The Alternative Culture

Humanities 11
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The 1960s, a decade usually described by its rock music, drugs, and promiscuity, was the beginning era of the hippie counterculture’s rise against society’s views. Made up of mainly the baby boomer generation of middle class citizens, this counterculture was full of aspiring activist in the categories of politics, culture, and lifestyle. The hippies were known for believing in the power of peace and love, and in their movement they displayed just that to create change. They overall wanted the chance to create an environment that can help break the bond of America’s standards, and allow people the chance to decide their own fate and actions without the fear of how they would be viewed by society. As the counterculture developed, they began breaking from the customary and what they offered was an alternative life for those who craved freedom from the double standards; open sexuality; opportunities to expand their mind; opposition to formality; and most importantly acceptance. The hippie counterculture was looked down on by society for defying the 1950s lifestyle; however, the movement succeeded in influencing not only the youth to live free of stereotypes and the norm, but also American society to gain new cultural perspectives.

The development of the hippie counterculture movement was an indirect outcome of America entering post-World War II, in 1945. When the war was declared over and the soldiers returned home, the depression felt during the war was overpowered by hope and certainty that the future will remain positive. Corresponding with the increase of expectation was the rehabilitation of a conservative lifestyle filled with conformity. The norm was highly influenced, for instance, when “men and women had been forced into new employment patterns during World War II, once the war was over, traditional roles were reaffirmed” (“The Culture”). Society no longer saw it necessary for women to continue the work they had when most men were gone to battle; as it was the men’s priority to take care of financial and manual labor while the women
stayed at home. As a slight enforcement for women to remain home-bound in this developing society, America pushed the ideals of the 19th century Cult of Domesticity. This cult was essentially “designed for the wives and daughters of the men who made up America’s white, middle and upper class power structure” (“The Cult”). Originally formed when females began developing new ideals of life in the 1820s-1860s, it was used in the 1950s as a restraint to what a woman’s place would be in society. The Cult of Domesticity was the outline for women to maintain “piety, purity, submissiveness, and domesticity in all their relations”, as they were now given the responsibility to display a proper appearance and manners to protect their family name and reputation (“The Cult”).

Along in 1945, as people were getting settled, many citizens were excited to finally have the opportunity to start a family after the many years of depression. Thus, in 1946 the baby boomer generation began, populating “40 percent of the nation’s population” with a whopping “76.4 million children” born between 1946-1964 (“History.com”). However, with the growing amount of population of children and veterans returning home, these Americans suffered from minimum housing, poor communities, and racial fears (“Suburban”). William Levitt, also known as the “King of Suburbia”, helped this issue when he joined his family company to create affordable housing (Schneiderman). His first housing construction, named Levittown, consisted of 17,000 homes on 7.3-square-mile suburb, and was open for sales in Long Island, New York in 1947 (Schneiderman). With Levitt continuing after the Levittown project to rapidly produce suburbs in the eastern part of America, he became known as setting the trend of providing suburban mesas to middle class, white families. As they provided both a way for them to escape worn down towns, and avoid contact with minorities and homosexuals; while having the benefit to live in the ideal American dream with a white picket fence and a normal family.
Besides the new conservative lifestyle of the 1950s defining how to accomplish the ideal American family, it also provided insight to what will go against the new society. For instance, many media outlets “portrayed women as obsessed with bleaching their clothes a purer white and defined by kitchen, bedroom, babies, and home. Society even expected homosexuals to remain deep in the closet, and those who did not faced taunting, beatings, or arrest” (Lockard). Women were confined to being housewives, eliminating their acceptance if they were to ever step out of this placement. As for homosexuals, they were not seen appropriate for society, as they went against what normal was defined as in the 1950s. At the time, society was built mainly on acceptance based on appearance; to “maintain appearances was, in fact, a major preoccupation of the 1950s middle-class households. Mothers, fathers, children all faced enormous amounts of pressure to conform to an ideal that has been cooked up by the media and advertising executives. Image and appearance, secured through consumption and adherence to middle-class behavioral norms, held the key respectively and status” (Lemke- Santangelo 40). Overall, the 1950s held a layout of a perfect nuclear family: a family consisting of 1 female wife, 1 male husband, and children; the mom stays home and cares for the children; the husband works and supports the family; everyone portrays a proper and well-mannered appearance; and surrounded by those of a similar class level. Because of this restraint anyone who did not objectified these characteristics were seen abnormal, and were no longer positively accepted into society.

