradigm. Creswell (2013) indicated this is a traditional approach to planning qualitative research that seeks understanding. Christians have absolute, universal values by which to live and by which to judge a society and the political state in which they live and have grounds for the basic dignity and value of the individual as unique in being made in the image of God (Schaefer, 2005). This framework affirms that each participant constructs a different understanding of events because he or she experiences them differently (Rockinson-Skapkiw & Spaulding, 2014). It is important to realize what a difference a person’s worldview makes in his or her strength as he or she is exposed to the pressures of life (Schaeffer, 2005).

Creswell (2013) stressed that researchers always bring certain beliefs and philosophical assumptions to their research. My role was to understand and then explain the lived experiences of the research participants. The philosophical assumptions made by researchers when they undertake a qualitative study include ontological, epistemological, axiological, and
methodological. Ontological assumptions involve the nature of reality. When conducting qualitative research, researchers embrace the idea of multiple realities (Creswell, 2013). Reality is subjective and can best be represented by the words of those who have experienced the phenomenon in question (Davenport, 2014). Each participant was able to express himself or herself in relation to their experience with administrator bullying.

Epistemological assumptions involve the nature of knowing. The researcher must go inside, to the greatest extent possible, the experience of each participant, to construct knowledge (Davenport, 2014). Subjective evidence is assembled based on individual interviews, as the researcher tries to get as close as possible to the participants being studied (Creswell, 2013). It was crucial to this study that the researcher not only hear the words being spoken by the participants, but also to feel the pain they experienced. For this to happen, the researcher had to connect with each participant on a personal level.

Axiological assumptions involve the role of the researcher’s values. Davenport (2014) stressed that it is impossible to be completely neutral in the research process. The values the researcher brought to this study were to help show the impact that administrator bullying has had on the lives of the participants. It was because of a shared experience of administrator bullying that the researcher had that this study has been conducted. All researchers bring values to a study, but the qualitative researcher makes known his or her values in the study, and inquirers admit the value-laden nature of the study and actively report their values and biases as well as the value-laden nature of information gathered from the field (Creswell, 2013).

Methodological assumptions involve the process of research. The logic the researcher follows is inductive, from the ground up, rather than handed down from a theory or the perspectives of the inquirer (Creswell, 2013). This part of the process may elicit changing or
revising the research questions. Research questions may need to be changed in the middle of a study to reflect better the types of questions needed to understand the research problem, therefore, the data collection strategy planned before the study needs to be modified to accompany the new questions (Creswell, 2013).

Qualitative research is concerned with understanding a phenomenon from the perspective of those who live(d) it and is often grounded in constructivism, in which knowledge is seen as relative and socially constructed (Rockinson-Szapkiw & Spaulding, 2014). The phenomenon is perceived and described in its totality, therefore, in a fresh and open way with complete description given of its essential constituents, variations of perceptions, thoughts, feelings, sounds, colors, and shapes (Moustakas, 1994). School administrators are entrusted by parents and the community to be fair and act responsibly with students and faculty. Bullying of educators by administrators must not be tolerated, as these actions can affect educators which affects students.

**Problem Statement**

Gray and Gardiner (2013) stressed that incivility and bullying are significant issues for teachers and administrators. Some organizations not only create the conditions that enable bullying, they also encourage it (Olive & Cangemi, 2015). The concept of workplace bullying entails situations where an employee persistently, and over a long period of time, perceives him-or herself to be mistreated and abused by other organizational members and where the individual in question finds it difficult to defend him/herself against these actions (Verkuil et al., 2015). Parker (2014) added that the phenomenon impacts more than targets, as the harmful effects of bullying send shockwaves throughout organizations, impacting targets, bystanders, and ultimately the American workforce and society. Bullying can have a negative effect on victims
and witnesses and can induce anxiety and stress which in turn reduces job satisfaction, commitment, and loyalty (Reese, 2018). The current educational context might be promoting bullying by holding schools to unreachable goals, punishing them when goals are not met, publicizing the punishment, and generally ruling with fear (H, 2012).

School administrators and school boards have spent considerable time and energy addressing student bullying in K-12 schools, although less attention has been directed toward the issue of workplace bullying among school personnel in those schools (Kleinheksel & Geisel, 2019). Educators often enter the field of education for the love of serving students, academic stimulation, and the opportunity to connect with rising scholars, but that inspiration can change to a need of defense in the wake of an aggressive boss who bullies the staff in need of career support and grooming (Hollis, 2017). Also, research indicates that reporting adult bullying behavior up the organizational chain seldom brings the relief one might expect (Kleinheksel & Geisel, 2019).

Emerging research on workplace bullying in educational settings has recently appeared in the literature; however, investigators have primarily examined instructor-to-instructor bullying, although there has been a growing interest in the topic of harassment of teachers by administrators (King & Piotrowski, 2015). Adult bullying in K-12 schools is just as prevalent as it is in other professions and organizations despite the fact that educators work so tirelessly to prevent that behavior in their students (Kleinheksel & Geisel, 2019). I feel that calling into question the actions of those in power often is not considered as it goes against what many individuals have been taught. Respecting authority and doing as one is told are hallmarks of employment and often are not areas to be challenged. The problem is that administrator bullying in public schools has become a more prevalent concern for educators and with such a high
turnover and so many vacancies it is imperative that any deterrent be eliminated. The field of education needs to be redeemed and be brought back to the high level of respect that it once held.

**Purpose Statement**

The purpose of this transcendental phenomenological study was to discover and explore the lived experiences of public school educators who were bullied by school administrators. This phenomenological study included 10 public school educators (past and present) to allow for investigation of their experiences of administrator bullying. At this stage in the research, workplace bullying was generally defined as conduct that cannot be objectively justified by a reasonable code of conduct and has a likely or actual cumulative effect that threatens, undermines, constrains, humiliates, or harms another person or his/her property, reputation, self-esteem, self-confidence, or ability to perform (Ryan, 2016). It is being elaborated as an unethical and aggressive behavior of an individual to another in a workplace usually involving a supervisor to their subordinate (Mubarak & Mumtaz, 2018). Administrator bullying was generally defined as a power differential, that threatens, harms, humiliates, induces fear in, or causes educators substantial emotional stress (McEvoy, 2014). The theory guiding this study was the social cognitive theory by Albert Bandura (1986, 1989, 2001). As Bandura (1989) explained, individuals make casual contribution to their own motivation and action within a system of triadic reciprocal causation. There is a continuous interaction between the social environment, internal stimuli, and behaviors (Swearer, Wang, Berry, & Myers, 2014). This contribution, agentic action, is self-directed action toward personal growth and development. Research on brain development indicates the influential role that agentic action plays, as it is not just about exposure to stimulation, but agentic action in exploring, manipulating, and influencing the
environment that counts (Bandura, 2001). Improving our understanding of the impact that administrator actions have on educator well-being may help to address the bullying situation.

**Significance of the Study**

Qualitative research is conducted when a problem or issue needs to be explored (Creswell, 2013). This study was designed to explore the problem of bullying of public school educators by administrators. Despite scholarly research and practitioners’ concerted efforts, organizations have continues to struggle with ethical issues stemming from interpersonal mistreatment in organizations (Mackey et al., 2018). Gray and Gardiner (2013) explained that adult incivility is embedded in the competitive nature of the school culture and the effects are long-term and severe. Exposure to bullying at work is a serious social stressor that can have important consequences for the victim, the co-workers, and the whole organization (Pilch & Turska, 2015). McEvoy (2014) stressed that exposure disrupts the trust and nurturing relationships necessary to achieve any school’s mission. Creswell (2013) explained that a qualitative study may lead to an in-depth understanding, fill a void in existing literature, establish a new line of thinking, and lift the voices of individuals who have been marginalized in society, or assess an issue with an understudied group or population. There is a scarcity in the research with regard to workplace bullying among public schools (Sorrell, 2015). There is an abundance of research related to student-on-student bullying in schools, but there is a gap in the literature regarding adult-on-adult bullying in the K-12 workplace (Kleinheksel & Geisel, 2019). As Orange (2018) indicated, prior research on workplace bullying demonstrates that it is a problem in K-12 schools, but research is needed to get a better understanding of teachers’ perceptions of why they have been mistreated by their administrators; if teachers’ perspectives are understood, perhaps districts could implement policies and procedures to address the problem.
Pepi (2019) stressed that research gives data of how many individuals are targeted by bullies in the workplace, but does not usually express the understanding of the human aspect of the phenomenon. The transcendental phenomenological model offers a way of interrelating subjective and objective factors and conditions, a way of utilizing description, reflection, and imagination in arriving at an understanding of what is, seeing the conditions it comes to be, and utilizing a process that opens possibilities for awareness, knowledge, and action (Moustakas, 1994). For these reasons, transcendental phenomenology was the best approach for this study since I was to capture the experiences of others who had lived through this phenomenon. There is less focus on the interpretation of the researcher and more on a description of the experiences of the participants (Creswell, 2013).

The theoretical significance of this study lies in its contribution to social cognitive theory. Individuals can conceive unique events and different novel courses of action and choose to execute one of them (Bandura, 2001). People perform behaviors they are confident they can do and that produce desired consequences (Walker & Posner, 2003). Ryan (2016) stressed that bullies may convince themselves their actions are justified, but bullying is ultimately so corrosive to the work environment, and when nothing is done to stop the abuse, bullying is therefore enabled. It was important to retell the events from each educator’s perspective and get across his/her feelings to the audience to feel the true magnitude and depth that bullying has not only on those who have experienced it, but also so others might understand the detrimental nature it has on the field of education.

The practical knowledge gained from this study may be relevant in providing information to combat bullying. Helping the victims by giving them a voice may produce interventions and awareness to alleviate the destructive nature of bullying in the educational setting. It is
everyone’s responsibility to stand up to bullies and send an important message that the winds of change are coming (Ryan, 2016).

**Research Questions**

The following research questions focused on administrator bullying of educators in the public school setting and guided this phenomenological study.

**CQ:** What are the lived experiences of public school educators who have experienced administrator bullying?

The purpose of this question was to give a voice to those who have experienced bullying by an administrator and make others aware of the phenomenon. Qualitative research is conducted to empower individuals to share their stories and have their voices heard while minimizing the power relationships that often exist between a researcher and the participants in a study (Creswell, 2013). Human science research questions seek to reveal more fully the essences and meanings of human experience and do not seek to predict or to determine causal relationships (Moustakas, 1994). Bullying among students gets considerable attention, yet some of the worst examples of bullying in academic settings have occurred between colleagues (H, 2012). Allowing individuals who were bullied to share their experiences involving administrator bullying is the focus to arrive at an understanding of this phenomenon.

**SQ1:** How do public school educators describe the impact of administrator bullying on their health and well-being?

The purpose of this question was to better understand not only the effects that can be physically seen by others, but also the damage that can be caused to the educator’s health and the negative long-term effects this can have. Effects of bullying have a huge impact on the well-being of the bullied individual and those closest to him/her (Olive & Cangemi, 2015). Bullying
by abusive supervisors has been shown to result in a whole set of negative consequences for employees such as psychological distress, job dissatisfaction, and emotional exhaustion, and it may also encourage employees to become bullies themselves by humiliating their colleagues, being rude to each other, or being aggressive towards others (Moss, 2016).

SQ2: How do public school educators attempt to resolve issues of administrator bullying within their school setting?

This question was used to determine the measures taken by the educator to resolve the bullying they were experiencing. While some educators may feel they can speak freely with those in their school, or even to the administrator bully themselves, others may feel the need to move to the district level in an attempt to have their issue resolved. Organizational culture may actually support aggressive behaviors if they are thought to be functional for motivating employees and if disrespectful behaviors and those harming others are tolerated (Pilch & Turska, 2013). Employees must be aware that bullies exist in the workplace and be cognizant of how to detect and deal with them while protecting themselves from their destructive behaviors (Olive & Cangemi, 2015).

SQ3: How do public school educators attempt to bring the issue of administrator bullying to the attention of their school district officials?

The purpose of this question was to determine the need for district level officials to become involved in an attempt to resolve the bullying situation that was occurring. Collaboration and intentional community building could help turn things around when there is negativity in a school (Gray & Gardiner, 2013). The responses organizations utilize to combat bullying unfortunately provide for the persistence of bullying in the workplace (Olive & Cangemi, 2015). Workplace policies designed to protect victims of bullying protect the organization by keeping
outside parties, such as lawyers, from looking too closely at the organization (Olive & Cangemi, 2015).

SQ4: How have public school educators’ perceptions of the field of education changed since experiencing administrator bullying?

This question was to help to understand the impact the bullied educator’s experience had on their outlook of the field of education and to give light to any career changes the educator may have made. Stresses related to the early years of teaching and beyond contribute significantly to decisions to resign (Buchanan et al., 2013). Literature suggests that the school environment directly impacts teacher retention, as teachers want to work in schools where they have greater autonomy, higher levels of administrative support, and clearly communicated expectations (Hughes, 2012).

**Definitions**

1. *Abuse* – Unnecessarily insulting, harmful, injurious or offensive treatment inflicted by a person; a pattern of behavior that threatens, degrades, demeans, humiliates, and bullies, and causes fear, insecurity, or severe emotional distress and serves no academic, legitimate, or ethical purpose (Bhatia, 2013).

2. *Administrator bullying* – A power differential which threatens, harms, humiliates, induces fear in, or causes educators substantial emotional stress (McEvoy, 2014).

3. *Bullying* – Negative, consistently aggressive behavior that is extremely detrimental to the victim occurring over an extended period of time and where there is a clear imbalance in power resources between the victim and the persecutor, with the victim clearly at the disadvantage (Oxenstierna, Elofsson, Gjerde, Magnusson Hanson, & Theorell, 2012).

4. *Incivility* – Discourteous behavior or disrespect (Gray & Gardiner, 2013).
5. *Mobbing* – Mobbing is often used synonymously with workplace bullying and has a similar definition to workplace bullying, but it involves the group/organization abuse of an individual or group of individuals (Sorrell, 2015).

6. *Workplace bullying* – Conduct that cannot be objectively justified by a reasonable code of conduct and whose likely or actual cumulative effect is to threaten, undermine, constrain, humiliate, or harm another person or their property, reputation, self-esteem, self-confidence, or ability to perform (Ryan, 2016).

**Summary**

The problem of administrator bullying of K-12 public school educators has not been extensively researched but is a common problem with substantial effects. Sorrell (2015) explained that bullying is part of the academic landscape although academia was once considered a safe place to work. It has been identified as a leading workplace stressor, with adverse consequences for the individual employee, groups of employees, and whole organizations (Gillen, Sinclair, Kernohan, Begley, & Luyben, 2017). Bullying gives an organization the reputation of being a hostile workplace and leads to increased employee turnover (Olive & Cangemi, 2015). It costs U.S. organizations billions of dollars per year in lost productivity, increased absenteeism, and health care costs (Blum, 2017). Victims of bullying may show signs of suffering with overall decreased performance, including diminished morale and motivation, which can disrupt organization functioning, reduce productivity, and increase turnover (Parker, 2014).

As Gray and Gardiner (2013) stressed, incivility and bullying are significant issues for teachers and administrators. The purpose of this transcendental phenomenological study was to discover and explore the lived experiences of public school educators bullied by school
administrators. Reflection on the background, as well as the historical, social, and theoretical contexts as they relate to the research were addressed along with revealing the significance of the study and significance to the researcher with a review of the research questions. As Sorrell (2015) mentioned, there has only been minimal research done with regard to workplace bullying among public schools. The irony of the situation is that teaching is considered to be a caring profession, but teachers are subjected to a distinct lack of care from their employers (Bhatia, 2013).
CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW

Overview

This chapter provides a theoretical framework and review of the literature related to the study. The theoretical framework is social cognitive theory (Bandura, 1989, 2001), which subscribes to a model of emergent interactive agency (Bandura, 1986), as persons make causal contributions to their own motivation and action within a system of triadic reciprocal causation (Bandura, 1989). Related literature is presented with the emergence of themes related to administrator bullying of educators. Emphasis is placed on an organization’s role in bullying, along with bullying characteristics, types, and effects. A brief history of bullying is explained along with disturbing accusations that bullying of public school educators is not a new phenomenon but has not received as much attention as it should. Victimology, mobbing, leadership and power, and mitigating workplace bullying are also discussed in this chapter, along with the law as it relates to bullying in the workplace. The teaching profession is discussed and how it specifically pertains to school administrator bullying, as well as researcher concerns and directions for the future.

Theoretical Framework

A theoretical framework is an empirical or quasi-empirical theory applied in helping to understand a phenomenon being studied (Rockinson-Szapkiw & Spaulding, 2014). As Bandura (1986) explained, progress in the understanding of human functioning is best achieved by theories that have a broad range of applicability, and the explanatory and predictive generality of theories are strengthened by evidence that divergent procedures produce convergent results. A theoretical framework helps to narrow the scope of the research area by selecting the most important factors for a study: the types of methods, the forms of analysis, the participants, and
the research question itself (Rockinson-Szapkiw & Spaulding, 2014). Social cognitive theory holds that an individual’s knowledge or experience can be related directly to observations of others within set contextual parameters (Bandura, 2001). This theory helps to demonstrate the complexity and possible deep-routed aspects that bullying can have on an individual and the pivotal role that psychology can play.

The social cognitive theory by Albert Bandura (2001) gives theoretical significance to this study. Bandura (2001) explained that people devise ways of adapting flexibility to remarkably diverse geographic, climatic, and social environments, figure out ways to circumvent physical and environmental constraints, redesign and construct environments to their liking, create styles of behavior that enable them to realize desired outcomes, and pass on the effective ones to others by social modeling and other experiential modes of influence. This theory not only fits with how the victims have handled their bullying situations, but also how the schools and districts as a whole have handled the situation and how it may have impacted others who were exposed to the bullying environment. Hoy and Miskel (2008) explained that behavior in organizations is not simply a function of its elements and environmental forces; it is a function of the interaction of the elements, and therefore, is the result of the dynamic relationship among its elements. Human functioning is analyzed as socially interdependent, richly contextualized, and conditionally orchestrated within the dynamics of various societal subsystems and their complex interplay (Bandura, 2001). Exposure to bullying, supportive attitudes toward bullying, and the expressed attitudes and behaviors of family members, peers, and other individuals are interrelated, and although there are many possible explanations for the correlation to the exposure to bullying and perpetration of bullying behaviors, social cognitive theory asserts that this link happens as a result of observational learning (Swearer et al., 2014).
Bandura (1986) stated the social cognitive theory asserts that human behavior is governed by multiple determinants operating through varied mechanisms and seeks to clarify how self-efficacy judgment influences human action, thought, and affect. It is an important heuristic for understanding the complexity of bullying behaviors and the social nature of involvement in bullying (Swearer et al., 2014). Self-efficacy judgment influences human functioning through its impact on choice behavior, effort expenditure, and perseverance, on self-hindering or self-aiding thought patterns, and on affective and neurophysiological reactions to environmental demands (Bandura, 1986).

I and I (2002) explained that when individuals are mistreated at work, the focus of their attention is diverted from completing their work to trying to understand and manage the mistreatment, or in other words, to surviving. The social cognitive theory proposes that there is a continuous interaction between the social environment (e.g., witnessing other’s behaviors), internal stimuli (e.g., cognitions and feelings), and behaviors (Swearer et al., 2014). A fearful and stressed teacher generally will downshift to the lowest mode of functioning with creativity suffering, paths of communication changing, and can be especially damaging because such mistreatment is often clearly visible to students (I & I, 2002). An individual’s self-efficacy beliefs determine his or her level of motivation, as reflected in how much effort he or she will exert in an endeavor and how long he or she will persevere in the face of obstacles (Bandura, 1989). Social cognitive theory suggests that in order to break the cycle of bullying interventions focused on cognition and social functioning are necessary (Swearer et al., 2014).

Teachers have become so accustomed to perceived abuse and bullying that is has become the status quo; causing them to accept such abusive behavior from administrators without realizing the rights they have to a safe and respectful environment (I & I, 2002). Bandura (1986)
explained that social cognitive theory seeks to clarify how self-efficacy judgment affects human action, thought, and affect, rather than treat perceived self-efficacy as a trait-like entity. A key issue is the concept of agency and the notion that an individual chooses how to act regardless of the dominance of any particular discourse (Fahie, 2014). Bandura (1989) explained that threat is a relational property concerning the match between perceived coping capabilities and potentially aversive aspects of the environment. An individual’s own beliefs in his or her abilities can affect the amount of stress and depression able to be withheld in adverse situations; as threat is relational to the match between perceived coping capabilities and the environment (Bandura, 1989).

This phenomenological study relates to components of the social cognitive theory, especially in the area of self-efficacy. The experiences of the participants was compared to previous research for further validation as to how individuals respond to stressful situations. Rockinson-Szapkiw and Spaulding (2014) explained that the qualitative researcher begins the study advancing a theory, collects data to test it, and reflects on whether the theory was confirmed or disconfirmed by the results in the study. Researchers must also address concerns about validity, and they must display the expertise, competence, and rigor needed to support their findings (Rockinson-Szapkiw & Spaulding, 2014). A qualitative study seeks to convey why people have thoughts and feelings that might affect the way they behave, and the research is used to gain insights into participant’s thoughts and feelings, which may provide the basis for a future stand-alone study or may help researchers to map out survey instruments for use in a qualitative study (Sutton & Austin, 2015). This required the researcher to allow each participant to express their feelings by presenting a compassionate atmosphere, so each participant felt comfortable. The researcher also gave some additional insight into their personal experiences to show the
participants they were not alone and that the researcher had experienced the phenomenon as well, in hopes to bring additional attention to the area to help prevent others from experiencing bullying by an administrator.

**Related Literature**

There is some research published regarding workplace bullying. This section represents an array of publications that clearly identify bullying as a problem. There are varied attempts at a definition for the phenomenon and a lack of proper managing of how to deal with bullying when it happens.

Workplace bullying, as an under-reported and relatively under-analyzed phenomenon, is alive and well in the U.S. workplace (Lutgen-Sandvik et al., 2007). Workplace bullying rarely involves physical violence and usually consists of non-physical, sub-lethal violence that has no boundaries and crosses all demographics and classes (Namie, 2003). Even with the lack of physicality of some bullying situations, there is still the ability to cause immense lifelong trauma. Bullying has been heralded as a social relationship problem (Swearer et al., 2014). Bullying needs no formal power to be involved, as it is enough for the victim to feel inferior to another or to several others (Oxenstierna et al., 2012).

Olive and Cangemi (2015) explained that there is no generally accepted definition for workplace bullying, but researchers do define it as persistent, offensive, abusive, intimidating, malicious, or insulting behavior. Nagele-Piazza (2018) defined bullying as unwelcome behavior that occurs over a period of time and is meant to harm those who feel powerless to respond. Abuse of power and unfair penal sanctions make the target feel upset, threatened, humiliated, or vulnerable, and aggressive behaviors are intended to inflict psychological angst or even physical harm to others in the workplace (Olive & Cangemi, 2015). Sansone and Sansone (2015) defined
workplace bullying as the repeated and organized engagement of interpersonal abusive behaviors that negatively affect both the individual being targeted as well as the workplace, and, as expected, include several negative emotional/psychological, medical, and socioeconomic consequences. Even with no generally accepted definition for workplace bullying, the general terminology provided by these references give a good idea of what takes place during these events.

Workplace bullying is a significant predictor for subsequent mental health problems, including depressive-, anxiety-, and PTSD symptoms and other stress-related psychological complaints (Verkuil et al., 2015). According to the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (DSM-5, 2013), anxiety, worry, or physical symptoms can cause clinically significant distress or impairment in social, occupational, or other important areas of functioning. Being the target of workplace bullying was significantly correlated with mental dysfunctions such as anxiety and depression (Warszewska-Makuch, Bedynska, & Zolnierczyk-Zreda, 2015). Stress has been defined as the damaging emotional and physical responses that occur when the resources, needs, or capabilities of an individual are overwhelmed by the demands of life (Yaman, 2015). PTSD is an anxiety disorder characterized by a variety of symptoms thought to result from exposure to one or more traumatic events, and although some stressors are not life-threatening, they may constitute a major life event that can be considered traumatic (Rodriguez-Munoz, Moreno-Jimenez, Vergel, & Hernandez, 2010). This disorder may be especially severe or even long-lasting when the stressor is interpersonal and intentional (American Psychiatric Association, 2013). Few blame victims for having PTSD when causes are natural, although the experience is just as strong when trauma is induced by intentional human design (Namie, 2003).
Workplace bullying shows little correlation to the physical size differences between those involved and can include verbal slander that is disruptive to the workplace environment and cannot be justified by any code of conduct; resulting in a threatening, undermining, humiliating, or harmful effect causing duress to the person experiencing the bullying and/or their ability to perform their work duties (Ryan, 2016). Studies conducted during the past 20 years indicate that systematic, prolonged experience of negative acts perpetrated by other employees may have serious health consequences for the target, especially those who received little social support (Warszewska-Makuch et al., 2015). Despite having no clear and distinct definition, bullying is still evident and seen across all cultures.

Sorrell (2015) indicated that workplace bullying involves repeated verbal abuse, psychological abuse, or both within an organizational environment. Bullying is an interpersonal hostility resulting in deliberate, repeated, and intensity that is enough to cause harm to the targeted individual’s health and the bullies’ need to have power or control over another, often resulting in undermining legitimate business in the process (Sorrell, 2015). Bhatia (2013) explained that the abuse can take many forms of behaviors used to harass and intimidate educators and may include face-to-face confrontation, memos, cyber bullying, criticizing their work, and making unreasonable demands on workload, sarcasm, and jokes aimed at the victim. A commonality of bullying practices is the intent to wear down the victim psychologically enough to get that person to leave (Sorrell, 2015); this may include undermining the victim by overruling his or her discussions and vows while delaying or turning down his or her promotion, cause demotion, give low salary, or not allow them additional training (Bhatia, 2013). The abuse can be harsh or barely recognizable. Subtle bullying behaviors are bullying acts that are not immediately obvious and can be interpreted in various ways, and as bullying may become
increasingly subtle with further legislation, these behaviors may be more difficult to identify (Samnani, 2013).

The current debate over definitions and terminology derives from efforts to fit a very complex phenomenon into more restrictive policy or legislative definitions, but if the goal is to have employers and legislators enact effective responses to workplace psychological harassment, there must be a duty to provide a precise nomenclature and engagement of comprehensive empirical research of this complex phenomenon (Crawshaw, 2009). Klein (2009) suggested that by recognizing the factors that can contribute to bullying and mobbing, readers may begin recognizing these characteristics, observing their work cultures and dynamics, and understanding individual and situational forces that allow bullying and mobbing to occur and continue. It is imperative that bullying must be recognized in order to be stopped and prevented.

**Types of Bullying**

Experts have noted that bullying today is more complex, lethal, and considerably different in many ways from bullying in the past and falls into distinct types of behavior: physical, emotional, and cyber (Ryan, 2016). If conflict is not managed, it may escalate into bullying, and a distinguishing factor between conflict and bullying is the frequency and longevity of the action (De Wet, 2014). Thus, the importance of further research and investigation cannot be stressed enough because of the heightened level of complexity and negative outcomes. Sorrell (2015) explained that workplace bullying includes many hostile behaviors such as harsh criticism, setting impossible deadlines, withholding information, social isolation, spreading rumors, attacks on physical or personal characteristics, ridicule and humiliation, verbal threats, interfering with work talks, and even assigning demeaning work tasks. Bullying tends not to be reduced to acts of brute force, but that does not mean there is not an aspect of physical threat, as
physical effects can be the aftermath, rather than the initial impact, and can cause illness, anxiety, or other stress disorders (Ryan, 2016). Moss (2016) also included forms of non-physical aggression, which includes ridiculing an employee, putting an employee down in front of others, accusations of incompetence, placing blame, lying to an employee, and not giving an employee credit for work. When a person in a position of power demonstrates these behaviors, an individual may feel that the organization is supporting these behaviors. Richardson and McCord (2001) stated mobbing, or group bullying, involves one bully creating a hostile environment for the targeted person and gathers others to willingly, or unwillingly, participate in continuous malevolent actions to force a person out of the workplace. In other words, mobbing is like a cancer that can spread quickly and destroy vital elements of an organization (Richardson & McCord, 2001).

