"A" Level Sociology

A Resource-Based Learning Approach

Module Two:
Media and Popular Culture

Unit M1: Youth Subcultures

| Syllabus Area |

" **P**opular culture, Definitions and Themes. Culture and sub-culture, youth culture; consumer culture and life style; modernism and post-modernism".

| What? |

The keywords in this unit are:

- **Youth subcultures**
- **Adolescence.**
- **Non-sociological theories of youth subculture**
- **Culture** and **Subculture**
- **Deviant youth cultures**
- **Spectacular subcultures**
- **Mass society**
- **Identity**
- **Anomie**
- **Self-fulfilling prophecy**

| 1. Consumerism and Affluence |
| 2. Effect of the 2nd World and socialisation. |
| 3. The Extension of Education. |
| 4. The Influence of the Mass Media. |

| Why? |

You will be able to define:

- **The concepts of youth culture and subculture and the difference between the two ideas.**
- **Varieties of sociological theories of youth (including Functionalist, Marxist and Interactionist perspectives).**
- **The manufacture of youth subcultures.**

| How? |

You will be able to apply your knowledge to:

- **Non-sociological theories of youth**
- **Sociological theories of youth**

| Decision |

You will be able to evaluate:

- **The difference between sociological and non-sociological theories of youth subcultures.**
- **A variety of sociological theories of youth culture and subculture.**
- **The significance of the concepts of class, gender and ethnicity in relation to youth subcultures.**
- **The concept of youth subcultures.**

Youth Subcultures

In previous Units we have looked at various ways that the concepts of culture and subculture can be defined and, to some extent, the relationship between culture, identity and life style. In this Unit, therefore, we can start to develop these ideas by applying them to a particular form of subculture, namely the concept of youth subcultures.

What?   The key ideas in this section are:

- **Adolescence.**
- **Non-sociological) theories of youth subculture**
- **Youth culture and subculture**
- **Self-fulfilling prophecy**
- **Youth as a transition period**

Why?   Historically, the study of **youth subcultures** is a relatively new of area of sociological analysis for reasons which will become clear as we progress through this Unit.

The majority of studies have been written after the 2nd World War and concentrate on the development of youth subcultures after this time. There are exceptions however. **Pearson** ("**Hooligan: A History of Respectable Fears**", **1983**) focuses on various youth subcultures throughout the 20th century.

Early studies in this area were mainly produced by Functionalist sociologists (the dominant sociological perspective in 1940's / '50's) and tended to focus upon **youth** as a distinctive form of **culture**.

The **relatively modern** nature of youth subculture studies is not too surprising, given the fact that most sociologists tend to agree that the idea of **youth as a distinct phase in social development** is itself a relatively modern phenomenon - one that is characteristic of **advanced industrial societies** with **well-developed educational systems**.

For example, general themes in this "**sociology of youth**" tended to be things like:

- Youths holding **norms and values** that were significantly **different** to the norms and values held by their parents.

- The idea that youth represents a period of "**ambivalence**" - a distinct **phase** in social development that represents a **transition period** from childhood to full adulthood.

How?   **Philip Aries**, for example (**"Centuries of Childhood**", 1962) argues that youth is a relatively modern concept and he claims it was only from the mid-17th century that "young people" started to be seen as both dependent on adults and as having special characteristics of their own.

For example, the idea that children exist in a state of "innocence" is one idea that springs to mind here - a concept that is still fairly current in modern societies)

According to **Aries**, such ideas developed initially amongst the **upper classes** and, although **Aries' methodology** has been criticised, it is evident that **youth** - as opposed to **childhood** - is a concept that has started to have significant meaning in the 20th century. We need only think, for example, of the way young people were treated in Victorian Britain to suspect that the concept of youth is a relatively modern one in our society. One of the earliest attempts to develop the idea of youth as a distinctive phase in social development involved the concept of adolescence.

> See, for example, **Martin Shipman** ("**The Limitations of Social Research**" 1982).
>
> Part of **Shipman's** criticism is that **Aries** misinterpreted evidence about the way children were supposedly viewed and treated as "young adults" in the past.

Exercise 1	**Identify and explain two problems we might encounter when trying to define the concept of "youth".**

What?	**The Transition From Child To Adult.**

Adolescence.

Why?	In **psychology**, for example, the concept of **adolescence** become current at the end of the 18th century.

Adolescence defined a period "between childhood and adulthood" and **G.Stanley Hall** ("**Adolescence**", 1904) provides the first 20th century discussion of a claimed relationship between adolescence and distinctive patterns of behaviour amongst young people.

Hall's work focuses upon the relationship between **biological / chemical changes** and human behaviour and represents an attempt to understand **youth culture** as a form of **pathological response.**

> In basic terms, **pathology** relates to the way **social** behaviour is related to **biological** development. For example, changes in body chemistry during puberty may theoretically produce behavioural changes in the individual - behavioural changes that the individual is **relatively powerless** to prevent or control.
>
> If something is **pathological**, therefore, it means we cannot stop it happening (a pathological liar, for example, cannot stop lying).

How?	In this respect, Hall noted that the "problems of youth" included:

- **Unbridled sexuality**
- **Rejection of parents / teachers**
- **Lack of concentration**
- **Extremes of emotion / violence**
- **Unpredictability.**

Deviant behaviour, therefore, resulted from **chemically-based** body changes in the **transition** from child to adulthood. This behaviour was pathological and was not, therefore, the fault of the person involved. Young people's behaviour, in this sense, could be explained as a type of "disease" caused by chemical changes in the body. In addition, Hall argued that social conditions could aggravate this condition.

> For example, confining children within the family or classroom highlights behaviour as deviant when it is really only a case of "growing-up" - a natural process through which all humans supposedly pass.

The above relates the concept of **adolescence** to **psychological problems** associated with a **transition** from childhood to adulthood in **modern** societies. This is mainly because **non-industrialised (pre-modern) societies** do not need a transition period between childhood and adulthood. In these types of society, the individual passes directly from childhood to adulthood.

> Without going into detail here, the basic idea is that modern societies have a complex division of labour. In basic terms, people do a wide variety of jobs and they have to learn the knowledge and skills required to perform them which requires a period of extended education (for example, in our society, basic compulsory education now takes place up to the age of 16). This creates a period "between childhood and adulthood" that we label "youth".

Hall argued that adolescence involved various **emotional problems** that were associated with such things as:

- The break from family life experienced by teenagers as they moved out of the confines of their family and into the wider, more impersonal, confines of education.

- The development of independent personalities that starts to conflict with parental socialisation.

In this respect, Hall placed great emphasis upon adolescence being a time of emotional **storm and stress** as the individual was forced to try to come to terms with the differing demands placed upon them by parents, teachers, peers and so forth.

> A sociological term for this is **anomie** which, in this sense, means that the individual becomes **confused** about the **norms** of behaviour they are expected, by others, to display. In basic terms, adolescence represents a period of rapid **social change** for the individual where the norms of childhood give way to the norms of adulthood. The adolescent has to learn to replace childhood norms with adult norms and this takes time and can result in **normative confusion** (**anomie**) that expresses itself as "behavioural problems of adjustment".

