Native American Autism: Creating Space for Acceptance, Inclusion, and Culturally Informed Research, Resources, and Supports for Children and Their Families

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Abstract

This study examines the understanding of autism and engagement through a critical lens. It explores and considers an Indigenous worldview of Autism as an alternative to existing settler-colonial, ableist, racist, deficit-modeled, and oppressive worldviews of Autism, which currently saturate contemporary narratives, interventions, research, and social outlooks on Autism and Autism engagement. This study is designed to be inclusive of Native American parents of Autistic Children; to reflect their needs, ideas, and voices when it comes to engagement and services for their children and families. Theoretical frameworks used in this study include Community-Based Participatory Research (CBPR) and Indigenous Storywork. The contents begin with a cultural opening and an introduction by the author. This lays the foundation for the rest of the study, which is culturally grounded and shared through an Indigenous worldview. Settler Colonialism and its impact on Native American Autism research, engagement, and interventions are explored and critiqued before the research is shared. The study concludes with recommendations and discussion about the future of Native American Autism engagement, advocacy, and acceptance.

Keywords: Native American, Autism, Acceptance, Settler-Colonialism.

Acknowledgments

Figure 1

Duke's Aura

Note. *Duke's Aura* [Drawing], by White, C., 2024.

This artwork was created by my husband, Colby White Sr., and it incorporates an Indigenized, re-imagining of the widely used Neurodiversity Acceptance symbol: a rainbow-colored infinity symbol. Here, our son, Duke, centered and represented by a silhouette, is followed by the rainbow-colored buffalo tracks that outline an infinity symbol. The buffalo figure signifies strength, and the tracks behind our son symbolize the aura and the impact Duke makes on the world.

This image has guided me through my research, reminding me of why I do this work, and the beauty, impact, and strength of our son and family. It also reflects a guiding principle of this work: that the time, work, and sacrifices that were made to complete this research were not just for the benefit of our son, but for all who came before him, and all those who will follow. My vision for this work is that it will help leave the world a more informed, supportive, and accepting place than we found it.

I want to thank my son, Duke, for selecting me as his mother. He has been my teacher since 2017, when I learned I was pregnant. Duke inspired this work and walked with me through this academic journey. Thank you, Duke, for strengthening our family and teaching us to be kinder, more understanding, loving, generous, accepting, respectful, and more compassionate human beings. I also want to thank my husband, Colby Sr. Thank you for always supporting me, and for your time, love, patience, and acceptance. To my family, my mother, my father, my siblings, my late grandparents, and my tíos, tías, primos, nieces, and nephews, thank you for your continued love, strength, guidance, and encouragement throughout my lifetime. I would also like to acknowledge my ancestors and relations who have crossed over to the spirit world. Especially my abuelita, Doña Nico, and my niece Alicia; you both continue to be in my thoughts, prayers, and heart. Finally, I want to acknowledge my connection to the land, the natural resources, and my more-than-human relatives on and near the Muckleshoot reservation and in Guerrero and Jalisco, Mexico: including the waters that flow, the mountains, including təqʷubəʔ (Mt. Rainer), our animal relatives, our spirit relations, and the future generations of our people.

All these relatives have supported, advised, and motivated me throughout my lifetime; I could not have accomplished this without all of you. t̕igʷitubułəd, Gracias, thank you, to you all.

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Four Generations

Note. “*Four Generations*” [Photograph], 2018, Personal Collection.

Pictured left to right, Laurie Molina (Ross), Madrienne White (Salgado), Doña Nico Figaroa-Salgado holding Duke White, Colby White Sr., and Niceto Salgado.

These relatives form the pillars of my identity, positionality, intersectionality, and relational accountability.

Introduction

The United States Centers for Disease Control (2025), which crowns itself the “world’s premier public health institute”, declared the prevalence of Autism in America has risen steadily over the last two decades, citing 1 in 150 children in 2000, and increasing to 1 in 31 children in 2022 (Centers for Disease Control [CDC], 2025, paras.1-4). The National Center for Education Statistics (NCES, 2024) also reported that in 2022-2023, 15 percent of all public school students received special education and related services under the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA). Of that number, 19 percent of students were identified as American Indian/Alaskan Native (AI/AN), the highest racial or ethnic group represented in the study, with 13 percent of those students identified as Autistic.

These numbers indicate two things: first, a significant population of AI/AN students in public schools utilizes Special Education services; and second, many of them have been identified as Autistic. Despite the current prevalence of Autistic American Indian/Alaskan Native (AI/AN) students, as indicated by the aforementioned numbers, there is an underrepresentation of studies, research, engagement, visibility, and culturally relevant educational opportunities for and about the Native American Autism community. The purpose of this study is to take a critical look at how colonization has impacted the ways neurotypical people perceive Autism and engage with Autistic people, and how this colonial worldview has impacted Native American Communities and their Autistic relatives.

The study also explores the occurrence of Autism from a Native American positionality through an Indigenous Storywork methodology (Archibald, 2008), specifically, through Community-Based Participatory Research (CBPR) [Kovach, 2021; Chilisa, 2020] methods with American Indian/Native American/Alaska Native parents. Qualitative and quantitative data collected in this study provides a mixed-methods approach to acknowledge and share the experiences, challenges, and desires of these parents.

Additionally, qualities of Indigenous ways of knowing and being are also examined to consider how they relate to Autism Acceptance in Native American communities. These epistemologies and ontologies are examined to help explain and affirm their value and influence with respect to reclaiming and rethinking interventions with Native American Autistic relatives and their families. Together, this information and these assertions aim to inform and inspire later work, for creating a culturally- and identity-affirming support guide for Native American parents and their Autistic children, along with recommendations for informational tool kits for educators, therapists, and community members. All efforts aim to reduce harm in these communities and promote healing, acceptance, education, understanding, respect, reciprocity, and love.

Positionality and Intersectionality

haʔł sləx̌il, Madrienne White tsi dsdaʔ bəqəlšułabš čəd. (Good day, my name is Madrienne White, and I am a Muckleshoot Tribal member.) I am married to Colby White Sr. (Yakama/Diné), and we have a seven-year-old Autistic son named Duke. My bonus children are Ali and Colby Jr. I was born in Kapowsin, Washington, but I grew up in Southern California until I was eleven. After that, I have spent the last thirty-three years living on or near the Muckleshoot Indian Reservation in Auburn, Washington. I come from the Ross family there; we are descendants of the traditional Muckleshoot village area of sqwəlac, now known as Boise Creek near Buckley, Washington. My Mother is Laurie Molina (Ross), my Father is Niceto Salgado, and my maternal grandparents are the late Marvin (Muckleshoot and Yakama) and late Alfreda Ross (Cline family of Nooksack). My paternal grandparents are the late Isaac and late Nico Salgado, both from Guerrero, Mexico, specifically, the village of Apaxtla.

I walk with my ancestors from both sides of my family as I navigate the academic, professional, personal, and cultural pathways of life. I acknowledge them for their guidance and raise my hands to them for the strength, love, and protection they have provided me. This introduction serves as strands of a braid that represent my positionality and intersectionality as a person, a relative, a mother, an ancestor-in-training, a protector, a professional, a student, and a researcher. I offer this introduction to help establish the foundation and provide context for the thoughts, words, and positions in the text that follows (White, 2024, p. 2).

Who I am as a person, a scholar, and an Indigenous mother is important to this research and to understanding the worldview and relational accountability I have to the people I love, the ancestors I descend from, and the places I represent.

Definitions and Language Use

Before proceeding into the core of this dissertation, it is necessary to begin with several definitions of words and language used in this document, so that the reader will know and understand my particular views, references, and perceptions. This section also supports a connection between the writer and the reader, helping move forward a shared understanding of what *I* mean and/or the context from which I derive and reference certain words.

According to the CDC (2025), Autism is defined as,

> … a developmental disability caused by differences in the brain. People with Autism often have problems with social communication and interaction, and restricted or repetitive behaviors or interests. People with ASD may also have different ways of learning, moving, or paying attention.” (Centers for Disease Control [CDC], 2025)

In my initial introduction to Autism and in the beginning stages of researching, understanding, and unpacking Autism, I struggled with the term “disorder” and even “disability” in such references as the one above applied to Autistic people, which are both common terms used to describe Autistic people. I still struggle with these terms to some degree, but I understand and can appreciate that these words are used by individuals who have the agency to own and use these terms as they see fit. From my positionality as a mother, researcher, and Indigenous person, I see these words as having negative connotations in society and in research. I would prefer more descriptive and affirming words or phrases, i.e., the Māori phrase that you will read about later.

Another example of challenging language is the use of labels such as “high” and “low” functioning. A label of high functioning might seem like a compliment. But it can be received as offensive, and it is actually harmful; “It also doesn’t help autistic people get what they need, because it doesn’t show how autistic people need help with different things” (Autistic Self Advocacy Network [ASAN], 2020, p. 5). These functioning phrases can, in fact, be weaponized to work against the needs of Autistic individuals by minimizing, diminishing, or dismissing their individual characteristics and support needs. This is harmful, misleading, and damaging to all Autistic people. It creates equity issues by stereotyping, ranking, and recklessly suggesting that only a select number of the population are worthy of recognition and support.

From an Indigenous Worldview

“Takiwātanga” is a Māori phrase, coined by Keri Opai and developed with the Māori community and elders, that, depending on the derivative, means “my/his/her own time and space” (Altogether Autism, Accessed September 10, 2025). Reflecting on this definition, I see no mention of disability. It talks about people in a context of time and space. This definition aligns with what I consider a more holistic consideration of Autistic people, one that does not problematize the population; it simply acknowledges their existence.

From an Autistic Worldview

The Autistic Self Advocacy Network (2020) released a welcome guide to help people understand Autism from an Autistic point of view, stating,

> Autism is a developmental disability that changes a lot of parts of our lives. It changes how we think, understand the world, move, communicate, and socialize. Autism makes us different from non-autistic people, and that's ok! Autism is a normal part of life, and makes us who we are. (ASAN, 2020, p. 11)

As someone who values Autistic voices, I respect and celebrate this definition of Autism. I recognize the strength and empowerment that come with owning and reclaiming words like 'disability' despite my previous confession of struggles with terms such as 'disability.' I want to listen and learn from the Autistic community and allow their voices to influence and inform my growing knowledge of what Autism is and how Autistic people want to be understood. I also recognize that nothing is static; my beliefs, perceptions, and understandings can change and develop over time. Likewise, my internalized biases and learned ableism have and will continue to wane as I encounter new information and explore Indigenous and Autistic informed epistemologies and ontologies.

Native American, Indigenous, American Indian/Alaskan Native (AI/AN), and Tribal

I acknowledge that different people, generations, and tribally affiliated communities have preferred terminology they choose to identify with and to describe their ancestral heritage. I do not intentionally mean to offend or alienate anyone by using any such phrases, words, or terminology. What I am doing is using language that is meaningful and comfortable to me for a variety of reasons, for example, terms and phrases that have been used by family and friends since my childhood, such as Native Pride.

Therefore, for the purposes of this study, the terms Native American, Indigenous, American Indian/Alaska Native (AI/AN), and Tribal may be used interchangeably to refer to the

"Indigenous peoples of Canada and the United States" (Britannica, 2025). These terms are also used by governmental and academic entities, such as the United States and the University of Washington, meaning that they are regularly found in government messaging or communications, for example, the United States Department of Education has a discretionary grant called the Native American Career and Technical Education Program (U.S. Department of Education, 2026), and the University of Washington Tacoma has an "Indigenous-centered cohort" in their Educational Leadership program (University of Washington Tacoma, 2026).

Neurodiversity-

The following is one of my favorite definitions in this section, presented by the National Autistic Society (2026):

> Neurodiversity is a way of saying that human brains are different to each other. This is a biological fact. No two brains (or nervous systems) are the same. Neurodiversity includes every single human being. Like biodiversity describes all life on Earth, neurodiversity describes the diversity of all human brains. There is no single or 'official' definition of neurodiversity. To understand the word, it can be broken into two parts: Neuro: refers to the nervous system, i.e. the brain, spinal cord and nerves Diversity: refers to variations or differences within a group. (paras. 1-3)

This definition is inclusive, matter-of-fact, balanced, and doesn't have or imply negative undertones when describing neurodiverse people. The definition has a quantitative essence that I appreciate; this characteristic lends itself to being presented as factual and non-judgmental versus oppressive and ableist

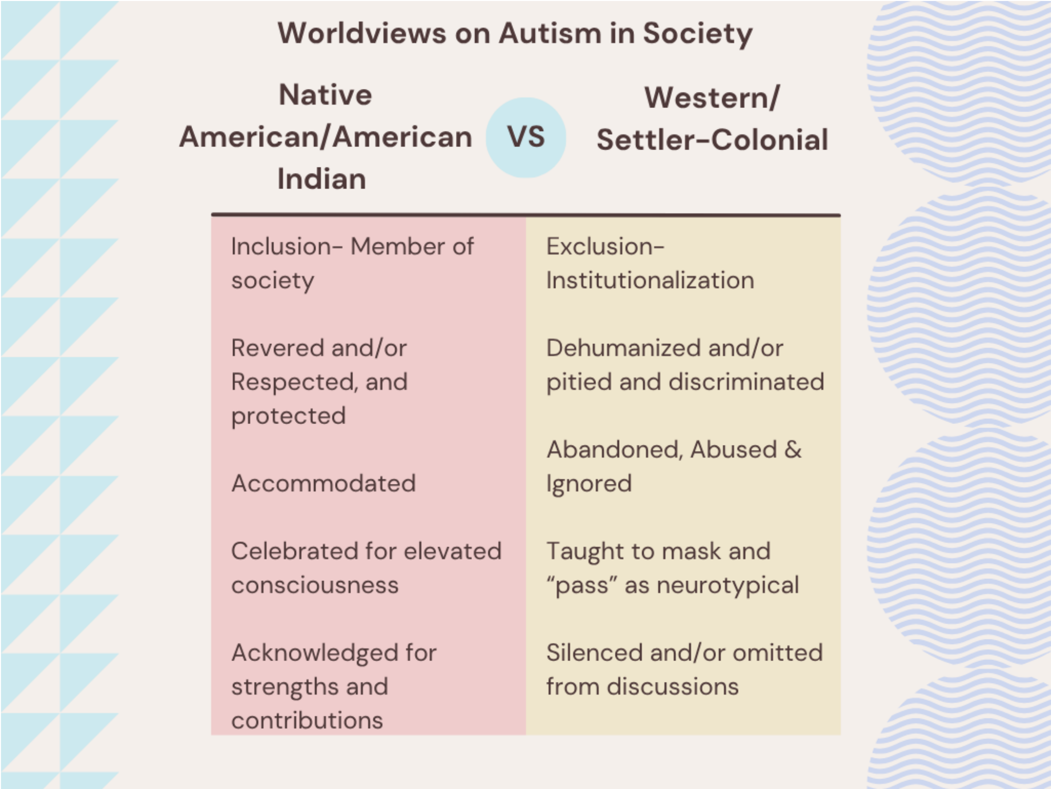
Connecting the Writer and the Reader

This chapter provided an introduction to the topic of this dissertation. It also provided a foundation for understanding, positionality, and shared language. Furthermore, it included statements from my positionality as a mother and my identity as a Muckleshoot person, coupled with my comprehension of Autistic people, especially through a cultural lens, where I explored terms such as disorder, disability, or problem when describing people, which I revealed troubles me. I believe that these words have historical roots in settler colonial and ableist worldviews that continue to negatively affect and influence social, educational, and therapeutic outcomes.

