

I'M PUZZLED BY YOUR INCOMPETENCE: AN EXPERIENTIAL EXERCISE FOR UNDERSTANDING WORKPLACE MICROAGGRESSIONS

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ABSTRACT

Microaggressions are subtle acts, omissions, or verbalizations that chip away at another person's dignity. Although typically, microaggressions have been applied to members of marginalized groups, we consider it to be more broadly applicable to all employees in a workplace. This paper introduces the idea of microaggressions, situates it in the aggression literature, and discusses its impact and how to deal with it. All of these serve as the conceptual grounding for the experiential exercise which follows and that helps learners become better aware of the elements and impact of workplace microaggressions.

INTRODUCTION

Microaggressions are “the brief and commonplace daily verbal, behavioral, and environmental indignities, whether intentional or unintentional, that communicate hostile, derogatory, or negative racial, gender, and sexual orientation, and religious slights and insults to the target person or group” (Derald Wing Sue, 2010, p. 229). Microaggression research has centered on members of underrepresented groups, and, indeed, anecdotal and research evidence reveals that members of any definable group can be subjected to microaggressions. However, it is possible that all employees in a workplace, regardless of their membership in a marginalized group, experience some form of microaggression given that it is a subset of bullying.

This paper considers the dimensions of microaggression, how it overlaps with related constructs, and the impact it has on targets, bystanders, workplaces, and beyond. Then, we address how to deal with it from multiple perspectives. This introduction serves to ground the experiential exercise that follows. This exercise is intended to build learners' awareness of the elements and impact of workplace microaggressions.

WHAT ARE MICROAGGRESSIONS?

Defining the boundaries of the construct of microaggression is challenging because it includes a broad range of acts (or non-acts) such as insensitive comments, insults, or dismissive behaviors. Such verbalizations or behaviors vary in their extent of overtness, intentionality, directness, and commission/omission. In their literature review, Sue et al. (2007) identified three categories of racial microaggressions that can be extended more generally, including:

1. **Microinvalidations** (usually unconscious): “verbal comments or behaviors that exclude, negate, or nullify the psychological thoughts, feelings, or experiential reality” (Sue et al., 2007, p. 276) of the target (examples: ‘he didn’t mean anything by it;’ ‘don’t be so petty;’ ‘you’re imagining this;’ arriving late to a scheduled meeting with the target; ignoring the presence of the target; removing target’s email address from a distribution list).
2. **Microinsults** (usually unconscious): verbal comments or behaviors that are rude, insensitive, or demeaning (examples: ‘we’ve all had parents die, that’s not an excuse;’ ‘you speak French well for an anglophone;’ ‘it looks like you enjoy food – a lot;’ ‘you did better than I expected;’ ‘be smart about this;’ extending invitations to others but not the target – especially if done in front of the target).
3. **Microassaults** (usually conscious): explicit verbal or nonverbal denigrations or put-downs or avoidant behavior intended to hurt the target (examples: ‘out-of-touch Ivory Tower sitter;’ ‘uncultured Westerner;’ ‘you’ll have to repeat that for her, her lightbulb is dim’).

Although many microaggressions are verbal in nature, they can also be nonverbal. The latter can be expressed through body language and may consist of actions or inactions, whether intentional or not (Gueits, 2022; Nadal, 2018; Sue, 2010; Torino et al., 2019; Williams, M., 2019). Here are some examples:

- People check their phones or visually ‘tune out’ when you’re speaking.
- People physically turn away or avoid interactions with you.
- People roll their eyes or show derision or disdain toward you.
- Meeting organizers ignore the needs of persons with special needs (accessibility, diet, etc.).
- People talk over you or continue their conversation while excluding you.
- People disregard an idea when you contribute it but do not do so when someone else presents the same idea.

