



*Discussion Guide*

*YES! Winter 2001*

## **Welcome to the *YES!* Discussion Guide Series**

*We're delighted that you've decided to take up some of the issues explored in YES! magazine in your class or discussion group. When people gather in groups to talk with mutual respect and caring about the critical issues of our time, they create a powerful avenue for constructive social change. The staff of YES! magazine has prepared this guide to help you get started. We hope you'll find it useful.*

*We've posted selected articles from YES! on our website at [www.yesmagazine.org](http://www.yesmagazine.org). You're welcome to download and photocopy them free of charge. If you'd like to purchase multiple copies of YES! or subscriptions for your class or group, please phone 1-800-937-4451 and ask for the Discussion Group Discount.*

### **A New Culture Emerges**

*This guide is designed to provide a starting point for your discussion of some of the issues explored in the Winter 2001 issue of YES! magazine. There is no one correct way to approach these issues — please use this discussion guide to provoke conversation, not to limit it. Invent your own questions. Try different processes: open-ended discussions, or round-robin discussions, where each participant has a certain amount of time to explore his or her own responses and views. Try relating these questions to your own experiences and asking individuals in the group to make presentations on relevant topics.*

**The Rise of the Cultural Creatives** ("A Culture Gets Creative," by Paul Ray and Sherry Anderson, pp. 15 - 20)

*This issue of YES! argues that we are living at a unique moment in history, a cultural turning point of enormous importance, perhaps the most important change of course in our planet's history. One scholar has labeled it *The Great Turning*, a crossroads where we turn away from several centuries of materialism and its disastrous results: ecological harm, impoverished peoples and impoverished cultures, and unsatisfying ways of life.*

**But what are we turning towards?**

According to Paul Ray and Sherry Anderson, 50 million people in the U.S. alone (almost a quarter of the population) are changing their perceptions of the world, putting more value on environmentally sustainable lifestyles, community, respect across racial, cultural, and gender lines, and so on.



Q: Take the “Are You A Cultural Creative” test on page 19. How well do these values describe you? Do you think they tend to go together? Would your parents answer these questions differently? Your grandparents? Q: What possibilities would open up if there were in fact 50 million Cultural Creatives in the U.S.? How might so many Cultural Creatives affect local issues you care about? national issues? possibilities for a more ecologically sustainable future? prospects for greater sharing of the world’s wealth?

Q: In your own experience, among your friends, colleagues, and in your larger community, have you witnessed signs that we are turning away from materialism toward life?

### **Calling All Oddballs**

Have you ever been called a Pollyanna because you believe we can change the world? Ever felt like an alien from another planet because your primary motivation is not money? Or because those bumper stickers - “Shop ‘til you drop” and “Whoever dies with the most toys wins” - seem more pathetic than funny to you? If so, you’re not alone. According to Ray and Anderson, most of the 50 million people in the U.S. who share Cultural Creative values feel, at one time or another, like odd balls.

Q: Share with the group an experience when your values seemed to be totally at odds with the accepted norms of the group you were with.

Q: What are the common themes in the stories your group members shared? What values were you expressing at those times when you felt incompatible with the larger society? What sorts of values were generally accepted by the group?

Q: How important is it for people who share these values to understand that they are not alone? How can they discover that? Does this mean that we simply need to hang around with people who are like us?

### **Show Me the Evidence**

Q: Ray admits that the boundaries of this group are fuzzy and that up to 40 percent of the population of the U.S. is made up of Cultural Creatives or potential Cultural Creatives. If so, why does the gap between rich and poor continue to grow? Why are we buying SUVs and manufacturing weapons faster than ever before? Why aren’t we feeling the impact of these Cultural Creatives? - or are we?

Q: Let’s assume Ray and Anderson are right-this group is emerging and changing the values of the larger culture. Why are the Cultural Creatives emerging worldwide now?

Q: Why are there more women Cultural Creatives than men (Ray and Anderson say Cultural Creatives are two-thirds women)?

\*NOTE: Ray and Anderson's data and their original survey are not published in their book, *The Cultural Creatives*. We do know that the survey they used to gather their data is not the same as the quiz, although the quiz is taken from their book.

**Are we humans getting any wiser?** (“Breakthroughs” by Richard Heinberg, pp. 12 - 14)

Q: We homo sapiens (our name means the wise ape that knows it is wise) now have several thousand years of recorded history behind us. Have we gotten any wiser? Thinking back over our history from earliest times, what evidence can you point to?

Q: On the other hand, as devil's advocate, can you think of evidence that humans have made no moral progress at all, or are moving backward?

Q: For which viewpoint can you make the stronger case? Is it possible we could be living in a paradoxical time in which both are true? If so, can we continue to head in two directions at the same time, or will humanity eventually choose one or the other?

**Love, Anger, and Power** (“Love with Claws and Jaws” by Carolyn Raffensperger, pp 38 - 39)

Q: Carolyn Raffensperger says her environmentalism didn't grow out of love - it grew out of anger. To what degree are you motivated in your work by love? anger? hope? fear? Which of the emotions sustain and strengthen you, and which ones seem to undermine your work?

Q: How does her experience of “enemies” compare with your own? Who and what are your enemies? What would it be like for you if you were to “swear off enemies” ?

Q: Early in her career, Raffensperger found herself ambivalent about power - wanting it and, at the same time, hating it. What are your own feelings about power? When is it corrupting and when is it not? In your own life, how do you deal with issues of either having or not having power?

Q: Do you sometimes sense, as she does, that guardians of some sort determine your destiny or guide your choices? If you like, share with the group an incident similar to Raffensperger's car accident when you sensed guidance from outside yourself.

**A Silent, Singing Revolution** (“India's Silent But Singing Revolution” by Pramila Jayapal, pp. 33 - 37)

Q: The Swadhyaya movement started with middle-class people from the city simply spending time with “Untouchables” in the countryside, poor villagers they would ordinarily never spend time with. What would be the equivalent to this “cross-caste” relationship in the U.S.? Have you had experiences of this kind? What would make it difficult to spend time with people of a very different “caste” in the US? What would be the rewards?

Q: Much of this movement's power has come from people who simply choose to give to others,



including very poor people who fish one extra day per week to provide food for those who are without. What would the equivalent be in your community? If food is not needed in your community, what is needed? What gets in the way of that happening? What difference could this type of sharing make?

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*We welcome feedback on your experience in using our discussion guides. Email comments to DiscussionGuides@futurenet.org.*

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