9 Considerations for First-Generation Students in Graduate School

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Many graduate programs are sincerely invested in fostering diversity and increasing the number of students from under-represented backgrounds who will contribute to our discipline. But increasing representation is only one step needed to address inequities, disparities, and injustices. Helping all students thrive and have an equal opportunity to achieve their educational goals requires the creation of "safe spaces" in which demographic differences are understood, appreciated, and considered in larger educational systems.

A frequently overlooked identity characteristic that can significantly impact the graduate school experience is being a first-generation (first-gen) college student. First-gen status can present unique challenges that not only affect students' performance and graduate training experiences, but also their identity development and relationships with loved ones. As such, first-gen status is an important aspect of students' identity that warrants consideration and tailored support. In this chapter, we (a) define first-gen status; (b) note the common strengths of first-gen students; (c) elaborate on challenges first-gen students may face; and (d) share examples of how first-gen status may intersect with other aspects of one's multicultural identity. Following this discussion, we provide specific recommendations for first-gen psychology graduate students navigating academia.

We would like to acknowledge up front that the discussion that follows is not intended to equate the experiences of first-gen status with the litany of challenges faced by students belonging to minority groups (e.g., students of racial/ethnic minority, international, or LGBTQ status). Rather, we are noting that first-gen students have unique experiences, compared to continuing-generation students, and these experiences may be particularly relevant and impactful for minority students.

This chapter is adapted from "Considering first-generation status among clinical psychology doctoral students" (Calhoun et al., 2021) published in *the Behavior Therapist.*

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1. A Note About the Authors

All authors were once first-gen, doctoral graduate students in clinical psychology programs, with graduation dates ranging from 1993 to 2019. Currently, the authors are of different professional statuses, ranging from postdoctoral fellow to tenured faculty. In this chapter, we present shared themes that characterized our, and others', collective experiences as first-gen graduate students. Throughout, we provide personal anecdotes to illustrate how being of first-gen status impacted our personal and professional lives as graduate students.

1.1 First-Generation Status

First-gen students are typically defined as individuals whose parents or legal guardians did not receive a degree (associate, bachelor, master's, doctoral) from an institute of higher education. That is, they are typically the first in their immediate family to attend college. According to the Center for First-Generation Student Success 2015–16 National Postsecondary Student Aid Study, approximately 59 percent of US undergraduates are first-gen college students. Approximately 76 percent of first-gen undergraduates decide not to pursue graduate education (Mullen et al., 2003), and those who do are more likely to drop out of graduate programs before obtaining their terminal degree (Kniffin, 2007; Nevill & Chen, 2007). Unfortunately, data on the representation of first-gen students in psychology graduate programs are lacking, and as such, little is known about experiences that may be unique to first-gen graduate students in these programs. Admittedly, the authors of this chapter all received a doctoral degree in psychology and may not adequately represent those students who did not matriculate. However, we provide our perspectives here to help elucidate factors that may contribute to attrition and resiliency among first-gen students in psychology graduate programs. Although the discussion that follows is centered on the experiences of first-gen doctoral students in psychology, much of the content may also be relevant for first-gen graduate students pursuing a master's degree in psychology and/or specializing in an allied field.

1.2 The Strength To Be First

First-gen students offer a number of unique strengths within academia, at least anecdotally. They often have reputations for being resourceful, persistent, independent, and self-reliant students who have been able to figure out how to successfully gain admission to highly competitive graduate programs despite having few, if any, exemplars to guide their path. These students may also possess unique insight into the underserved patient populations that many psychologists hope to serve – able to communicate with, and relate to, those who come from a diverse range of backgrounds and experiences. Similarly, many first-gen students report a strong personal focus or connection to their work, with challenges faced by themselves and their families often motivating various aspects of their professional goals

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(research, clinical work, etc.). In many cases, these assumptions likely are true: many first-gen students have worked tirelessly to overcome a wide array of barriers and demonstrate grit, perspective, and commitment that helps them thrive in our field, and as such often possess expertise in factors that inform resiliency. Such considerations may hold particularly true for first-gen students with marginalized or underrepresented multicultural identities, which present a litany of additional challenges (e.g., racial discrimination, acculturative stress) that may cause the journey to, and through, graduate school to be particularly stressful (described in greater detail below). The determination and perseverance needed to overcome these pervasive and stressful life experiences speak to the exceptional strength and resiliency of many first-gen students (Roksa et al., 2018), which may inform their preparation and approach to the rigorous training requirements of a psychology program.

