

The Problem of Teacher Abuse:

Sociopaths in the Schools

Introduction

Numerous reports of teacher abuse found in the education literature and on Internet sites indicate that many teachers have experienced anxiety, depression and loss of their careers as the result of the abusive actions of other teachers or their administrators. This phenomenon is commonly described as bullying, because it is often prominent and readily observable. However, a more penetrating and comprehensive analysis of the motives and methods of attacks on teachers by other educators is required, if these situations are to be prevented or reduced.¹

This account of teacher abuse is based on examples of sociopathy described in the psychological literature. When the model of sociopathy is used to examine the nature of teacher abuse, it becomes obvious that sociopathic educators organize and perpetuate this behavior. It will be seen that attacks on teachers are more complex and secretive than simply one or more teachers bullying another.

To prevent or markedly reduce the instances of this abuse in our schools we require answers to the following questions:

1. What are the goals and personality characteristics of sociopathic teachers?
2. What are the characteristics of teachers who are most likely to be attacked?
3. What are the characteristics of those teachers who assist sociopaths in this abuse?

4. What are the various methods of abuse and why are they effective?
5. What are the consequences of this abuse on targeted teachers?
6. Can this abuse be prevented?

Sociopathic Teachers

Neuroscientists report that some individuals have poorly developed areas in the part of their brains that support what is referred to as social intelligence or empathic capacity.² According to neuroscientists, the brain area for general intelligence that is, memory and reasoning, is distinct from the brain area that gives rise to empathic capacity. This means that an individual may have great facility in general intelligence but below average social intelligence; some individuals may be high in both forms of intelligence, or below average in both.

Sociopaths vary in general intellectual capacity, but without emotional intelligence they have no conscience and never feel shame or remorse; moreover, there are virtually no limits on their actions to achieve whatever they desire. As Martha Stout says, “The presence or absence of conscience is a deep human division, arguably more significant than intelligence, race, or even gender.”³ The destructive practices of sociopathic teachers typically go unnoticed, because the majority of people have some sense of right and wrong, and cannot believe that an educated person who chooses to work with children and young people could be of such a mind that they actually enjoy observing the pain and distress they can cause for others. The disbelief that such people exist is perhaps a sociopath’s greatest asset.

As Stout further notes, what sociopaths find most invigorating of all is “to bring down people who are smarter or more accomplished than you, or perhaps classier, more attractive or popular or morally admirable. This is not only good fun; it is existential vengeance.”⁴ For a sociopathic teacher this vengeance is aimed at good teachers--those who are competent, popular with students and respected by school personnel and parents. These are the teachers who possess either high empathic-capacity, or high systemizing skills with an average level of empathic capacity.⁵ When sociopaths hear students praise another teacher they may seek to demonstrate their superiority to themselves and others by showing that this teacher, thought to be so wonderful, is actually an unstable incompetent.

Students recognize the empathic capacity of some teachers and are drawn to them because they: (i) are easy to talk to; (ii) take the time required to assist students; (iii) offer helpful suggestions for dealing with problems; and (iv) show a genuine concern for student progress. Students may praise these teachers to a sociopath. Other teachers may make positive comments about the teacher.

Sociopaths believe that they do not have to perform to any standards, because in their minds, they are superior individuals, as is evident in their power over all others. Lacking a conscience, they feel no shame about not helping students assigned to them. Anyone who supervises or evaluates them will either be impression managed or removed. Principals or department chairs will be subjected to a threat analysis and diminished or protected, depending on the results of that analysis.

Clinical psychologists point out that since sociopaths have zero empathic capacity, they have a limited awareness of how other people experience emotions. Without the ability to understand how others think and what they feel, zero empathy individuals are deprived of the

benefits of experiencing other points of view.⁶ Sociopaths seem to have learned early in life that great stress can be created in those targeted for destruction when they experience (i) the loss of friends and (ii) lowered social status in the groups with which they want to associate. As Kate Pickett and Richard Wilkinson report:

[T]he most powerful sources of stress affecting health seem to fall into three intensely social categories: low social status, lack of friends, and stress in early life. All have been shown, in many well-controlled studies, to be seriously detrimental to health and longevity.

