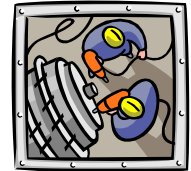# Sub-cultural Theories Continued: Delinquency as the Consequence of Normal Working Class Values. Walter Miller and Delinquency Drift Matza

Matza and Miller/16/3/2000/1999 /P. Covington

Introduction

So far we have looked at theorists who suggest **all are committed to money success**. In this context, subcultures are seen as a **reaction** by **male working class lads'** inability to obtain this goal. Other theorists utilise this concept, but do not share such functionalist assumptions.

Miller (1962) is somewhat different from the rest of the theorists we have looked at in terms of Sub-cultural theory. Miller **does not** see the deviant behaviour occurring **due to the inability** of the lower class groups **to achieve success**. Instead, he explains crime in terms of the **existence of a distinctive lower class subculture**.

He believes that this lower class group has for centuries **possessed their own culture** and traditions with a **fundamentally different** from those in the **higher classes**. This thus suggests that this lower class culture has been passed on not by one generation but for much longer than this.

What are the Concerns of this Culture, Compared with the Higher Strata?

- **Toughness**: this involves a concern for masculinity and finds expression in courage in the face of physical threat and a rejection of timidity and weakness. In practice this can result in assault, and battery as the group attempt to maintain their 'reputation'.

- **Smartness**: this involves the 'capacity to outfox, outwit, dupe, take others. Groups that use these techniques, include the hustler, conman, and the cardsharp, the pimp and pickpocket and petty thief.
- **Excitement**: Involves the search for 'thrills', for emotional stimulus. In practice it is sought in gambling, sexual adventures and booze, which can be obtained by a traditional night out on the town.
- **Fate**: They believe that little can be done about their lives - Ce sera sera, what will be will be...
- **Trouble**: young working class males accept their lives will involve violence, and they will not run away from fights.

Miller notes that two factors tend to emphasise and exaggerate the **focal concerns of the lower class subculture**.

1. A peer group that **demands close conformity to group norms**
2. Youngsters in terms of the **peer status and norms achieve status**.

Exercise One

Look at the following and link them to the middle class or working class.

1. Toughness
2. A belief in luck
3. Belief in hard work and career progression
4. Smartness
5. Conformity
6. Intellectual intelligence
7. Excitement
8. Masculinity
9. Risk awareness
10. A liking for freedom
11. A dislike of authority

Why are they Delinquent?

✓ They are acting out the **concerns of their culture.**
✓ This is **due to socialisation** for many generations.
✓ It is the **result of the need to ensure a pool of low skilled labour**. These repetitive jobs would not be endured without the above culture. The culture provides methods to deal with these jobs, and provides an excitement.

Criticisms:

☝ This present a picture of this group living their lives isolated from mainstream society. **David Bordua** states...

Miller seems to be saying that the involvement in lower class culture is so deep and exclusive that contacts with agents of middle class dominated institutions, especially schools have no impact.

Exercise Two

Do these focal concerns exist?

Exercise Three

Which groups hold them? Class, ethnicity, gender, age differences.

Exercise Four

Do women hold these focal concerns?

Exercise Five

Groups who hold Focal Concerns	Those who do Not

Exercise Six

Write two Strengths of this theory and two weaknesses.

Exercise Seven

Write a sketch, explaining and exemplifying the differences between conformists and working class values.

David Matza (1964) Delinquency and Drift and British Studies. (Downes and Rock)

Introduction

This American sociologist has attacked some of the **assumptions** on which **sub-cultural and structural theories are based**, and provided his own explanation. These deterministic views were in particular attacked. **Matza** claimed that **delinquents are similar to everyone else** in their values and voice similar feelings of outrage about crime in general as the majority of society. Matza's theory also brings in an element of the action approach, which focuses on the way behaviour is adaptable and flexible and involves dimensions of choice and **free will**.