Cyberbullying is on the rise as a form of workplace bullying (Sorrell, 2015) and has been defined as harassment performed via electronic means, such as mobile phones or the internet, through email, instant messages, in a chat room, on a web site, or through digital messages or images sent to a cell phone and is not limited to the workplace (Ryan, 2016; Wolke & Lereya, 2015). Technology has had many advances, but with that comes challenges when individuals use the system in a hurtful way. Characteristics of cyberbullying and cyber harassment can be either direct or indirect, as direct cyberbullying and cyber harassment involve threatening or harassing someone online while using one’s true identity, while indirect cyberbullying and cyber harassment would involve a perpetrator being anonymous (Davenport, 2014). Regardless of the type of cyberbullying, there is intention of direct or indirect psychological harm of another individual (Sorrell, 2015). Davenport (2014) indicated the phenomenon of cyber harassment is increasing, but there is an unpreparedness of educators to deal with it. Reisdorph (2015) stressed
that the use of technology (e.g., emails, phone calls, texting, and use of social media) to bully is out of control, but it is more difficult to intervene until the damage has been done. Ryan (2016) explained that bullies especially like to control information and their communiques can be particularly unpleasant.

**Mobbing**

In the 1980s, Heinz Leymann was one of the first researchers to dedicate a study to the specific behavior of workplace bullying, and he referred to this bullying action as “mobbing” (Murphy, 2013). Leymann’s initial interest in school bullying subsequently expanded to include bullying at work (mobbing) when he recognized similar dynamics in adult patients (Lutgen-Sandvik et al., 2007). Namie et al. (2009) explained that Leymann was a German psychiatrist, who had established the world’s first work trauma clinic in Sweden in the 1980s, as he was the founder of the international anti-bullying movement and cared most about bullying’s impact on the health of individuals. Mobbing, often used synonymously with workplace bullying, involves the group/organization abuse of an individual or a group of individuals (Crawshaw, 2009). Leymann used the term “mobbing” to document the trauma that can result from sustained “psychological terrorization” in the workplace, and the term “workplace bullying” was coined by Andrea Adams, a pioneering British journalist, in 1992 (Namie, 2003, p. 1). Although this term may seem new, the issue has been around for a long time.

Mobbing appears to be more common in the professional service sector, such as in education and health care, where work is complex, goals ambiguous, best practice debatable, and market discipline far away (Westhues, 2003). It is concerning to see mobbing appear in fields where individuals who exhibit such care and concern for others have become the target. Mobbing is an important construct that has an impact on numerous psychological variables, as
research indicated that mobbing has a direct impact on stress, which has been defined as the damaging emotional and physical responses that occur when the demands of life overwhelm the resources, needs, or capabilities of an individual (Yaman, 2015).

Mobbing is usually initiated by a person in a position of power or influence where there is an urge to crush or eliminate the target (Westhues, 2003). Sorrell (2015) explained that downward mobbing is the most prevalent form of workplace bullying and involves the bully as the supervisor/manager and the target as the subordinate. A type of mobbing called “academic mobbing” happens mostly in institutions of higher learning and is defined as a non-violent and sophisticated kind of psychological bullying where a colleague is humiliated, intimidated, terrorized, ostracized, and wrongly accused (Pheko, 2018).

Bullies are individuals who typically lead others, called mobbers, with aggression toward a target (Klein, 2009). Branch et al. (2013) stated that the terms “harassment” and “mobbing” are often used to describe bullying behavior, but “workplace bullying” tends to be the most consistently used term throughout the research community. While researchers have made considerable advances in developing conceptual clarity, frameworks, and theoretical explanations that help explain and address this very complex issue, it is still often an over simplified and misunderstood phenomenon (Branch et al., 2013).

**Characteristics of Bullies**

Bullies often are clever and tend to be outliers-similarly insecure and unhappy (Ryan, 2016). Richardson and McCord (2001) explained there are many different types of bullying behaviors, but a bully is mainly interested in maintaining his or her power and control. Bullies generally seek domination and control over victims as well as witnesses and bystanders (Reisdorph, 2015). They often are opportunistic and have the ability to read situational cues and
act upon them (Thomas, 2017). These characteristics put administrators in a prime position to become bullies themselves. There was also discussion that workplace bullies victimize others because of a pathological personality and that aggressive adults have psychopathologies similar to sadism, narcissism, and antisocial behavior (Sorrell, 2015). Bullies are often driven by their own fears and insecurities; therefore, they rarely can be cured, but their behavior may be controlled or eradicated (Richardson & McCord, 2001). Many bullies target individuals they find threatening to their own position of power and want to eliminate anyone who they see as being able to challenge their position. Bullies are often quiet and work behind the scenes to undermine their victims, and therefore leaders in organizations (such as institutions of higher education and public education) have a hard time believing accusations of bullying (Olive & Cangemi, 2015). Exposure to bullying has also been associated with work-related and behavioral outcomes such as intent to leave, lack of commitment, job dissatisfaction, and absenteeism (Nielsen & Einarsen, 2018).

Namie (2003) explained that a characteristic common to all bullies is that they are controlling competitors who exploit their cooperative targets, although most would stop if the rules changed and bullying was punished. Moss (2016) explained that bosses who become bullies may themselves feel stressed and under pressure from their own bosses or experience conflict with coworkers that spills over into their relationships with their direct reports. Multiple factors may lead to workplace bullying such as: ego, financial interests, status cautiousness, manipulation, violence, aggression, exploitation, threats, personality clashes, masculine superiority, gender politics, power play, patterns laid down in childhood, and liking or disliking (Mubarak & Mumtaz, 2018). Moss (2016) also mentioned that some bullies’ actions may have nothing to do with work, as some bully bosses have a history of family abuse, while others just
have little ability to manage their emotions. Regardless of the reason behind the behavior, bullying needs to be stopped.

Organizational leaders who are also narcissists may use their power in the organization to abuse through relational aggression or indirect aggression (Sorrell, 2015). Olive and Cangemi (2015) explained that narcissists may exhibit many desirable leadership qualities while believing they are above everyone else and feel their needs are of primary importance while the needs of others are of secondary importance or not important at all. Olive and Cangemi (2015) also identified several other types of behavior to include: delusional leaders who lack the skills to lead effectively and blame their subordinates when quality and time constraints are not met; paranoid leaders who feel others in the organization are out to get them and target those who are bright, ambitious, well-liked, and successful; and domineering leaders who have a blatant disregard for others, even though they often possess many of the traits that would make them effective leaders. Pilch and Turska (2015) explained that a study showed that Machiavellianism may also be recognized as a personality variable related to bullying behavior, as employees who were high in Machiavellianism exhibited higher levels of bullying behavior. Machiavellianism is a personality trait where individuals are so focused on their own interests they will manipulate, deceive, and exploit others to achieve their goals (Harley Therapy, 2015).

**Effects of Being Bullied**

Adult bullying at work is a unique phenomenon with four specific features: intensity, repetition, duration, and power disparity (Lutgen-Sandvik et al., 2007). Negative acts such as direct harassment and intimidating behavior are associated with psychological stress-reactions and a negative physiological stress response (Hogh, Hansen, Mikkelsen, & Persson, 2012). Yamada (2010) stressed that workplace bullying is a form of health-endangering psychological
Workers who perceived greater exposure to workplace bullying report greater levels of psychological distress (Giorgi et al., 2016). Parker (2014) indicated that victims may suffer from anxiety, depression, burnout, frustration, helplessness, difficulty concentrating, and lowered self-esteem and self-efficacy. Murphy (2013) indicated that victims’ overall health can be affected if they are involved in bullying over a long period of time. Xu et al. (2019) indicated that workplace bullying and violence are likely to induce negative emotions and stress reactions as pathways to cardiovascular disease since they are major social stressors. Abused employees have poorer attitudes towards work, decreased psychological health, and are more likely to suffer from health complaints related to the suffering at work (Parker, 2014). This may lead to individuals missing more days of work than necessary. Also, stressful work environments may create frustrating events, and frustration in employees may lead to higher levels of aggression (Sischka, Schmidt, & Steffgen, 2020). Ultimately, bullying can create feelings of defenselessness in the target and undermine an individual’s right to dignity at work (Jilles-Thibodeaux, 2019).

Lutgen-Sandvik et al. (2007) used the metaphor of being burned by degree to explain that as bullying degree increases so do negative outcomes: (a) low levels of abuse would be compared to first-degree burns (e.g. sunburn), causing damage over time, but are common, potentially superficial, and usually quick to heal; (b) intensive, frequent, and persistent levels of bullying are similar to second-degree burns and are more painful and often require professional treatment and intervention to heal; and (c) extremely escalated cases of bullying are similar to third-degree burns and can result in deep scarring and permanent damage. The effects of bullying not only have an impact on victims, they are also felt by friends and family. Olive and Cangemi (2015) explained that, in extreme cases, the results may include suicide, homicide, and PTSD, while family members and coworkers may experience stress and guilt. Research indicates that
PTSD symptoms are highly prevalent among victims of bullying, with significant gender differences, and that the experience of being bullied may shatter an individual’s basic assumptions regarding personal invulnerability, benevolence of the world, meaning, self-worth, and relations with others (Rodriguez-Munoz et al., 2010).

Bullying fundamentally disrupts the trust and nurturing relationships necessary to achieve a school’s mission (McEvoy, 2014) and leads to increased employee turnover and giving the organization a reputation as a hostile workplace (Olive & Cangemi, 2015). Consequences can include damaging organization reputation and company performance, even when supervisors are pursuing goals outlined by the organization (Parker, 2014). Olive and Cangemi (2015) indicated that bullying can also lead to counterproductive behaviors aimed at undermining the goals of the organization. Organizations should take this seriously and make it a priority to address any bullying behavior.

Bullying creates a hostile work environment driven by the bully’s jealousy and desire for power and control (Ryan, 2016). Regardless of how bullying is manifested, whether by verbal assaults or strategic moves to render the target unproductive and unsuccessful, it is the aggressor’s desire to control the target that motivates the action (Namie, 2003). Among the detrimental outcomes of bullying, it is postulated as a major risk factor for exclusion from work, as this term may reflect any illegitimate distance between an employee and the work he or she was hired to do (Glambek, Matthiesen, Hetland, & Einarsen, 2014). Bullying can also cause employees who were bullied to become bullies themselves, start to be rude to fellow colleagues, show aggressive behaviors, and even purposefully humiliate others (Moss, 2016).

Bullying might not lead directly to mental health problems but, rather, may undermine important internal and external assets that support personal coping (Fullchange & Furlong,
Stress, a function of perceived situational demands and an individual’s perceived ability to cope with such demands, and strain result from a perceived imbalance between situational demands and perceived coping abilities (I, I, & Du, 2008). Bandura (1986) explained the processes and determinants of self-efficacy judgment are concerned with how information conveyed inactively, vicariously, persuasively, or physiologically is selected, weighted, and integrated into self-efficacy judgments. The target of bullying may be disempowered by those who witness an overt confrontation, and the resulting humiliation can deliberately be designed to compel the target to act in a docile/passive manner and to accept the domination of the bully (Fahie, 2014). It can serve to act as a warning to observers not to transgress, as to do so could potentially provoke a similar reaction directed towards them (Fahie, 2014).

**School Administrator Bullying**

Most of the focus of bullying has been on children, but it is known that children learn from adults the way in which adults treat each other and how adults use their power in relationships (Raphael, 2016). Abusive principals, when compared to abusive bosses, exhibit similar behaviors (e.g., discounting teachers’ needs, withholding resources, sabotaging and criticizing teachers, making unreasonable demands, threatening teachers, giving unwarranted reprimands, forcing teachers out of their jobs); like workers who were described in scientific literature, abused teachers experienced the same devastating effects, which are very harmful to teachers’ professional and personal lives (I & I, 2006). In some ways, it may be easier for principals to use their clout, to fail to listen to others, make cutting comments, and disregard those whose views do not match their own (Hoerr, 2013). Many administrators can bully an educator without being noticed, given the readily available resources they have. King and Piotrowski (2015) stressed how problematic it is when the administrator is the bully because the
more highly ranked the administrator, the less oversight will be applied to behavioral propensities, and the bully administrator will probably be unsympathetic to efforts aimed at addressing and/or curbing bullying activities and could impede any constructive steps in this direction. It can be difficult to prove bullying is taking place since it must be proven to be purposeful. The bully administrator probably would block any potential investigations into inappropriate behavior and might retaliate against anyone who complained or supported the accuser and hide behind a supposed superior administrative oversight (King & Piotrowski, 2015).

Abusive principals severely undermine the development of innovative and collaborative structures among faculty as well as teachers’ overall level of involvement in their schools (I & I, 2006). Stoelinga (2011) described harassing supervision practices as those characterized by the goal of making teachers uncomfortable so they will leave voluntarily, and principals may use a variety of harassing supervision approaches, from those that might be construed as trying to develop a teacher to those that would more universally be described as harassment. The unequal power structure leaves the targets vulnerable and unable to defend themselves, and targets often have no choice but to remain in the situation because no one takes their accounts seriously or they are financially dependent on those who abuse them (Parker, 2014). Harassing supervision of principals may be the result of a complex web of factors that includes: (a) a poor teacher evaluation system; (b) inadequate principal training programs; and (c) high rates of principal turnover (Stoelinga, 2011). This can be problematic in itself, as harassing supervisors may try to justify their actions, which only complicates the matter.

As a phenomenon, workplace bullying is now better understood with reasonably consistent research findings in relation to its prevalence, negative effects on targets, bystanders,
and organizational effectiveness, and some of its likely antecedents (Branch et al., 2013).

Bullying in the workplace is rampant due to a breakdown in four levels of accountability: personal (the victim), peer (witnesses to the behavior), supervisory (team leaders), and formal discipline (human resources) (Ryan, 2016). Sorrell (2015) added that toxic organizational structures, personality disorders, and emotions can all lead to bullying behaviors. In fear-based organizations, employees may be so concerned with avoiding blame and humiliation that they cannot help the organization, even when they have the skills to do so (Parker, 2014).

**Additional Concerns of Bullying**

Attention to bullying has exponentially increased among educational, psychological, and legal scholars and practitioners, as well as among youth and adults worldwide, but, despite increased attention, bullying does not appear to be significantly declining (Swearer et al., 2014). King and Piotrowski (2015) explained that researchers of bullying have largely neglected the study of educational settings, although there has been a growing interest in the topic of harassment of teachers by administrators. One report of elementary and secondary school settings even found that 25% of teachers experienced bullying by educational administrators (King & Piotrowski, 2015). The impact of bullying is staggering, yet those in the workplace have been slow to respond to such accusations (Olive & Cangemi, 2015).

Workplace bullying has been recognized as a main source of distress that is associated with subsequent health and decreased well-being, to lowered job satisfaction and performance, reduced commitment, higher levels of sickness absenteeism, and even psychotropic drug use (Verkuil et al., 2015). Parker (2014) explained that few organizations have clear human resource policies that prohibit bullying; therefore, rarely are the targets of bullying protected, and the absence of such policies could communicate to targets that their experiences are not important.
Additionally, organizations need to develop clear policies, so that human resources may send a positive message that advocates for targets (Parker, 2014).

The phenomenon of bullying impacts more than targets as the harmful effects send shockwaves throughout organizations, impacting targets, bystanders, and ultimately the American workforce and society (Parker, 2014). It is every individual’s responsibility to stand up to bullies, as this may not be successful every time, but at the very least can send the message to bullies and victims alike that the winds of change are coming (Ryan, 2016). When people stick together and protect each other, it can become a greater challenge for a bully to impact a victim. Gray and Gardner (2013) explained that schools must establish a culture free from bullying for all members of the school community which requires an understanding of educator-peer relationships, as schools promote a particular orientation toward the world, others, and the individual.

Further research should be conducted to identify characteristics favoring bullying and characteristics limiting that disadvantageous phenomenon, operating within the configuration created by the dominating type of culture (Pilch & Turska, 2015). Emotion-focused research has the potential to significantly advance the understanding of workplace bullying (Branch et al., 2013). Future studies should explore why administrators (e.g. principals) bully teachers, as some administrators may experience mistreatment themselves, which then spills over into their management (Sorrell, 2015).

**Legal Aspects of Bullying**

Currently, there is no federal legislation outlawing bullying and similar behavior, but with the increasing attention administrator bullying has gained, there may eventually be new laws implemented to help prevent bullying (Richardson & McCord, 2001). Two forces serve to
encourage employers to adopt policies about workplace bullying: (a) workplace bullying and the prospects of legal reform and bullying-related lawsuits are being taken more seriously; and (b) organizational accrediting and membership bodies may adopt standards that, directly or indirectly, require employers to address workplace bullying (Yamada, 2010). Since there is no law defining workplace bullying or how to respond to it, most employees will ignore the issue to protect their own liability, allowing workplace bullying to continue to take place (Raphael, 2016). To help curb bullying, California and Utah have both started mandated training in abusive conduct for supervisors of 50 or more employees (Namie & Namie, 2016).

American’s have come a long way in recognizing workplace bullying as a threat to both personal well-being and organizational productivity, but too many targets of this destructive behavior have found themselves abandoned by the law (Yamada, 2010). Current laws are not likely to provide the target with legal redress unless they have protected status based on race, ethnicity, religion, or disability (Namie, 2003). Discrimination legislation falls short of protecting victims unless they are members of a protected class and the bullying behavior relates specifically to the protected trait (Olive & Cangemi, 2015). Many victims will never take legal action because of their experiences due to the lack of protection from retaliation offered by the legal system. Raphael (2016) explained there are currently two bills that have been introduced in Washington regarding bullying which would provide legal recourse for employees who have been harmed psychologically, physically, or economically by being deliberately subjected to abusive work environments. Providing legal incentives for employers may help to prevent and respond to the mistreatment of employees in the workplace (Raphael, 2016). When polled, 93% of individuals would be in support of legislation to make workplace bullying unlawful (Raphael, 2016). A major reason why there have been no federal laws put in place to prevent workplace
bullying is the amount of funds that would be required by the Federal Government (Maurer, 2013).

There are conflicting views when it comes to enacting laws regarding bullying. Maurer (2013) explained that proponents of bullying legislation say that without laws on the books, employers will condone bullying as a means to an end, while critics argue that companies already address workplace bullying because this behavior is detrimental to their business by affecting employee morale, quality of work, and turnover. Policy itself is deemed a structural factor, although it could be viewed as a political factor, because perpetrators abuse certain policies using their positional power (Lee, 2019). Murphy (2013) added that without a clear definition for bullying behavior, there is the question as to how the authorities such as human resources will investigate claims, and also, the issue of filing a claim costs money and takes time, while the victim continues to remain in a powerless position. A real value of having a law in place for bullied employees is to legitimize targets’ complaints and compel employers to correct and prevent health-impaired abusive conduct by holding bullies accountable (Namie, 2003).

**Victimology**

There is general agreement that bullying is about negative, consistently aggressive behavior that is extremely detrimental to the victim, taking place over an extended period of time (as distinguished from random bullying or picking on an individual) and where there is a clear imbalance in power resources between the victim and the persecutor(s), with the victim clearly at a disadvantage (Oxenstierna et al., 2012). It is deliberately intended to dominate, cause distress and fear in the intended victim and often happens in private settings and by a person in authority and difficult to find material evidence for (Agarwal, 2018). Most programs focus on student-to-student bullying, and some even deal with a teacher who is a bully to a student, but there seems
to be a lack of programs to address when the teacher is the victim. Fullchange and Furlong (2016) indicated that the association between victimization of psychosocial distress is well-established, while less is known about how bullying is related to constructs that support overall well-being. Moss (2016) explained that individuals with low self-esteem are more likely to be bullied if they appear weak or vulnerable, therefore, it is not difficult to understand how some types of employees might be provocative victims for a bully.

Olive and Cangemi (2015) explained that victims are often assumed to be the weak and downtrodden within an organization, but they actually tend to be popular, hard-working, and morally upright individuals and are often identified as technically skilled veteran associates who are well respected by their peers. Moss (2016) reported that earlier research indicating that poor performers were more likely to be the victims of bullying has been contradicted by current research which shows that high performers also experience this phenomenon. High performers represent a threat to supervisors who place a high value on their dominant position in the hierarchy, as they may feel an up-and-coming subordinate who performs beyond expectations might replace them, supersede them, or garner some of the resources normally reserved for them, such as status, attention from higher-ups, or advancement opportunities (Moss, 2016).

Victims of workplace bullying may find that coworkers and others within an organization do not provide support or assistance when faced with the trauma of workplace bullying (Murphy, 2013). Coworkers may even be prevented from rendering assistance to bullied employees for fear of becoming the next target (Olive & Cangemi, 2015). Features of support could be experienced within the broad organizational culture and specific communicative experiences, although the seeking of support often requires a proactive approach and targets may be unlikely to engage in support-seeking behavior if they feel helpless and victimized (Branch et al., 2013).
Raphael (2016) stated that a recent survey showed 72% of people have knowledge of workplace bullying existing, while 27% have current or past experience with it, which means that one in four people in the workplace have experienced bullying and three out of four have witnessed it. Sorrell (2016) added that the research on gendered aspects of workplace bullying is contradictory but provided insight into the complexity of this phenomenon: Men and women reported victimization at the same rate. Despite the same victimization rates, the Workplace Bullying Institute (WBI, 2014) reported that 69% of bullies are male, while 31% of bullies are female; however, a female target is chosen 68% of the time when the bully is female, and male bullies choose female targets 57% of the time and male targets 43% of the time. Ethnic minorities are twice as likely to experience workplace bullying than Caucasian employees; Hispanic employees reported the highest prevalence of bullying (57%), with 54% of African-Americans and 53% of Asians reporting being bullied, while Caucasian workers only reported bullying 44% of the time (Workplace Bullying Institute, 2014).

**Mitigating Workplace Bullying**

All organizations should make every effort to focus on long-range goals and ethical treatment of their employees (Olive & Cangemi, 2015). Hoy and Miskel (2008) explained that organizational members’ perceptions of fairness in an organization include both distributive justice (the fairness of the way things are distributed) and procedural justice (the fairness of the distribution procedures), also known as organizational justice. It was also added that a sense of organizational justice in the school workplace is dependent upon administrative behavior that is equitable, sensitive, respectful, consistent, free of self-interest, honest, and ethical (Hoy & Miskel, 2008). As Richardson and McCord (2001) explained, bullies not only stifle productivity and innovation within an organization, they most often target an organization’s best employees.
because it is precisely those employees who are the most threatening to bullies. Bullying entails costs on a society, which underlines the importance of working to forestall it in the workplace (Oxenstierna et al., 2012). Due to bullying, enterprises are robbed of their most important asset in today’s competitive economic environment: precious human capital (Richardson & McCord, 2001).

King and Piotrowski (2015) explained the best course of action when dealing with abusive situations is to avoid the bully, although when confronted by a bully, the victim needs to stay calm, recognize that personal confrontation is almost never productive, and document any and all complaints. The more documentation recorded, the more likely constructive actions can be implemented to thwart this toxic behavior (King & Piotrowski, 2015). Employers need to encourage workers to report incidents of suspected bullying and make sure reports are investigated quickly and thoroughly (Olive & Cangemi, 2015). Samnani (2013) added that witnesses should understand that they can play an important role in the bullying process and that such behaviors should be reported when observed, as they should not feel political pressures to partake in bullying or fear that they may be victimized if they do not partake. It should be noted that discouraging a climate where social dominance and rewarding supervisors for development of high performers can help curb bullying (Moss, 2016).

Employees must be aware bullying exists in the workplace and be cognizant of how to detect and deal with bullies while protecting themselves from the destructive behaviors of bullies (Olive & Cangemi, 2015). Ryan (2016) also stressed that it does take a village to address bullying, with many of those who have been victimized banding together to bring a well-formed complaint forward, enlisting the support of supervisors in the chain of command, and being able to rely on a strong human resources presence, as well as the institution. If that kind of strong and
healthy infrastructure existed in a given workplace, it would not be fertile ground for bullying to start with (Ryan, 2016).

The dual themes of prevention and management of workplace bullying have been emphasized within the literature, but understanding the processes of how best to move from conceptualization to good practice is only starting to gain momentum (Branch et al., 2013). Orange (2016) outlined three main areas for dealing with mistreatment: education on policies and state codes of ethics; how to document perceived mistreatment and the responses to it; and finding sources of support for victims. Samnani (2013) suggested that employees should receive training that provides for a greater awareness about bullying and should be encouraged to report bullying behaviors when experienced. Potential witnesses should also be sensitized towards bullying by helping them develop an understanding that they can play an important role in preventing bullying (Samnani, 2013). Additionally, professional development of staff needs to be far more evidence-based than it currently is, suggesting extensive avenues for empirical research (Branch et al., 2013). Evaluation research on workplace bullying programs is still at an early stage and needs to be addressed sooner than later (Escartín, 2016).

Moss (2016) suggested that organizations have several options to combat bully supervisors: (a) Consider the idea of screening supervisors for high social dominance orientation (SDO), as individuals with this tendency are attracted to institutions and professions that enhance and reinforce social hierarchies and tend to discriminate against individuals from lower-status groups; (b) Create cultures where social dominance is discouraged by rewarding supervisors for developing, rather than undermining, high-performers; and (c) Give clear signals from top management about how to treat high performers. Interventions to reduce bullying must address the complex array of psychological, cognitive, and social characteristics that are contributing
factors of bullying, and only when these constructs are investigated will individuals be able to transform their bullying behaviors into prosocial interactions (Swearer et al., 2014). Woestman and Wasonga (2015) added that destructive leadership behaviors should be part of conversations in educational programs, educational leadership practices, and school leader performance evaluations.

A challenge that educators must face is overcoming the problem of principal mistreatment/abuse of teachers and preventing the devastating effects it has on teachers’ relationships, school-wide decision making, and classroom instruction (I & I, 2006). King and Piotrowski (2015) suggested the following initiatives to manage incidents of adult bullying in academia: (a) outline specific examples of behaviors, actions, and implications, (b) take seriously all episodes of bullying and incivility, and (c) implement a hotline for reporting incidents. Parker (2014) noted the importance of human resource policies and procedures being completely transparent. Teachers should have risk-free ways to address the issues of a bullying administrator to ensure they believe they will not face retaliation for reporting possible mistreatment (Orange, 2018). As such, periodic external audits and public reporting might also reduce the culture of fear that bullies are allowed to perpetuate (Parker, 2014).

Teachers should be supportive of colleagues whose mistreatment they witness, including being willing to confront mistreatment on their colleagues’ behalf, and this is especially true of experienced teachers who witness principal mistreatment of new or inexperienced teachers (I & I, 2006). Organizations can implement ideas to identify potential bullies that do not put victims in the uncomfortable position of stepping forward to level a claim of workplace bullying with an anonymous survey on bullying to yield insights as to who may be engaging in bullying activities,
keeping tabs on employee turnover to identify potential bullies, and exit surveys (Olive & Cangemi, 2015).

Teaching Profession

New teachers seem to be leaving at an alarming rate, and with a national shortage of teachers, there needs to be something done to address this issue. The reasons why new teachers leave the profession cannot be understood unless there is an appreciation for an individual’s point of view, and research is conducted using methodologies that go beyond the manipulation of sociodemographic variables and to couple the analysis of abandonment factors with perseverance/resilience factors, in order to gain a greater understanding of this complex phenomenon (De Stercke, Goyette, & Robertson, 2015). Teacher educators in university-based teacher preparation programs often emphasize only the positive aspects of and approaches to teaching, yet seldom do they address the dark side of school life (I & I, 2006). Teacher abuse is highly prevalent and remains undetected and under reported, as the victim may not trust the system to support or believe him or her and may fear retribution or more abusive behavior (Bhatia, 2013). Teaching as a caring profession where many employees may be subjected to a distinct lack of care by their employers and law enforcement agencies (Bhatia, 2013).