Microaggressions often occur carelessly and casually and without intending harm to the recipient (Desmond-Harrisjenne, 2015). Because they may not be intentional behaviors, perpetrators may not perceive them as being negative or harmful. Perpetrators may believe that their communication approach or behaviors are helpful and supportive (Smart Richman & Leary, 2009; Williams, M., 2019). In some instances, perpetrators view their comments as part of their personal style, where the use of sarcasm or terse choice of words is their trademark (Berk, 2017).

HOW DO MICROAGGRESSIONS DIFFER FROM RELATED CONSTRUCTS?

Several constructs within the literature on aggression in the workplace reference verbalizations, acts, or non-acts that have a negative impact on targets, for example, aggression, bullying, incivility, and microaggression. These constructs overlap conceptually to varying extents on several dimensions including intensity, intentionality, and observability.

Aggression is “behavior that is intended to harm another person who is motivated to avoid that harm” (Allen & Anderson, 2017, p. 2). Allen and Anderson posit that aggression involves: (a) observable behaviors (not thoughts, beliefs, or feelings) and (b) intentional behaviors intended to harm another person. Because microaggressions are often considered to range from unintentional to well-intentioned, and possible harms may be considered small, they are not commonly considered a type of aggression (Williams, 2019).

Bullying “usually involves repeated incidents or a pattern of behavior that is intended to intimidate, offend, degrade or humiliate a particular person or group of people” (Canadian Centre for Occupational Health and Safety website). Where aggression is goal-directed and intentional (Neuman and Baron, 2005), bullying research doesn’t require that negative acts be “intended” by perpetrators to be considered bullying (Zapf & Einarsen, 2005). Indeed, confirming the presence of intent in bullying behaviors is difficult (Zapf & Einarsen, 2005). Although many similarities exist between bullying and microaggression acts, what differentiates bullying from microaggression is that bullying typically consists of repeated incidents or a pattern of behavior by the perpetrator (and thus are more intense). In contrast, microaggression may consist of only one incident or experience, although the harm felt by the target may be as acute (Berk, 2017).

Incivility is “low-intensity deviant behavior with ambiguous intent to harm the target” (Andersson & Pearson, 1999, p. 456). Incivility overlaps conceptually with microaggressions in that both involve subtle behaviors for which the intention to harm is blurred. In both cases, perpetrators may intend to harm targets, or they may well be unaware of the impact of their behaviors. This ambiguity of intent allows perpetrators to deny intent to harm and, perhaps, indicate that their comments or behaviors weren’t meant to be harmful, they were misinterpreted by the target, they were meant to be a joke, or that the target is hypersensitive (Andersson & Pearson, 1999; Nadal, 2018; Reich & Hershcovis, 2015). Moreover, observers may minimize the significance and impact of uncivil behaviors to the same extent as microaggressions.

As Table 1 illustrates, microaggressions are likely to be opposite to aggression on all these dimensions. Although there is much overlap, as one moves toward the right side of the table (from microaggression to incivility to bullying to aggression), behaviors become more intensely negative and easily observable. Brotheridge’s (2005) “levels of bullying” (Appendix A) illustrates this continuum of behaviors ranging from Level 1 or “indirect” bullying, which parallels microaggressions and, to a certain extent, incivility to Level 3 or “direct, severely aggressive bullying, which reflect aggressive behaviors. Whereas the perpetrators of aggression’s intention to harm is amply clear, that is not the case for the remaining constructs. Given this ambiguity, whether harm has been done is more likely to be measured by the impact of the behavior on targets.

MICROAGGRESSION'S FIT WITH RELATED CONSTRUCTS

TABLE 1

	Microaggression	Incivility	Bullying	Aggression
Intensity	Subtle	Likely to be subtle	Moderate	High
Intentional	Likely to be unconscious	Likely to be unconscious	Potentially intentional	Most likely
Easily observable	Not likely	Somewhat	Moderately	Yes

WHAT IMPACT DO MICROAGGRESSIONS HAVE?