The hippie counterculture movement then began in 1964; when the baby boomer generation became fed up with dealing with society’s boundaries of the 1950s and developed new views on drugs, music, sex, and acceptance (Flower Power). Taking place in Haight Ashbury, San Francisco in 1967 with around 100,000 people attending from all around the
country, the Summer of Love Festival marked the official beginning of the hippie counterculture (“Counterculture”).

The hippie counterculture introduced an alternative to the stereotypes of the 1950s by offering women the chance to create their own interpretation of life. At the closing of the war, women were encouraged to conform to the common stereotypes of a lady at the time. By taking away their acceptance to engage in thought provoking or laborious task; many women lost the sense of passion in their lives. It became stereotypical for men to perceive women as a simple creature that did not need the satisfaction of creativity and productivity. It was even stated that “even wives who worked outside of the home – as millions did during the post-war years – found little in the way of challenge and stimulation” (Lemke- Santangelo 39). The hippie movement offered opportunities, that allowed women to take the chance to change how society sees them. They commenced on a journey that will help in creating “explorer, seeker, and thinkers” (Lemke- Santangelo 50), an environment where:

Women were not simply cooking, cleaning, and minding children; they were bursting out of nuclear families, establishing and joining new tribes, experimenting with sexual freedom and open marriage, devising methods for educating ‘free’ children, and learning a myriad of new skills: organic gardening, composting, canning, animal husbandry, midwifery, holistic healing, and crafts production. (Lemke- Santangelo 159)

By expanding the limitations of a woman, it encouraged them to continue to pursue what they desire without fear of rejection. A former female hippie, Constance Trouble, even made a response on an interview saying “I risked everything – education, career, parental approval – all because I wanted a life that affirmed nature, intimacy, creativity, cooperation, peace, justice and
spirituality…. I wasn’t exploited, brainwashed, duped or oppressed. I was on a personal and collective mission of liberation and I loved almost every moment of it” (Lemke- Santangelo 32).

The hippie movement held similar aspects of the traditional relations between men and women; but they differed by encouraging women to extend their boundaries. In the hippie communes, it was analyzed by inside and outside sources that “roles were generally divided among traditional male-female lines, with the women looking after the food, houses, and children and the men looking after the trucks and physical plant” (Lemke- Santangelo 60). The hippie community was based on the natural element for women to contribute to more motherly and delicate task, and a man to handle more aggressive and challenging ones. Despite this adaption of the woman to man relationship that may seem similar to that of the 1950s lifestyle; the hippies truly influenced a lifestyle opposing the traditional ways. Women in the 1950s lifestyle were stuck in restraints of valuing the structure of a household, that they fell into routine, had no passion, or were not able to please the structure; because there was no interest or they were not trained. In the hippie community, women became more comfortable with performing their labors because it was “in the company of other women rather than in privatized, nuclear family settings” (Lemke- Santangelo 61). This adjustment to the women’s labor made a significant difference by making their task more natural and voluntary, than forced and structured. Joyce Robinson, a founder member of the New Buffalo commune in New Mexico even mentioned “a great sisterhood grew among the women who lived there, a lifetime bond. Even when I stood for hours in front of a wringer washing machine, it never seemed like drudgery” (Lemke- Santangelo 61). The counterculture worked to promote the ideals of “Eastern, esoteric, Native American, and pagan spiritual beliefs to explain or affirm gender duality” (Lemke- Santangelo 61). This was their basic fundamentals; to focus on the harmony of
men and women and to stress the energy of a woman as positive and comforting. They also worked to break the restrictions of the double standard, and distribute more sexual freedom to deny sex, or even explore different forms of sexuality. It can be added that, “while their roles may have seemed traditional, hippie women’s relationship to sex, their bodies, and their partners was not most certainly novel and liberating” (Lemke- Santangelo 61-62).

