

Autism and the Lessons of Female Rain

A Diné Mother's Perspective of Disability and Advocacy for Culturally Sustaining Practices of Care

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Presentation Overview

- * Introduction
- * Intergenerational love
- * Diné Understandings of inter-relatedness- *K'é*
- * Teachings of *Niitsa' bii'aad*, Female Rain
- * Tensions and Challenges within systems & sectors
- * Lessons learned from Female Rain & honoring the wholeness of all our diverse relations.
- * Working with Diné families
- * Thoughts for families
- * Reflection

Intergenerational love

- We grow from our contexts
- Leadership within families- positive roles models
- Unconditional love
- Learns how to parent intergenerationally
- Our children don't just belong to us, they belong to our ancestors.
 - Our ancestors loved our children, prayed for them and sacrificed for them. Our future, our children, are precious.
- Planting seeds in the present not nurture the future
- Caretaking is sustainability.

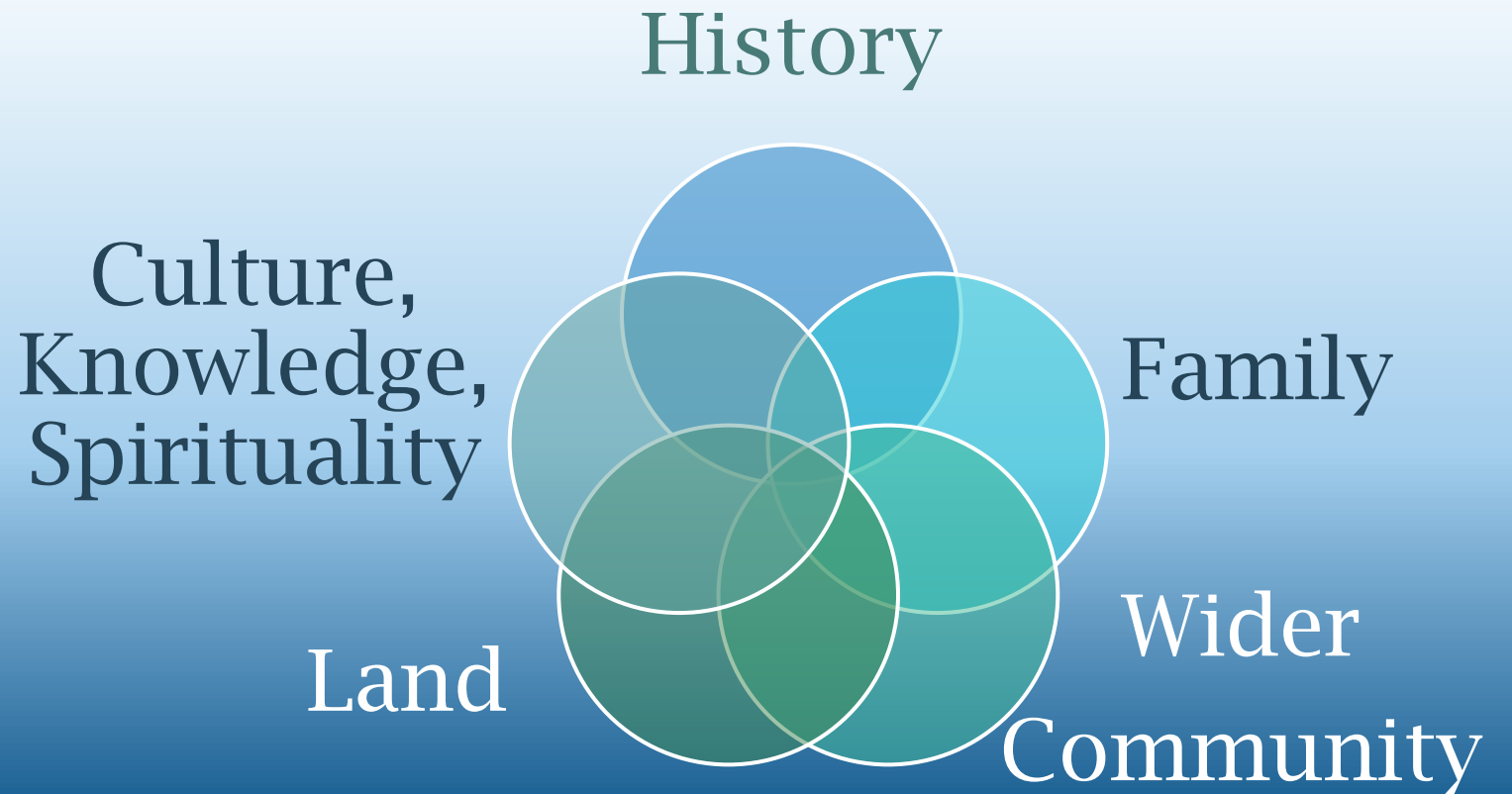
The foundations of interrelationships are vast and temporal...