1.3 The Challenges of Being First

Despite their strengths, first-gen students may have faced, and continue to face, substantial personal and logistical challenges by deciding to pursue a unique occupational path. These challenges can greatly influence first-gen students' ability to achieve their academic goals (Seay et al., 2008).

What follows is a list, by no means exhaustive, of various challenges typically encountered by first-gen students in psychology.

1.3.1 A Lack of Role Models

First-gen students are disadvantaged from the time that they initially decide to pursue higher education (Cunningham & Brown, 2014). As they apply for and enroll in college, they are in immediate need of support outside of their immediate family, given that their family often cannot provide informed advice about a student's many "new" experiences. Although there are academic counselors to assist when needed, these relationships often feel impersonal, short-lived, and are primarily focused on a specific area of need (e.g., 30-minute meeting to assist with course enrollment). For first-gen students, there is no singular form of support that can offer a comprehensive perspective on how to maximize success during and after college; this is true for continuing-generation students as well, but these students may require much less frequent extra-familial support. While academic mentors are highly valuable and desperately needed to "fill the gaps," they often do not have the shared experiences to understand the nuances of first-gen students' backgrounds and intersecting identities, and even if they do, they aren't able to offer the level of support that an emotionally and financially invested parent may provide. Further compounding the issue, a lack of diversity in program leadership (i.e., mentors, supervisors, training directors) often results in first-gen students having limited access to faculty who can offer general advice and recommendations about navigating first-gen challenges, including those intertwined with other aspects of diversity (e.g., race, ethnicity, country of origin, language). Many of us learned that some grad school colleagues had parents who helped them find

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post-baccalaureate research assistant positions, reviewed grad school/internship/postdoc applications, proofread theses and dissertations (and later, even scientific articles), practice for internship/postdoc interviews, and so on. One of us had a labmate in graduate school whose father was a successful academic who not only co-authored a paper with his child, but also informally mentored his child in how to prepare manuscripts, conduct peer reviews, and seek external funding. Without easy-to-access familial supports who pursued higher education, first-gen students may become conditioned to rely on themselves to a greater degree, and in the end, feel more isolated in their academic pursuits.

1.3.2 Navigating Without a Map

Many first-gen students "don't know what they don't know" and are often behind in learning about various academic processes and opportunities. They frequently learn by trial and error, sometimes making unwise decisions or missing out on experiences that could boost their competitiveness for graduate programs or later career opportunities (Lunceford, 2011). For instance, one of us didn't know about the undergraduate honors thesis until it was too late to apply for the program, and after entry into graduate school, it seemed that those who had completed an undergraduate honors thesis were better prepared to conduct research, particularly the first grad school milestone project (the master's thesis). Moreover, some of us had continuing-generation peers that had entire mentorship teams developed well before they entered graduate school to help them identify funding mechanisms, research awards, and training opportunities to best prepare them for a career in psychology. First-gen students who "learn as they go" often have fewer such support systems to keep them on the right path, and this deficit could have both emotional and financial repercussions.