A common misperception is that experiencing microaggression has only a minor negative impact on the target. For example, perpetrators and observers may tell targets to “get over it,” or they may perceive targets as weak (“just put on your big girl panties and deal with it”) or oversensitive (“stop acting like a child”). Yet, a plethora of studies supports the relationship between microaggressions and negative health outcomes. Microaggression increases levels of self-doubt and indirect/passive coping responses. In turn, self-doubt is associated with increased levels of burnout and symptoms of ill health (Lee & Brotheridge, 2006). Among college students of color, cumulative stress due to microaggressions predicts higher levels of depression and anxiety and lower levels of self-esteem (Williams et al., 2020). A distinct aspect of microaggression is the indirect and subtle nature of acts that may be construed as performed either in jest or to inflict harm. The ambiguity requires greater sense-making effort for targets and observers alike to determine their responses (Ng et al., 2019). Yet, the situational uncertainty itself *and* how to cope effectively jointly contribute to the targets’ experience of distress.

HOW CAN TARGETS RESPOND TO MICROAGGRESSION?

Targets may adopt various adaptive strategies in an effort to manage their perceived mistreatment:

- **Direct problem-solving.** Targets may take direct action such as discussing the occurrence with the perpetrator to clarify perceptions and establish boundaries for appropriate behavior (Lee & Brotheridge, 2006).
- **Using humor.** Targets may choose to use humor as a lens through which they attempt to understand a potentially adverse situation. If the apparent microaggressive act appears to have been done in jest, the use of humor could be a suitable response to prevent any misreading of the other party’s intentions. In contrast, if the act appears to have been done with malice, humor may help to avert a strained situation (Hogh & Dofradottir, 2001).
- **Support seeking from coworkers, friends, and family.** After experiencing a microaggressive act, the target may seek support from coworkers and managers/supervisors. This tactic is associated with a reduction in negative health outcomes (Kim et al., 2018). Receiving training on how to detect and manage microaggressive acts at the workplace has been associated with higher emotional well-being following ill-treatment. In contrast, Lewis and Orford (2005) found that a lack of coworker and organizational support negatively affected female employees’ ability to defend themselves against their perpetrators. This led to vulnerability, isolation, and diminished self-worth.
- **Quitting, requesting a job transfer, use of sick leave, avoiding/ignoring perpetrators.** Problem-focused coping may also take the form of avoidance behaviors. Common alternatives include requesting a job transfer or quitting (Zapf & Gross, 2001), using sick leave time (Kivimäki et al., 2000), avoiding the perpetrators, or disregarding their behaviors (Keashly et al., 1994). Avoidance is problem-focused since it allows targets to escape short-term ill-treatment and also provides targets with a break from the negative emotions associated with the mistreatment. This better enables them to respond constructively over the long term (Folkman & Moskowitz, 2004). For example, if their supervisor orders targets to perform an undesirable task, instead of saying they will not comply, targets may discover that the best response is to leave the workstation just before the supervisor approaches. The problem is “solved” by this tactic, as the supervisor will now direct a coworker to complete the task (Ashforth & Lee, 1990’s “Avoiding Action”).

Targets may find it useful to use multiple coping approaches in tandem with each other (Lazarus & Folkman, 1987). Also, their coping responses may evolve over time.

The overarching challenge is influencing workplaces to ensure that all their members feel welcomed, respected, and valued. Managers and supervisors need to demonstrate an “ethic of care” for their members in order to maintain a respectful work