K'ē: A way of relating and connecting to know oneself and others.

When we speak of an individual, they are never removed from their larger context of cascading relations.

Understanding and honoring a sense of completeness of a person.

These interrelationships impacts how we know the world, know one another and how we honor the wholeness of a person and their many relations.

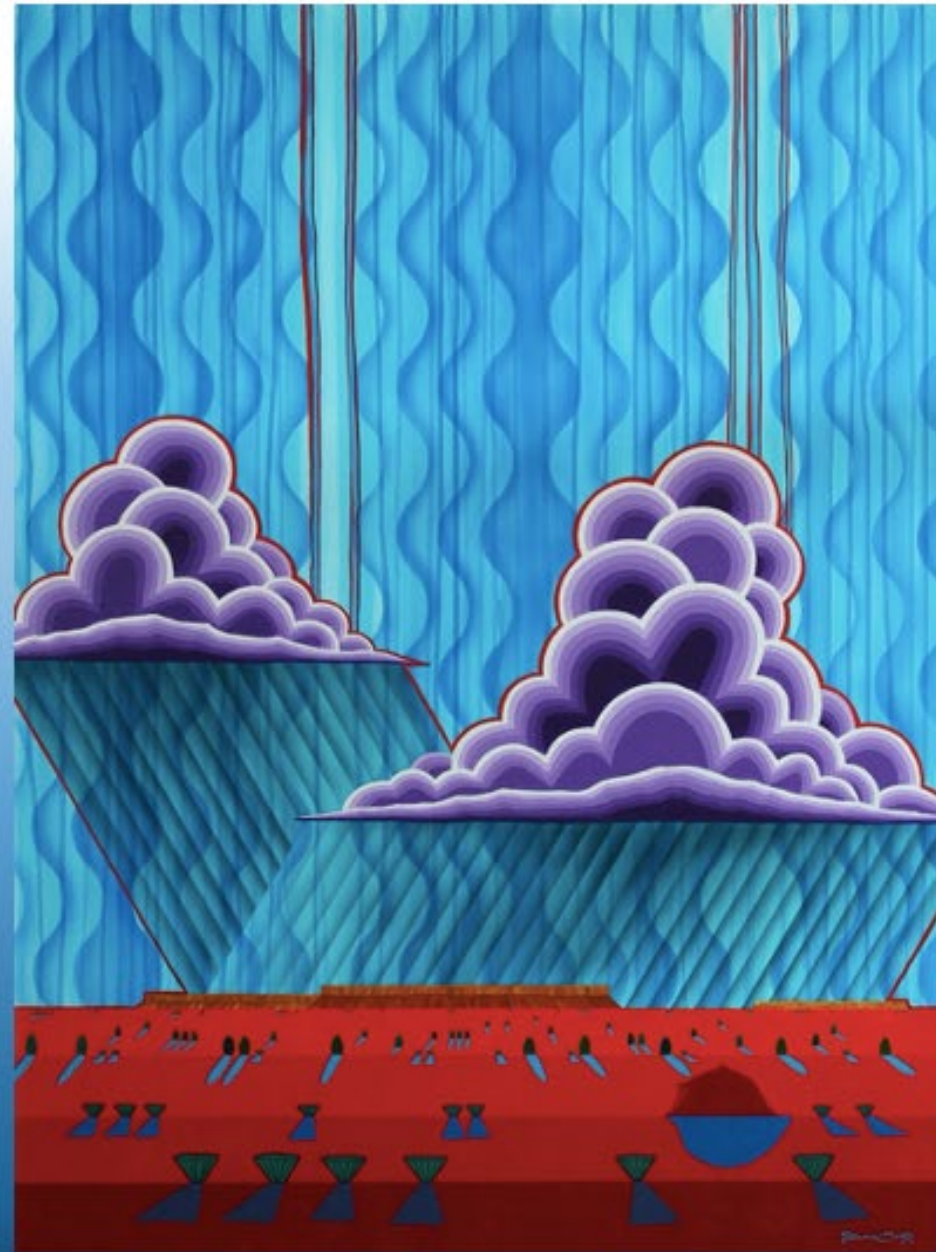


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Female and Male Rain, Gil Scott, Diné



Female Rain, Gil Scott, Diné

<http://www.gscott-tru-arts.com>

Hardship of Assessment and Diagnosis

To meet diagnostic criteria for ASD according to DSM-5, a child must have persistent **deficits** in each of three areas of social communication and interaction (see A.1. through A.3. below) plus at least two of four types of restricted, repetitive behaviors (see B.1. through B.4. below).

A. Persistent **deficits** in social communication and social interaction across multiple contexts, as manifested by the following, currently or by history (examples are illustrative, not exhaustive; see text):

- A. **Deficits** in social-emotional reciprocity, ranging, for example, from **abnormal** social approach and **failure** of **normal** back-and-forth conversation; to **reduced** sharing of interests, emotions, or affect; to **failure** to initiate or respond to social interactions.
- B. **Deficits** in nonverbal communicative behaviors used for social interaction, ranging, for example, from **poorly** integrated verbal and nonverbal communication; to **abnormalities** in eye contact and body language or deficits in understanding and use of gestures; to **a total lack of** facial expressions and nonverbal communication.
- C. **Deficits** in developing, maintaining, and understanding relationships, ranging, for example, from **difficulties** adjusting behavior to suit various social contexts; to **difficulties** in sharing imaginative play or in making friends; to **absence** of interest in peers.

Diagnostic tools become the framework for talking about *people*.

