

## Gratitude and Reciprocity: Foundational Values for a Sustainable Apparel Future

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**Introduction** Systemic practices of the consumer culture have put the environmental and social health of all living beings at risk. A shift in the western mind-set may be possible when there is collaboration with Indigenous peoples to understand a perspective of gratitude for the earth's many gifts and to learn the wisdom of the generations before us. Indigenous practices can actively guide engagement in reciprocity "through gratitude, through ceremony, through land stewardship, science, art, and in everyday acts of practical reverence." (Kimmerer 2012 pp.190) Often a consumption-driven mind-set manufactures need and demand with a pretense of improved quality of life. However, in our growth-driven economy, we are losing sight of what is truly valuable. Reducing consumption with the goal of minimizing waste and sharing more is an urgent and critical challenge (Jahren 2020). We fail to recognize the connection between new jeans and how they grow from the soil, water, and land. Nor do we think of the people who grow the fiber, spin the yarn, weave, and dye the fabric, cut, sew, and transport the jeans

The wisdom and traditions of Indigenous peoples have been challenged and ignored for centuries, perhaps it is not too late to humbly learn. Ahtone shares, "From our mother, we have received the materials from which we make our way in the world. Our cultural drive to make things is the product of the need to survive combined with the guiding stories that tell us that we should do what we do well." (Yohe & Greeves 2019 pp.37) Investing time and effort when making apparel creates value. Beadwork takes many hours to create and is often repurposed and considered an heirloom that is passed down through generations. There are many sacred and precious traditions as well as the wisdom and history that is held by the knowledge holders for the entire community that must be honored (Itta 2020). The goal of this research is to develop a better understanding of the core values used by Indigenous apparel makers so the wisdom can be shared with other apparel makers and students to support more sustainable practices.

**Method** Gratitude and reciprocity underpinned the design of this research and we are honored to partner with these generous makers. We invited the voices of Indigenous apparel makers from North America to share the foundational values that guide their apparel making. A snowball technique was used to recruit participants with at least five years of experience. Participants were compensated with a gift card to support their professional practice. The open-ended responses and transcripts were read, independently coded, and organized into themes by the researchers.

**Results** Eight apparel makers from six different tribes in North America responded to the survey and four of those were interviewed. These makers have been practicing an average of 21 years and ranged from five to 50 years of experience. Five of the makers are practicing as their full-time work, while three are practicing as a side business that complements their main source of income, honors their family, and acts as a creative and spiritual channel. The participants were asked to share their practices around foundational values including gratitude and reciprocity, the history of their practice, and how they connect to the earth.

**Conclusion and Implications** Indigenous makers openly shared how they include gratitude and reciprocity in their practices as it related to the six themes: **relationships, connection to the land, spirituality, community, identity and healing, and sustainability.**

The wisdom from centuries of Indigenous makers could be the basis for reflection that brings us back to a more sustainable and balanced relationship with Mother Earth.

- Take the time to build, nurture, and respect personal and professional relationships to support growth, wellbeing, and the common good. With a support system and partners to share, anything is possible.
- Slow down and be intentional in how we use time, energy and the earth's resources. Time to consider the spiritual parts of life and the role decisions make to a sustainable apparel future are worthy of attention.
- Reconnect to nature. Everything has a purpose in the ecosystem and every decision has an impact.

A sentiment about the future that was shared by one of the makers is worth contemplation. **"Mother Earth heals herself and so us as humans have to make a cognizant decision about whether we want to be here in the future or eliminate ourselves from the face of the earth, but I believe that the earth will live on."**

### References

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her work "honors and represents my grandmother and ancestors. I am stepping in this world with all my ancestors stepping with me."

"Everything comes from the earth and the earth gives us life. I give thanks to it every day," is a belief shared by these makers.

"I gain a lot of insight and inspiration from Nature and all she provides us. I also let ideas come to me instead of forcing them through which I feel has to do with organically letting your spirit roam freely for ideas."

"I have developed my personal floral style over time and my florals have gotten more unique while also staying true to my identity as an Ojibwe person."



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