

# Personality analysis of charles manson essay sample



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Manson is a convicted serial killer who has become an icon of evil. In the late 1960s, Manson founded a hippie cult group known as “ the Family” whom he manipulated into brutally killing others on his behalf. “ Helter Skelter,” Manson believed, was going to occur in the summer of 1969 when blacks were going to rise up and slaughter all the white people. He told his followers that they would be saved because they would go underground, literally, by traveling to an underground city of gold located in Death Valley. However, when the Armageddon that Manson had predicted did not occur, he said he and his followers must show the blacks how to do it.

The reason why I chose Manson for my analysis is because this man is an obviously highly disturbed individual. Also, being from Los Angeles where most of his crimes occurred, I’ve seen first-hand some of the crime scenes and heard personal stories from family members about encounters. When my mother was a young teenager, she lived near Manson’s Spahn Ranch in Chatsworth, CA and used to hike the trails alongside his house. No one knew until later that he was actually living there at the time.

## Biography

Charles Manson was born on November 12, 1934 in Cincinnati, Ohio to a 16 year old Kathleen Maddox. His mother was a well-known promiscuous girl who was heavily involved in crime and alcoholism. She was briefly married to a man named William Manson which is the reason why his last name was changed. In 1940, when Manson was only 6 years old, Kathleen was found guilty of armed robbery and sent to prison.

“ Mom was in a cafe one afternoon with me on her lap. The waitress, a would-be mother without a child of her own, jokingly told my Mom she’d buy me from her. Mom replied, ‘ A pitcher of beer and he’s yours.’ The waitress set up the beer, Mom stuck around long enough to finish it off and left the place without me. Several days later my uncle had to search the town for the waitress and take me home.”

During this time, Manson was sent to live with different relatives. His grandmother subjected him to heavy religious standards, one uncle decided he acted too feminine so he dressed him as a girl for his first day of school, and another uncle committed suicide while Manson was under his care. Due to all these varied styles of living, Manson never had any steady modes of style of being raised. This dysfunction in his life was carried over into adulthood.

After her release from prison, Manson’s mother continued to date. When her current boyfriend made her choose between him or her son, she made the decision to give up her son. After Manson was rejected from foster care, he lived on his own and stole as a means for survival. He ended up being sent to the Gibault Home for Boys in Indiana. Some speculate that his lust for stealing stemmed from his desires to have something that he could call his own and it allowed him to create his own identity.

He spent much of his teen years in and out of different reform schools. He stole cars to get around and robbed in order to get money. He was never able to be out on his own for very long as he was always caught and sent back to an institution. Manson claims he was repeatedly raped during his

time at the Indiana School for Boys. The first prison sentence came from driving a stolen car across state lines. His first year there resulted in assault charges. He was released in 1954 after being transferred to another prison.

A year after his release when he was 21, he married a 17 year old girl named Rosalie Jean Willis. The two traveled to California in a stolen car and the only thing that kept Manson from another prison sentence was that Rosalie was pregnant with his child. He eventually failed to meet his requirements for probation and was sent to Terminal Island Prison for 3 years. Rosalie gave birth to their son, Charles Manson Jr., while he was in prison and he never heard from either of them again after she ran off with another boyfriend.

He was released from prison again in 1958 and supported himself by becoming a pimp in Hollywood. He then received a 10 year suspended sentence for attempting to cash a stolen check. During this time he married another girl before being arrested again in 1960 for crossing state lines for prostitution. His sentence this time was for 7 years at McNeil Island Penitentiary in Washington and then was transferred back to Terminal Island in California. During this time, his wife divorced him after giving birth to his second son named Charles Luther Manson Jr. He spent his prison time learning to play guitar and studied Scientology. After being released in 1967, he traveled to San Francisco. There he met a woman named Mary Brunner and moved into her apartment. She soon fell in love with Manson and he used that to manipulate her into sleeping around with multiple women. She eventually lost her job at UC Berkeley, fell deep into drug use, and began travelling with Manson. Mary Brunner became an important part in his development of the “Manson Family”. Lynette Fromme was the first to join <https://assignbuster.com/personality-analysis-of-charles-manson-essay-sample/>

the family. The three lived together on the streets of San Francisco while Manson mentored and prophesized his ideas to the girls. His childhood manipulative tendencies helped fuel his status as a prophet.

In 1968 after time spent travelling, the group ended up living in Chatsworth, California on Spahn Ranch. Here Brunner gave birth to his third son named Valentine Manson. Manson wanted a son to carry on his legacy and planned to have many more.