climate (Prieto et al., 2016). Managers who are sincere about creating and encouraging a climate of diversity need to first recognize and accept that microaggressions exist and lead to psychological distress. Management must also consider factors beyond the interpersonal level that foster interpersonal microaggressions or that reduce them. As an example, Brotheridge and Lee (2006) found that poor team climate has been linked to targets' work being undermined and belittled. As well, low job autonomy and unfair treatment have been linked to belittlement. Methods of discouraging microaggressions include promoting empowerment and equitable treatment of all organizational members, as well as encouraging peer and organizational support (Kim et al., 2018). More and more progressive organizations are attempting to ensure that microaggressions do not intensify into a toxic work climate and devolve into other forms of incivility and even open conflict (Prieto et al., 2016). Managers can model appropriate behavior by avoiding microaggressions and, instead, engaging in microaffirmations, by expressing and engaging in small acts of support that preserve the dignity of all team members. "Management by walking around" should be actively promoted, as microaggressions are often difficult to detect, let alone correct (Prieto et al., 2016). This practice permits managers to be more aware of the existence of any form of hostile acts, even those quite subtle and seemingly minor. In this way, potential perpetrators will be made more aware and self-conscious of their actions and their corresponding negative impact on others, particularly the most vulnerable and stigmatized organizational members. To some, microaggressions may seem harmless, but when they are ignored, will likely reoccur and worsen over time.

EXPERIENTIAL EXERCISE

OBJECTIVES

This exercise helps learners develop a personal understanding of microaggressions – from a 'lived experience.' By the end of the exercise, learners should be able to define microaggressions, understand their impact, and identify how to deal with them appropriately. Although most people can relate to and avoid engaging in the more obvious forms of incivility, bullying, or aggression, they may find the notion of microaggressions, which are more subtle and indirect, and their impact to be elusive to grasp. Whereas simply communicating information regarding microaggressions builds a cognitive understanding of the construct, this awareness-building role-playing exercise is intended to generate a visceral, deep appreciation of its toxic nature. It is for this reason that the exercise requires that they engage in and experience microaggressions.

PARTICIPANTS

Typically, this exercise has been undertaken with a cohort of working managers enrolled in a managerial skills course for MBA students. Students have taken several courses with each other, and the subject is approached near the end of the semester. By this point, the students know each other well and have developed good relationships with each other. Moreover, instructors have had the opportunity to observe the students and their interactions. This permits instructors to create balanced dyads and assign the role of 'microaggressor' to individuals who would be able to carry this role appropriately (not overdoing it, nor avoiding it). Since being on the receiving end of microaggression may have deleterious effects on their relationships or personal esteem, aside from careful debriefing, instructors must select targets who are capable of putting the experience in perspective.

Instructors may use this exercise to introduce the topic of aggression in courses on conflict, organizational behavior, and leadership at the undergraduate or graduate level. Although this exercise can be used in different class sizes, its complexity and debriefing time increase significantly in larger courses.

TIME REQUIREMENTS

The instructor would typically introduce the exercise as an icebreaker at the beginning of a class. If instructors have been using icebreakers in preceding classes, this one comes across as especially unremarkable. Depending on the depth of debriefing undertaken, the exercise requires about 40 to 60 minutes with approximately 10 minutes of that time used for solving a puzzle. It is typically followed by an interactive lecture on workplace aggression.

REQUIRED MATERIALS

1. Puzzles. We have used the puzzles contained in the AHA Brain Teaser Kit created by ThinkFun (<https://www.thinkfun.com/wp-content/uploads/2015/09/AHABrain-1450-IN01.pdf>). It consists of six puzzles to be solved, an example of which is The Missing T puzzle for which a pattern is available online. Before the class, instructors determine how many dyads will participate in the exercise and ensure that each dyad has a distinct puzzle to solve. Instructors may optionally create triads so that an observer is present in each group. Instructors may choose to give the instructions to solve the puzzle to one member of each dyad (the microaggressor), although this isn't necessary.