1.3.3 Financial Challenges

First-gen students most commonly come from low-income families that are not able to provide financial assistance (Gardner & Holley, 2011). As such, these students may accrue significant student debt to cover tuition and living expenses while completing their undergraduate education (several of us had loans in excess of $100K upon receiving our undergraduate degree). With these loans looming, first-gen students may be hesitant to pursue an advanced degree. Despite the availability of funding mechanisms that may cover tuition and provide a modest stipend for students in psychology graduate programs (e.g., research and teaching assistantships, NIH training awards), these funding opportunities are not guaranteed and can be quite competitive. Even if a student is able to obtain a stipend or funding award, extraneous costs can be difficult to cover and may require part-time employment or additional student loans. For instance, conference travel is a major expense for first-gen students that they must often pay for out of pocket. Attending and presenting at conferences has become a necessary component of success in the pursuit of an advanced degree in psychology, as it is one of the most accessible opportunities to gain visibility in the field during earlier stages of training. Restricted access to

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conferences reduces the likelihood that undergraduate, post-baccalaureate, and junior graduate students will have the "currency" needed to stand out among other well-qualified candidates as they continue to pursue opportunities and awards in psychology. Unfortunately, access to this form of currency can be especially restricted for low-income, first-gen students.

Low-income first-gen students often face challenging financial decisions that their families do not understand. From the start, some of us were strongly encouraged to forego a career in psychology and told instead to pursue a career that would generate a higher income, such as law, business, or medicine. Indeed, one of us has a father who said, "I've worked 7 days a week for 30 years so that I could send you to medical school. If you don't want to become a surgeon, can't you at least try to become a psychiatrist?!" Additionally, some families may rely on young family members to provide financial assistance, and hold on to the notion that one day their child will earn large sums of money that will alleviate their financial stress. In these situations, first-gen students may feel selfish for being a "professional student" who plans to remain in school well into their thirties, only to make a relatively modest income upon receiving their terminal degree in psychology. Choosing a career that aligns with one's passion but produces a more modest salary can understandably lead families of origin to worry about their child's long-term financial comfort, as well as their own. These concerns are, of course, amplified as the student accrues more and more student loan debt, which can make the decision to attend graduate school seem financially irresponsible.

1.3.4 Lack of Family Understanding of Chosen Schooling/Career Path

Because first-gen students' families lack firsthand knowledge of the graduate school experience and the training goals specific to psychology, they often "don't get it" and have inaccurate assumptions about what their family member does on a daily basis (Gardner & Holley, 2011). Parents might not understand the nature of what it takes to get an advanced degree, and assume that their child is simply taking *a lot* of classes for five (or more) years. Many of us have been asked "What do you do all day?" and when trying to explain how reading, writing, running analyses, teaching, and clinical work can be taxing and stressful, the idea of being exhausted from "thinking all day" doesn't quite connect. And, we have all found it challenging to explain academic milestones such as comprehensive/qualifying exams, the dissertation process, and internship ("Wait, you have to move again? And you get paid *how much* as an intern?"). Following graduation, the pursuit of an academic job or postdoctoral position only extends the confusion that much longer ("You're moving *again*?!?! When is this going to stop? Can't you find a job closer to home and settle down?").

For many of us, whether we are recent graduates or 20 years into our careers, our families still don't quite understand what we do for a living. Often their perspectives are influenced by the stigma associated with mental illness, and our careers are described with comments like "My daughter treats crazy people for a living" or "He does research, whatever that means." The complexities of clinical work are reduced to "So you just talk to people about their problems?", and attempts to

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explain the difference in talk therapy and modern, empirically supported treatments is often met with a blank stare or resistance ("I would never talk to a stranger about my problems"). As researchers, the scientific process also is easily lost on our families ("Research? Like on Google?"), especially when attempting to articulate our study of abstract, intangible (and according to our relatives, potentially non-existent) psychological concepts. And, of course, we've all been angered by the familiar saying about teaching ("Those who can't … "). With these perspectives fueling conversations with family, first-gen psychology students naturally begin to question the value of their careers ("If my family doesn't even understand or appreciate what I do, then is it really all that meaningful?"), leaving them feeling confused and unfulfilled. Such ambivalence may lead first-gen students to minimize or ultimately avoid speaking with their families about the significance and meaning of their research, clinical work, and teaching, despite these tasks being the main focus of their day-to-day life.