Manson was an avid reader of the Bible. He landed a job working as a movie consultant for Universal Studios. Aside from the fact that he had incredibly poor hygiene habits, he was able to quickly quote any line from the bible which made him useful for the job. He began attending parties given by the wealthy and well known that he worked around and this only fueled his lust for riches and power himself as a musician. During this time, Manson and his girls became friends with Dennis Wilson who was current drummer for the Beach Boys. They spent much of their time at Wilson's mansion, making themselves right at home even when Wilson was out on tour. He met a music producer named Terry Melcher who promised him a deal to produce one of his songs, but the deal fell through.

Eventually Wilson cut ties with the Manson family and feeling this rejection along with his crushed music dreams gave Manson more reason to hate those who he so envied. After listening to the Beatle's ' White Album', Manson became obsessed with their music, especially a song called Helter Skelter, and used the Bible to translate what he thought was their secret message. He concluded that there would be an apocalyptic race war that

would be brought on by the blacks at the time, and the outcome would be Manson and his family leading the new world as the only whites left. He told his followers that he was the 'Fifth Angel' who would be given the 'key to the pit of the abyss'. To Manson and his followers –he was the actual human embodiment of Jesus and his family members were his chosen disciples.

The revolution wasn't happening like Manson had envisioned and he believed the blacks needed his help to get the ball rolling. As his followers began to grow, he tested their loyalty. Tex Watson, a follower, stole \$2,000 from a drug dealer named Bernard Crowe who threatened to retaliate. Manson settled the issue by shooting Crowe in the stomach who survived and never reported the incident. This caused the Manson family to feel unsafe so they all began carrying around guns and knives for protection.

The first murder that the family committed was a man named Gary Hinman. The event initially began over money, but turned into Manson cutting off one of Hinman's ears and stealing his car. He ordered Mary Brunner, Susan Atkins, and Bobby Beausoliel to stay behind who held Hinman captive for 3 days before stabbing him to death. They were ordered to write the words 'political piggy' and a paw print in Hinman's blood to make it seem as if the crime was done by the Black Panther Party. This led to the beginning of the revolution, which Manson called Helter Skelter. In 1969, Manson ordered Tex Watson, Susan Atkins, Patricia Krenwinkel, and Linda Kasabian to the home of Terry Melcher (the music producer) with instructions to murder anyone who was in the house. Using knives, they brutally killed Steven Parent, Jay Sebring, Wojciech Frykowski, Abigail Folger, and famous actress Sharon Tate who was pregnant at the time. The next day Manson, Tex Watson, Susan

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Atkins, Patricia Krenwinkel, Steve Grogan, Leslie Van Houten, and Linda Kasabian went to the home of Leno and Rosemary Labianca where they tied the couple up, stabbed them to death, ate dinner, took showers, and then went back home to Spahn Ranch.

In October of 1969, the family was arrested on suspicion of stolen cars. During their time in Jail, Susan Atkins gave detailed stories about the murders and upcoming revolution to cell mates. During trials, Manson's attorney tried to argue the fact that Manson himself never actually killed and shouldn't be indicted on serial murder charges but Manson hurt his case when he showed up to court with a bloody swastika carved by himself into his own forehead, a scar he still has to this day.

In January of 1971 Manson was convicted of murder along with the rest of the family members and sent to prison. He was transferred between 4 different prisons in California because of constant conflicts with other inmates and guards before he ended up in Corcoran State Prison which is where he has remained since 1989. Because of several threats on his life, he is kept under constant care in a protective housing unit. During his time in prison since the murders, he has been raped, set on fire, beaten several times and poisoned. As of this month, he has been denied parole 12 times after showing no signs of 'rehabilitation' and will not be eligible again until 2027 when he will be 92 years old.

" Look down on me, you will see a fool. Look up at me, you will see your lord. Look straight at me, you will see yourself." – Charles Manson

Sigmund Freud's Psychoanalytic Theory

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Psychoanalysis is the concept that “ who you are” is a mere reflection of biological and unconscious factors that determine behavior. There is no way to know for sure if Manson’s crimes could have been prevented if his past was different, but Freud strongly believed that parental influence plays the most vital role in healthy development and it may have been the root to his life of crime. Manson grew up in a highly unstable environment with an absent father and a mother who made it clear that she did not want him. His childhood is a long history of neglect and abandonment. This caused him to develop a sense of worthlessness and could be what caused his anger towards authority throughout his teen and adult life. Perhaps he sought his mother’s approval by emulating her same criminal behavior because that was all he knew.

