Values:
A Changing Worldview

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I began exploring values when a colleague passed on a report by the Institute of Noetic Sciences discussing evidence of a world transforming. The report proposes humanity is shifting from an unsustainable way of life mired in contradictions of religion, politics, power and profiteering to a new understanding of human consciousness that is about learning to live harmoniously in a healthy and sustainable ecosphere (Noetic Sciences, 2007). The report demonstrates how our worldview is in transition and transforming, and gives examples of how our value system is changing. Sociologist Paul Ray has been tracking values and cultural change over the last decade and provides evidence of this new value system emerging. Before talking about this new value system, it's useful to delve into values.

Values Are Meaningful

As market researchers we are always trying to understand attitudes and behaviour; however we pay very little attention to values. Yet theorists who have investigated this fully say values determine attitudes and behaviour. This is because values influence and shape our selection and choices. So what is meant by values? Social Psychologists Shalom Schwartz and Wolfgang Bilsky have extensively investigated research literature on values and define it as: "...transituational goals, varying in importance, that serve as guiding principles in the life of a person or other social entity." They say, in contrast to attitudes, "...values are seen as more central to the self, transcend objects and situations, and determine attitudes and behaviour." Their definition can be applied to individuals, groups or even nations (Schwartz & Bilsky, 1987).

Ray says, "Values speak to what is most important in our lives...Research on values shows us something deeper than opinion polls and attitude studies, and deeper than standard behavioural psychology as well – because values say what is most important in our lives...Public polling has often been used as a way to hold up a mirror to ourselves...but it has focused mostly on transitory opinions and attitudes, changeable as the sea." Drawing on work by Social Researcher Daniel Yankelovich, Ray points out that values are slow changing, on a time-scale of generations rather than months or years. His summary on how values differ from attitudes and opinions follows:

- Values are deeper, slow changing, and fewer in number than attitudes and opinions. And attitudes are deeper and fewer in number than opinions.
- Culture's effects are all-pervasive, influencing values, attitudes and opinions.
- Values usually remain constant, despite new information coming in. New information that doesn't fit one's values is likely to be ignored, explained away, or rejected.

- Personality is not a good predictor of attitudes and opinions (Ray, 1996).

Schwartz and Bilsky point out that values are multi-faceted and can encompass the biological (physiological), the social (interpersonal interaction) and the institutional (societal interests). Values may shift as people move through life-stages, eg: values such as wisdom and courage emerge as people mature and as they experience and come to terms with life. Values can also support social interaction and engagement, eg: values such as kindness and equality reflect an active and positive concern for others (Schwartz & Bilsky, 1987). The point here is that values are deep and wide ranging, go beyond individual concerns and evolve as culture shifts and changes.

Sociology provides very interesting territory for market researchers to explore. In contrast to psychology which focuses on the individual; sociology explores people's relationships and roles in society. Even science has begun to recognise that "…we live in a highly dynamic, interactive, interconnected world that is full of potential. Chaos theory (enables) small changes to have profound impacts…This interconnectivity means that from a certain perspective we are not really separate from one another, even though our senses trick us into believing we are." (Noetic Sciences 2007)

New Value System
As mentioned, Ray has been tracking values and cultural change through social surveys in the USA since 1986, and has evidence that a new value system has begun to emerge that is transforming Western culture. This is especially important for researchers because it's impacting the way people consume and the future for 'consumer culture'. It has implications for marketing and research, along with the role brands have in our lives.

Ray has identified a new and growing subculture that he calls Cultural Creatives (by 2000 a survey identified around 50 million adults in the USA as Cultural Creatives – one in four adults). He distinguishes Cultural Creatives from two prevalent subcultures: Traditionals and Moderns. Very briefly summarised, Traditionals are "heartlanders" and mostly conservatives, driven by a strong moral compass. Their roots are rural – they believe in small towns, strong churches and the "American Way". Moderns are professionals and mostly liberal, driven to climb the competitive economy. Their roots are urban – they believe in personal success, consumerism, materials and technology. They have also been responsible for bringing greater equality,

justice, civil rights and democracy. Interestingly, Cultural Creatives are for the most part unaware of their own existence as a subculture (Ray, 2000).