Research indicated that most teachers were in the profession for the love of students and teaching is the primary reason for becoming a teacher (Thibodeaux, Labat, Lee, & Labat, 2015). Teachers aspire to work in schools where they have greater autonomy, higher levels of administrative support, and clearly communicated expectations; the literature seems to indicate that helping administrators understand their level of influence, guide them toward building a positive working relationship, and empowering teachers would enhance teacher retention (Hughes, 2012). Thibodeaux et al. (2015) agreed by explaining in a recent study that principal
leadership styles and behaviors had an impact on teachers’ intent to remain in the teaching profession. It cannot be stressed enough how important the role an administrator plays in the school environment and the impact made on retention when poor leadership is present.

Minimizing teachers’ experiences of victimization may increase the probability that they remain teaching in a school and remain in the profession (Curran, Viano, & Fisher, 2019).

There are also implications for teacher educators. Teacher educators can provide prospective and practicing teachers the following: (a) recognize and understand the potential effects of principal mistreatment; (b) train in the use of action research; (c) gain knowledge and develop skills for assertively protecting themselves; (d) be supportive of colleagues whose mistreatment they witness; (e) learn how to work with their local, state, and national associations to enact anti-abuse policies; and (f) build knowledge about the functions of organizational factors that contribute to the problem (I & I, 2006).

**Leadership and Power**

Leadership involves a social influence process in which an individual exerts intentional influence over others to structure activities and relationships in a group or organization (Hoy & Miskel, 2008). The assertion that everyone could lead is not generally accompanied by deep reflection on the implications of this stance (Lumby, 2013). Leadership behaviors can have profound effects on subordinates (Onorato, 2013). Therefore, leadership within organizations should be carried out with oversight and in an ethical manner.

Many states now offer a probationary contract to newly hired educators, allowing administrators to release an educator without cause during this time. These types of contracts can become useful tools with which a bully can gain control over a victim. However, counseling and employee assistance programs, which are there to help employees, can also be used against them.
Olive and Cangemi (2015) explained that employees who may have issues with health, alcohol, drugs, bullying, etc., may have this information given to leaders, such as supervisors who may be bullies, and then have the information used to further torment the victims.

The exercise of power may be seen as a formative or creative force (Fahie, 2014). According to Onorato (2013), unethical leadership does result in workplace bullying. Lumby (2013) explained that what is not fully acknowledged or theorized is the relationship between power and inequalities and the degree of tension that may lie submerged beneath, as workers operate within complex structures of power that create and constrain their opportunities to lead. Leaders have a significant impact on the values created by an organization and society as a whole, and ethical leadership underscores the significance of respect, as leaders who show respect to others allow them to be themselves, with collaborative support, conveying a sense of unconditional worth and appreciation of their contributions (Onorato, 2013).

All employees within the workplace have access to a range of power sources (that could be used inappropriately) and, by exploring power dynamics, a more complex explanation of workplace bullying emerges (Branch et al., 2013). Power may be perceived as donated or lent by those in authority roles or seen as a spontaneous result of individuals’ membership of a community (Lumby, 2013). Being a “tough boss” is not the same as a bullying boss, as the bully boss’s goal is to repeatedly use aggressive behavior that causes physical or psychological torment and arises from unethical, unreasonable, and inappropriate practices (Onorato, 2013). Gaining an understanding about power differences within groups may be beneficial. Moss (2016) explained that political and social psychologists use social dominance theory to explain these differences. Individuals with high social dominance orientation are more likely to have a view of the world as a competitive, dog-eat-dog environment and seek to reinforce inequality between
groups in order to sustain their access to resources such as power, status, and wealth (Moss, 2016). A tough boss may actually bring out qualities such as creativity in employees, while a bully boss would only stifle or prevent those qualities.

**Organizational Climate**

Bullying in the workplace may be an organizational problem and not always tied to the pathology of a few bad employees because, in most cases, many employees are involved and range from being bullies to silent witnesses (Parker, 2014). Abusive leadership is a societal problem and also a challenge that faces organizations, and schools in particular (Khumala, 2019). Sorrell (2015) stated that bullying is about the climate that individuals work in and not about the individuals themselves. Organizations themselves create the environment conducive for bullying to take place (Smith & Coel, 2018). Therefore, employees tend to interpret leadership in the organization as reflective of the intentions of the organization (Samnani & Singh, 2016). While Ryan (2016) stressed that bullies may convince themselves that their actions are justified, he added that bullying is ultimately so corrosive to the work environment and is enabled when nothing is done to stop the abuser. Bullying erodes employees’ implicit expectations from their organization, which may lead to frustration, anger, and silence as a way to survive (Rai & Agarwal, 2018). Research revealed less than ideal outcomes for those considering long careers in the field of education, as the current climate uses bullying to remove seasoned educators from their jobs (Sorrell, 2015). With a national teacher shortage, is it crucial to stop any action that may cause educators to leave or avoid the field altogether.

Organizations usually are a conglomeration of features attributed to certain types of cultures (Pilch & Turska, 2015). Organizations that move away from what is considered professional behavior, when there is no policy about behavior and when tough management is
preferred, can result in an environment of workplace bullying (Sorrell, 2015). Many of the traits exhibited by bullies bear a high degree of correlation with the traits considered to be admirable in leaders including terms like tough, hard-nosed, and no-nonsense, while leadership traits such as charismatic, risk-taking, determined, and persuasive also are closely linked to sociopathic behavior (Olive & Cangemi, 2015). In many cases, the same traits that were so desired have become those that are causing the issue of bullying within an organization. Leaders tend to implement their own personal beliefs and standards when developing working missions, goals, structures, and procedures (Murphy, 2013).

The current educational system might be especially ripe for bullying behaviors to persist, because when bullying is institutionalized by a nation’s educational policy by holding schools to unreachable goals, punishing them when they do not meet those goals, publicizing the punishment, and generally ruling with fear, it stands to reason that schools become places where bullying behaviors proliferate: It seems conceivable that as irrational pressures on humans increase, irrational human behaviors also increase, with bullying between adults being but one of those behaviors (Anonymous, 2012). The pressure placed on administrators can impact the way they treat their educators and ultimately lead to the bullying of staff, even when this is not the administrators’ intention. Gray and Gardiner (2013) added that when incivility is not addressed in a school, the workplace becomes a site where hostility and bullying are allowed to flourish.

Bullying in organizations should decrease if organizations make a sincere effort to transform the organizational culture that allows bullying (Murphy, 2013). An organization can create a culture of respect in which innovation, performance, and healthy communication can flourish when it adopts a bully-free environment (Richardson & McCord, 2001). Therefore, organizations that want to avoid an environment in which bullying occurs generally have three
options: (a) create a culture that does not tolerate bullying actions and ensure that human resource practices support actions that eliminate this destructive behavior; (b) upper management must set standards that will not tolerate the destructive actions of bullies; and (c) employers need to develop screening techniques that preclude bullies from being hired (Parker, 2014). Only through sharing various views and doing what is best by considering others’ perspectives is there any hope of comprehending the full nature of the phenomenon (Crawshaw, 2009).

Many of the incidences of workplace bullying can be attributed to the particularities of the workplace environment (D’Cruz & Noronha, 2016). Unfortunately, it is difficult to alter the organizational governance in the workplace, causing a much greater task to remove it entirely from the workplace (D’Cruz & Noronha, 2016). Richardson and McCord (2001) purported that the issue of bullying should not be addressed simply to avoid lawsuits or other negative reactions and Pilch and Turska (2015) agree that the culture of hierarchy seems to be in favor of bullying behaviors, as large bureaucratic structures may not notice employees’ problems and authority may be abused. Workplace bullying has become a serious problem that affects a significant proportion of professionals and is growing (Ariza-Montes, Muniz, Leal-Rodriguez, & Leal-Millan, 2014). The increase in reported bullying incidence may be an indicator that the problem is not being resolved and needs to be addressed immediately.

In organizations where individuals are together, the role and importance of communication is great, and in educational organizations, the role of communication cannot be denied as it enables individuals to act together and understand one another (Memduhoglu, 2015). Employee emotional abuse (EEA) is a repetitive, targeted, and destructive form of communication that is directed by more powerful members at work toward those less powerful (Lutgen-Sandvik, 2003). Language involves both verbal and nonverbal aspects and, in its
complexity, is the first weapon of many workplace bullies (Dzurec et al., 2014). Given the research of the importance of communication from Memduhoglu (2015) and the information Parker (2014) mentions with employee involvement shows the atmosphere responsible for breeding bullying environments.

Pilch and Turska (2015) stressed that exposure to bullying in the workplace can be a serious social stressor, having important consequences for the victim, the co-workers, and the whole organization. It is also understood to be a multi-causal phenomenon, and it is the result of individual differences between workers, deficiencies in the work environment, and situational factors (Pilch & Turska, 2015). There is no legitimacy for the power relations of bullying as they only serve to exert negative and damaging control in the long run (Dzurec et al., 2014). A common lament from bullying targets who reported the behavior to their employer is that their complaints either were ignored or the employer made the situation even worse (Yamada, 2010). With these outcomes, it is no wonder that individuals are afraid to speak up when they are experiencing being bullied. An organization must be able to recognize and rid itself of the performance and talent-robbing behavior of bullying or risk losing their single most important competitive asset – their talented employees (Richardson & McCord, 2001).

Future Directions

Yamada (2010) stressed that the American legal system has been somewhat slow to respond to workplace bullying compared to other institutional stakeholders. Despite considerable advancements in recent decades, there is much more that requires attention, especially the key aspects of the definition itself, the development of a guiding theory, investigation of the impacts of various workplace levels and structures such as groups, and the efficacy of interventions (Branch et al., 2013). Many challenges remain, particularly in relation to its theoretical
foundations and efficacy of prevention and management strategies (Branch et al., 2013). When staff is in conflict, the work of educating students becomes clouded by the discord (Gray & Gardiner, 2013). Students may be those who pay the ultimate price when it comes to administrators bullying educators as they see first-hand the destructive impact on teachers, along with their presentation and morale.

Anti-bullying advocates have been pushing legislation to protect workers who are not in a protected class (Maurer, 2013). Bullying has no boundaries and can affect anyone in any position, at any time; it follows no rules and can have severe lasting impacts on the victim. It is to be expected that an organization going through major changes will stimulate bullying processes, especially for employees who lack decision authority and who experience conflicting demands (Oxenstierna et al., 2012). Power arises from dependency and the more an individual depends on another for reaching goals and gaining resources, the less power they have in the relationship (Liao, Wee, & Liu, 2017). The value of written policies associated with preventive and management interventions requires further research attention, especially because of its overwhelming use in organizations as a measure to reduce or manage workplace bullying (Branch et al., 2013). Care in collaboration must take place to translate findings from research and practice into effective prevention and intervention strategies (Crawshaw, 2009).

Much more research is needed to know the impact of principal mistreatment on victimized teacher’s mental and physical well-being, classroom teaching, relationships with students, involvement in school-wide improvement efforts, and student learning, as well as familiarity with laws and organizational policies associated with workplace mistreatment and with ways to take individual and collective action in cases of mistreatment is warranted (I & I, 2006). Unfortunately for many, these changes will happen too late to stop the emotional toll
bullying has had on them. Analyzing the work environment may be a bit too little, and a bit too late, therefore, those individuals should receive assistance in order to deal with their experience of being a victim of workplace bullying (Notelaers, Vermunt, Baillien, Einarsen, & De Witte, 2011). Another relevant venue is to address the possibility whether the observed effects of workplace bullying are independent of earlier exposure to stressful events or whether they actually have additive or even interactive effects which might make it easier to address the causal nature of workplace bullying on mental health complaints (Verkuil et al., 2015). Although previous research has consistently cited the field of education as a high risk profession for negative workplace relationships, there has been little consideration of the impact of workplace bullying for those involved (Fahie & Devin, 2012). Employees should not fear or stress going to work due to bullying situations they experience or witness.

**Summary**

The majority of workplace bullying is perpetuated by supervisors, and targets have few options for theoretically managing these situations, as they are rendered powerless by their abusive supervisors, complicit organizations and their need to stay employed, since they are financially dependent on the abuser (Parker, 2014). The majority of bullying targets are faced with two choices: either endure the abuse or leave (Grigoryan & Weisdorn, 2019). The culture of hierarchy seems to be in favor of bullying behaviors, as large bureaucratic structures, employees’ problems may not be noticed, and authority may be abused (Pilch & Turska, 2015). This unfair balance in power makes it even more difficult for an educator to combat and end any bullying they are experiencing from an administrator.

Bullying closely resembles domestic violence, as both were shrouded in silence before being brought to the attention of the public (Namie, 2003). Awareness that workplace bullying
exists in educational settings and an understanding of the underlying factors that contribute to the bullying of teachers is necessary to intervene and/or prevent it (Anjum et al., 2019). Ryan (2016) added that when nothing is done to stop the bullying, it is effectively enabled, and often the person who sets about making the lives of others miserable does so simply because he or she can. Even though the legal liability that may eventually stem from proposed laws is still hypothetical, the cost of bullying behavior to an organization and to its employees is simply too great to be ignored (Parker, 2014). Creating a bully-free environment is a proactive step to improve a company’s strategic position in a highly competitive global economy (Richardson & McCord, 2001).

The research indicates there are many varying factors and conclusions about the phenomenon of bullying. Aranda (2018) indicated that because of a plethora of factors contributing to what constitutes bullying and the number of types of organizations represented in the exploration of workplace bullying, researchers continue to try and search for a definitive definition of workplace bullying. While early on it was found that poor performers were more likely to experience bullying, new research has suggested that those who excel in their positions are just as likely, if not more so, to experience this phenomenon (Moss, 2016), showing that no one in the workplace is safe from experiencing bullying by a supervisor or administrator. Harassing supervision can be an imperfect response to a set of imperfect circumstances, as it may emerge as a rational response to an irrational system (Stoelinga, 2011). Workplace abuse can be perpetrated by and through communication and is often the result of an antagonistic use of language within organizations, therefore, should be a key area of interest (Lutgen-Sandvik, 2003). Some states have brought forth legislation to help protect employees in the workplace from bullying, but there has yet to be a federal law that protects employees from this same
bullying, which is due to the high cost to the government in order to enact such a law (Maurer, 2013). If not addressed, though, many educators may be concerned for their own safety and security at school and decide to move to another school or otherwise leave the teaching profession entirely as a consequence of victimization experiences and/or ineffectual school response (Moon, Saw, & McCluskey, 2020).

Gary Namie, PhD, WBI Research Director, lays the blame for workplace bullying on the employer, who he says is failing to take responsibility for prevention and correction (Industrial Safety & Hygiene News, 2020). The impact of workplace bullying on organizations is primarily financial, while physical and psychological health issues tend to be the most common repercussions for the targets of workplace bullying (Trott, 2017). In chaotic organizations where protective policies are non-existent, supervisors seem to have legitimate power to bully others (Pheko, 2018). All organizations must have an understanding of the importance of employees and leaders working together in order to aid the organization in growing, wherein human capital is being of great importance (Akram, Li, & Akram, 2018).

CHAPTER THREE: METHODS

Overview

The purpose of this phenomenological study was to listen to educators’ voices regarding their experiences of bullying by administrators in order to develop an understanding of this phenomenon. This chapter provides an overview of the methods used to carry out this transcendental phenomenological study, including design rationale, research questions, setting/site, participant information, research procedures, researcher’s role, and a description of data collection and data analysis. The chapter ends with an explanation about trustworthiness and ethical considerations along with a summary of the study.
Design

It is appropriate to use qualitative research when a problem or issue needs to be explored and a detailed understanding can only be established by talking directly with people and allowing them to tell the stories unencumbered by what is expected or has been presented in the literature (Creswell, 2013). Phenomenology is the study of the world as it appears to individuals after laying aside prevailing understanding of those phenomena and revisiting their experience of the phenomena (Gall, Gall, and Borg, 2007). Phenomenology attempts to eliminate everything that represents a prejudgment, setting aside presuppositions, and reaching a transcendental state of freshness and openness (Moustakas, 1994). Lester (1999) stressed that phenomenological methods are particularly effective for bringing out the experiences and perceptions of individuals from their own perspectives, and therefore, challenging structural or normative assumptions. Moustakas (1994) explained the investigator abstains from making suppositions, focuses on a specific topic freshly and naively, constructs a question or problem to guide the study, and derives findings that will provide the basis for further research and reflection. Conducting this type of research may empower individuals to share their stories, hear their voices, and minimize the power relationships that often exist between a researcher and the participants in a study (Creswell, 2013). This study applied a transcendental phenomenological research design that portrayed a phenomenon and gave voice to the participants in the study.

There are a variety of approaches to phenomenological research, but the approach chosen for this study is transcendental phenomenology. Transcendental phenomenology takes a fresh look at a phenomenon, while hermeneutic phenomenology takes previous views into account when looking at the phenomenon. In hermeneutic phenomenology, prejudgments are corrected in view of the text, the understanding of which leads to new prejudgments (Moustakas, 1994). It
involves writing a description of the phenomenon, maintaining a strong relation to the topic of inquiry and balancing the parts of the writing to the whole (Creswell, 2013). A hermeneutic study requires a reflective interpretation of the interview during which the researcher considers and examines their own biases and presuppositions in order to avoid imposing personal views on the participant’s experience (Rockinson-Szapkiw & Spaulding, 2014). Whereas the transcendental phenomenological approach engages in disciplined and systematic efforts to set aside prejudgments regarding the phenomenon (known as the Epoch process) in order to be as far as possible free of preconceptions, beliefs, and knowledge of the phenomenon from prior experience and professional studies – to be completed open, receptive, and naïve in listening to and hearing research participants describe their experience of the phenomenon being investigated (Moustakas, 1994). As Creswell (2013) explained Moustakas’s (1994) transcendental phenomenology is focused less on the interpretations of the researcher and more on a description of the experiences of participants.

Transcendental phenomenology is a scientific study of the appearance of things where the challenge is to explicate the phenomenon in terms of its constituents and possible meanings and arriving at an understanding of the essences of the experience (Moustakas, 1994). Creswell (2013) explained that Moustakas focuses on one of Husserl’s concepts, known as epoché (or bracketing), in which investigators set aside their experiences, as much as possible, to take a fresh perspective toward the phenomenon under examination. It is called transcendental because it moves beyond the everyday to the pure ego where everything is perceived freshly, as if for the first time (Moustakas, 1994).

Through this methodology, the attempt was to capture the voices of educators who had experienced bullying from their administrators. Davenport (2014) explained the way to
understand the experience of another person is to experience a phenomenon as directly as possible, and when it is not possible, a direct immersion into the phenomenon with the participant through data collection procedures is warranted. Phenomenology is rooted in asking questions that give direction and focus to meaning and in themes that sustain an inquiry, awaken further interest and concern, and account for passionate involvement with whatever is being experienced (Moustakas, 1994).

**Research Questions**

The following research questions will be implemented to guide this phenomenological study.

CQ: What are the lived experiences of public school educators who have experienced administrator bullying?

SQ1: How do public school educators describe the impact on their health and well-being from administrator bullying?

SQ2: How do public school educators attempt to resolve issues of administrator bullying within their school setting?

SQ3: How do public school educators attempt to bring the issue of administrator bullying to the attention of their school district?

SQ4: How have public school educators’ perceptions of the field of education changed since experiencing administrator bullying?

**Setting**

Academia was once considered a safe place to work, however, bullying has become part of the academic landscape (Klein, 2009). The setting for this study included K-12 public school districts in the United States. Participants were chosen based on their availability and willingness
to participate with complete transparency along with their geographical location, with no attention paid to a specific region of the country. Davenport (2014) added that the purpose of qualitative sampling is to describe a particular phenomenon in detail, not to generalize to a particular population or setting. This setting of public school districts was chosen because of an increasing awareness of incidents of administrator bullying relayed through professional relationships and research on the topic. The public school setting contains the majority of educators in the United States. The demographics for this population included: age range, gender, ethnicity, years of teaching experience, and grade level(s) taught. The proposed demographics consisted of participants ranging in age from 26 years old through 51 years old with varying years of experience. Seventy percent were female and 30% were male. Ethnicity is primarily Caucasian and African-American. This study included educators from various geographic settings and various grade levels. Fifty percent were from urban/inner-city schools and 50% from suburban/rural schools, and 50% from the elementary setting and 50% from the secondary setting. The study was conducted with educators in public school settings to give voice to educators’ bullying experiences from administrators.

**Participants**

Detailed information was required about who the participants were, how they were recruited, and that informed consent was presented to participants about the study’s purpose, procedures, risks, benefits, and the participant’s rights in a manner readily understandable for the person’s cultural background, language, and educational background as suggested by Rockinson-Szapkiw and Spaulding (2014). Creswell (2013) explained that qualitative researchers gather up-close information by actually talking directly to people and seeing them behave and act within their context.
The K-12 public school educators in this study must have experienced documented proof of administrator bullying including grievance filing, union issue, legal representation, letters of reprimand, teacher evaluations/reviews, or other pertinent documentation. Recruitment of the participants came from professional educator referrals or they were identified from cases of administrator bullying from state and national professional educator associations. Contact for inclusion in the study occurred via telephone or email to begin rapport with participants.

It is essential that all participants have experienced the phenomenon being studied, therefore, criterion sampling works well (Creswell, 2013). The researcher should choose the sample size that has the best opportunity for reaching data saturation (Fusch & Ness, 2015). Creswell (2013) recommended interviewing five to 25 participants in order to reach saturation. The sample size consisted of 10 participants and were selected by their willingness to share their experiences and had required documentation. A general guideline for sample size in qualitative research is not only to study a few sites or individuals but also to collect extensive detail about each site or individual studied (Creswell, 2013). This research included participants from 10 different school districts across the United States.

**Table 1**

**Participant List**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Co-Researcher Pseudonym</th>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>Location</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Julie</td>
<td>37</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>Midwest</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Natalie</td>
<td>42</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>South</td>
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<td>Erica</td>
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<td>F</td>
<td>Northwest</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sarah</td>
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<td>F</td>
<td>Midwest</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Amanda</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>Northeast</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hanna</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>South</td>
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</table>
Prior to submitting the documentation to the Institutional Review Board (IRB), written approval from each participant’s superintendent was obtained, for the specific educators involved in this study. After permission is granted, copies of approval forms and the completed IRB application forms will be submitted to the IRB (see Appendix A). Creswell (2013) outlined the major procedural steps in the process to include: (a) determining if the research problem is best examined using a phenomenological approach, (b) describing the phenomenon of interest to study, (c) recognizing and specifying the broad philosophical assumptions of phenomenology, (d) collecting data from individuals who have experienced the phenomenon consisting of in-depth and multiple interviews with participants, and (e) focusing on gathering data that will lead to a textual and structural description of the experiences and ultimately providing an understanding of the common experiences of the participants.

Sampling methods described in the participants section were used. The concept of purposeful sampling is used in qualitative research, as the inquirer selects individuals and sites for study because they can purposefully inform an understanding of the research problem and central phenomenon in the study (Creswell, 2013). Informed consent was obtained from the participants (see Appendix B). This involved presenting information to participants about the study’s purpose, procedures, risks, benefits, and the participant’s rights in a manner readily understandable (Rockinson-Szapkiw & Spaulding, 2014).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>Region</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>George</td>
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<td>M</td>
<td>Midwest</td>
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<tr>
<td>David</td>
<td>51</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>Northeast</td>
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<tr>
<td>Michael</td>
<td>41</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>South</td>
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<tr>
<td>Bethany</td>
<td>51</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>West</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
Data collection consisted of the following: (a) referrals and/or documented cases, (b) individual interviews (see Appendix C for questions), and (c) a guided journal reflection activity (see Appendix D for instructions and questions). Creswell (2013) explained that qualitative data collection via the Internet has the advantages of cost and time efficiency and provides participants with time and spare flexibility that allows them more time to consider and respond to requests for information.

Technology based methods were used to record and store data. Some principles regarding data handling and storage include developing a master list of types of information and developing a data collection matrix as a visual means of locating and identifying information (Creswell, 2013). The physical information is stored in a locked cabinet and computer-based information is password protected.

**The Researcher’s Role**

The researcher is considered to be a key instrument by collecting his or her own data through examining documents, observing behavior, and interviewing participants (Creswell, 2013). The researcher engages in disciplined and systematic efforts to set aside prejudgments, biases, and preconceived ideas regarding the phenomenon being investigated (known as the epoché process; Moustakas, 1994). The researcher needs to be completely open, receptive, and naïve in listening to and hearing research participants describe their experiences of the phenomenon being investigated (Moustakas, 1994).

The participants came from professional educator referrals and documented cases of administrator bullying, therefore, I will had no personal or professional relationship with any participant. The participants came from public school districts across the United States, with no attention paid to any specific region. I was able to open up and become more vulnerable about
my past experiences with administrator bullying. Opening up to participants can be difficult, although a researcher needs to be able to show a relation to participants but not want to over-share information to make the participants feel uncomfortable or as if there is a lack of care with their experience and situation. It was also important to help guide the participants through their interviews in order to obtain enough detail and information needed for this study. The participants needed to be able to convey their stories effectively, however, when someone has experienced something for themselves he or she may omit important details that help add to a situation. I tried to create as strong of a relationship as possible with the participants in order to show support and to demonstrate the level of dedication to the study.

Data Collection

Whatever philosophical standpoint the researcher is taking and whatever the data collection method, the process will involve the generation of large amounts of data (Sutton & Austin, 2015). A general principle involved is that phenomenology-based research is of minimum structure and maximum depth (Lester, 1999). Data triangulation occurred in three stages: (a) referrals and/or documented cases, (b) individual interviews, and (c) a guided journal reflection activity. Data triangulation is the use of multiple forms of data collection to increase credibility (Rockinson-Szapkiw & Spaulding, 2014). This process usually involves corroborating evidence from different sources to shed light on a theme or perspective which provides validity to the findings (Creswell, 2013).

Stage 1 Referrals and/or Documented Cases

Potential participants were selected from referrals by those who have indicated a bullying incident had occurred. Bringing up this study has elicited much discussion about bullying that has occurred among co-workers and their acquaintances. Also, documented cases were
investigated to attain possible contact with those involved. Legal documents filed with attorneys, courts, or school boards were provided to the researcher and were analyzed to determine the credibility of the case to ensure it met the outlined criteria of administrator bullying. Participants also provided notes, if they had them, that were taken at the time of the incident to help verify the occurrence. This initial step provided a list of possible participants in the study and channeled the information into demographics of years of experience, grade level taught, gender, age, and school demographic setting classification (i.e. rural, urban, suburban). There must have been verifiable documented proof of an incident to make sure there was a valid claim of bullying.

Additional research was completed regarding the specific school and district once participants were chosen to help the researcher better understand the school environment that the bullying took place. This information included, but was not limited to: school demographics, school age, school location, district policies as they relate to bullying/harassment, and licensure requirements for employees in instructional and leadership positions. This information was used to give a well-rounded perspective of the school and district in which the bullying took place as well as to provide any additional federal guidelines for funding that were in place during that time.

**Stage 2 Individual Interviews**

Interviews are a particular method by which study results reach data saturation (Fusch & Ness, 2015). Interviews conducted in this study were semi-structured with open-ended questions which provided rich interpretive data to aid in the understanding of the bullying phenomenon. DeJonckheere and Vaughn (2019) explained semi-structured in-depth interviews are commonly used in qualitative research, as they typically consist of a dialogue between researcher and participant, guided by a flexible interview protocol and supplemented by follow-up questions,
probes, and comments. Interviews can be conducted in multiple ways (i.e., face to face, telephone, text/email, individual, group, brief, in-depth) and provide deep exploration of participant thoughts and experiences with insight into participant perspectives (DeJonckheere & Vaughn, 2019). Conducting interviews is taxing and in phenomenological interviews, asking appropriate questions and relying on participants to discuss the meaning of their experiences requires patience and skill on the part of the researcher (Creswell, 2013). A semi-structured data collection method should involve caution to be careful not to steer the participant’s answers too much to obtain inductive data (Elo et al., 2014).

