How Cultural Creatives are transcending alienation and isolation in an industrial world and bringing forward the practical wisdom of conscious living.

In this interview with social scientist Paul H. Ray, Ph.D., Pathways associate editor Lisa Reagan connects the dots between her insights from 15 years of holistic family wellness advocacy and Ray’s investigation of Cultural Creatives, a growing segment of the Western population transforming mainstream culture. Driven by their holistic values, integrated worldview and ability to synthesize vast amounts of information with an inner vision (insight) of wholeness, Cultural Creatives are, in Ray’s words, an “emerging wisdom culture.”

Ray presented his research findings in 2000 with the book Cultural Creatives: How 50 Million People Are Changing the World, written with his wife, Sherry Anderson, Ph.D. In this interview, Ray shares his updated findings from a 2008 study of Cultural Creatives and a peek into his forthcoming book on the critically needed element Cultural Creatives bring to the current failing industrial culture: practical wisdom.

Ray shares with Pathways readers why it is vital that they connect with one another and recognize they are participating in a consciousness-raising movement whose importance and impact will not be reflected in mainstream media, but is measurable by any social scientist who cares to look (and whose job is not dependent on him not looking).
Cultural Creatives cover a very wide range of social class positions, from working class to the elite. They may be middle class on average, but the range is so wide that it is almost meaningless to describe them in terms of occupation, education or income. The key identifiers are values, worldview and lifestyle, not demographics. People with identical values can be of very different social classes, and people of the same social class can live in totally different cultural worlds.
Over the past few years, in the United States and across Western Europe and Japan, a set of independent surveys by different research teams, has found that Cultural Creatives are 33–37 percent of adults, averaging 35 percent. What goes with that research finding is a parallel realization: This is an emerging planetary culture. The values and worldviews of Cultural Creatives all around the planet are much more similar to each other than they are to other people of their own particular countries. The emerging planetary values and worldviews are converging across nations to create a “trans-modern” culture. That is, it can cut across the rancorous conflicts and divisions among peoples and religions to integrate modern and traditional values with something new that’s still in process, still emerging. It’s a wiser culture, one that supports the people more than elites. It’s a surprising new basis for planetary integration, and for creating a sustainable world.

We are getting a surprising picture of convergence that cuts right across the nationalisms that we grew up with, and which still dominate the news, and international confrontations of today. But this picture is how a leading edge of the people see matters, not how the dominant culture of Modernity pictures them, for those governments, businesses and non-governmental organizations often reflect a dying era. The new picture is based on the robust rhetoric of numbers based on data, not the hollow rhetoric of obsolete political philosophies and self-serving ideologies.

New numbers placed into a better picture help make better rhetoric than we’ve been getting lately. For completely contrary to what the mainstream media says, these numbers establish that most Americans are catching up to the Europeans and Japanese, and losing their myopia at the same time that they face up to bigger issues. A large majority of Americans already “get” the problem of climate catastrophe, even if conservative politicians and business leaders don’t (or refuse to acknowledge it). And they are emotionally ready to take up the issue of a larger planetary perspective. The data doesn’t say they have practical ideas on what to do yet, but rather that it is okay to put such things on the national agenda—and to have a planetary agenda.

It’s also important to notice that our survey also showed that 71 percent of Americans now see themselves as citizens of planet Earth as well as Americans. There is movement in the collective consciousness toward planetary awareness, planetary concerns, and not just globalization of an economic kind, but planetary integration, at precisely the same moment in history when the whole planet is threatened by climate crisis.
Are You a Cultural Creative?

By Paul H. Ray, Ph.D.

As with any burgeoning movement, there are probably more Cultural Creatives out there than we realize…or who even recognize it themselves. If you’re wondering if you’re one, this list of statements can give you an indication.* In the list below, count the number of statements you agree with. If you agree with 10 or more, you’re probably a Cultural Creative. Higher scores increase the likelihood.

You are likely to be a Cultural Creative if you…

1. …love nature and are deeply concerned about its destruction.

2. …are strongly aware of the problems of the whole planet (global warming, destruction of rainforests, overpopulation, lack of ecological sustainability, exploitation of people in poorer countries) and want to see more action on them, such as limiting economic growth.

3. …would pay more taxes or pay more for consumer goods if you could know the money would go to clean up the environment and to stop global warming.

4. …place a great deal of importance on developing and maintaining your relationships.

5. …place a lot of value on helping other people and bringing out their unique gifts.
6. 
…volunteer for one or more good causes.

7. 
…care intensely about both psychological and spiritual development.

8. 
…see spirituality or religion as important in your life, but are concerned about the role of the Religious Right in politics.

9. 
…want more equality for women at work, and more women leaders in business and politics.

10. 
…are concerned about violence and the abuse of women and children around the world.

11. 
…want our politics and government spending to put more emphasis on children’s education and well-being, on rebuilding our neighborhoods and communities, and on creating an ecologically sustainable future.

12. 
…are unhappy with both the Left and the Right in politics, and want to find a new way that is not in the mushy middle.

13. 
…tend to be somewhat optimistic about our future, and distrust the cynical and pessimistic view that the media promulgates.

14.
…want to be involved in creating a new and better way of life in our country.

15.

…are concerned about what the big corporations are doing in the name of making more profits: downsizing, creating environmental problems, and exploiting poorer countries.

16.

…have your finances and spending under control, and are not concerned about overspending.

17.

…dislike all the emphasis in modern culture on success and “making it,” on getting and spending, and on wealth and luxury goods.

18.

…like people and places that are exotic and foreign, and enjoy experiencing and learning about other ways of life.

*Note: This is not a research questionnaire. Rather it is a handy way of showing some research results to people who may not be good at statistics. These statements are drawn from items that reliably correlated with being a Cultural Creative in a number of surveys. A statistical analysis of the research findings provides an idea of how many yeses it takes to give a reliable probability that you are a Cultural Creative: If you agree with 10 items, there’s a 60 percent chance that you are one; agreeing with all 18 items means the odds are over 90 percent.

“Practical wisdom is what ensures the taking of proper means to the proper ends desired by moral virtue.”
“Aristotle’s man of practical wisdom, the phronimos, employs his intelligence to discover what is good for the individual and the community, what ‘conduces to the good (eudaimonic) life as a whole.’ But the phronimos goes beyond recognizing the components of a good life; he is disposed to achieve them. That is to say, the exercise of phronesis [practical wisdom] is not solely a theoretical venture. Unlike the other intellectual virtues, practical wisdom has an explicitly moral character. Phronesis is not simply knowledge; it is the capacity for knowledge in action. Practical wisdom is ‘imperative,’ Aristotle states: ‘it gives orders.’ The phronimos practices rather than simply understands the virtuous life, while securing rather than simply identifying its worldly components.”

—Thiele, The Heart of Judgment
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