

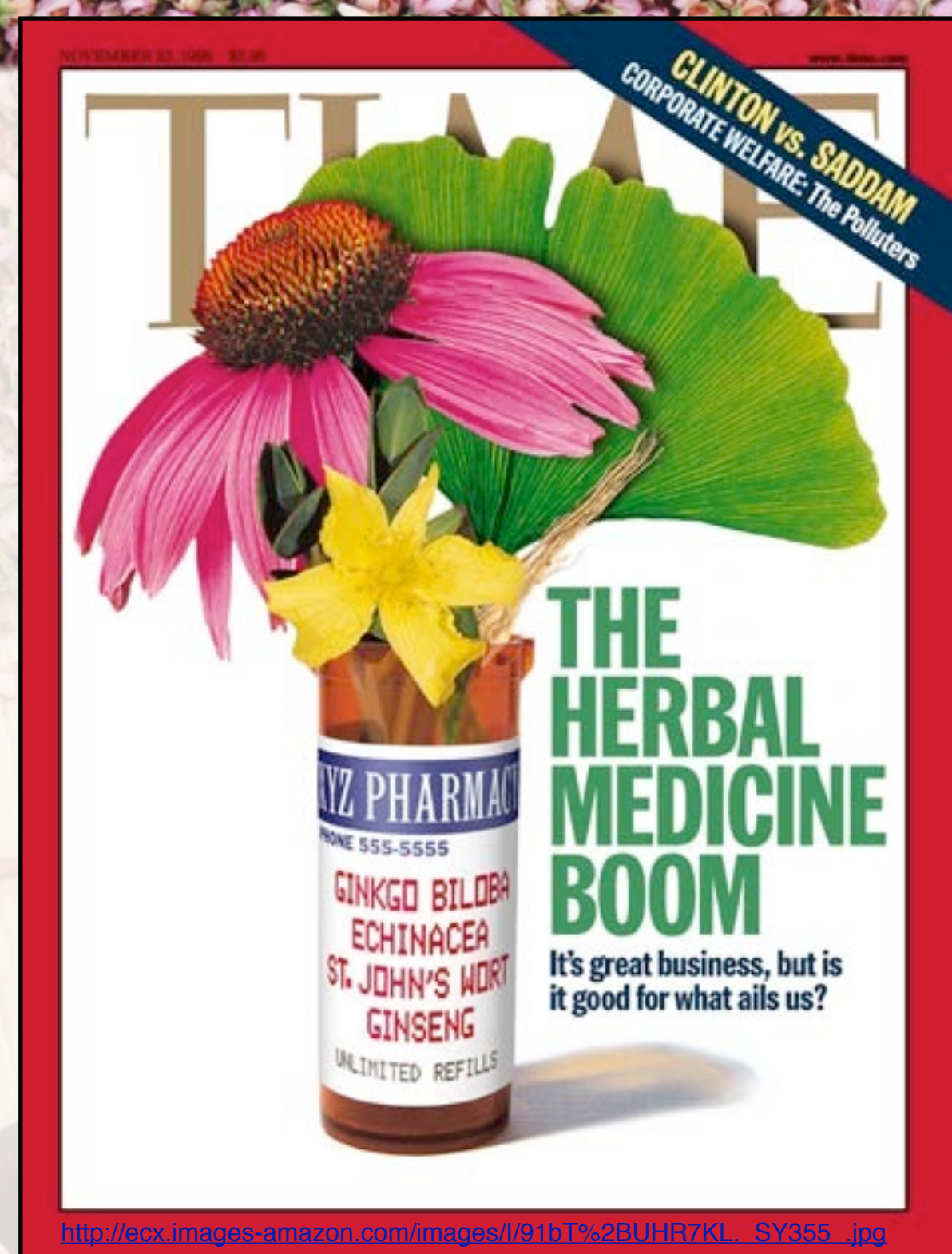
In the Pursuit of Naturalness

Diagnosing the Movement Towards Alternative Medicine in the United States

What is *natural* in the context of alternative medicine?

Introduction

Medicine is so inherently ingrained in how societies perceive their bodies, how they define what is *natural* and what isn't, and how they accept or reject the innovations of science and technology. I set my attention on the United States where I intended to examine the fad of natural medicine, its varied perceptions, and what makes it unique in the US. The main question I ask is as follows: **What is *natural* in the context of alternative medicine?** Using the answers from my survey, I find, within a wide range of opinions that advocate for allopathic and alternative medicine, ideologies about sickness, health and medical care that hint as to why *naturalness* is growing in desirability.