Creswell (2013) listed the steps for interviewing as follows: (a) decide on the research questions that will be answered, which should be open-ended, general, and focused on understanding the central phenomenon of the study, (b) identify interviewees who can best answer these questions based on the purposeful sampling procedures, (c) determine what type of interview is practical while netting the most useful information, (d) use adequate recording procedures, (e) design and use an interview protocol or guide which contains approximately five to seven open-ended questions and ample space between the questions to write responses to the interviewee’s comments, (f) refine the interview questions and procedures through pilot testing selected on the basis of convenience, access, and geographic proximity, (g) determine the place for the interview, (h) obtain consent from the interviewee by explaining the purpose of the study, amount of time required to complete the interview, plans for using the results, and offering a copy of the report, and (i) use good interview procedures by being a good listener, staying to the questions, completing the interview within the specified time, being respectful and courteous, and offering few questions and advice. Sutton and Austin (2015) explained that audio- or video-recording data collection recordings must be transcribed verbatim before data analysis can begin,
as it can take an experienced researcher/transcriber up to 8 hours to transcribe one 45-minute audio-recorded interview, a process that will generate 20-30 pages of written dialogue. Davenport (2014) stressed there is no right or wrong, winning or losing, correct or incorrect answers to the research questions in the study.

Creswell (2013) summarized data collection for phenomenology as: (a) finding multiple individuals who have experienced the phenomenon, (b) interviews and sometimes multiple interviews with the same individual, (c) bracketing one’s experiences, and (d) transcribing and storing data. A folder of field notes can complement audio-taped interviews, which allows the researcher to maintain and comment upon impressions, environmental contexts, behaviors, and nonverbal cues that may not be adequately captured through the interview recording (Sutton & Austin, 2015). These notes can provide important context to the interpretation of data and can help remind the researcher of situational factors that may be important during data analysis (Sutton & Austin, 2015).

For this study interviews were conducted in a very informal manner and were either face-to-face in person or via electronic video communication. There was no order in which interview questions were asked and most were answered during the explanation of the events in question and not in a typical interview fashion. Participants should feel as if they are telling their story and not simply answering questions. At the end of the interview additional questions were asked, when they were not covered during the participants recollection of the event. The interview questions were semi-structured and are provided below as well as in Appendix C of this dissertation and have been tested for validity and reliability with a fellow administrative colleague.
1. Please tell me what happened leading up to the bullying you experienced by an administrator.

2. Please describe what you experienced while working under this administrator.

3. How long had you worked for/under/with this administrator?

4. What kind training did you receive while in college, with any employer, or through any other means on how to handle any bullying situations with respect to administrators?

5. In what ways did you attempt to resolve the issue/conflict you were experiencing?

6. If other employees in the district or school board were aware of the issue, what did they do in response to knowing?

7. Explain any impact this situation has had on your health and well-being?

8. How has this incident impacted your view of the field of education?

9. What else would you like to share about administrator bullying to help in understanding your experience?

Questions one, two, three, and four are knowledge-based questions to help the participant describe the bullying incident and give an overview of the participant’s background and relationship with others in the district. These questions were meant for the participant to have the chance to share their experience in a relaxed and non-threatening way with as much time as possible provided to answer these questions. Participants were able to take breaks as needed as the subject matter being discussed could be sensitive to the participants.

Quantitative research methods can be used to determine how individuals undertake particular behaviors, while qualitative methods can help researchers to understand how and why such behaviors take place (Sutton & Austin, 2015). Fusch and Ness (2015) stressed that hearing and understanding the perspective of others might be one of the most difficult dilemmas facing
the researcher. Qualitative work requires reflection both before and during the research process by the researcher as a way of providing context and understanding for readers; reflexivity requires researchers to reflect upon and clearly articulate their position and subjectivities (worldview, biases, perspectives), so that readers will be able to better understand the filters through which questions were asked, data was gathered and analyzed, and findings were reported (Sutton & Austin, 2015).

Question four is both knowledge-based as well as helped to address research sub-question one. This question looked to identify any training that was provided to the participant, either by the employer or in a school/university setting. This also helped the researcher to understand the direction in which the participant took in the issue resolution process and gain a better understanding of why the participant chose that direction. A common theme to bullying practices in a specific study showed there was intent to wear down the victim psychologically, enough to get them to leave (Sorrell, 2015). As King and Piotrowski (2015) indicated, administrators who bully likely have bullied more than one victim.

Questions five and six sought to answer what direction the participant did take to resolve the bullying they were experiencing, and to find out what, if any, other employees of the district or school board were aware of or involved in the bullying incident and how they attempted to resolve the situation. These questions also gained the understanding of any other colleagues who may have been aware of the situation and if they were able to assist in any way to help come to a resolution or if they provided support to the participant. The direct involvement where the administrator is the bully is very problematic because that administrator will probably be unsympathetic to efforts aimed at addressing and/or curbing activities and may even impede with
any constructive steps in that direction (King & Piotrowski, 2015). Parker (2014) stressed that alternative solutions to this type of destructive leadership must be identified.

Question seven answered the impact the bullying has had on the participant’s health and well-being and to understand where their mental and emotional state were currently. The impact made on the participant from the bullying incident helped to identify the extent of any long-lasting damage that may have been done. The effects of bullying have a huge impact on the well-being of the bullied individual and those closest to him/her (Olive & Cangemi, 2015). Only through sharing various views and trying to consider others’ perspectives will there be the ability to comprehend the full nature of the phenomenon (Crawshaw, 2009).

Question eight helped the researcher to understand how the bullying incident had changed the impression of the field of education on the participant. This question addressed not only the participant’s view for the field as a career, but also their view of how it related to students and families of both students and employees. This can be a crucial component, as the field of education plays a pivotal role in a students’ life and their experiences during this time shape who they are to become later. Concern for others must be placed at the top of the list of priorities of twenty-first-century schools (De Sterckke et al., 2015). As Bhatia (2013) indicated, teacher abuse is highly prevalent yet remains undetected and under reported. Research may also help to understand why there is such a teacher shortage across the United States.

Question nine allowed the participants the opportunity to share any information about their experiences that were not already been discussed. This question is very important as it allowed the participant to share any additional information they felt was pertinent and may not have been covered with another question or to emphasize on an area that really made an impact on them.
All together these questions answered the central question of the study: What are the lived experiences of public school educators who have experienced administrator bullying?

**Stage 3 Guided Journal Reflection Activity**

Prior to and following the individual interviews, participants were provided with the opportunity to reflect upon the interactions with a guided journal reflection activity. Participants were required to have a minimum of four journal entries including a pre- and post-interview set of questions, each with a minimum of 20 minutes of reflection time which was determined based on the log-in times with the journaling website; reflection time did not necessarily mean writing time, but time spent reflecting and making additional notes or comments as the participant saw fit, and one full length page, including a minimum of one paragraph for each question being asked. There was one journal entry required prior to the individual interview in which participants were asked to answer a set of provided questions to help prepare and jog any memory of the events that occurred as well as a timeline created to help the researcher to connect dates and details. Participants may have had more than one entry prior to their interview, but a minimum of one was required, along with the timeline. If a participant had not completed the journal entry before the interview was to take place, the interview was postponed allowing them to complete this step. This step was a very important reflection piece for the participant to help with the recollection of the event that occurred.

After their interview, participants were required to have a minimum of one additional journal entry to answer the post-interview questions. Participants had an unlimited number of journal entries during this time, but there was a cut-off date for entries to be included in the research, which was three months after the interview had taken place. Participants were required to have a minimum total of four journal entries for the duration of the study. At the end of the
study, all journals were turned over to the sole ownership of the participants and they were asked to change their log-in information if they wished to keep the journal. Davenport (2014) explained that guided journal reflections enable participants to voice sensitive, personal thoughts that they may have been uncomfortable sharing face to face. Participants were reminded to keep the journals completely confidential and not to share them with anyone else. The journal instructions and questions are provided below as well as in Appendix D of this dissertation.

**Journal Instructions**

This section contains the information that was provided to participants for completing their journal entries. Participants were required to complete the pre-interview questions before interviews could take place, these were intended to help participants remember details of importance and not leave out key information during the interview process. The post-interview questions were meant to help participants in making sure that all areas and pertinent information was covered and if anything was forgotten or left out it could be addressed here. Participants were also welcome to contact the researcher to add additional information along with the responses they provided for the post-interview questions.

Please remember that anything you write in this journal will be kept completely confidential and will not be shared with anyone else. If you are including other individuals in your writing, please make sure to list their position/relationship to you. Names will be changed of everyone that you include in your writing. Your journal must have the initial entry and timeline completed before your scheduled interview. If you are unable to complete these tasks please let the researcher know so the interview may be rescheduled.

You can write about the same event/time period for all four entries or different events/time periods each entry (i.e. if the bullying took place over multiple school years or days
you could designate each entry as a different year or day). You should write for 15-20 minutes for each entry if you can, with a minimum of one full page in length. You must have a minimum of one full paragraph per question being answered. The days you choose to write are up to you, given they are within the timeline of the study. Don’t worry about spelling or grammar. If you run out of things to say, simply repeat what you have already written. Keep writing about the topic until the time is up. Write only for yourself. You are writing for yourself and no one else. Remember this writing will be kept completely confidential and will be used with the hope to end bullying by administrators.

Pre-Interview Questions

1. Is there anything specific you want to make sure that you mention or touch on during the interview?

2. Please create a timeline of the events that occurred, beginning with the start of employment with the district in which the bullying incident took place. If there are any other important dates before this time, please make note of those.

3. How did this experience make you feel? Did it change your view of yourself or others?

Post-Interview Questions

1. What have you missed in your interview that you would like to make sure is mentioned?

2. What advice/recommendations do you have for future educators?

3. How has retelling your story brought new information to your attention?

Pre-Interview question one allowed the participant to make notes to ensure that any pertinent information that may potentially had been forgotten during the interview was discussed. The participant used this question to make their own notes on their incident to aid them in recalling the event.
Pre-Interview question two had the participant create a timeline of events to help ensure the recollection was correct and gave a general timeline and sequence to the events that occurred.

Pre-Interview question three instructed the participant to discuss how the events made them feel while recalling the events. This was intended to bring up strong feelings regarding the event to better understand the magnitude and impact the bullying has had on the participant.

Post-Interview question one gave the participant the opportunity to make note of any information that was missed or excluded from the interview. In some cases, this may also have allowed for items that were too intense to mention during the interview.

Post-Interview question two helped to show how the bullying incident had affected the participant’s view of the field of education. By allowing the participant to give their advice it showed if there was any animosity toward the field of education and if they felt the bullying was due to not being fully prepared or other reasons.

Post-Interview question three had the participant reflect on their bullying event to determine if anything was missed during the interview or may have been overlooked while they were experiencing the event. This was especially important to ensure accuracy of the event being researched to ensure validity.

Journal access was provided to participants once they were accepted into the process. Interviews were be set up at a minimum of one month from the date journal access was received by the participant to allow time for the participant to answer and review the pre-interview questions. Journals were then turned over to the sole ownership of each participant three months after their interview had taken place. This allowed time for participants to reflect on the interview and ask any additional questions of the researcher they had.
Upon acceptance into the study participants were provided with access to an electronic journaling system. Participants were required to utilize this system a minimum of four times throughout the process. Once the initial journal entry was completed, participants then completed an interview with the researcher where the bullying incident was able to be discussed in greater detail for clarification. The researcher used the documentation provided by the participants along with the interviews and journal entries in an attempt to provide enough information to reach data saturation. Ideally the researcher saw the same events mentioned multiple times across the data to ensure an accurate recollection of the event being studied. There is a direct link between data triangulation and data saturation, as triangulation ensures saturation (Fusch & Ness, 2015). It is important to understand the collection of data is among the most difficult tasks for the novice researcher as it requires achieving data saturation, which occurs when the researcher ceases to find additional data that informs the process or action being studied (Rockinson-Szapkiw & Spaulding, 2014).

The sequence I employed for data collection was referrals, interviews, and journaling. The rationale for this sequence was for referrals to aid in identifying prospective participants. Referrals can act as a bridge to communication, as some individuals may feel apprehension in sharing such a destructive phenomenon with an individual they do not know. Sorrell (2015) screened study participants to ensure they were knowledgeable about the actual definition of workplace bullying, along with purposeful sampling, to gain a sample of educators that truly experienced workplace bullying. Conducting interviews are a method by which one’s study results reach data saturation (Fusch & Ness, 2015). Use of field notes to complement interviews allows the researcher to maintain and comment upon impressions, environmental contexts, behaviors, and nonverbal cues that may not be adequately captured during the interview (Sutton
Guided journal reflections enable participants to voice sensitive, personal thoughts and reflections they may have been uncomfortable sharing during the interview (Davenport, 2014). This activity was requested to have completion submitted within two weeks of being issued.

**Data Analysis**

Qualitative research is about putting oneself in another person’s shoes and seeing the world from that person’s perspective. Therefore, the most important part of data analysis and management is to be true to the participants, as it is their voices the researcher is trying to hear so that they can be interpreted and reported on for others to read and learn from those experiences (Sutton & Austin, 2015). Murphy (2013) indicated there are several ways to analyze data. Davenport (2014) recognized the need to organize the data first by participant, then by the nature of the experience, and finally, by relevance to the research questions.

Sutton and Austin (2015) contend that interpretation of the data depends on the theoretical standpoint taken by researchers, and with a phenomenological approach, it is important that the researcher reflects upon and articulates his or her starting point for analysis; therefore, personal history forms the filter through which the data will be examined. This filter does not diminish the quality or significance of the analysis, as every researcher has his or her own filters that will be explicitly stated and acknowledged so the researcher makes it easier for readers to contextualize the work (Sutton & Austin, 2015). Interpretation is a process that involves abstracting out beyond the codes and themes to the larger meaning of the data, as it begins with the development of the codes, the formation of themes from the codes, and then the organization of themes into larger units of abstraction to make sense of the data (Creswell, 2013).
The clustered themes and meanings are then used to develop the textural descriptions of the experience (Moustakas, 1994). Creswell (2013) explained they are also used to describe the context or setting that influenced how the participants experienced the phenomenon, called imaginative variation or structural description. Creswell (2013) also described a simplified version by Moustakas (1994) of the Stevick-Colaizzi-Keen method as follows:

1. Describe personally experiences with the phenomenon under study to attempt to set aside the researcher’s personal experiences (which cannot be done entirely) so the focus can be directed to the participants in the study.
2. Develop a listing of significant statements that involve nonrepetitive, nonoverlapping statements, meaning horizontalization of the data.
3. Group the significant statements into larger units of information, called “meaning units” or themes.
4. Write a description of “what” the participants experienced which is called a “textural description”.
5. Write a description of “how” the experiences happened which is called “structural description”, as the inquirer reflects on the setting and context in which the phenomenon was experienced.
6. Write a composite description of the phenomenon incorporating both the textural and structural descriptions. This is the “essence” of the experience and represents the culminating aspect of a phenomenological study.

A textural description exposes what the participants in the study experienced with the phenomenon and includes verbatim examples (Creswell, 2013). Audio recordings should be transcribed verbatim, regardless of how intelligible the transcript may be when it is read back
A structural description exposes how the experience happened, as the inquirer reflects on the setting and context in which the phenomenon was experienced (Creswell, 2013). Davenport (2014) added that structural descriptions can offer rich description of how the phenomenon was experienced by participants and combining that with textural descriptions allows the researcher to move to the final steps of data analysis, a formulation of the essence of the experience. The essence of the phenomenon focuses on the common experiences of the participants, as all experiences have an underlying structure (Creswell, 2013). The analysis is about getting underneath what a person is saying to try to truly understand the world from his or her perspective (Sutton & Austin, 2015).

**Trustworthiness**

As qualitative research continues to gain popularity, there is a need for greater disclosure and more sophisticated tools to facilitate researchers in conducting trustworthy qualitative research (Nowell, Norris, White, & Moules, 2017). The concept of trustworthiness, which is a way researchers are able to persuade themselves and readers that their research findings are worthy of attention, was refined with the introduction of the criteria of credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability to parallel the conventional quantitative assessment criteria of validity and reliability (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). It is important to gain the trust of the participants if they are to feel comfortable in revealing their personal experiences. In order to help with the level of trustworthiness there will be initial contact and interaction with each participant, before there is a face-to-face interaction or interview. Time and effort need to be used in order to build rapport with the participants to ensure they are willing and comfortable enough to share their experiences in the most transparent and in-depth way. The personal nature of this dissertation required that the researcher open up about their experiences in order to demonstrate the
vulnerability that needed to be shown as well as the dedication the researcher had to the topic. This area required a longer amount of time in order to build the relationships that were needed in order to have the most effective outcome. This also helped in being able to express the more personal connection and personalities of the participants involved. Kouzes and Posner (2012) explained that one of the clearest and most unambiguous signals of trust is the concern shown for others.

**Credibility**

Researchers must ensure that those participating in research are identified and described accurately to establish credibility (Elo et al., 2014; Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Rockinson-Szapkiw and Spaulding (2014) explained that qualitative researchers can employ the following strategies: prolonged engagement in the field and persistent observation of participants, triangulation (multiple forms of data collection), peer debriefing, negative case analysis, and conducting member checks with participants. This study used triangulation to provide credibility. Creswell (2013) explained that triangulation involves corroborating evidence from different sources to shed light on a theme or perspective, therefore, providing validity to the findings. Member checking was also employed for credibility. This technique solicits participants’ views about the findings of the study and is considered to be the most critical for establishing credibility (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Creswell (2013) explained this involves taking data, analyses, interpretations, and conclusions back to the participants so they are able to judge the accuracy and credibility of the account.

**Dependability and Confirmability**

Davenport (2014) explained that dependability refers to stability and consistency, which is addressed through the provision of rich detail about the context and setting of the study. It
refers to the stability of data over a period of time and under different conditions (Elo et al., 2014). Dependability is enhanced through the establishment of an audit trail (documentation of data collection and analysis procedures employed, typically in appendices) and carrying out the audit by a competent external, disinterested auditor (Rockinson-Szapkiw & Spaulding, 2014). The strategy of keeping an audit trail throughout the data analysis process involves clearly describing the steps and allows the researcher the freedom to make unique research decisions not previously prescribed while still requiring that each decision and the justification for that decision be recorded along the way (Lietz, Langer, & Furman, 2006).

Confirmability is a form of trustworthiness where the results of the study could be confirmed or corroborated by others (Davenport, 2014). It refers to the objectivity, in other words, the potential for congruence between two or more independent people about the data’s accuracy, relevance, or meaning (Elo et al., 2014). Lincoln and Guba (1985) explained peer review or debriefing provides an external check as the role of the peer debriefer is an individual who keeps the researcher honest by asking hard questions about methods, meanings, and interpretations while providing the researcher the opportunity for catharsis by sympathetically listening to the researcher’s feelings. Both the peer and researcher are to keep written accounts of the peer debriefing sessions (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

**Transferability**

Transferability is about presenting the findings in such a detailed way that the study can be duplicated or that a researcher can determine if the findings of the study might be relevant to their study (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). It relies on the reasoning that findings can be generalized or transferred to other settings or groups (Elo et al., 2014). Transferability is increased when the researcher provides thick, rich, descriptions of the context (Rockinson-Szapkiw & Spaulding,
Davenport (2014) stressed strengthening transferability by providing articulated detailed procedures and providing a clear, concise report of the findings. In qualitative investigations, the reader determines transferability of findings, as opposed to the researcher generalizing findings to a population in quantitative investigations (Rockinson-Szapkiw & Spaulding, 2014). This was completed by ensuring all details were included, no matter how trivial they appeared to be, and having the participants review the information being presented in the article. These additional steps were taken to prevent missing information and or misconstruing information that was provided to the researcher from the participant.

**Ethical Considerations**

Rockinson-Szapkiw and Spaulding (2014) explained that ethical principles are critical in the development of a study that uses people as research participants. The first principle involves respect for individuals to be free to make their own decisions on whether to be involved in a study and given enough information about the study to make a reasonable choice (Rockinson-Szapkiw & Spaulding, 2014). Participants were to feel pressured in any way or to feel at ease whether to engage in the study. This information is outlined in the consent letter that all participants were required to sign before taking part in the study.

The second principle focuses on beneficence, therefore, minimizing potential harm to participants and maximizing possible benefits (Rockinson-Szapkiw & Spaulding, 2014). IRB approval provides an added measure to protect the rights of the participants and ensure the study is ethical and moral in its approach. It is important to establish a good level of rapport and empathy to gain depth of information, particularly when investigating issues where the participant has a strong personal stake (Lester, 1999).
The third principle is examining justice by treating people equally and fairly and by not exploiting vulnerable populations (Rockinson-Szapkiw & Spaulding, 2014). A qualitative researcher conveys to participants that they are participating in a study, explains the purpose of the study, and does not engage in deception about the nature of the study (Creswell, 2013). All participants were assured about confidentiality and provided the opportunity to member check both the transcriptions and the data analysis phase of the study.

Creswell (2013) stressed the importance of thinking about ethical issues in qualitative research by examining these issues as they apply to different phases of the research process, as there has been more sensitivity given to potential issues that may arise in collecting data, especially through interviews and observations. Due to the sensitive nature of the topic being discussed, was stressed to the participants they were able to discontinue the study at any time with no questions asked.

Davenport (2014) explained the importance of striving to present information gathered in the study in a professional manner and to the best of the researcher’s ability. The researcher tried to remain neutral during interview sessions and stay focused on the purpose of the study, therefore, not allowing for any judgement of any kind. All data gathered during the study was kept on a password-protected external hard drive along with all documentation placed in a locked fireproof safe that only the researcher had access.

**Summary**

This transcendental phenomenological study focused on describing the phenomenon of administrator bullying of educators. The participants included educators from K-12 public schools. The procedures consisted of identifying a phenomenon to study, bracketing out my own experiences, and collecting data from several individuals who had experienced the phenomenon
(Creswell, 2013). Interviews and guided journal reflections were completed, along with documentation verifying the bullying incident. Data analysis was completed by qualitative methods; giving an epoché, fully describing my own experiences, creating meaningful units, and describing the essence of the phenomenon through textural and structural descriptions. Ethical considerations were employed to maintain a high quality, sensitive study. Ethical principles that currently guide research involving human subjects were initiated out of tragic human experiments, therefore, they are critical in the development of a dissertation that uses people as research participants (Rockinson-Szapkiw & Spaulding, 2014).

The findings are documented in the next two chapters of the study. The process of explicating the phenomenon involved recognizing and describing the qualities where every perception was granted equal value, nonrepetitive constituents of the experience were linked thematically, and a full description was derived (Moustakas, 1994). Chapter Four is reserved for findings specifically in the form of themes (narrative), charts, graphs, and tables with clear and concise description of the contents. Data is clearly and meaningfully integrated into theme development. Chapter Five provides a concise summary of the findings while discussing the implications in light of the relevant literature and theory. Delimitations and limitations explain boundaries and potential weaknesses of the study, leading to recommendations for future research.
CHAPTER FOUR: FINDINGS

Overview

The purpose of this qualitative study was to discover and explore the lived experiences of public school educators who were bullied by school administrators. The study explored the impacts of school administrator bullying by conducting a qualitative transcendental inquiry in order to gain an understanding of the lived experiences of 10 educators who had been bullied. The transcendental phenomenological method was the most appropriate due to data collection by face-to-face and virtual correspondence (due to restrictions from the current pandemic), to obtain participants’ perspectives without the use of quantitative data. This study focused on the perception of bullying by the participants and was not based on the researcher or any statistical measurements.

Chapter 4 provides the results and analysis of the findings which are based on the methodology outlined in chapter 3. The contents and organization are as follows: (a) participants, (b) results, and (c) summary. Following the presentation of individual narratives, my transcendental phenomenological analysis of the data is provided

Participants

The following section details the participants’ accounts of the bullying they experienced, and their personal feelings and beliefs involved. These are summaries of the events that occurred from the perspective of the participant obtained through the research process. Some of the events were very traumatizing for the participants and it was the researcher’s hope that this emotion was able to be portrayed through these summaries.
**Julie: 37-Year-Old Female from the Midwest**

Julie is a veteran teacher with tenure, based on district requirements. She has spent most of her career at two schools, the second with over 10 years of service. After an incident when a fire alarm was pulled, she injured herself helping her students safely exit the building from the second floor. While coming down the stairs there was a bottle-neck, a known problem the school district had looked into resolving, and she was pushed into the railing and her ankle was stepped on by another person (unsure if it was staff or student). She was able to make it out of the building and once to safety she notified her administrator that she was in pain and needed medical care. Her administrator informed her she needed to return to her room with her students and the school nurse would be sent up to look at her injuries. The school nurse never came to the room and it was further determined the nurse was never informed of the situation. During her lunch break she informed the front office that she would be going off campus and heading to a local clinic to have herself checked out. This was over an hour after the incident occurred. While at the clinic, x-rays were taken, and it was determined that she had fractured her ankle and broken two ribs. The clinic recommended she go to the hospital to have everything written up since it occurred in the workplace. She immediately called the school to let them know she would need to take the remainder of the day off. Her administrator called her later in the day to check on her and see how she was doing, letting her know to take as much time as she needed to recover. Julie returned to work the following day with a medical boot on her foot to support her ankle and was told to try and stay off her feet as much as possible. She turned in the necessary paperwork to apply for worker’s compensation. District became involved once worker’s compensation was requested. Then Julie started to notice her workplace was becoming more hostile. Her fellow teachers were very supportive and checked on her often, but administration
started to visit her class on a more consistent basis and started to make comments about her performance and how she was not standing in front of the students to provide instruction. When her formal evaluation came, she received very low marks, putting her onto a plan for improvement, something she had never been on in all her years of teaching. Included in this plan were written instructions on requirements that would need to be met to avoid termination from the school district, along with information stating that administration could stop in at any time to check on her progress. At this time Julie requested to have union representation. The Union came in and met with all parties involved and warned her to be very cautious. At the end of the school year, her administrator let her know that her services would no longer be needed, and she was being let go. According to district guidelines, if a veteran teacher with the District is not being retained by an administrator, that teacher has the right to move to a different school under new administration for no less than one school year. This option was not provided to her, so she once again requested assistance from the Union. The District stepped in and let her know the administrator improperly terminated her and she would be able to retain her position at her current school, under her current administrator. This was the only option provided to her, so she decided to continue with the school the following year, knowing she needed to be very cautious. The day before school started her administrator came in and told her that she would need to move her classroom to another area of the building. The new classroom was significantly smaller and had never been used as a classroom. Her current classroom was then made into a storage area for computers and textbooks. Her administrator came in multiple times a week to evaluate her and would even interrupt her instruction to ask questions that were inappropriate to be asked in a classroom setting, such as why she was choosing to teach the material in a particular manner. Julie had previously been a model teacher and mentor to many new teachers, and
therefore, as they were noticing her treatment, many came to her aid and offered their condolences. At this time her injuries had healed, and her compensation had been handled through the school district. At her first informal evaluation she was told she needed to continue to be on an academic improvement plan. She then requested to be evaluated by a district official in the classroom, which is something allowed with her contract. A district official came in to evaluate her and while she was being evaluated her administrator came in and once again interrupted her instruction. A few weeks later the district employee met with her to review her evaluation and it was recommended that she seek employment at another school within the district, not because of her teaching abilities, but due to the situation that was obvious to the district level employee. Julie let the district employee know that she had been with the school and loved her colleagues and had no interest in being pushed out by her administrator. At the end of the school year she was once again terminated by her administrator. Julie decided to file a lawsuit against the school district and her administrator for her unfair treatment. During the case it was shown that the Administrator had pushed out many employees at schools they had worked for and a worker’s compensation claim is noted under the administrator of the school at the time of an incident. Julie believed she was being targeted because of her injury. She did win her case and the school district awarded her two years of pay and a recommendation letter for her to work elsewhere. The administrator who caused her issues still remained at the school and Julie has since left the field of education to pursue other career options. Julie decided to leave education, even though it was the only career she had ever known, because she was heartbroken that a system could fail someone so much. She deeply cared about her students and had invested her life in being an educator and while she knows she did nothing wrong, she was still not protected by her District or her Union. She wanted to save herself the heartbreak and decided that the
annual pay was not enough to put herself, or anyone else, through such an emotional challenge. She has since worked with a therapist to help move past her experience and hopes that she is a phenomenon in the system.