Moreover,

Friends make you feel appreciated, they find you good company, enjoy your conversation – they like you. If, in contrast, we lack friends and feel avoided by others, then few of us are thick-skinned enough not to fall prey to self-doubts, to worries that people find us unattractive and boring, that they think we are stupid or socially inept.⁷

People are generally aware of their status within the groups in which they participate. W. C. Wohlforth finds that “cumulating research shows that humans appear to be hardwired for sensitivity to status and that relative standing is a powerful and independent motivator of behavior.”⁸ The neuroscientist, Michael Gazzaniga, is quoted as follows:

When you get up in the morning, you do not think about triangles and squares and these similes that psychologists have been using for the past 100 years. You think about status. You think about where you are in relation to your peers.⁹

Sociopathic activity is directed at removing friends and lowering social status of their targets, by means of character assassination. When teachers lose friends and experience a lowered status on the faculty, they feel the stress that the sociopath desires, but they experience even greater stress when they no longer enjoy teaching. This latter stress is incomprehensible to sociopathic teachers. Teaching for a sociopath may be nothing more than a supportive environment for the parasitic lifestyle mentioned by psychologists as a characteristic of this personality disorder.

Other Participants in Sociopathic Abuse

When sociopaths join a faculty, their first task is to sort each teacher and administrator into one of three categories: (i) those in need of existential vengeance, that is, potential targets for removal; (ii) useful instruments to attack targeted teachers; and (iii) irrelevant. Teachers judged by sociopaths as useful participants are intensely cultivated. They must be judged by the sociopath to be capable of harming another teacher, which means, as the neuroscientists point out, they must have no *empathic motivation*. Highly empathic individuals cannot observe another person in distress without attempting to remedy the situation. Thus, anyone who participates in the attack on another person must be of low to zero empathic capacity.

Creation of a mob is an important instrument, because an attack by many colleagues is more effective at lowering a teacher's sense of their social status than would be rejection by the sociopath alone. Some of these teachers will have been friends of the targeted teachers. Bullying a teacher is also more effective as the number of people doing the bullying increases. Sociopaths ignore good teachers as potential mob members because they readily detect their emotional and cognitive commitment to teaching. Consequently, serious teachers do not respond to the sociopath's superficial ways of interacting.

How do we explain those teachers who willingly join the sociopaths in the abusive treatment of their colleagues? For good teachers, time in the classroom is enjoyable, but for others, it can be a stressful experience. In every school, all personnel--secretaries, clerks, custodians, students and others--have an opinion about which teachers are good and which are marginal to poor. Moreover, there is usually a high level of agreement within these ratings, and teachers are usually well aware of how they are regarded within their school or academic unit. Students also have ways of making both positive and negative ratings known to their teachers.

Weaker teachers may subsequently enter with fear into what Jan and Tim McGregor refer to as a sociopathic transaction, a Faustian pact in its truest form.¹⁰ These teachers know, given a lackluster record as a teacher, that they may not obtain an equal or better teaching position. They may have school debt or other problems as well. Assured of a sociopath's protection, any motivation to improve their teaching is now absent. Furthermore, it is inevitable that when good teachers are driven into depression, both their teaching and social status as leaders decline. *As good teachers are diminished and weak teachers turn in even poorer performances, the concern is that one sociopath on the faculty can lower the quality of instruction in an entire school or academic unit.*

Paul Babiak and Robert Hare point out that in some cases there are “puppetmasters” who manipulate and bully others, the puppets, into attacking the targeted individuals. “To the puppet master, both the intermediary (the puppet) and the ultimate victim are expendable since neither is viewed as a real, individual person.”¹¹ These individuals,” be they manipulators, bullies, or puppet masters, operate best in secret, so your reputation can be destroyed without your even being aware that anyone has doubts about your competence and loyalty.” As Babiak and Hare point out, if you attempt to respond...

“[Y]ou may very likely find that the waters have been poisoned against you, and every effort you make to remedy the situation may be seen as confirmation of the ‘problem employee’ reputation that you now have. Once you have lost your credibility, you are essentially defenseless.”¹²

Some teachers willingly assist sociopaths in their attacks on a good teacher because they are insecure and feel that they cannot perform at an adequate level or satisfactorily fulfill the demands of their positions.¹³ They seek to avoid situations in which their inadequacies will be obvious, using apathy as an avoidance strategy. In return for the protection offered by the sociopath, these individuals will demonstrate their unquestioned loyalty by becoming as the McGregors say, “foot-soldiers to the sociopath.”¹⁴ The McGregors refer to these persons as “apaths,” a term they derive from “apathetic” or “apathy.”¹⁵

The selected individuals serve the sociopath’s desire for power over others, especially, as Stout points out, when a work situation affords them “undersupervised control over a few individuals or small groups, preferably people and groups who are relatively helpless or in some

way vulnerable.”¹⁶ Such individuals are readily identified by sociopaths. The apaths, in their recognition of the power of the sociopath, are drawn to the person for protection, in exchange for which they give unquestioning loyalty.