Decision

This general way of viewing the concept of adolescence has been criticised by both psychologists and sociologists. We can look at some basic criticisms in the following terms:

Firstly, modern psychology, physiology, and sociology views the "stresses" identified by Hall as **social** rather than **physical**.

For example, we could explain "teenage behavioural problems" in terms of the concept of **a self-fulfilling prophecy**

We can outline this idea in the following way.

A **self-fulfilling prophecy** is a **prediction** (prophecy) that eventually comes true **because** of the fact that a prediction has been made.

In effect, therefore, by predicting something will happen you effectively act in ways (consciously or, more usually, unconsciously) that make your prediction come true.

- In our society, we generally expect young people / teenagers to be "difficult", in terms of their behaviour (the **prophecy**).

- Where people associate the period of transition between childhood and adulthood with tension, emotional stress and so forth, the behaviour of adolescents is consequently, interpreted in this light (**self-fulfilment of the prophecy**).

In effect, the interpreter looks for evidence of emotional problems in behaviour because that is what he / she **expects** to find. In this respect, a teenager who does not display "emotional problems" may ironically become a cause for concern because they are effectively deviating from the expected (predicted) norm.

The adolescent, taking their behavioural cues from the expectations of others begins to develop "problem behaviour" because this is what seems to be expected from them…

Secondly, not all teenagers experience the "problems" that are supposedly associated with youth. Given that chemical changes in the body take place, the degree to which they affect social behaviour appears to be **culturally determined**. Again, this may relate more to the expectations that adults and young people have about how they are supposed to behave at a certain stage in the life-cycle than to any real pathological condition.

There is, therefore, little evidence to suggest that "adolescence", in itself, is necessarily an "emotionally stressful" period in life. However, the increasing **length** of adolescence may produce **tensions** between the **biological** and the **social** aspects of human development.

This is an important idea, not just in this context but for the "sociology of youth subcultures" generally.

A great of research over the years has concentrated on the "**spectacular subcultures**" (the **punks**, **hippies**, **skinheads**, **goths** and the like who hit the media headlines at various times), whereas very little work - until recently - has been done on the vast majority of youths who do **not** join such clearly-demarcated subcultures. In this Unit we need, therefore, to recognise and explain two basic things:

Firstly, what are the causes of and reasons for **spectacular subcultures**?

Secondly, what happens to the vast **majority** of young people for whom their youth is little more than a period of time between the end of childhood and the beginning of work, marriage and the like?

It's possible, therefore, to view youth subcultures as a means of managing the resultant dislocation between emotional / biological / psychological maturity and social norms.

> For example, there may exist a tension between physical sexual maturity and the social norms governing sexual activity (when you are allowed to have a sexual relationship, with whom and so forth).

Finally, these kinds of biological / pathological "explanations" of youth are **methodologically** flawed because their starting-point is the assumption of the very thing they should be concerned to test.

> That is, they **take for granted** the idea that "teenagers" are somehow "different" to every other age group and then collect empirical evidence to support their theory. This, in turn, simply serves to confirm the original "assumption of difference".

What?   **The Sociology of Youth.**

Common sense (non-sociological) theories of youth subculture

Why?   To begin our look at sociological analyses of youth cultures and sub-cultures, the work of Geoffrey **Pearson** ("**Hooligan: A History of Respectable Fears**", 1983) is a good place to start, mainly because Pearson's work gives us a solid **historical perspective** on the "recurrent problem of youth" in Britain throughout the 19th and 20th centuries.

Pearson argues that common **sense (non-sociological**) analyses of youth deviance tend to have a number of characteristics:

> These theories focus on spectacular subcultures and invariably view them as "socially undesirable". Examples of explanations for the existence of youth subcultures include:
>
> **1. Lack of parental responsibility.**
>
> **2. The breakdown of the family / authority and respect for the law / community values.**
>
> **3. The lack of discipline in schools.**
>
> **4. The "permissive society".**
>
> **5.The (bad) influence of the mass media (**television and film in particular).

1. They tend to define "the problem of youth" as one that is specific to the **age** we live in. That is, the (mis)behaviour of the young is invariably seen as a novel problem - one that was not a problem in the **previous generation**.

2. Alongside this argument, explanations of youth deviance develop around the idea that an **idealised past** is contrasted with an **uncertain present**. In trying to make sense of youth behaviour, people contrast deviant behaviour now with a "**golden age**" sometime in the past (usually "20 - 25 years ago" - probably a popular choice because it refers to the previous generation) "when youth deviance was not a problem".

3. Given the confines of this viewpoint, explanations for youth deviance are given in terms of "things that are wrong now that weren't wrong in the past".

Although Pearson clearly shows that, from the 19th century onwards each successive generation explained things in this way (which should alert you to the fact that some contradiction and misunderstanding of the phenomenon is present here), commensense perceptions and themes still persist.

Thus, the general perception of the "causes" of youth deviance may change but simple, repetitive, themes are always in evidence (especially in the mass media).

For example, in the **early 20th century, comics** were a bad influence on youth, whereas today it is **videos** that provide the bad influence - the technology changes but the song remains the same.

For example, as I noted earlier, various **commensense explanations** for the existence of **deviant youth subcultures** include:

1. Lack of parental responsibility.

2. The breakdown of the family (especially amongst the working class).

3. The breakdown of authority and respect for the law.

4. The breakdown of community values.

5. The lack of discipline in schools.

6. The "permissive society" (at the present, the 1960's represent our permissive society, but this theme reappears from time to time throughout our history).

7. The (bad) influence of the mass media (television and film in particular).

In the following pages, we can look briefly at some of these themes in various common sense theories surrounding the development of **deviant youth cultures** in post 2nd World War Britain.

The difference between the two, for our purposes, is that this view of **culture** refers to all young people, while **sub-culture** refers to particular groups of young people.

In this respect, the types of theories considered here tended to see "all young people" as potentially much the same (or, in technical terms, as "a **relatively undifferentiated mass**").

The defining factor involved in this group of explanations is the stress placed on the significance of youth as being substantially different from adulthood or childhood - a **culture** rather than a **subculture**.

In this respect, there was a tendency to link the development of specific forms of youth culture to **social change**.

- Thus, taking a selection of these theories, various "causes" of youth cultures were identified as:

This involved the implicit use of concepts such as **anomie** (social change as potentially confusing to the individual) and **socialisation** (the idea that young people were being lead astray by **inadequate socialisation** from parents, teachers and the like).

- **Consumerism** and **affluence** (especially post-2nd World War).
- The effect on children's **socialisation** of the 2nd World War.
- Extension of **education** into the "teenage years" (the creation of a "**transition phase**" between childhood and adulthood).
- The effect of the **mass media** on teenage behaviour.

Exercise 2	**Briefly define the concept of a "golden age"**

Exercise 3	**Suggest two reasons for the argument that the concept of "youth" may not be a sociologically useful category.**

Decision	We can briefly evaluate these general types of theory in the following way:

1. Consumerism and Affluence

Abrams ("**The Teenage Consumer**",1959), for example, characterised youth behaviour and culture as "affluence without responsibility" and focused especially on "working class consumerism". The basic idea here was that young people, with lots of spare money and few responsibilities began to get out of control in terms of their general behaviour.