1.3.5 Family Values Conflicts

First-gen students often feel as if they have abandoned their families, and have become odd, unfamiliar, or no longer relatable (Gardner & Holley, 2011). In many cases, including several of our own, the decision to pursue graduate education is perceived by parents as a rejection of the family's core values or identity, which creates distance between first-gen scholars and their loved ones. Some families perceive the pursuit of higher education or a scholarly career as unnecessary, "elitist," or an abandonment of the family business or trade, and these sentiments may be expressed in various ways. Many first-gen students have had the experience of being shamed within their families, assumed to be "showing off" or "selling out" when sharing their accomplishments, accused of being "super liberal," and being mocked with statements like "Is that what they're teaching you in college?" when they make a mistake or express a viewpoint not held by others in the family. These criticisms are not necessarily offered out of cruelty, and are sometimes even delivered as a back-handed compliment. Sometimes this criticism stems from the pain and fear that family members feel when their child begins to become less recognizable. Regardless of intent, the comments can still cause first-gen students to feel less accepted and understood by their parents, siblings, or non-academic peers.

Some parents may initially experience great pride in their child's success ("My child is going to be a doctor!"), but as their child grows increasingly independent, and acquires academic role models, they may feel less relevant and important to their child. These feelings may be amplified when their child moves far away (as often is required for academic careers) or discusses psychology-related topics that remain stigmatized back home. At the start, parents may encourage their children to "do better than they did" by going to college, but the implications of these good intentions for family relationships can later be surprising and difficult to bear. Over time, parents' pride may dwindle and be replaced with concerns that their child's chosen path is diverging from family values, which in turn can strain family relationships. Some of our parents feared that we would become "one of those ivory tower liberals"

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who would forget our humble beginnings. For others of us, the pursuit of individual success, although it was rooted in helping others, was perceived as an offense to our collectivistic cultural backgrounds. A few of us were raised in religious households, where our parents worried that studying psychology would promote secular views that would conflict with our religious faith. Additionally, almost all of our parents shared concerns about when we were going to "get married" and "start a family," pointing out the impact of our career decisions on these family-oriented life goals ("If you wait any longer to have kids, I might not be around to see them graduate high school"). While these concerns can be helpful for reminding first-gen students to reflect on and balance their personal and career goals, they can also feel invalidating as first-gen students assess the value of the sacrifices they made to pursue higher education ("Wait, I thought getting a PhD was a good thing?").

1.3.6 Identity Challenges

The challenge of *fitting in* with family and academic colleagues can create a perpetual identity conflict (e.g., Leyva, 2011). On the one hand, first-gen students could cling to their unique, decidedly non-academic roots, which can make them feel vulnerable or insecure when surrounded by their professional-background colleagues. On the other hand, first-gen students who assimilate to their professional environment may feel guilty for betraying their family of origin. Ironically, attempts to satisfy both identities simultaneously can leave individuals feeling unfulfilled in both realms, as though they are always sacrificing one part of their identity in some way. Those who are practicing clinicians may advise their clients to strive for alignment and reconciliation between their personal and professional values. Yet, many first-gen students (and some of the authors) may struggle to do this, as they find that having separate identities specific to each context is often reinforced with positive social feedback.

To further complicate the identity clarification process, first-gen students are among those who are particularly vulnerable to acute (and chronic) experiences of "impostor syndrome," wondering whether they deserved admission to a graduate program, feeling compelled to explain why they did not have similar prior experiences to their peers, and being afraid to ask questions about things that "everyone else just knows" (Bernard & Stone-Sabali, this volume; Canning et al., 2020; Craddock et al., 2011). The impostor syndrome can amplify the internalization of negative feedback across all professional contexts ("They've finally realized that I'm not as competent of a clinician/researcher/instructor/etc. as I've pretended to be!"), leaving a first-gen student's identity and self-esteem in constant limbo. First-gen students may be fraught with high levels of anxiety and stress when faced with seeing patients, giving presentations, writing research papers, and defending research projects, exercises commonly associated with pursuing an advanced degree in psychology. As such, they may work extremely hard on these tasks, set unreasonably high expectations for their performance, and put in excessive amounts of time and energy relative to their continuing-gen peers in efforts to "prove their worth" to themselves and others (Sakulku, 2011). While this may lead to success and praise in the short

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term, as the next impending project arises, the cycle repeats. This psychologically draining process can lead first-gen students to experience academic burnout as this approach to overcoming internalized insecurities may not be sustainable over the course of their graduate school tenure.

