

***Microaggressions and Implicit Biases in the Academy***  
**Professor Kevin Nadal, John Jay College of Criminal Justice**  
***Faculty Diversity Dialogues***  
**Office of Recruitment and Diversity, The City University of New York**  
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*“Examine your position, what privileges do you possess?”*

Dr. Kevin Nadal is a Professor of Psychology at John Jay College of Criminal Justice and former Executive Director of the Center for LGBTQ Studies (CLAGS), the first university-based LGBTQ research center in the United States. As a member of the University Advisory Council on Diversity (UACD), Dr. Nadal provides guidance that supports ORD’s efforts to create diverse and inclusive campus communities.



In his presentation, Dr. Nadal reviewed the history and outlined a set of key terms and definitions while providing relevant examples to help the audience identify microaggressions in everyday situations. A person’s worldview, the collection of beliefs about life held by an individual or a group, shapes understanding of what is ‘normal.’ Each person carries a set of identities and we need to reflect on which of our identities has power and privilege. If you are a person with a historically marginalized identity, you become hyper-vigilant about the potential for the next slight. Likewise, it is not the sole responsibility of a member of a marginalized group to educate others.

Microaggressions are “brief and commonplace daily verbal, behavioral, or environmental indignities, whether intentional or unintentional, that communicate hostile, derogatory, or negative slights and insults toward various people, particularly those of historically marginalized groups.” (Nadal 2013; Sue 2010)

*Who gets to control the narrative of microaggressions?*

Nadal prompted the audience to think about who gets to decide what is normal or not, and how we participate/validate this process of normalization. Gaslighting, a term to describe when people invalidate another person’s claims, is another form of microaggression and may create problems on a systemic level. It is helpful to understand power and privilege in a practical sense, where they exist, how they are expressed, and what consequences they can have. Nadal highlighted the 2013 photographs of Fordham University student Kiyun Kim to depict unintended minor insults and subtle racism. For example, people who are able bodied have power. People do not always think about making a space more accessible. What happens when the ramp is in disrepair or placed on the other side of the building? What do we take for granted that creates realities that are more difficult for others? Another example Nadal provided were gender binary restrooms. For those who are cisgendered, this is a form of privilege. For transgender people, this can create serious problems and can even affect a person’s physical health.

## *The impact of microaggressions*

People who experience microaggressions are more likely to develop negative psychosocial outcomes. Research shows that the accumulation of microassaults, microinsults, and microinvalidations have a negative impact on people's mental health. These can include acute emotional reactions, depressive symptoms, anxiety, binge drinking, and eating disorders. Acknowledging microaggressions is an important step towards understanding the changing face of racism, sexism, heterosexism and transphobia in the current social landscape. The quantity and quality of microaggressions is different toward historically marginalized people and happens on a daily basis.

### ***Recommendations for Addressing Microaggressions***

- Provide a safe space in which a student/colleague/client would be able to discuss concerns.
- Be willing to admit when you make mistakes.
- Be willing to discuss your own working relationship, your own biases and identities, and other dynamics that may influence the discussion.
- Address the microaggression directly.
- Validate the individual/provide psychoeducation about microaggressions
- Provide **microaffirmations**, subtle small acknowledgements of a person's value and worth.

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