The idea that affluence is linked to changes in behaviour is called the "**Embourgeoisement Thesis**".

.**Affluence** means having money and **consumerism** means being encouraged to buy certain goods and services.

The argument here is that young people, form the 1950's onward, were able to easily earn reasonable amounts of money (young people were more affluent than their pre-war peers) and they used this spending power to buy consumer goods aimed directly at this age group (clothes, records and the like).

In basic terms, this involves idea that the increasing affluence of young working class people leads to the adoption of middle class norms and values and lifestyles.

This theory has been largely discredited by the work of **Goldthorpe Lockwood, et al ("The Affluent Worker In The Class Structure**", 1969). In a study of "affluent workers" at the Vauxhall Car Factory in Luton they demonstrated major differences in the lifestyles, behaviour, social expectations and so forth of working class and middle class employees.

There are a couple of problems we can note with this particular theory.

- **Firstly**, we can question the extent to which young, working class, people could be considered affluent in Britain in the late 1950's / 1960's. For example, **Brian Abel-Smith** and **Peter Townsend** ("**The Poor and the Poorest**", 1965) suggest that the idea of a general affluence amongst all sections of society in Britain was largely a myth (just as it has been a myth in the 1970's and 1980's).

- **Secondly**, even if **affluence and consumerism** could be shown to be characteristic of all young people at this time it doesn't explain why some young people (especially young, working class, males) became involved in various deviant youth subcultures (such as Teddy Boys, Beatniks and Mods and Rockers) but not others.

2. Effect of the 2nd World War on socialisation process of young:

Fyvel ("**The Insecure Offenders**", 1966) linked the absence of a father during 2nd World War. with "incomplete socialisation" and "Cold War insecurity".

→

Thus, the basic explanation here is that "faulty or inadequate" **socialisation**, linked with social stress (feelings of fatalism leading to displays of **hedonism**), lead to youth cultures such as Teddy Boys (a violent male youth subculture)

- We have recently seen a reappearance of this theme in the political attack on single-parents (especially mothers) as being responsible for raising a generation of juvenile delinquents.

> This idea relates to the supposed lack of parental control over "the young" because of the absence of a father. In addition, young males were supposedly lacking "male role models" for the same reason.
>
> "Cold War insecurity" relates to the idea that, during the 1950's / early 1960's the young were prone to feelings of fatalism about the future because of the fear of atomic war between America and the Soviet Union. This supposedly created a "live now for tomorrow we may die" culture amongst the young.

A problem here, of course, is that there is little evidence that the "absence of fathers" can be linked to the behaviour of teenagers. In addition, the "problem of youth behaviour" seems to have existed both prior to the 2nd World War and long after the supposed effects of "incomplete socialisation" and "insecurity" should have diminished...

3. The Extension of Education.

The basis of this type of argument is that the gradual extension of **compulsory education** to 16 (in Britain) led to young people seeing themselves as "different". That is, as going through a "special phase" in their physical and cultural development. This, it is argued, led to the development of specific types of youth culture that reflected the "special importance" that society gives to this period in life.

- The idea that the extension of education into the late teenage years has helped to create a perception that youth is a **social category** that has some **meaning** to both the people involved and adults is probably **valid**. In this respect it represents a potentially significant **starting-point** for any sociology of youth (since it explains the emergence of youth as a recognisable and meaningful social category), but it is not in itself an explanation for the behaviour of the young since it fails to explain the behaviour of all "teenagers". Why, for example, do some young people conform to various social norms while others rebel?

4. The Influence of the Mass Media.

This is always a popular explanation for the behaviour of young people and one version of the theory is that the mass media are seen as being responsible for "spreading the word" about youth culture. In effect, the media (especially television) create a national phenomenon by causing "impressionable and emotionally vulnerable youth" to **copy** the types of "anti-social behaviour" they supposedly see in the media.

> The theory of media effects on which this idea is based is the **hypodermic syringe** or "**magic bullet**" **model** of **media effects**. We have already looked at this model in an earlier Unit.

The basic - and relatively simple - "media effects" theory relies heavily on the concept of "**mass society**". This theory was popularised by the **Frankfurt School** during and after the 2nd world war (a group of **Marxist** sociologists that included Herbert Marcuse, Theodore Adorno and others.). They argued that in a **mass society** the ties of **community**, family and the like that were a source of **individual identity** in the past are no-longer as powerful as they once were and people look to other sources to "tell them who they are". The media are an obvious source of **identity** here.

> **Mass society** involves the increasing "atomisation" of society into a mass of individuals - something that we looked at earlier when discussing the origins of the "hypodermic syringe" model of media effects)

> This basic theory (of both society and youth) is one enjoying a resurgence in (post-)modern sociology, albeit in a more-sophisticated form.

We can note a couple of possible problems with this type of theory and its explanation of youth subcultures:

Firstly, while media involvement is significant in the popularisation of a **spectacular subcultures** such as the **Hippy** movement in the 1960's, there is such a wide diversity of modern **unspectacular subcultures** that this type of simple, unsophisticated, media effects theory is not particularly useful for sociological explanations of youth subcultures.

Secondly, some modern sociologists (such as **Stan Cohen**) argue that youth subcultures are actually a **media myth** in the sense that it is the media itself that is largely responsible for the development of spectacular youth subcultures. Cohen's ideas are considered in more detail at a later point in this Unit (**see page 31**).
Sociological Theories of Youth Subcultures.

In this section we are going to look at a range of
sociological theories, grouped for **organisational
convenience** into various perspective categories
(Consensus, Conflict, Interactionist and so forth).

The basis idea here is that similar
theories can be grouped into various
categories to make it easier for you to
organise your ideas, notes and so forth.

A. Consensus (Functionalist-type) Theories of Youth.

Affection,
Traditional relationships,
Sharing relationships,

Although the theories we've just considered owed varying
degrees of debt to Functionalism, we can now turn towards a
more-explicit analysis of what might be crudely termed **consensus-based**
theories.

What? We are going to look at two basic types of consensus-based theories
of youth.

1. Those that focus on the idea of **youth cultures**.
2. Those that focus on the idea of **youth subcultures**.

Why? It is important that we differentiate between the two basic types of
explanation. Theories of **youth culture**, for example, tend to focus on the idea
of young people as a large, **relatively undifferentiated**, groups who, because
of their similar social positions in society,
develop similar responses to the social
pressures that surround them.

For example, **gender** might be an
important subcultural factor. Young males
and females, for example, although having
their **age** in common actually have very
different experiences and expectations of
youth. This leads to the development of
different **reactions**, such as young males
being much more likely to form gangs or
subcultural groups than young females.

Theories of **youth subculture**, on the other
hand - while accepting the broad premise that
youth is a specific social category - tend to
argue that we should focus our attention on the
"groups-within-the group" aspect of subcultures.
That is, although all young people share certain
features and characteristics that derive from their position in society, we can
identify and explain the behaviour of different groups within this category on
the basis of their particular social characteristics (such as **class, gender,
ethnicity, region** and so forth).

How? Consensus theories of **youth culture** frequently use the concept of
anomie as the basis of their argument.

Writers such as **Talcott Parsons** ("**Essays in Sociological Theory**", 1964)
and **Eisenstadt** ("**From Generation to Generation**", 1956), for example,
begin with the fundamental assertion that the **family group** is the **primary
unit** of **socialisation** in society.

