Chapter 6
Lucia’s Journey of Bridging Two Worlds: Counseling Latinx First-Generation College Students

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Lucia is a Latina first-generation college student (FGCS) attending a predominantly white institution, a state university in her hometown, located in a large metropolitan city in the Southern United States. While in her sophomore year, Lucia accessed counseling services on her campus to discuss having difficulty balancing school, work, and home responsibilities. In this chapter, the author discussed the challenges experienced by Latinx FGCS along with the strengths they bring to college settings. In addition, the author utilized the case study of Lucia to discuss her counseling approach for helping Latinx FGCS navigate the terrains of higher education.
INTRODUCTION

Lucia is a Latina first-generation college student (FGCS) attending a predominantly white institution, a state university in her hometown, located in a large metropolitan city in the Southern United States. In higher education settings, FGCS refers to students whose parents did not attend college or any postsecondary institution (Wang & Castañeda-Sound, 2008). When she entered college, Lucia began pursuing a degree in mechanical engineering. However, early on in her transition to college, she began experiencing some struggles. As a result, Lucia accessed counseling services on her campus at the start of her sophomore year. In her intake session, Lucia discussed having a difficult time balancing school, work, and home responsibilities. From an outside perspective, it could appear that Lucia’s presenting concern relates to time management issues, a typical struggle college students experience. Often times, college students are viewed as a homogeneous group. However, undergraduate students are quite diverse; they hold an intersection of identities related to race, ethnicity, class, social economic status, gender, sexual orientation, and ability.

Lucia, like many Latinx FGCS, was struggling with navigating the culture of higher education (e.g., understanding degree expectations, connecting with faculty, and locating campus resources). This was coupled with Lucia also navigating issues of marginality on her campus: not seeing Latinx representation, institutional invalidation, and microaggressions. For low-income FGCS, the campus environment can provide validating or invalidating experiences, which in turn can have a positive or negative impact on their college persistence (Rendón, 1994; Rendón Linares & Munoz, 2011). Validation occurs for FGCS when “an enabling, confirming and supportive process [is] initiated by in- and out-of-class agents that fosters [the] academic and interpersonal development” of these students (Rendón, 1994, p. 44). The focused is placed on how faculty, staff, peers on campus are cultivating a welcoming and supportive environment for FGCS. Invalidating actions include “faculty who students believe are unapproachable, inaccessible, and often dehumanizing toward students” (Rendón & Munoz, 2011, p. 20). For Lucia, the invalidating actions she experienced on campus made her question if she was “college material.” Lucia also experienced various forms of microaggressions on her campus. Microaggressions are:

…subtle, innocuous, preconscious, or unconscious degradations, and putdowns, often kinetic but capable of being verbal and/or kinetic. In and of itself a microaggression may seem harmless, but the cumulative burden of a lifetime of microaggressions can theoretically contribute to diminished mortality, augmented morbidity, and flattened confidence. (Yosso, Smith, Ceja, & Solórzano, 2009, p. 281)