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Perceptions of Environmentalism and Indigenous Peoples

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Perceptions of Environmentalism and Indigenous Peoples

Abstract

Many Indigenous communities believe in a sibling bond with the Earth and all inhabitants; these relationships are not transactional, but rather, they are nurturing. However, many people lack an understanding of such practices. By looking at the historical environmental frameworks of Indigenous communities we can begin to understand how to better sustain all beings. The purpose of this study was to determine how people perceive environmentalism, Indigenous communities, education, and government action/inaction in hopes of identifying what could strengthen human bonds with the environment. Through a survey, I gathered fixed beliefs people have on environmental issues, connections to Indigenous communities, and environmentalism in education curricula. By conducting interviews, I was able to gather people's further understandings on intergenerational knowledge of Indigenous Peoples'. Although most participants indicated there are environmental issues, many still are not clear on the positive interactions that are nurturing and sustainable between humans and the environment. This study solidifies the need for identifying Indigenous practices/strategies of nurturing the environment and the need to share this information in order to raise awareness and educate folks.

Perceptions of Environmentalism and Indigenous Peoples



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INTRODUCTION



Figure 1. Shades by Nick Kumbari. Source: "dribbble.com" <https://dribbble.com/shots/4677736-Shades>

It is an unfortunate reality that Indigenous Peoples have been constantly oppressed in their fight to sustain the environment and their communities. Many Indigenous communities believe in a sibling bond with the Earth and all inhabitants; these relationships are not transactional, but rather, they are nurturing. However, many people lack an understanding of such practices. By looking at the historical environmental frameworks of Indigenous communities we can begin to understand how to better sustain all beings.

BACKGROUND

“Do you believe humans do more harm to the environment than good?”

In this study, conducted to collect and examine the thoughts that individuals have on environmentalism, nearly 90% percent of participants responded yes to the question above. What does it mean for us, as humans, to go about our life endeavors in a society that continues to harm the environment? It means, whether we are aware or ignorant of our actions, we are participating in this detriment.

Why we must reimagine Environmentalism through Indigenous Storytelling

Despite a long history of exploitation, destruction, and greed, it is important to note: positive interactions between humans and the environment do exist.

Historically, Indigenous Peoples' holistic approach and practices in caring for the environment have been founded on a belief of interconnectedness.

METHODS

The purpose of this study was to determine how people perceive environmentalism, Indigenous communities, education, and government action/inaction in hopes of identifying what could strengthen human bonds with the environment. Through a survey, I was able to gather fixed beliefs people have on environmental issues, connections to Indigenous communities, and environmentalism in education curricula. By conducting interviews, I was able to gather people's further understandings on intergenerational knowledge of Indigenous Peoples' and sociopolitically constructed needs for energy in a capitalistic society.

DATA ANALYSIS

Interviews

As part of this study, I conducted interviews with two individuals who have backgrounds and experience in environmental studies, biology, and Indigenous environmentalism.

Interview #1: The first individual provided information about the ways in which energy has continuously been causing problems for Indigenous communities while simultaneously disrupting natural communities. The sociopolitically constructed “need” for