Thus Matza is suggesting that male delinquents to be…

- Committed **to the same values and norms as other members of society**.
- **Society has a strong hold on them** and prevents them from being delinquent, most of the time.
- He exemplifies this point by noting that delinquents **often express 'regret' and 'remorse'** at what they have done. And when in 'training school' shows disapproval to crimes such as mugging, armed robbery, fighting with weapons and car crime.
-
- Far from being deviant this group are...*casually, intermittently, and transiently immersed in a pattern of illegal activity* to put it into Matza's words.
- They **drift into deviant activities**. In other words, there is a lot of spontaneity and impulsiveness in deviant actions.

Subterranean Values
The first point that Matza made is that we all hold **two levels of values.**

1. **Conventional Values**, roles such as father, occupation
2. **Subterranean Values** values of sexuality, greed and aggressiveness. These are however, **generally controlled**, but we all hold them, and we all do them.

Matza thus suggests that delinquents are simply **more likely than most of us** to behave according to subterranean values in '**inappropriate' situations**.

Exercise Eight

In each case say if it is an **appropriate arena** to pursue subterranean values or **inappropriate**....

- School
- At A Bar
- Going To Watch Arsenal FC
- At Work

✋ In The Street
Techniques of Neutralisation

If delinquents are as much committed to conventional values as anyone else and, furthermore, express condemnation of crimes similar to the ones they themselves commit, **why do they commit them at all?**

Matza suggests that delinquents **justify their own crimes as exceptions to the rule**.

'Yes, what I did was wrong, but...'

They are thus able to convince themselves that the **law does not apply to them** on this particular occasion. Deviance becomes possible when they use techniques of **neutralisation**. Matza identified five such justifications of neutralisation....

1. **Denial of Responsibility:** it's not the culprit's fault - something made him or her do it. I.e. I was pissed! It was my upbringing! It is the area.
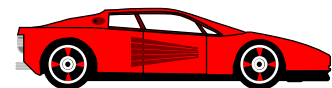
2.

3. **Denial of the Victim:** the crime in general is wrong but the victim in this case deserved it. I.e. I Hate Whites.

4. **Denial of Injury:** The victim is supposed not to be harmed by the crime. They can afford it.

5.

6. **Condemnation of Condemns:** This is where delinquents argue that the accusers are no different from themselves, for example, 'Yeah, I was driving when drunk, but so does everyone else'

7. **Appeal to Higher Loyalties:** The delinquent claims that he or she had to do it because of some general ' moral standard' for example, I could not leave my mates (during a fight).

Exercise Nine

Give an example of each of the above categories of neutralisation.

Drift

The final element in Matza's explanation for delinquency is **drift**. If we all hold subterranean values, and could all justify our actions if necessary, **why is it that only some young people** commit crime?

- Matza suggests that **youth** is a period in 'no man's land', not yet adult but no longer a child
- Youths feel that they **lack any control** over their own lives, and they long to gain some power over their destiny
- This period of **drift** loosens the adolescent from the **constraining bonds of society**, so they are more susceptible to **suggestions of deviants acts** by the peer group
- This may be due to preparation, they may for example, need to learn some skills from experienced delinquents. And or may be needed to be pushed over the dividing line between deviancy and conformity for the first time.
-
- Finally in an effort to show they have control over their lives, youths may commit a delinquent act.
- However, there is **no deviant career**, the youth is not committed to the way of life of crime, and he or she 'tends to drift in and out of crime, for instance, when a decent job opportunity presents itself.

Criticisms of Matza

- If a youth wishes to gain control over their destiny, **why commit a crime**? Surely any act would do
- It makes **no attempt** to group delinquency in a **wider framework or structural location of economic and social circumstances** that drive male working class youths into greater levels of delinquency than anyone else.
- **Taylor, Walton and Young**, raise doubts about the view that those who are using the techniques of neutralisation **are never challenging the dominant values in society**.
- **Stephen Box** suggests that evidence that criminals **are remorseful may not be sincere**.
- **Cynics have pinpointed** the difficulty in operationalising the concept of drift.