The McGregors hold that while apaths may, under other conditions, might be fair and reasonable individuals, they can become involved in the attack on another teacher because they lack insight.¹⁷ This is explained by their reluctance to judge others as evil or destructive. On the other hand, they lack the courage required to protect or defend the targeted person. “In their interactions with a sociopath, the apathetic person’s conscience appears to fall asleep.”¹⁸ A person of high emotional-capacity could not bring themselves to engage in such behavior. The McGregors further hypothesize about the motives of apaths:

The apathetic person might bear a grudge, be jealous or angry, or have a sense of being let down by the individual concerned, and in consequence may be as keen as the sociopath to see the target defeated. Hence, the apath may be willing to join forces with the sociopath because he too has something to gain from the evolving situation.¹⁹

An understudied aspect of sociopathic teachers’ abuse of good teachers is the unrestrained aggressiveness, which enables sociopaths to provide various forms of protection, the most important of which is increased social status, or at least a guarantee of no loss of social status.²⁰

P. J. Henry observes the following:

Because a great deal of our sense of self comes from our social identities, the value of the groups to which we belong is integrated into our value as a person, based on the hierarchical ordering of the groups we belong to.

Moreover, “there has been a great deal of thought and study to the toll that being a member of a low-status group can have on people’s sense of their social value.” When people find themselves in a low-status position within their organization, they sense the loss of their worth to others and themselves. “That threat must be managed, controlled, or compensated for in some fashion, including the vigilant defense of one’s existing sense of personal worth.” Such a defense can “trigger violent reactions, particularly against those who threaten that worth.”²¹ While violent reactions do occur at times, before the anger and frustration builds to that level, the sociopath has already approached the apath in ways that show them that by becoming his/her loyal friend, they can experience an improved level of social status.

Low social-status individuals who reject participating in the sociopath-directed activities, may have already achieved low-status compensation in “resource exchange” by engaging in other institutional activities, in which they see themselves as having a higher status, thus proving they have personal worth. Examples of such exchanges might involve increased participation in church activities, community groups, family relationships, or recreational pastimes. In these activities, an individual can prove they are valued by others, evidence sought to fortify their own value as a person. Henry states: “Put simply, lower-status individuals are expected to engage in these strategies more than higher-status individuals,”²² which suggests that low-status individuals will seek out activities in which they can excel, that is, activities in which their status is beyond question.

The formation of a mob creates a defensive resource if a targeted teacher attempts to report what is being experienced. Should a teacher seek relief, the sociopath and mob members will report that the targeted teacher has been acting strangely and that they have no idea how someone could believe such things about them. The administrator to whom the targeted teacher turns to for assistance may already been impression-managed to some extent by the sociopath.

While sociopaths manipulate the impressions of less able teachers, the most valuable of these individuals to the sociopath are those who have had a close relationship with the targeted employee, because they may have knowledge of a target's past mistakes or regrets, which can be used in the attack. Others who might join the sociopath will not be recruited if they are judged by the sociopath as incapable of the viciousness required. Furthermore, teachers who have previously had a positive relationship with the targeted colleague help hide the fact that mobbed abuse is underway, because they are seen as friends of the target.

In higher education there is the oft cited distinction between the locals and the cosmopolitan teachers. The latter are producers and publishers of research while the former are focus on classroom teaching only. Sociopaths do not consider including the cosmopolitan teachers in their abusive activities, because they will not engage in such pursuits and do not see the sociopath as a source of protection. They are also aware of the sociopath's lack of interest in academic content and their lack of participation in an academic discipline. The sociopath focuses on local teachers, because they understand the comradery that forms their social reality. Sociopaths also know how to gain their acceptance and can more easily manipulate their impressions. Some local teachers who readily serve the sociopath's goals may not reveal antisocial personality characteristics, but neither do they display moral character or professional dedication.

If these accomplices of the sociopath can easily turn on a fellow teacher, how professionally do they relate to their students? How do individuals with some history of a positive relationship with another teacher so easily turn on their former friend? Low social-status and fear of the sociopath are motivators, but the manner in which these teachers enthusiastically participate in the abuse suggests low empathic capacity.