Ray has studied these Cultural Creatives very closely in the USA & published his findings in 2000 after conducting surveys with 100,000 people, 500 focus groups and 60 in-depth interviews. Since then, Ray has also conducted studies in Western Europe and Japan that confirm Cultural Creatives are a world-wide phenomenon. A more recent survey in 2008 by Ray estimates 30 percent of Americans and 35 percent of Western Europeans are Cultural Creatives (Wisdom University, 2009). They're not defined by standard demographic criteria of age, race, religion, or income. They're defined by their values. Cultural Creatives are predominately made up of people who have participated in the social and consciousness movements. The movements of: civil rights, the environment, women's rights, peace, alternative health, spirituality, self-growth, etc. In the 1960s and 1970s these movements focused on individuals and the personal. Through the 1980s and 1990s these movements have broadened their focus to the social and ethical, addressing problems and concerns in communities and the planet (Ray, 2000). Over this time, what were once perceived as radical movements have become mainstream movements, eg: Greenpeace, SAFE (animal rights), Amnesty International, etc.

Ray says Cultural Creatives have a deep interest in the environment and community. They pay a lot of attention to world events and global trends. They have both a strong concern for social justice and developing their personal and spiritual growth. Although they're not defined by standard demographic criteria, there is one significant demographic – two-thirds of Cultural Creatives are women. Ray has identified that values are particularly important to women. He points out that women's values tend to be different to men. They include receptivity, empathy, dialogue, listening, interconnectedness and relationship. They're concerned about social justice and development of their inner life. He says women tend to have a more holistic view of the world.

Cultural Creatives are concerned about and committed to the environment, relationships, social issues and a sustainable future. They're especially tuned into new information and changes on global warming, environmental issues, technological changes and entrepreneurial opportunities. Their concerns and interests embrace multiple issues (not just single issues). They are interested in remaking their lives and institutions around better and deeper values in order to build a sustainable culture for future generations. Ray says this shift in values has occurred as these people have become disenchanted with materialism, greed, status display and inequalities. Cultural Creatives are

especially concerned about society's failure to care for children, the elderly and women. They are critical of corporations and governments. The values of Cultural Creatives haven't changed overnight – their values have shifted and emerged slowly over time, taking 10 to 15 years to come to this new value system (Ray, 2000).

Ray has conducted a more recent survey in 2008 on values and ecology. It shows that this value system is also being embraced by the "Millennium Generation", young people aged 15 to 25 years – the children of the Baby Boomers seem to agree with their parents on many of their basic values (Wisdom University, 2009). Here are some preliminary results from the 2008 data copied intact with permission from Integral Partnerships LLC.

There's been a dramatic shift at the values level in 10 years toward more ecological and planetary awareness...

Americans are now emotionally ready to act on global warming and ecological crisis, and it really fits their values.

But they are not yet clear what to do, or what sacrifice is needed, if any. They want leadership from government and business and believe in technological solutions. They are vastly more aware of planetary problems than 10-15 years ago.

From Values Section of Questionnaire:

68.35% say Very or Extremely Important is: concern that our country has been headed in the wrong direction

64.50% say Very or Extremely Important is: concern that my children will live in a much worse world than I grew up in

60.35% say Very or Extremely Important is: helping to create a sustainable world for myself and for my children

57.95% say Very or Extremely Important is: making sure that we leave a decent legacy for future generations

55.80% agree: Our materialistic way of life can be replaced by a new, more hopeful one

51.70% say Very or Extremely Important is: wanting to be involved in creating a better society than we have today

49.95% say Very or Extremely Important is: desire for a more ecologically sustainable way of life in America

From Ecology Section of Questionnaire:

87.05% agree: We need to treat the planet as a living system

83.20% agree: Each generation's duty is to make the world a better place for future generations

82.45% agree: We must stop the destruction of the globe's farmlands, forests and oceans

82.45% agree: Humans need to have more respect and reverence for Nature

81.25% agree: Corporations must take more responsibility for their impact on global warming

80.20% agree: We should change the way we live now so future generations have decent lives

75.35% agree: People need to work for the good of the planet, for it is our only home

73.40% agree: We have a moral duty to protect all God's creatures from extinction

71.75% agree: It is our sacred obligation to care for God's creation

70.50% agree: I see myself as a citizen of Planet Earth as well as an American

63.00% agree: Too many people refuse to accept the seriousness of global warming

62.00% agree: The earth is headed for an environmental catastrophe unless we change

60.40% agree: America needs to take the lead on global warming, not drag its feet

55.40% agree: We need solar and wind power for global warming, not coal and nuclear

Theme: Willing to get involved, but not just to pay through the nose (it's a recession mentality)