In this respect, they contrast the characteristics of the **family** with the characteristics of **wider society** (especially work)

The argument, in this respect, is that people develop **patterns of behaviour** that are appropriate to the social institutions to which they belong. The point here is that the behaviour learnt within the family group is unlikely to be considered appropriate in other social groups (such as education or work).

> Self-interest,
> Emotional coldness,
> Judgements made about others on the basis of social status.

As people move from one pattern of behaviour to another (from the family to work, for example) the concept of **anomie** comes into play because the movement from one institution governed by one type of pattern (family life) to an institution governed by another type (the workplace) would potentially result in feelings of unhappiness, isolation and loneliness - we would not know how to behave properly in the new institution since we would be experiencing an "anomic situation".

> This is because the values and norms we learn during childhood within the family are not totally appropriate to the norms we need to display in later life in other institutions.
>
> For example, an employer is unlikely to respond favourably to being addressed by a "pet name", whereas your father or mother may encourage the use of pet names ("mum, dad" etc.).

Sociologists such as Parsons, however, argue that society is a form of "**self-adjusting and self-regulating organism**". If social life is to continue, societies are **forced** to create ways of easing such **transitions** - to make them less traumatic and thereby eliminate the possible causes of anomie. In this respect, the general **function** of youth cultures is to provide a "period of transition" between childhood and adulthood that reflects the transitional period in modern societies between the family and work.

> This illustrates the initial distinction made earlier between **youth culture** and **subcultures**. **Parsons**, for example, is not particularly interested in the different **forms taken by** youth subcultures since they are all merely variations on a general theme. They develop as a response to anomie. In this respect, writers such as Parsons simply want to demonstrate the inevitability of youth subcultures in modern societies.

Decision

This type of theory is elegant because it seems to explain a number of things about youth subcultures.

1. The modern phenomenon of youth culture.

2. The involvement of boys rather than

> **Pre-modern societies** did not have the functional requirement of a period of transition between childhood and adulthood because:
> The family was centre of economic production.
> People were not geographically mobile.
> An education system was not required.

> To some extent, this theory explains the apparent "invisibility of women" in relation to youth culture on the basis that it is generally men who experience the marked transition between the family and work. For women, the norm is the swapping of one set of affective relationships (their parents' family) for another (their own). This is, of course, a highly debatable idea, one we will look at more closely in a moment.

girls.
3. The transient (temporary) nature of youth culture.

> Youth cultures are a "passing phase" not because people get fed-up with them, for example, but because as the teenager moves into adulthood (learns the norms, responsibilities and so forth associated with this new social status), youth cultures lose their **function** for that individual. Once the **transition period** is complete, youth cultures are no-longer functionally necessary and they simply disappear.

4. Youth cultures as a "normal" aspect

> **Moral panics** about youth are essentially misconceived according to this viewpoint since youth cultures represent no threat to social stability. On the contrary, youth cultures **must** occur in a "healthy" society because they are **functionally necessary**. If youth cultures were suppressed, for example, wider social problems would be created (ones that really did threaten social stability). This idea of "functional necessity" (or functional prerequisite as it's sometimes called) is an important one in Functionalist theory that appears time after time in the analysis of social systems.

of modern society.

Although this type of theory offers an explanation for the development of youth subcultures (as a cultural phenomenon) there are a number of problems we need to note:

1. Are all families characterised by the patterns Parsons' identifies?

> A major criticism of Parsons' view of family groups is that he "romanticised" family life, in terms of the content of various relationships. As Ann **Oakley**, a major (Marxist) feminist critic of Parsons' view of family life has noted, Parsons' seems to think that the "idealised" portrait he paints of White, American, Middle Class, family life is a common experience in all families.
>
> The critical theorist, **R.D.Laing** has also suggested that the family is actually the source of many of the traumas that we have as individuals in later life - most people find the family such a traumatic, unhappy, experience that they cannot wait to leave it.
>
> This suggests that "transition problems" may be more apparent than real and, if so, the problem of anomie does not actually occur in the way Parsons' suggests.

2. The Involvement of Women.

Exercise 4	Read the article ("It's Different For Girls" by Christine Griffin) in the book of Readings that accompanies this Unit, and answer the following questions.

1. Outline the main features of the "gang of lads model".

2. Identify "two unfortunate consequences" of youth culture studies.

3. What problems did Griffin face when trying to apply the "gang of lads model" to women?

4. What does Griffin mean by the "different social structure of most female friendships"?

If this type of theory is to be seen as basically sound, it must follow that, as more women

5. How does Griffin suggest female deviance is defined differently to male deviance?

3. It says little about the form that youth cultures take.

> Although I noted earlier that this type of theory is not particularly interested in explaining the form taken by various youth subcultures, the question of why some young people (especially males) develop subcultural groups, whereas others do not may be significant in this context.
>
> For this reason we need to look at a number of related consensus-based theories that do try to explain this idea.

How? One of the main differences between **consensus-based subcultural theories** and **consensus-based cultural theories** is the different emphasis placed upon youth as a sub-cultural (as opposed to a purely cultural) phenomenon. There are three basic reasons for this:

Firstly, subcultural theorists assign more-significance to the temporary nature of youth cultures, seeing this idea as central to any explanation of youth behaviour.

Secondly, the fact that not all young people became involved in youth subcultures is given more-prominence. It is seen as highly-significant that youth subcultures take different forms and have different content and meaning for the people involved. In particular, subcultural theorists tend to place more emphasis on trying to explain why particular groups of young people (for example, white and black working class males) develop some spectacular youth subcultural forms.

Finally, and probably most importantly, there is increasing evidence to suggest that youth subcultures retain important **links** with wider (adult) cultures and subcultures. What this means, therefore, is that we should be careful not to see youth as a discrete (that is, totally separate) separate category of human behaviour, somehow divorced from the wider culture of a society.

As an example, here we could note the work of **Peter Wilmott** ("**Adolescent Boys in East London**", 1969) ——→ since this encapsulates the increasing focus on youth as a subcultural phenomenon.

> For example, in his study Wilmott identified three types of (male) adolescent, distinguishable by their different attitudes, in the Bethnal Green, area of London he studied:
>
> **Working Class** (someone who basically recognises their position in life and conforms to it).
> **Middle Class** (Slightly better prospects than the working class boy, who also conforms.
> **The Rebel** (mainly working class, but sometimes middle class) who does not conform and never "grows-up".

A variation on this approach might be that of **Walter Miller** when he argues that **working class subcultures** derive from **working class cultures**. Each social class, therefore, is seen as having distinct (sub-)cultural concerns and youth cultures reflect these cultural concerns.

> You could also note the work of writers such as Robert **Merton** and **Cloward and Ohlin** here. These **subcultural theorists** are considered in more detail in the **Deviance Module.**

B. Conflict (Marxist-type) Theories of Youth.

| What? | The key ideas in this section are: |

- **Social class / class fractions**
- **Structural location**
- **Semiology** ⟶ | **Denotive** and **Connotive codes** |
- **Hegemony**
- **Relative autonomy**
- **Social cohesion**
- **Class position**
- **Symbolic resistance**

| Why? | We can begin to look at Marxist sub-cultural theories of youth by noting a number of basic characteristics of this general perspective. |

Firstly, although, like their **consensus theorist** counterparts, **Conflict theorists** generally see human behaviour in terms of the various ways in which the structure of people's relationships broadly conditions the way they behave, writers in this perspective tend to focus on the complex nature of individual / social group responses to the social environment in which they live.