Methods of Teacher Abuse

The literature on teacher abuse typically points to bullying as the means of creating debilitating stress; however, an equal and perhaps even more effective method for removing a teacher's friends and lowering social status, is the whisper campaign. Sociopaths identify those teachers who will participate in this activity by observing how they respond to gossip, part of the sociopath's initial sorting process mentioned earlier. Those found to be eager contributors or receivers become active participants in the campaign against targeted teachers. The whisper campaign is endless; a sociopath's destructive intention, via gossip, is pursued any time another person will listen. This is similar to the saturation technique used in advertising, and eventually seems to influence, perhaps subliminally, other teachers' views of the targeted teacher.

The most disappointing of the methods used against a good teacher is what might be referred to as two-facing. From the targeted teacher's or the sociopath's first week, depending on which is new to the school, the sociopath is engaged in befriending the targeted teacher, as they simultaneously attack their character in interactions with others judged useful in the process. It

will be weeks or months before the attacked teacher realizes that something is wrong. By then, it will be too late to repair the damage.

To stimulate the whisper campaign, information damaging to the targeted teacher is obtained in two basic ways. In the first, the sociopath does negative comment fishing. They initiate a conversation with the targeted teacher, then mention another teacher, about whom they make a negative comment, hoping to entice the targeted teacher to follow their lead and say something negative in reply. In response to this leading remark, the teacher may only nod their head, or agree with what has said. This small bit of evidence is carried to the teacher who was the topic of conversation, as evidence of the target's ill will toward them. As this activity is repeated with different teachers, the targeted teacher begins to experience rejection. Note that the sociopath is in no way inhibited from enhancing what was actually said in the initial conversation. This information is also entered into the whisper campaign.

A second technique for gathering information for the whisper campaign comes from the unannounced visit at the targeted teacher's apartment or home, in hopes of finding the teacher in some negative or compromising state. Regardless of the sociopath's actual experience, the report of the visit will contain comments such as, "You should have seen her house!" "The kids were so rude." "The lawn looks like it hasn't been mowed this season. No wonder he can't get it together at school."

There is also the device of creating derogatory or demeaning names for the teacher targeted for removal. These may include, but are not limited to, negative descriptors of physical appearance or behavior that implies that the target is deficient in some way or does not fit within the values of the faculty. The scorned person can become vilified simply by the repeated use of

unflattering labeling. Sociopaths typically float a derogatory name within the group to see who will embrace it enthusiastically.

Pickett and Wilkinson, as noted, state that the most damaging sources of stress come from low social status, lack of friends, and childhood problems. A *fourth source of stress* can be added to this list. It is devastating for competent teachers to observe those who have no commitment to either their students or an academic discipline receiving praise and rewards while better teachers are ignored. The sociopath and/or mob members arrange things so that the clearly targeted and competent teacher is passed over for some role or position. This is an obvious way to lower a person's social status in their eyes and those of others. The idea that professional people will consciously engage in actions to harm another professional is evil enough, but to consciously make professional decisions related to services given to students is equally heinous. As Stout says, "...there are times when having integrity begins to feel like merely playing the fool."²³

Bullying is also a device for driving teachers away or into depression, but these actions will usually be out of sight of others. The facial expressions of the bullies can affect empathic teachers with great force. Moreover, as Lieberman points out, part of the effectiveness of bullying is the targeted teacher wondering about the extent of this hostile attitude on the part of others.²⁴ While bullying has a negative impact, as mentioned earlier, the whisper campaign is more devastating, because it directly attacks friendship and social status. None of the main books that discuss teacher abuse as bullying mention (i) gossip or its role in these attacks, (ii) whisper campaigns or (iii) occupational triangulation.

Consequences for Targeted Teachers

At the point when teachers realize they are being shunned by colleagues, their anxiety levels rise. As emphasized, it is the highly empathic teachers who are targeted for sociopathic abuse, which means that of all the teachers, they are the most negatively affected. The targeted teacher's first response is to assume that they have said or done something that has offended these other teachers, but mainly something that offended the aggressive teacher. This interpretation of the changed relationship is the direct result of sociopathic activity. As noted, the initial relationship between the sociopath and the targeted teacher is always friendly and respectful. When the attack is initiated the sudden change in this relationship is taken by targeted teachers to be the result of something they did. Of course, this hostility was planned all along.

Empathic teachers come to this interpretation, because they have experienced or observed instances in which miscommunication has resulted in someone feeling offended. As they attempt to correct any confusion they think might exist, sociopaths will see these efforts as evidence that the attack is effective, and will increase the intensity of the abuse. Sociopaths also know that a targeted teacher may mention something during the attempted reconciliation that can be exploited further in the whisper campaign.

