

The hippie movement, a counterculture



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A counterculture, as described by sociologists across the world, consists of a group that does not follow and/or rejects the simplest norms, values, and practices of the larger society and replaces them with their own.

Countercultures can be controversial or just plain weird to members of society, but they have individual purposes that gave them significance at that time and even today. In the 1960s, the prominent Hippie Movement arose and sparked interest all over the United States through their rejection of cultural norms and values concerning dress, hairstyle, work, and raising children (Thomas).

“ Make love not war,” the hippies emphasized. This saying along with others summarizes the beliefs and motives of the Hippie Movement of the 1960s and 1970s. Influencing law, politics, and everyday life, “ hippies” did not care what others thought of them in the slightest (The Hippie Movement). They lived happily while supporting political causes that they found best for the happiness and health of the people of our nation. Outside of political thinking, hippies had views of sex, drugs, and rock ‘ n’ roll that countered the popular cultural influences during the ‘60s. No hippie was the same as another, and their individualism contributed to the way they felt “ vibes” or energies, and focused on liberty and self-expression (Issitt). Flowers, peace signs, bright colors, tie-dye, ripped jeans, and long hair and facial hair for men became the perceptible fashion for hippies as they wandered outside of the social norm (The Hippie Movement).

Culture began to change in America during the post-World War II era, and once the Vietnam War began, hippies spoke out and became famous through their peaceful protests to bring the troops home. Historians pinpoint their locations of origin as mainly the Haight-Ashbury part of San Francisco, California, and the East Village of New York City (The Hippie Movement). Eventually the hippies gathered in small villages or areas of their own, and in 1965, the first hippie commune was established in the outskirts of Trinidad, Colorado entitled “ Drop City” (Issitt). Among the first hippies, Ken Kesey and the Merry Pranksters in California and Oregon contributed to the counterculture, taking long road trips in colorful school buses, growing their hair long, wearing bizarre fashions, and taking the drug LSD, which was legal at this time (Cogswell). Smoking marijuana was also an important part of hippie culture, for they sought a life free of stress. Because of the youthful age of the hippies during their derivation, parents feared that their children would want to drop out of school and join the movement, desiring to take their own path of self-discovery (The Hippie Movement).

The hippies reached their peak in historical significance during the summer of 1967, which history refers to as the “ Summer of Love.” During this summer in San Francisco and numerous other cities across America, Canada, and Europe, hundreds of thousands of hippies gathered to express their value of free love. Here, their well-known nickname of the “ flower children” surfaced. In 1969, the Woodstock Festival in New York marked another milestone for hippies, where they embraced music and peace. Jimi Hendrix’s distinguished performance of the Star-Spangled Banner at this festival signified the political aspirations of the Hippie Movement: to reconsider

general society and its impact on the people (Cogswell). Coverage of these events by the press led to a growth in the movement, but not for long. After the exultant time for hippies of the '60s, and after the Vietnam War concluded, their counterculture slowly declined due to crime, drug addiction, and maturing (Perera). The Hippie Movement's ideology did not completely diminish because of the middle school and high school students during the '60s, who in the '70s and later decades continued aspects of hippie culture (Issitt). Elements of the Hippie Movement do still appear today in the 2000s, however, they are just not as controversial or odd as they were during their time of emergence.

Developing a sociological perspective allows one to view the behavior of groups in a systematic way, and a sociological imagination gives one the ability to see the connection between the larger world and personal lives (Thomas). The hippie counterculture caught the eye of people all over the country as their cause spread, and soon enough philosophers, writers, musicians, activists, politicians, and the nation's youth gathered inspiration from them. Hippies nearly invented the political stance of liberal, socially supporting a sexual revolution and feminism. During the decades of the counterculture, immense social conflict occurred within the United States; although political activism was not the main focus of the hippies, they brought attention to the wrongs of some conflicts, such as the Vietnam War, the civil rights struggle, the Cold War, and the nuclear disarmament movement. They also stood against government laws that banned recreational drugs. The peace symbol, which many Americans know and love today, made its first appearance during the hippie era to symbolize

nonviolence. Overall, the Hippie Movement impacted the entire world in the way that it strived for things uncommon in the American culture at the time, causing America to increase its introduction of international culture (Issitt).

Ethnocentrism, or the tendency to view one's own culture as superior to all other cultures, definitely surfaced during the decades of the Hippie Movement (Thomas). Americans, especially those who were most patriotic, looked at hippies as inferior, weirdos, and a definite counterculture. Hippies celebrated any activity that brings pleasure, such as drugs, music, and sex, and the larger society viewed this aspect of their movement as provocative. The liberal hippies were living inside of a larger culture that they felt was dominated by conservative values and materialism. During the '60s, Martin Luther King, Jr. and the Civil Rights Movement angered some members of society, and the way in which hippies supported individual rights and freedoms arose similar feelings. Focusing on a pleasant society and cooperation as the peaceful pursuit of one's happiness, hippies were viewed as chaotic. The group is specifically depicted as a counterculture because of their emphasis on changes in major cultural stereotypes. Sex, for example, was looked at as a form of self-expression, passion, and love rather than something that should remain within marriages, a norm of this time period. Additionally, few Americans had concern for the environment in the early '60s, so the hippies' environmentalism shed new light on a rising movement (Issitt). The hippies did not possess ethnocentrism as Americans did, for they viewed everyone as equal.

Cultural relativism defines as the belief that cultures should be judged by their own standards (Thomas). Average Americans completely judged and

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criticized the hippies, looking at their movement as indiscriminate, unhygienic, and irresponsible. In a society where equality for women was not generally accepted, the hippie women leaving their homes to join the movement brought them the risk of severe judgement of others. Americans must have understood that the hippies acted the way that they did for a reason; they desired to express themselves and to rid their lives of negative energy. Sociologists refer to the behavior of the hippies as deviant behavior, which means they surely act opposite of the norm (Issitt). They did so because of their desire to alternate the demanding, negative aspects of American society.

The Hippie Movement, although controversial at that time, appeals to me in the way that hippies supported peace and individualism, as do I. Apart from the drugs and crime, I admire the outlook on life in which the hippies braced; they sought stress-free lives where negativity is marginalized. They mainly focused on love, and I believe everyone should incorporate aspects of hippie ideology into their lives. They envisioned a world of cooperation and sharing where everyone spreads love to one another, and their pure love for the world inspires me to do the same. Their spirituality was the opposite of self-centered, which a majority of Americans had at the time and still do. Hippies were the ultimate model for the term “counterculture,” as a majority of sociologists would agree, and their movement overall served significantly to the world and sociology all together.

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