2. Optional: Hershey's hugs and kisses chocolates for distribution after the exercise debriefing.

INSTRUCTIONS FOR CARRYING OUT THE EXERCISE

1. Before carrying out the exercise, instructors must determine the pairs of learners who would create compatible dyads. Instructors may decide to not assign the microaggressor role to a member of several dyads (as "control" conditions). Also, instructors must decide whether an observer will be assigned to each dyad. Adding an observer may be a valuable way of examining the impact of microaggressions on observers and how observers can/should respond to them. Finally, before the exercise (and outside the view of other students), instructors should speak privately and individually to those who will play the role of microaggressor. Instructors must tell them that they are to engage in a specific set of non-supportive/discouraging behaviors as their partner assembles a puzzle. Some examples of what this person might say/do in this context are:
 - Oh, I thought you'd be quicker than this.
 - Wow, you're so confused. Try to approach this logically.
 - Do you need me to do this for you?
 - The box says that this exercise is for grades 2 to 8, so it should be easy. But it's not easy for you, is it?
 - I'm puzzled by your incompetence.
 - You're not good at puzzles, are you?
 - Relax. You're stressing me out just watching you.
 - Possible gestures: roll one's eyes, sigh, shake one's head, look away, smirk

Instructors should not use the word "microaggression" in explaining the person's role. This permits the participants to be "blind" to this concept during the exercise. Instructors must ask the "volunteer" if they are willing to carry out the role and to do so subtly and without letting their partner know that they are "acting." Not everyone will feel comfortable engaging in this behavior.

2. Introduce the exercise – At the start of class, instructors inform all learners that they will be doing "a fun icebreaker as usual" in dyads. Instructors should divide them into pairs in a manner that appears to be randomly determined but that is pre-selected. Instructors then ask learners to sit next to the assigned partner (and with their observer, if assigned).
3. Provide instructions and materials – Instructors tell learners that they'll be working on a puzzle in dyads, with one person finishing a puzzle before the second person starts their puzzle. Thus, instructors give the impression that each member of a dyad will have the chance to work on a puzzle. But, in fact, only one dyad member, the target, will attempt to solve a puzzle. Instructors then distribute a puzzle to the designated target in each dyad.
4. Carry out the exercise – Instructors announce that the dyads have 10 minutes to solve the puzzle. The target works on the puzzle while the microaggressor comments on their progress. If an observer is assigned, that person notes the behaviors and reactions of both dyad members and their impact on the resolution of the puzzle. Instructors need to remain conscious of any distress within the dyads. If it seems that a target is distressed, instructors should approach their dyad and give them new instructions: "work cooperatively." This will minimize targets' distress. Instructors inform dyads when five minutes remain on the clock. Instructors may lengthen the duration of the exercise as appropriate. At the end of the 10 minutes, instructors announce that the time for doing the exercise has ended. At this point, instructors do not pick up the materials since the dyads will be needing them in a few minutes.

DEBRIEFING THE EXERCISE

In the first step of the debriefing process, instructors inform all learners that certain individuals were playing a pre-assigned role. This is crucial since it helps targets understand and attribute the behavior of their partner to the role being played rather than the person. This helps targets feel more comfortable in describing their experience. It usually results in a collective sigh of relief and immediate, informal repair attempts between the microaggressor role-players and their targets. Formal repair exercises are undertaken at the end of the debriefing.

Instructors should proceed with debriefing without much delay. The word "microaggression" should not be used at this point since doing so may influence the direction of the early debriefing questions. Instructors use Kolb's experiential learning cycle to debrief this exercise (Kolb, 2014). In doing so, they ask learners questions about their experience (reflection), invite them to step back and consider the broader lessons that the exercise reveals and draw linkages to what we know about

microaggressions and other forms of aggression, and then encourage everyone to consider the implications of the exercise for future action (action planning). Here are some pertinent questions and possible answers:

1. **What happened?** Here’s a question for the dyad members who were solving the puzzle: how was the experience for you? What were your thoughts and feelings during the exercise? How did your partner help or hinder your resolution of the puzzle? What was the effect of your partner’s behavior? Here are some potential answers to these questions: “It was frustrating and confusing. I felt incompetent and, in fact, a bit upset. I was concentrating on doing the puzzle, but my partner was not there for me. Their subtle digs blocked me from doing the puzzle. In fact, I was surprised since ___ is usually such a nice person.” [As targets are reporting on the behaviors of their partners, their feelings, and the effects of the behaviors, instructors should write these on a whiteboard. Below is an example of a table structure that an instructor may use to organize the responses.