Targeted teachers note a similar change in their colleagues, which is the result of the whisper campaign. As the abuse continues, targeted teachers' stress levels increase, because the level of cortisol, the flight or fight hormone, in the blood rises. The presence of this hormone impairs judgment and behavior. Just as the teachers' friends are reassessing the targeted teacher's state, the attacked teacher's behavior is changing. This may provide credibility to the sociopath's negative comments. Original doubters may begin to think the criticism filling the halls and

teachers' lounges is legitimate. Once again disbelief that a teacher in their midst could be so evil protects the sociopath and renders effective the abuse of good teachers.

When these highly empathic teachers are rejected and defamed by those who obviously have no commitment to their students or what is taught, the situation becomes unbearable. This explains the anger observed in teachers who have been attacked by those who reveal more enthusiasm for the destruction of a fellow teacher than they ever demonstrated in their teaching.

It is important that distressed teachers not attempt reflexively to counter the abuse visited upon them. Impulsive actions can exacerbate the social situation in ways that further the objectives of the sociopath and followers. Reactive hostile or injudicious comments provide additional content for the whisper campaign. A better *first* reaction is to avoid contact with the abusers, as continued interaction will only promote greater anxiety. Panic attacks may follow, which the sociopath will exploit if this leads a teacher to leave a meeting abruptly or to dismiss a class early. Depression may also set in. The end state for this situation is emotional paralysis, which makes it difficult or impossible to teach or interact with others. Unless an individual has experienced this condition, it is impossible to imagine it.

Note that overt, hostile and heated bullying stands out as behavior that is markedly deviant from normal teacher-to-teacher interaction; note also that it is the subtle day-by-day distancing of former friends from a targeted teacher that is much more devastating than being addressed in a hostile manner by angry colleagues. Bullying is a device that is used, but the focus on this behavior misses the numerous subtle aspects of sociopathic attacks.

Teachers may fear that if they report the abuse they are experiencing they will be seen as overreacting because no one will believe that there are such people on the faculty. The targeted teachers may also be aware of the resentment toward them by other teachers who see their

popularity with students as some sort of devious manipulation of them. Having no social intelligence, these teachers cannot comprehend what it is about the abused teacher that is so valued by students. These teachers may not be unhappy to see that the targeted teacher is in distress.

Apathic colleagues may, in private, explain to targeted teachers that if they would act differently, they would be accepted. This “gaslighting” is intended, of course, to make the targets feel that it is their fault that they are being rejected. Undermining self-confidence is an effective device for increasing anxiety. If other teachers see the target as emotionally broken down, but without knowledge of the mobbing going on, the target will experience an even greater distancing from peers, which, of course, escalates anxiety.

When it becomes clear to targeted teachers that they are under an attack in which their former friends are actively and even enthusiastically participating, depression is markedly increased. They believe that either the insecurity of teachers who participate in the mobbing must be greater than they thought, or the supposed friendships were inauthentic. Unfortunately, many teachers have had their own *Et tu Brute?* moment. But perhaps the most troubling aspect of these attacks is not sociopathic activity; sociopaths are wired to act that way. The biggest concern is that educated individuals willingly abuse a colleague, even when they see that the person is in distress or entering a state of depression.

Abused teachers wonder how widely they are disliked among faculty members. They become embarrassed by the anxiety they feel, and fearful that others can see their distress. Though it is unknown to the attackers, this depression is increased by the fact that serious teachers see their abusers as having no commitment to either their students or the subject matter taught. As noted, the disbelief by most teachers that there are individuals in teaching who

knowingly and with great glee inflict such distress on a colleague renders these attacks invisible to all but those who have experienced them.

There is one additional torment visited upon the targeted teachers. Neuroscientists report that there exists what they refer to as the default network.²⁵ When we are unoccupied for even a few seconds with a task or problem, the default network takes our minds to other people. Neuroscientists think that this network makes us more social, in that we learn about other people in small episodes during the day. For a targeted teacher, the default network adds to the distress of being mobbed, because they cannot escape thoughts of the dreadful treatment they are receiving from former friends and colleagues.