The issue is that this language places Autistic people in a stigmatized, othered, and socially disadvantaged context (Norris, 2014, p. 65). This placement perpetuates negative stereotypes, fears, and misunderstandings that harm Autistic people, their families, and communities, rather than placing them in a context that acknowledges their differences, needs, and strengths, while also acknowledging their humanity and value to society. Due to their misalignment and real-world impacts, concepts like language and the incongruence between Indigenous and Westernized worldviews around disability, Indigenous scholarship is beginning to surface, which draws attention to these challenges. Inseese-Nash (2020), for example, examined these and related topics in their overview of Western ideology and definitions around disability. They juxtaposed traditional Anishinaabe teachings and language with Westernized concepts, highlighting the stark differences and conflicts in perceptions and understandings. Figure 3.0 provides a visual critique from my perspective that highlights the contrasts between language and Indigenous and Westernized Autistic worldviews.

Figure 3

Indigenous Vs. Western Autistic Worldviews



Worldviews on Autism in Society

VS

Native American/American Indian	Western/ Settler-Colonial
Inclusion- Member of society	Exclusion- Institutionalization
Revered and/or Respected, and protected	Dehumanized and/or pitied and discriminated
Accommodated	Abandoned, Abused & Ignored
Celebrated for elevated consciousness	Taught to mask and "pass" as neurotypical
Acknowledged for strengths and contributions	Silenced and/or omitted from discussions

Note: White, M. (2025). *Indigenous Vs. Western autistic worldviews* [Unpublished]. School of Education. University of Washington Tacoma.

This overview of competing Autistic worldviews is based on my interpretations. The foundational beliefs, feelings, treatment, and behaviors on each side towards, with, and about Autistic individuals that form from these points of view have a real and tremendous impact on the quality of life, hearts, minds, and bodies of Autistic individuals, relatives, and their families.

Chapter Two

Figure 4

Carrying on our Culture and Legacies

Note. "*Carrying on our Culture and Legacies"* [Photograph], by Unknown, 2019, Personal Collection, Pendleton, Oregon.

Colby White Sr. (holding Duke White) and Madrienne White are pictured in the foreground during an intertribal song at the Warm Springs annual Fourth of July Celebration. This image reflects intergenerational learning in practice. It was chosen to lead this chapter to acknowledge and reflect the value and respect I place on traditional knowledges and Indigenous voices, both within and beyond academic spaces.

Literature Review

This chapter highlights and explores scholarly work in the field of Autism, critiques of contemporary views on Autism, and Autistic voices as sources of information, expertise, and wisdom, which have been studied for over a century. Autism research and studies have been conducted for over a century. The word Autism was coined in 1911 by Swiss psychiatrist Eugen Bleuler, who characterized Autism as a severe symptom of schizophrenia and described Autistic behaviors as, "…infantile wishes to avoid unsatisfying realities and replace them with fantasies and hallucinations" (Evans, 2013, p 4). As studies went on, perceptions changed, and eventually paradigm shifts occurred. By 1981, Lorna Wing published a transformative paper, where she coined the term Asperger's syndrome, which grouped Autism with cognitive deficits; thus, launching a shift in Autism understanding and categorization from mental illness towards developmental disability (Evens, 2013, p. 23). Wing (1985) stated, "All children with autism and related conditions are mentally handicapped because they lack the essential quality needed for normal intelligence and adaptability to the demands of life…" (para. 10).

Whether categorized as mental illness or disability, the ideology and perceptions about Autism, like those held by Bleuler (1951) and Wing (1985), portray Autism and Autistic characteristics in a negative and deficit-language model. This negative model surrounding Autism has continued to occupy space in Autism research, publishing, and education for nearly one hundred years. In order to disrupt and dismantle these oppressive and harmful narratives and worldviews about Autism, disabled Native Americans, people of color, and other marginalized communities have taken it upon themselves to start researching and storying their own experiences and realities of Autism. My entrance into this space of research, exploration, advocacy, and visibility for Native American Autistic relatives is part of this work.

It is important to note that work that disrupts and dismantles can also heal and advocate to resolve long-standing wounds, inequities, and trauma caused by oppressive narratives and ideologies. Such work includes Brown et al. (2017), who issued an anthology of Autistic narratives, poems, photos, cartoons, and messages for and by Autistic people of color. This anthology contains the life experiences of people from a variety of cultural, social, and economic positionalities and intersectionality. Black, Asian, Latinx, and Indigenous voices were all included in the anthology, which provides an intimate and introspective look at the lives of the contributors and the realities they have faced, including discrimination, abuse, ableism, racism, and internal struggles such as self-loathing and fear. It also shares stories of reconciliation, humility, strength, brilliance, and perseverance. This is an example of a shift in the Autism narrative, away from predominantly white, cis male, privileged perceptions of Autism to a more inclusive and authentic introspective way of talking and sharing about how Autistic people of color engage with and perceive the world. I liken this shift toward self-determination to what Smith (2012) describes as “reframing” (p.155) in the work, *Decolonizing Methodologies*. The author states that "Reframing occurs also within the way indigenous people write or engage with theories and accounts of what it means to be indigenous" (p. 155). There is a parallel here that exists between these identities that I find fascinating and fluid.

A similar work, Wong (2020), was produced to share the accounts and realities of disabled people across generations, religions, ethnic backgrounds, and genders. Disabled identities from queer, institutionalized, Indigenous, Jewish, and people from all walks of life are represented in this collection. It is a testament to the level of diversity, genius, courage, and vulnerability that exists within the disability community, especially within the spheres of education, medical treatment, social contexts, family, and policy. It is also a display of the intricate ways people are connected, either by place, relationships, experiences, beliefs, histories, and humanity.

People of color are not the only marginalized group of people that have been erased and camouflaged in Autism research, narratives, and understanding. As alluded to earlier, Autistic females have also been underdiagnosed, misdiagnosed, and pushed to the margins as well. According to Gabrielsen et al. (2023), male bias in research, including different profiles and patterns, i.e., Autism traits, and the evolution of Autistic characteristics as females age, adds to gender inequities in Autism identification and diagnosis, thus adding to the under-publication, research, and understanding of the prevalence and presentation of Autism in females. The authors conclude, "There is a palpable hunger for more information to better guide the experiences in assessment for the autistic and professional communities" (p. 255). This statement can be true for Autistic women, Native American populations, and people of color.

Yet another example of the shift in narratives and ideology from Autistic and disabled worldviews comes from an Indigenous-based book by and for Indigenous people with disabilities. Ward (2025) compiles narratives and accounts of disabled, Indigenous writers from around the world. Contributors hail from Indigenous communities from around the globe, including North and South America, Africa, Algeria, Australia, and more. Themes in the authors' experiences, histories, and assertions connect to colonization, racism, and ableism. However, they also voice hope, futurism, healing, decolonization, and reflections on the acceptance, inclusion, and humanization of Indigenous disabled people. Their stories and contributions provide first-account voices that translate and foreground Indigenous knowledges, epistemologies, and ontologies. Collectively, they work to fill a significant gap in disabled and Indigenous voices, experiences, and knowledges that often exists in disability studies and research. This type of publication is a remedy for the colonial constructs that omit and are ignorant and oblivious to Indigenous knowledges, epistemologies, ontologies, and axiology's that build and inform Indigenous worldviews of disabilities like Autism.

In addition to the exclusion of diverse and disabled voices in Autism and disability research and engagement, there is a general history of harmful outcomes by said work as well, including stereotypes reinforced, researchers leaving with their data without using the information to help or support the people they researched, etc. As a resolution for these negative outcomes, Quinless (2022) emphasizing the necessity for works that inform improved and decolonizing data that would support these communities, they state, "If moving forward in an era of reconciliation when new strategies and policies are to actually have a transformative effect on Indigenous peoples' lives, there must be a concerted effort to develop strategies that are community driven for change" (p. 75; also see Brown et al., 2017: Wong, 2020; Ward, 2025, and Gabrielsen, 2023). Andersen et al. (2025) added to this outlook on outcomes of Indigenous and community-based research by stating:

> Strength-based and solution-oriented research provides a promising alternative to the normative approach. Ensuring that Indigenous peoples have authority over how they are researched and how they are portrayed as a result of that research is critical to producing effective and beneficial research (Andersen et al., 2025, p.102).

The works mentioned in the previous section, along with their assertions and calls to action regarding the need and urgency of including and valuing Indigenous knowledges and disabled voices, and of creating methodologies for beneficial outcomes in research and Autism studies, inspire my dedication to Autism research in Native American communities. They also validate the inner desire and need I feel to include my community in my research. These authors are providing a pathway and an invitation that guides and informs the work I pursue within my Muckleshoot community in Native American Autism research and the movement toward Autism acceptance and inclusion within Native American communities, systems, and all spaces where humanity is concerned. These contexts, themes, and assertions lead to the discussion below, which examines my rationale for this body of work and research.

Rationale

The following foundational frameworks serve as tools for structuring my rationale. Although their content is relevant to my research, they are not the theoretical frameworks used to design my research. However, it is important to understand these foundations before continuing on to the review and exploration of the theoretical frameworks that influence and guide my research. The foundational and theoretical frameworks covered in the next chapter intersect and complement each other, helping to create a relationship that supports my research. Additionally, they influence and explain the relational accountability amongst me, the work, my tribal community, and my family.

Disability and Race

Annamma et al. (2012) explored the intersectionality between disabilities, including Autism, and race through a critical analysis of Disability Studies (DS) and Critical Race Theory (CRT). Their research described the connections between these disciplines, emphasizing the presence of ableist and racist hierarchies that exist, which result in inequities across societal and educational structures and systems. These inequities result in students of color being overrepresented in special education systems and juvenile detention rates and suffering other forms of negative social and educational outcomes and discrimination, including higher dropout and unemployment rates (Annamma et al., 2012; Jacob & Jonson, 2020). Their examination led to the combination of elements from the two respective disciplines, DS and CRT, and they proposed a theoretical framework called Dis/ability Critical Race Studies. Their work helps to examine the incredible connection and intersections between disabilities and race, such as Autistic Native Americans.

Tribal Critical Race Theory

The work of Annamma et al. (2012) parallels the scholarly contributions of Jones-Brayboy (2006), who established the framework and case for Tribal Critical Race Theory (TribalCrit). This theory is comprised of nine tenets that illuminate the inequitable, racist, and oppressive nature that exists between Native American communities and the social, political, educational, and financial systems of our American society. The first tenet of TribalCrit is, "Colonization is endemic to society" (Jones-Brayboy, 2006, p. 429). The other tenets include:

2. U.S. Policies toward Indigenous Peoples are rooted in imperialism, White supremacy, and a desire for material gain.

3. Indigenous peoples occupy a liminal space that accounts for both the political and racialized natures of our identities.

4. Indigenous peoples have a desire to obtain and forge tribal sovereignty, tribal autonomy, self-determination, and self-identification.

5. The concepts of culture, knowledge, and power take on new meaning when examined through an Indigenous lens.

6. Governmental policies and educational policies toward Indigenous peoples are intimately linked around the problematic goal of assimilation.

7. Tribal philosophies, beliefs, customs, traditions, and visions for the future are central to understanding the lived realities of Indigenous peoples, but they also illustrate the differences and adaptability among individuals and groups.

8. Stories are not separate from theory: they make up theory and are, therefore, real and legitimate sources of data and ways of being.

9. Theory and practice are connected in deep and explicit ways such that scholars must work towards social change (Jones-Brayboy, 2006, pp. 429-430).

Tenets four, five, seven, eight, and nine equip me with a theoretical framework and validation for the considerations I make, the approach I take, and the methodologies I will practice with respect to Autism research, engagement, and education within and beyond the parameters of this document. For example, tenet four speaks to my calling to this work as a practice in tribal educational sovereignty; tenet five speaks to the tribal lens through which I experience and engage in this work, perpetually in relationship with my cultural identity. Tenet seven is a core component that compelled me towards Autism study and engagement: it considers philosophical values and relational accountability, the void that I felt (lack of Indigenous Autism understanding, visibility, etc.), motivated, mobilized, and manifested into action for the betterment of the future. Tenet eight relates to my dedication to using Indigenous Storywork as methodology in this work, and tenet nine circles back to my relational accountability, demanding I be an agent of change. To do research in Native communities, I choose to bring love, healing, responsibility, compassion, and understanding to this work, and provide support, resources, and tools that practice respect, reciprocity, relevance, and reverence as pillars, to disrupt and dismantle white settler-colonial frameworks and systems which have erased or ignored cultural and Autistic voices.

Furthermore, I assert that tenets one, two, three, and six have directly or indirectly influenced the current status of Autism and Native American Autism education and engagement in this country. This includes the lack of diversity, overwhelming white presence, prevailing worldviews, and lack of or non-existent culturally relevant/Indigenous-informed Autism resources, education, engagement, interventions, and more. Writer and French (2021), along with their interviewees, call attention to this reality, speaking to the ongoing prevalence of settler-colonialism/white-supremacy in educational systems in this country. They consider a future for Multicultural Education (MCE), where "MCE must address settler-colonialism to envision, create space for, and support Indigenous futurities [Tuck & Gaztambide-Fernandez, 2013]" (Baptiste & Writer [Eds.], 2021, p. 78).

Lived Experience

I consider how these Tribal Crit tenets have influenced the current status of Autism and, by extension, Native American Autism in this country through the lens of my reality, lived experience, and understanding, and through my positionality and intersectionality. Through the lenses of my epistemology and ontology as an Indigenous and Muckleshoot woman, I came to recognize that my son's experience and our family's, with Autism engagement, was void of Indigenous-informed education, visibility, and worldviews. This is where inspiration for this academic work evolved, and why I endeavor to be an agent of change. This particular experience has generated resistance inside me. Curtice (2023) explains this well, as not just a resistance to "the dangerous status quo of our time" but also as an energy (p. 23). This energy manifests as self-determination, choosing ourselves, and resisting colonial constructs such as ableism and racism (Curtice, 2023, p. 24).

Misperceptions and Miseducation

I contend that the lack of cultural representation in Autism engagement and understanding is a direct result of and symptom of the assertions made in the Tribal Crit tenets. They reveal how the political, social, imperialist, and settler-colonial values have impacted and influenced the current status of American society and, by extension, Native American Autistic relatives and their families. There are shocking voids, misperceptions, and miseducation in our Nation's understanding and acceptance of the Autism community. That is how we come to see ableist mindsets perpetuate deficit language used to describe our Autistic relatives that support studies for cures, solutions, and "treatments" for Autism, like the ones being published by the current U.S. Food and Drug Administration (FDA). For example, the FDA (2025) published an article in September announcing its intention to approve Leucovorin Calcium for relabeling to make the drug available to Autistic patients. The drug is currently prescribed to patients with Cerebral Folate Deficiency (CDF). The FDA states these patients "have been observed to have developmental delays with autistic features (e.g., challenges with social communication, sensory processing, and repetitive behaviors) seizures, and problems with movement and coordination" (para. 1). In a statement connected to this relabeling, the current FDA commissioner, Marty Makary, said, "We have witnessed a tragic four-fold increase in autism over two decades…Children are suffering and deserve access to potential treatments that have shown promise. We are using gold standard science and common sense to deliver for the American people" (USFDA, 2025, para. 3). The language used, and conclusions made by the FDA and Makary (n.d.), are classic examples of deficit modeled language and an ableist worldview to describe and interpret Autism and Autistic behaviors. Their assumptions and implications problematize Autism, which is harmful and rooted in oppression.