WHITEBOARD FORMAT
TABLE 2

Behaviors	Thoughts/Feelings	Effects

2. **So, what does this mean?** Puzzle solvers, your partner was asked to engage in those subtle digs. These behaviors [pointing to the table] are a form of microaggression which are indirect and subtle forms of aggression. [Instructors can now add the word “Microaggression” just before the word “Behaviors” on the table.] Everyone: (a) What parallels might you draw between what happened in this exercise and your experience in other contexts? Do you see these behaviors at work or elsewhere? At what point do these behaviors stop being ‘innocent’ or funny (if at all) and slip into a form of aggression? To what extent does the perceived intent of the aggressor influence the target’s attributions? What lessons/principles/conclusions can you draw from your experience: (b) about yourself; (c) about microaggression, more generally? What other lessons can you draw from this exercise?
Here are some potential answers to these questions: “(a) These seemingly minor acts happen all the time. We’re either not aware of them, or we dismiss them as being unimportant. But they accumulate to impact our sense of self, our relationships, and our performance. (b) I didn’t think that I was that sensitive to others’ comments, but I found the lack of support to be demotivating, puzzling, and distracting. I felt like reacting with even more snarky or sarcastic comments toward my partner in a tit-for-tat manner. And yet, without being aware of it, I have probably engaged in these behaviors myself. I have become more aware of the “death by a thousand cuts” that arises from microaggression. (c) Microaggression is a form of incivility that may be contagious. It may grow into outright bullying if it’s not addressed immediately (rather than ignored). It is a sign of disrespect that should not be ignored. It can easily damage relationships and productivity.”
3. **Now what?** Given what you experienced in this exercise, what might you do differently the next time? How might the exercise influence your behavior in the future?
Here are some potential answers to these questions: “I realize now that my sarcasm may be hurtful to others, and it might damage my relationship with others. I need to be respectful and supportive at all times. When others are behaving this way toward me, I need to let them know that I don’t feel respected. If I observe others engaging in microaggression, I will try to intercede so that this behavior doesn’t continue. As the leader of my department, I will work with my employees to establish rules for ensuring that we have a respectful work climate.”
4. **Other comments and questions?** Some learners may be surprised that sarcasm and other subtle digs are *bad* and that microaggression is “a thing.” Others may think that some people are overly sensitive and reactive and interpret everything as a slight. They suggest that people develop some ‘grit’ and get over these minor hurts. Still, others may say that sarcasm, etc. is simply humor to them, i.e., it’s their way of expressing themselves and no offense is intended. In response, instructors need to address the minimization of the effects of microaggression and the need for awareness of the effects of our behaviors in interactions with others in their follow-up lectures on the topic. Also needing to be addressed is the difference between positive humor and humor as a form of aggressive communication (see DiCioccio, 2012).

DEBRIEFING FOLLOW-UP

This exercise serves as a brief introduction to the topic of aggression in the workplace. It is typically followed by an interactive lecture on microaggression, bullying, and aggression. However, before moving on to the theoretical portion of the class, some repair work is needed to mend any possible remaining fissures in the relationships among the learners. To this end, we recommend two closing exercises as follows:

1. Instruct learners that, to achieve closure for the exercise, you will give each dyad a chance to solve the puzzle collaboratively as a team. Give the students five minutes to do this. If they are having difficulty solving the puzzle, give them a few hints or even the answer sheet.
2. Next, and optionally, say that a great way to end such an exercise is for everyone to just go ahead and share hugs and kisses or extend a handshake. Turn around to reach for your bag of Hershey's hugs and kisses which you have placed on a chair or table behind you. Typically, at least some dyads have interpreted your suggestion literally. Then, while holding your bags of Hershey's hugs and kisses up, turn around and face the students. This typically results in laughter and creates a positive mood for all. Distribute the chocolate and take a five-minute break before moving on to the theoretical portion of the class.