Should a teacher report this abuse to the relevant administrator? It is important to first evaluate the kind of administrator in charge. Teachers become administrators for three reasons. Some individuals believe that through administration they can improve education; others become administrators because they require additional salary to support their families. Still others are those who find that they cannot teach well and are disliked or avoided by students whenever possible. These administrators are of low empathic capacity and are impression manageable by a sociopath. In addition, they may realize that they themselves are vulnerable to sociopathic attack. In this instance, they will avoid any conflict with the sociopath, a fact of which the sociopath is well aware. As a general rule, any administrator who has been observed engaging in gossip about a teacher or student should be avoided, because such actions reveal low social intelligence.

If an administrator in question actively participates in state or national groups, speaks knowledgably about educational matters, has written a letter of commendation to the target teacher, or has been positive in their evaluations, they will more likely be approachable for this kind of concern.

Prevention of Teacher Abuse

To what extent is sociopathic inspired and directed teacher abuse occurring in the nation's schools? How many teachers leave teaching or have their effectiveness as a teacher markedly reduced because of the sociopathic activities described above? How many teachers develop illnesses from this kind of treatment by their fellow teachers and/or administrator? According to The National Commission on Teaching in America, "One-third of all new teachers leave after three years, and 46 percent are gone within five years."²⁶ Teachers, of course, leave their teaching positions for various reasons, but how many leave because of sociopathic abuse?

The National Education Association reports that in "a recent survey of medium-sized school districts, 25 percent of employees reported that they had been bullied, and that "the bullying of teachers has become a serious problem."²⁷ Playground bullying is serious, but what is reported as bullying by educated adults is clearly the result of antisocial personality disorders. The hypothesis is that what is being reported as bullying is actually sociopathic abuse of teachers by their colleagues. Definitions vary, but bullying is incivility aimed at harming another person in some way. The *Workplace Bullying Institute* defines bullying as "repeated, health-harming mistreatment of one or more persons (the targets) by one or more perpetrators that takes one or more of the following forms: verbal abuse, offensive conduct/behaviors (including nonverbal) which are threatening, humiliating, or intimidating; or work interference – sabotage – which prevents work from getting done." Behind the 25 percent of bullied individuals are sociopaths and their implementers.

Martha Stout estimates the percentage of sociopaths in the general population at four percent. Assuming that she is correct, does this mean that four percent of new teachers who leave do so because they were attacked by a sociopath? It is possible that one sociopath could remove one or two teachers every few years. Four percent or so per year might seem to be significant, but not destructive to the education of the nation. If the four percent per year are the best teachers, however, then not only are they lost, but others may resign who have observed the abuse and do not want to remain in their present positions.

It is also possible that some contexts of teaching are attractive to sociopaths. As any teacher who has taught in different schools will verify, some school situations, for various reasons, place few demands on teachers. And as the psychologists report, sociopaths are drawn to occupational contexts that support their desire for parasitic lifestyles. In such situations, apaths will be supported and empathic teachers driven away, which results in a school or unit that provides students with poor learning experiences. Students may be driven away from some academic studies because of these negative experiences.

Given the number of responses found on the Internet and in publications concerned with teacher abuse, it is clear that more than a few teachers are being subjected to indefensible treatment by peers and administrators. Moreover, abused teachers typically do not want to talk about their victimization; they may feel embarrassed at their emotional response to the actions of those seen as clearly incompetent. There may also be disappointment in the response of the administration of the school or unit. Departing teachers may want to put the experience behind them without further reflection. While the actual number of cases of teacher abuse will never be known, it is, nevertheless, not unreasonable to fear that many schools and university departments are underperforming, with students the unintended victims of sociopathic abuse.

Remediation begins with the recognition of the fact that within any social group there are individuals who, because of their brain structures, vary in general and social intelligence. If we learn to recognize the characteristics of sociopathic teachers and can detect their efforts to manipulate other teachers, who themselves may be classified as borderline antisocial, their influence can be reduced if not eliminated.

If teachers are concerned that sociopathic activity is taking place, they should be alert to any gossip or derogatory naming, which should be ignored or responded to with disapproval, depending on the situation and relationship with the gossiper. Shunning gossip reduces the influence of the whisper campaign. Consequently, the sociopath's ability to lower social-status and prune away friends is limited somewhat. When the sociopath's followers observe even slight limitations on their leader's power to influence others, they will see less benefit in their association with the person.

When sociopaths make trivial or derogatory comments about policies or teacher actions, the responses should imply that the sociopath's comment is taken seriously, that is, not taken as a laughing matter. The reply to the sociopath's comment should be short and to the point. The goal is both to curtail such comments and to show that this shallowness is a waste of everyone's time. In these ways the lack of seriousness of the sociopath is publically identified, which shows the apaths that the sociopath is not as powerful as was thought. The goal is to show would-be followers that there is little to be gained by joining the sociopath's mob.