1.3.7 Intersecting Multicultural Identities

The challenges of pursuing a graduate degree may be especially amplified for first-gen students who come from historically under-represented racial/ethnic backgrounds or who possess other marginalized multicultural identities (e.g., religious minority backgrounds, LGBTQ). Given that the range of intersecting multicultural identities is limitless, attempting to capture them all far exceeds the scope of this chapter. Instead, we focus on two multicultural identities that most commonly add to the challenges faced by first-gen students.

One prominent challenge comes from being a first-gen student who is also a member of a historically under-represented racial or ethnic group (Howard, 2017; Leyva, 2011). Indeed, the journey of obtaining an advanced degree in psychology in itself represents a stressful period denoted by major life transitions, increasing scholarly independence, and struggles to maintain a healthy work/life balance. However, for first-gen students who are one of the only students on campus of a particular race, these stressors may be compounded by feelings of isolation and marginalization (Stone et al., 2018). Unfortunately, the relevance of microaggressions and other negative interactions pertaining to one's race or ethnicity may serve to instantly invalidate the years of hard work and effort that students of color have put in to attain success. For instance, at least one of us who identifies as a person of color can recall being told as a graduate student, "You only got this award because you are Black" when sharing with a professor news about receiving a competitive fellowship. These invalidating messages may directly refute affirming messages provided by family and friends that led many of us to pursue advanced degrees in the first place. Such experiences may be particularly taxing for first-gen students who may be attending institutions with no formal programming or support systems in place for students of color to feel supported and validated.

Another challenge in particular lies in the experience of first-gen students who come from immigrant families in which the student's parents and other role models do not speak English and/or have limited understanding of the US educational system. This presents a unique set of challenges over the course of the student's academic life. Beginning in early childhood, the student may not have had the luxury of having parents who could help with homework assignments, advocate for their child in the school system, or help their child navigate the complexities of academic transitions. When applying to college, and later to doctoral programs, these students did not have the advantage of parents who could proofread personal statements, assist with demystifying the process of applying for financial aid, or help with the practicalities of transitioning to university life. In addition, in some immigrant families, there may be an overreliance on children and/or other family members due to a limited proficiency in the English language, which could continue even as the child pursues higher education.

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1.4 Program Support and Mentorship

We all agree that graduate programs and individual mentors can increase the likelihood of a first-gen student's success. Some first-gen students have been fortunate to have mentors who were extraordinarily sensitive to some of the above challenges and who took them "under their wings," providing mentorship that went above and beyond what is typically expected. Others may not have had such good fortune, but have strived to provide a higher level of mentorship to their own first-gen students. Doctoral programs can strive to institute practices to help first-gen students navigate challenges they may face throughout their graduate training. In the next section, we provide specific pieces of advice to first-gen students to avoid some of the challenges discussed above.

