

## **Sustainable Innovation 2021**

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

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The systemic practices of our consumer culture have put our environmental and social well-being at risk. In collaboration with Indigenous peoples to understand a perspective of gratitude for what the earth provides and to learn from generations of wisdom may support a shift in the western mind-set. 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, p.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 valued. Reducing consumption with the goal of using less and sharing more is an urgent and critical challenge (Jahren, 2020). We no longer know how many T-shirts or shoes are enough to meet our physical, functional, and expressive needs. 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. Do we consider the impact of how we launder the jeans or the possibility of repairing a rip or a broken zipper to extend value?

Humans, plants, animals, and the earth are all connected; however, our human-centered perspective reduces the purpose of all beings. Sustainability is broadly defined by scholars as the interconnection of the social, economic, and environmental domains and intergenerational resource usage and requirements (Parson, Nalau, Fisher, 2017) demonstrating systemic solutions. Bowers (2016) encourages looking to cultural commons as a means of sustainable wealth that supports lifestyles that are rooted in “indigenous intergenerational knowledge of how to live within the limits and possibilities of their bioregions,” (158) in balance with the money economy. Learning forgotten traditions of daily practice and ways of knowing can help create awareness of how to live with greater sensitivity and a reduced impact on the environment (Bowers, 2016).

Indigenous apparel makers are being interviewed with the goal of uncovering links between the core values of gratitude and reciprocity as applied in their modern practices. 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, p.37)” Investing time and effort on making apparel, while maintaining function, increases value. As beadwork takes so many hours to create, it is often repurposed and considered part of the family, becoming heirlooms that are passed down through generations. The specific colors, shapes, and patterns of beads grant objects with meaning that is important to each cultural group. (Monture, 1993) Insights, conclusions, and recommendations will be presented.