Hippidom allowed women the chance to explore, and become more comfortable with themselves without the stress of respecting traditional values, and by proposing “free love”. Not many females knew about their bodies, nor thought their bodies were beautiful because of the double standard. In this culture, men have been taught to see “sexual appetite as an integral feature of masculinity”, and that they had the freedom to embrace their urges without ridicules from society. Nevertheless, when it came to women, being raised to view commitment, emotional intimacy, and sex as a package, they faced the opposite of a man. Women have been restricted to undergarments to maintain a certain image; their genitals were seen as “disgusting, ugly, and a source of danger”; menstruation was embarrassing; and pregnancy, childbirth and lactation was shameful (Lemke- Santangelo 62). To add to their shame, the media constantly advertised sex that appealed to the free-spirited men instead of the image-conscience women. The hippie counterculture movement opened the window for women “to enjoy sex without the burden of guilt – of being labeled fast, loose, a whore” (Lemke- Santangelo 65). In addition to, “claiming their right to the total sexual liberation that the ‘straights’ have either denied them through narrow- mindedness, or exploited through prostitution and the ‘pleasure industry’” (Labin 156). In the hippie community, they wanted to grant women the chance to recognize that they are beautiful. Barbara Ehrenreich reflects on her experience in the hippie movement, and mentions how “that ‘newfound sexual freedom’ not only liberalized the culture, it ‘brought the
added benefit of a healthy confidence in their bodies – and in their ability to live, at least part of
the time without being seriously involved with a man…” (Lemke- Santangelo 66). In the
spiritual beliefs of the hippies, they labeled a woman as a pure energy filled with “nurturing,
passive, receptive, and intuitive”, traits that are commonly overlooked by women themselves
(Lemke- Santangelo 61). So the hippie culture worked to help women recognize their inner
beauty and accept their outer body because it is natural blessing. As for a hippie, “to live is
above all to love, which means that the more profoundly he explores all the aspects of love –
romantic, sensual, mystic, carnal, hallucinogenic – the higher will he rise on the tree of life”
(Labin 160). So, along with the boost of confidence of a women and her body, went the proposal
for sexual liberation.

The hippie counterculture was supportive when it came to encouraging men and women
to experiment with different forms of sexuality. Essentially, the counterculture was “more
tolerant of sexual experimentation than the mainstream [heterosexual relations]. Most men and
women simply accepted that sex between men and women was the norm (Lemke- Santangelo
65). Going back to the hippie’s belief in the Eastern spirituality, where people are recognized by
their energies, and relations are based on the harmony between two people; hippies were more
accepting of being free to love how ones please. As a way to empower and help women to
become more comfortable with their sexualities, hippie communes were built to host women
who wanted to be surrounded by other women with the same mindset. Most of these sexuality-
based communes “joined together to forge a feminist identity that emphasized the dignity, if not
superiority, of ‘feminine’ values and labor” (Lemke- Santangelo 71). As for a man, “gay hippie
men, fully at home in neither the hip nor the homophile subcultures, began to establish their own
communes, gay events, festivals, and institutions – all in keeping with the counterculture’s
transformative vision” (Lemke- Santangelo 71). Because of the “declining belief that homosexuality was a psychiatric disorder, as well as the rise of civil rights ideas and groups along with the new countercultural sensibility among the young led homosexuals to a new path by the end of the Sixties. In 1969, when New York police raided the Stonewall Tavern, a well-known gay bar, the tavern-goers astonished both the police and themselves by fighting back. The Stonewall riot marked the beginning of the gay liberation movement in the United States (Rorabough 130). By increasing the openness and acceptance of homosexuals in the community, hippies may have indirectly sparked the rise of the LBGT liberation movement. The hippie counterculture movement encouraged men and women to embrace their ideals of "free love”, by accepting homosexuality, bisexuality, transsexualism, pansexuality, and polysexuality along with heterosexuality.

