

An interview with Paul H. Ray, Ph.D., sociologist and author of "**The Cultural Creatives: How 50 Million People are Changing the World**" from [www.SoulfulLiving.com](http://www.SoulfulLiving.com)

**Q: So, who are the Cultural Creatives?**

A: The Cultural Creatives are 50 million Americans who care deeply about ecology and saving the planet, about relationships, peace, social justice, and about authenticity, self-actualization, spirituality and self-expression. Surprisingly, they are both inner-directed and socially concerned, they're activists, volunteers and contributors to good causes more than other Americans. (There are probably about 80-90 million Cultural Creatives in the European Union as well.)

However, because they've been so invisible in American life, Cultural Creatives themselves are astonished to find out how many share both their values and their way of life. They have no idea how big a group they are, a quarter of the adults in America, and how important they can be to American life. If you ask them, "how many people share your values, what you see as most important in life?" they will tell you that it's just them and a few of their friends. Press them on this point and they'll say, "Oh maybe 1% or 5% of Americans" But with that 5% they're ready to pull back, sure that they've exaggerated their numbers. Once they realize their numbers, their impact on American life promises to be enormous, shaping a new agenda for the twenty-first century.

**Q: Why do you call them the Cultural Creatives?**

A: Because they are literally creating a new culture. Innovation by innovation they are shaping a new American culture for the 21st century.

**Q: Well, what kinds of things are the Cultural Creatives doing?**

A: In between the pure profit making business and the begging-for-money charity, there's a whole rainbow spectrum of new kinds of organizations and social experiments.

Take a yoga center for example: is it a business, a spiritual place, an education center, a health and exercise place, or a way of life? The answer is Yes to all the above. We're crossing categories all the time.

We interviewed a sculptor named Vijali Hamilton who travels around the world creating something she calls the World Wheel. In each community she creates an environmental sculpture and she does community building. She asks the people to go deep into who they are and how they connect to the rest of the world, and from their answers they create a piece of theatre, and music, and a community ritual. Is this art, community building, entertainment, spirituality, ecology? Again, Yes, to all the above.

**Q: Why does all of this make such a difference?**

A: What makes Cultural Creatives different than most Americans is their reframing of social movements. Reframing is a big deal. It lets us look at our old problems from a new angle of vision. And it gives a new way of explaining them, and a new way to state our moral concerns. The Cultural Creatives are the ones who have been really paying attention, applying those reframings in their own lives.

Reframing means you start to question the unspoken assumptions of the social codes all around you. It's not okay to let big business destroy the environment. It's not okay to have nuclear power. It's not okay to let the

foreign policy elite send our young people off to wars without involving the citizens. It's not okay to put down, or harm, people who are different than you are. And so on.

If you are exposed to half a dozen big reframes, two things happen: the content changes your whole world view, and you get comfortable with the process of questioning the unspoken assumptions of the old culture. That's where the Cultural Creatives came from. And that's where a lot of our new direction is coming from.

All those people who have questioned the unspoken assumptions had to rely on their own direct experience. How else could you take off the old culture's eyeglasses? This has an incredible potential for opening up creativity in our lives. It gives us some comfort in going into the unknown. And that is where our whole society is going anyway at this time in history.

This is a part of the personal life changes that so many Cultural Creatives have gone through. So often they said to us that they had to live more authentic lives after opening up questions they really cared about, and having to live through the experiences they've had. The Black Freedom Movement called it "walking your talk" and this need for authenticity was picked up by every social and consciousness movement since then.

This emphasis on authenticity is at the center of who the Cultural Creatives are today, and is one of the key values they've brought into American life.

## **Three Competing Subcultures**

*From the Potential for a New, Emerging Culture in the U.S. by Paul H. Ray, PhD*

Americans who see themselves as 'Traditional' actually favor a 19th century worldview and values and they are largely in reaction against the culture of today's world, usually from a rural, small town or religiously conservative stance. This includes a large proportion of working class and elderly people. In the US context, this nostalgia for a small town past and strong churches is based on a mythic image of an America that never existed in history. Since about 1950, Traditionals seem to have shrunk from roughly 50% of the US adults to roughly 25%...

'Moderns' tend to see the world through a filter of personal success and financial gain, with an acceptance of 'things as they are' in big cities, big organizations, the latest technologies, mass media, and a 'modern' life rewarded by material consumption. Moderns cover the gamut from politically progressive to conservative...

Cultural Creatives often describe themselves as 'bridge people' between the other two contending cultures who are busy having a culture war. They are trying to make a cultural synthesis, and also transcend the others. Their most important values include: ecological sustainability and concern for the planet (not just environmentalism); liking what is foreign and exotic in other cultures; what politicians and media refer to as 'women's issues' i.e., concern about the condition of women and children both at home and around the world, concern for better health care and education, desire to rebuild neighborhoods and community, desire to improve caring relationships and family life, etc.; social conscience, a demand for authenticity in social life and a guarded social optimism; and giving importance to altruism, self-actualization and spirituality as a single complex of values...

## Are You A Cultural Creative?

*Take Our Quiz and Find Out. This list can give you an idea. Choose the statements that you agree with.*

*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
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. ...do volunteering 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 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 a 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 is given by the media
  
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, on wealth and luxury goods
  
18. ...like people and places that are exotic and foreign, and like experiencing and learning about other ways of life

*If you agreed with 10 or more, you probably are a Cultural Creative.*