Negatively charged, generalized comments and calls for studies to correct or treat Autism, such as those above, are harmful and misguided at best; they look, sound, smell, taste, and feel like passive aggression and microaggression towards Autistic people and their families. To assume that Autistic individuals need to be relieved of their Autistic selves and experiences is presumptuous and perpetuates ableist narratives and worldviews that prefer and value perceived 'able' bodies and minds and ignore cultural and individual identities, values, epistemologies, and ontologies. Alternatives to Western worldviews are being explored now more than ever. Knott Fife (2025) acknowledges the "Western tendencies for deficit-based perspectives on disability" and offers an alternative approach to special education for Indigenous students (p. 40). Knott Fife (2025) offers a similar outlook to mine regarding interventions and education engagement, which is to acknowledge identity, celebrate their gifts, and forge a path forward with identity-affirming care and engagement, which Knott Fife refers to as "Culturally Responsive/Relevant Pedagogy (p. 39).

Furthermore, this particular example completely ignores, omits, and erases any Autistic voices from the discussion and considerations. It also fails to include or consider the side effects in Autistic participants of treatments, in this case Leucovorin Calcium, which, according to the American Academy of Pediatrics (AAP, 2025), "have included appetite changes, diarrhea, and irritability" (para. 7).

The above critiques, coupled with my cultural consciousness, tell me that this rhetoric and these methods are wrong in their assumptions and should be challenged. I maintain that without the involvement of Autistic voices and without consideration of or acknowledgment for the negative impact drugs like Leucovorin Calcium can have on Autistic people, studies and comments like these being espoused by the FDA are lacking in representation and transparency, which weakens their validity.

Additionally, the words, tone, and messaging in the above statements by the FDA plant and cultivate seeds of fear, shame, and anxiety in society. Generating thoughts and feelings into the minds of parents, relatives, citizens, and communities: communicating that Autism is something to be feared, something to be corrected, and something to be ashamed of. I disagree and challenge the nature and short-sightedness of these ableist and oppressive narratives that have real-life and sustaining impact on the lives and well-being of all Autistic relatives and their families, especially in our Native and Indigenous communities. For example, according to representatives from the ARC of King County, Autistic people practice masking or hiding their Autism for the comfort of others, leading to anxiety, depression, and suicidal ideation in Autistic adults (Siddeek & Maher, 2026).

The FDA's Leucovorin Calcium initiative is but one example of how identity and culture have been omitted from the Autism engagement process and how oppressive and harmful ideologies continue to prevail across sectors, i.e., health, politics, educational systems, etc. This example also epitomizes the frameworks from Western, oppressive, ableist, and exclusive worldviews that form, represent, engage, and educate our society. These systems and structures were designed to repress and exclude any culture and identity that is not white. They continually lack identity-affirming community resources, learning opportunities, or Indigenous-informed outreach to our Tribal Autistic community.

For example, a study conducted in the southern United States revealed significant disparities in Autism diagnosis and resource availability, especially in rural communities (Bennett et al., 2021, pp. 970-971). Their study suggested a lack of culturally relevant interventions and representation within the Autism community, but especially for marginalized groups like Indigenous and Native American populations, specifically Navajo and other local tribes in the southwest area of the United States. However, the results of this study could be from anywhere in the United States. There is a complete lack of identity-affirming care for Native American Autistic relatives across the nation.

Settler-Colonial Impacts, Raising Voices, and What is Next

The voids in Indigenous-informed Autism engagement are directly related to settler-colonialism in this country. They exist as a symptom of the systems that engage with our Autistic relatives and their families, systems that consciously or not, continue to highlight, favor, and represent white-settler-colonial worldviews and values, such as those pointed out by Jones-Brayboy (2006): Imperialism, racial bias, and assimilation. These connections and foundations in oppressive values breed ableist and racist worldviews within society, which continue to shroud Autism engagement, education, scientific research, methodologies, and theories. These foundations also account for the use of deficit language and model usage when speaking about and defining Autism from a Westernized lens. Due to their roots in racism, discrimination, and ableism, these foundations also account for the erasure of Indigenous, Native American, American Indian, and Alaskan Native representation and knowledges in Autism visibility, research, education, medical interventions, and community engagement.

Synergized by critical lenses, such as theories, frameworks, and research by Annamma et al. (2012) and Jones-Brayboy (2006), my rationale asserts the need for more culturally responsive and Indigenous-informed engagement with Autistic Native Americans and their families. Due to the continued influences and impacts of colonization, which I argue are rooted in ableist, oppressive, and white supremacist worldviews, I also assert that more equitable and culturally responsive engagement and learning opportunities in the Native American community will result in the improved status of Native American Autism acceptance and inclusion across cultures and systems. I hypothesize that this shift in engagement and acceptance will feed the mental, spiritual, and physical needs of Autistic Native American children and their families. This would ultimately result in positive social, emotional, educational, spiritual, and likely economic outcomes for this community.

In addition to bringing attention to the settler-colonial roots of Autism engagement and education, I lay the groundwork in the coming chapters to provide a pathway to healing for our Muckleshoot and Native American Autistic relatives and their families. Because, although I believe Native American parents of Autistic children love their kids and want to celebrate, support, and advocate for them, healing is needed to address the grief, alienation, and stress that come along with an Autism diagnosis of a child. Attaining the diagnosis can be a revelation and beneficial in many ways, for example, it provides an explanation for behaviors, it also provides a bona fide rationale for accommodation and support needs of our Autistic relatives, it can also be the beginning of an alienating, lonely, and difficult journey for a lot of families. My work aims to heal, empower, and reflect the love and support that Autistic relatives and their families need and deserve.

This chapter provided a brief overview of the historical roots of theories of Autism and their development over time. This transitioned into sharing works by Autistic voices, positioning them as credible sources for Autism knowledge-building, Autism community engagement, and development. Finally, the chapter transitioned to framing my rationale, which lays the groundwork for the theoretical frameworks discussed in the next chapter.

Chapter Three

Figure 5

Story of the aye-aye-esh girl

Note. “*Story of the aye-aye-esh girl”* [Mural], by Roger Fernandez and Toma Villa, 2018, University of Washington, third floor Miller Hall. Roger Fernandez is a Lower Elwa elder; also an educator, artist, and storyteller. Roger Fernandez tells a version of the aye-aye-esh girl, from the Sahaptin-speaking people of Yakama, Washington (The Creative Advantage, 2020).

This is an art expression of a version of the Klickitat Basket Story, also known as the story of the aye-aye-esh girl. The mural layers Storywork with Indigenous pedagogy and art; it represents Indigenous educational sovereignty, intergenerational learning and teaching, and the intersections of relationships with more-than-human relatives, such as spirits and nature. These teachings and respect for Indigenous worldviews on education serve as a visual aid to the chapter that follows.

Theoretical Framework

The following theoretical review and exploration will provide context for the frameworks used in this study. They also provide support and explanation for the methods and methodologies used in the research. Furthermore, these overviews and examples provide additional insight into the worldviews, intentions, and relational accountability embedded within the research, which are also intimately woven into the fabric of my cultural identity.

The theoretical frameworks for this study will include Community-Based Participatory Research (CBPR) and Indigenous Storywork (ISW). Tuck and McKenzie (2015) discuss CBPR as being particularly useful for producing action-oriented outcomes that are co-created with researchers, real people, and stakeholders, using a place-based methodology, "because of its ethical touchstones" and its "richly textured, accurate, and useful data" (Tuck & McKenzie, 2015, p. 88). Incidentally, Tuck and McKenzie's statement reinforces Jones-Brayboy's (2006) Tribal Crit tenets seven, eight, and especially nine. By connecting these dots and practicing mindful research while remaining grounded in my ancestral homelands, tribal values, and by respecting familial connections and relational accountability, I can maintain honest, intentional, and inclusive research that speaks to the lived realities of our Native American Autistic relatives and their families.

In addition to Community-Based Participatory Research, another framework that I was drawn to include in this work was Indigenous Storywork (ISW). Jo-Ann Archibald (2008; 2022), a First Nations citizen of Canada, was my introduction to this framework. She describes the ISW methodology as an Indigenous practice of conveying knowledge, experiences, and sharing cultural and oral histories. This methodology exists within a framework pillared by the values and "…storywork teachings of respect, reverence, responsibility, reciprocity, holism, interrelatedness, and synergy" (p. 2). Being raised on the Muckleshoot Indian reservation for most of my childhood, I had experiences with Indigenous Storywork, although I did not know to call it that during my youth. However, because of this exposure and my connection to and respect for this style of engagement, knowledge transfer, learning, sharing, and practice, I was motivated to use this methodology in my practice and research.

Archibald (2008) examines the use of storytelling in Indigenous cultures as an integral part of multi-generational knowledge transfer practices, cultural preservation efforts, and the understanding of layered, rich, and versatile stories that produce dynamic and relevant learning experiences and opportunities. These opportunities combine relationality, cosmology, history, science, social protocols, morality, and language to reveal information about ourselves and our environments. Storytelling, as presented by Archibald (2008), is shared and produced in a style in which listeners are invited to become active participants in the story, at times making their own conclusions and taking from the story what they will regarding significance, values, nuance, and teachings. Cajete (2015) also highlights "story as Indigenous education" (p. 95). He contextualizes story as a universal human tool for educating and communicating, stating, "Even in modern times, we are one and all storied and storying beings. At almost every moment of our lives, from birth to death and even in sleep, we are engaged with stories of every form and variation" (p. 95). Cajete combines the concepts of storytelling, art, dance, and singing as forms of exploring and developing attention, creative thinking, flexibility, and understanding relationships of time and places (p. 96). These are concepts that explain my attraction to Indigenous Storywork, and the powerful role it plays in our Tribal education and consciousness as Indigenous and human beings.

Take, for example, the video recording of the Klickitat[1] Basket story as told by Vi Hilbert, Upper Skagit Elder from Washington state (New Canoe Media, 2020). In the film, Hilbert recites the story from their home in Washington state to a living room full of listeners. Hilbert speaks in Lushootseed, the first language of the original people, commonly known as Coast Salish, from the area now known as the Pacific Northwest in the United States. This geographical area, before colonization, was home to hundreds of villages, most of which were eventually amalgamated into federally recognized tribes, including the Upper Skagit, Tulalip, Muckleshoot, and Puyallup. Hilbert is recorded translating a story from Lushootseed into English and moving fluidly between languages throughout the video, presumably for the benefit of non-Lushootseed speakers. Due to the impacts of colonization, this likely included most, if not all, of the present in that room.

Hilbert starts the story by describing a little “disadvantaged” and “inadequate” girl who did not play with other children. The girl was sitting alone under a Cedar tree when the tree began to speak to her. The Cedar tree coached the girl on how to make a Cedar root basket. The little girl who had been described as disadvantaged and isolated from other children eventually, after four tries, created a waterproof cedar root basket inspired by images in nature, such as the shapes of mountains and the imprints left by snakes slithering in the dust. Once the basket was finished, the Cedar tree instructed the girl to give the basket away to the eldest woman in the village. This is the story of how the Klickitat people became known as exceptional basket weavers.

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[1] The area of Klickitat is geographically located in the south-central area of Washington state, and is the location where the story told by Hilbert takes place. This area was and is the traditional homelands to the Sahaptin speaking tribal nations (Klickitat County, N.D).

I have watched this video several times over the years. Every time I hear it, it continues to reveal nuances and new meanings. The last time I listened to and received lessons from this story, several layers stood out to me regarding cultural teachings and traditional values. The first and maybe the most important, especially as it relates to my work in Native American Autism, is the teaching that no matter how old or young, whether human or more-than-human, abled or disabled, all our community members and relatives have contributions to make. They have talents, skills, knowledges, competencies, relationships, and gifts to share.

Other teachings include the significance of numbers, like taking four tries to get the basket right. Hilbert briefly touches on the significance of the number four in our culture during the video, “Everything Happens Four Times” (New Canoe Media, 2020). The number four holds great significance in our community. I think of four directions, four verses in a song, the four seasons in a year, and so on. This lesson reminds us that numbers are important to pay attention to; they are more than just arithmetic; they also help us consider balance and relationships.

An additional value and teaching I gained from the story was the act of gifting. It is customary for someone to give away what they have made for the first time to an elder; this lesson and practice have remained significant over generations. It is a practice that perpetuates a culture of giving, reciprocity, respect, love, and centers humility as a value. This is a teaching that was passed down to me when I made my first cedar-woven rose. I gifted the rose to my Aunt, Kathy Crombie, a respected elder and basket weaver of the Muckleshoot Indian Tribe. This practice aligns with the principles of the Potlatch. Johnsen (2024) makes note of this practice, categorizing it as a type of societal and cultural “law” (pp. 234-235), which translates into a form of and practice of reciprocity.

Further teachings include the value of hard work, practicing intentionality when creating something, taking pride in your workmanship, and valuing relationships. The very act of creating with your hands, whether art, food, or labor, our culture values doing things in relationship with our Mother Earth, our more-than-human relatives, and in harmony with others.

In the space and time I last heard this story, it spoke to me about connecting, creating, sharing, and acknowledging. The next time I hear it, it may have new lessons for me. This is because I will come to it from a renewed positionality. I will have new experiences to reflect on, additional information to consider, and will have developed new relationships that will influence my understanding and intersectionality. It is up to me to actively listen and draw my own inferences about the story's underlying themes and content. That is what makes this framework so valuable and versatile. It encourages self-exploration, connection, and self-determination by crossing boundaries of time and space. It is truly beautiful and an example of Indigenous genius.

It is important to identify these theoretical frameworks through which this dissertation was conducted. They exemplify Indigenous methodology, which is the foundation of the research that follows. These methodologies reinforce research conducted "*with* and *within* Indigenous communities" (Windchief et al., 2017, p. 533).

Experiential Interpretation of ISW

In addition to traditional and ancestral stories, such as the Klickitat Basket Story, I interpret the sharing of lived experiences and realities as Indigenous Storywork (ISW) as well. This is a version of ISW that will manifest later in this work as it relates to research and methodology. Included is a collection of storied experiences from Muckleshoot Tribal members and other tribally affiliated parents and caregivers of Autistic children.

Themes and responses from the data that emerge from the research will be shared in narrative and visual aids. To the best of my knowledge, this expression, style, and level of engagement with ISW within the circle of my Native American Autism community has not been previously done before. This style of engagement, methodology, and data sharing aligns with the understanding and learning styles of Indigenous people and, arguably, human beings as a whole.

Circling back to Cajete (2015), he explains that as an Indigenous community, story helps to frame and bridge learning and education, stating, “Story is how we frame information and experience within a context that makes them meaningful” (p. 95). As a community, we benefit from this approach to research and methodology because our historical and social connections to Storywork are embedded in our collective educational practices. Thus, I assert that we learn best from the framework of stories and lived experiences.

The elements of relationality, axiology, and place-based methodology applied by Community-Based Participatory Research and Indigenous Storywork in this research all work together to create meaningful dialogue for sharing, educating, and healing for families. This collaboration and community-based approach also support the creation of Muckleshoot and Indigenous-informed learning materials for the benefit of educators, therapists, and communities. In this way, they may better understand the realities, languages, and worldviews of the Native American Autistic students, families, and patients they work and engage with.

Indigenous Research

In their work examining Autism research in Indigenous communities, Bruno et al. (2025) illuminated the need for (and current lack of) Indigenous-produced and informed research that develops meaningful and authentic outcomes and recommendations for these communities. Bruno et al. also asserted that influences of colonization and imperialism persist in these communities, which therefore sustain the presence and perceptions of Westernized, deficit-based worldviews about Autism and disability (additional support for my rationale). To promote a shift in Autism research, language, and perceptions, from a deficit model to one that aligns with an Indigenous-based approach, Bruno et al. (2025) also illustrated the stark disconnect between Indigenous and Westernized worldviews, claiming:

> Before European contact, these teachings would have encouraged a supportive and inclusive society that was based on relationality and connection; today, they offer valuable insights into how to meaningfully accept, include, and support Autistic people in educational, clinical, and research spaces. (p. 276)

This work, engagement, and research can translate to a response to the voids in Autism research and engagement. In my work, I pledge to develop Indigenous-informed research conducted by and for Muckleshoot and Indigenous Autism families to help explain and highlight existing and emerging Native American Autism acceptance, education, care, and inclusion needs and realities. Findings from this research will benefit communities, educators, therapists, medical providers, and extended families. Anyone will have the opportunity to learn from the lived realities and stories shared from this research, to gain a better understanding of Muckleshoot and Indigenous worldviews and perspectives on Autism and disability. Community, both tribal and non-tribal, will gain a better perspective of what Muckleshoot and Indigenous Autism families face, feel, and need as support.