**Natalie: 42-Year-Old Female from the South**

Natalie is a career changer who has been working in education for three years. She worked in human resources many years before she had children. Once she had children, she became a stay-at-home mom and homeschooled her children for a few years. When she was ready to re-enter the workforce, she decided she wanted to go into teaching. She found employment with a local district and worked her way through additional college courses that allowed her to get licensure in her state. She was provided a mentor teacher and received great reviews from her first administrator. During her third year of teaching, the school brought in a new administrator after her prior administrator retired. She was immediately moved to teaching a grade she was not licensed in and told she needed to work on getting additional licensure. The person who took her original grade level was a close friend of the new administrator. During this time, she began looking for employment at another school within the district. District policy requires employees to inform administration if they are considering changing schools within the district in order to alleviate a vacancy for too long. She interviewed at a school she really liked and with an administrator she really liked. During her interview she was very honest about why she was looking elsewhere and what happened at her current school. The Administrator she interviewed with had to call and let her current administrator know they were planning to offer her a position. It was later found out that her current administrator blocked her from moving to the new school. The union contract allows an administrator that right if the position is one that is “hard-to-fill” and if they would be needed until a new person could be hired to replace her. Her
current administrator revoked her parking permit and informed the school resource officer her car needed to be towed, since you need a valid parking permit to park in the school employee lot. The Administrator also notified her she needed to take additional courses in professionalism and sexual harassment, stating there had been an incident report filed against her. She was not told who had filed this, since that person is protected by the school district as well. After missing a few days of work due to an illness, with approved sick-time, upon her return her administrator let her know she was going to have her formal evaluation that day. This is something that is set up well in advance and normally scheduled with a teacher to ensure they are prepared, as there are many areas an administrator is looking for someone to showcase. When she requested for her formal evaluation to be moved to another day she was told she would need to have this evaluation and once it was reviewed with her she would be able to request an additional evaluation to demonstrate any skills that were not performed or observed. When she had her formal evaluation, she received very low marks and broke down in tears not understanding what she had done wrong. Her administrator told her “some people are just not cut out to be teachers” and that she should consider other career options. She asked her administrator if there was any way she would be able to accept the transfer to the school that had offered her a position, which had already been blocked due to being a “hard-to-fill” position. Her administrator told her she had not found one person to interview for her current position, so she was unable to accept the new position. When Natalie went home, she checked and did not see the position posted, so the following day, she called the District employment office and they informed her they had never been notified to post a position. At that time, she requested assistance from the Union to step in and help with a mediation between her and the new administrator. The Administrator showed up to the mediation with an attorney, which needed to be approved by both parties and the school
board before the mediation was able to take place. During mediation, the Administrator told the Union that Natalie was “just being whiney” and needed to “put her big girl pants on” if she wanted to be successful in education. The mediation ended with no resolution and the Union assured her they would protect her and not allow this administrator to force her out, especially since all her prior evaluations gave her high remarks.

At the end of the school year, she was able to transfer to a new school and a grade level she already held licensure for. As the new school year got underway, she received a letter at home stating her license was under review due to questionable behavior. She immediately contacted the Union to find out more information. They learned someone had anonymously reported her to the State for an inappropriate relationship. There were no other details that could be provided until after the State’s initial investigation had concluded, the final area of which would be an interview with her. When she was called in for her interview it became clear to her that someone had accused her of having relationships with students’ parents in exchange for higher grades. Since this was something that did not have a direct impact or put any students in harm, she was able to continue teaching during the investigation. Once the investigation was finished, taking almost four months, she was cleared of all charges, but had a remark put on her State record showing she had been under investigation. Since she was found to have done nothing wrong, she was told this would not have an impact on her when she went to renew her licensure. A little over a month after the investigation concluded while leaving work, she noticed her car had been egged. She at first assumed this was a student who was unhappy with her or could have been a case of mistaken identity and they meant to go after someone else’s car. Since the vandalism happened on school property the school officer came out to take a report and went to check the cameras but were unable to get anything identifiable of the person who did this.
Later, during the same school and year over spring break, Natalie had her car broken into and again vandalized with eggs. This time she called the police as it was not on school property, but she did let law enforcement know of the recent incident that happened so they could investigate further. One week before the school year was to end, Natalie came out to her car and all four tires had been slashed and was once again vandalized, but this time with multiple colors of spray paint. The school resource officer was notified and called local officers to come and assist since this had become a recurring situation. The officers reviewed the footage and this time showed it to Natalie, asking her to help identify the person on the footage. It was her former Administrator from the previous school year. She immediately asked for a restraining order which was quickly granted. The Union provided her with an attorney who also helped her seek restitution for all the money she was out each time she needed to have work done on her car to correct the damages that had been done by the administrator. The District ended up removing the administrator from their position at the school. Natalie moved to a new location and the District allowed her to decide on whether she would like to transfer to a different school or continue to work where she was, knowing the Administrator was aware of where she worked and she may fear there could be another targeted attack. Natalie decided she would return to the school her former administrator had worked at, since she did not want to leave in the first place and now that the administrator had been removed, she was able to feel more relaxed.

After everything Natalie went through, she is very thankful the school district and Union supported her and rectified the situation. She believes she is most likely not the first person to be victimized by this administrator and is hopeful that in standing her ground and not quitting will show others that there is light at the end of the tunnel and if they can hold on they can overcome any obstacle. She is still not completely sure why she would have been targeted in such a way
and to that extreme. She left the school as soon as she was able and completed the school year as her Administrator wanted her to do, by blocking her from going elsewhere.

**Erica: 26-Year-Old Female from the Northwest**

Erica was fresh out of college and had landed her dream job of teaching at an out-of-state school district. She was hopeful and optimistic that she would be one of the better teachers and her dreams were to one day become a *teacher of the year*. Erica was hired by a recruiter that came to her college for a career hiring event put on through the college. The recruiter let her know that she would be offered a contract with the district, although she was unable to tell her which specific school she would be working at and that it would be contingent on her receiving her licensure from the State. She was told administrators who have vacancies are provided with the resumes of candidates and are able to choose who they would like to have work for them. This was a common practice for this district, and she felt very confident.

Just a few days after getting her official licensure in the mail she received a call from an administrator welcoming her to the school. The administrator asked about her plans for moving down and offered to put her in touch with others who worked for the school that moved from out of state to help with housing and the overall transition. Erica felt she had not only landed her dream job, but also landed her dream administrator.

The district Erica would be working for offered a new employee orientation where everyone gets together and they get to know a little about each other, along with all the district required paperwork. She met a few others who would be working at the school with her and they all quickly learned they would soon be assigned a mentor teacher who would walk them through all the processes and help them over the next three years to become successful teachers. Later that day Erica met with her mentor teacher and was very pleased, but she was warned that the
administration did have a very specific way of running things at the school and to just not ask too many questions and “go with the flow”.

Two days before students were to come and meet their teachers Erica saw her classroom for the first time. She was both happy and overwhelmed. She met the rest of her grade level teachers who were all happy to jump in and help her prepare her classroom. She stopped by the front office to introduce herself to everyone and hope to meet her new administrator, but she was not able to meet with anyone at that time. Over the next few days, she became more confident in her new position and was ready for the first day of school.

On the first day of school she welcomed her students and as she prepared to start an icebreaker, another adult walked into the classroom. This was a person she had never seen before and when they entered, they started to look around the room. Erica asked if she could help the person with anything or to help them find the front office. The person let her know she was fine and was just going to look around the classroom, as this person did not identify themselves. After several minutes of trying to get a little more information from the person on who they were and why they were in her classroom, she decided to call the office for assistance. She hit the intercom button and a person asked how they could help her. The adult in the room quickly took over and told the person who answered that the teacher was being unprofessional and trying to kick her out of the classroom. Immediately the voice over the intercom apologized to the adult and identified the adult as the administrator of the school. Erica was terrified and quickly tried to apologize and explain why she called the office. The administrator was not interested in her apology and instead told her “I hope you teacher better than you interrogate”.

During lunch she met with her fellow teachers and explained what happened. They were all very supportive and told her she did the right thing since she did not know who the adult was,
even though it was the administrator. At the end of the day the administrator asked her to come to their office. When she entered the office, she was met by the administrator, a union representative, and the secretary for the administrator. Erica started to apologize again for the incident that occurred, but the administrator interrupted her and started to make comments on her performance for the day. They told Erica she was an embarrassment to the school, and they had regretted hiring her and she was “clearly smarter on paper than in person”.

That night Erica went home humiliated and questioned her entire college and career history. She had no idea that was her administrator and tried to think of a way to make it better. She quickly called her mentor who calmed her down and told her to brush it off and to join the union immediately if she had not already done so. Erica decided to listen to her mentor, who was a veteran teacher and had been at the school for many years. The next day she went back to work and started fresh. When the week ended, she felt confident that she would be successful, but as she was packing up materials to head home for the weekend she was called back into the administrator’s office. This time the administrator let her know they were rethinking their decision to hire her. Per district policy the administrator was able ask her to leave and allow district to place her at a different school. There were safeguards in place for employees who were hired at events similar to those that Erica had been hired at, so she would not be completely out of the job until at least the end of her first full year of teaching. Erica was apologetic and told her administrator that she knew she could prove herself and she wanted to stay.

The following week the administrator was back in her room looking around and sitting in on lessons. During the first quarter the administrator had visited her room 17 times and did not announce or make any remarks while there. Being a first-year teacher, Erica was provided with an opportunity to sit in on other classrooms to observe any mentor teachers if she would like. She
decided to take all three of her classroom observations during the second quarter so she could hopefully learn what she may be doing wrong. It was also during the second quarter that she had her first informal evaluation. This evaluation was completed by two administrators at two different times, which were both unscheduled. One administrator was an assistant principal, while the other was the principal who had hired her. The assistance principal gave her very high remarks, so she felt confident, but when the principal met with her, she was shocked to hear the complete opposite. She was referred to as being “lazy and not connecting with students” and told she needed to work on developing more “cognitively complex tasks”.

Erica knew this administrator was not going to let her be successful, so she contacted her district and asked to be moved to a different school. She reviewed what had been occurring and district told her they would have to investigate the events and get back with her. A few days later she was called back into her administrator’s office for what she thought was a conversation about moving to another school. Instead the administrator let her know that she would in fact not be moving to another school and how disappointed they were that she had contacted district and lied to them about the events that had transpired. She was asked if she would like to have a union representative in the meeting before they continued their conversation, which she opted for. Once the union representative arrived, she was informed that she was being put on notice for violating the terms of her contract. When she asked what she had done, the administrator pointed out that she had missed more than 10 days of work, which is the total amount of days she is able to miss for the entire year. Erica said there must be some sort of mistake as she had not missed any days, she had only missed three times in her classroom while she was observing mentor teachers, but those times were for an hour each. The union representative, who worked in the same building, knew she had not missed that many days, so they quickly requested her clock
hours to prove she had not. The administrator told them they would be provided by the end of the week.

On Friday, at the end of the day, Erica was provided with a copy of her clock hours, showing she had indeed missed 10 days of work. She quickly went back to her classroom where she kept her planner and checked those days, none of them were correct and she had actually administered a test on one of those days and noticed several of those days were days she was logged in to her account with students. She printed out the grades and documented log in proving she was at school, as this was a program that could only be accessed while on school property. On Monday she went to find the union representative who had sat in the meeting with her and they reviewed everything on paper. They scheduled an appointment to meet with the administrator. When they met with the administrator, they showed all the documents and the administrator logged on to their computer and showed where those login dates and times were not in the system. Both walked out of the office in confusion.

Later that day the union representative told her they needed to go to the district office as soon as the school day ended. What Erica did not know at that time was that the union representative had asked someone from the district office to pull records showing if anyone had altered the log in information or the clock hours on Erica’s accounts. When they got to district, they met with a group of higher-level administrators and the union president who provided all the proof and documentation. Erica was informed that she would be taking the next three days off work with pay and without any penalty to her. They made sure to tell her she was not in any trouble and they needed to complete a few things before she could return to work. During those three days Erica met with a personal attorney to find out what her options were. She did not retain the attorney at that time and was told to just hold off on anything until she knew what was
going on. After her three days of being off were up she hesitantly went back to work to find that her administrator was out for the day. The Union rep and union president came into her classroom before the school bell rang and let her know the administrator had been placed on leave. Erica was frantic and stated that she never meant for any of this to happen. The Union told her they would protect her and asked her if she would like to continue to work at the school she was at or if she would like to move to a new school. They could not guarantee anything would be different if or when the administrator returned. She decided to stay, at that point the school year was almost halfway over and she wanted to finish the year with her students.

After several weeks of the administrator being out, they finally returned. Erica was told the administrator would no longer be completing her evaluations and would not be coming into her classroom for the remainder of the year. She would be evaluated by one of the assistant principals. She was also told the district was unable to prove it was the administrator who had changed the login information, as the secretary and technology worker both had access to the administrators login credentials as well.

The rest of the school year went by without any incident, as Erica made sure that another staff member would pick up her school mail in the office and that she showed up early and left late every day to avoid any interaction she may have with the administrator. At the end of the school year she was able to transfer to a different school and has since found success in the classroom. She wishes that colleges would prepare educators for the politics they face in the schools and has learned that while there are unions, they are still unable to completely protect you.
Sarah: 28-Year-Old Female from the Midwest

Sarah was a young teacher with a few years under her belt. She had been teaching at the same school for her entire career and had been a substitute teacher at the same school while she was in college. Her dream was to become a teacher and help to shape the future of America. Two years into her teaching career her administrator retired, and a new administrator came in. This new administrator came with years of experience from a neighboring school district. The new administrator was very honest with staff and well liked. Sarah quickly took to her new administrator and felt confident in meeting with them any time she needed feedback. Sarah was looking at going back to school to get an additional degree and add to her licensure, as she eventually wanted to work at the district level as a mentor to new teachers. She often met with her administrator when making decisions about courses to take that would help her advance in her position.

During her time with the school district she had been in a relationship with the same person and over the summer she had gotten engaged. Her fellow colleagues were so excited for her they threw her an engagement party during back to school planning week. Her administrator came to the party and congratulated her on her engagement. Shortly after, she noticed she was getting significantly more attention from her administrator who kept referencing her desire to move into a higher-level position within the district. It was as if she was taken under the wing of the administrator and being mentored to work toward that goal. She even met with her administrator outside of work at various locations to discuss work related matters.

Slowly the meetings became more frequent and started to also include personal conversation, something Sarah was not completely comfortable with, but she assumed it was just her administrator being friendly, as they had been working closely together on her career goals.
Her administrator started to call her into their office more often and even started showing up to her classroom during her planning times. She would notice days where small gifts were left for her from her administrator, anything from coffee in the morning to lunch being purchased. As the school year continued, she started receiving gifts like lotions and even a dress, and it was starting to make her quite uncomfortable.

She decided to meet with her administrator and discuss the gifts and let them know they were not necessary. Her administrator brushed it off as just gifts for being there to provide support as they were also going through a few things and they felt she had become a close confidant. She was told the gifts would stop and the administrator apologized if they had made her feel uncomfortable or as if they were perceived as anything more than a gift of kindness.

As spring break approached, she was called into her administrator’s office and this time things felt different. The door was closed behind her and the secretary was asked to make sure there were no interruptions. Sarah thought she had done something wrong and maybe a parent or colleague had complained. Her administrator sat close to her and put their hand on her leg. She drew herself back, so the administrator removed their hand. As she continued to sit, the conversation started to get more personal with discussion of her plans with her fiancé and their relationship.

Sarah left that meeting feeling awkward and uncomfortable. She spoke with a colleague and her fiancé who both confirmed that her feelings were warranted and they both warned her to not be alone with her administrator any longer. From then on, when her administrator would call her into the office, she would request that they meet in her classroom where she was better able to get the attention from someone else if she needed help.
One day her administrator caught her right as she was packing up to leave for the weekend. Most of the other staff had already left for the day, so she was on her own. They were in Sarah’s classroom. She attempted to keep a desk or table in between the two of them, but the administrator managed to get her cornered and started to make advances toward her. Sarah was unsure what to do so she told her administrator she was uncomfortable and would like to leave. The administrator then put their hands on her and told her not to “play hard to get”. Sarah started to cringe and tried to yell for help, but her administrator placed their hand over her mouth and started kissing her. She was unable to remember all the specifics of what happened after that as the next thing she remembered was walking to her car crying. She knew what happened was wrong, but she did not know what to do since this was the person who was her boss. She wondered if she had led the administrator on or possibly given the administrator the idea that she wanted that as well. She did not know if she should tell anyone, so she kept it to herself for the weekend.

When Monday came, she decided to call off work for the day, not wanting to face her administrator and to be able to have a day to herself to help her process everything. While at home thinking about everything, she decided she was going to take Monday off, as well as the next two days and speak with the Union as well as a counselor so she could better process everything that happened to her. She wanted to change how people are treated in the workplace and now she was understanding why it was so hard for others to come forward with the experiences or to press charges or file claims. This was her administrator, and she knew they held all the power. It would be easy for her to lose her job over this and she had no idea if anyone would be on her side or believe her.
Tuesday, she met with the Union and discussed what had been going on. She was assured that she was doing the right thing and they would help her through the process. They also gave her a referral to a counselor who would be covered by the district to help her process everything. When she did return to work on Thursday, she did her best to avoid her administrator, but ultimately, they did show up to speak with her, so she quickly moved the conversation into the hallway. She had learned that she needed to be more diligent in keeping herself safe.

At the start of the following week, she met with the Union again since they wanted to follow up on how things were going. She told them nothing else had happened and that she would rather just forget everything happened. She was feeling more confident in her work and thought it was a onetime incident and maybe she had given the administrator the impression that it was “ok”. A few more weeks passed, and the administrator started to come around more again, the same as before. She started to notice more personal conversations coming up again, and to avoid a similar situation she asked a fellow teacher to come straight to her classroom everyday as soon as students were dismissed. She was getting nervous and felt herself starting to be more cautious of her actions and think about every move she made before she did anything. On days where her administrator was out, she felt relief.

One day when Sarah came into work she noticed she had flowers on her desk. She was delighted and thought nothing about who they came from since her fiancé had sent her flowers in the past and just figured this was another kind gesture. The next day her administrator caught her off guard while she was walking down the hallway and asked how she liked her flowers. She said she liked them very much and spoke about how generous and kind her fiancé was. Then her administrator let her know that they were who had gotten her the flowers. She felt embarrassed to not thank her administrator, but then asked why they had gotten her such a gift. The
administrator likened the beauty of the flowers to the beauty of Sarah and then told her they would like to meet with her in their office later that day. When Sarah questioned what it was for, the administrator mentioned her future plans for her education as well as her teaching position for the following year. She agreed to meet with the administrator.

When she went to the office she was let in by the secretary who closed the door behind her. This was nothing new as most meetings in the administrator’s office are sensitive in nature and occur behind closed doors, but she felt uneasy. The administrator got close to her and asked her how she liked working at the school. As they continued to get closer, she started to move her chair farther away to distance herself from her administrator. The administrator grabbed the chair and asked her “don’t you want me to like you, you need me to be happy with you to work for me.” Sarah was immediately taken back and began to feel terrified sitting there. The administrator told her that they would meet for dinner the following night or she would not have a position at the school the following year. They would make sure she would not be able to be hired anywhere else in the district. She reluctantly agreed out of fear for herself and her career.

When she got home she immediately broke down and told her fiancé what had been going on. Her fiancé told her not to return to work until she had spoken to a lawyer and called the local police department.

The police department took her statement and let her know they would be showing up to the school the following day to speak with her administrator. As she had planned, she did not return to work the next day and called the Union to give them an update. She was asked to come in to the Union office to speak with someone. The Union filed a grievance for her and immediately asked the school district to allow her to have time off until the situation could be resolved. The District allowed her to have a week off and after that she was to report to the
school district for an alternative assignment. Sarah was both relieved and worried. She did not know if her causing this issue would cause her to lose her job and even blacklist her from getting hired anywhere else as a teacher.

The school district, Union, and local police department all conducted their investigations and as a result, Sarah was granted a restraining order. The district permanently placed her at a different school within the district, which was not what she wanted. She wanted to work at the school she had been at, the school with her friends and colleagues she had grown to love and appreciate. Sarah did not have any other interactions with her administrator and never got the chance to return to the school she cared for so much. Ultimately the administrator was not punished and was able to remain employed at the school in the same position. Her restraining order expired and was not extended since she was no longer working at the school with the administrator.

Sarah no longer works in education because of her experience and believes the school district failed her. She also felt the Union should have done a better job protecting her as the victim and that moving her to a different school was more of a punishment for bringing her experience to their attention. She also stated that she will never send her children to public school, she will send them to private school where she feels they will be better protected as the private schools are run by stakeholders who hold employees more accountable for their actions.

**Amanda: 32-Year-Old Female from the Northeast**

Amanda had been working with the school district for several years as a volunteer, one year prior she was able to get her license to teach and was thrilled and could not wait. She took a position with the school she had been volunteering, which was the same school her children attended. Amanda had a child in a special program at the school so she wanted to make sure she
stayed close. At the end of her first year she was asked by her administrator to consider taking a position at a neighboring school. Amanda was unsure what she had done for her administrator to have such a request, since she thought she had done well teaching. Her evaluations were all very good for a first year teacher and she had made all the corrections that were suggested to her to be a more effective teacher.

Amanda taught a class that was specialized at the school where she worked and no other school around her offered the class. She was part of a new district initiative that only select schools in the district had implemented. She loved teaching and what she was teaching. There was a great deal of district level trainings involved, meaning she missed at least a few days a month to attend, which was something every teacher in that program was doing. She first wondered if the school she was moving to was in fact getting that program and it was her being asked to take her knowledge to start the class there. Even if that were the case, she still would have turned down the opportunity given that her children were at the school she was currently working.

Amanda had made many friends over the years while volunteering at the school and was well liked. When the school year was getting ready to start, she was looking forward to getting back to seeing everyone. Normally the school would send out an email detailing everything that was planned the week before students return, a week known as pre-planning for teachers and staff. The week normally consisted of multiple trainings both at the school and district level as well as offered time for teachers to get into their classrooms to set up and become familiar with their new roster of students. This year Amanda did not receive that email and instead heard about it from some of her friends.
Amanda was unsure why she had not received the email and wondered if it had anything to do with her staying at the school and not accepting the new position, so at any time she was expecting to get an email from the other school detailing the week to come. In the meantime, she asked a friend to forward the email to her while she called her grade level administrator. Her grade level administrator was surprised to hear from her and quickly remedied the incident, so no additional thought was put into it, as she thought it was a simple error.

When pre-planning started, Amanda showed up anxious to get into her class and start setting up. When she walked in to pick up her keys, she was surprised to be handed a new set of keys that were not the same as those she had the year before. Her classroom had been specifically chosen by the district the previous year due for storage and access to certain areas of the school. This new classroom was much smaller and did not have any of the same accessibility. Once again, she brushed it off, but did return to the office to let them know she needed access to her former room so she could collect the belongings that were to stay with the class.

She was able to move everything over from her former room to her new room and start setting up. She wondered how she would modify the classroom to work as it should so she sent a message to her district cohort for the curriculum of the class for some guidance, remembering this class has a very specific layout that she needed to follow. District was surprised that she had been moved to another room, since they had not been informed of this and they asked the reason why. She did not know the reason why, so they told her not to get too comfortable in the new room.

The following day her school administrator came into her new room and apologized, telling her there must have been some sort of mix up since she was not supposed to be moving rooms. Amanda worked quickly to move things back to her former room. Later in the day her
district level program coordinator came to the school to meet with her and review the upcoming school year and changes that had been made to the curriculum.

Two weeks later, Amanda needed to schedule her time to go for a district level meeting and she noticed that the hours from the second day of pre-planning were showing that she was absent. She knew she was there since that was the day, she switched back to her old room, so she went to speak with the secretary to make sure she had signed in for the day. The secretary confirmed that she had signed in for the day but was not paid because she did not attend a faculty meeting that was required that day. She was very apologetic and told them she had no idea she had even missed a meeting and did not remember hearing any announcement for the meeting. She was told the secretary would speak with district to have her pay provided for that day since it was known that she was at work that day.

A few more weeks passed, and Amanda’s administrator came to see her again asking how things were going and if she was enjoying the position again this year. Her administrator seemed to hint that the curriculum was not enjoyable to teach and praising her for teaching something “so hated by students”. Amanda was taken aback as she always felt her students really enjoyed the class. Amanda asked her administrator if any of her students had mentioned not liking the class or if anyone else had heard from any student or parent about not being pleased with her or the class. Her administrator just shrugged it off and walked away from her.

When it came time for her evaluation, she received high marks on her content knowledge, but low marks on student engagement and student outcomes. She thought the class had gone very well and all the students seemed to have been engaged and she even did a Jeopardy style quiz at the end and all the students were very engaged and had to work together as a team to answer the questions. She asked her administrator for additional feedback and how she could improve and
demonstrate those areas of growth. Her administrator told her there were no additional resources or strategies they could provide since they had already reviewed everything with her in the past and she should consider getting help from her district program trainer.

Her program trainer was happy to help and came out to observe a day in the classroom. She received very high praise and positive feedback from the trainer and was told that maybe the class had been having a rough day and maybe the administrator possibly picked up on that. Amanda asked that the trainer come out one more time before her performance evaluation to make sure there was no misunderstanding in her review since she needed to keep high marks to continue working in that position.

During her performance evaluation both the trainer and the administrator sat on opposite sides of the room. Her administrator marked low scores for student participation and the trainer gave her high scores across the board, even mentioning that she should share some of her engagement strategies with others teaching the class because she had some of the most engagement and energetic students in the program. The administrator kept referencing the students they sat next to, saying they were not engaged and were talking most of the time, being off task. When the trainer mentioned that part of the activity was to talk and work with shoulder partners, the administrator snapped back telling the trainer they were the administrator and knew what students were and were not supposed to be doing.

Amanda’s trainer decided to place their observations in her district record since they believed the administrator did not fully understand the nature of the class and the styles being used to teach it. The trainer also asked Amanda to share some of her experience and knowledge at their next district training for the teachers of that class. Amanda was honored and happily
accepted. This would give her additional points on her evaluations, as it counted as her being a collaborative district trainer.

At the end of the school year Amanda was again asked if she would take a position at another school within the district, which she again declined. The administrator brought her into their office and told her that she needed to consider taking a different teaching position at the school if she wanted to continue working there. The administrator told her that she had poor student engagement and they would like to see a more effective teacher in the position. Amanda was very upset and was unsure how to respond since she had not seen her performance evaluation, so she knew it must have been poor.

She asked her district trainer what to do and the trainer was shocked. The trainer felt Amanda was one of the strongest teachers in the district of that class and any other school would be lucky to have her as one of their own. The trainer felt something else must have been going on and told Amanda they would look into things and get back with her. As it turns out, the administrator was trying to get a family member into that position, so they were purposely trying to get Amanda to either move schools or move out from teaching that particular class. Amanda was upset and hurt that the administrator would hurt her career just to get a family member into a position they had never taught before.

Amanda was asked to come to the district office to meet with her trainer and a district level curriculum coach. While meeting with them she was instructed to fill out a grievance form and submit it to them and they would take things from there. Amanda was unsure since this was something that would also be placed in her file, showing she had an issue with an administrator that she was unable to resolve and needed assistance. She did not want it to look like she was difficult to work with and did not want to make her administrator even more upset.
Amanda filed the form and anxiously waited for what was next. She was called back to her district level for a meeting where she, her trainer, the curriculum coach, her administrator, and an assistant superintendent were all present at the meeting. During the meeting it was determined that Amanda would be staying in the position and the administrator would no longer be her evaluator. Also, any additional discussions or concerns would need to go through district.

The following year went without an incident and the administrator left the district. Amanda still feels ashamed and hurt that she had to go through such great lengths to keep her position when she was highly effective in her performance. She has since received many awards of recognition from her school and district for her teaching and has even been asked to take on a district level position herself. Her record will always reflect the grievance she filed and is a mark against her, one that she feels should not be there when she had done nothing wrong. She has been told the file stays within district, but she believes at any time someone could pull the file and use it against her. She fears she will have another administrator like the one she had, and they will use the grievance against her stating she cannot get along with anyone.