51.00% agree: I'm willing to do volunteer work as part of a commitment to help save the planet

45.45% agree: Working on the planet's problems is now the main task for humanity

But then here are some old familiar items:

only 25.45% agree: I'd pay more taxes to help solve our global warming problems
        (50% disagree)

only 22.95% agree: I'd pay 50 cents more a gallon for gasoline if it's used to stop global warming (50% disagree)

Ray has discovered the lifestyles of Cultural Creatives are quite different from the lifestyles of the other two subcultures (Traditionals and Moderns). The spending habits of Cultural Creatives are based around their values. They believe in cooperation and interdependence. When they shop they're less interested in the latest, newest and improved product. Or even that it's the cheapest. Cultural Creatives have different concerns and ask different questions. They want to know where the product comes from, how it is produced, who made it, whether producers share in profits, whether it is organic and its packaging is recyclable, and they want to know what will happen to it when they're done with it. They want to know the story behind the product and that it will benefit not just themselves but also the greater good. They scrutinise the actions companies take to ensure there is consistency between who they are, what they say and what they do. This new value system is about substance, not image. Cultural Creatives have a strong desire for product (and brand) authenticity, and actively look for that in what they buy. They look for products (and brands) that fit with their beliefs and

values. To check if you're a Cultural Creative, here Ray's questionnaire copied intact (Cultural Creatives, 2009).

Are you a Cultural Creative? 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, 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. ☐ ...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.

Rethinking 'The Good Life'

The importance of values and the emergence of a new value system are also evident in recent research into happiness. Sociologist Juliet Schor points out that "...holiday homes, swimming pools, travel abroad, really nice clothes, a lot of money and second cars are symbolic of a good life." (Schor, 2007). Yet despite having more things, better health and higher pay, we are not any happier. There's considerable data in the US and UK that shows happiness hasn't increased since the 1950s despite better living standards and higher incomes (Layard, 2005). Social research identifies that beyond a certain threshold, things that we buy don't make us happier. In fact, this research shows that excessive concern with financial success and material values is associated with lower life satisfaction and self-esteem. It seems values are central to happiness. Psychologist Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi discusses research that shows "...people report being happier when they are actively involved with a challenging task, and less happy when they are passively consuming goods or entertainment." It was found that activities that involved psychic energy such as: reading, gardening, painting, craftwork, etc. result in greater happiness (Jackson, 2006).

Research by Philosopher Kate Soper identifies a shift amongst some people (admittedly more educated and affluent) who are fed-up with the treadmill of trying to keep up with ever-increasing living standards. They are mainstreamers not activists who are re-thinking what 'the good life' means and what contributes to happiness and satisfaction. These people recognise both current and future generations' happiness is being compromised through the unsustainable burden human activity is placing on the planet. They've become aware of the negative impacts of living an overworked, overcommitted and overstimulated life dominated by materialism. The by-products of materialism (eg: noise, pollution, overwork, stress, waste, etc.), consuming in an unsustainable way (eg: driving, flying, eating processed foods, clutter and waste of goods, etc.), the loss of traditional and familiar practices (handcraft, growing produce, community events, etc.) is all

prompting these people to re-think their values and their way of living (Soper, 2007).

These people are actively expressing their concern and raising awareness by challenging companies and insisting it's time to act in a more ethical and responsible way. It's evident in examples like: the public backlash over use of sweatshop labour in Asia, protest against damaging fast food business practices and resistance to excessive marketing and advertising to kids and teens. It is also demonstrated in consumer demand for GM free, organic and fair-trade products. (Kaur 2007). Soper points out that consumption here is a 'public' concern where people are looking beyond their individual (private) concerns to reflect upon and take responsibility for collective/citizen (public) concerns. It's not too big a leap to see a shift and change in values occurring.

These people are consuming differently now in order to preserve more enjoyment and happiness for themselves as well as for others in the future. They're opting for better choices (eg: organic, fair-trade, etc.). They are spending time cooking instead of relying on fast food and are walking or cycling instead of driving. And they derive satisfaction and happiness out of consuming differently; knowing it's contributing to longer-term social and environmental benefits (Soper 2007). Interestingly recent research shows that while organic food sales in the UK are trending down as a result of the recession, the Food Ethics Council says people's concern about environmental issues and their aspiration to buy ethically is stable, eg: Fair-trade is maintaining growth (Food Ethics, 2009).

