**The Development of Sub-cultures, with particular reference to youth cultures**

A Sub-Culture is a smaller culture held by a group of people within the main culture of a society, in some ways different from the dominant culture of a society, but with many aspects in common.

**Subcultures** come in a diversity of forms, associated with street gangs, prison inmates, drug addicts, football hooligans, religious cults, hippie communes, and punk rockers. On a larger societal scale, subcultures include working-class and underclass subcultures, racial/ethnic subcultures, immigrant subcultures, regional subcultures, and youth subcultures.

 Hippie Subculture

The existence of many subcultures is characteristic of complex societies such as the United States. Conflict theorists argue that subcultures often emerge because the dominant society has unsuccessfully attempted to suppress a practice regarded as improper, such as the use of illegal drugs.

The impact of subculture within the United States is evident in the celebration of seasonal traditions. December is dominated by the religious and commercial celebration of Christmas holiday – an event well-entrenched in the dominant culture of American society. However, the Jewish subculture observes Hanukkah, African Americans observe the relatively new holiday of Kwanzaa and some atheists join in rituals celebrating the winter Solstice (K.Peterson, 1992).

A subculture develops an ‘argot’ or specialized language, which distinguishes it from the wider society. Argot allows ‘insiders’, the members of the subculture, to understand words with special meanings. It also establishes patterns of communication which cannot be understood by ‘outsiders’. Sociologists associated with the interactionist perspective emphasize that language and symbols offer a powerful way for a subculture to maintain its identity. The particular argot of a given subculture provides a feeling of cohesion to the members and contributes to the development of group identity (Halliday, 1978).

For example, in Mauritius, the youth especially the boys have a different argot of our national language, the ‘Creole Language’. It actually distinguishes them from the rest of our society. Words like ‘Chek sa’, ‘Mamou’, ‘Payer net’, ‘Met la faya’, ‘Tai Carte’, ‘Pren Nisa’, ‘Siloy Net’ and so on, form part of the everyday jargon of our Mauritian youths today.

Subcultures develop in a number of ways – they often emerge because a segment of society faces problems or even privileges unique to its position. Subcultures may be based on common age (teenagers or old people), region, ethnic heritage or beliefs (a militant political group).

Although not all subcultures are deviant, the term subculture is often used to refer to the values and attitudes of deviant groups, and especially deviant groups of juveniles.

* **Deviant subcultures--**groups that develop values and norms considered outside the culture of the dominant population; examples of deviant subcultures include some musical groups, youth gangs, alternative lifestyles, and non-traditional religious communities.
* A deviant subculture may be considered "deviant" because it is involved in behaviour that threatens the mainstream population or because it is labeled as deviant by the mainstream population.

**Example of the Skinhead Counterculture**

Beginning in about 1968, a new counter culture surfaced in Great Britain. The Skinheads were young people with shaved heads who often sported suspenders, tattoos and steel-toed shoes. In part, Skinhead groups emerged as vocal and sometimes violent supporters of certain British Soccer teams. These young people generally came from working-class backgrounds and had little expectation of ‘making it’ in mainstream society. They listened to music that extolled violence and even racism, performed by such groups as Britain’s Skrewdriver, France’s Brutal Combat and the United States’ Tulsa Boot Boys.

More seriously, some Skinhead groups championed racist and anti-Semitic ideologies and engaged in vandalism, violence and even murder. Immigrants from India, Pakistan and the West Indies became a common target of Skinhead attacks.

Today, while some Skinheads around the world adopt only the distinctive dress and music associated with this counterculture, most seem to espouse White Supremacy and racial hatred. In almost all the countries where Skinhead groups exist, they have committed acts of reckless violence against racial and ethnic minorities, including Jews.

Since the 1990s, lesbians, gay men; the homeless and people with disabilities have also become targets of Skinhead attacks. It appears that Skinheads attack those viewed as ‘weaker’, in order to bolster their own feelings of superiority.

Skinheads constitute a youthful counterculture which challenges the values of larger societies. Their dress and music represent a symbolic rejection of the traditions of previous generations.

**Source**: *Anti-Defamation League of B’nai B’rith, 1993; Canne, 1989; ‘The Economist’, 1990; Hamm, 1993, T.post, 1992)* from the Book: Sociology by Richard T.Schaefer and Robert P.Lamm, 5th Edition, 1995.

**Youth and Youth Sub-Cultures**

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**‘Youth’s style of today’**

**Youth**

* Adolescence or youth is a social construction as it is culturally variable
* Identified by social psychologists as a time of ‘Storm and Stress’ – puberty generates problematic behaviour
* Informal peer groups become an important part of the socialization process and in the development of youth sub-cultures
* There is also the influence of media on youth over issues like fashion, music and consumerism – these as well contribute to the development of youth sub-cultures

**Youth Sub-Culture**

Sub-Cultures are an effective means for some young people to bridge the dependency of childhood and the ‘freedom’ and ‘responsibilities’ of adulthood. They give young people the chance to express their difference from the rest of the society, yet co-exist within it. More importantly, they enable the young to find their own individual identity, yet still have the support of group solidarity.