Manson’s psychological issues stemmed from his unconscious desires. His neglect could also account for the fact that it was difficult for him to rely on others. Not only was he let down by his own family, but also by the loss of Wilsons hospitality and the promise of a music career. Due to his feelings of abandonment and lack of family, I believe this is what caused him to develop his own ‘ family’ with his followers. Many of the women who were part of his cult looked up to Manson as a father figure because they, too, lacked that in their lives. His desire for stability led him to control those around him which satisfied his need to dominate.

According to Freud, unconscious conflicts of sexual and aggressive nature are the unconscious factors driving people to act impulsively and irrationally. Not only did Manson hold a lot of aggression from a very young age, but he also experienced sexual conflicts in his life. Freud’s Oedipus Complex  
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describes the idea that within a boy's unconscious mind lies the desire to possess their mother and to kill their father. This occurs during the phallic stage, around ages 4 to 5, which was about the time that he was being passed around to relatives including the uncle who dressed him as a girl. Perhaps because he never had those defined parents to develop such relationships with, it led to confusion in his own psychosexual development. In fact, Freud has stated that most serial killers in general usually have issues with their sexuality. There are also the multiple rapes during his teen years in reform school along with his sexual relationships with his followers whom he considered to be his children which contributed to his confusion. It is said that frustration of the libido often turns into anxiety and aggression.

Freud describes personality as having three parts – the id, ego, and superego. The id causes irrational behavior in accordance to the need for self-pleasure and the superego is what gives us morals and a conscience. The ego is meant to balance the two out by using rational ways of gaining such satisfaction. It seems that Manson had a heavy unbalance and relied mostly on his id rather than his ego. This explains his constant need to steal, commit crime, and manipulate others for his own personal gain with no remorse. Perhaps it is because he was never given the proper upbringing for him to develop a proper superego with acceptable morals set by societal standards.

Manson's actions showed signs of denial and displacement to deal with his anxiety. Rather than dealing with his problems, he forced himself to be someone else who couldn't help but be loved and accepted. He took his aggression and hatred towards society, especially the rich and famous whom  
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he envied so much, and vented his unconscious reactions in a different way that would still give the same results but would make him feel better about himself. This is seen by his idea that he was actually Jesus sent for a mission and the fact that he never actually committed the murders himself, but that others wanted to do it for him.

### B. F. Skinner's Operant Analysis Theory

Skinner described behavior as being reactions to our environment that are used to establish an association between a behavior and its consequence. This means things that are happening around us, things learned by us, and things that are reinforced by others. He believed that there is no difference between those we consider normal and those we consider abnormal and that more focus should be on environmental determinants rather than on inner determinants.

Behaviors are learned by using reinforcements and punishments known as conditioning. Conditioning is a form of learning that takes place when an instance of spontaneous behavior is either reinforced by a reward or discouraged by punishment (Grice, 2010). Due to the fact that Manson grew up being passed around from one unstable home to another so he never learned proper behaviors by any type of positive conditioning. Manson was an only child and never spent much time around other family members or peers his age. He never experienced others his age going through the same time of conditioning and only had an idea from the negative sources in his life.

Another fact is that children often learn what is acceptable by basing off of their parents own behavior. Not only was Manson never encouraged when

performing good behavior, but he also saw his mother perform countless acts of negative behavior including crimes and prison time which surely influenced him. Perhaps because he only received negative attention for his negative behavior, he just became accustomed to the fact that it would be the only attention, period. This fact could also be the root to why Manson constantly committed crimes because he learned that if he needed something, he did anything he could to take it regardless of the possibility for reform school or prison sentences (secondary punishment). Later into his adulthood, Manson received reinforcement from his newly formed 'family' of followers which, to him, appeared to be positive and that seemed to fuel his wrong behavior even more. Obviously, Manson's ideas of helping to get the race war started and ordering murders were highly negative, but he was still rewarded by his followers on the level of some kind of a deity. By having his bad behavior reinforced in such a positive way, Manson continued to develop his warped sense between right and wrong.