Soper believes there is an opportunity to encourage this shift and change in values by the citizen-consumer so more mainstreamers re-think the 'good life' and consume in less damaging and more sustainable ways. Actively consuming in 'better' ways in order to preserve enjoyment for present and future generations has to be worth pursuing.

People Talking Values

So coming back to how values are of use to us as market researchers…. values influence the way people live, what they consider right and wrong, how they judge themselves and others, what they feel is good or bad, what they consider important or not, and of course what they will or won't buy. Values have a role in people's purchase decision-making process as it helps answer questions, "Is this product of use to me?" "How will it affect me?" "Will it make my life better?" Exploring values brings a deeper understanding of the 'relationship' people create with the brands they rely on, as well as the

brands they avoid or reject. In QZONE research in FMCG and service industries, research participants reveal the role values have in the brands and products they select. NB: Quotes are included with permission.

Research into beverages shows that while convenience is important it isn't at the expense of people's beliefs. One male research participant says of a well-known fast food brand: "Their food is terrible quality...it changes the way people live life and how they look." He regards this brand's shift towards healthy options with skepticism and says their "...Healthy options are just a gimmick...They're still selling their main products which are burgers. It doesn't take responsibility for anything other than selling goods. It doesn't act with integrity." Health and fitness is important to him. He says, "If you're fit and healthy you feel better and live longer. You are what you eat. If you eat lots of high processed and fatty and sugary foods, you get the results that go with that." He believes food companies should lead the way in providing better choices and that the world would be a better place with healthier products. Consequently he chooses products that do that for him and brands that express a commitment to that.

In another example from research on beverages, a participant with teenage children expresses her concern around the products available and their environmental impacts. At a broader level she's anxious about the future her children will inherit. She feels a moral responsibility to make thoughtful choices. She says, "I buy my cleaning products online because they're environmentally friendly. I look for products not tested on animals. I'm aware of chemicals in the environment (household, body and food products). I've researched it and I'm interested in it. I read labels. It's time-consuming but I want to stay healthy. I'm aware we're breathing in chemicals. With food I try to get healthy food." However she acknowledges it can be difficult to manage healthy choices in the household. For some Mums staying true to their values can cause tension. She points out, "My boys don't care so it's a balancing thing. They don't like it if it's too obviously healthy. They're older now and more assertive about what they want...My 14 year old has his own opinions now. He's discovered Coke and thinks it's fantastic. I don't like that and don't want him to have it...I want my kids to keep healthy. That matters to me...I read articles on food and its effect on health. I have a strong interest in it."

In research for a manufacturer supplying the commercial building market, research participants (material specifiers) acknowledged how important sustainability issues have become. However they also point out their clients can treat it as a fad. An architect says clients may request sustainability be considered in the selection of materials, however sustainability issues are

bigger than that, impacting the design of the building too. He says the manufacturer (and brand) "Have to believe in their product...the manufacturing facility has to be careful with the disposal of waste and how they use energy. They must be genuine and consistent." He says arguments must be understandable and make sense – it's critical that it's not just 'marketing'. There must be a "...heartfelt response to sustainability issues," where the manufacturer believes in what they're doing. This architect finds it "Painful to see (materials) ripped up and thrown out." He points out how wasteful it is. He believes manufacturers should understand the values of good architecture and says, "Architects want to be proud of producing good architecture. Being different isn't special – being good is special." So this architect's beliefs and values directly shape the product and brand choices he makes for his clients.

Again, in research in the commercial building market, an interior designer says the manufacturer she deals with is their preferred supplier because they actively lead the industry and live their values. She says, "People copy them. They lead in design and manufacture...They have a track record in environmental issues, sustainability; the challenges and commitment to zero waste." She points out when things haven't gone smoothly they've rectified things and come clean about it. "Their marketing story goes right through...They have a whole philosophy...It's not a greenwash. They're committed to the story. They have integrity and don't shirk from issues – they'll sort them out." She chooses this supplier because their values fit with her values. Those values act as guiding principles in the way she works. She believes manufacturers must prove they do what they say, "They have to be committed to recycling, not just say the words, (they have) to be doing it. Everyone can write a mission statement. They have to walk the talk...It has to stack up."

'Consumer culture' and the role of brands in our lives are changing and this is likely to be permanent. I believe it's becoming vital for brands (and the companies behind them) to create alignment with people's values in a true, honest, open, engaging and authentic way. Ultimately this facilitates that brand becoming worthy, valued and meaningful. This requires marketing and research engaging with people consuming in a more collaborative, transparent and meaningful way.

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