Methodologies, Interpretations, and Relational Accountability

The theoretical frameworks identified for this research project are Community-Based Participatory Research (CBPR) and Indigenous Storywork (ISW). These frameworks respect, value, and acknowledge the role that traditional knowledges, relationships, and relational accountability play in Native American Autistic communities. This is imperative for conducting Indigenous-informed and community-based research in these communities. The Indigenous worldviews around education, community, respect, and responsibility can be celebrated within these frameworks, which create a bridge for respectfully communicating and representing the realities and conveying the messages, contexts, and identities of the researcher and those participating in the project. Kovach (2021) illustrates the significance of Indigenous-informed and community-based research methodologies, "From an Indigenous point of view, relational means self in relationship with the natural world, the human world, kin, community, place, and land: relationships over time; and relationships that are interdependent and collectivist. This is why community engagement is so critical in Indigenous research" (p. 74). These community-based and Indigenous-informed forms of research methodologies are used in this dissertation to affirm Indigenous knowledges and to encourage community-based and culturally informed resolutions of inequities experienced by Native American Autistic communities.

Chapter Four

Figure 6

Duke's Heart

Note: *Duke's Heart* [Drawing], by White, C., 2026, Personal Collection. This art piece was created by Colby White Sr. It honors our son, Duke. It reflects the journey Duke is on and the vibrance of the connections between Duke's spirit, interests, identity, and character.

This piece symbolizes the complexities and beauty of Native American Autism realities, and the intricate nature of understanding, identity, and engagement with Autism. The piece lends itself to the next chapter, highlighting the importance of acknowledging, honoring, and connecting to identity in Autism research and engagement.

Study Design

This study was grounded in a Community-Based Participatory Research (CBPR) theoretical framework. It started by offering interviewees an option to meet in person a quiet, familiar, and secure space on the Muckleshoot Indian Reservation. The space was intended to be located on the Muckleshoot Indian Reservation, in order to provide the interviewees with a sense of feeling grounded and connected to a Tribal space, place-based if you will, which was believed would help to reaffirm the participants' and the researcher's relationality within the context of the research. However well-intentioned this idea was, this option did not work for everyone interested in participating in the project. Participation was soon shifted to offer online meetings via Teams or Zoom. This shift allowed for additional opportunities and participation for those with schedule considerations and geographical accommodation needs.

As an Indigenous researcher, I felt it was important to appreciate this aspect of the research. It provided a teaching moment about adaptability, understanding, and the importance of flexibility, which enables inclusion and promotes accessibility. These teachings reminded me of some of our cultural and plant teachings, like those shared by GRuB and the Northwest Indian Treatment Center (2021), to be flexible like the Willow encourages adaptation to changes and, "Just like the willow branches bend but do not break, we can be open to new perspectives or experiences and also remain true to ourselves" (p. 53).

Interviews were subsequently conducted via voice recording or an online video meeting. As a cultural practice, it is common for Muckleshoot hosts to offer greetings and welcome remarks to their guests, as well as to feed their visitors. However, not all participants were able to be fed or offered refreshments, due to the online nature of the event. Introductions did take place before recordings started. However, not all participants were able to be fed or offered refreshments, due to the online nature of the event. Introductions did take place before recordings started. These mostly occurred via email, over the phone, or by Zoom during the recruitment process. This allowed participants the opportunity to meet the researcher (build a relationship), ask questions about the work, and discuss any challenges or excitement they might be feeling about their participation.

Upon completion of listening to the participants' stories, the researcher assessed and compiled the data. Answers are shared in the next chapter and in the appendix; data is shared via a synthesized thematic outline of the information. Once the information was converted into a comprehensible format, the findings were shared with participants before submitting them for publication. This was to ensure and empower the participants with the ability to review and approve or retract any of their contributions.

In an effort to support and practice trust, respect, and responsibility, all quotes, themes, and stories that are shared from the research, which employ Community-Based Participatory Research and Indigenous Storywork frameworks, will have been reviewed and approved by the participants of this research before submission and publication of this work. Participants were given the opportunity to retract and edit their responses for clarification and protection purposes. Furthermore, once this research is published, it will be considered public. Although I will be writing, facilitating, and submitting the research, this work is by and for the Native American Autism community. This work is for the benefit of all Native American Autistic relatives and their families, their educators, and anyone else who has the blessing of engaging with them.

This work is also being done in the spirit of reciprocity and as a gift to prior generations of Indigenous Autistic relatives and their families, in acknowledgement of their existence, their strength, their resilience, the challenges they faced, and the battles they fought. Additionally, this work is meant to be a seed, to inform and inspire additional and elevated work in this realm, to help and support future and existing generations of our people, to encourage and recommend considerations, communication, understanding, accommodations, planning, and enlightened Indigenous perspectives regarding our Native American Autistic relations and their realities. Therefore, this work is also a gift to the future generations that will follow in our footsteps.

Research Methods/Methodology

As referenced in Chapter Three, the theoretical framework and methodology for this study were inspired and influenced by both a Community-Based Participatory Research (CBPR) model and Indigenous Storywork (ISW). These two methodologies provided a foundation and guide for this work; as such, participants comprised of American Indian/Alaska Native adults, eighteen years or older, who were the biological parent, a stepparent, or a guardian and blood relative of a Native American Autistic child or children (community-based). These participants were also invited to tell their story (ISW) by answering, in whole or in part, the outlined research questions, which were provided to them for review ahead of the scheduled interview.

They were asked these questions in a conversational sense and were encouraged to answer based on their experiences. Sixteen research questions were posed, and the interviewees were told they could skip questions if they chose. However, all the questions were answered by all of the participants. While some questions were formulated to gather quantitative data, others were also formulated with the intention of evoking qualitative answers.

I believe the answers from the ladder of the two question categories are the true gems in the research. These questions invited storytelling and anecdotal responses, which allowed participants to guide the dialogue, speak freely, and recount lived experiences. This mode of conversational exchange encouraged participants to tell authentic stories, which honors

Indigenous knowledges. It also revealed layered epistemological and ontological perspectives among the participants while fostering relational learning and engagement between the participants and the researcher. For example, participants' answers repeatedly highlighted the importance of community in advancing inclusion initiatives and the desire to be seen in engagement and intervention activities.

Justification of methods

My approach to this research comes from a place of intention to disrupt and dismantle the harmful ongoing impacts of colonization on Autistic Native American communities, for example, a lack of Indigenous visibility in research, a lack of culturally relevant supports or interventions, a lack of identity-affirming educational tools, and so forth. My predictions of outcomes for this research are that it will reinforce and validate the need to create culturally relevant tools, materials, and resources adapted for Native American Autistic relatives and their families. Which, I predict, would improve academic, social, and emotional outcomes for this population.

In order to collect data that will support these assertions, I looked at Community-Based Participatory Research as a model. According to scholars such as Chilisa (2020), Community-Based Participatory Research (CBPR) is a type of decolonized research methodology (p. 271). Swan et al (2025) also affirm, "Community-based participatory research is an authentic component to perform studies to accurately reflect Indigenous findings" (Minthorn et al, Eds, p. 224). These assessments of CBPR provided encouragement and validation for selecting the CBPR theoretical framework, which guides this work and influences the methods that honor the role of Native American Autistic communities.

Furthermore, Community-Based Participatory Research is an appropriate methodology to adopt in this research because this approach emphasizes trust, respect, and the identification of Indigenous voices, strengths, inquiries, and culture, and embeds them in the research. I assert that this approach to research, while facilitated and delivered through an Indigenous lens, enriches and validates the methods of this body of work, ultimately producing valuable and usable data and information that will benefit the Native American Autistic community. Future outcomes and deliverables intended to evolve from this research include Indigenous and community-informed printed resources, such as community-building guides and toolkits, designed to encourage understanding, respect, reciprocity, relevance, and responsibility from an Indigenous worldview that is culturally respectful.

With respect to Indigenous Storywork (ISW) methods and methodology, this approach also aligns with my goals and pursuits for an authentic, decolonized, and culturally inclusive research paradigm (Tsosie et al, 2022). In fact, four of the seven ISW pillars outlined by Archibald (2008) inspire my research: Respect, Responsibility, Reciprocity, and Reverence[2]. The other three pillars are holism, interrelatedness, and synergy, which I believe are implied by the aforementioned pillars (p.2). In fact, all of these tenets emphasize the importance of community involvement, imply interconnectedness, and regard tribal values and ways of transferring Indigenous knowledges as powerful and legitimate aspects of inquiry and knowledge transfer. They also place land, people, and ancestors as core concepts of the methodology, which I respect and agree with. The inclusion of stories as a traditional means of sharing, learning, and

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[2] Indigenous Storywork is a methodology written and produced by Jo-ann Archibald (2008). In her work, she draws attention to the work of Kirkness and Barnhardt (1991). For drawing attention to Indigenous teachings and their significance in educational spaces, such as postsecondary education. Kirkness and Barnhardt wrote an article which highlighted, “The four R’s – respect, relevance, reciprocity, responsibility” in Higher Education (p.1).

knowledge transfer is a beautiful form of conveyance and practice in educational sovereignty. I am proud to include these methods in my research.

In Practice

An example of a Community-Based approach to research is exemplified by Kapp (2011). Kapp examined the Navajo worldview of Autism and how it is presented in the community, which included observing meaningful relationships and occurrences of self-determination of Autistic individuals. In his critique of Westernized worldviews of Autism and their juxtaposition to Navajo values and perceptions, he captured and put into words the significance and value of gaining understanding, guidance, and knowledge from the Navajo culture being researched, studied, and engaged with:

> A study of the outlook on disability by a group also disabled by society and experiencing challenges in self-determination offers a lens through which to examine its core values, the significance of cultural differences, and lessons to draw from these differences in relation to the predominant culture (p. 584).

Although I do not agree with Kapp's statements about the Navajo having challenges in self-determination, I do believe studies such as his reinforce support for Community-Based approaches to research. They encourage engagement with the Autistic community from a culturally relevant and Indigenous-informed approach that includes Native Autism families and aims to highlight Native American worldviews on Autism, community, and inclusion.

Work such as Kapp's validates and encourages my intent not only to approach research from a culturally responsive angle but also to gather information from the Native American Autistic community and their families, and to provide recommendations to improve and inform engagement and interventions with Native American Autistic relatives and their families. What is gathered from within this community will help guide, build, grow, and educate others on the significance of Ancestral knowledges, tribal identity, and cultural values in the space of Autism inclusion and engagement.

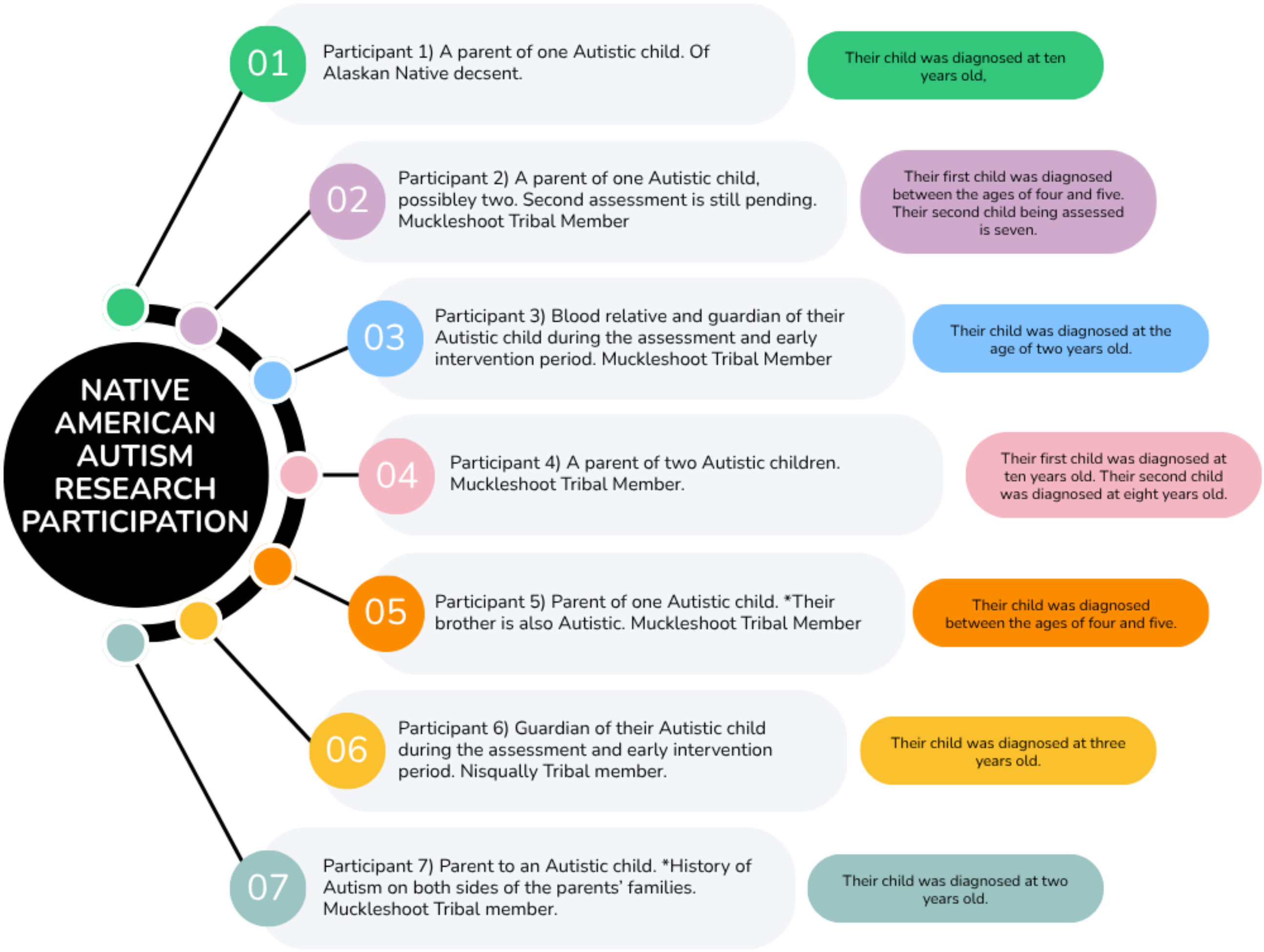
Furthermore, an example of Indigenous Storywork was found in Cooper's (2021) dissertation, which found that there is a wealth of information, data, and understanding to be gained by working directly with Native American and Indigenous communities. Cooper's work focused on the Autism assessment process and found that ISW allowed for authentic engagement and data collection. This work further illustrates the need to tap into Native American Autistic communities as a resource for valuable knowledge on how to engage, understand, and support our Autistic relatives and families in an Indigenous-informed and culturally relevant, responsible, respectful, and reciprocal manner. I move toward that course to engage the community and to help develop culturally relevant, identity-affirming engagement opportunities. And eventually to develop educational tools and guides that will benefit educators, medical professionals, and community members.