Administrators have the ability to convey social status on some and lower that of others. The suggested general rule is to be alert to any teacher who is: (i) known to be socially aggressive; (ii) is average in skill and motivation, and (iii) is known to engage in negative gossip about other employees. This person is likely an individual with an antisocial personality disorder.

If that person has made negative comments to the administrator about another teacher, this strongly suggests that the person mentioned is currently under attack. An abused teacher may be in denial about the systematic nature of the experienced attack. The appropriate action will vary with the situation, but the status quo is unacceptable.

All members of the teaching profession should be cognizant of the phenomenon of teachers with antisocial personality disorders who attempt to remove good teachers from the school or unit they wish to dominate. Since their activities are for the most part invisible to teachers and administrators, and as noted targeted teachers are reluctant to talk about their stress, it will be helpful if those teachers who have experienced sociopathic abuse, or teachers who have observed other teachers being attacked, would report their experiences or observations. Having read about these practices, some teachers may recognize the pattern of abuse and protect themselves, or provide some comfort to those who have been targeted. This reporting can be accomplished anonymously by means of the various Internet sites that accept reports of this abuse. If these incidents are made public in sufficient numbers, the attention of both administrators and educational researchers will be drawn to the problem.

The National Association for Prevention of Teacher Abuse lists the following as appropriate responses to being attacked by an administrator or another teacher.

Consider transferring or leaving your job as soon as you recognize abuse is taking place.

Do not doubt your competence, talents or abilities. Trust yourself and your experience.

Believe in your own strength.²⁸

This is the correct advice. Do not allow yourself to accumulate bitter memories that will be with you the remainder of your life. The initial anxiety is only the first phased of distress. There is very little time between that first realization and emotional paralysis. As cortisol builds in the brain, eventually end-state depression will follow. All attacked teachers must decide which course is best for them. The fact is that those teachers who are attacked are always the good teachers suggests that they can obtain better positions.

One final point. As was noted earlier, a distinguishing characteristic of good teachers that poor teachers lack is empathic motivation, which, as noted, is a component of social intelligence. Empathic teachers have the emotional impetus to assist students in difficulty and to recognize student achievements or successes. Lower empathic teachers do not feel that urge. Permitting sociopaths to enter or function on any teaching faculty allows them the opportunity to target and eliminate these good teachers. Teachers and administrators in all educational institutions should be concerned with individuals whose main focus is not on good teaching, but rather on causing pain, distress or worse in their colleagues. It is nothing short of malpractice to allow sociopaths entry to any teaching faculty.

PostScript: Terminological Differences

The terms ‘psychopathy’ and ‘sociopathy’ are, unfortunately, used differently by various writers. For example, Paul Babiak and Robert D. Hare in *Snakes in Suits: When Psychopaths Go to Work*, published in 2007, say on page 19,

Psychopathy is a personality disorder described by the personality traits and behaviors that form the basis of this book. Psychopaths are without conscience and incapable of empathy, guilt, or loyalty to anyone but themselves. Sociopathy is not a formal psychiatric condition. It refers to patterns of attitudes and behaviors that are considered antisocial and criminal by society at large, but are seen as normal or necessary by the subculture or social environment in which they developed. Sociopaths may have a well-developed conscience and a normal capacity for empathy, guilt, and loyalty, but their sense of right and wrong is based on the norms and expectations of their subculture or group. Many criminals might be described as sociopaths.

Martha Stout, in *The Sociopath Next Door*, published in 2005, says of sociopaths:

You have to be careful, because if you slip up, you may be caught and punished by the system. But you will never be confronted by your conscience, because you have no conscience. Page 4.

And on page 12, she says,

This condition of missing conscience is called by other names, too, most often “sociopathy,” or the somewhat more familiar term, psychopathy. Guiltlessness was in fact the first personality disorder to be recognized by psychiatry, and terms that

have been used at times over the past century include *manie sans délire*, psychopathic inferiority, moral insanity, and moral imbecility.

Part of the explanation of the lack of attention to sociopathic teachers derives from terminological confusion. “Psychopathy,” “sociopathy” and “antisocial personality disorder” are seen by some to name three distinct concepts, while other writers do not make these distinctions. In this analysis, “sociopathy” was used, because the literature most useful to teachers prefers that term. By any of these labels, *teachers with no social intelligence are a danger to us all*.