#### Gordon Allport's Trait Theory

Our proprium (or sense of self) develops through our early childhood environment. Manson developed a warped sense of himself through his early childhood. He held a self-identity because he knew he existed, but his self-esteem and pride had been highly impacted in a negative way. His own mother rejected him a number of times and he experienced numerous events of humiliation. Because self-image consists of learned expectations of the roles we are required to enact and aspirations for the future, his was warped through the examples set by his role models. He was not able to learn the correct acceptable behaviors and therefore, his goals for his future

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were based on crime and punishment. The traits that he learned through childhood development were predictors for his future behavior.

Functional autonomy is motives that we use as adults but develop from our evolved childhood desires. Once again we see his view on crime from his mother and how it bridged his own desires. Manson had a strong desire for family and a sense of belonging so he formed his own family and used manipulation to get what he wanted even at the expense of others. In a healthy mature person, depending on others and protecting their self-esteem is no longer a high priority. This wasn't the case with Manson who obviously still held onto his self-esteem issues well throughout adulthood and could be classified as a highly immature person.

Part of being considered a mature person is self-acceptance which is being emotionally secure with oneself and being able to avoid overreactions in matters that are beyond one's control. Manson was highly insecure with himself. Essentially, he hated himself and made himself into a different person. He created a character that everyone loved and looked up to. He also not only overreacted to situations but also took it upon himself to change the situation to benefit him. If most people experience a dream being crushed or a lie, they would react in a negative way about it, but not to the extent of murder. He wanted revenge on those who wronged him. His perception on reality was highly distorted to the degree where he was not able to develop any skills or knowledge that made it necessary to live a normal healthy life. Being a prophet on a mission from God was his only way of living life in his mind because he wanted to be anyone but who he

actually was. Manson's unifying philosophy of life was essentially that of a naive child, filled with ego-centered goals with immoral societal standards.

Manson's strong commitments to religion may have been Intrinsic oriented in his own mind, believing that he was nothing but completely committed to God and his mission, but the whole point between "good" and "bad" orientations is not using religion for ulterior motives other than just the pure worship of God. While Manson may have thought he was doing just that, in reality he knew that the idea of God could be one of the most useful manipulators. He used his religious orientations to force others into following his rules where he controlled how and when his victims died. Manson's distortions with religion added to his immaturity and goals for his life.

Obviously, Manson's most important trait was political. He claimed to be superior above others and used that for the reason to be almost worshiped himself. That dominance is what fueled aggression and hostility. His need for dominance may have stemmed from spending his whole childhood with only having authority from punishment from time spent in prisons. Perhaps he wanted to turn the tables on himself and become the one power over others in retaliation to all he knew.

### Rollo May's Existential-Analytical Theory

Rollo May's theory describes our views on the world as an absurd place with no meaning. Our entire goal in life is to gain self-realization as we struggle to find our true potential. According to May's theory, Manson did seem to follow this idea throughout his life, even if he did stray from his twisted path. His entire goal in life was to become somebody that others could love and who  
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had power. He did this first through his attempts to become a famous musician by learning to play the guitar and attempting to get his record contract. He had already gained the love from his followers, but Manson didn't develop his plan to the degree of "Helter Skelter" until he realized that it may have been the only way for him to receive the attention he truly desired.

Existentialism leads to the belief that all existence comes to an inevitable end, and before that happens, we must make the best of it. Manson seemed to contradict his path in life when it came to existentialism and religion. On one hand, he was determined to make himself into an icon. He chose his path and didn't let anything stand in his way. Everything he did was a carefully chosen action, no matter how absurd it seemed, and he used manipulation as a primary tactic. On the other hand, Manson heavily relied on God to show him the way. Manson removed the idea of "human freedom" from his world and actually believed that his entire purpose in life was to serve as the reincarnation of Jesus Christ, and this what he saw as his true potential. Even though Manson had achieved the desire for being loved and worshiped, it seemed that he had to keep taking it a step further and dared to push the boundaries of society.

"I don't break laws, I make laws. I'm the Lawmaker" (Mann, 2008). Perhaps he just became obsessed with the idea of more love and more power and developed his own God / Superman complex, or maybe in his eyes he was never satisfied with his achieved goals. Like everyone else, Manson's Umwelt, or basic biological drives, were normal. His basic drives for food, water, or sex were fulfilled. The abnormalities in Manson's modes of being-  
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in-the-world were seen in his Mitwelt and Eigenwelt. Manson felt love for others but it was seen with selfish sexual desires, the need for worship, and as a means for control. He may have truly loved before such as , but after looking at his strong manipulative history, we can never tell for sure if he ever truly loved another human being in his adult life. Eigenwelt is self-awareness and relating to one's self. Manson obviously couldn't love himself and tried desperately to become someone else whom he could accept. This twisted view of himself greatly affected his view on the world and those around him.