Participants

Madrienne White, the Principal Investigator (PI) and researcher of this work, participated in this study. I am an enrolled member of the Muckleshoot Indian Tribe, and I am the mother of Duke, a seven-year-old Native American and Muckleshoot Indian Tribal citizen child, diagnosed with Autism at the age of two years old, just one month shy of his third birthday. Other participants were selected based on volunteerism. Requirements for participation were that they be a biological parent, stepparent, blood relative, and/or guardian to an Autistic child; these relatives were also required to be involved during the child's Autism assessment journey, educational and therapeutic/medical interventions, and to be an essential, if not the primary, care provider of said child. The participants were also required to be an enrolled member of a federally recognized Indian Tribe or an Alaska Native Community. Direct descendants of enrolled members were also permitted. There was a total of three different Tribal affiliations represented in this study. Figure 7.0 highlights the participants, their tribal affiliations, and the years in which their children were diagnosed with Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD).

Figure 7

Native American Autism Research Participants



Note: This diagram was created specifically for this research project. Each participant has a story to tell, especially about their experiences with their diagnosis. For some of them, the process took one year, for others it took between two and three years. Each experience was different, with most facing barriers or challenges in obtaining a diagnosis from a licensed physician/psychologist. For example, the limited access to a licensed medical professional or challenges in communication and relationships with physicians, sometimes requiring visits to two to three different doctors.

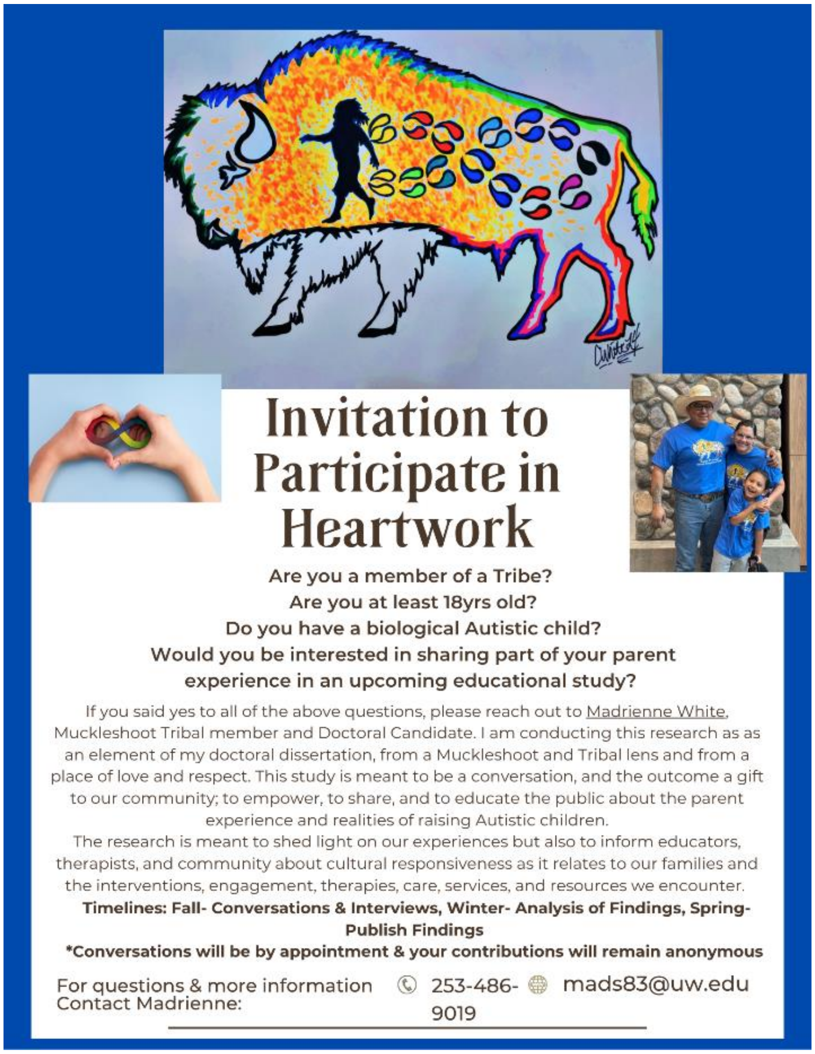
All participants were also required to be willing to share their information and story as they related to the research questions, including experiences with the Autism assessment process, past and present therapy interventions, and/or educational strategies and experiences, such as the Individual Education Plan (IEP) process. It is important to add that originally, the standards for participation were much more rigid. i.e., only Muckleshoot Tribal members, only members of federally recognized tribes, and only biological parents of Autistic children. However, ultimately, to gain greater participation and to remain flexible like the Willow (cultural plant teaching), eligibility was opened up to be more inclusive, accepting, and understanding of Native families' dynamics, enrollment status, and their broader understanding and worldview of parents, caregivers, and the realities of raising children in a Native American community. i.e., parents, Aunty-moms, stepparents, siblings raising siblings, intergenerational caregiving, blood quantum, etc.

Recruitment activities included posting announcements in various Tribal buildings, such as the Muckleshoot Tribal College, and online platforms, including the Facebook page: Native American Autism Acceptance & Parent Support Group. Additional recruitment notifications were shared via email to Muckleshoot tribal members, the University of Washington Ed.D.

Muckleshoot cohort, and various direct messages, texts, and phone calls. Figure 5.0 provides the announcement used for social media posts and distributed flyers, inviting participants to join the research as interviewees.

Figure 8

Heartwork Invitation



Invitation to Participate in Heartwork

Are you a member of a Tribe?
Are you at least 18yrs old?
Do you have a biological Autistic child?
Would you be interested in sharing part of your parent experience in an upcoming educational study?

If you said yes to all of the above questions, please reach out to Madrienne White, Muckleshoot Tribal member and Doctoral Candidate. I am conducting this research as as an element of my doctoral dissertation, from a Muckleshoot and Tribal lens and from a place of love and respect. This study is meant to be a conversation, and the outcome a gift to our community; to empower, to share, and to educate the public about the parent experience and realities of raising Autistic children.

The research is meant to shed light on our experiences but also to inform educators, therapists, and community about cultural responsiveness as it relates to our families and the interventions, engagement, therapies, care, services, and resources we encounter.

Timelines: Fall- Conversations & Interviews, Winter- Analysis of Findings, Spring- Publish Findings

***Conversations will be by appointment & your contributions will remain anonymous**

For questions & more information Contact Madrienne: ☎ 253-486-9019 mads83@uw.edu

Note. "*Heartwork invitation*" [Flyer], by Madrienne White, 2025, was a call for participation in Native American Autism Research.

A total of seven participants were included in the research. Although an additional five others were identified as interested in participation, they ultimately decided not to participate or inquired about participation after the data collection process was complete.

Protection of Human Subjects

According to the institution's guidelines, this project did not qualify as research; however, the researcher fully complied with the University of Washington's Human Subjects Division (HSD) and the Institutional Review Board (IRB) guidelines and regulations. This includes obtaining signed consent forms and submitting all requisite forms and applications to said divisions and boards.

Analysis

To honor the concepts of Community-Based Participatory Research and the four pillars of Indigenous Storywork: Respect, Responsibility, Reciprocity, and Reverence, which inspired the methodology for this research, applicable information, quotes, and/or stories from the individual participants will be shared in the analysis portion of this research. The data conveys lived experiences, knowledges, and ideas of participants, and serve as a guide for the recommendations to come in the next chapter, i.e. to create tailored resources and materials that will be educational and useful for educators, Autism Assessment takers, therapists, family members, and community members, to better serve, accept, and understand Native American, American Indian/Alaskan Native/Indigenous Autistic relatives and their families.

These recommended resources and tools, which are currently scarce, if not non-existent, in Native American and Indigenous communities, will serve as examples of necessary Indigenous-informed engagement that will provide visibility and representation of Native

Americans in Autism spaces, research, and education. This visibility will work to reconcile the adverse effects of settler-colonialism, i.e., oppression, racism, and ableism, which have impacted the state of Native American and Indigenous Autism Acceptance, understanding, and inclusion in the aforementioned spaces, and Indigenous communities and therapeutic settings.

Such negative impacts have been studied and published on, such as Drexler (2018), who allude in their research that institutional racism has direct correlations to disparities in Autism diagnosis in Indigenous communities (p.1). Ableist worldviews can also be linked to limited access to quality healthcare and quality interventions for Native American Autistic populations, and result in the erasure and deficit-focused narrative and dialogue that exists within our contemporary society.

Researchers such as Bennett et al. (2021) are addressing these realities by launching pilot telehealth programs in rural areas that serve the Navajo and Hopi communities (pp. 970-971). Inspired and motivated by Drexler's and Bennett et al.'s findings, the intent of this research is to address the erasure of Native Americans and their worldviews in Autism research and to provide useful data that support the development of healthy and inclusive engagement with Native American Autistic relatives and their families. This work was done with and by Native community members, supporting Indigenous-informed and self-determined resources, solutions, and guidance for the future.

Research Questions

As previously indicated, this study employs Community-Based Participatory Research (CBPR) methods, which, in this case, indicates research inclusion and engagement with Native American/Alaska Native community members and family members of Native American Autistic children. Initially, the questions were drafted independently by me, the primary investigator (PI);

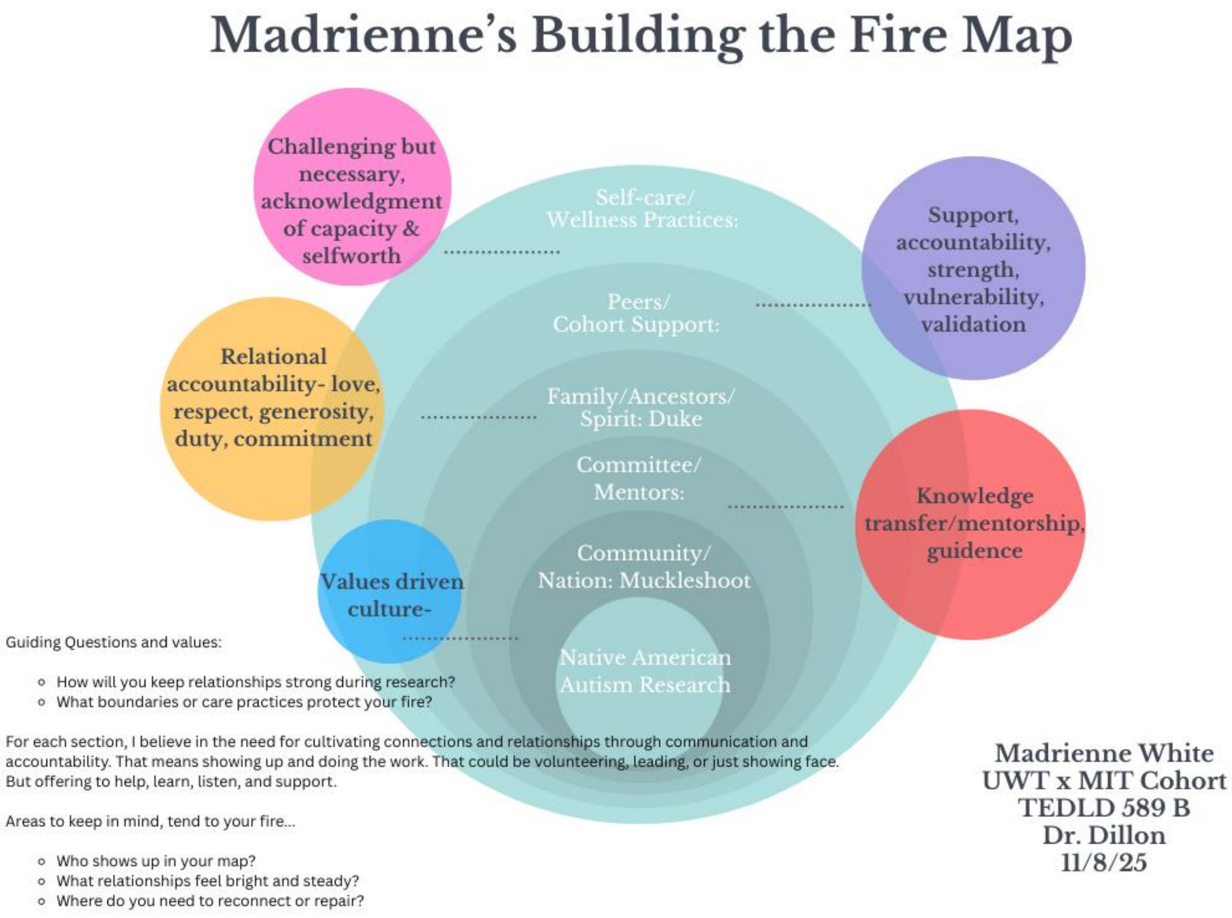
they were later shared and further developed in collaboration with members from my dissertation committee and several Muckleshoot Tribal and community members. This approach was initiated to align with the intentionality of CBPR, which includes community participation in research development.

Upon review of the originally drafted questions, collaborators provided specific feedback, recommending edits to include inquiries about participants' feelings, thereby drawing attention to and valuing the emotional aspects and context involved in this research and the lives of Native American Autism families. Research question contributors also asked that I include specific questions about education; this was the crux of question number seven but is also alluded to in multiple other questions. This subject area should be of particular interest to educators, professionals, the community, and family members due to its focus on preferred learning engagements and intervention method strategies.

Additionally, once the collaboration process was finished, these questions were presented to the Muckleshoot Internal Review Board (Muckleshoot Education Committee), where permission was requested to proceed with the research on Native American Autism from a Muckleshoot Tribal member's point of view, with predicted engagement from Muckleshoot Tribal members, and with part of the research to be conducted on the Muckleshoot Reservation. Figure 8.0 contains a diagram of how I centered my questions in community and culture.

Figure 9

Madrienne's Building the Fire Map



Guiding Questions and values:

- How will you keep relationships strong during research?
- What boundaries or care practices protect your fire?

For each section, I believe in the need for cultivating connections and relationships through communication and accountability. That means showing up and doing the work. That could be volunteering, leading, or just showing face. But offering to help, learn, listen, and support.

Areas to keep in mind, tend to your fire...

- Who shows up in your map?
- What relationships feel bright and steady?
- Where do you need to reconnect or repair?

Madrienne White
UWT x MIT Cohort
TEDLD 589 B
Dr. Dillon
11/8/25

Note. This map was adapted from an in-class assignment I submitted in the Fall of 2025. The assignment was about connecting research to our values and cultural and relational accountability. (White, 2025)

Below are the formulated questions. Also see the appendix for a full readout of the data gathered in response to these research questions.

1. Are you an enrolled member of a Federally Recognized Indian Tribe? If so, please identify which Tribe.

2. Are you the biological parent of an Autistic child?
3. Has your child received a diagnosis of Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD)?
    a. If so, what was their age at the time of diagnosis?
    b. What is their current age?
4. Do you have more than one child diagnosed with Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD)?
5. Did you receive culturally relevant or Indigenous-informed instruction, materials, education, or engagement at the time of diagnosis and assessment? Were any Native Americans present during this process? i.e., educators, assessors, etc.
    a. If so, please describe the engagement and, please, express the feelings you experienced when encountering the culturally relevant or Indigenous-informed instruction, materials, or engagement.
    b. If not, please describe how you felt about not receiving culturally relevant engagement.
6. Please share your experiences and feelings past the diagnosis stage of the ASD assessment, i.e., engagements or interventions such as Special Education meetings, Individual Education Plan (IEP) meetings, and/or speech, physical, or occupational therapy sessions. What were they like? Was your Indigenous identity represented in any way? How did they make you feel? Were the interventions helpful? For example, did they help with your education or understanding of Autism Spectrum Disorder?
7. Currently or in the past, what did education and learning look like for your child? Were there any practices or strategies that your child strongly connected with?
8. Has your child's school, medical, or therapy clinic, that you know of, offered any parental Autism information sessions or training?

