

## Handout 3-1: Case Study – Carlos

### Background

Carlos, a Latino man in his 30s, is diagnosed with bipolar II disorder. He lost his job a few months ago, and his family is struggling to make ends meet.

### Case Study

I had a really frustrating first appointment with my new therapist. I've been struggling a lot lately since I lost my job, and the stress makes it harder to manage my bipolar disorder, too. I needed help and advice.

But whenever I tried to ask my therapist how to get help finding a job, he would take the conversation back to my emotions and symptoms. I already know all about my diagnosis; I've been dealing with bipolar disorder since I was 20. What I'm feeling now is stress because I don't have a job and I'm worried about money.

The therapist wouldn't let me talk about what's worrying me, and he didn't want to give me advice. He had this idea that I must be a typical macho Latino guy who just won't admit my problems or talk about my emotions, and that's not it at all. I'm talking about needing a job because I'm really worried, not because I can't admit that I have emotional problems. How does this guy think he's gonna help me if I can't even talk about the reason I'm here?

## Handout 3-2: Case Study – Jaime and Adam

### Background

Jamie is a 30-year-old black woman who attends a prestigious, private university in the Southeastern U.S. Jamie is the first in her family to have graduated from college. She is now earning a master's degree in public policy, while working part-time as an administrative assistant for her department.

Adam is a 50-year-old white male counselor who primarily works with clients who are white and of a high socioeconomic status – the characteristics of most of the students at this university. Adam considers himself a culturally competent provider because he has counseled students from all over the world.

### Case Study (Part 1)

A couple months into the school year, Jamie begins to feel homesick, since she is very close to her family and has never lived this far away from them. She moved across the country without friends or family and is having trouble getting used to her new surroundings. Jamie often feels like an outsider among her classmates because she is older, comes from a lower socioeconomic background, and is one of the only black students in her program.

After a major exam, Jamie complains to a friend about her job and the trouble she's having adjusting to life at the university. She admits that she doesn't think she'll complete the master's program. Jamie's friend convinces her to visit the university's health center to speak with a mental health counselor. Jamie schedules an appointment with Adam. She is worried that her grades will suffer if she doesn't start to feel better.

In their first session, Jamie tells Adam that she often feels like an outsider. She mentions that while her classmates, who are mostly White, are usually nice and seem well intentioned, there have been times when she has felt uncomfortable.

She describes several group projects where classmates talked over her and ignored her input. When scheduling group meetings, her classmates are not considerate of her work schedule or the fact that she lives far away from campus. Jamie gets the impression that, when she's late because of work, her classmates think she's lazy. One classmate asked her if she got into the school based on affirmative action. Jamie believes her classmates don't view her as their equal.

### Case Study (Part 2)

Adam listens to Jamie and wonders if she is being overly sensitive. He acknowledges that Jamie's classmates' words have hurt her, but he asks: "Are you being assertive in stating your opinion?" "Do you have an attitude when addressing your classmates?" "What are you doing that might lead them to think you don't care about the group project?"

These questions frustrate Jamie. She feels irritated that Adam assumes the best intentions of her classmates, who he doesn't even know, while placing the blame on her. She thinks to herself, "Why is he assuming I have an attitude or don't assert myself? I moved across the country to a place where I don't know anyone to pursue a master's degree. Doesn't that seem assertive?"

Jamie withdraws from the conversation. She thinks to herself, “What does Adam know, anyway? These kinds of slights probably don’t happen to him on a day-to-day basis.”

Before the appointment ends, Jamie makes one last effort to help Adam understand her perspective. She explains that at work, she frequently gets ignored at her desk. Many professors and students who come by her desk treat her condescendingly until they realize, with some embarrassment, that she is a master’s candidate.

Adam again directs the blame to Jamie, inviting her to consider the possibility that she is suffering from low self-esteem. Adam begins to ask Jamie questions about her self-esteem. Jamie gets even more frustrated. This is not what she hoped for from the counseling session.

Adam never seems to understand the point Jamie is trying to make. He seems to disregard the possibility that Jamie frequently encounters microaggressions at the university and that this is the source of her stress and frustration. Jamie cuts the session short, believing the cultural differences between her and Adam make it difficult for him to understand her perspective. Adam asks Jamie to consider returning for another session, but this experience was so unpleasant that Jamie does not return.

### **Case Study (Part 3)**

Jamie describes her experience with her classmates to Adam. Adam listens to Jamie and begins to wonder if she is being overly sensitive. But this time, he decides he needs to learn more before he can make this judgment.

He says “I see this is important for you. Can you tell me more? For example, who are the people you are interacting with at school and at work? Has this kind of interaction happened at other times of your life?”

Jamie describes a situation at her job to help him understand her perspective. Jamie mentions that she frequently gets ignored at her desk. Many professors and students who come by her desk treat her condescendingly until they realize, with some embarrassment, that she is a master’s candidate.