Hippies created a safe haven and positive mindsets for the homosexuals that were outcast by the conformed lifestyle of the 1950s. It is assumed that “one cannot exactly argue that the hippies spawned the gay liberation movement, it is fair to say that hip tolerance of the sexual activity contributed to the atmosphere in which the gay revolution would emerge” (Miller 56). With the use of the hippie underground press, and festivities dedicated to “free love”, the hippies highly supported the lifestyles of homosexuals. The counterculture focused on five main points as to why homosexuality should be welcomed just as naturally as a heterosexual relationship. They believed “homosexuality is natural and good”, as it was present in ancient history and it can also serve as a natural birth control. Secondly, every “person has the right to free sexual choices”, and everyone should have the rights to acceptance in the real world. Thirdly, “one should not have to hide his or her sexual preferences” because homosexuality was not seemed wrong; so what would be a justified reason for hiding it. Fourthly, the hippie community
believed that “all private acts between consenting adults should be legal”. Lastly, they believed that social discrimination should stop; there is never going to be equality among everyone if America continued to treat people differently, exclude them, and neglect them of opportunities because of their sexuality (Miller 57). Overall, as way to assist the growing “LGBT” community - besides promotion in festivals and in the papers - they provided hippies with “small openings for women to explore alternate sexualities or express bisexual and lesbian identities. In cities such as San Francisco, Los Angeles, Boston, and New York, many gay, lesbian, bisexual, and transsexual (GLBT) youth straddled the hippie and gay subcultures” (Lemke- Santangelo 69).

The creation of communes not only provided homosexuals with a “safe haven”- like organization; but they went on to create communities that can appeal to all hippies. Communes were created for the hippies in the movement – and they were based of the foundation that they fought for – some call it the Utopian lifestyle. In the communes they were ran by their selected politics, and encouraged acceptance, community, harmony, equality, and peace. Hippies in the communes and outsiders agreed that they “are moving towards a conscious community of artists and lovers who live together, work together, share all things – smoked dope together, dance and fuck together, and spread the word together every way we can – through our dress, our freedom of movement, our music and dance, our economy, our human social forms, through our every breath on this planet” (Miller 90). By the hippies creating various and original communities, they were able to offer the best life for each citizen in the movement. For instance, “there were urban and rural, drug- using and drug- free, egalitarian and chauvinistic, structured and anarchical, religious and secular communes…” (Miller 94). The hippies had realized that “generally [they] were raised in a world where survival was strictly for self, for self-gain, for self-survival…. Now the pendulum is coming to a point where the only way we will survive is when everybody is
The counterculture believed that combining like-minded people into these communes will help build community, and a support system to help people through the tough times of the conformed lifestyle. That there would be no growth or change if everyone does not band together. Aaron, a male hippie, concluded that “It was [his] dream to belong to a tribe, where the energies flow among everyone, where people care for one another.... The premise of all these places,” he concluded, “is that we love one another. Freaks joined with others to find meaning in life. In a communal setting deep” (Rorabaugh 169).

Another way the hippie counterculture united its members was through the use of rock. It was stated by several historians that “rock and roll was one of the first music genres to define an age group, giving teenagers a sense of belonging” (“Counterculture” 15). Because the hippie movement was made mainly of the baby boomer generation, rock was the perfect way to appeal to younger citizens while promoting an alternative style of media to the traditional form. Rock music “has been associated with political activism as well as changes in social attitudes to race, sex and drug use, and is often seen as an expression of youth revolt against adult consumerism and conformity” (“Counterculture” 15). Although rock is mostly recognized by its instruments, the lyrics held the greatest impact. John Lennon wrote one song whose lyrics explains the basic purposes of the hippie counterculture: “Imagine there's no countries/ It isn't hard to do/ Nothing to kill or die for/ And no religion too/ Imagine all the people/ Living life in peace... You/ You may say I'm a dreamer/ But I'm not the only one/ I hope someday you'll join us/ And the world will be as one” (John Lennon “Imagine”). In the song, Lennon describes how we need to live a life where nothing can separate people from one another; that the world will be better if we lived in unity. This song was a pure example of how rock bands took advantage of the music to spread political messages to their listeners. To the counterculture’s benefit, “the larger revolutionary
role for rock lay outside specifically political arenas; it lay in the purported ability of rock to expose the sham of the Western culture and to change the life orientation, political and otherwise, of its listeners” (Miller 77).