Youth sub-cultures give easily identifiable teenagers a means to rebel but it is through style, not crime. Style has become the expression of independence. For example, in the 1950s, all over Britain, gangs of teenagers were seen in their newly adopted dressing styles. (The Teddy Boys)

But what appeared to be a naïve, stylish expression of independence for the majority of the young people, gradually became, especially in the hands of the media and academics, who are often the first to voice concern about the nation’s youth, a problematic alien social phenomenon.

By wanting to act and dress differently to their peers and therefore, set themselves apart, they unconsciously offended the dominant culture’s mythical vision of unity and cohesion. But were they doing anything wrong?

In the eyes of the adult world, not only are the youth subcultures somewhat beyond comprehension, but they are also fundamentally corrupt. In short, they are deviant. In a way, it is the adult society that has created these deviants, simply because they have broken no rule other than that which we see as the accepted dominant rules of style, behaviour and expression.

 ‘Style of youth subcultures’

**Creation of Moral Panics over Youth**

The mass media often create a stereotype of young people as a ‘problem group’ in society. They give a misleading impression of young people as a whole.

***Folk devils and Moral Panics***

In his book on the Mods and Rockers of the 1960s, ‘*Folk devils and Moral Panics’*, Stan Cohen suggests that mass media stereotypes of the young provide exciting stories and sensational headlines to sell newspapers. Also he argues that young people are used as scapegoats to create a sense of unity in society, by uniting the public against a common ‘enemy’. Some young people involved in trivial deviant actions or groups, are labeled in the media as folk devils or groups posing a threat to society. This causes a moral panic in society – an overreaction suggesting that society itself is under threat. Editors, politicians, Church people, police and social workers then ‘pull together’ to overcome this imagined threat to society.

**Status Frustration and the deviant sub-culture**

According to the American sociologist Albert Cohen,not all crimes are committed for economic gain, for example, vandalism and joyriding *but they are directly motivated by the success goals of mainstream culture*. Working class youths share the same dreams of being successful like the mainstream individuals, however they have very little opportunity to attain them, as they are placed in the lower stratification system with success avenues blocked. This leads them into believing that they are failures. This causes them to be frustrated, and forces them to find an alternative set of norms and values that give them the same success and prestige.

Most delinquents are motivated by status frustration whereby they feel they are looked down upon by the rest of society and denied any status. They therefore develop a **delinquent subculture** which turns many of the norms and values of the wider society upside down.

The peak age of criminal activity is during the years 16-25. This may be due to the following factors:

* Boys often have to ‘prove’ their masculinity which can, at times, result in criminal activity
* The likelihood of a young person belonging to a subculture is high, and some subcultures engage in criminal behaviour
* Young people may have few legitimate means available of acquiring material goods
* Less responsibilities
* Teenage rebellion can lead to people breaking the law

According to Cohen, those most likely to commit deviant acts are generally found in the lower streams of schools, living in deprived areas and having the worst chances in the job market.

At school, playing truant, messing about in class, and destroying school property may replace the values of studying and exam success. Stealing becomes a means of getting money, replacing career success and vandalism replaces respect for property. Such acts of delinquency enable some lower-working class youths to be successful in the eyes of their peers. In this way, the problem of status frustration is partly solved. At the same time, this offers them the chance to hit back at the system which has condemned them to failure. This is a major feature of the youth lifestyle in Mauritius, especially in certain private boys’ colleges.

**Relative Deprivation, social exclusion and marginality**

Those who find themselves pushed to the margins of society and excluded from the normal everyday life that most members of society enjoy, and who have a sense of relative deprivation, are vulnerable to committing crime. This is because crime offers one way to resolving the problems of relative deprivation, social exclusion and marginality that arise when people are denied things that others may take for granted.

It is a fact that most of the time, youths are blamed for many such acts. For example, in Mauritius, in January 1968, serious communal riots broke out between the Muslims and the ‘Creoles’ of Plaine-Verte and Roche Bois. This led to the death of 24 persons, the destruction of several houses, causing intense psychological effect on the region. In ‘le Cerneen of the 26th January 1968, Mr Duval said that the racial conflicts were caused by “les bandits impunis (of the past) qui ont debordes la vase” and by the **Youths** **who had lost hope over problems like overpopulation, unemployment and economic stability.**

**Youth and Class Conflict**

Deviant youth sub-cultures are usually associated with Working-class sub-cultures. The young people concerned who come from working class families and neighbourhoods, have a working class experience of growing up – they are in the lower streams at school, leave as soon as possible to look for a job, they are unemployed or they go through a succession of dead end tasks and training schemes.