> For example, **broad** class groupings such as upper, middle and working class.

Secondly, **Marxist conflict theorists** for example, tend to focus their attention on categories such as **social classes** and, possibly more importantly, **class-fractions** rather than "youth as a whole".

> For example, upper working class, middle working class, lower working class and so forth.

The main reason for this the idea that **different classes** and **class fractions** experience the social world in different ways. In this respect, an individual's position in a system of **social stratification** affects:

a. How they **experience** the social world.

b. The **beliefs** they develop about the nature of the social world and their relative prospects (**life chances**) in the society into which they are born.

> The concept of **life chances** relates to the chances an individual has of **achieving** the things a society considers to be **desirable** (for example, wealth, health, high social status and so forth) and **avoiding** the things a society considers to be **undesirable** (poverty, a criminal record, etc.).
>
> In general terms, the higher your position in society, the greater are your life chances (you are more-likely to achieve the desirable things and avoid the undesirable things).

Following from the above, Marxist perspectives on youth sub-cultures develop around the need to explain how and why different social groups (albeit predominantly male and working class groups) respond to the structural pressures that surround them. To achieve this theoretical explanation, two levels of analysis are frequently used:

- Firstly, a **macro level** that seeks to understand the **social structural pressures** that surround and act on our choices of behaviour.

> These pressures are **economic**, **political** and **ideological,** with the usual Marxist emphasis being on the importance of **economic relationships**.

- Secondly, a **micro** level that seeks to understand the various ways that different groups **respond** to these pressures.

> This level looks at how individuals understand the structural pressures they experience, the meanings they give to their actions and so forth.

Note: If you've looked at **Conflict Theories of Deviance** you will have come across an application of this type of analysis when you looked at both **Radical Criminology** and **New Left Realism**.

How?

When thinking about this second level of analysis, what is usually involved here is a **semiological analysis**.

We can illustrate this level of (symbolic) interpretation through the use of an example.

- Turn to the Readings that accompany this Module and look at **Reading 2** taken **McRobbie and Garber** ("**Girls and Subcultures**", 1975).

McRobbie and Garber were writing about female teenage subcultures and they attempted to explain why these female subcultures are expressed differently to male sub-cultures.

To do this they followed a line of reasoning that involved understanding two aspects of female lives.

> **Semiology** involves the idea that we can "read the responses" made by different groups (sub-cultural / cultural) to their differential position in a stratification system. This reading involves understanding two types of **codes** (in simple terms, the meanings involved in any social event or act):
>
> - **Denotive codes** are sets of symbols having a clear link to what they signify.
>
> For example, a drawing of a light bulb is simply a pictorial representation of this common household item - the drawing **denotes** the actual object. In this respect, denotive codes are tightly linked to what they describe and are **not** culturally specific (their meaning doesn't change from culture to culture).
>
> - **Connotive codes** involve **hidden** or encoded meanings that are constructed theoretically above denotive codes (sometimes called a **meta language**). This is a rather complex way of saying that everyday behaviour and events can have a level of meaning that is not immediately apparent.
>
> For example, if I shake my fist at you, this might **denote** that I am angry with you (the fist denotes aggressive intent). If, however, I am smiling / laughing as I shake my fist, the **connotation** you put on my action will be quite different - the "hidden meaning" of my action is that I am **pretending** to be angry with you.
> Connotive codes are highly culturally specific (that is, they normally only have the same meaning to people who share a particular culture) and, clearly, they are open to interpretation. In the above example, you might mistake my smile as being some bitter and twisted way of expressing my enjoyment at the thought of punching you (and you would, of course, be right)...).

- Firstly, the **structural** aspect and
- Secondly, the **semiological** aspect.

We can explain these ideas in the following way…

The **structural aspect** of women's lives and experiences has two basic dimensions:

- **Firstly**, he behaviour of teenage girls in society is more **closely controlled** by parents. This means that opportunities for cultural expression (in terms, for example, of their sexuality) are more limited. In simple terms, young girls have **less freedom of movement and expression** in our society.

> Their **structural location** in society means that in order to behave in ways that are considered normal for boys, young girls would risk **negative sanctions** being applied to their behaviour.

- **Secondly**, young girls are far more likely than young boys to attract **negative labelling** for their behaviour, even when it is exactly the same as that of young males.

> A **double standard** applies in relation to sexual expression, for example, whereby girls have much more to lose (their reputation) if they attempt to express their sexuality in ways that are considered acceptable for young males.

The **semiological aspect and interpretation**:

McRobbie and Garber suggest that this particular **structural aspect** to **female lives** conditions both the way they generally behave and, of course, our sociological analysis and interpretation of this behaviour. Thus:

- Girls, like boys, have to live within a clear **cultural framework** of **social expectations** and **labelling** in relation to their choices of behaviour. All forms of cultural expression (especially that relating to sexuality) is conditioned by these constraints.

- Where girls are denied the opportunity for cultural expression in overt ways, they express their cultural needs through "pre-packaged" cultural forms. For example, through pop icons, film stars and so forth. These are accessible to females on two levels:

     1. A **physical level**. Cultural expression can be brought into the home, thereby escaping the physical constraints placed on female behaviour.

     2. A **psychological level**. These forms of cultural expression are open to all girls as long as they understand the codes involved. Additionally, cultural codes (language, dress, music, etc.) can be used to exclude adults, thus making this both a personal and shared "youth" experience.

- This "**bedroom culture**" also allows girls to express cultural yearnings in a relatively safe way. Sexual fantasies about "distant" pop stars, for example, allow the expression of sexuality in a way that is in line with the structural constraints on their behaviour. Again, two levels of safety exist here, **physical** and **psychological**.

> **Physical** in the sense that girls don't have to go out into the world and actually meet these people - their reputation remains intact - and psychological in the sense that girls can express their feelings (sexuality and so forth) in a socially acceptable form (albeit one that is perhaps not understood - or is misinterpreted - by adults).

For **McRobbie and Garber**, therefore, female cultural expression is a **symbolic revolt** against the constraints on girl's lives, in same way that boys cultural expression is **symbolic** in a different, more overt, form.

It is worth noting that what we should see if / when girls are emancipated from these structural constraints (society changes, controls are weakened or whatever) is that they will behave in much the same way as boys. Indeed, this may be happening in some class fractions (for example, lower working class girls, upper class girls) where parental controls / social controls are weaker.

- **Bedroom culture** serves a similar purpose for girls as do more overt (gang) sub-cultures for boys. For example, **Teeny Bopper** culture involves an **exclusive language** and experience that excludes adults - but it has the advantage that it is available for all girls who are tuned into the same youth cultural wavelength.
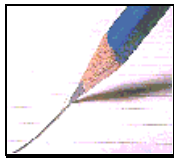
Project Idea

You could use McRobbie and Garber's work as the basis for a project that tests the idea of a female "bedroom culture".

