

Counterculture analysis: the manson family



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In a world full of different continents, countries, and beyond, there are a vast variety of different societies, and within those societies, different cultures.

While there is a general culture set by the majority of society, there are also branches of other cultures with their own set of values and norms. Some are simply referred to as subcultures, and others are referred to as countercultures. A counterculture refers to a group of people within a society that creates new norms outside the general culture that make coexisting difficult between the larger and smaller cultures (Sociology 39). While there are have been and continue to be countercultures living inside the culture of the majority, some countercultures have gone down in history for their notorious actions-countercultures like the Manson Family.

The 1960s were quite a change from the modest 1950s. The Beatles took the world by storm, and half the American population were impressionable teenagers ready to take their lives by the horns, like questioning the validity of mainstream religious (PBS), and giving drugs like marijuana and LSD power (University of Virginia Library). Also, the rise of the civil rights movement influenced the opinions of citizens all across the country (History). All these concepts were new to the Americans, which made culture a volatile entity among society.

Charles Manson, an ex-convict, saw the fluctuation in culture as an opportunity to display his ideas of utter chaos in front of the public in attempt of gaining followers and support, to which he succeeded. Manson utilized his charisma in manipulative ways by using sex as a way to gain

followers, starting with his first lover after the time he did in California State Penitentiaries, Mary Theresa Brunner. After Brunner, other women began to band together in support of Manson, satisfying his ever desire, officially creating the group the world now knows today as the Manson Family (Virginia).

The idea of this counterculture was created by Manson as a concept later coined "Helter Skelter", the same name originally given to a The Beatles song. Helter Skelter was essentially the idea that the world was lingering on an impending apocalyptic race war between the white people and the black people. Manson believed that the blacks would dominate, but would fail to maintain their dominance, which would be Manson and his family's cue to weasel their way into power after surviving the war through hiding (Virginia). Manson's theory took the norms of this time period and added an element of violence and chaos. He took this theory into his own hands and made that violence and chaos a reality.

In order to induce the race war he predicted, Manson had a plan. During this time of the clashing beliefs between black people and white people over civil rights, Manson and his family committed heinous crimes against white celebrities in attempt to frame black people and create more conflict between the two races (Virginia). The most famous cases held responsible by the Manson family were the murders of Gary Hinman, Leno and Rosemary LaBianca, and Sharon Tate.

The murder of Gary Hinman was carried out primarily by the Family members Charles "Tex" Watson, Susan Atkins, Mary Brunner, Bobby

Beausoleil, and Charles Manson himself. After a scam played by Watson under the orders of Manson, Hinman allegedly owed Manson Money. When Hinman was unable to cooperate under the pressure of Beausoleil, Atkins, and Brunner, Beausoleil stabbed and killed Hinman, finishing Manson's job after slicing Hinman's ear with a sword (Crime Museum).

Atkins and Watson, along with Manson, were also discovered to have involvement in the murder of Leno and Rosemary LaBianca as well as other Family members, Steve Grogan, Linda Kasabian, and Patricia Krenwinkel (Crime Museum). After attending a party at their house a year before their murder, Manson mercilessly killed the innocent grocery-chain owner and his wife in attempt to inflict more conflict to provoke his race war (Crime Museum). Both murders between Hinman and the LaBiancas were equally morbid, but the murder of Sharon Tate garnered the most attention.

Actress Sharon Tate, pregnant with her baby, had had ex-fiancée and celebrity Jay Sebring and heiress Abigail Folger and her boyfriend Voytek Polanski over as guests the night she was murdered, all of which fell victim to the Manson Family's schemes as well. The murder was carried about by Watson, Atkins, Kasabian, and Krenwinkel under Manson's instruction. After investigating this crime scene, police found drugs which initially lead them to believe the Tate case had no connection with the other murders, but eventually discovered the truth with the help of Atkins cooperation (Peacock).

Sociology has coined terms in order to help people look at a situation that involves others' actions that they might have not otherwise understood. The

sociological perspective views society in a scientific manner, which prompts people to look beyond what they might personally believe and know in order to explain why people are the way they are (Sociology 4), which leads to the sociological imagination which conveys the idea that when having a sociological perspective, a person is able to connect personally values to the world outside of them (Sociology 5). For example, looking from the outside, the Manson Family's actions were completely inexcusable, but reading into those actions, their beliefs reflected the pop culture of that time greatly. Manson's theory was named after a The Beatles song, who were incredibly famous at that time especially. Furthermore, like a large portion of the population, the Manson Family were under the influence of drug, which influenced their decisions and actions. The Manson Family are a counterculture not because they lived in an entirely different culture than the rest of the American population at that time, but because they took pop culture to an entirely new level.

Ethnocentrism is a concept that has its negatives and its positives, and each culture fails victim to it, including the Manson Family. Ethnocentrism is the belief that one culture is superior to all others, or culture bias (Sociology 35). The Manson Family had no regret for anyone else in the world but their own "Family". They believed they could take over the world when it would be at its weakest. They killed people for their own gain. The Manson Family showed signs of ethnocentrism in their strongly loyalty and devotion to each other and their community, but ultimately their beliefs of superiority lead them to commit murder over and over again.

Cultural relativism is used in sociology in order to eliminate bias of one's own culture. Cultural relativism states that culture should be judged independently and apart from the standards of all other cultures (Sociology 36). For example, by applying cultural relativism to this situation, one can evaluate the culture of the Manson Family by labeling them as violent, savage people that have committed horrible crimes, however, when their own norms and values are taken into consideration it might not seem so out of character. People all around the world since the beginning of time have relied on religion, and they use that to make excuses for their behavior, which is generally socially acceptable. The Manson Family committed their crimes partly because they thought they were following their own beliefs. Some members of the Manson Family believed that Charles Manson was Jesus Christ, including himself (Peacock 78). When other factors that might not be so obvious are taken into consideration, the actions behind the motives may be emphasized with.

The Manson Family committed murder for their own selfish gain. The factors of sociological perspective, sociological imagination, ethnocentrism, and cultural relativism can be used in every direction possible, but their actions cannot be excused. Yes, they played their values and norms in a sense like any other culture that ever lived has done, but the degree the Manson Family took it to was unhealthy and unacceptable. The Family was misguided by their infatuation for their leader and, ignorantly unbeknownst to them, his manipulative ways. Charles Manson gathered his Family in order to carry out his theory of Helter Skelter by murdering people so he could take the reign

of the world. The Manson Family will remain a counterculture with its negativity toward humankind.

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