The alternative lifestyle of the hippie counterculture helped inspire the new adaption of artistic styles. In Hjorvar H. Arnason’s *History of Modern Art*, he spoke about psychedelic art and modernism, and listed that “there could be no more striking demonstration of the variety of recent art than the contrast between the rigors and discipline of color-field, systemic, or minimal art on the one hand, and on the other hand, the surprise images of cosmic or mythic events induced by ‘mind-liberating’ drugs” (Blauvelt). One direct formation of artistic style from the counterculture was psychedelic, which can be defined as “any kind of visual artwork inspired by psychedelic experiences induced by drugs such as LSD….” This psychedelic art also represented the revolutionary political, social and spiritual sentiments that were derived from these drug-induced, psychedelic states of consciousness” (Blauvelt). In comparison to the more strategic and realistic forms of art reviving in the 1950s, the hippies influenced the use of color and abstract materials, along with being under the influence, to produce more thought provoking art. Historian and curator Lars Bang Larsen describes psychedelic art as “made in the service of the hippie lifestyle and politics… that unfolded on camper vans, in communal murals, in light shows and media happenings, and in the graphic design of rock posters and record covers.” Larsen concludes, “However non-conformist and immersive these were, the counterculture was generally indifferent towards the art concept and reified art in its aestheticization of everyday life.” (Blauvelt) Basically, the hippies never intended to create an inspiration in the art community, as they made these creations without looking for a reward of money or acceptance; but simply as a representation of their counterculture’s experiences. As the
age of psychedelic art came to an end, an artistic style called pop art took its place. Pop art can be described as “used imagery from popular media, culture, news, entertainment, etc. and transformed the art medium from traditional fine art” (“Counterculture” 9). One of the most recognized artist that took inspiration from this increasingly popular style of art was Andy Warhol, who was recognized for his “pop art soup can paintings, and [his] satirized celebrity with his Marilyn and Jackie silkscreen portraits” (Rorabaugh 35). Overall, the hippies’ accidental popularization of psychedelic art led to the creation of not only more alternative art styles, such as Pop, Color Field, Minimalism, Post-Minimalism, Conceptualism; but also different mediums to compose an art piece, like light shows, posters, and silk screening.

The hippie movement’s inventives for forming communes influenced new architectural designs, that opposed traditional layouts of buildings and homes. It began with fellow hippies, or newly labeled as droppers for those who built communes, attended Buckminster Fuller’s recent lecture in Boulder, Colorado, where they were introduced to new civilization. A dropper Bill Voyd has written, “we were held together by a common feeling that the whole structure of American society was rigid and oppressive, that the only way to physical and spiritual free lay outside the established system’. Domes represented an alternative to the planned, mass-manufactured, and unoriginal housing developments spreading across America” (Auther and Lerner 9). The lecture in Colorado influenced these hippies to recreate the formation of domes as housing for their communes. Following a couple years after the conference, a developed hippie commune known as Drop City, “was found outside Trinidad, Colorado. Originally established as an artists’ community, its striking domes covered with automobile tops became a prominent landmark in the hip communal scene, and it lasted through the heyday of the counterculture” (Miller 88). Lorraine Wild writes, the hippies were inspired by “a utopian dream of design
working for the public good, with form being secondary to process.” Their methods were “not particularly linear or scholarly, but instead reflected the improvisatory ‘garage mechanic’ (or ‘garage band,’ depending on one’s generation) energy empowering the work.” (Castillo). The hippies’ creation of communes that involved untrained workers performing construction, dome shaped architecture, with its thriving depended on the nature surrounding the commune area served as an influence to environmentally based buildings. One inventor, named Buckminster Fuller, had a “concept of a ‘design science revolution,’ in which the fundamentals of nature would function as the guide for human invention, that inspired the hippie bricoleurs to shoulder their generation’s emerging notion of environmental stewardship and ecological activism” (Castillo). His concept went on to inspire the:

1971-72 course at the College of Environmental Design at the University of California, Berkeley. ARCH 102 ABC, or “Integrated Synthesis of the Design Determinants of Architecture,” a studio taught by assistant professor Sim Van der Ryn, recruited graduate students for a year of research and construction on a forested hillside in Marin County. The studio offered an “on-site experience in the theory and practice of basic building design, land use, and village technology” and — in true back-to-the-land spirit — practical know-how on “making a place in the country.” Mornings were devoted to workshops in skills needed to establish a rural foothold, including “adapting to the natural environment,” site mapping, shelter design, tool use, carpentry and wood frame construction, and “energy and waste systems.” (Castillo)

Overall, the idea of ecotecture was made in response to the hippie’s alternative style of architecture, which basically is “to design in terms of the smallest coherent system, so that we become aware and thus responsible for the effects of our actions,” Van der Ryn wrote (Castillo).
This method is used to “encourage residents to see things whole, the household could be redefined as ‘a mini ecosystem in which rabbits, chickens, fish, honeybees, plants, microbes, and people interact in a flourishing example of interrelated self-reliance’” (Castillo). By introducing various methods to society on being eco-efficient, the hippie culture influenced environmental awareness.