British Studies

Willmott (1966)

- Studied **working class district of London**
- Found **little evidence of delinquent subculture**.
- His explanations, were...
- **Boredom**, they looked for fun and excitement. But these were rarely planned nor were they motivated by money reward.
- **Visibility**: because of small homes and lack of space they hanged out on the street. This brought their horseplay to the attention of the police. Any minor skirmishes were more likely to be punished by the police simply because they were under police observation.

David Downes (1966)

- Study of **East London adolescents**, and tested the American sub-cultural theories.
- There was **no evidence to suggest the existence of status frustration** or of the '**illegitimate opportunity** structure's Cloward and Ohlin
- He did find strong evidence in support of **Matza**.
- Their lives were characterised by **dissociation from work** and aspirations of career. They **did not enjoy their jobs**; it was merely a means of gaining money.
- However, **they did not show resentment about low school status** (as Cohen would have predicted)
- **Or lack of Employment opportunities**, (Contrary to Cloward and Ohlin)
- **The lack of satisfaction at work** and school often led youths to stress what Downes called '**leisure values**' which is very similar to Matza's subterranean values. The youths in his study placed a much greater stress on leisure values than middle class youths tended to do precisely because of their relative lack of satisfaction at school and work.

Similarities Between US and UK Studies

Later studies were to **move away from the sub-cultural approach**. Instead **Marxist approaches** began to gain credence. There is though broadly speaking a similarity between UK studies and US. Both groups describe the **structural strain between the 'deviant' minority and the majority**, which come to be expressed in **cultural and behavioural terms.**

Exercise Ten

Match the sentence taken from an A grade answer from a recent AEB examination to the appropriate theorist(s)

1. He thought that in a capitalist society the overwhelming aim was money success.
2. This theory also brings in an element of the action approach, which focuses on the way behaviour is adaptable and flexible and involves dimensions of choice and free will.
3.
4. They contend that as well as 'legitimate opportunity structures' varying between groups 'illegitimate opportunity structures' also vary.
5. He suggests that although groups of working class males originally accept the wider social goals, their growing awareness of their inability to achieve these goals leads to the development of 'status frustration', where the goals are ultimately rejected. Instead, new and deviant sets of goals are created and a delinquency sub-culture formed.
6. This writer thought that young working class males were not rejecting the norms of society as a whole, but were attempting to live up to the norms of working class life. Lack of role models, fatherless families' etc have left the lower classes with very different norms from the middle classes.
7. These theorists took Cohen's idea further by suggesting that there were three subdivisions of criminal subcultures. One where the gang turned to crime, another because of lack of opportunity turned to conflict and gang warfare and the third 'double failures' who were denied access to either of these.
8. He saw the rejection of particularly young working class males to the lack of educational and material success, and related it to the formation of gangs. These turned the norms and values of society up side down with deviance and rejection of the system giving gang members status.

Exercise Eleven

Match the criticism with the appropriate theory….

1. Not everyone turns to crime, and some crimes such as petty vandalism do not bring money success.
2. This present a picture of this group living their lives isolated from mainstream society. David Bordua states...Miller seems to be saying that the involvement in lower class culture is so deep and exclusive that contacts with agents of middle class dominated institutions, especially schools have no impact.
3. This theorist overplays the fact that there is a dominant set of values that is rejected by British youth. More modern Relativist approaches question this commonality of values.
4. Not all working class males turn to gangs for self-esteem.
5. However, there is a wide range of explanations as to why people become retreatist or conformist that this study does not touch on.
6. This study fails to look at females and ethnic minority groups.

Exercise Twelve

Explain the main reasons for the development of subcultures.

Resources Used

Sociology in Perspective: Mark Kirby et al
Crime and Deviance: Simon Holdaway
Introduction to Sociology: Mike O'Donnell, 4th Edition
Sociology an Interactive Approach: Nik Jorgensen et al
Sociology, Themes and Perspectives: Michael Haralambos, 4th Edition.
Investigating Crime and Deviance: Stephen Moore, 2nd Edition.

Matza/4/9/97/P.Covington/
Matza and Miller/19/5/98/P.Covington/ 1997/