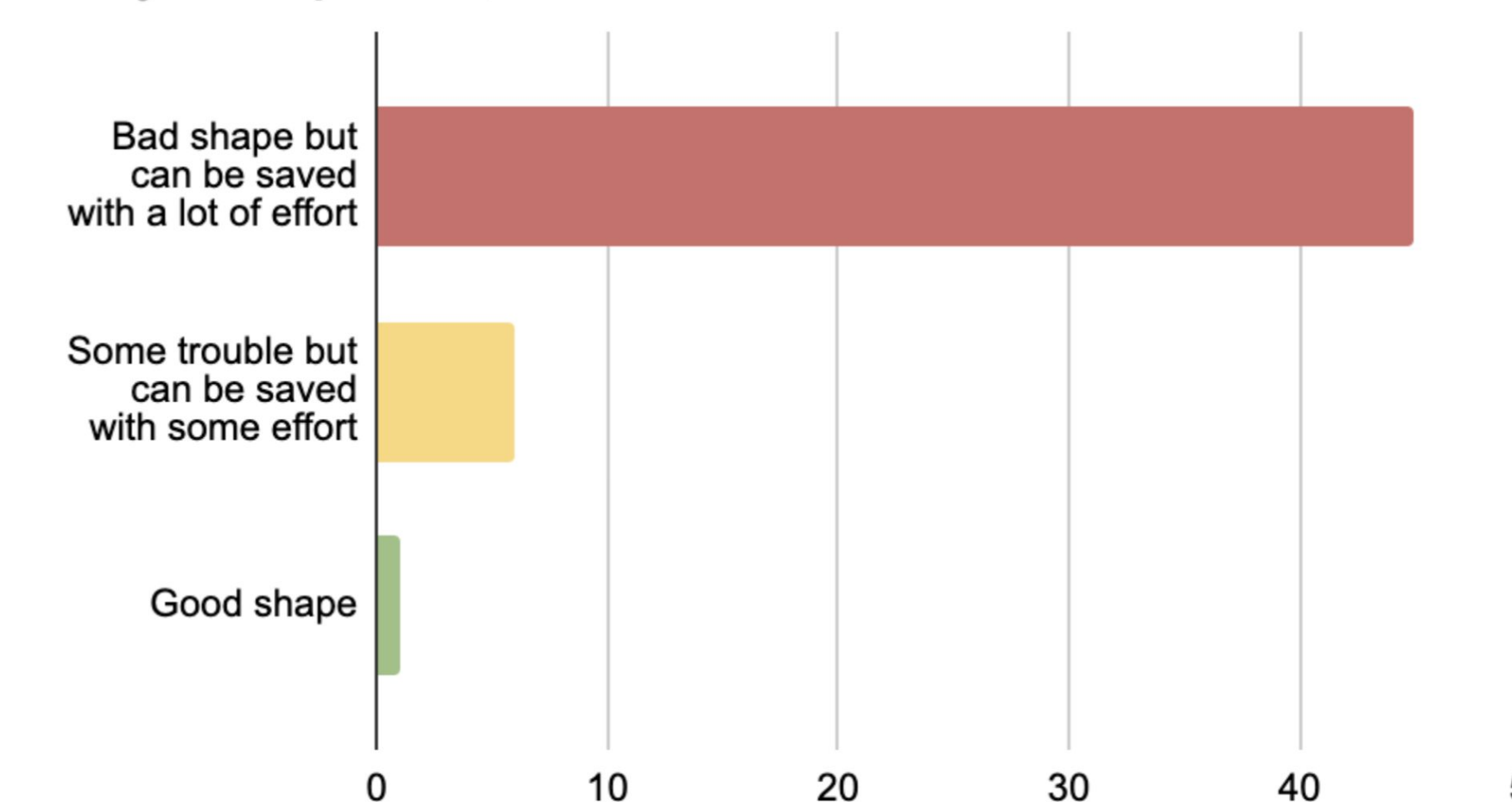
energy in a capitalistic society continues to fuel the exploitation of natural resources; in this exploitation, Indigenous communities have suffered by being forcibly displaced as well as having resources depleted.

Interview #2: The second individual shared a great amount of stories that she has heard by the folks she has connected with. The commonality heard by this individual between each story is that it is ultimately the passed down healing practices that will continue to sustain natural communities.

“There is power in intergenerational knowledge. These practices passed down by generations who have cared for the natural communities as siblings. Cherish this knowledge; share it; live it.”