Background

In the past two decades, the US has seen an enormous influx in the use of alternative forms of medicine seeping into the predominant biomedical (allopathic) healthcare system (WHO 2001). Historically, alternative therapies have been stigmatized in the US, which branches from the well-established principle that a product or service that is lacking scientific testing of its efficacy should never reach the market. Health insurance does not reliably cover alternative therapies, thus limits the population of users. Goldner (2004) believes that individuals seeking alternative treatments are like activists who are perpetuating the movement towards new therapies. What is it about alternative medicine that is gaining attention in US culture?



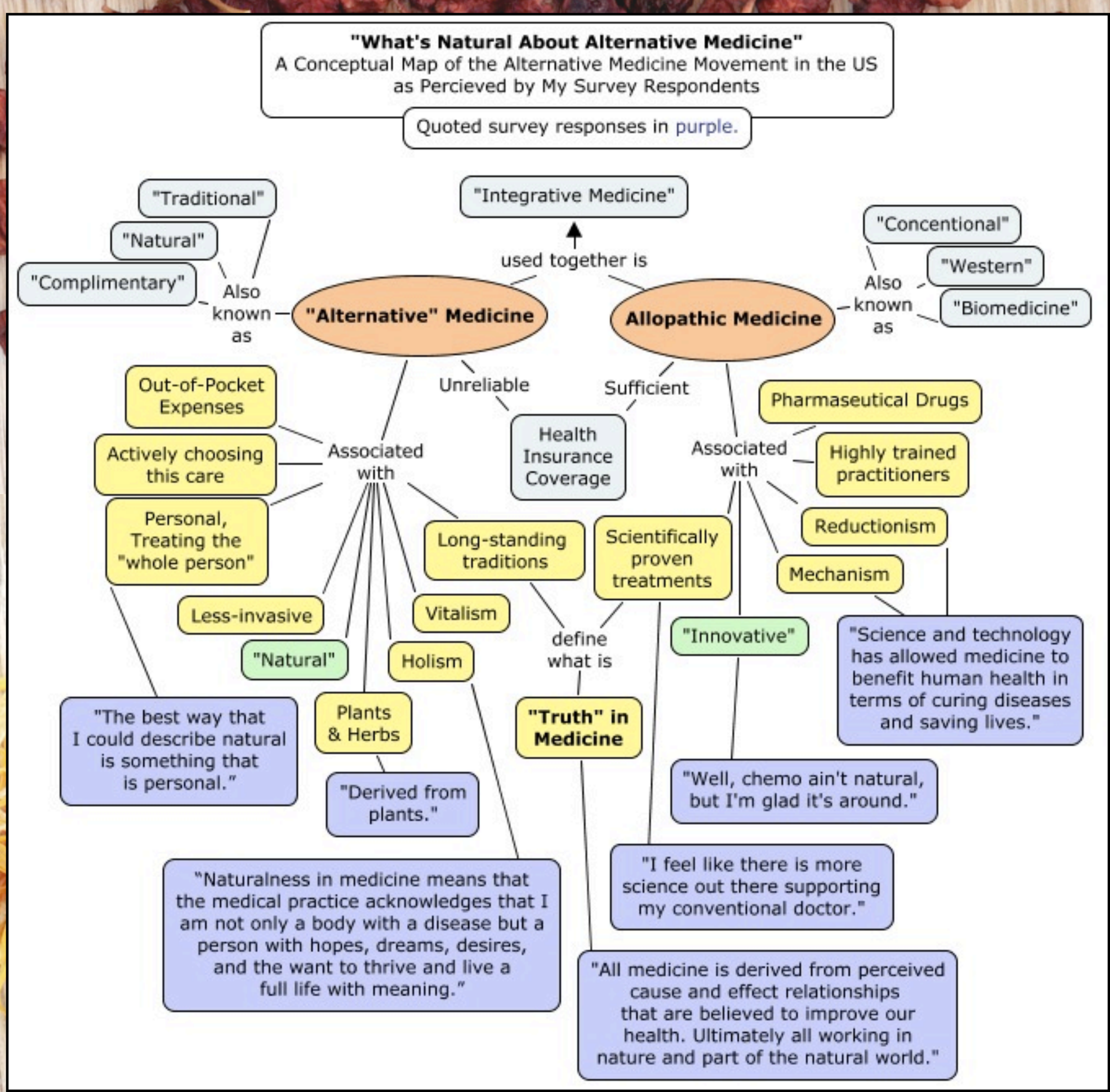
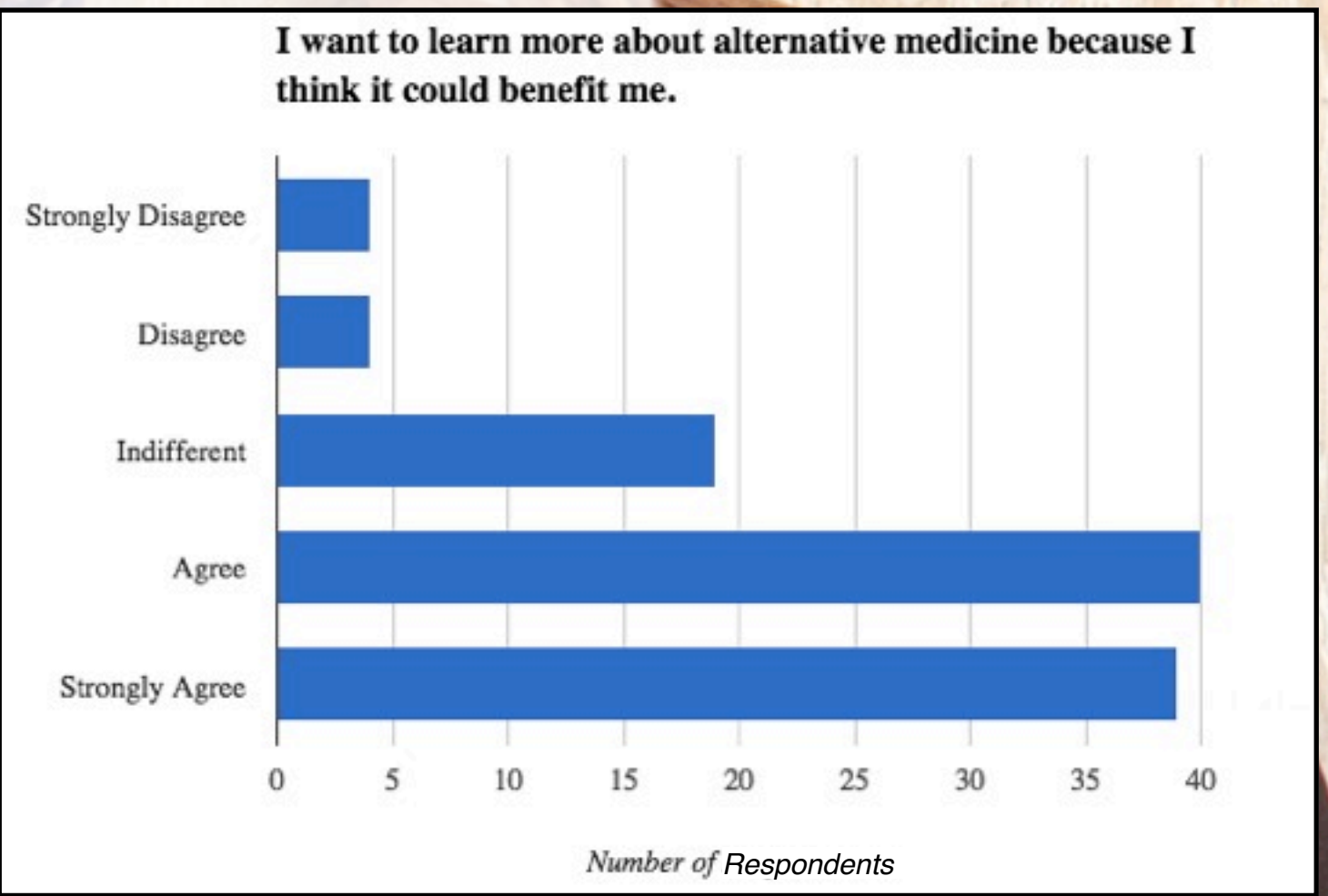
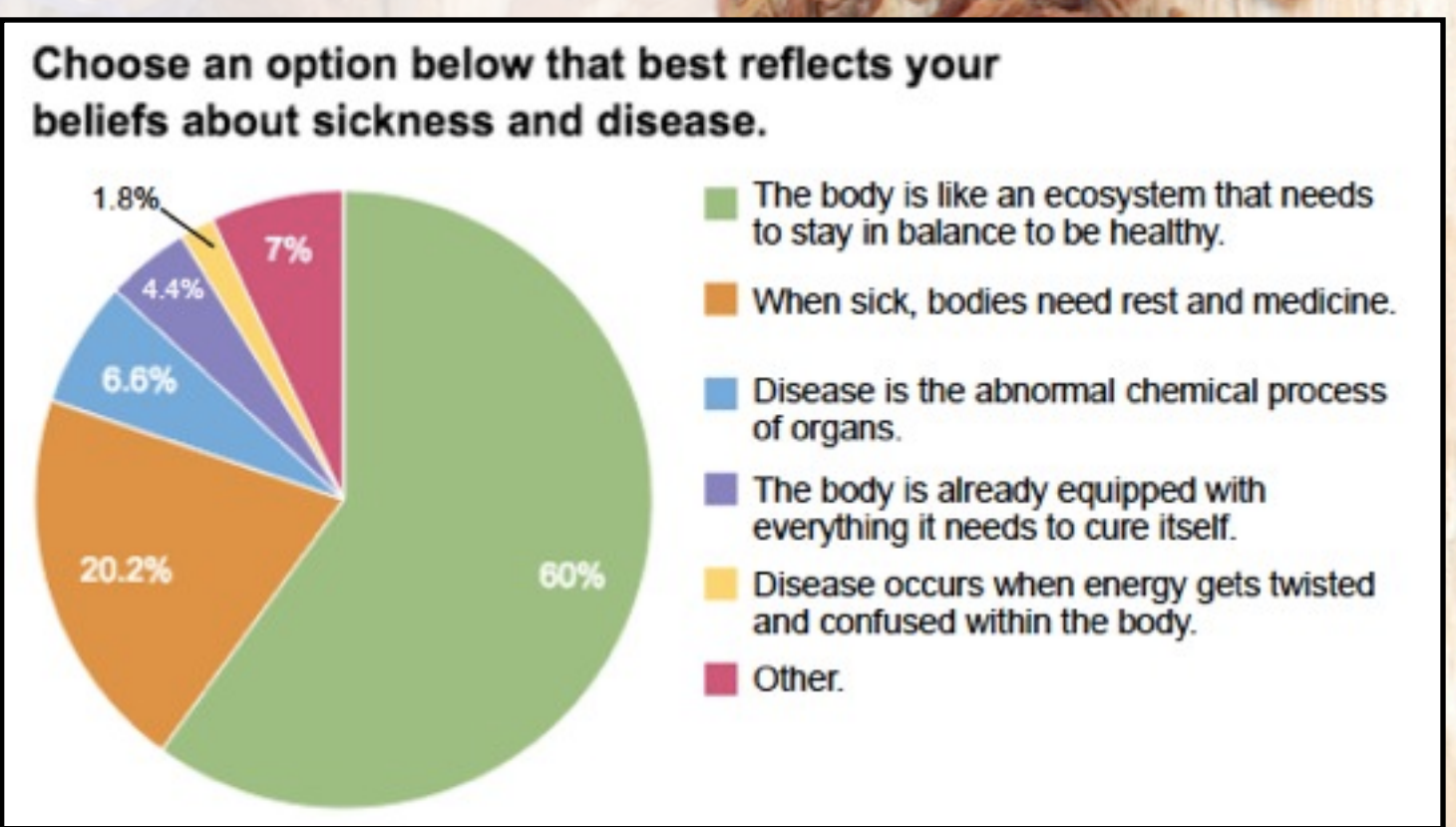
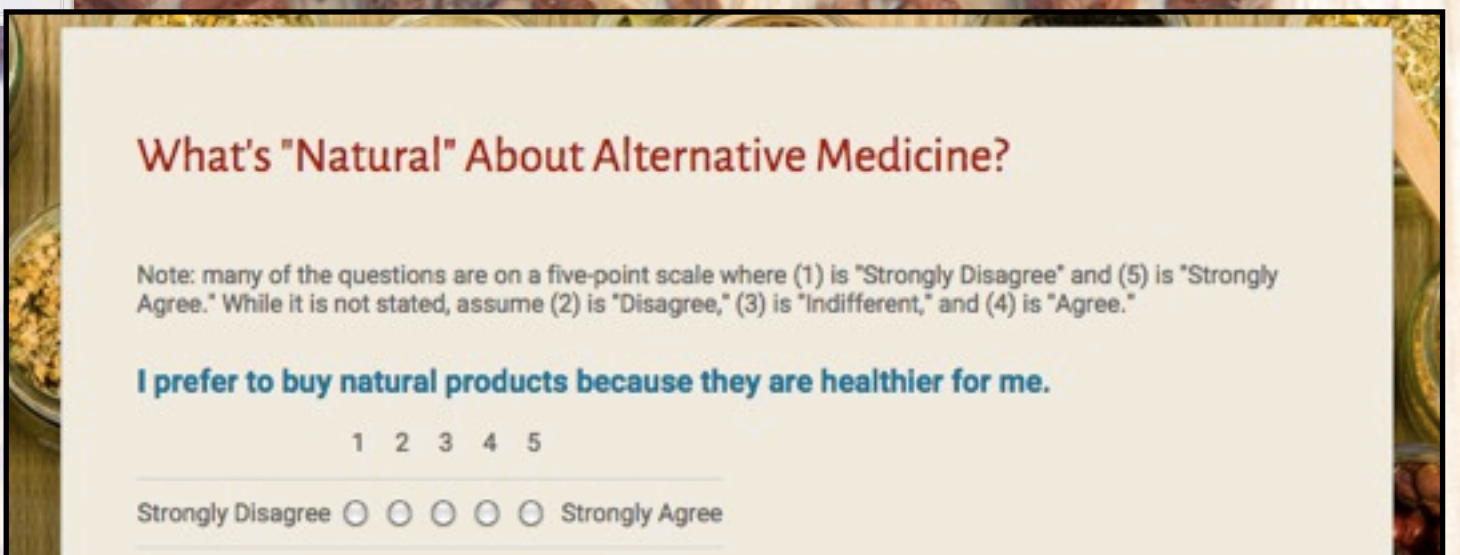
YOUR BODY ON ACUPUNCTURE