Amanda believes the education system needs to move in a direction where those who do their best to resolve issues should not be punished by getting a mark on their record. There are very few paths someone can take to resolve an issue with an administrator and most times the administrator will win, as they have the final say at the school level.

**Hanna: 33-Year-Old Female from the South**

Hanna was a seasoned teacher looking to get into administration. She had gotten the degrees and had passed the tests required for licensure in her State. She started applying for any position she could find in her district to be an academic coach. An academic coaching position was someone who helped to write curriculum and mentor teachers who may need additional
assistance with the content area, among other duties. Hanna interviewed at a school she had never worked at before but was still within the same district she had spent all her years teaching. When she received the call offering her the position, she was elated. She knew these positions were hard to come by and once people get into them they stay for the rest of their career.

The position started mid-way through the school year, so she knew there would be some transition time, as she was coming in to finish out the year under what someone else had already started. When applicants apply for these positions, they must interview with district level employees and no one at the specific school is involved in the hiring or decision-making process. Hanna knew a little about the school before her interview and learned more to prepare herself for any questions that may come her way about the student population or programs already in place. She had never been to the school before or met anyone working there.

On her first day as she was unloading her car, she was greeted by the assistant principals and other coaches. All were very welcoming and happy to have her. She did notice the absence of the principal, but just thought they must have been busy with someone else or not there that day. As the day went on, she continued to unload her car and set up her office, which she shared with another academic coach. Later in the day the principal came in and introduced themselves to Hanna. Hanna was apprehensive and felt nervous after the encounter, but chalked it up to her being new and thinking the administrator having other things going on.

As weeks went by, her new office partner and her got closer and started to go out after work, which was great because she knew this other coach had several more years of experience and she had a lot to learn. One day, while in the office, the other coach asked her if she knew all the people who had applied for the position. To her surprise she had learned that over 30 people had applied, including the administrators own child. Hanna felt honored to have been chosen
over all those applicants and thought nothing more about it, other than that they must have seen something special in her and that she wanted to live up to whatever potential they felt she had.

As the third quarter was coming to an end, she started to get emails from the principal about her performance and her end of year evaluation. Hanna met with the principal to review everything and discuss what she needed to do since she did not have an evaluation at the start of the school year, which would have been how she would have shown growth. The principal told her they would just use the interview remarks as her beginning of the year evaluation. Hanna thought this was a little odd, but did not know any better than to accept that answer.

When it came time for her face-to-face evaluation, Hanna met with the principal and was surprised by the remarks the principal had for her. The principal mentioned that she was not a team player and her ideas were mediocre at best compared to what had been promised in her interview. This was shocking to Hanna as she had made many friends and received positive feedback from many staff members about how helpful and knowledgeable she was. She asked what she could do to raise her evaluation scores and the principal let her know the evaluation was final and there was nothing that could be done.

When Hanna left the principal’s office, she met with her office partner who let her know that what had happened to her was not right and that she needed to file for a second evaluation. A second evaluation would come from a different administrator and the two evaluators would sit down together to come up with a score between what they both determine. Hanna was hesitant since she did not want to make her principal mad or lose her position. Since this was her first year in the position, the principal had the right to request her to either be moved to a different school or move her back into the classroom based on her evaluation.
Hanna reluctantly requested a second evaluation and to her surprise the second evaluation was dramatically better than the first. Unfortunately, when the two administrators met, they came up with the same outcome as the principal had, which was confusing to her. Hanna decided to ask for the union to get involved and try to help determine what was going on. The Union looked at everything and knew something was going on since the second evaluation was so high, but the overall final of the two administrators was essentially the same as her first evaluation.

The Union met with Hanna and let her know that district policy states the principal has the overall final say in an evaluation, even when a second evaluation is conducted. Hanna wondered what the purpose of a second evaluation even was since the principal was able to make it whatever they wanted anyway. Unsure of what to do, Hanna made an appointment with her principal and asked what she could do to improve herself professionally. The principal gave her minimal feedback but let her know the best thing she could do would be to return to the classroom and get some more experience before stepping back into a coaching role again. Hanna was devastated because she knew that was going to be the principal’s recommendation for her and that she would lose her position for the following school year. What Hanna was unaware of is that the principal must pick the replacement from the pool of applicants that had already been interviewed by the school district and their pick must then be approved by district level officials.

After a few weeks of waiting to learn what her position would be the following school year, Hanna was called into the principal’s office. When she walked in she met with not only the principal but also the panel of employees who conducted her interview and placed her at the school. The panel let her know they were there to conduct an evaluation to find out what areas she could improve upon and attempt to resolve the issue. During the evaluation, it became evident that the principal was making Hanna look poorly so they could attempt to place their
own child in the role. When the panel let the principal know this was not a possibility due to a conflict of interest the topic was quickly changed to what Hanna could do to improve herself professionally to be successful.

The principal was asked multiple times for evidence and recommendations and was not able to give anything more than minor corrections that come with experience in the position. Hanna felt awkward, but hopeful. Once the panel completed their evaluation they let Hanna and the principal know they would be letting them know their decision soon.

The following week, Hanna learned that she would be able to keep her position with the school. She was called into the principal’s office again and the principal let her know that she had two options. If she decided to stay she would make sure to give her poor evaluations until she decided to quit or the principal would give Hanna a great recommendation and she could go teach anywhere else in the district. Hanna knew she wanted to keep her current position, but was it worth it for her to go through this trouble and would she even be able to be successful. Hanna decided to keep her position.

Hanna had children who were very involved in school programs and they attended school in the same school district she worked in. Her children were good students who did not miss school and made good grades. When final report cards came home she noticed her children all had poor grades and several disciplinary remarks on their report cards. Hanna immediately called the school her children attended and asked to speak with someone regarding this. Once she got someone on the phone she learned that none of the disciplinary issues had been documented in the system, as they usually would be and they all had the same entry date, but different dates throughout the year on when the issues occurred. The school promised Hanna they would investigate and get back with her. These grades would prevent her children from participating in
school activities for the entire first quarter of school and they were all very active in school
programs, so this was a big issue for them.

A few days later, Hanna received a call from her children’s school letting her know the
disciplinary actions had been removed from their records and she could either come and pick up
their correct report cards or they would be mailed. At the time, she also asked about their grades.
The school then reviewed their grades and told her they would need to speak with their teachers
to find out what was going on. Hanna had a good relationship with the teachers, but did not want
to use her position in the district to call them and find out. She wanted to go the same path
required by all parents.

Several days later she received another call letting her know their grades were all
incorrect in the system and they were being corrected as they spoke. She asked what had
happened between the grades and disciplinary actions, thinking maybe the system had an issue
and printed another student’s information under her children’s names. She was told that someone
who was not with the school had entered the information, but the school assured her they were
going to handle the situation.

As summer went on, Hanna learned her principal would not be returning to the school the
coming school year and had been placed at a different school. This was a great relief for Hanna,
but she then felt bad that maybe the commotion she caused may have had an impact on the
principal and their career, which was never her intention. Hanna started to notice strange things
going on around her property. Over the next month, her car was keyed multiple times. Her front
door had a rock thrown through it, which was a full glass decorative door. Her fence had been
spray painted with graffiti. Her care tire went flat and then her husband’s tire went flat. All of
these seemed like too many things to be coincidental, so when her husband’s tire went flat they
decided to call the police and file a report, thinking similar things may be happening in their neighborhood. The police let her know they were the first report of anything like this they had received in their neighborhood.

Hanna and her husband purchased a home security system, something that would turn on a light and record when there was movement outside. Not long after the system was installed, they caught their first person on camera. Hanna recognized the person on video as her former principal. She was shocked that her former principal would be doing something like this. Her husband wanted to turn the video over to the police, but Hanna was not sure, as she did not want her principal to get into any trouble. Reluctantly she agreed with her husband and the police issued an order where the principal would not be able to come on their property. Hanna was also told she could press charges and file in court for the cost of the acts that had been committed, but she declined. She wondered how someone could be so mad to bring themselves to this level.

A few weeks after the school year started, Hanna learned that the principal she had worked for the previous year was no longer with the district. The district had learned about the retaliation from the principal toward her had a zero-tolerance policy, so the principal was let go. Hanna felt terrible, but knew there was nothing she could do and felt she was not responsible for the actions of her former administrator. Hanna wondered how the district could have even let things escalate this far and thought everything could have been possibly resolved with that second evaluation she had requested if it was a more equal decision for all administrators and not weighted. With the second evaluation, her scores would have been high enough that the possibility of losing her position from the principal would have been off the table.

Hanna has since become a more active member in the union and is still happily an academic coach. Her goal with the union is to help make sure district policy changes to prevent
one person from having so much power and there is a better system for checks and balances in place.

**George: 39-Year-Old Male from the Midwest**

George was a veteran teacher who had been with the same school for many years. He had recently added a new area to his teaching license and was able to take a new higher-level position within the school district. His administrator wrote a letter of recommendation showcasing his achievements, which got him a position with another school within the district working as an academic coach. Coaches are not just hired by administrators, they are placed by district level staff at schools that need the additional supports in place.

George was welcomed at the school and seemed to be getting along well with everyone. During his first evaluation, he was given high marks by his administrator. Shortly after he got engaged and updated his social media with the good news, he included some coworkers at his new school. A few days later, George was called into the administrator’s office to discuss his social media. His administrator let him know that he needed to remove all staff and school district employees from his social media account, and when he inquired why, he was told that he was not the “kind of representative the district wanted to be associated with”. In shock, George immediately thought this was a meeting about being fired, so he asked for a union representative. The administrator seemed to be taken aback by this request and paused their meeting until a representative could be present.

During the meeting, it was disclosed that the reason for the request was because George was engaged to a male, which showcased him as a gay man working for the school district. This was nothing George had ever kept as a secret from any of his colleagues and many coworkers had in fact met his fiancé over the years. After some consultation with the union representative,
George agreed to part of the administrator’s request and removed staff that worked at the school he currently worked. He did not feel a need to remove anyone else. He also removed any identifying information that showcased his employment with the district.

When it came time for George to have his next evaluation, which determined his employment for the following year, he was shocked to learn that he had received poor marks. As per his contract with the district, he is able to have a chance to meet with his evaluating administrator and be provided with an additional chance for a new evaluation to be completed, while still being able to be with the same administrator. George chose that option and met with his administrator who let him know that there were several areas they felt he was not proficient in, even though those areas received high marks on his first evaluation. He scheduled a new evaluation date and started to prepare. He also called the Union and asked for their advice. They told him to let them know once the next evaluation was complete and they could step in from there if it was warranted.

George felt extremely prepared for his new evaluation and even had additional documentation and data to back up his areas of focus. He again received poor marks on his evaluation, but not as low as the one before. He requested that a union representative be present at this meeting that was scheduled since he was worried what it may mean in regards to his employment. During the meeting, every remark the administrator had George was able to back up with research and data and finally at the end of his evaluation, the administrator let George know that the administrator believed George was not a “good fit” at the school. He would be able to finish his year there, but the administrator would then be requesting that he be reassigned to a different school. The union was only able to help contest the evaluation and have his marks moved to higher levels since there was additional data to justify higher marks. Getting his
evaluation to have higher marks would allow George to continue in his current position at any
school in the district. The union notified district of the situation and district assured him that he
would be placed at a different school of his choosing. While this was a satisfactory move, it was
not what George wanted. He felt he had done nothing wrong and he knew that by getting to pick
where he would go that would mean that someone else would be bumped from their school.

George did ultimately decide to go back into the classroom and go back to his former
school where he felt welcomed and unjudged by his lifestyle decisions. George was welcomed
back with open arms and settled into his teaching position. After George completed his first
evaluation back in the classroom, he was approached by the union and asked if he would like to
file an issue against his former administrator. He was told that even if he did not want to file, one
would still be filed on behalf of the union. Not wanting to be brought into any publicity or bring
any more attention to himself, he opted out of being a part of the issue.

Once the union filed an issue with district, George was contacted by district and asked to
come in to speak with an assistant superintendent regarding the event. He did learn that he was
not the first gay employee to be pushed out by the administrator, and once he learned this, he
decided he did want to file an issue of discrimination against both the administrator and the
district. The union put George in touch with an attorney and the issues were filed.

During the investigation period, the administrator resigned. The district found that
George was discriminated against and was offered compensation for the situation. George did
ask that the district do a better job protecting those who have a potential to be discriminated
against and to put other safeguards in place. The district agreed and has since put in place that
when a new evaluation is requested for any reason that a different administrator or evaluator
complete the evaluation. The highest of the scores will be used and the person being evaluated
will have a chance to raise their score by providing documentation to justify a higher evaluation score.

**David: 51-Year-Old Male from the Northeast**

David was a tenured teacher who had worked in the same northeastern school district for most of his career. David started teaching right out of college and was approaching his 30-year anniversary for teaching. The school he had been for most of his career was closing for a two-year time frame, so a new school could be built in its place. All staff and students were placed at surrounding schools until the new building was complete. The administrators from the school were to rotate between schools to help the new schools with the additional student population and staff reviews.

David was placed at a school where he would be teaching the same subject he had always taught, but a different grade level and, therefore, a different curriculum than he was used to. He was up for the challenge and had taught the grade level curriculum many years before for a short time. Staff did not get to choose the school or subject they would be teaching, since they were guests at the schools they were placed at.

Teachers were told they would not be evaluated or reviewed by their normal administrator, but instead would be split up between the temporary school’s administrators who would also receive input and assistance from their regular school administrators. This was not something that worried David, as he was a solid educator and had received the highest reviews the district offers, leading to his tenured contract.

In this district, a tenured contract means that instead of having a contract renewed every year, teachers are given a contract for anywhere between 3-10 years based on performance. David was currently in year 8 of his 10-year contract, meaning the last two years of his contract
would be at the new school. The contract does not guarantee a specific grade or subject, although it does guarantee employment. This means that if a teacher is placed in an area they are not certified to teach, they will have one year to gain that certification or will need to be moved to another area. This was not the case for David since his certification covered the subject he was being asked to teach.

Due to the increase in student population, the school brought in portable classrooms and turned many of their elective classrooms into core classrooms. This caused strain as many core classes were combined, and even with the additional staff, classes were still well beyond the district capacity that was in employee contracts. David took this in stride and knew it was only a temporary situation and wanted to be there for his students, as he knew they were the ones who would be suffering the most from this change.

At David’s midpoint review, he was told he was doing very well and had adapted to the curriculum and change better than most. He was thanked for being a “team player” and asked if he would be willing to help mentor some of the newer teachers who were struggling in some areas. This was something David had done in the past and was happy to help with again. It also meant he would receive a small additional stipend for the time he would spend with those new teachers.

Shortly after his review, the administrator who oversaw him left the school for unknown reasons. David was assigned to a new administrator who had been brought over from a different school in the district to help cover. That administrator made no secret of their dislike for their new placement and how much farther of a drive the new school was for them.

Since the new administrator had not been able to see anyone before their midpoint reviews were complete, they scheduled to step into each person’s classroom to observe them and
get an idea of their capabilities. This seemed very normal, as it would give the new administrator a baseline for the end of year review they would be completing. After the new administrator observed David’s classroom, they asked to meet with him, which he thought was happening with each teacher.

The new administrator was personable, and David was hopeful this would be a good change and there would be no impact on his annual review scoring, but he knew there was always that possibility since it was a different person than he had in the past. David met with the administrator and he felt the meeting went well. They gave him a few areas to focus on and told him they would come back a few more times before the formal review would take place to see how he had taken those areas of focus and improved upon them. The administrator told David those would be the areas he would be mostly rated on for his review, something that was not consistent with his reviews in the past or his contract with the district.

David decided to meet with his union representative just to inform them of what had been going on and all the changes he was experiencing. He knew the review from this administrator would not hold much weight since his contract was still in place, but that it could hurt him the following year when the district would review his file to determine the type of contract he would be offered. Most of the time the tenured contracts are offered based on the review of the previous years and awarded based on the number of years a teacher has high reviews, which meant if David had poor reviews on this it could potentially change the number of years he would be offered for his next tenured contract.

During David’s formal final review, he made sure to demonstrate all areas that were noted on his evaluation form, including those that the administrator had made areas of focus on. He felt very confident that he had done well since he saw the students engaged and actively
participating. Part of David’s evaluation was also based on how well students scored on an end of year assessment. This school had students scoring below the district average, but all David needed to demonstrate was adequate growth from the majority of the students in his class. This was a long-debated topic in the district between board and union members.

During David’s formal review with his administrator, he was marked as adequate. This was the lowest score David had received in over 20 years of teaching and came as a shock to him. He made a conscious effort to demonstrate the changes in the areas the administrator had asked him to focus on and combined with the level of engagement of the students, that should have been a high score in David’s eyes. The administrator made sure to let David know areas that were of concern and gave him suggestions on how they would show these things. When David spoke to the administrator and pointed out the areas he had made changes in based on the administrators earlier remarks, the administrator let him know the changes were noticed, but not in the preferred way the administrator would have done them. David felt this was unfair as that was personal preference and opinion and not a part of the review.

David took his concerns to the union. After a review and investigation his score was raised to effective, one mark higher than adequate but still one level down from the top marking where he normally performed. David was satisfied with the outcome as this still looks better than what it had been and he was aware that it can be extremely difficult to get any review changed, so he was grateful for the efforts the union had made on his behalf.

The next school year and last of his current contract, David returned to the temporary school he had been placed and was moved back to the subject he had usually taught. This was a positive change for David and he felt good about the upcoming year, knowing it would still be a challenge since classes were still over capacity and many teachers were still displaced. David
learned the administrator who evaluated him at the end of the previous year would be returning and still overseeing his reviews. This was a little concerning to David, but he felt the administrator may have been able to see any error they had made since the union was able to get his review marks changed.

After David’s first informal review, he found out the union stepping in had a very negative impact on the administrator and was clear to him the administrator was planning to take their anger out on David. The administrator told David the review was so low they wanted to place him on an improvement plan, something David had never been on in his career as a teacher. David requested to have a union representative sit in on the meeting, so the meeting was rescheduled to a time when that could happen.

During the meeting with David’s union representative present, that administrator pointed out several things that happened in David’s classroom, but they were all personal preference and more of how the administrator took what they saw and twisted it to fit their agenda. For example, David had a student who answered a question without raising their hand. The administrator marked this under poor classroom management and being unable to control the classroom setting. While it could fall under this area, what had happened was the student knew the answer before David was done asking the question and blurted it out, something many students had done daily at this school.

The union noted all the discrepancies and had them attached to David’s review. This would not change his review, but since this was not a formal review it was unable to be contested and the best way to argue the review was to attach the notes to them. David was very concerned with what this could mean for his formal review, as it would have the biggest impact on his new contract that would be offered at the end of the school year. The union offered to have someone
sit in on his formal review to give their own review to be able to contest any inaccuracies that were seen between David and the administrator.

When time came for his formal review David felt very prepared and that it went very well. He once again received an adequate remark from the administrator, but a highly effective from the union. These two were very opposite, and areas the administrator marked as being poor were seen differently by the union. This caused the union to file against the administrator on David’s behalf. They were filing for both the formal review discrepancy and the inappropriate use of power on the administrator. After an investigation, the board sided with the union and David’s evaluation scores were once again changed.

When it came time for a new contract to be offered to David, he was given a 3 year contract, which greatly surprised him. He knew the last two reviews were lower, but with all the work the union had done, he thought it would be seen by the Board in a less negative way. The board was not provided with any background on his review scores, just the scores themselves and a marking showing when someone contests scores, without any details on why or what the outcomes were. David accepted his contract and went back to his newly rebuilt former school under his former administration.

Since the incident, David has received the highest reviews and is now a union representative for his district. David believes the evaluation process and the authority administrators are given is inappropriate and would like to see a more balanced system. He knows that if the union had not stepped in he could have possibly not even been offered a contract after his was up, and all based on the personal opinions of one person over a short period of time. He believes this is a part of the problem and reason why so many tenured educators are leaving the system and why so many new educators do not stay. It is the unfair
balance of power that administrators have over teachers and staff in the school. He believes the union should not have had to be brought in or utilize their resources over something that should have been a “grown-up conversation between two adults” to come to an understanding. David is thankful that this situation did not occur in his early years of teaching, as it may have had a more negative impact on his outlook of the profession and even caused him to leave the profession entirely.

Michael: 41-Year-Old Male from the South

Michael was a seasoned educator who had worked his way up to a position that was leadership, but not administrative. He spent most of his career with the same school district and felt secure in his position and knew the staff well. Michael had a good working relationship with all of his administrators, except one. This particular administrator had already disciplined Michael for his teaching style and had made a formal complaint to higher administration to have him removed from his teaching position. The complaint against Michael was determined to be unfounded and Michael held his position, but the complaint was placed in his file with the district.

One day Michael caught two students at the school together who were being sexually inappropriate with each other. These students were both in the same grade and should have been in class at the time. Michael immediately separated the two students and took them to the office where he separated them. He spoke with one of the students who informed him of everything that happened and that the two were in a consensual relationship and had been for quite some time, and this was not the first time they had been intimate with each other.

Michael had not handled a situation like this before so he felt it would be best to speak with an administrator to find out what he needed to do. The only administrator he could find was
the administrator who had made a complaint against him in the past. Not thinking anything of it, he spoke with the administrator who told him he needed to finish his investigation and file his report and there would be nothing more necessary. Michael did as he was instructed to do by the administrator and allowed both students to return to class.

That night Michael received a call from his administrator asking about the situation. He told the administrator what had happened and that he had spoken with another administrator to get guidance on how the situation should be handled since it was something he had not handled before. The administrator told Michael that when he arrived at the school the following morning he needed to park near the main office and he would be escorted in by the school deputy. This confused Michael, but he thought the deputy may have needed to write his own report as well.

The following morning he was escorted in by the deputy and sat with a children services employee who asked him about the situation. He was informed by the employee that he should have called children services immediately, as these were minor children. He apologized and was then taken into his administrator’s office. He was greeted by several district level employees and was told that he was being placed on administrative leave. When he inquired more, he was told that he had failed to report a child abuse situation, which could result in the loss of his teaching licensure and he failed to notify any administrator when the event occurred.

Michael immediately explained that he had spoken with an administrator and was unaware this was considered child abuse since he believed these were two consenting adults. He later found out that the administrator he had spoken with about the situation lied and told their administrator they had not spoken with Michael at all regarding the situation that day. As the investigation continued, Michael learned that the parent of one of the students, the school
district, and law enforcement were going to be pressing charges against him and this would be a felony on his record, rendering him unable to continue to work for the school district.

Michael was provided an attorney appointed by his union and sought additional support from a private attorney on the matter. Detectives were brought in to investigate the situation and review all recorded footage from the incident that day. Michael’s attorney also requested footage of him immediately after he learned of the event be pulled to show he went to the administrator. Footage was found of him going into the main office, but there were not cameras in the main office where he spoke with the administrator. This was entered into evidence along with testimony of everyone working in the office that day.

At the end of the school year, Michael was relieved of his position. His contract had been a single year contract that needed to be renewed at the end of each school year. Michael knew this would put a financial strain on his family, but he also knew he needed his job and he felt compelled to clear his name of any wrongdoing he was being accused of. The administrator involved in the incident continued to work at the school.

After several months, the felony charges were dismissed. It was determined that he was required to notify children services, but given the unique circumstances and seeing that they believed he had gone to the administration for guidance, was an area not well covered in his training. The school district did not offer him his position back or any other position with the district. The State continued on with their investigation to determine whether or not Michael would be able to keep his teaching credentials given this event.

After over a year Michael, was cleared and his license was released. He would be able to teach again, but not with the school district he had been formerly employed with. The district let Michael know that he would no longer be able to work for them in any capacity given what had
occurred. Michael thought this was unfair since the administrator who knew of the situation, and also did not report the event immediately, still kept their job and from his point of view there was no type of reprimand.

Michael was eventually able to find a position in a different school district, but has been very unsure and hesitant of anyone he works with. He mostly keeps to himself and calls in additional support for documentation purposes frequently. Anytime he needs to document anything he has the secretary come in and initial that he has completed the task. Michael believes he was very fortunate to be able to keep his license and understands now that he should have contacted children services, but feels the system was unfair to him since he faced the charges and punishment when he thought he was doing the correct action by seeking support from an administrator. He also believes that administrators should be screened better before being placed in a position where they have so much authority over others and believes district level employees are quick to dismiss what anyone has to say that may be against one of the school administrators and refers to all school systems as “good ole boy” systems where you are “golden if you know the right people”. He also often wonders how many others this has happened to and may not have been as fortunate as he was to be able to seek new employment.

**Bethany: 51-Year-Old Female from the West**

Bethany was a veteran teacher who was close to retirement. She met the requirements for the school district but was not old enough to receive her full benefits and insurance. She had been working at the same school and under the same administration for over 10 years. Bethany was also a teacher who mentored new teachers to help them through their first year of teaching. She knew many people at the school and district level since she had been with the same district for her entire career. This year her mentee was struggling with a few things, most notably with
classroom management. Bethany tried to help and even called other teachers who had strategies to help with classroom management to model for her mentee, but her mentee was still struggling. This mentee had also completed student teaching at the school where they worked so they were familiar with staff and students at the school. During student teaching there was no mention of classroom management issues.

After exhausting all avenues, Bethany asked administration to help step in to support her mentee with classroom management and even provide some additional professional development opportunities. At this point the situation was out of her hands. A few weeks later her mentee came to her regarding their evaluation with administration, it was average, and they were marked down on classroom management and differentiating instruction for diverse learners. This was a little concerning to Bethany since she not only received her own classroom evaluation, but also an evaluation on how she was as a mentor which adds additional income to her paycheck. If her mentee does poorly she will not receive the additional stipend and could be removed from the mentorship program.

Bethany met with her administrator about her concerns again and was assured this would not reflect on her since she had provided all the necessary resources she could to her mentee. When the end of the school year came, her administrator approached her and asked her about her intentions for the following year, knowing that Bethany was able to retire at any time due to her years of service. Bethany let her administrator know that she was not ready to retire and would be continuing her contract the following year, even mentioning that it would be at least another 5-7 years before she would consider the idea.

During the summer months, Bethany received a phone call from the school district asking her about completing the retirement paperwork. She was confused since she specifically had the
conversation with her administrator that she would not be retiring any time soon. After hanging up with district she immediately called the school to speak with her administrator. Her administrator assured her there must have been some confusion and she was on the roster to return.

Two weeks before the school year was starting Bethany received her contract for the school year to let her know what her salary would be. She noticed she did not have the mentor supplement added to her paycheck and that her additional year of service was not counted for the year before. She immediately contacted human resources and they let her know that she was not being retained as a mentor and that for some reason the system had miscalculated her years of service and they would correct that. Bethany was taken aback by learning she would not be a mentor that school year, but remembered how her mentee struggled, so she decided to not make a big deal about it and just enjoy the year off.

When the school year started Bethany was given a mentee, which surprised her since she was told she would not be a mentor that year. She asked her administrator about it and her administrator thought she was a mentor again. She explained what had happened with human resources and the administrator let her know they would call and clear things up if she was interested in still being a mentor. Bethany asked if there was anyone else who could be the mentor, as she had looked forward to having the year off and getting the extra time to herself. Her administrator let her know they would get back with her if they needed her.

A few weeks into the school year one of the new teachers came to her asking for assistance. Bethany was happy to help but reminded the mentee that they should also seek guidance from their mentor since that was what they were there for. The mentee let her know that their mentor was not helping them, and they needed additional support. Bethany knew the
mentor they were speaking of, so she went and spoke with them. This was a mentor who had mentored other teachers in past years, so to hear they were not being very helpful was a bit surprising. Bethany had a pleasant conversation with the mentor and went on her way.

A few days later, Bethany was called into her administrator’s office. When she walked in, she saw a few other district level people in the room as well. She was notified that someone had filed a complaint about intimidation of another staff member. This was a shock to her, and she could not figure out who they were referring to or the incident in question. They let Bethany know they were just starting the investigation and wanted to know her side of events. After hearing the minimal details, she still could not determine what they were talking about and asked them to clarify if it was indeed her who the complaint had been placed on.