9. Please share any ideas or recommendations for culturally relevant or Indigenous-informed instruction, materials, education, or engagement that you would suggest being offered to Muckleshoot or American Indian/Alaska Native (AI/AN) Autistic relatives and their families.
10. If these were offered to you, how would you feel receiving Indigenous-informed instructions, materials, and engagement?
11. As a parent, what would be your response if you discovered that your child was receiving Indigenous-informed and culturally relevant instruction, materials, engagement, and potentially speech or occupational therapy?
12. Do you believe that you, your family, and your child might potentially benefit from culturally relevant and Indigenous-informed interventions, resources, and education?
13. Do you have any predictions regarding the outcomes you would expect or anticipate after receiving Indigenous-informed interventions, resources, and education?
14. Do you think educators, therapists, medical professionals, family, and community members would benefit from Indigenous-informed Autism resources and tool kits? Do you think this would improve their service to your Autistic relative and your family?
15. Is there anything you wish to express or share regarding your experience or story as a parent of an Autistic child from the Native American/American Indian/ Alaskan Native/Indigenous community?

16. What does decolonized Native American Autism engagement, education, and/or Inclusion mean to you?

These questions were developed in collaboration with the Muckleshoot community and tribal members and were influenced by the Community-Based Participatory Research and Indigenous

Storywork methodology. They were designed to gather information from Native American community participants and to allow said participants to respond in a narrative style or through the Indigenous Storywork (ISW) method. This format for questions and answers reflects my intention to respect and honor Indigenous epistemology and ontology, while also recognizing and placing value and legitimacy on adopting Indigenous-informed research methodology. Below is a summary of the data collected from these research questions, divided into thematic groupings. As mentioned, the appendix includes a full readout of the collected data. The data is rich with thematic and synthesized information, direct quotes from participants, and provides further detailed responses to the questions.

Research Question Themes:	**Data Collected:**
Questions one through four- These questions were asked in order to determine eligibility to participate in the study, to gather qualitative data about the participants, and to determine the Tribal affiliations of participants.	**Relationships:** Five Biological parents, one blood relative, and one guardian were identified in the study. **Quantitative Data:** Five parents identified as having one Autistic child. One parent identified as having two Autistic children. One parent had one Autistic child and was in the middle of an Autism assessment for a second child. **Tribal affiliations:** Five participants were Muckleshoot Tribal Members, one was of Alaskan Native/Athabaskan descent, and one participant was a Nisqually Tribal member.
Questions five and six: These questions primarily focused on the intervention and engagement experiences of their Autistic children and their families. Themes focused on whether or not they received culturally relevant (CR) or Indigenous-informed (II) engagement or interventions.	**Answers:** Overwhelmingly, participants responded that (CR) resources or engagement were not provided during Autism assessment and/or intervention with their child and families. Feedback from participants regarding the diagnosis process indicates that most participants would prefer receiving (CR) engagement during this time. With respect to post-diagnosis interventions, participants' feedback indicates a lack of (II) representation. Responses in this area were mixed. For example, several participants expressed a desire for CR and II-affirming

	engagement. Several other participants said practitioners were doing their best, and one participant did not deem it a high priority.
Questions seven and eight: These questions focused on the area of education. i.e., what approaches to education worked well with their children. And if they (parent) received any education or training on Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD).	**Answers:** Top responses regarding successful learning strategies for their Autistic children included: Consistency, accommodations, behavioral programs, technology support, and music/dancing coupled with special interests. Regarding parent education, over half of the participants had access to (ASD) education.
Questions nine through sixteen: These questions focused on Parents' thoughts, feelings, and predictions of outcomes regarding receiving and offering (CR) and (II) Autism education, engagement, or training for their children, families, communities, educators and medical professionals/ therapists.	**Answers:** These answers were layered and revealed positive feedback from participants. They shared ideas about how to respectfully incorporate (CR) and (II) resources and knowledges into praxis and pedagogy for educators and interventionists. Most participants also indicated they would respond positively if they knew their children were receiving (CR) or (II) engagements, i.e. Feel seen, grateful, and/or relief. Over half of participants predicted positive outcomes from such engagement. All seven participants responded that they thought community, educators, medical professionals/therapists would benefit from (II) tool kits/educational resources- to better serve their Autistic children and their families. **Stories:** Their stories share feelings and emotions. Their journeys included periods of denial, difficulties, and negative experiences. They also included declarations of joy, realizations, and connections. Their advocacy, determination, and unwavering pursuit of quality and safe education and interventions for their children was indisputable. **Decolonizing Native American Autism engagement/education:** This question provided many ideas for (CR) and (II) learning. Including but not limited to: an increase in Indigenous representation in Autism fields/resources/services, inclusive cultural opportunities, movement to destigmatize Autism in Native American communities, and creating culturally grounded systems that respect Indigenous ways of learning, communicating and being.

Design, Inclusion, and Indigenous Research Realized

At the beginning of this chapter, Study Design was covered, including the overview of Community-Based Participatory Research (CBPR) and Indigenous Storywork (ISW). Examples were provided of these two theoretical methodologies, revealing the conceptual frameworks incorporated within the design of the research methodology and methods used in this body of work.

In the Research Methodology section of this chapter, additional information was provided regarding the approach to the questions and their relation to CBPR and ISW. Justification of methods was also discussed, including an overview of the impacts of colonization on Native American Autistic communities. The justification of the methods included incorporating decolonized and culturally inclusive methods that respect and acknowledge the value and validity of Indigenous knowledges, epistemologies, and ontologies, and creating space for educational sovereignty. In the next chapter, I will discuss how these methodologies were adopted and realized in the research.

Also covered in this chapter were the research's intentionality and process, including participation requirements, recruitment methods, research question design, and key takeaways.

Layered in this section were examples of how CBPR and ISW were incorporated and intentionally present throughout the research processes. As sources of inspiration and pillars of the research framework, these two methodologies were necessary to highlight in this section. These highlights served as a tool to illustrate and further explain my approach, beliefs, and values as they relate to Native American Autism research. In the next chapter, I will review the collected data and make recommendations to enhance engagement among tribal communities, families, therapeutic interventionists, and educators, to better support and listen to Native

American Autistic families. All recommendations will be based on data and information gathered within this research.

Chapter Five

Figure 10

Grass Dancer

Note: "*Grass Dancer"* [Photograph], by Colby White Sr., 2024, Personal Collection.

This photograph represents a labor of love, bringing many hands together and multiple generations to complete Duke's grass dance regalia. His suit, his roach, and beadwork, all represent a village of relatives working toward a common goal, to love, celebrate, and include Duke in our community, in our culture, and to affirm his identity. This collaboration mirrors the level of engagement needed to conduct respectful and meaningful partnerships in Native American Autism.

Discussion/Implications

Projects like those mentioned previously, completed by Bennett et al. (2021) to support the Navajo and Hopi communities inspired this research, to work for and with the Muckleshoot community, to provide culturally relevant, accessible, and useful data, to inform and inspire relevant and respectful resources and services to our Native American Autistic community and their families, is and continues to be a dream and goal of mine. However, these thoughts and hopes go beyond my family, my Tribe, and my generation. This work is done in relationship with and in honor of those relatives (human and more-than-human) who have come before us and to those generations that will come after us. This work is my gift (Reciprocity), my duty (Responsibility), and my honor (Respect) to my people, my relations, my ancestors, and my more-than-human relatives (Reverence). This work and this research move to disrupt and dismantle (Refusal) harmful, biased, and ableist worldviews, systems, and practices that have been imposed upon Native Americans, disabled people, and especially disabled Native Americans. Together, Reciprocity, Responsibility, Respect, Reverence, and Refusal make up the Five R's, which ground, strengthen, and validate my approach to and involvement in Autism advocacy, research, and education.

Oppressive worldviews, systems, and practices that have been discussed throughout this document are what Meunier (2017) describes as, realities, "which retain the white colonial privilege" (p. 433) that restricts inclusion, limits social capital, and devalues the purpose of individuals with disabilities from all backgrounds (Brown et al., [Eds.], 2017). This is my opposition, which I intend to overcome.

My goal with this research was to create accurate, helpful, and beautiful representations of the values, needs, and realities of our Muckleshoot, Indigenous, American Indian/Alaskan

Native Autistic relatives and their families. My objective also includes creating a movement that supports the safety, wellness, and development of the minds, bodies, and spirits of our Native American Autistic relatives and their families. This movement toward culturally informed engagement and education has been proven to produce positive outcomes in Indigenous communities. The Māori people in New Zealand, for instance, "studies show that, when Māori learners' cultural identity is affirmed and valued within the educational setting, they experience greater academic success. This finding aligns with New Zealand's shift towards strengths-based approaches in education, moving away from deficit thinking…" (Shay & Sarra [Eds.], 2026, p, 119).

Furthermore, the research questions shared in chapter four were developed with these goals in mind. And act as a vehicle to collect data that will inform the work that needs to follow this dissertation. That is the development of curricula, community engagement activities, and intervention methods, which I believe will revolutionize the current status of American Indian/Alaska Native Autism engagement from identity-deficient to identity-forward paradigms. This movement toward inclusion, respect, acceptance, love, and healing, by my hypothesis, will welcome a new era of outcomes that surpass current measures of success in academics, social-emotional learning, fine and gross motor development, and beyond.

The Five R's and How to Honor Them

Like any good Indigenous story, this research is intended to make you think, reflect, discern, and gather information in ways that connect to cultural and traditional identity. And like my experience with the Klickitat Basket story, shared by Vi Hilbert in chapter three, my hope and intention for this research is that it has readers come back to it from time to time, so that new ideas speak to you the way they didn't the last time you read this. I also pray that this supports families, educators, community members, and tribal relatives to better understand the lives, needs, abilities, strengths, and identity of our Native American Autistic relatives. The intentions, hopes, and prayers of this research acknowledge and honor the five Rs mentioned above: Reciprocity, Responsibility, Respect, Reverence, and Refusal.

Although this research aims to honor, respect, and acknowledge Indigenous knowledge, worldviews, and Storywork, it does include some limitations. Including the limited variety of the questions. They were restricted to engagement, assessment, and educational themes of Native American Autistic Children. Other areas that deserve further exploration and consideration include the sleep challenges of Autistic children[3]. Diet and food aversions[4], Sensory processing disorders[5], Pathological Demand Avoidance[6] (PDA) and other co-occurring conditions or profiles associated with Autism, and a look at parents and their challenges and support needs as caregivers, amateur therapists, invisible load carriers, etc. Parents can often experience incredible stress, which studies have shown to impact marriages, job performance, and can increase feelings of depression and anxiety (Bernier et al. 2020, p. 121).

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[3] According to publications like Autism Parenting Magazine (2025), sleeping issues in Autistic children are common. They state melatonin dysfunction, sensory sensitivities, and anxiety as factors to consider (Hobbs, 2025)

[4] Autism Speaks (2025) cited a recent study, which found that Autistic children are “five times more likely to have mealtime challenges such as extremely narrow food selections, ritualistic eating behaviors (e.g. no foods can touch) and meal-related tantrums” (Kuschner, 2025).

[5] Sensory Processing Issues are common in Autistic children, this can look like “trouble handling information from their senses, including sight and sound”, children can be hypersensitive or hyposensitive (Bancroft, 2025).

[6] PDA presents itself in Autistic individuals who “have an increased sensitivity towards demands that challenge their autonomy”, it can look like fight or flight, freeze reactions, and generally exemplifies avoidance of demands (Reframing Autism, 2024).

Data Interpretations

According to the research, there is a deficit of culturally relevant Autism engagement and assessment tools and practices for the Native American/Alaska Native population. Eighty-six percent of the participants in this study reported not receiving culturally relevant engagement at the time of assessment or during Autism engagement services. Although some culturally relevant practices were identified in the research, most of the distinctions were connected to interventions and assessments that were offered in a Place-Based environment. The instruments or interactions themselves were not categorized as culturally relevant, which indicates a need for development and tailoring in this area.

Furthermore, nearly half of the participants expressed negative experiences during these processes, recalling the "Process was difficult and intimidating," and saying they "Weren't listened to, we had to work harder." Another participant voiced that they felt their request for culturally relevant interventions went unanswered.

This outcome was exactly what I hypothesized. It adds further weight to Indigenous work and research, such as that mentioned in Chapter Three by Bruno et al. (2025), which highlights the need for culturally responsive and grounded engagement with the Indigenous Autistic community. Even non-Indigenous scholars are beginning to make acknowledgements about the application of interventions. For example, in their guidebook for educators of Autistic students, focusing on Evidence-Based Practice, Wolfberg and Buron (2024) state, "it is essential to acknowledge disparities in the field's perception and practical application of EBP with diverse autistic learners" (p. 11). They mention the critique of said practices, indicating questioning of their effectiveness for diverse populations (p. 11).

The data also revealed parents' observations of their children's learning preferences. Stating that their children positively respond to educational strategies that employ consistency, consider their accommodation and support needs, utilize technology, and include rhythm, music, and dance into the curriculum. Three of the seven parents also said they had not been offered Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) education or training from their child's school, medical, or therapeutic clinic. With parents being the ultimate knowledge carriers about their children and how they respond to learning approaches, environments, communication styles, etc. I believe one hundred percent of parents with children diagnosed with ASD should be provided with resources, education, and training on Autism. This would ensure shared understanding between parents and educators/medical and therapeutic providers. It would also provide parents with a gained understanding of their child's Autistic experience. This breakdown of communication and education between the adults who engage with Autistic Native American children needs to be addressed in a respectful and culturally informed manner that supports and empowers parents, educators, and intervention providers. I predict that the increased and improved education and communication between these adults will result in increased collaboration and partnership, which will lead to beneficial results for children.

Furthermore, the parents of these Native American Autistic children have creative and respectful ideas about how to incorporate culturally relevant engagement with their children, families, and community, and to incorporate Indigenous-informed books, traditional language lessons, songs, and dances into educational methods, interactions, and interventions. Not tapping into this knowledge pool of parents, guardians, and relatives is a missed opportunity and gross oversight. Engagement with the family and communities of these Native American Autistic Children is foundational and essential for engagement services and resources to improve and provide respectful identity-affirming interventions that honor and acknowledge the tribal knowledges, languages, and cultures of this population.

Suggestions for this engagement by interviewees included Native American-centered materials, parent education trainings, and culturally grounded support. Others voiced the need for tribal community engagement in schools, the need for inclusion of student voices, and instruction on respectful engagement and interaction with disabled students. Further suggestions for culturally relevant engagement come from my personal experience, including an annual culturally relevant Autism Acceptance Walk.

Duke's Autism Acceptance Walk

For the last five years, my husband and I have been sponsoring an Autism Acceptance Walk in honor of our son, Duke. We invited family, friends, caregivers, teachers, administrators, State Senators, therapists, principals, paraeducators, tribal leaders, and many others to this event. We offered food, prayers, songs, refreshments, open mic, sensory activities, swag items, and a peaceful, non-competitive walk in celebration and acknowledgment of Duke and our other Autistic and Neurodivergent relatives. My husband created an original design that we have incorporated into the giveaway items for this event, see Figure 1.0. This representation, which fuses Indigenous symbology with the Neurodiversity Acceptance iconography, has supported our work towards creating culturally relevant resources and visibility for our Native American Autistic relatives.