Using a sample of young women you could use questionnaires / interview methods to discover whether or not such a culture exists amongst your female peers. If this type of culture does exist, you could then try to construct a semiological explanation for its existence.

We can develop the kind of **semiological** example we've just applied to an understanding of female subcultures in our society to look more generally at Marxist Conflict theories of youth. In order to do this it is necessary to understand the way Marxist sociologists theorise and analyse the nature of society.

Even if you are relatively familiar with Marxism, it will be useful to read through the following because it is used as the basis for the subsequent analysis of youth subcultures.

What?   To begin with, we need to look at two major concepts used by Marxists in their analysis of societies (especially, but not exclusively, capitalist societies), namely:

- **Hegemony** and

- **Relative Autonomy**.

This, in simple terms, means political leadership with the "consent" of the led (that is, leadership that is considered by those who are led to be the legitimate exercise of leadership).

"Autonomy" means freedom of action and relative autonomy means freedom within the confines of certain limitations. For example, for as long as we do not break the law, we are relatively free to behave as we please.
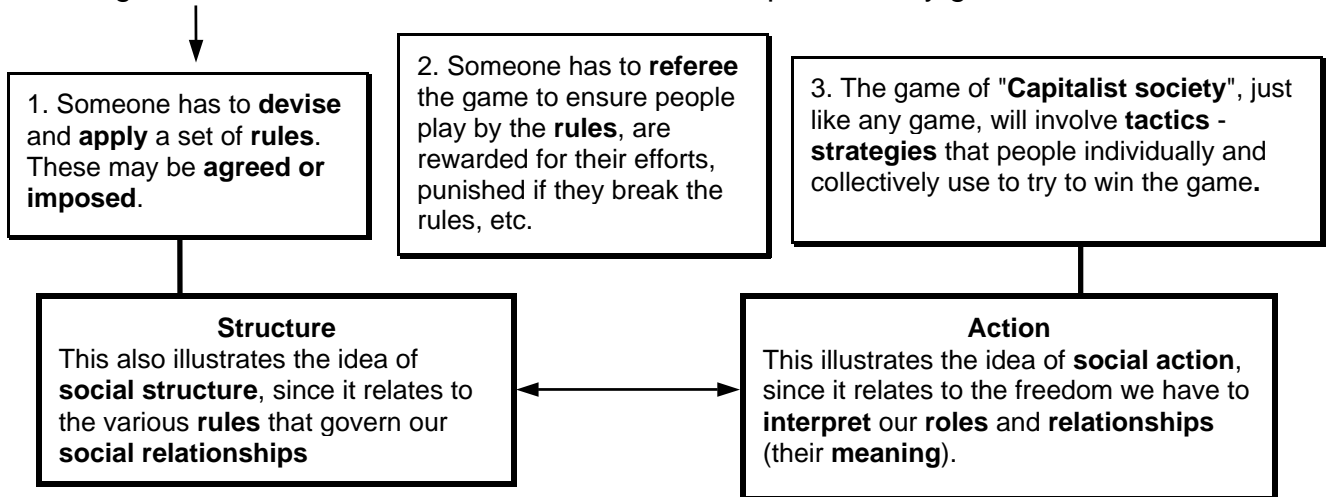
Why?	We can see the significance of these

concepts if we think, using an **analogy**, about society in terms of it being a **game** we play (like football, for example).

In the following, therefore, we can set-out a theoretical model that we can then apply to an understanding of Marxist / conflict theories of youth subcultures.

An **analogy** is a device we use to aid our understanding. Thus, we use something that is **familiar** to us (like the organisation of a game) and show how something **unfamiliar** to us (like a Marxist view of society) has similar features to it. By doing this we draw on our understanding of the familiar to illuminate our understanding of the unfamiliar.

It is important that analogies are used carefully and **critically**. You need to be aware of their purpose and their **limitations**. For example, in this instance we are **not** claiming that a Marxist view of society is exactly like a game of football, merely that it has similarities we can use for the purpose of illustration.

To begin with, therefore, we can note three basic aspects to any game:

1. Someone has to **devise** and **apply** a set of **rules**. These may be **agreed or imposed**.

2. Someone has to **referee** the game to ensure people play by the **rules**, are rewarded for their efforts, punished if they break the rules, etc.

3. The game of "**Capitalist society**", just like any game, will involve **tactics** - **strategies** that people individually and collectively use to try to win the game**.**

Structure
This also illustrates the idea of **social structure**, since it relates to the various **rules** that govern our **social relationships**

Action
This illustrates the idea of **social action**, since it relates to the freedom we have to **interpret** our **roles** and **relationships** (their **meaning**).

Having outlined these basic ideas we can now look at each in a little more detail.

1. Creating the rules

For Marxists, the people who create the basic rules of the Capitalist game are going to be the **bourgeoisie** (initially at least, since the rules may well be amended as time goes by, through **class conflict** and so forth). It is this class that has a **hegemonic role** in society.

The **bourgeoisie** or **ruling class** are defined by Marxists as those people who "**own and control the means of economic production, distribution and exchange**".

The way the social world is organised in economic terms produces **values**; in this respect, we can consider values as **broad ideas** about the way things **ought** to be. The **bourgeoisie** is in the best position in society to translate **their values** into **political action** (through the creation of **laws**, for example, that are favourable to and help protect their interests - the things they value).

The reason for this is that, for Marxists, **political leadership** derives from the power to own and control the means of production in society. The **class** that **owns** these means will automatically be extremely **powerful** and economic power can be translated into **political influence** (the ability to condition the way people **behave** in society) and **ideological influence** (the ability to condition the way people **think** about the social world).

- We can think about the **values** of the **bourgeoisie** as being like the **rules of a game** because they, in effect, **define** how the game should be played. In addition, the rules of the game tell us roughly how to play the game and they set **limitations** on the way that we can **legitimately** play.

> You should note, however, that unlike most games, these rules are not very well defined; they are flexible and open to interpretation).

2. Refereeing the game.

There are a number of objectives, for the bourgeoisie, in playing the Capitalist game which can be summarised as follows:

a. Everyone in society has to be encouraged to play the game. →

> In this type of society, for example, people have to be encouraged to work (so they can produce profits), form families (to produce the next generation of workers) and so forth. In addition, people have to believe that the game is not fixed, the rules bent in favour of one group or another and so forth.

b. There has to be some objective to the game. →

> People have to be given incentives to play the game. The objectives in this game, for example, might be set as the pursuit of wealth, power, status and so forth (since these are attractive social attributes for the bourgeoisie).

c. Everyone has to be given an "equal opportunity" to compete in the game. →

> Since the **direct involvement** of the bourgeoisie in "enforcing the rules" might create feelings in people that the game is rigged in favour of some sections of society, the **State** (government, civil service, police, army and so forth) is encouraged to develop a role for itself as an apparently "**neutral**" **referee**. Thus, those who are economically powerful do **not** necessarily have a **direct decision-making role** in the creation of specific game rules (but they will be highly influential in determining how these rules are interpreted since the State will have to take notice of powerful players in the game).