A few days after she was notified of the investigation, Bethany went to see her administrator and asked if there was any other information that could be shared or if they were able to confirm that it was her who the complainant was referring to. She was told that the complaint specifically named her and gave detailed information about the event and they did have her on camera interacting with the person who filed the complaint, but they did not have the specific event that occurred on camera. Bethany was unable to give a detailed account of the incident since she was still completely uncertain. Since the investigation had advanced, she was able to learn the person who was accusing her and she was shocked to hear that it was the mentor of the mentee she had helped earlier in the school year.

She told her administrator that she remembered the conversation she had with the mentor and had since had many others, but nothing that she was being accused of happened during any of their interactions. Bethany was shocked and not sure what to do so she tried to distance herself as much as possible from the teacher, who she once had called a friend. Shortly after she started
distancing herself, she was called back into the administrator’s office with the district level employees and was told there was a new complaint that she was bullying the same person who made the original accusation. Bethany let them know that she had been distancing herself because she was unsure how to handle the situation since the event she had been accused of never occurred. She was steering clear of the teacher to be sure nothing else could be misconstrued against her. She made her statement and went back to her classroom.

A few days later her administrator called her to their office to discuss everything and let her know they had decided to just leave a disciplinary letter in her file and to let the bullying incident be dismissed. Bethany was certainly not ok with this action, as she had done nothing wrong. She told the administrator she would like to appeal the action. She spoke with the same district level employees who had handled the investigation and they took her appeal. The appeal would be filed along with the disciplinary letter and would let anyone know who pulled her file that she essentially disagreed with the findings in the letter and that it would not have any impact on her ability to remain with the district.

As the winter break approached, Bethany was called back into her administrator’s office. Her administrator asked if she wanted to reconsider retiring at that time. Bethany was completely confused and wondered what she must have been accused of now. Her administrator let her know there were no accusations, but the concern was that not only was the discipline on her file, it was also a mark against the administrator and would be reviewed during their annual review. Bethany knew this really had nothing to do with her since the entire incident was made up and felt the additional bullying charge was proof enough that she was not guilty of what she had been accused of.
For the rest of the school year Bethany received poor remarks on her evaluations when it came to anything other than specifically teaching content in her classroom. She received the lowest markings possible for collaborative practices and professional development. Bethany contacted the school district to see what her options there were, since she believed she was now unfairly targeted by her administrator. They told her the only option she had was to file a report against the administrator. This was not something she wanted to do, so she decided to try and speak with the administrator about her reviews. The administrator continued to reference the discipline action and that action was why her markings were low. She contested her evaluation.

Being at a loss of what other options she had, she decided to file a report of bias against the administrator. She printed out everything on her evaluation and added her comments about what she was told for the reasoning. At the end of the school year, one of the assistant administrators came to her and asked what her intentions were for the following school year. This was something her administrator always took care of but knowing the situation she felt this was appropriate. She let them know she intended on returning to the school the following school year. At that time she was told she would not be able to return to her current teaching position. She was confused and knew she was being specifically targeted and punished for her report.

She contacted the district and went in to see someone. She was told that since she had so many years in with the district she was able to make the decision on what grade level and subject she would like to teach, but ultimately if an administrator did not want her in a building, it could make for an unpleasant work environment. The only way an administrator could block a teacher from getting the position they choose would be if there were extenuating circumstances that would need to be proved to the district. She decided she would not let this incident ruin her final years of teaching and that she wanted to return to the school she had worked at.
During the summer, Bethany was left out of all communication, including school-wide events for employee team building. She was not told when she could come and pick up her classroom keys and get into her classroom. She would hear about everything from her colleagues, which started to frustrate her. She called and made an appointment to speak with her administrator. When she arrived for her appointment, she was asked to wait in the school lobby for over an hour until the administrator was available, as they were double booked. She waited and once called she noticed another administrator was in the office as well. Her administrator let her know they were not comfortable being without a witness to the conversation due to past accusations made by her.

Towards the end of the conversation the second administrator stepped out to use the restroom. It was at this time her administrator told her that if she decided to stay they would make this school year the most unpleasant year she had and would guarantee to move her room multiple times and find a teacher who could replace her so she would have to move to a different subject. This would be the administrator’s sole purpose of the year. Bethany was completely shocked and when the second administrator returned from the restroom she recounted what was just told to her in from of that administrator. Her administrator acted shocked and as if that conversation did not just happen. The second administrator told her they had not heard any such thing, and when she stated it was when they stepped out to use the restroom, the administrator stated they had never left the room at all. She knew she was cornered and there was nothing she could do.

Instead of making her final years uncomfortable and ruining her joy of teaching, she decided it was best to move to another school in the district. Bethany had many friends in the district, so she was able to easily get her same position at another school within the district.
Bethany did not mention her reasoning to anyone and did not hear anything additional from her former administrator.

During all her years in education she had heard of horror stories from other teachers and never thought anything like that would happen to her, especially being under the same administration for so long. She wished the district would have had a better system in place to protect teachers and staff since administrators have the last say and their word is taken as more important than the teachers.

**Results**

The results of this study show very disturbing actions of school administrators and the detrimental effects of those actions on educators. Although it should not be necessary to educate those entering the profession of this behavior, clearly it should become part of the curriculum to adequately prepare students before they do enter the field of education. Educators in this study were exposed to such damaging actions from administrators and were not prepared to handle what they encountered.

**Theme Development**

Ten participants agreed to share their experiences with administrator bullying. The participants came from across the United States and were not bound by gender or race and did include both male and female participants, but racial demographics were not specified. As Creswell (2013) stressed, it is essential that all of the participants must have experienced the phenomenon being studied. Professional referrals and identified cases of administrator bullying were used to achieve this group of participants, which then involved documented proof of the bullying incident. The interview process was then conducted at the convenience of each participant. The procedures and purpose of the study were provided and confidentiality measures
were reviewed. It was important to convey a trusting environment so participants would feel at ease and not pressured about discussing their experiences. Concern shown for others is one of the clearest and most unambiguous signals of trust (Kouzes & Posner, 2012).

The data collection method focused on interviewing educators using semi-structured questions to allow them to respond based on their perspectives of administrator bullying. This allowed for flexibility in obtaining additional information after they had a chance to think about what was being asked. Open-ended questioning offers participants to be straight forward with their responses. Participants were also asked to complete a guided journal activity, which required both pre and post-interview questions to be completed. The purpose of the guided journal was to help participants recall specific details and possibly work through feelings they may experience when recalling the bullying that occurred. While many participants felt comfortable speaking about their experience, the journal was able to show more vulnerability and a deeper impact the experiences had on participant health and well-being. The data analysis process interpreted the cast amount of material. Interpretation is a process that involved abstracting out beyond the codes and themes to the larger meaning of the data (Creswell, 2013). The analysis is about getting underneath what the participant is saying to get a true understanding of the world from their perspective (Sutton & Austin, 2015). A significant theme that stands out is the lack of follow through when it comes to district policy and union capabilities. In several cases the union stepped in to attempt to help the educators and were unsuccessful since they did not have the ability to enforce their policies and practices and were at the mercy of district level officials. Some of the administrators also showed their intent to follow through with their own personal agenda, even after being directed otherwise from district
officials. This showed a lack of respect for the chain of command put in place by many school districts.

The analysis is about getting underneath what the participant is saying to try and understand the world from their perspective (Sutton & Austin, 2015). The results Creswell (2013) described from Moustakas’ (1994) simplified version of the Stevick-Colaizzi-Keen method are as follows:

**Step 1: Describe personal experiences with the phenomenon to attempt to set aside the researcher’s personal experiences.**

In a previous position as an elementary school counselor, I not only witnessed the abuse of power from an elementary principal, I was the recipient of that abuse. A student reported what seemed to be child neglect or abuse. As a school employee, it is mandated that concerns of this nature be reported. After notifying this concern to my administrator, the school principal did not want any of the information to be reported to the children services agency, and I was instructed to “keep quiet” regarding this situation. I reported the incident, which did result in an investigation, and it was determined there was concern for the student involved. The principal exhibited retaliation by assigning duties to me that were clearly not in my job description, took away all previously assigned duties as a school counselor, and became verbally abusive towards me. The treatment I received forced me to resign my position.

While working at a different school district, I witnessed an administrator who was both bullying staff members and students. There were occasions in which staff members were threatened with their employment if they did not adhere to what the administrator wanted them to do. The requests made by the administrator ranged from falsifying district materials, requiring staff members to look over state test materials, or use their planning period time for duties
outside of their assigned job description. Those who failed to comply with the administrator’s directives were threatened with their employment being immediately terminated through falsified documentation or not offering a renewal of their position for the following school year. I was informed that several of these situations had been brought to the attention of the board of education, where little or no remediation was offered. There was high teacher and staff turnover under this principal’s tenure, as each was terminated at the administrator’s request or presented with such unbearable working conditions he or she resigned under duress.

**Step 2: Develop a listing of significant statements that involve nonrepetitive, nonoverlapping statements, meaning horizontalization of the data.**

The information was compiled horizontally to distinguish any common patterns or similarities. Examples of relevant experiences reported by the participants included being belittled, false accusations, and even physical damages. The feeling of no control was also expressed along with the need for more accountability of administrators.

**Step 3: Group the significant statements into larger units of information, called “meaning units” or themes.**

Meaning units appear by closely analyzing all the significant statements for repetition among the co-researchers. Creswell (2013) described interpretation as a process that involves abstracting out beyond the codes and themes to the larger meaning of the data.

**Table 2**

*Outcomes*

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Open-Codes</th>
<th>Enumeration of open-code appearance across data sets</th>
<th>Themes</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Feelings of Fear</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>Personal Effects/Mental Health Impact</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Feelings of Shock</td>
<td>10</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Feelings of Humiliation</td>
<td>8</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Feelings of Discomfort</td>
<td>10</td>
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</table>
Step 4: Write a description of “what” the participants experienced which is called a “textural description”.

A textural description exposes what the participants experienced with the phenomenon and includes verbatim examples (Creswell, 2013). These participants were belittled with various statements. Natalie was told, “some people are just not cut out to be teachers”. Erica was told, “I hope you teach better than you interrogate”, and that she was “clearly smarter on paper than in person”. George was told he was not the “kind of representative the district wanted to be associated with”. These statements represent intentional harm to the victims.
Step 5: Write a description of “how” the experiences happened which is called “structural description”, as the inquirer reflects on the setting and context in which the phenomenon was experienced.

A structural description exposes how the experience happened, as the inquirer reflects on the setting where the phenomenon was experienced (Creswell, 2013). Often the perpetrator seemed to make sure there were no witnesses, while sometimes they seemed to purposely hurt the victim in front of others. Julie was physically injured in the school building, while Hanna experienced vandalism of her personal property and at her residence. This indicates victims may not have safety even after leaving work. Often the verbal abuse was perpetrated in private between the abuser and victim. The unwanted physical attention Sarah experienced was on school property when only she and the administrator were present. Bethany was left out of the communication during the summer when school was out.

Step 6: Write a composite description of the phenomenon incorporating both the textural and structural descriptions. This is the “essence” of the experience and represents the culminating aspect of a phenomenological study.

Structural descriptions can offer rich description of how the phenomenon was experienced by the participants and combined with textural descriptions, the researcher can move to the final steps of data analysis, which is the essence of the experience (Davenport, 2014). The finals step is the intuitive integration of the fundamental textural and structural descriptions into a unified statement of the essences of the experience of the phenomenon as a whole (Moustakas, 1994). As Creswell (2013) stated, the essence focuses on the common experiences of the participants, as all experiences have an underlying structure.
All the participants seemed to care genuinely about their profession. Whether they were fresh out of college like Erica, a volunteer who became a teacher like Amanda, a career changer to education like Natalie, a younger teacher like Sarah, or those with many years of experience, like Hanna, David, Julie, Michael, George, and Bethany, they were all passionate about their profession. Erica was hopeful and optimistic and Sarah wanted to shape the future of America. Then came the perceived bullying by their administrators. Their pain could be felt in their stories. From David expressing worry to Michael being unsure and hesitant of anyone he works with now, they were all profoundly affected by these encounters. Amanda was thrilled to enter the profession and left with shame and hurt from her ordeal. All these participants, though, exhibit extreme courage to allow sharing their experiences to bring attention to a problem often not dealt with in the school setting.

Parker (2014) stated the majority of workplace bullying is perpetuated by supervisors and victims have few options for managing these situations, as they are rendered powerless by their abusive supervisors, complicit organizations and their need to stay employed, since they are financially dependent on the abuser. The powerlessness was clearly evident as the themes were organized. The mental health effects ranged from feelings of discomfort and humiliation to shame and hurt. Those effects were evident as the participants’ expressions developed into such themes as being “victimized”, “demoralized”, “taken for granted”, “taken advantage of”, “unappreciated” and “worthless”. The nature of the bullying was represented with unkind words to actual physical property damage. Courses of action taken included union representation and having law enforcement involved. The majority of participants, though, had their reputations affected. Some left the field of education, while others transferred to different schools or districts to alleviate the situation. Clearly, the victims were rendered powerless by their abusive
supervisors. The following table provides clusters of significant statements by the participants to provide an understanding of their experiences:

**Table 3**

*Theme Statements*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Theme</th>
<th>Significant Statements</th>
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| **Personal/Mental Health Effects** | • “I was drained in every way possible and I felt there was nothing I could do”  
• “I couldn’t eat, I couldn’t function”  
• “I was so scared, I would have panic attacks heading to work”  
• “It felt like a kick in the chest and like someone was targeting me, because they were”  
• “My doctor recommended a therapist. I felt as is no one would understand how I was feeling”  
• “I felt helpless and trapped”  
• “[They] humiliated me and made me feel worthless” |
| **Nature of Bullying** | • “I felt trapped in my own classroom, scared of what was waiting for me when I left”  
• “My principal loved the power, the fear [they] instilled in us”  
• When your administrator tells you, ‘you are the most useless and worthless they have seen in their 20 year career’, it just breaks your spirit”  
• “They want the good ones gone, so they stay on top”  
• “The whole system is flawed to protect the bad guys”  
• “I felt like a target, they were stalking me at work, were they doing it when I was at home?” |
| **Course of Action Taken** | • “All the union did was tell me not to let it get to me”  
• “The union seemed disinterested or like I was the problem”  
• “Everyone felt sorry [for me] but no one would help, or they could be next”  
• “The district just kept telling me someone would call me back, but no one ever did”  
• “The district didn’t care, they just didn’t want negative press”  
• “The union promised to help, but I still was the one who had to move schools, while nothing happened to the true person responsible”  
• “The district told me I could move schools” |
### Professional Outcomes/Closure

- “My job was my life and without it I had to start all over”
- “A principal breaks the rules and they stay, a teacher suffers and they are forced to leave”
- “I left my students, my friends, my career, all because no one cared”
- “They moved me and left the principal, how is that fair policy?”
- “After 10 years of teaching at the same school, they finally broke me”
- “My awarded reputation ruined by my jealous principal”
- “I adored my students but I just couldn’t take it anymore”

### Policy and Professional Development

- “District officials should be experienced and educated, not just hired for who they know”
- “They need to prepare teachers for this, it’s like going to war at work”
- “The school board should have to answer for these actions”
- “Your principal should be encouraging and build up your confidence, not tear you down for fun”
- “Anyone working in a school should be a role model, not a threatening menace to the system”

Teacher victimization is an important component of the teacher experience that can have significant implications for the teacher workforce and ultimately student achievement (Curran et al., 2019). When supervision is abusive, teachers suffer from health problems and emotional challenges which are destructive, harmful, and painful and the emotional abuse affects teachers’ performance levels which exacerbate injustice as learners do not benefit from the schooling system (Khumalo, 2019). Kleinheksel and Geisel (2019) provided that research indicated that reporting adult bullying behavior up the organizational chain rarely brings the relief one might expect. This was in agreement to the present study, as the educators felt they did not get the relief or support to handle the administrator abuse they had expected. Endure the abuse or leave are choices the majority of bullying targets are faced with to alleviate the situation (Grigoryan &
Weisdorn, 2019). The responses from participants in this research are clearly in agreement with this finding.

Changes need to be made to better support teachers and to deal more effectively with administrators who may bully teachers to improve teachers’ working conditions (Orange, 2018). Teacher safety is important in and of itself, but minimizing teachers’ experiences of victimization may increase the probability that they remain teaching in the school and remain in the profession (Curran et al., 2019). Participants in this study felt this was a crucial need to address. Some suggested accountability from the school boards and administrator, while others felt the need for better preparation during the process to become an educator. A societal problem such as workplace bullying should be fought from all angles.

**Research Question Responses**

This study’s purpose involved identification of actions that were perceived as administrator bullying to discover and explore those lived experiences. The qualitative method allowed for data to be organized based on common themes and analyzed as they related to the research questions. The following four open-ended research questions guided this study:

**CQ.** What are the lived experiences of public school educators who have experienced administrator bullying?

**SQ 1.** How do public school educators describe the impact of administrator bullying on their health and well-being?

**SQ 2.** How do public school educators attempt to resolve issues of administrator bullying within their school setting?

**SQ 3.** How do public school educators attempt to bring the issue of administrator bullying to the attention of their school district officials?
SQ 4. How have public school educators’ perceptions of the field of education changed since experiencing administrator bullying?

Central Question

What are the lived experiences of public school educators who have experienced administrator bullying?

While this study specifically looked at the higher profile cases it does show a significant impact on educators who have been bullied by their administrators. The following themes directly answer this research question as follows: (1) The lived experiences of those educators included mental health effects involving fear, shock, humiliations, discomfort, shame/hurt, and confusion, and the emotions described were clearly detrimental to the educators personally; and (2) From a professional aspect, the majority had to change their reporting locations to get away from the perpetrator, while a few even left the field of education altogether. These outcomes resulted even though there was ample union representation and assistance. This is even a further complication when the safety net to protect employees cannot fully alleviate the victimization.

Sub-Question 1

How do public school educators describe the impact of administrator bullying on their health and well-being?

The following themes answer this research question as follows: (1) Some participants did seek outside medical attention for their mental health and well-being as a result of the bullying they experienced. While very few cases become physical, many cases are straining on someone’s mental health, which can be harder to treat and cause more significant impacts later if not properly treated. Several of the participants mentioned seeking help to understand and work through their experiences. In some areas of the country, mental health issues are still seen as a
negative, which can result in an individual not getting the help they need; and (2) Several participants did note they still feel apprehensive, even after their situation has resolved and they continue to feel a level of uneasiness and fearful of a similar situation reoccurring. These feelings can eventually lead to other health issues and as some mentioned should be covered under workers compensation since they are a result of an incident that occurred at work, but none have stated the school districts recognized them as such.

Sub-Question 2

**How do public school educators attempt to resolve issues of administrator bullying within their school setting?**

The following themes directly answer this research question as follows: (1) All the participants in this study contacted either their union for assistance or district level employees. Some went through the proper chain of command, while others skipped some steps in hopes for a quicker resolve to their issue. In some of the cases, the educators unintentionally got their administrators in trouble as they were unaware they were being targeted until later; (2) Many of the educators in this study found it uncomfortable or were unsure of how to resolve their specific issue with their administrator even after learning of the issues. In many cases the educator felt uncomfortable bringing anything to the attention of their administrator, since they are also their boss and believed it could become a “he said, she said” issue that would lead to more issues; and (3) Participants also noted they felt intimidated to bring issues to the attention of their administrator since they had the ability to prevent them from being rehired or even could cause issues with the educator finding employment elsewhere should they need to.
Sub-Question 3

How do public school educators attempt to bring the issue of administrator bullying to the attention of their school district officials?

The following theme directly answers this research question as follows: Some of the educators brought the issue directly to their district level contact, while others went through their unions. In each case, the union did involve district level officials in attempt to resolve the issues being experienced. Unfortunately, in many cases the level of bullying may not be extreme enough to warrant district level intervention, which allows for little support and recourse for the educator experiencing the bullying. Districts have different means of getting in contact with officials, generally phone calls and e-mails were the preferred methods of contact, but in more than one case the educator did physically go to the district office to get the attention needed for assistance.

Sub-Question 4

How have public school educators’ perceptions of the field of education changed since experiencing administrator bullying?

All of the participants in this study had their perceptions changed. The following themes directly answer this research question as follows: (1) Some of the participants left the field of education all together while others stayed with the field; (2) In some cases the participants have even made efforts to help prevent and resolve bullying issues, like they experienced, by getting involved in other agencies or unions; (3) None of the participants even considered bullying being an issue in education from an administrator, although, several knew of events that were heard of regarding students and parents and a teacher; and (4) Many participants feel there needs to be a better level of protection in place for educators to prevent or limit this type of situation from
happening. In some instances there were systems put in place by district level officials, but the administrator still did not follow the protocol of that system and instead followed what they wanted instead.

**Summary**

This chapter reported the findings of the study containing the experiences of 10 public school educators with administrator bullying. The transcendental phenomenological method was appropriate for use with data collection involving the interview process. This allowed for participants to describe the details of their experiences.

Using the qualitative method then allowed for the data analysis process to involve organization based on common themes, analyzing them as they related to the research questions. The results revealed that bullying from administrators is very harmful and the effects can be detrimental. All the participants had negative impacts on their mental health, while only a few experienced actual physical damages. Feelings of discomfort, shock, and hurt were unanimous. Half of the educators transferred to other schools, while two educators left the field of education.

Although there was union representation provided and three educators took legal action, there was a lack of accountability from the administrator bullies. The majority of victims would like to see policy reforms to protect victims. There were suggestions about having more balanced administrative authority, better administrative applicant screening, and better college preparation programs.

Chapter 5 provides a summary of the findings. There is discussion of theoretical and empirical literature as well as implications of the study. Recommendations for future research are also included. Clearly, this phenomenon must be addressed for the well-being of all those involved and the future of the education system.
CHAPTER FIVE: CONCLUSION

Overview

Bullying is vastly underreported and can have a negative impact on any school in the nation. A bully administrator can take a once successful school and ruin it. In school districts today a significant amount of power and responsibility falls on the school building administrator, which shows a level of professionalism is expected.

The purpose of this qualitative study was to discover and explore the lived experiences of public school educators who were bullied by school administrators. The study explored the impacts of school administrator bullying by conducting a qualitative transcendental inquiry in order to gain an understanding of the lived experiences of 10 educators. This chapter discusses the findings presented in chapter 4, including a summary of the findings, a discussion of the findings and the implications in light of the relevant literature and theory, methodological and practical implications, limitations and delimitations, and recommendations for future research. The chapter ends with a summary.

Summary of Findings

The purpose of this transcendental phenomenological study was to project public school educators’ voices regarding their experiences of bullying from administrators to develop a deeper understanding of the phenomenon. This study included a central research question and four sub-questions which focused on 10 public school educators who had perceived bullying from their administrators. The questions were structured to gain a deeper insight into the phenomenon of administrator bullying, its effects, and its impacts on those who had experienced it, while also serving to fill in a gap in existing literature. Multiple open codes emerged from the data, which resulted in seven overarching themes.
Central Question

What are the lived experiences of public school educators who have experienced administrator bullying?

The purpose of the central question was to explain the experiences of educators who have been bullied by their administrators. This question was chosen due to personal past experiences and a lack of research exploring and explaining this phenomenon. The intent was to give a voice to those who have suffered from the actions of those in a higher position of authority. The participants provided in-depth details of their experiences.

The lived experiences of public school educators who experienced administrator bullying was detrimental to the victims as well as the education system. The feeling of shock, fear, discomfort, confusion, and hurt were very prevalent. Even though educators reached out to those in higher positions of authority and used available resources, such as union representation, they generally did not get the corrective action they were seeking. Many of the educators had their record or reputation negatively affected. Some transferred schools or districts, while a few left the field of education. The level of experience and years of teaching actually appeared to put educators more at risk for the bullying behavior. Also, most of the administrators were experienced, which shows they were probably well aware of their actions and most likely had an agenda. Many of the victims stated the need for policy changes to protect all employees.

Sub-Question 1

How do public school educators describe the impact of administrator bullying on their health and well-being?

A key point in this area is mental health. While many who have experienced bullying may not show any physical injuries, the injuries that cause mental harm can be long-lasting and
life changing. Many participants expressed how their personal mental health had changed since their experience. Issues with trust were affected. Trust is a crucial component of relationships. The hurtful actions felt by the educators from their administrators resulted in confusion and discomfort which had such a negative impact on them. The pain felt by these educators was clearly represented through the interviews.

Sub-Question 2

How do public school educators attempt to resolve issues of administrator bullying within their school setting?

In several cases, educators did not even realize they were being targeted until others questioned events that were occurring. Once those situations were brought to light most of the educators felt uncomfortable confronting their administrator due to the power they held over their position within the school. All participants sought help from either their union or higher level district employees. Most had union representation and communication with district level employees. The main results of this were of documentation of a problem but most did not receive a positive outcome to the problem. If anything, it weakened their confidence in a system that is supposed to protect employees. This question exposed a serious problem in how to resolve the phenomenon of administrator bullying, as there is not an easy solution.

Sub-Question 3

How do public school educators attempt to bring the issue of administrator bullying to the attention of their school district officials?

Taking an issue to a district level employee is considered to generally be the highest in the hierarchy at the school level. All the participants went through either union officials or district officials to resolve their situation. Union representatives are generally seen as those who
handle district level issues and are often used as a buffer between an educator and the district level employees.

**Sub-Question 4**

How have public school educators’ perceptions of the field of education changed since experiencing administrator bullying?

All the participants perceptions on their field were impacted. Some chose to continue on in the field of education, but with a greater hesitation. Some chose to work in a role within the union, while others chose to leave the field of education all together. With a worldwide teacher shortage, it is disheartening to see educators leaving the field due to an experience that could have been completely avoided and gives question to how many educators are leaving the field for the same reasons.

The responses revealed there are perceived impacts on educators who have received bullying from administrators and include health problems, affecting both their personal and professional lives, and negatively affecting how they felt about their organizations and overall job satisfaction. These responses exposed the critical issue of bullying and how its effects are not only damaging to victims, they also effect the surrounding communities.

**Discussion**

Previous research indicated a real concern about bullying in the workplace. Bullying is an abusive behavior that has a long history and it quite pervasive in society today (King & Piotrowski, 2015). It has reached epidemic proportions in the workplace and not only impacts the health and well-being of its victims, it also impacts organizations (Olive & Cangemi, 2015).
Theoretical Literature

The theoretical framework used to guide this study was Bandura’s social cognitive theory. Swearer et al. (2014) stressed the importance of using this theory as a heuristic for understanding the complexity of bullying behaviors and the social nature of involvement in bullying. The unique feature of social cognitive theory is its emphasis on social influence and its emphasis on external and internal social reinforcement (LaMorte, 2019). Social cognitive theory provides a way to view the phenomenon of administrator bullying and the study’s results confirmed the application of it as a guiding framework.

Previous research literature on social cognitive theory stressed an individual’s role in handling stressful situations. Individuals devise ways of adapting flexibility to remarkably diverse geographic, climatic, and social environments, figure out ways to circumvent physical and environmental constraints, redesign and construct environments to their liking, create styles of behavior that enable them to realize desired outcomes, and pass on the effective ones to other by social modeling and other experiential modes of influence (Bandura, 2001). Social cognitive theory proposes there is a continuous interaction between the social environment, internal stimuli, and behaviors (Swearer et al., 2014). As Bandura (2001) stressed, human functioning is analyzed as socially interdependent, richly contextualized, and conditionally orchestrated within the dynamics of various subsystems and their complex interplay.

Bullying is a complex action where the victim must try to handle the situation by figuring out why it is happening while trying to handle the emotional toll as well. Bandura (1989) asserted that an individual’s self-efficacy beliefs determine their level of motivation, as reflected in how much effort they will exert in an endeavor and how long they will persevere in the face of
obstacles. Although, it is important to distinguish what the obstacles are, as material obstacles present problems, while bullying is of a personal nature and may have a deeper impact.