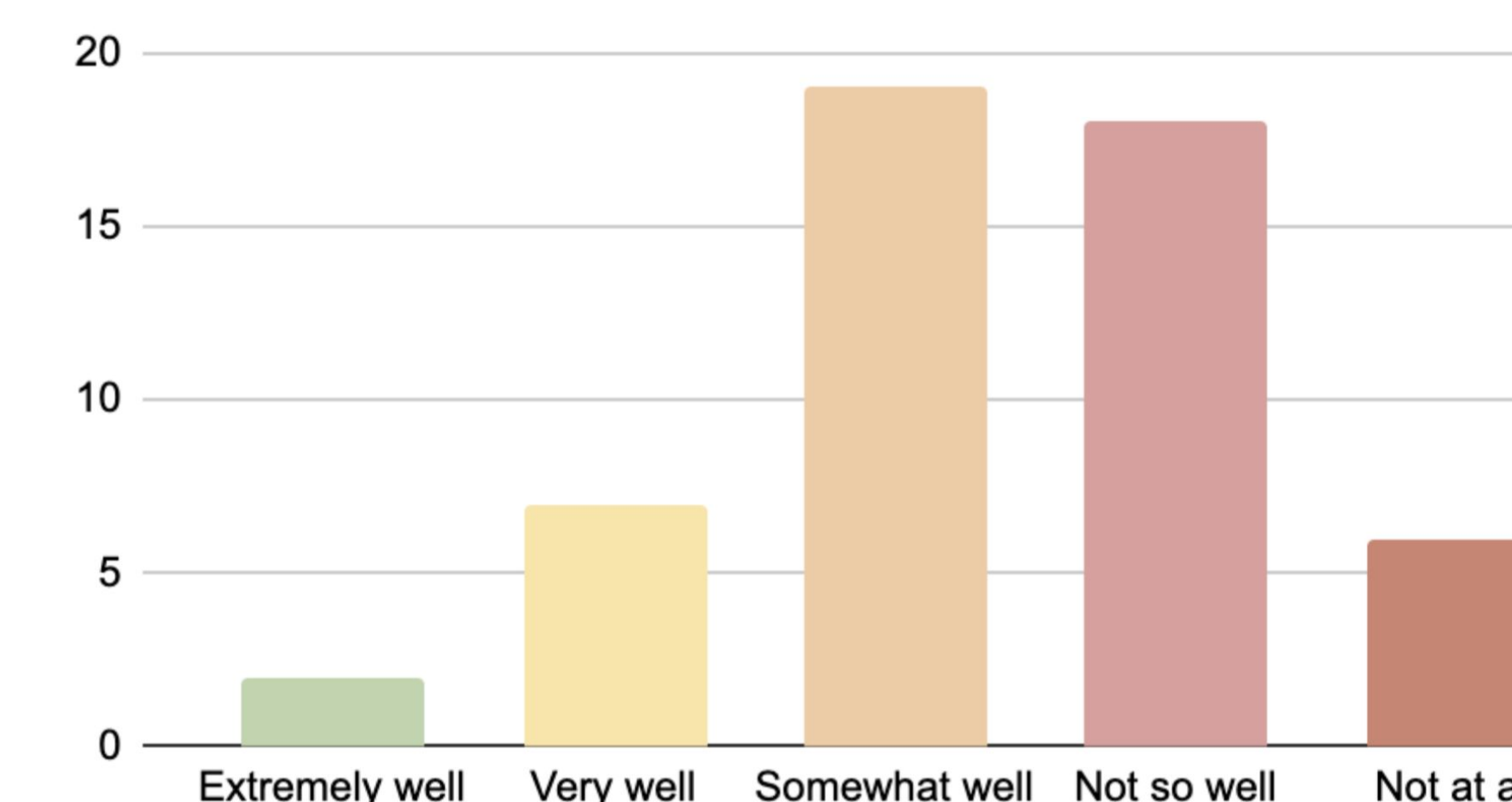
Survey

In your opinion, our environment is in:



Graph 1. Participants' perceptions of the quality and shape of the environment.

Understand the connection between Indigenous communities and environmentalism?



Graph 2. Participants' understanding of the connection between Indigenous communities and environmentalism.

RESULTS

According to the results, there is a clear majority of people who believe that the environment is experiencing detrimental effects to some capacity. From these results it is safe to assume that most participants do not have a clear understanding of how the nature of the connection between Indigenous communities and environmentalism works. Additionally, 100% of respondents also agreed that it would be beneficial to provide environmental/sustainability education in k-12 curricula as well community-led conversations and courses.

SUGGESTIONS

- Creating a coalition of folks who are committed to 1) cultivating intergenerational knowledge that centers sibling/family bonds with the Earth; 2) initiatives that push to educate folks about sustainable practices; 3) Indigenous Tribal Sovereignty.
- Gathering stories, practices, and knowledge.
- Constructing educational curricula/guides around what is gathered.
- Providing accessible forms of these curricula/guides for ALL communities.
- Pushing holistic environmental policies and initiatives
- Funding for contributions, trauma, and involvement.

CONCLUSION

Although most participants indicated there are environmental issues, many still are not clear on the positive interactions that are nurturing and sustainable between humans and the environment. This study solidifies the need for identifying Indigenous practices/strategies of nurturing the environment and the need to share this information in order to raise awareness and educate folks.