What our event does is layer culturally relevant activities and imagery (Songs, prayers, and imagery), with social and intergenerational engagement opportunities. For the last two years, we have also offered a place-based event, with the activities taking place on the Muckleshoot

Indian Reservation. Approximately forty people consistently show up in support of this effort to raise visibility, understanding, and support for our Autistic relatives. This year, 2026, saw our largest crowd; we had sixty people in the group photo. That's a 50% increase from the year before. Qualitatively speaking, this increase in participation suggests to me that there is interest in and a need for culturally relevant Autism engagement and interventions for the Native American community.

Features and elements offered and promoted during the 2026 and previous years during "Duke's Autism Acceptance Walks include:

Inclusiveness	Multi-generational, Multi-cultural, Cross-sector engagement, etc.	Everyone was welcome: family, Elders, Educators, Friends, Caregivers, Leaders, Therapists, Community, etc.
Sensory-Informed	Fidgets, squishy toys, chewies, Play-Doh, etc.	Items were offered to everyone, and a quiet coloring station was offered as a self-regulation station.
Culturally Relevant	Songs, prayers, place-based, & design elements.	2025- Prayer song by Colby White Sr. 2026- Feast song by Muckleshoot Canoe Family, Duke's Aura design by Colby White Sr.
Acceptance	Neurodiverse or Neurotypical	Activities were designed to be included, respected, seen, loved, and valued by all Neurotypes.
Food & Allergy Considerate	Food aversions and allergies are common for Autistic relatives[7].	Considerations were made for dairy, egg, & nut allergies. Soft & crunchy foods were offered. i.e., apple sauce

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[7] One study taken between 1997 and 2016 found that out of 200,000 Autistic children, between the ages of 3-17, between 11.25% had a food allergy, compared to the 4.25% of allistic children who had a food allergy. However, as Allergy & Asthma Network (2025) suggests, "more research is needed to prove there is a relationship".

		packets, chips, etc., for texture-sensitive eaters.

The above example is a model for the inclusion and representation of cultural and identity-affirming engagement for Native American Autistic communities. Engagements like these include community, educators, therapists, elders, and family to create a safe, welcoming, and non-threatening space for networking, collaboration, and community building, something that is painfully missing in current Autism engagement and interventions.

In addition to this powerful walk that brings together family, community, administrators, therapists, and educators on tribal land, I have also created a Facebook page called the Native American Autism Acceptance and Parent Support Group. This is a private support group page, where parents can share, learn, and post encouragement to each other. This group was established in January of 2025. We have twenty-three members thus far, but more are always welcome. Expectations of the group include Native American enrollment or Native American descent, Parent or Family member of an Autistic child/relative, respectful language, and being mindful and careful around promoting/disparaging products.

Further Reading and Recommended Books

Here are some additional resources for further reading to expand knowledge and understanding of Autism, Native Culture, and how to better serve, engage with, and include Autistic relatives, students, and clients. These books are by Indigenous authors, Autistic authors, and professionals working in special education and other related fields.

Sheldon, E. (2023). *I am unique*. Muckleshoot Language Department.	Book about a Native American (Muckleshoot) Autistic girl. Representing an authentic reflection of how Autism presents itself in

	this particular little Indigenous girl. Translated from bəqəlšułucid into English.
Lindgren, S. (2023). *This is my hair*. Muckleshoot Language Department.	A reflection of the cultural significance of hair in the Native American community through a Muckleshoot lens. Translated from bəqəlšułucid into English.
Grandin, T. (2012). *Different not less*. Future Horizons Inc.	An anthology of contributions by Autistic Adults. Reflecting on their experiences, employment, overcoming challenges, and successes in life.
Watson, K. (2025). *Good autism practice for teachers, Embracing neurodiversity and supporting inclusion*. Routledge.	Written from an Additional Support Needs educator's point of view. This comprehensive guide provides examples, definitions, and recommendations for inclusive strategies and praxis for educators.
Price, D. (2012). *Unmasking autism: Discovering the new faces of neurodiversity*. Harmony.	Comprehensive look at Autism and Neurodiversity from a Neurodiverse Transgender man. The content touches on many relevant considerations, from cooccurring diagnosis', Autistic women, Autistic black and brown people, Autistic stereotypes, etc.
Ballard, A. [Ed]. (1999). *Mythology of southern puget sound.* (2nd ed.). Snoqualmie Valley Historical Museum.	This book of traditional stories was originally printed in 1929. Elders and first language speakers (English was their second language) from Muckleshoot and Puyallup Indian villages recount stories of the land, relatives (more-than-human), and natural history. These were recorded and translated into English by Author Ballard.
Sorscher, N. (2025). *Your neurodiverse child, How to help kids with learning, attention, and neurocognitive challenges thrive*. Rowman & Littlefield.	This book acts as a resource for parents. It provides general overviews of some common disorders such as Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder, Autism, Dyslexia, and more. It provides historical and legal information pertaining to people with disabilities. It also discusses considerations for parents as they make decisions and advocate for their child regarding education and therapeutic options.

The final data interpretation comes from the last question in the research questionnaire, regarding decolonizing strategies for Native American Autism engagement, education, and inclusion.

Everyone had a different answer; however, they all shared an overarching theme: the importance of culturally relevant and identity-affirming interventions and engagement. They said, “Our children are connected to our culture; it should be open and inviting,” and “Let children be who they are without having to apologize”. They also commented that Indigenous children are being forced into systems that were never designed for their success. They want adapted systems that respect Indigenous ways of learning, communicating, and being.

All of this data signifies that Native American parents want to be active participants in their Autistic children’s education and engagement. They have ideas, knowledges, and strategies that can aid and augment the pedagogy of educators and the praxis of doctors and therapists. This can lead to improved outcomes for Native American Autistic children. More research needs to take place regarding the outcomes of culturally relevant Native American Autism engagement. I predict positive results from such a project.

Ending with a Story

For several years, I have considered writing a short children’s story reflecting the reality, challenges, and beauty of my son Duke’s life. My vision for the story was that it would contain cultural representation as well as truths about Autism and how our family has experienced it. Although the idea was there, I struggled with actualizing the written form. After letting go of the idea for almost a year, it suddenly came to me while sitting in the waiting room of the Children’s therapy clinic, where Duke receives occupational and speech therapy. It is inspired by life, culture, and identity, layered with spiritual elements from our heritage and contains hopes for the future. Where our Native American Autistic relatives are seen, valued, and accepted in society. I may further develop this story in the future; however, the following is the first rendition and my contribution to Indigenous Storywork, I felt it was fitting to share at this time, at the end of my dissertation:

There once was a little Muckleshoot boy from the sqwəlac “Huckleberry” village. He was bright, loving, and sometimes silly. He was also Autistic, which meant the pathways in his mind operated differently than those of people who are not Autistic. The people called him Roadrunner because he could run so fast that no one could keep up with him. He was also a shapeshifter; he could be a buffalo, an elk, a shark, a fish, a dog, even an elephant or crocodile.

Because Roadrunner was Autistic, he spoke differently from the other children of the village; he moved differently, he thought differently, and he acted differently. Some thought he was too different, and they stayed away from him because he didn’t play, talk, or interact like the other children.

But some thought he was fun, creative, and energetic, and appreciated his humor, artistic nature, and his unique point of view. As he grew older, he started to become friends with more people, as well as animals, spirits, and places. The people began to see his gifts- generosity, love, imagination, humor, and empathy. People began to learn from the boy who was becoming a young man about understanding, inclusion, kindness, and appreciation of diversity in all of its forms.

The boy helped people become more mindful and caring for their Autistic relatives. He inspired them to open their minds and their hearts to see the impact, the genius, and the medicine of these Autistic relatives.

When everyone started to recognize the value and importance of difference, and began to include and accept their Autistic relatives, the spirits of the Muckleshoot homelands- their ancestors, animal relatives, the natural elements, water, earth, air, and fire, and spiritual beings- were so pleased, they blessed the Muckleshoot people with health and happiness for seven generations. They also blessed the people with unity, strength, enlightenment, and with more Autistic people to learn from, to include, and to love. This made the village and the future generations joyful, respectful, accepting, and strong.

This was the dawn of Autism Acceptance, education, engagement, and inclusion for the Muckleshoot and people of sqwəlac village.

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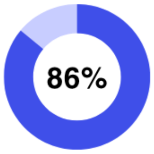
Appendix

Native American Autism

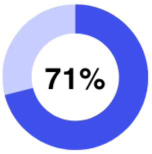
Page 1

Research Questions & Answers

Q1. Are you enrolled in a Federally Recognized Indian Tribe

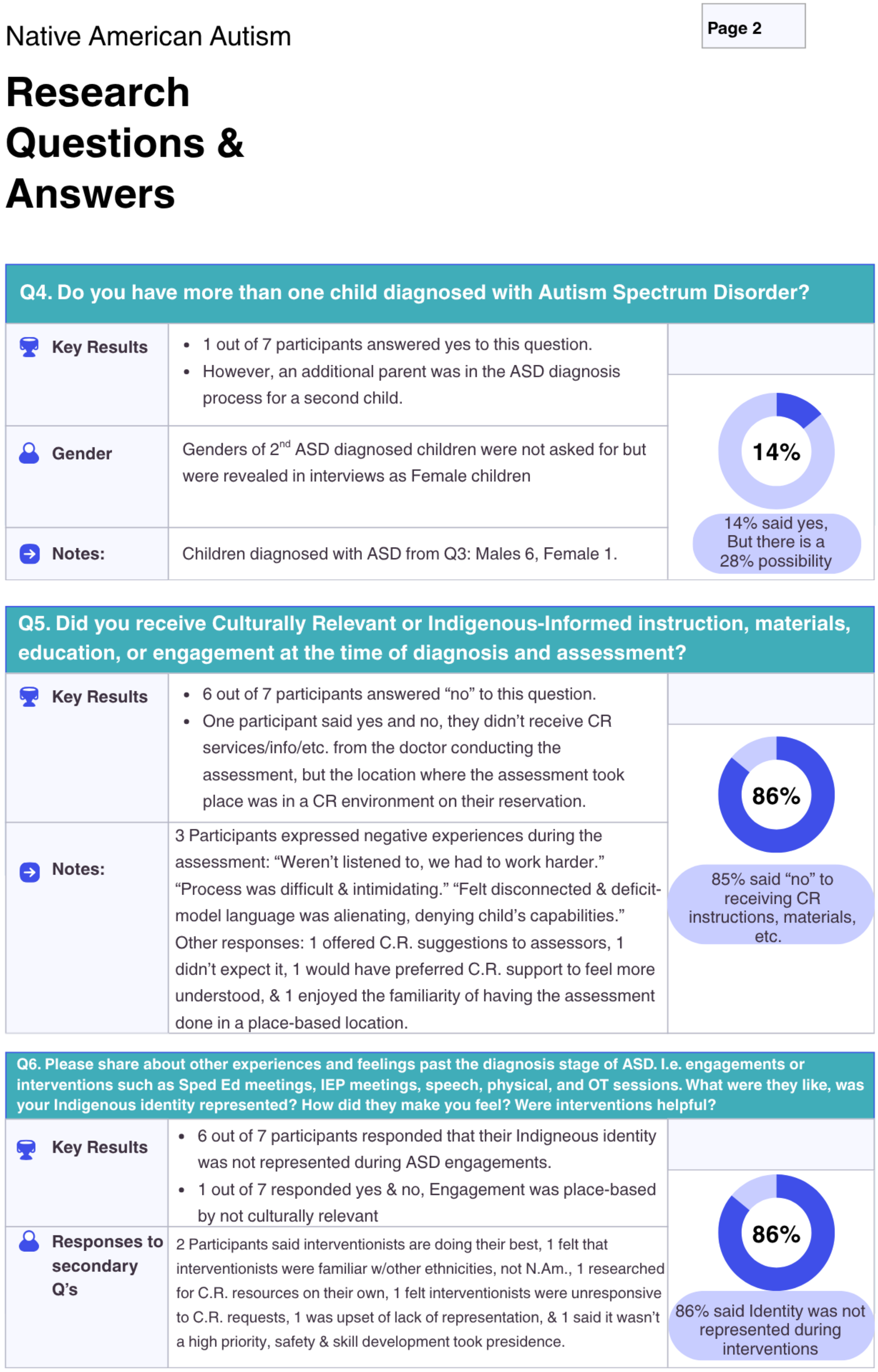
Key Results	• 6 out of 7 participants were members of a Federally Recognized Indian Tribe. • One participant was a descendant.	 86% Tribal enrollment, 100% Tribal lineage
Tribes	Tribal affiliations: Muckleshoot, Nisqually, & Alaskan Native	
Timeline	December 2025-April 2026	
Notes:	The study included 3 in-person interviews & 4 online interviews.	

Q2. Are you the biological parent of an Autistic child?

Key Results	• 5 out of 7 participants were the biological parents of an Autstic child. • 2 of 7 participants were the guardians of an Autistic relative.	 71% Bio parents, 100% Relatives
Notes:	Participation was opened up to more than just biological parents to allow a wider range of families to participate. This was done to acknowledge realities of tribal family systems, that often include extended family members in a household.	

Q3. Has your child received a diagnosis of Autism Spectrum Disorder?

Key Results	• 100% Of participants said yes to this question.	 100% Autism Diagnosis
Q3- a	Participants were asked the child's age at diagnosis	
Q3- b	Participants were asked what the child's current age is	
Notes:	Ages ranged from 2-10 years old at time of diagnosis.	



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Native American Autism

Research Questions & Answers

Q4. Do you have more than one child diagnosed with Autism Spectrum Disorder?

Key Results	- 1 out of 7 participants answered yes to this question. - However, an additional parent was in the ASD diagnosis process for a second child.
Gender	Genders of 2nd ASD diagnosed children were not asked for but were revealed in interviews as Female children
Notes:	Children diagnosed with ASD from Q3: Males 6, Female 1.

14%

14% said yes, But there is a 28% possibility

Q5. Did you receive Culturally Relevant or Indigenous-Informed instruction, materials, education, or engagement at the time of diagnosis and assessment?

Key Results	- 6 out of 7 participants answered “no” to this question. - One participant said yes and no, they didn’t receive CR services/info/etc. from the doctor conducting the assessment, but the location where the assessment took place was in a CR environment on their reservation.
Notes:	3 Participants expressed negative experiences during the assessment: “Weren’t listened to, we had to work harder.” “Process was difficult & intimidating.” “Felt disconnected & deficit-model language was alienating, denying child’s capabilities.” Other responses: 1 offered C.R. suggestions to assessors, 1 didn’t expect it, 1 would have preferred C.R. support to feel more understood, & 1 enjoyed the familiarity of having the assessment done in a place-based location.

86%

85% said “no” to receiving CR instructions, materials, etc.

Q6. Please share about other experiences and feelings past the diagnosis stage of ASD. I.e. engagements or interventions such as Sped Ed meetings, IEP meetings, speech, physical, and OT sessions. What were they like, was your Indigenous identity represented? How did they make you feel? Were interventions helpful?

Key Results	- 6 out of 7 participants responded that their Indigneous identity was not represented during ASD engagements. - 1 out of 7 responded yes & no, Engagement was place-based by not culturally relevant
Responses to secondary Q’s	2 Participants said interventionists are doing their best, 1 felt that interventionists were familiar w/other ethnicities, not N.Am., 1 researched for C.R. resources on their own, 1 felt interventionists were unresponsive to C.R. requests, 1 was upset of lack of representation, & 1 said it wasn’t a high priority, safety & skill development took presidence.