The sociological question is: What is the relationship between such young people’s class-based experiences and their sub-cultural styles? How do deviant groups express working class ‘values’?

Deviant styles are non-conformist and such non-conformity is not simply a gesture of adolescent rebellion against parents but involves, more importantly, a confrontation with middle class authorities, a statement of working class identity.

Young people of Britain in the late 1970s, for example, did not just dye their hair green because they liked the colour but also because they knew what effect this would have on the other people. They wanted to *parade* their rebellion, and this was a rebellion not against working class experiences as such but against middle class attempts to define and confine those experiences.



Likewise, it is the case in Mauritius - Youths adopting different dressing and hair styles to express their rebellion against the whole society as well as to create their own identity.

American sociologists like Miller argues that young delinquents expressed lower class culture ‘naturally’ – they articulated in intense and public but spontaneous ways the beliefs and values they had grown up with (notions of masculinity, what it means to be a ‘real man’, in particular).against the whole society.s would have on the other people. tites, a stateowownoo

**The lower working-class subculture**

The values of the lower working class male subculture often lead to crime among young people. This subculture encourages men to demonstrate their toughness, their masculinity and to pursue excitement and thrills. These features of working-class life lead to clashes with the law.

In order to achieve status in their peer group, young men engage in delinquent acts to show how tough they are. For e.g. a ‘good night out’ consists of a few drinks, a fight outside the pub, a rampage round the streets with mates, and a run-in with the police, with everyone competing to show they are more ‘macho’ than the rest.

### Difference between Crime and Deviance; Law and Law-Breaking

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| Crime | Deviance |
| * Crime refers to those activities that break the law (e.g. murder, theft, rape). * Decisions about what is legal and what is illegal are made consciously by people in authority in the legal profession and the government. | * Deviancy refers to behaviour which is disapproved of by most people in a society and which does not conform to a society’s norms and values. [Norm-breaking behaviour] Examples: bad table manners, burping. It includes moral disapproval, like in many cultures for homosexuality. * Social norms are changeable over time and in different cultures and they evolve as a social process rather than a decision making process by people in authority. |

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| Laws | Law-Breaking |
| Laws refer to all the rules of conduct established and enforced by the authority or legislation of a given community or state. For example, drivers must follow the road traffic codes to prevent accident. | Law-Breaking means violating the laws of a state. For example, a drunkard driving at a high speed, putting his life and that of others at risk. |

### Perspectives on Deviance

1. The **Functionalist view** states that crime & deviance is inevitable.

This is because:

* + Order is necessary for society to function
  + Order is achieved through the process of socialisation
  + Socialisation occurs when people see what elicits both approval and negative social sanctions
  + Without the example of those who do not conform no-one would learn what is appropriate

Who decides what is deviant?

* + Social consensus – It is the idea that society as a whole - a functioning body - develops notions of what is acceptable behaviour and what is not. This rather positive idea of how social norms develop is central to the functionalist view of deviance.

**2. Sub-cultural view**

**The Sub-cultural View** states that particular groups in society operate as subcultures.

* 1. Cohen (1955) & Cloward & Ohlin (1961) – analysed the nature of deviant subcultures particularly amongst young males.
  2. They described the Freudian theory of 'reaction formation' which is a hatred of something that threatens ones sense of self. In this case the reaction formation is against middle class or 'college boy' values. The boys' inability to be part of this value system creates a sense of rejection which in turn causes the boys to attempt to destroy it.
  3. They find themselves unable to cope with the middle class parts of their world - the middle class values that seem to dominate the education system.
  4. Frustration drives the delinquents to pursue values that disrupt the world they can't cope with.
  5. Deviance in this case is **non-conformity.**

**3. The Conflict View**

Marxist theories are critical of the norms and values in capitalist society.

* + Like Functionalists, Marxists recognise that social order is necessary for society to work
  + **But** they also argue that in all capitalist societies the ruling class gains most in every aspect of social life.
  + Ruling classes therefore more keen to maintain the status quo i.e. the norms and values of capitalist society (ideology)
  + The ‘soft edge’ of social control is ideology – the 'hard edge’ is the police, armed forces, courts and prisons
  + Deviance is due to unequal power relationships
  + The best way of resisting the dominant ideology is through political action (the revolution) rather than criminal activity

According to Marxism, the problem of deviance has its roots in the need for the rich and powerful to maintain their own ideology. Deviance occurs at every level in society but working class groups are most often cited when crime statistics are quoted.

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