Adam realizes that Jamie is dealing with stressors beyond just the heavy workload she faces as a graduate student. Although there is a perception that campus life is harmonious and open to everyone, Adam is aware that not all students have that experience.

Adam acknowledges to Jamie that, based on his counseling experience on campus, microaggressions like those she has dealt with are not uncommon experiences among students of color. He talks with Jamie about ways to manage stress and connects her to other resources for students that could help her to cope and feel more a part of the community on campus.

## Handout 3-3: Case Study – Abel and Jenna

### Background

Abel is a 68-year-old Ethiopian man. A few years ago, following the death of his wife, Abel moved from his hometown in Ethiopia to the suburbs of Washington, D.C., where his children had immigrated to decades before. He lives with his daughter, son-in-law, and their teenage children. Abel's sons and their families also live nearby. Recently, Abel has experienced memory loss, fatigue, and difficulty concentrating, and he is increasingly socially isolated.

Jenna is a 39-year-old Arab-American woman. Jenna has worked as a clinical psychologist for over a decade.

### Case Study (Part 1)

Abel isn't feeling well, and his adult children are worried. He's less involved with his grandchildren. His daily one-hour walk has turned into the occasional stroll. He has stopped having lunch every day at the local deli with some retired neighbors. Most of all, his children are worried that he's becoming forgetful and unfocused. He seems so tired.

Abel blames it all on old age, but his children wonder if something else is the matter. Abel visits his primary care physician, and Abel's physical examination and screening laboratory work are both normal. Still, Abel's physician is concerned about Abel's symptoms, so she refers Abel to a psychologist. Abel insists it will be a waste of time but makes an appointment so his kids will stop nagging him.

Jenna notices right away that Abel focuses only on his physical health. He insists nothing is the matter; he's simply getting older and slowing down. But he does explain matter-of-factly that he has trouble reading novels, remembering what his grandchildren are up to at school, and recalling the names of the neighbors he meets for lunch. Abel is not too worried about this because he always knows where he is and what day it is.

Abel did not express emotional complaints like hopelessness, helplessness, or worthlessness that are consistent with depression in the DSM-5. However, he does mention missing his wife and home. Jenna considers his physical complaints, his grief over the loss of his wife and leaving Ethiopia, and his risk factors for depression: he's isolated from extended family after his move to the U.S., and he's isolated himself from his local friends. He seems to be having trouble adjusting to a new country and family life. Jenna decides to screen Abel for depression.

### Case Study (Part 2)

Mental illness is highly stigmatized in Abel's culture. In fact, where he's from in Ethiopia, depression is not a socially acceptable condition – it's not even a term Abel was familiar with growing up.

Abel has avoided discussing his feelings of helplessness with his family, and he also refuses to share these feelings with Jenna. He's afraid it's a sign of weakness. He instead focuses on fatigue, difficulty concentrating, and forgetfulness.

Although he blames these symptoms on old age, his children, who are aware of the dominant U.S. understandings of mental illness, suspect Abel is experiencing depression since Abel's physician found no medical causes for his complaints.

Jenna understands that Abel will likely not make emotional complaints. In fact, she realizes he may not experience depression as a mental or emotional state of being at all, the way many Americans do. But because Jenna is aware of different idioms of distress and the cultural stigma around mental illness, she is still able to recognize his signs of depression. She also recognizes Abel's grief over the loss of his wife and leaving his home, and she discusses this grief with him as a prelude to discussing depression.

When she does move to the subject of depression, Jenna also makes sure to talk to Abel about his condition in the way that he experiences it – for example, using the words he uses – so he will feel more comfortable discussing it with her and hopefully continue treatment.

### **Case Study (Part 3)**

For a while now, I haven't been feeling like myself. At first when I moved to D.C., I missed home but I also really enjoyed meeting the neighbors, reading new novels, and playing with my grandchildren. Then... I don't know what happened, but I didn't feel like doing anything anymore. I was just so tired and forgetful. Actually, this was very embarrassing, but I figure this is what happens when you get old. I just tried to ignore it as much as I could so my family wouldn't worry.

Well, long story short, my kids encouraged me to meet Jenna. I really didn't understand the point of this, but my kids are very persuasive. Jenna and I met once a week last month, and you know what? I'm starting to look forward to our conversations. It feels good to talk to someone about how I'm doing.

I didn't realize how alone I felt after my wife passed and after leaving Ethiopia. I thought I needed to be more excited to get to live near my children and play with my grandchildren. I liked the neighbors I met, but... I don't know. Their lives are so different than mine.

Anyway, Jenna really listens to me. Even though we're pretty different, she tries to learn about me and my life, and she wants to help me feel better in ways that feel comfortable to me. It's nice. I like that she involves my kids when I want to, and she helped me find an activity to do with other recent immigrants from Ethiopia. She even recommended group therapy, and... I can't believe I'm saying this, but I think I might like that.