Possibly the greatest influencing factor in Manson's personality according to existentialism would be his lack of a moral compass. He spent his entire life being raised with negative morals according to societal standards. He was rejected by his mother where he learned that crime was not only an acceptable behavior, but also a necessary one. The only attention he received as an adolescent and into early adulthood was through punishment. He learned that bad attention was better than no attention. This unhealthy individualism stemmed from a lack of community in his life.

I'm not sure whether to assign a healthy or unhealthy communal orientation to Manson when it comes to knowing exactly what he wanted in life through his values and feelings. This is because he actually did have a solid idea of what he wanted his life to be and how he wanted to live it. He had moral values and used those to dictate his actions. So in this way we can say he was healthy because according to Rollo May, life means making yourself happy regardless of what society says otherwise. Manson can be considered an overall mentally unhealthy and unstable human being. According to this <https://assignbuster.com/personality-analysis-of-charles-manson-essay-sample/>

fact, his communal orientation, while seen as healthy in his eyes, could actually be unhealthy when compared to average and normal humans. While he held his own moral values and strove to achieve his goals, they were all negative.

His anxiety was purely neurotic. The way Manson dealt with stress was not only because he was unable to deal with a threat, but also because he dealt with his problems using extreme measures. The most notable examples of this were the murders that he ordered. He attempted to kill a rival drug dealer after fear of retaliation, which was an extreme way of coping with his fear. The Tate-Labianca murders were another way of coping with the fact that the race war wasn't happening as he had imagined. Manson also spent his entire life trying to repress the anxiety of his childhood, which obviously affected him as an adult more than he would like to think.

Going back to Manson's childhood and how it affected his personality development as an adult, we see that he didn't experience a healthy physical or psychological dependence on his mother. May considers this to be an essential tool in becoming mature. Thus, we can determine that without it, Manson would never really be considered a mature adult. Another fact in being immature is that he was never able to accept his own errors. Not only did he view himself as being a perfect human being, or an actual prophet at that, but also he did everything in his power to make others view him without errors. He wasn't able to take responsibility for his own actions which is why he never actually committed the murders himself. This also could have led to his internal struggle for power.

Manson was in a constant state of rebellion, from early childhood up until adulthood. He constantly committed crimes regardless of the fear of punishments. His inner strength was formed due to negative social moral values, thus making him into a negative individual with negative goals.

### Evaluation of Validity

Freud believed that an adult's personality is strongly influenced by their childhood development, and that gives this theory strong validity when looking at the horrific childhood that Manson experienced. The neglect and lack of attention from his parents, most notably his mother, along with his unconscious desires and unbalances between his id, ego, and superego are all signs that point to why Manson acted the way he did. Manson also had issues with expressing his aggression and defense mechanisms which can also be good explanations for his behavior.

Skinner's Operant Theory describes behavior as depending mostly upon reinforcement. While looking at Manson's childhood development, we see that he received mostly negative reinforcement for his negative actions and positive reinforcement was scarce to non-existent. This is a valid way to credit his negative actions in adulthood because he never received the proper reinforcement as a child. Thus, he became accustomed to his negative behaviors because he believed that negative attention was better than no attention at all, and the lack of reinforcements led him to develop unnatural morals. Skinner's theory would have to be the best way of analyzing Manson's behavior. However, I do believe that while it may be the best, there are still parts of Freud's theory that should be included to make a

complete and valid explanation, in my opinion, simply because I feel that nature plays a small part in the nature vs. nurture debate.

Allport's theory is also a valid choice in ways, but not the best. When it comes to traits like self-image and self-esteem, Manson was obviously considered unnatural. While I think that the traits that Allport describes is one of the main reasons why Manson's personality became what it was, we have to think what factors caused those traits to develop. Was it his lack of positive reinforcements? His unconscious desires that stemmed from childhood? Or was it purely just because of his nature as Allport suggests?

May's theory has the weakest validity for explaining Manson's personality, in my opinion. This is because while Manson did show signs of being an immature adult, Allport strongly stressed that a mature person develops goals and desires that satisfy one's self without regards to society. A mature person must realize what their own potentials and fulfill them, so while by May's theory we can consider Manson to actually be somewhat mature, if we actually compared him to what is normally considered mature as a whole, he fits into a different description. Thus, May's theory seems to be contradicting when explaining Manson's personality.

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