1.4.1 Program Support

First-gen students are likely to seek out and feel supported by programs that have relevant support mechanisms in place. To start, determine if your university has a first-gen organization, and if so, reach out to see if they provide resources and support for first-gen *graduate* students (many focus primarily on undergraduate students, but some of the resources they provide could benefit graduate students as well). Encourage your graduate program to host or identify seminars on funding opportunities, financial planning (e.g., student loans in the long term), and professional development could be particularly helpful for reducing financial stress among first-gen students. A peer mentorship program led by more senior students could help first-gen students boost their proficiencies in academic writing, statistics, applying for awards/internship, submitting conference proposals, conducting peer reviews, and more. Peer mentorship may be especially effective for helping first-gen students set realistic expectations (through peer comparison), which could alleviate stress caused by the impostor syndrome. Self-care seminars hosted by fellow students could help first-gen students establish a healthy work–life balance. Establishing a student resource library funded by the program could also reduce the need for first-gen students to locate and purchase training resources (e.g., costly statistics/therapy manuals). To reduce the financial burden of conference travel, programs may consider setting up a travel fund (funded by donations from alumni, other donors, or clinic proceeds) to prevent first-gen students from incurring any upfront out-of-pocket costs from conference travel; programs could also advocate for such funds to be offered by the department, college, or university. If your program forbids students from seeking outside employment, you may ask them to revisit this policy, as first-gen students may rely on additional funding to make ends meet, or be responsible for providing money to their families of origin.

Universities and training programs that offer a variety of supportive mechanisms for first-gen students also alleviate burden on mentors, who may at times feel overwhelmed by the different layers of support a first-gen student may need. Being able to refer first-gen students to other available resources (e.g., resource library, peer consultation, institutional organizations) can help ensure that mentors are able

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to provide more targeted support that best capitalizes on their expertise. If your program does not have a diversity committee, advocate for one. Supporting and training increasingly diverse students, and creating an accepting culture in a program/department, requires a team-based approach, especially given that the time dedicated to these efforts is often based on volunteerism. Diversity committees can alleviate some of the burden on individual mentors to seek resources relevant to first-gen students' needs. Pushing for increased diversity among the faculty will likely increase awareness of first-gen training needs and potential support mechanisms. However, it is important that program faculty share the responsibility of supporting first-gen students and do not overburden under-represented faculty with this task. For instance, instead of tasking a faculty member of color with leading a seminar on a topic relevant to first-gen students, programs might choose to create regularly scheduled panels of faculty who can share advice and guidance to these trainees.

1.4.2 First-Gen Students and the Mentor–Mentee Relationship

Given the power differential in the mentor–mentee relationship, it can sometimes be difficult for students to openly share their first-gen status. Students may fear that doing so will lead mentors to see them as less capable or qualified than other students. However, sharing your first-gen status and discussing relevant personal growth areas could lead to collaboratively developed support efforts that will increase the chances of achieving your goals and having a rewarding graduate school experience. Personal disclosures of this nature do not necessarily need to happen right away; it can take time to build trust with a mentor and feel safe sharing personal information. If your direct mentor is not able to support you in the ways that you need, seek supplemental mentorship. Many programs have a diversity training committee that may be able to offer additional guidance and mentorship.

Additional tips for students are provided below.

2. Tips for Dealing with Financial Challenges

- Be proactive in seeking funding opportunities. In many programs, grad school costs can often be deferred or mitigated through TA-/RA-ships and other fellowships. You may also explore national and federal funding mechanisms. For instance, female-identified students can qualify for very low interest loans (www.peointernational.org/about-peo-educational-loan-fund-elf) and/or apply for a $15,000 dissertation award (www.peointernational.org/scholar) through the Philanthropic Education Organization. In addition, the American Psychological Association, National Institutes of Health, and numerous other organizations provide funding opportunities to support students at all levels of training.
- Apply for travel awards to buffer travel costs for conference attendance. These awards may exist at your home institution and through the organization hosting the conference; for some conferences, students can receive registration and travel subsidies for volunteering. If you are unable to obtain (or are ineligible

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for) external travel awards, ask your mentor if any laboratory or departmental funds could pay for conference expenses. Determine if there are ways for larger expenses (air/hotel/registration) to be paid directly by your department's grant manager or the entity funding a travel award, so that you do not have to pay out-of-pocket and wait for reimbursement.
- If you are unable to travel home to see family for the holidays, explore alternative ways to make holidays away from home feel less lonely. You might organize program holiday events, suggest community holiday events in the area, or simply talk to other students about the difficulties of being away from family during these times. Many college campuses coordinate (e.g., through their International Student Affairs Office) social events for students, including for those unable to travel for the holidays.