86%

86% said Identity was not represented during interventions

Native American Autism

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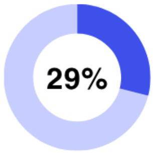
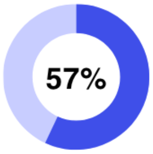
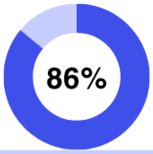
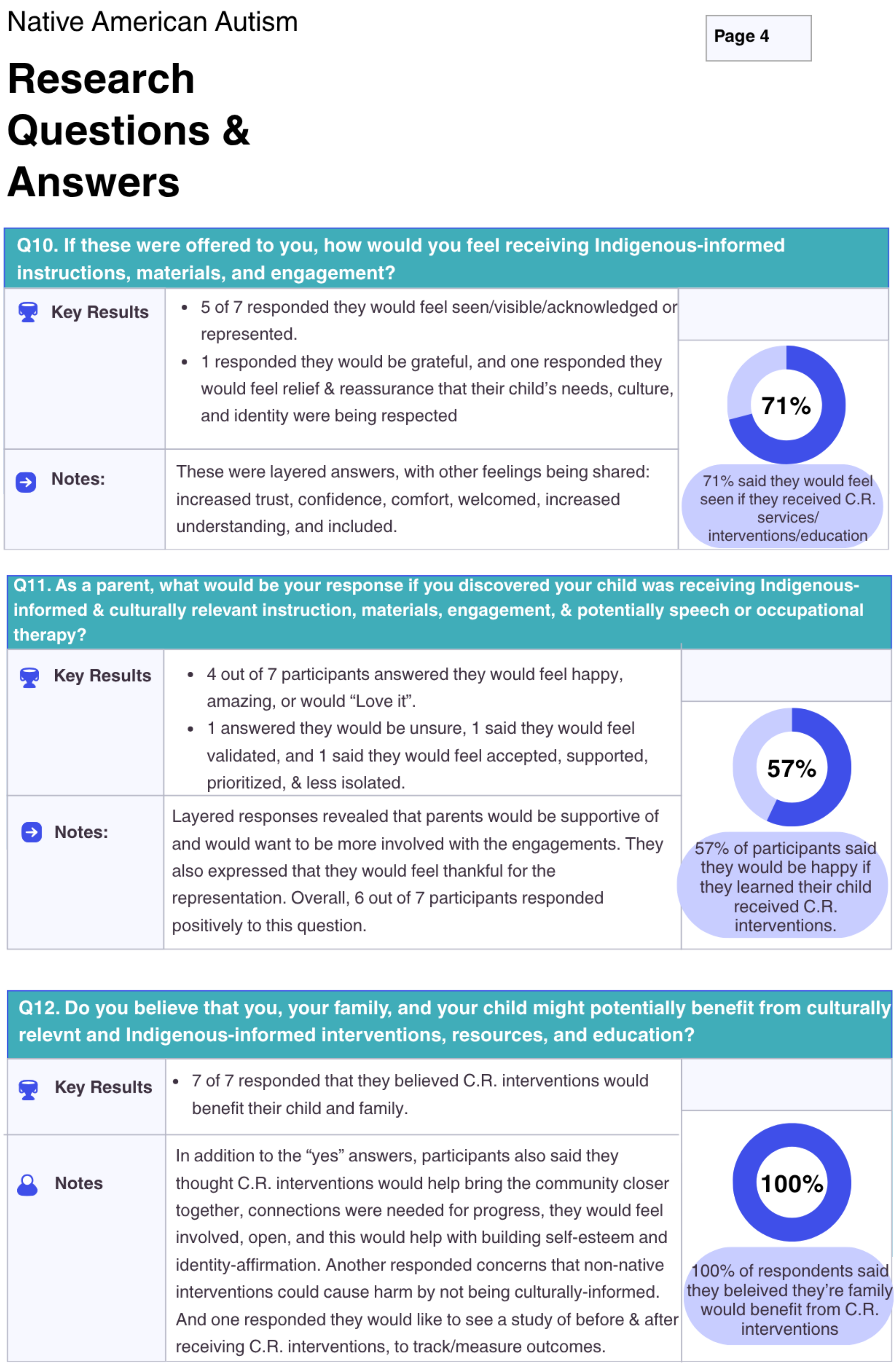
Research Questions & Answers

Q7. Currently or in the past, what did education & learning look like for your child? Are there practices or strategies that your child connects with?		
Key Results	• 2 of 7 responded that consistency aided in learning, and another 2 of 7 said accommodations are needed before learning can take place. • 1 responded that behavioral programs helped learning, 1 said technology supported learning, and 1 said music/movement combined with special interests aided in learning.	
Notes:	These were layered answers, with 3 of 7 mentioning sound/music/dancing, and rhythm supporting learning	29% said Consistency & another 29% said accomodations aided in learning

Q8. Has your child's school, medical or therapy clinic, that you know of, offered any parental Autism informaitn sessions or training?		
Key Results	• 4 out of 7 participants answered "yes" to this question • 3 of 7 answered "no" ot this question	
Notes:	Educational offerings were offered at Tribal Early Learning facilities or Therapy Clinics. It is worth mentioning that each respondent could only think of one facility offering parent education/training. It was one or the other, not both or even multiple learning opportunities/offerings across intervention facilities.	57% of participants said schools or clinics provided parent education/trainings

Q9. Please share ideas or recommendations for culturally relevant or Indigenous-informed instruction, materials, education, or engagement that you suggest be offered to Muckleshoot or American Indian/Alaskan Native Autistic relatives & families.		
Key Results	• 3 of 7 responded they would like N. Am. centered materials, info, parent education, and "culturally grounded support", 2 of 7 wanted Indigenous language, songs, books, and culture taught in classrooms • 1 responded they wanted Indigenous staff & therapies available on tribal lands, 1 said Tribal community engagement at schools was needed, student voices needed, & teaching about respectful engagement with disabled students.	
Notes	These were layered answers, with a heavy emphasis on sharing, understanding, and implementing N. Am. epistomology, ontology, praxis, and pedagogy in learning opportunities & settings	86% said Identity was not represented during interventions



Native American Autism

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Research Questions & Answers

Q10. If these were offered to you, how would you feel receiving Indigenous-informed instructions, materials, and engagement?

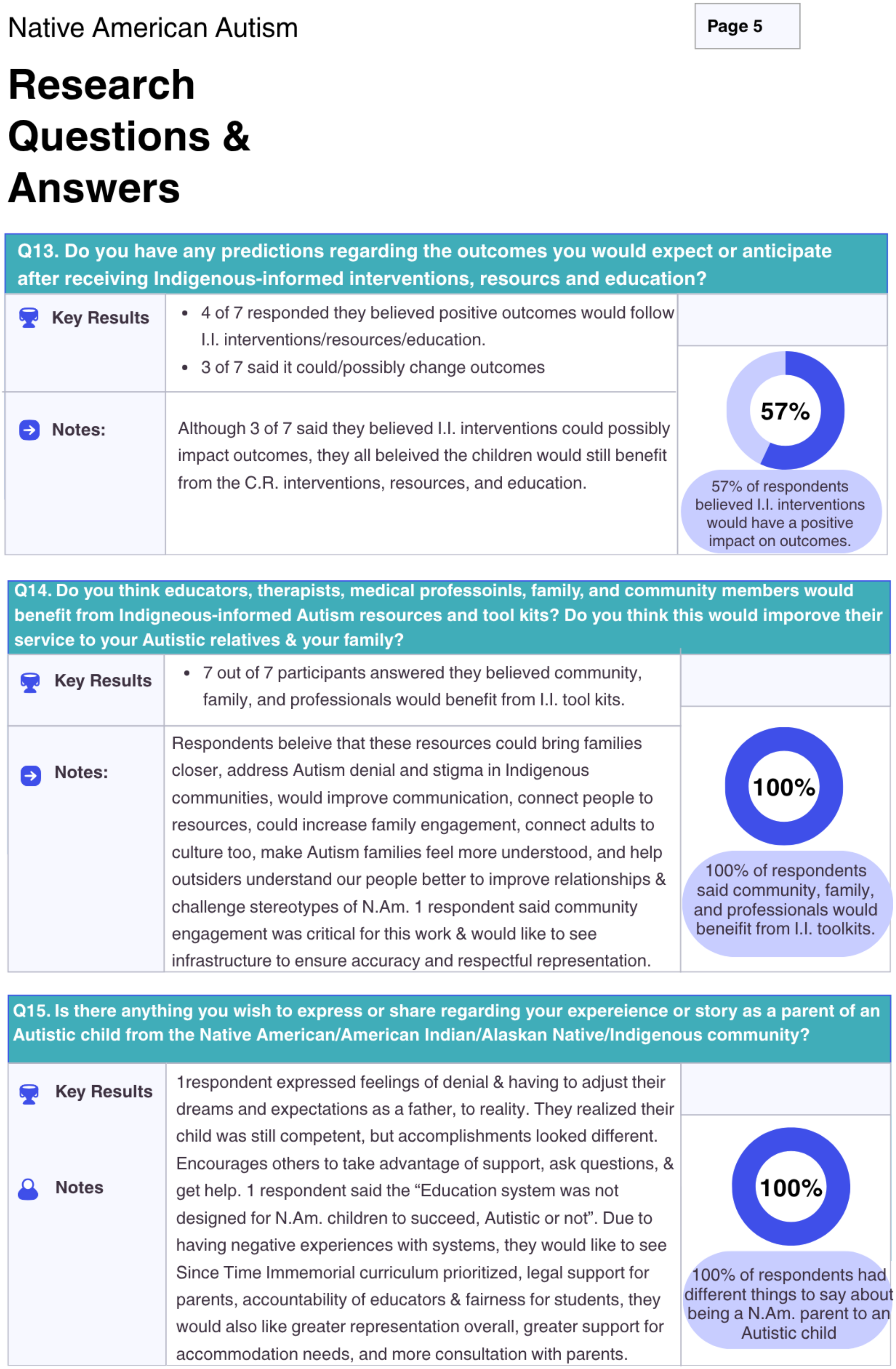
Key Results	• 5 of 7 responded they would feel seen/visible/acknowledged or represented. • 1 responded they would be grateful, and one responded they would feel relief & reassurance that their child's needs, culture, and identity were being respected	71% 71% said they would feel seen if they received C.R. services/ interventions/education
Notes:	These were layered answers, with other feelings being shared: increased trust, confidence, comfort, welcomed, increased understanding, and included.	

Q11. As a parent, what would be your response if you discovered your child was receiving Indigenous-informed & culturally relevant instruction, materials, engagement, & potentially speech or occupational therapy?

Key Results	• 4 out of 7 participants answered they would feel happy, amazing, or would "Love it". • 1 answered they would be unsure, 1 said they would feel validated, and 1 said they would feel accepted, supported, prioritized, & less isolated.	57% 57% of participants said they would be happy if they learned their child received C.R. interventions.
Notes:	Layered responses revealed that parents would be supportive of and would want to be more involved with the engagements. They also expressed that they would feel thankful for the representation. Overall, 6 out of 7 participants responded positively to this question.	

Q12. Do you believe that you, your family, and your child might potentially benefit from culturally relevnt and Indigenous-informed interventions, resources, and education?

Key Results	• 7 of 7 responded that they believed C.R. interventions would benefit their child and family.	100% 100% of respondents said they beleived they're family would benefit from C.R. interventions
Notes	In addition to the "yes" answers, participants also said they thought C.R. interventions would help bring the community closer together, connections were needed for progress, they would feel involved, open, and this would help with building self-esteem and identity-affirmation. Another responded concerns that non-native interventions could cause harm by not being culturally-informed. And one responded they would like to see a study of before & after receiving C.R. interventions, to track/measure outcomes.	



Native American Autism

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Research Questions & Answers

Q13. Do you have any predictions regarding the outcomes you would expect or anticipate after receiving Indigenous-informed interventions, resources and education?

Key Results	• 4 of 7 responded they believed positive outcomes would follow I.I. interventions/resources/education. • 3 of 7 said it could/possibly change outcomes
Notes:	Although 3 of 7 said they believed I.I. interventions could possibly impact outcomes, they all beleived the children would still benefit from the C.R. interventions, resources, and education.

57%

57% of respondents believed I.I. interventions would have a positive impact on outcomes.

Q14. Do you think educators, therapists, medical professoinls, family, and community members would benefit from Indigneous-informed Autism resources and tool kits? Do you think this would imporove their service to your Autistic relatives & your family?

Key Results	• 7 out of 7 participants answered they believed community, family, and professionals would benefit from I.I. tool kits.
Notes:	Respondents beleive that these resources could bring families closer, address Autism denial and stigma in Indigenous communities, would improve communication, connect people to resources, could increase family engagement, connect adults to culture too, make Autism families feel more understood, and help outsiders understand our people better to improve relationships & challenge stereotypes of N.Am. 1 respondent said community engagement was critical for this work & would like to see infrastructure to ensure accuracy and respectful representation.

100%

100% of respondents said community, family, and professionals would beneifit from I.I. toolkits.

Q15. Is there anything you wish to express or share regarding your expereience or story as a parent of an Autistic child from the Native American/American Indian/Alaskan Native/Indigenous community?

Key Results **Notes**	1respondent expressed feelings of denial & having to adjust their dreams and expectations as a father, to reality. They realized their child was still competent, but accomplishments looked different. Encourages others to take advantage of support, ask questions, & get help. 1 respondent said the “Education system was not designed for N.Am. children to succeed, Autistic or not”. Due to having negative experiences with systems, they would like to see Since Time Immemorial curriculum prioritized, legal support for parents, accountability of educators & fairness for students, they would also like greater representation overall, greater support for accommodation needs, and more consultation with parents.

100%

100% of respondents had different things to say about being a N.Am. parent to an Autistic child

Native American Autism

Research Questions & Answers

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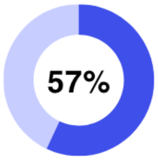
Q15. Continued

Key Results

1 respondent described their initial introduction to Autism as dark. Veiled with deficit-modeled language and negative bias. But they broke through barriers, negative stigma, & sought I.I. ways of thinking about and engaging with their child. They are happier with this outlook. 1 said they want N.Am. parents to feel comfortable having an Autistic child, it's not bad, it's beautiful, and natural. 1 respondent wants more inclusion for Autism families at cultural ceremonies, events, etc. To represent our community as a whole. 1 respondent said "It's hard, it's been hard" being a parent of an Autistic child. They've felt isolated and judged, especially by white people. 1 respondent said, "Our children need us to advocate for them, because they can't do it for themselves, and we need culturally-grounded services and resources".



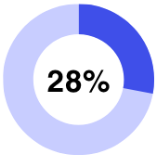
57% of respondents believed I.I. interventions would have a positive impact on outcomes.

Q16. What does decolonized Native American Autism engagement, education, and/or Inclusion mean to you?

Key Results

And Notes

2 respondents shared desires for Indigenous representation, C.R. content, and place-based services for Autistic children and their families. One of those respondents also mentioned "wrap-around" services that support mind, body, spirit, and place connections. 1 respondent mentioned re-establishing traditions that teach leadership & service, creating networks of support and commitment, and including multi-cultural learning for our mixed-race relatives. 1 respondent would like Indigenous Autism resources and books, like "I am Unique" (Sheldon, 2023). They also want to see Autism normalized, especially in cultural spaces, they said, "Our children are connected to our culture", it should be open and inviting. 1 respondent replied they would like children to have the freedom to express themselves without having to hide or obey (like in boarding schools), kids should be taught to self-advocate, and "Let children be who they are without having to apologize". 1 respondent said they would like to see more early interventions and resources and activities educating about Autism, to help destigmatize Autism, to celebrate differences, and let people know it's ok to be different. 1 respondent said they would like to see Indigenous communities move away from systems that see Autism as something to fix. They want our community to see our children as a whole: family, community, and culture. They also expressed the need to stop forcing Indigenous children into systems that were never designed for them. They want adapted systems that respect indigenous ways of learning, communicating, and being.



28% of respondents want place-based, C.R., & Indigenous representation included in Autism services