CONCLUSION

Workplace microaggression, through all its myriad forms, creates a toxic organizational climate and will adversely affect both targets' and observers' performance and well-being. The indirect and subtle nature of such negative acts is often difficult to detect and interpret, much less manage, after prolonged exposure. Through the preceding experimental exercise, participants experience firsthand how microaggressions may impact their own responses. The exercise may be integrated as part of orientation and training on cultivating equity, diversity, and inclusion. The participants are thus afforded an opportunity to reflect on the broader lessons that the exercise reveals and consider how best to promote a healthy social work environment.

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APPENDIX A BULLYING: LEVELS OF SEVERITY

What kind of behaviors make up bullying?

Level 1: Indirect, moderately aggressive

Denied your existence

- Gave you the silent treatment
- Ignored or excluded you
- Showed little or no interest in your opinion
- Left the area when you arrived
- Excluded you from important meetings, activities, or decisions
- Failed to return or respond to phone calls, memos, or e-mails (stonewalling)
- Displayed insensitivity to personal matters (e.g., death in the family)
- Withheld necessary information
- Shifted goals without telling you
- Removed your areas of responsibility without consultation
- Isolated you from colleagues

Failed to support

- Failed to defend or support you
- Failed to warn of impending danger
- Refused your reasonable requests
- Showed up late for meetings
- Delayed work or caused others to delay action in a way that made you look bad
- Used, hid, or removed needed resources
- Refused to provide needed resources
- Provided inadequate resources
- Denied opportunities for professional development for you but not for others
- Ignored you or your contributions
- Undervalued your efforts
- Did not provide you with credit when it was due
- Reacted to you with sighs, frowns, rolled eyes, etc.

Level 2: Direct, escalating aggression

Put You Down

- Interrupted/prevented you from expressing yourself
- Belittled and undermined you
- Talked down to you
- Called you names
- Used sarcasm
- Made jokes at your expense or teased you
- Criticized your abilities
- Told you that you were incompetent
- Treated you like incompetent
- Doubted your judgment
- Devalued or questioned professional competence
- Questioned your decisions
- Blamed you for other's errors
- Repeatedly reminded you of your previous blunders
- Inappropriately accused you of wrongdoing

Used Demeaning Nonverbals

- Glared at you
- Hovered over you
- Crowded your personal space
- Engaged in finger-pointing
- Gave you dirty looks

Undermined Your Ability to Work

- Overloaded you with work (quality and quantity)
- Ordered to stay late
- Set impossible deadlines
- Set you up to fail
- Asked you to do uncomfortable things
- Created new policies and/or that apply only to you
- Frequently changed rules
- Sabotaged your success
- Infringed on your privacy
- Spied on you (excessive monitoring of activities)
- Removed needed items from your workstation

Level 3: Direct, severely aggressive

Damaged Your Reputation

- Put you down and/or humiliated you in front of others
- Took credit for your work
- Revealed your private information
- Criticized your abilities in front of others
- Assassinated your reputation with higher-ups
- Talked badly behind your back
- Fabricated a case against you
- Blaming the work unit's problems on you (scapegoating)
- Transmitted damaging information
- Spread rumors and/or lies about you
- Gave you unwarranted reprimands
- Gave you unfair performance evaluations

Verbally abused you

- Yelled at you
- Swore at you
- Intimidated you
- Had a tantrum
- Made angry outbursts
- Threatened you

Physically abused you

- Pushed you
- Grabbed you
- Threw items at you
- Threatened physical violence
- Assaulted you
- Slammed things down