For Marxists, the "neutrality" of the State is qualified for two main reasons: ←

- **Firstly**, those who are **economically powerful** come from the same / similar **class background** to those who are **politically powerful**. They share, in effect, similar values about how the game of Capitalist society should be played.

- **Secondly**, in order to achieve **political power** you have to accommodate the wishes of those who are most **economically powerful** in society.

In semiological terms, therefore:

- On a **denotive** level of understanding, Capitalism is seen to benefit everyone in society, law's are in everyone's interest and so forth. Of course, some will benefit more, but this too can be rationalised ("explained away").

- On a **connotive** level, however, the bourgeoisie benefit the most, laws exist to protect and enhance the power of this class and so forth.

How?	5	Briefly explain why politicians have to listen to the views of the economically-powerful in our society.

Exercise 6	"Some people will benefit more than others in our society". Identify two ways this fact could be rationalised (justified in some way).

3. Playing the game.

In this section the concept of **relative autonomy** is employed. The **values** of the bourgeoisie set the rules of the game and these values will have associated **norms** (which, in terms of the game analogy we can think of in terms of specific **laws** (legal or State norms) and **tactical strategies** for achieving success).

Thus, just like in a game, people can employ different **tactics** (**norms**), whilst still playing by the same **rules** (**values**).

It is important to note that **not** everyone in society starts from the same position or with equal **access** to the same **resources**. Some groups (perhaps defined in terms of concepts such as social class, gender, age, ethnic background and the like) start in a more-advantageous position than others.

> The tactics you choose to adopt in order to try to win in the game will depend on the exact nature of society at any particular time (different tactics may apply in times of full employment to those applied during times of mass unemployment, for example).

- For example, in some societies it may give you a significant social advantage if you are **male** rather than **female**, **rich** rather than **poor**, **white** rather than **black**.

In this respect we need to be aware that even in our politically democratic society, although the basic rules of the game apply **equally to everyone**, not everyone has the same chance of winning (achieving the things our society encourages people to see as desirable (things like **wealth**, **power** and **status**). It's also important to note that whether or not you agree or disagree with the rules, they will apply and be applied to you.

Marxist Theories of Youth Sub-cultures:

Applying the Rules...

Within this scenario, the concept of **hegemony** can again be applied. A powerful class (the bourgeoisie) control the basic rules of the game. In this instance, these rules (**values**) relate to clear views about **appropriate behaviour** for young males and females. Through their leadership they transmit broad ideas to everyone in society That is, they set out the basic limitations of the game as it relates to the behaviour of "teenagers".

> This **transmission process** is achieved through **cultural institutions** such as **religions** and - most significantly in modern Capitalist societies - the **mass media** (which is owned and controlled by the ruling class).

Within the limits set-out by this **hegemonic role**, young people are **relatively autonomous**. That is, within the limits of the rules they can work-out their own "behavioural strategies" (how it is appropriate for young people to work their way through their teenage years). They have, in short, a certain degree of **freedom of interpretation** over **norms** of behaviour (they can try to bend the rules to their own advantage and so forth).

- Only when someone breaks the basic rules (which are, as I've suggested, not always very clearly defined) do the wider cultural **control agencies** (the **media** or **police**, for example, act (like a referee) to restore the rules - to punish youth for having broken them and re-establish acceptable forms of behaviour.

> Since these rules are not hard-and-fast, what counts as deviance and non-deviance, crime and non-crime will change over time - people will simply interpret the significance of behaviour differently at different times in the historical development of a society.

Exercise 7	**If this theory is valid, it should be possible to identify some of the basic rules of teenage behaviour as they apply to males and females.**

Male teenagers should:

Female teenagers should:

On the basis of the above, we can do two further things:

- **Firstly**, we can use it to account for the fact that the **social reaction** to people's behaviour will be different (stronger or weaker) according to the **class position**, **gender or age status** and **ethnic** background of the **deviant**. In effect, we can take this important **Interactionist** insight further by applying a **theory of power** to the concept of **social reaction**.

- **Secondly**, we can start to produce accounts of various forms of youth sub-cultures that explain them in terms of both the **structural position** of youth in society and the **meaning** that these subcultures have for their members and society (a **semiological** analysis).

In relation to the first of these points, we can use the question of why **upper** and **middle class delinquency** is rarely punished as severely as **working class delinquency** as an example of this overall process.

> For example, why is the same form of behaviour displayed by working class and middle class males punished in different ways?
>
> We could also use it to explain why female deviance is punished differently to male deviance and why ethnic minorities are generally punished more severely than ethnic majorities for the same forms of behaviour.

We know a **labelling process** operates here (along classic **Interactionist** lines), but what would be useful to know is why the same form of behaviour is punished more severely when exhibited by working class youth than when it is exhibited by middle class youth. We can explain this, using a **Marxist** form of interpretation, in the following terms:

> In case you need reminding, the following concepts should be kept in mind:
>
> 1. **Hegemony**: The bourgeoisie takes the lead in deciding norms of social behaviour (for youth). These norms reflect the values they encode into law.
>
> 2. **Relative Autonomy**: People are free, in a political democracy, to decide norms of behaviour (within the broad limitations of cultural values).

The response of control agents such as the media or the police to behaviour will be conditioned by:

a. The structural location of the deviant.

- Upper and middle class youth are part of the **bourgeoisie**. In this respect structural location is significant since this class of youth are assumed to accept the basic values of Capitalist society. In over-simple terms, they are "**one of us**" (the bourgeoisie).

- Working class youth are, by definition, not part of bourgeoisie ("not one of us"). Therefore, there is a greater level of **uncertainty** about the motives behind their behaviour. In effect, the bourgeoisie cannot be sure about the motives behind working class deviance.

> **Bauman** has expressed this idea in non-class terms by using the concepts of "**in-groups**" (people who share the same ideas and interests as ourselves - people who are "one of us") and "**out-groups**" (people who are "not one of us".
>
> Unlike Marxists, **Bauman** argues that these concept shave more meaning and significance to people than the concept of class in (post) modern societies.

- This follows, in Marxist terms, because the values of the bourgeoisie represent a form of "**dominant ideology**" that serves to give this class a sense of **social cohesion** (a feeling of belonging to a similar group who share your basic outlook and life style) and purpose. In effect, it helps to clarify for people of this class their basic **class interests** (which, again in simple terms, are to ensure that they continue to win in the game - which means that other classes must continue to lose...).

> As an aside, this view involves what is called a **zero-sum (or constant-sum) concept of power**. This involves the idea that the amount of power in a situation is always **fixed**. Thus, for someone to gain power they have to take it away from someone else.

b. The (semiological) interpretation of behaviour.

- The **denotive** level of **upper / middle class youth deviance** is simply the behaviour itself (for example, causing damage to a restaurant).

    - How this behaviour is interpreted (the **connotive** level) is conditioned by the **deviant's structural location** (position in the class structure). Thus, in this instance, this behaviour is more likely to be interpreted leniently (as "high spirits", youthful immaturity and so forth) because these people are **no threat** to bourgeois **hegemony**.

- The denotive level of **working class youth deviance** is again the behaviour itself (for example, causing damage to a pub).