Who would have guessed that a tiny needle (or 12) could be such a boon to your well-being? Here are 10 research-backed ways the ancient practice of acupuncture improves your health from head to toe.

- Head:** 20 sessions of electroacupuncture (where a small electric current is applied to the needles) within 4 weeks reduced the number of monthly migraines.
- Mood:** Once weekly acupuncture sessions can treat depression within 3 months (comparable to results from counseling) likely because it regulates happy-making neurotransmitters in your brain.
- Heart:** Regular sessions can decrease markers of stress and lower blood pressure.
- Sleep:** Acupuncture revs up the production of neurotransmitters associated with relaxation and sleep, helping insomnia sufferers sleep better.
- Menopause:** Acupuncture can ease the frequency and severity of hot flashes for up to 3 months after treatment, possibly by helping regulate body temperature.
- Weight:** Acupuncture helped obese adults shed up to 9 pounds over a span of 2-weeks to 4-months.
- Nose:** For seasonal allergy sufferers, 12 acupuncture sessions reduced symptoms and allowed people to use antihistamines less often.
- Throat:** 10 sessions over the course of a month treated acid reflux disease and soothed heartburn better than using meds, possibly by regulating acid secretion and speeding digestion.
- Immune System:** Well-placed needles can boost the activity of immune cells that seek out and destroy infections.
- Back:** 5 weeks of twice-weekly needling was found to relieve lower back discomfort for up to 4 months.

The Survey

To gain an understanding of the general perceptions of my own community, I released a survey on Facebook. Because my 114 respondents were largely 18 to 24-year-olds from Portland, 68% female with at least some college education, I can only apply my analysis to this cohort as situated within the greater US. My multiple choice questions aimed to distill the respondent's paradigms about sickness, health and the efficacy of certain medical therapies, which proved to be generally diverse. I also prompted them to "Describe your understanding of 'naturalness' in medicine," and separated their responses into four categories: **deriving from plants, historical or traditional, not manipulated by humans, and gentle and personal.** Their responses correlate with ideas of sickness and disease when compared to conventional and alternative ways of understanding the body. A small number believed the dichotomy between the medical disciplines is falsely constructed because all medicine is *natural*. Most were interested in learning more about alternative medicines.



Conclusions

An integration of both allopathic and *natural* medicine is developing, as alternative forms of medicine are going through the necessary steps to become accepted by the unbudging institution of science. *Naturalness* has also been gaining traction in many aspects of today's culture, where alternative therapies in Portland specifically are readily available and commonly accepted based on a demand for all things *natural*. Whether that's incorporating the use of herbs, traditional therapies, less chemically-synthesized drugs and more personal attention. One of the most fundamental ways to explore one's own body is by caring for it; and while allopathic medicine has proven it cures time and again, choosing to consume alternative medicine is just another, quite different, way to do so.



Sources
 World Health Organization. 2001. "National Policy on Traditional Medicine and Regulation of Herbal Medicines - Report of a WHO Global Survey." Accessed March 21, 2015. <http://apps.who.int/medicineservices/01579166/>
 Goldner, Melinda. 2004. "Consumption as Activism: An Examination of CAM as Part of the Consumer Movement in Health." In *The Mainstreaming of Complementary and Alternative Medicine: Studies in Social Context*, edited by Philip Lovey, Gary Easthope and Jon Adams, 103-123. Psychology Press.