3. Tips for Increasing Professional Familiarity and Engagement

- Set professional growth goals and ask for support you need in achieving these goals. Student success programs on campus and elsewhere (e.g., writing center, study tip training workshops) can provide low-pressure opportunities to practice your writing and research skills (e.g., journal clubs). Discuss different options for support with your mentor, and be specific in telling them how they could be most helpful (e.g., "it would be helpful if you could walk me through the process of creating a narrative outline for the introduction section of a paper"). It can be particularly helpful to seek support as you apply for various awards or positions (e.g., internship), as having opportunities to receive feedback on application materials and engage in mock interviews can increase the likelihood of a successful outcome.
- Seek out opportunities to expand your professional awareness and knowledge. Attend conferences and professional meetings when possible, and ask others how to make the most of your time at these events. If you are hoping to learn more about writing empirical manuscripts, ask your mentor if you could assist them in reviewing manuscripts for journals that relate to your interests.
- Ask your mentor to connect you with important others in the field. For example, at an annual conference, your mentor could reach out to a colleague to introduce you as a potential future intern or postdoc. Mentors could also support you in asking a "big name" in the field to serve on your thesis committee.

4. Tips for Managing Challenging Issues of Identity

- Seek support (e.g., from the program, mentors, local therapists, your family) to balance competing personal and professional demands. Admit when competing demands are difficult to manage and ask for help when needed. There may be options, solutions, or ways of thinking about a situation differently that you have not yet considered!

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- Acknowledge the impostor syndrome (e.g., unobtainable standards, unsustainable work habits, internalizations of self-doubt), and work to develop healthy work habits that will help daunting milestones (e.g., defending theses, writing dissertations) become more manageable. Establish reasonable timelines and expectations for research tasks (e.g., writing, analyses). Challenge disparaging cognitions (e.g., "I'm not qualified to help") that may arise when you begin to see patients in a clinical capacity. Set appropriate expectations that normalize the difficulty and nuance of being a clinician to buffer feelings of self-doubt when faced with challenging sessions, slow treatment progress, and/or other unforeseen circumstances (e.g., conducting a first risk assessment). Other students are likely struggling with imposter syndrome as well; talk with them to support, and learn from, one another.
- Consider and disclose competing personal and professional values when considering career trajectory and goals. First-gen students' overarching values may be unique to their families of origin (e.g., more collectivistic than individualistic, more in need of a balance between their family's needs and their own), which may influence the type and geographic location of positions they pursue. Identify other mentors who may help with various aspects of your intersecting identities while building your personal academic community.
- You may consider introducing your mentor to your family if the opportunity presents itself. This could help to increase family emotional support, demystify the graduate school process for the family, and help you integrate these two facets of your life.
- If you are a first-gen student of color, you may benefit from attending national conferences designed to promote the development of underrepresented groups in psychological science (e.g., Black Graduate Conference in Psychology) and become a member of affinity groups associated with national organizations (e.g., Latinx Caucus of the Society of Research on Child Development).

5. Closing Notes

At long last, the field of psychology has begun to seriously consider a multicultural framework, recognizing the biases that exist in our professional gateways, traditions, and even in the content of our scientific and clinical work. Far more work must be done to acknowledge potential barriers to professional advancement of racial, ethnic, sexual, and gender minorities. In recent years, our field also has recognized blind spots with regard to religious and political diversity within our psychology community. We believe these remain high-priority areas for attention as our field increasingly values diversity and commits significant resources to the future of our discipline. As reflected in this chapter, first-gen status is an identity characteristic that often intersects with more visible, and commonly discussed, forms of diversity. By acknowledging first-gen status as an important factor contributing to the graduate student experience, we can improve upon our collective efforts to support the increasingly diverse cohorts of students entering graduate programs in psychology.

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