Responses Welcome

Teachers who have experienced sociopathic abuse or who have observed it directed at other teachers are asked to consider reporting the details to the author. Also any reports of omissions or deficiencies in this presentation are also welcome. **mobbedteachers@yahoo.com**. All contacts are strictly confidential.

Useful Sources

Teacher Abuse

Karen Horwitz, *White Chalk Crime: The Real Reason Schools Fail*, Book Surge Publishing, 2008.

Joseph Blase and Jo R. Blase, *Breaking the Silence: Overcoming the Problem of Principal Mistreatment of Teachers*, SAGE Publications, 2002.

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https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Bullying_in_teaching

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Notes

1. Having experienced the phenomenon sociopathic teacher abuse, the author posted “How to Get Rid of Good Professors,” on the Bullied Academic site.

<http://bulliedacademics.blogspot.com/2010/02/how-to-get-rid-of-good-professors.html>

It was reprinted in Dental *Health Educators' Newsletter*, Volume 1, Issue 3, July 2010.

This statement and the now defunct mobbedteachers.com Internet site produced comments from teachers. Subsequent publications are the author's *Sociopathy: The Explanation of Teacher Abuse*, Mellen Press, 2015. The author's, *How Sociopaths Destroy Good Teachers: the Invisible Threat to Education*, 2016 is a complete sociological analysis of teacher abuse by sociopaths within the social context of schools.

2. See Mathew D. Lieberman, *Social: Why Our Brains Are Wired to Connect*, Crown Publishing Group, 2013. Social intelligence or empathy is composed of three elements, mindreading, affect matching and empathic motivation. These are, it is claimed, the basic capacities of good teachers.

3. Martha Stout, *The Sociopath Next Door*, Broadway Books, 2005, p. 4.

4. *Ibid*, p. 10.

5. Simon Baron-Cohen discusses the levels of empathic capacity and systemizing ability in *The Science of Evil: On Empathy and the Origins of Cruelty*, Basic Books, 2011. See pages 15-26 for levels of empathy, and pages 104-118 for levels of systemizing. See also the author's *How Sociopaths Destroy Good Teachers: the Invisible Threat to Education*, Edwin Mellen Press. 2015.

6. The neuroscientist Simon Baron-Cohen points out that it is important for us to recognize that low-empathy individuals are,

...not just oblivious to other people's feelings and thoughts but also oblivious to the idea that there might even be other points of view. The consequence is that you believe 100 percent in the rightness of your own ideas and beliefs, and judge anyone who does not hold your beliefs as wrong or stupid.

Baron-Cohen, *op. cit.*, p. 43.

7. Richard Pickett and Kate Wilkinson, *The Spirit Level: Why Greater Equality Makes Societies Stronger*, Bloomsbury Press, New York, 2010.

8. William C. Wohlforth, "Unipolarity, Status Competition, and Great Power War," *World Politics* 61, no. 1 (January 2009), 28–57.

9. Adam Waytz, "The Psychology of Social Status: How the pursuit of status can lead to aggressive and self-defeating behavior," *Scientific American: Mind and Brain*, Dec 8, 2009.

10. Jane McGregor and Tim McGregor, *The Empathy Trap: Understanding Antisocial Personalities*, Sheldon Press, 2013, p. 37.

11. Babiak, Paul; Hare, Robert D. (2009-10-13). *Snakes in Suits: When Psychopaths Go to Work* (p. 300). HarperCollins, p.190.

12. *Ibid*/, p. 300.

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14. *Ibid.*, p. 30.

15. Ibid., p. 31.
16. Stout, op. cit., p. 3.
17. McGregors, op. cit., p. 28.
18. Ibid.
19. Ibid.
20. Henry, P. J., “Low-Status Compensation: A Theory for Understanding the Roots and Trajectory of Violence,” pdf. https://www.uni-bielefeld.de/ZIF/FG/2007Control/members/material/Henry_Low-Status.pdf
- P. J. Henry for a useful discussion of low social-status compensation.
http://www.exzellentsforchen.de/ZIF/FG/2007Control/members/material/Henry_Low-Status.pdf, p. 5.
21. Ibid., 5.
22. Ibid., p. 9.
23. McGregors, op. cit., p. 37.
24. Lieberman, op. cit., p. 69.
25. Ibid., p. 15.
26. Why They Leave, <http://www.nea.org/home/12630.htm>
27. <http://neatoday.org/2012/05/16/bullying-of-teachers-pervasive-in-many-schools-2/>.
28. <http://endteacherabuse.org/recognize.html>

Author

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