With the hippies influence of being in touch with nature and growing guidance of Eastern based spirituality, they brought major attention on recognizing environmental problems. Hippies references to the environment was “antitechnological and philosophically based on Eastern metaphysics and pieces of the Native American tradition. The basic proposition was simple; human beings were an integral part of nature, not its masters, and one was thus obligated to adapt oneself to the flow of things instead of interfering with it trying to conquer it, which was perceived to be the traditional Western way dealing with nature” (Miller 109). Along with the influence of hippie spiritual views taking huge effect on the development of creating an ecofriendly environment, the feminist liberation of the counterculture also had a huge effect as well. It was no surprise that “hippie women developed their own particular environmental ethic. Because they did not become feminists until the mid-Seventies, they were less hostile to male domination and instead embraced the idea of a unique female relationship with nature. This led to ecofeminism” (Rorabaugh 220). For instance, one female involved in the developing ecofriendly environs was Wendy Johnson, a Buddhist and pioneering organic gardener. Her garden supplied fresh produce to Greens, a San Francisco vegetarian restaurant; and she helped the founder of Chez Panisse restaurant in Berkeley, “set up the first Edible Schoolyard at a Berkeley school. Waters stressed fresh, local ingredients. These organic items were healthier, but eating local food also helped the environment by cutting transportation costs. Because feminism,
organic farming, and the hippie back-to-the-land movement coincided in the Seventies, organic food production took off” (MacFarlane 88). Additionally, “by 2002, 11 percent of all American farmers were women, and they were more likely to use sustainable agriculture. In Washington State a majority of organic growers were women. Marcia Ostrom explained, ‘Women enjoy nurturing life in both plants and in the people they’re feeding.’” (MacFarlane 88) The focus on environmental issues, not only helped in creating new feminine jobs that also required rustic labor for women to break the stereotypes; but it also assisted in making an eco-conscious society accessible. As a result of this awareness, the first publically funded recycling was created in “Seattle in 1973 when the Honorary Mayor of Fremont, Armen Napoleon Stepanian, a longhaired hippie, established a neighborhood route to pick up recyclables” (MacFarlane 199).

The 1960s was a decade mostly described by its rock music, drugs, and promiscuity; however, many forget that it marks the beginning of a movement that worked to create an alternative life for the youth and American society. The hippies allowed the chance for women to pursue what they desire without fear of rejection, and gave the opportunities for women to acquire more productive task than traditional stereotypes gave. Naturally, the traditional formation of men and women relations was present, however, the hippie culture present the chance for women to expand their boundaries. This alternative culture also allowed women the chance to explore and become more comfortable with themselves inside and out. The hippies were supportive when it can to giving acceptance to homosexuals and those who were experimenting sexualities at the time. Along with providing acceptance of outcast homosexuals, they also issued a safe environment for them to live in peace. The creation of communes did not stop at protecting those that were outcast, but it also served as various communities that can appeal to any hippie preference, as their housing unit. The introduction to rock music helped
unify the younger generation of the 1950s, and promoted the ideas of the hippie counterculture. One indirect influence of the counterculture was the creation of various art forms, that displayed more color and freedom than the traditional fine art that was reoccurring in the 1950s. The hippie movement’s adaption of new environmentally-based, building designs inspired a new agricultural approach in American society. Lastly, due to the hippies having the empowerment of their spirituality to be one with nature, they caused the growth of environmental awareness in America. Overall, the hippie counterculture movement was successful in influencing the youth to live free of stereotypes and the norm and giving American society new cultural perspectives; by presenting ways for society to break away from the traditional values of the 1950s.
Works Cited


