

Connecting With Indigenous Clients of Diverse Cultures by Fisher Lavell

SUMMARY:

Fisher Lavell is a working-class person of Mixed-blood origins. Mixed-blood people are those who have some First Nations ancestry but were not raised in historically separate communities, and identify, or are identified by others, as Indigenous. Lavell contends that to connect authentically with Native clients, caring professionals need to begin by understanding the true diversity of Indigenous cultures, histories, and relationships with colonization. Although many First Nations people have experienced generations of enforced segregation on reserves, other Indigenous people have not. Respecting traditional First Nations cultural pursuits is important, but many Metis and Mixed-blood people have had their own experiences of culture and religion and, in many cases, have never followed the kinds of First Nations spiritual traditions thought to apply to all Indigenous people. One generalization that does hold for the vast majority of Indigenous people is that they have been raised in poverty or as working poor. Lavell references recent theory on working-class interpersonal and communication styles, and suggests that a class understanding is important to working effectively with Indigenous clients. She identifies three main considerations in counselling Indigenous clients; establishing and developing trusting relationships, communicating effectively, and often addressing multiple complex and ungrieved losses. Lavell advocates the building of relationship by being open to connection, not scheduling appointments, being cordial and responsive, and providing space for quiet reflection and sharing. She suggests that the counsellor first “take the burden of the talk.” She recommends against a highly verbal, problem-solving approach, advising instead careful listening and respect for silence and longer wait times. Nurture relationship, smile easily, attend to ethics, and keep trust by being trustworthy.

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A BRIEF READING LIST

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