Challenges and hardship for families/ parents/ caregivers who are not used to/do not desire to see their children as solely these traits.

These traits often become the focus of most conversations about our children.

Requirements are needed to access supports based on this system.

Compliance required on all levels and throughout all sectors.



Female Rain

By Gil Scott, Diné

<http://www.gscott-tru-arts.com>



Tifa Rain

What do these lessons mean to me?

*The
Pathway to
Beauty*

*Reciprocal
Accountability*

Interdependence

Community

Love



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Culturally-sustaining approaches for working with Diné families

1. Mainstream services and sectors are often culturally and philosophically unaligned.
2. Reconceptualizing people beyond their 'disabilities or diagnoses. How do we honor the wholeness of people?
3. Holding space and creating opportunities for Diné people to advance their ancestral teachings, narratives, stories and histories to support all our diverse relations.

How do we *assist* individuals to live a life they would want, not what we impose on them.



Ordinary language of 'disability' is not universal



Family voice, community knowledge and partnership.
Care in how we approach families and individuals.

Are we contributing to their wellbeing in honoring a person's sense of self, their integrity as a human being and their cultural identity ?

Thoughts for Families



Continue to talk to our kids about their strengths and qualities.

Tell them stories about disability from our own teachings.

Above image: Early Twilight Dawn Boy
Rain, T. (2022).

We have our own teachings & ancestral stories that teach us about how to achieve *k'é* (positive relationships).

Cultural revitalization:
knowledge
values
reciprocity

Finding communities of care.

Supporting one another to better support our children.

Perpetuating intergenerational love:
Nurturing our own growth and learning from what our children teach us.



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Ahéhee'

Special thanks:

To *shí yazhí* Tifa Rain

Diné artist Gil Scott for the images in this work.

<http://www.gscott-tru-arts.com/>

<https://www.instagram.com/gstruarts/?hl=en>