Abusive leadership is attributable to behaviors that are deviant, antisocial and counter-productive and that which is uncivil (Khumalo, 2017). Motivational components are tied to the consequences that follow certain behaviors; specifically, individuals are more likely to engage in behaviors they have learned where the consequences are valued and rewarding, while if the consequences of particular behaviors are more punishing and less reinforcing, individuals will be motivated to refrain from engaging in those behaviors (Swearer et al., 2014). The abusive administrators usually did not receive punishment and often their goal against the educators was achieved. This sets a precedence for abuse, as the administrators feel the sense of control to do as they please.

Social cognitive theory suggests that interventions focused on cognitive and social functioning are an important part of breaking the cycle of bullying involvement (Swearer et al., 2014). When individuals are mistreated at work, their focus of attention is diverted from completing their work to trying to understand and manage the mistreatment (I & I, 2002). Intervening directly with the bully perpetrators with the goal to help these individuals change their cognitive and social behaviors that underlie their bullying behaviors is proposed (Swearer et al., 2014).

A drawback to this theory is it heavily focuses on processes of learning, and in doing so, disregards biological and hormonal predispositions that may influence behaviors, regardless of past experience and expectation (LaMorte, 2019). It is limiting to describe behavior in terms of either nature or nurture, which underestimates the complexity of human behavior, and is more likely that behavior is due to the interaction between nature and nurture (McLeod, 2016).
Although, it appears as though there is much evidence to support the application of social cognitive theory to bullying behaviors (Swearer et al., 2014).

**Empirical Literature**

Earlier research on workplace bullying stated it was an under-reported and relatively under-analyzed phenomenon in the U.S. workplace (Lutgen-Sandvik et al., 2007). Ryan (2016) explained that experts have noted bullying to be more complex, lethal, and considerably different in many ways from bullying in the past. The participants in this study tried to resolve the bullying by seeking help from district officials, union representatives, and occasionally law enforcement. It is unknown whether this information even makes it beyond an individual’s desk, therefore, the reporting process may be flawed.

The complexity of each of these cases is consistent with previous research analyzed. Workplace bullying is defined as the repeated and organized engagement of interpersonal abusive behaviors that negatively affect both the individual being targeted as well as the workplace, and includes several negative emotional/psychological, medical, and socioeconomic consequences (Sansone & Sansone, 2015). Although, bullying needs no formal power to be involved, it is enough for the victim to feel inferior to another (Oxenstierna et al., 2012). This study involved the position of power over others to further complicate the bullying.

Workplace bullying includes many hostile behaviors such as harsh criticism, setting impossible deadlines, withholding information, social isolation, spreading rumors, attacks on physical and personal characteristics, ridicule and humiliation, verbal threats, interfering with work tasks, and even assigning demeaning work tasks (Sorrell, 2015). Moss (2016) added forms of non-physical aggression including ridiculing an employee, putting an employee down in front of others, accusations of incompetence, placing blame, lying to an employee, and not giving
employee credit for work. The participants in this study all received such hostile behaviors that should not have been allowed to continue. Adult bullying at work has four specific features: intensity, repetitions, duration, and power disparity (Lutgen-Sandvik et al., 2007). These features were very prevalent in this study.

Mobbing, using synonymously with workplace bullying, involves the group/organization abuse of an individual or group of individuals (Crawshaw, 2009). Heinz Leymann used the term “mobbing” to document the resulting trauma from sustained “psychological terrorization” in the workplace, while “workplace bullying” was coined by Andrea Adams, a pioneering British journalist, in 1992 (Namie, 2003, p. 1). Mobbing is an important construct that has an impact on numerous psychological variables, including a direct impact on stress (Yaman, 2015). Branch et al. (2013), indicated the terms “harassment” and “mobbing” are often used to describe bullying behavior but “workplace bullying” tends to be the most consistently used term throughout the research community. The term “bullying” was used almost exclusively along with “harassment” for the participants in this study.

There are many different types of bullying behaviors, but a bully is mainly interested in maintaining his or her power and control (Richardson & McCord, 2001). They generally seek domination and control over victims as well as witnesses and bystanders (Reisdorph, 2015). This research was very consistent in describing the actions of the bully administrators. They were very set on getting their way no matter how egregious their behaviors.

Previous research has tried to give some explanation for the behavior of administrators who bully. Namie (2003) suggested that bullies are controlling competitors who exploit their cooperative targets and that most would stop if the rules changed and bullying was punished. Moss (2016) indicated that some bully bosses have a history of family abuse, while others have
little ability to manage their emotions. Several other types of behavior for bullies include: a lack of skills to lead effectively, therefore, blaming their subordinated when quality and time constraints are not met; feelings of paranoia, as leaders may feel others in the organization are out to get them and target those who are bright, ambitious, well-liked, and successful; and leaders who are domineering and have a blatant disregard for others (Olive & Cangemi, 2015). The abusive administrators in this study often seemed to have an agenda and had no regard for the feelings of their victims. These educator views were shocked and hurt by the abuse, as many were experienced at their positions and thoroughly enjoyed where they worked.

Earlier research indicating that poor performers were more likely to be the victims of bullying has been contradicted by current research which shows that high performers also experience this phenomenon, as they may represent a threat to supervisors who place a high value on their dominant position in the hierarchy (Moss, 2016). This study showed that experienced educators who were mentors or coaches were just as likely to be bullied as new or inexperienced educators. Richardson and McCord (2001) indicated that bullies are often driven by their own fears and insecurities, and therefore, can rarely be cured, but their behavior may be controlled or eradicated. This would suggest not only helping the victim with the detrimental effects, but also requiring the bully to receive some sort of treatment so the behavior is not repeated over and over.

The effects of bullying can be felt by the victims and those around them, including the organization. Bullying fundamentally disrupts the trust and nurturing relationships that are such a necessity to achieve a school’s mission (McEvoy, 2014). It leads to increased employee turnover as well as giving the organization a reputation as a hostile workplace (Olive & Cangemi, 2015). Blum (2017) stressed that abusive supervision costs U.S. organizations billions of dollars per
year in lost productivity, increased absenteeism, and health care costs. Bullying is ultimately so corrosive to the work environment and is enabled when nothing is done to stop the abuser (Ryan, 2016). This problem was clearly present in this study. Administrators sometimes were just sent to another school, although often it was the victims who were moved to other schools or districts. This would surely enable the bad behavior because the administrator achieved their goal of overpowering the educator through the system. This action is unfair especially with the power disparity. The unequal power structure leaves the targets of bullying vulnerable to defend themselves, and they often have no choice but to refrain in the situation because no one takes their accounts seriously or they are financially dependent on those who abuse them (Parker, 2014).

There is recognition that workplace bullying is a threat to both personal well-being and organizational productivity, but too many targets of this destructive behavior find themselves abandoned by the law (Yamada, 2010). Discrimination legislation falls short of protecting victims unless they are members of a protected class and the bullying behavior relates specifically to the protected trait (Olive & Cangemi, 2015). Proponents of bullying legislation say that without laws on the books, employers will condone bullying as a means to an end, while critics of new laws argue that companies already address workplace bullying because this behavior is detrimental to their business by affecting employee morale, quality of work, and turnover (Maurer, 2013). Parker (2014) indicated that few organizations actually have clear human resource policies that prohibit bullying; therefore, rarely are the targets of bullying protected, and the absence of such policies could communicate to targets that their experiences are not important. This study clearly showed a lack of resources for victims and a definite lack of accountability toward the abusers.
Another concern towards bullying in the schools is the lack of oversight because the abuser is in the higher position. It is problematic when the administrator is the bully because the more highly ranked the administrator, the less oversight will be applied to behavioral propensities, and the bully administrator will probably be unsympathetic to efforts aimed at addressing and/or curbing bullying activities and could impede any constructive steps in this direction (King & Piotrowski, 2015). This was clearly an obstacle for the victims in this study. As King and Piotrowski (2015) stressed, the bully administrator can block any potential investigations into inappropriate behavior and might retaliate against anyone who complains or supports the accuser and hide behind a supposed superior administrative oversight. Fahie (2014) indicated the domination of the bully can serve as a warning to observers not to transgress, as to do so could potentially provoke a similar reaction directed towards them.

A common complaint from bullying targets who reported the behavior to their employer is that their complaints were either ignored or the employer made the situation even worse (Yamada, 2010). The participants in this study did not seem to be given adequate attention or concern for the situation they did not cause. Most of the time, they had to make accommodation to remedy the problematic behavior of their administrators by moving to different schools or districts or leaving the profession. Organizations must be able to recognize and rid themselves of the performance and talent-robbing behavior of bullying or risk losing their single most important competitive asset – their talented employees (Richardson & McCord, 2001).

This study adds to the growing research that administrator bullying is a problem in the field of education. Although most research on bullying in the workplace has looked at how to manage bullying once it has happened, rather than trying to stop it from happening in the first place (Gillen et al., 2017). Harassing supervision might be an imperfect response to a set of
imperfect circumstances, as it may emerge as a rational response to an irrational system (Stoelinga, 2011). Although, it must be effectively dealt with. When nothing is done to stop the bullying, it is effectively enabled and often the individual who sets about making the lives of others miserable does so simply because he or she can (Ryan, 2016).

**Implications**

The implications of the findings in this study are very relevant to the field of education and can also be applied to other employment settings. As Hoy and Miskel (2008) explained, behavior in organizations is not simply a function of its elements and environmental forces, as it is a function of the interaction of the elements, and therefore, is the result of the dynamic relationship among its elements. Bullying in academia has been acknowledged, but there have been relatively few empirical investigations of the phenomenon (Moss & Mahmoudi, 2021). Research has given data about how many individuals have been targeted by bullies in the workplace, but usually has not expressed the understanding of the human aspect of the phenomenon (Pepi, 2019). All the participants were individuals dedicated to their students and school. They just couldn’t understand why they were being harassed and had to deal with how to address the problem. Bullying is not the victim’s fault, regardless of what triggered it and is more about power and control, not the victim’s work ability (Raypole, 2019). The results of this study have theoretical, empirical, and practical implications to investigate.

**Theoretical Implications**

The theoretical framework used to guide this study was social cognitive theory. Social cognitive theory asserts that human behavior is governed by multiple determinants operating through varied mechanisms, as well as, seeking to clarify how self-efficacy judgement influences human action, thought, and affect (Bandura, 1986). An individual’s self-efficacy beliefs
determine their level of motivation, as reflected in how much effort they will exert in an endeavor and how long they will persevere in the face of obstacles (Bandura, 1989). This study’s results confirmed the applicability of this theory as a guiding framework.

When individuals are mistreated at work, the focus of their attention is diverted from completing their work to understanding and managing the mistreatment (Blasé & Blasé, 2002). Bandura (1989) explained that individuals who believe they can exercise control over potential threats do not conjure up apprehensive cognitions and, therefore, are not perturbed by them, while those who believe they cannot manage potential threats experience high levels of stress and anxiety arousal. This is directly applicable to the employee – employer hierarchy involving supervisory control over subordinates.

Bullying has been heralded as a social relationship problem, therefore, social cognitive theory is an important heuristic for understanding the complexity of bullying behaviors and the social nature of its involvement (Swearer et al., 2014). Among the mechanisms of personal agency, none is more central than an individual’s beliefs about their capabilities to exercise control over events that affect their lives (Bandura, 1989). Social cognitive theory suggests that interventions that focus on cognitive and social functioning can be important for breaking the cycle of bullying involvement (Swearer et al., 2014).

**Empirical Implications**

A qualitative research design was appropriate for this study as it dealt with human participants and human behavior. Phenomenological methods are particularly effective at emphasizing the experiences and perceptions of individuals from their own perspectives, and therefore at challenging structural or normative assumptions (Lester, 1999). Transcendental science emerged out of a growing discontent with a philosophy of science based exclusively on
studies of material things that failed to take into account the experiencing person (Moustakas, 1994). Qualitative research can help researchers in accessing the thoughts and feelings of participants, which can enable development of an understanding of the meaning that individuals ascribe to their experiences (Sutton & Austin, 2015).

This method of inquiry allowed participants to voice their displeasure with how bullying from administrators often is overlooked by their school district and the complications when the individual in charge is the bully. Previous research indicated detrimental effects of workplace bullying. As Parker (2014) explained, abused employees have poorer attitudes towards work, decreased psychological health and are more likely to suffer from health complaints related to the suffering at work. It was imperative to give victims a voice to expand knowledge of this phenomenon.

**Practical Implications**

Workplace bullying adversely affects both employees and employers, so consequently, each must do their part to minimize the impact of this type of bullying (Olive & Cangemi, 2015). The findings of this research study can add to the body of research on administrator bullying. The cost of bullying behavior to an organization and to its employees is simply too great to be ignored (Parker, 2014). Prior research found positive associations between employees’ perceptions of being mistreated and tendencies to mistreat others via displaced aggression (Mackey et al., 2018). Therefore, the effects of bullying can pass on to those not even involved.

Sharing information about acts of bullying may have a healing effect for those involved. Acknowledging the abuse these individuals suffered and to get their accounts of the abuse told may have a therapeutic effect in addition to the information to add for researcher to investigate.
It also may encourage others to come forward and report any abuse, so this problem can be addressed for the detriment to society that it is.

The field of education was once one of high respect and those who entered it were seen as professionals who were thought to be treated as such. In its current state the field is one that is consistently hiring due to growth or lack of applicants to fill vacancies. The idea that educators are being bullied in their positions does not help to fill these vacancies and can cause significant staffing issues, as well as low morale in schools with a bully administrator. Some educators were pushed out and turned off of the field of education based on their experiences after earning degrees or spending significant time and money to get into the field. Educators are not generally thought of to need the type of personality to handle this level of berating by a person, as shown by schools with higher need populations and their constant vacancies and inability to find those to fill those positions. Perhaps the best way to support fulfilling working lives is by investing in strategies that encourage respectful and supportive workplace cultures so that abuse, harassment, and violence at work is eradicated (Mullen & Wenger, 2017).

**Delimitations and Limitations**

Delimitations and limitations are inherent in any research study. Delimitations are the described boundaries set by the researcher for the study. Therefore, the researcher does have control over them. While limitations are influences in the study the researcher cannot control. Any delimitations to the study and the limitations that stem from those delimitations need to be clearly acknowledged and explained (Rockinson-Szapkiw & Spaulding, 2014). The researcher summarizes the study in its entirety and considers possible limitations (Moustakas, 1994).
Delimitations

Delimitations in this study included sample size and theoretical framework. This was a small study completed when looking at the large scope of the field of education. As research was completed there were many participants to choose from and the process of determining participants occurred by those who completed the necessary requirements first. Although the sample size was small, it was clearly within the usual parameters set for transcendental phenomenology research. A common misunderstanding is that results should be statistically reliable if the sample size is increased (Lester, 1999).

While this study sought to show that administrative bullying is not isolated to any certain part of the country, there are still many areas of the United States that were not represented in this study. Race was also not considered in this study and gender was not taken into account, although gender was disclosed. This study also did not investigate situations that involved non-administrators as the bully or those that had no legal documentation filed.

The theoretical framework chosen for the study was social cognitive theory by Bandura. The theoretical framework serves as a delimitation to the study as it is a researcher decision that serves to focus or narrow the scope of the study (Rockinson-Szapkiw & Spaulding, 2014). Although many other theories can be applied to investigate the phenomenon, social cognitive theory was chosen because as Swearer et al. (2014) explained, it is an important heuristic for understanding the complexity of bullying behaviors and the social nature of involvement in bullying. Individuals make casual contribution to their own motivation and action within a system of triadic reciprocal causation (Bandura, 1989). Bullying is described as a social relationship problem and the interplay between the individual and their social environment supports this conceptualization (Swearer et al., 2014).
Limitations

Limitations of the study include bias and subjectivity. Bias and subjectivity are not inherently negative but they are unavoidable, therefore, researchers should not try to simply ignore or avoid their own biases; instead, reflexivity requires researchers to reflect upon and clearly articulate their position and subjectivities (world view, perspectives, biases), so readers can better understand the filters through which questions were asked, data was gathered and analyzed, and findings were reported (Sutton & Austin, 2015). The potential for researcher bias must be acknowledged, and to curb potential preconceptions and assumptions, engaging in the practice of epoche before and after each meeting with participants as well as before and after data analysis of transcripts and notes should help (Davenport, 2014).

Data collection can be time consuming and participants feelings must be considered. Phenomenological approaches are good at surfacing deep issues and making voices heard, although, it is not always comfortable for participants, particularly when the research exposes taken-for-granted assumptions or challenges a comfortable status quo (Lester, 1999). There were factors implemented to ensure the privacy of the interviews and discussion with participants to assure they understood the questions being asked to avoid any weaknesses in the design. Data collection was also disrupted by the current pandemic and a limitation was face-to-face access. Many of the interviews were conducted through electronic means. Although observation is a key tool for collecting data in qualitative research (Creswell, 2007), it does appear the researcher was able to see the individuals were very able to express their experiences in great detail. A good level of rapport and empathy is critical to gaining depth of information, particularly where investigating issues where the participant has a strong personal stake (Lester, 1999)
A main issue with a phenomenological (or any qualitative) approach in a commercial or organizational setting is people not understanding what it is and expecting similar parameters to apply as for quantitative research (Lester, 1999). To address concerns of validity, qualitative researchers must display the expertise, competence, and rigor needed to support their findings (Rockinson-Szapkiw & Spaulding, 2014). There were no known problems with data collection and participants seemed very passionate about answering all the questions.

**Recommendations for Future Research**

Research should be done on the licensure process and programs of school administrators to make sure they are able to be objective in their profession and that they are not going to hold personal objectives against an employee. Research should also be conducted within other school districts around the world to see if they have experienced the same phenomenon and what process they have in place to help limit or remedy any similar situations. A quantitative study may provide statistical information as to how many educators have experienced some level of bullying in their career and to what level that bullying was experienced. Even investigation of the backgrounds of administrators who have been bullies or have experienced being bullied themselves could be beneficial to the field. Another area of interest would be comparing bullying incidences from years ago to those happening now and seeing if there is an upward trend or if it has always existed to this extent and was just never documented.

Bullying in any profession is wrong and should not occur, but in the field of education it is often overlooked or disregarded. Many hear of bullying incidents involving teachers and students, but there is an entirely different side to consider. The ten educators who participated in this study are only a very small sampling of those who have felt the impact of having an administrator bully them. Seeing the change that has occurred within just these individuals
should be a cause of concern for any school district and it is the hope that this research will open up the conversation to successfully resolve administrator bullying in the schools, as it results in a significant imbalance of power and should not be tolerated.

**Summary**

After completing the research for this study it is evident that administrative bullying among educators not only exists, but is a major problem. It is the aggressor’s desire to control the target that motivates the bullying action (Namie, 2003). Because of that desire for power and control, bullies create a hostile work environment (Ryan, 2016). Educators do not spend years earning a college degree to experience bullying by anyone, especially the administrator who is meant to be a mentor and guide to them.

Educators need protection from being bullied, while the irony of the situation is that the teaching profession is a caring profession subjected to a distinct lack of care by employers and law enforcement agencies (Bhatia, 2013). Principals may use a variety of harassing supervision approaches with the goal of making teachers uncomfortable so they will leave voluntarily (Stoelinga, 2011). This study revealed this was a successful tactic that occurred for 2 of the 10 participants.

While there are varying degrees at which bullying takes place, this study specifically focused on events that were well documented and had either union or district level evidence available. These are some extreme cases, but not the most extreme and only a small percentage of the cases that exist. In some of these cases a resolution was able to be found, but in some the issue was not followed up with after an educator left the building, district, or even the field all together. Often when an educator stands up against the bullying it is not quickly resolved and often leads to several weeks or months of effort to validate the claims being made by the
educator. Districts have the responsibility to stand behind their employees and should not ever make excuses or permit such behavior to continue. As the field of education continues to grow and be one that frequently experiences national shortages, it is imperative that a nurturing environment is provided for educators to be successful, since a successful educator is more likely to result in not only a pleasant work environment, but also successful students.
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April 21, 2020

Kristyn Baker
Russell Yocum

Re: IRB Exemption - IRB-FY19-20-64 THE LIVED EXPERIENCES OF PUBLIC SCHOOL EDUCATORS BULLIED BY SCHOOL ADMINISTRATORS: A TRANSCENDENTAL PHENOMENOLOGICAL STUDY

Dear Kristyn Baker, Russell Yocum:

The Liberty University Institutional Review Board (IRB) has reviewed your application in accordance with the Office for Human Research Protections (OHRP) and Food and Drug Administration (FDA) regulations and finds your study to be exempt from further IRB review. This means you may begin your research with the data safeguarding methods mentioned in your approved application, and no further IRB oversight is required.

Your study falls under the following exemption category, which identifies specific situations in which human participants research is exempt from the policy set forth in 45 CFR 46:

101(b):

Category 2.(iii). Research that only includes interactions involving educational tests (cognitive, diagnostic, aptitude, achievement), survey procedures, interview procedures, or observation of public behavior (including visual or auditory recording) if at least one of the following criteria is met:

The information obtained is recorded by the investigator in such a manner that the identity of the human subjects can readily be ascertained, directly or through identifiers linked to the subjects, and an IRB conducts a limited IRB review to make the determination required by §46.111(a)(7).

Your stamped consent form can be found under the Attachments tab within the Submission Details section of your study on Cayuse IRB. This form should be copied and used to gain the consent of your research participants. If you plan to provide your consent information electronically, the contents of the attached consent document should be made available without alteration.

Please note that this exemption only applies to your current research application, and any modifications to your protocol must be reported to the Liberty University IRB for verification of continued exemption status. You may report these changes by completing a modification submission through your Cayuse IRB account.

If you have any questions about this exemption or need assistance in determining whether possible modifications to your protocol would change your exemption status, please email us at irb@liberty.edu.

Sincerely,

G. Michele Baker, MA, CIP
Administrative Chair of Institutional Research
Research Ethics Office
APPENDIX B

CONSENT FORM
The Lived Experiences of Public School Educators Bullied by School Administrators
Kristyn R. Baker
Liberty University
School of Education

You are invited to be in a research study about sharing the lived experiences of educators who have been bullied by their public school administrators. You were selected as a possible participant because you are/were employed as a public school educator who has/had experienced bullying by your school administrator. Please read this form and ask any questions you may have before agreeing to be in the study.

Kristyn R. Baker, a doctoral candidate in the School of Education at Liberty University, is conducting this study.

Background Information: The purpose of this study is what are the lived experiences of educators who have experienced administrator bullying.

Procedures: If you agree to be in this study, I would ask you to do the following things:
1. Identifiable Case. Provide documented proof of the incident being discussed to verify the validity and general circumstances surrounding the claim.
2. Individual Interviews. Interviews will be scheduled at an agreed upon time and location between the participant and the researcher. Interviews can be in-person or over video-chat and will be audio recorded for accuracy and reference purposes for the researcher. Interviews may take place in a single session or in multiple sessions, depending on the preference and comfort level of the participant. Participants should expect to make themselves available for a minimum of 4-6 hours for the interview process to get as much information and supporting details as possible, this may be extended based on the circumstances being discussed or any additional clarification needed once the interview has concluded.
3. Guided Journal Reflection Activity. Participants will be provided with a journal to reflect on the interview and document any additional information regarding the situation being discussed or anything else that could potentially be pertinent to the study. This may include information that participants want to make sure they share during the interview, details that may have been forgotten to be included once the interview is complete, or any other thoughts and feelings that may not have been shared during the interview due to the sensitive nature of the topic being discussed.

Risks: The potential risks of this study are minimal. Participants will be provided with pseudonyms to protect their identity and only general regional information will be provided as an additional precaution, but as with any study there is a chance that the participants identity could be determined based on the information provided during the interview process. Participant information will only be stored under the participant’s pseudonym to help add an extra measure of protection.
Benefits:
Participants should not expect to receive a direct benefit from taking part in this study.

Benefits to society include the awareness of the public to the public school atmosphere and help the public better understand situations that educators face.

Compensation: Participants will not be compensated for participating in this study.

Confidentiality: The records of this study will be kept private. In any sort of report I might publish, I will not include any information that will make it possible to identify a subject. Research records will be stored securely, and only the researcher will have access to the records.

- Participants will be assigned a pseudonym. Interviews will be conducted in a location agreed upon by the researcher and participant to ensure the participants level of comfort and safety.
- Data will be stored on a password protected external hard drive.
- Interviews will be recorded and transcribed. Recordings will be stored on a password protected external hard drive. Only the researcher will have access to these recordings. Recordings will be erased if they are no longer needed after three years on file.
- I cannot assure participants that information that is transcribed and used for the purposes of the study will not be able to be identified by others who have knowledge of their circumstance. Participants may be able to be identified by a process of elimination based on information they have provided since the information may have been public record, covered by the media, or have been unique identifiable markers.

Voluntary Nature of the Study: Participation in this study is voluntary. Your decision whether or not to participate will not affect your current or future relations with Liberty University. If you decide to participate, you are free to not answer any question or withdraw at any time without affecting those relationships.

How to Withdraw from the Study:

If you choose to withdraw from the study, please contact the researcher at the email address/phone number included in the next paragraph. Should you choose to withdraw, data collected from you, will be destroyed immediately and will not be included in this study.

Contacts and Questions: The researcher conducting this study is Kristyn Baker. You may ask any questions you have now. If you have questions later, you are encouraged to contact the researcher. You may also contact the researcher’s faculty chair, Dr. Bunnie L. Claxton.

If you have any questions or concerns regarding this study and would like to talk to someone other than the researcher, you are encouraged to contact the Institutional Review Board, 1971 University Blvd., Green Hall Ste. 1887, Lynchburg, VA 24515 or email at irb@liberty.edu.

Please notify the researcher if you would like a copy of this information for your records.
Statement of Consent: I have read and understood the above information. I have asked questions and have received answers. I consent to participate in the study.

☐ The researcher has my permission to audio-record me as part of my participation in this study.

_________________________
Signature of Participant

_________________________
Signature of Investigator

______
Date

______
Date
APPENDIX C
INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

1. Please tell me what happened leading up to the bullying you experienced by an administrator.

2. Please describe what you experienced while working under this administrator.

3. How long had you worked for/under/with this administrator?

4. What kind training did you receive while in college, with any employer, or through any other means on how to handle any bullying situations with respect to administrators?

5. In what ways did you attempt to resolve the issue/conflict you were experiencing?

6. If other employees in the district or school board were aware of the issue, what did they do in response to knowing?

7. Explain any impact this situation has had on your health and well-being?

8. How has this incident impacted your view of the field of education?

9. What else would you like to share about administrator bullying to help in understanding your experience?
GUIDED JOURNAL REFLECTION INSTRUCTIONS & QUESTIONS

Please remember that anything you write in this journal will be kept completely confidential and will not be shared with anyone else. If you are including other individuals in your writing, please make sure to list their position/relationship to you. Names will be changed of everyone that you include in your writing. Your journal should come with you to your interview, so you are able to reflect and possibly use it to take notes, if needed.

• **Writing topic.** You can write about the same event/time period for all four entries or different events/time periods each entry (i.e. if the bullying took place over multiple school years or days you could designate each entry as a different year or day).

• **Length and frequency.** Write for 15-20 minutes for each entry if you can, with a minimum of one full page in length. You must have a minimum of one full paragraph per question being answered. The days you choose to write are up to you, given they are within the timeline of the study.

• **Write continuously.** Once you begin writing, write continuously without stopping. Don’t worry about spelling or grammar. If you run out of things to say, simply repeat what you have already written. Keep writing about the topic until the time is up.

• **Write only for yourself.** You are writing for yourself and no one else. Remember this writing will be kept completely confidential and will be used with the hope to end bullying by administrators.

    Pre-Interview Questions

4. Is there anything specific you want to make sure that you mention or touch on during the interview?

5. Please create a timeline of the events that occurred, beginning with the start of employment with the district in which the bullying incident took place. If there are any other important dates before this time, please make note of those.

6. How did this experience make you feel? Did it change your view of yourself or others?

    Post-Interview Questions

4. What have you missed in your interview that you would like to make sure is mentioned?
5. What advice/recommendations do you have for future educators?

6. How has retelling your story brought new information to your attention?