    - On the **connotive** level, however, such behaviour is **interpreted** quite differently - and **reacted** against much more strongly - since the behaviour of working class youth is seen to represent a **threat** to bourgeois **hegemony**. Their behaviour is symptomatic of a **rejection** of bourgeois hegemony (the rules of the game) and a **strong social reaction** is required in order to bring working class youth back into line.

Thus, the social reaction to "breaking the rules" will be different depending on:

a. The social cohesiveness of the bourgeoisie.

    - That is, the extent to which this class can enforce norms of behaviour in relation to very broad social values (cultural institutions such as religions and the media play a part here).

b. The class position of those who break the rules.

    - The interpretation of behaviour takes place within a broad framework (the rules of the game of Capitalist society) and it is, ultimately, the bourgeoisie who make and enforce these rules.

> You should note that **Marxists** can explain why the same behaviour will produce different social reactions (because they have a **theory** of social structure, power and so forth.) whereas **Interactionist's**, lacking this theory, can merely **describe** this process.

| **What?** | Having established a basic understanding of Marxist perspectives, we can use the work of the **Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies** (**CCCS**) as examples of Marxist subcultural analyses of youth behaviour. |

| **Why?** | As conflict theorists, writers such as **Phil.Cohen**, **John Clarke**, **Hall and Jefferson** and so forth, argued, in various ways, that the development of youth subcultures was linked to changes in the **structure** of society. For example, a change in the economic structure (such as the mass unemployment witnessed in Britain during the 1980's) is seen to produce cultural responses and changes, such as the development of youth subcultures. |

> Their basic thesis, therefore, was a classically-Marxist one that changes in **the economic structure** of society produce **cultural changes** in people's behaviour.

- Thus, in simple terms, the development of a "new" form of youth sub-culture, for example, is significant in relation to the fact that it must be **indicative** of some form of **structural change** (since the latter is seen to broadly "cause" the former). Using **semiological techniques**, therefore, it should be possible to **read** the **causes** (particular **structural changes**) from the **effects** (the development of **youth sub-cultures**).

| **How?** | **Phil Cohen** ("**Subcultural Conflict and Working Class Community**", 1972), for example, used this technique to analyse a variety of subcultural styles that originated in the East End of London. His basic argument was that the break-up of family and communal life (a **structural change** in society) created a **cultural vacuum** in the lives of the young (especially young males). |

In simple terms, youth subcultures, represent:

1. A **collective** attempt to **deal** with this "sense of loss".

2. An attempt to **retrieve** the cohesive elements of community lost by structural changes in the economic and political life of the community.

> "**Mod**" subcultures, for example, were explained as an attempt to ape the lifestyles of those East Enders who had "escaped" into a better-paid way of life following the collapse of community life in the East End through massive urban redevelopment.
>
> "**Skinhead**" subcultures, on the other hand, were seen as an attempt to recreate (in an exaggerated form) a working class lifestyle - one that threatened "middle class morality" - that had all but disappeared.

> A strong **class** element runs through Cohen's analysis, since he argued those most likely to be involved in this type of subcultural activity were:
>
> - Teenagers from lowest strata of the working class (those who were not socially mobile).
>
> - Those who had most felt the loss of community, class, status, etc., at the hands of the government, property developers and so forth ("the Ruling Class").

| Decision |

There are a number of specific **criticisms** we can make about this type of analysis:

1. Cohen's study is probably **out of date** and too **tied** to the situation he found in London's East End.

2. Subcultural styles have **persisted** long after the economic / social changes he described in his analysis.

3. There is a general failure to identify **why** some teenagers develop "mod" styles whilst others in much the same social situation adopt "skinhead" styles. If structural changes are the important variable, why do very different responses emerge?

4. No clear **link** is actually made between structural changes and youth sub-cultures. Although it might (or might not) be a reasonable assumption to hold that structural changes will produce cultural changes, little convincing evidence is provided for the supposed relationship between the two.

In addition, a particular criticism of this type of **semiological** analysis is that Cohen's "reading" of youth subcultures may owe more to his **preconceived ideas** and **theoretical starting-point** than to the "reality" of the situation as seen by the youth involved. With semiology, it is often impossible to know whether or not the **values** of the sociologist lead him / her into a "reading" that is simply a **reflection** of the things he / she is trying to prove. Thus, for Cohen, it was theoretically-convenient for him to "read" youth styles in the way that he did. Other sociologists, with different points to prove, "read" the signs in a different way?.

> For example, with reference to "skinhead culture", is it an attempt to emphasise / recreate elements of "traditional working class culture" or simply a style of dress and behaviour that is designed to shock people? More importantly, how do we know which interpretation is true?

| What? |

A development on the **CCCS** approach was that of using the concept of **hegemony** as a means of explaining the role played by youth sub-cultures in the lives of young people.

| How? |

Youth subcultures, in this respect, are seen as an attempt by the exploited and the powerless to **resist** ruling class / bourgeois **hegemony** by adopting behaviour, forms of dress, etc., that appear to challenge the "consensus". A number of studies have pursued this theme.

• For example, **Hall and Jefferson**, ("**Resistance Through Rituals**", 1976), have characterised youth subcultures in this way - as **symbolic** or **ritualistic** attempts to **resist** the power of bourgeois hegemony by consciously adopting behaviour that **appears threatening** to the "establishment" - thereby giving the powerless a feeling of power.

Another example of this approach is the work of **John Clarke** ("**An Example of Working Class Youth Subculture: Skinheads**").

Clarke explained the development of skinhead subcultures as

"…an attempt to recreate through 'the mob' the traditional working class community, as a substitution for the real decline of the latter. The underlying social dynamic for the style…is the relative worsening of the situation of the working class, through the second half of the sixties, and especially the more rapidly worsening situation of the lower working class (and of the young within that).".

In basic terms, Clarke argues that the violent, overly-aggressive skinhead style, considered both in terms of **dress** (the Doc. Martin "bovver boot", the skinhead haircut and so forth) and **reality** (the high levels of extreme violence levelled against homosexuals ("queer-bashing") and Asians ("paki-bashing")) was a response to the feeling that "territory" and "community" were under attack from "outsiders" (the most visible of these being people who represented, for skinheads, an "alien" **economic culture** (Asians) and **sexual culture** (homosexuals).

Why?

Hegemony involves:

"**Political leadership based on the consent of the led - a consent secured by ensuring that the view of the world they hold is that which is generally favourable to the interests of the ruling class**"

In basic terms, what this means is that if you want people to behave in ways that are favourable to your interests, you have to convince them that these interests are really the interests of everyone.

For example, when we look at the introduction of a law that tried to limit the effectiveness of picketing, we can see how the concept of **hegemony** applies. Thus:

1. Effective picketing was seen by a ruling class to challenge their interests because it meant that workers had **power** to disrupt the production process (and thereby eat into profits).

2. One way of negating that power is to **ban** picketing. However, this would produce problems for the ruling class because it would conflict with the ideas of **political democracy** (such as the idea that people are **free to demonstrate**, to express their grievances in a peaceable way and so forth). To simply ban picketing would both weaken the fabric of political democracy and demonstrate that the law was not even-handed.

3. The problem could be resolved by **co-opting** the "general public" - to get them to see the "problem" of picketing as a general problem, rather than one damaging to the interests of one section of society.

Thus, co-option was achieved by claiming that limitations on picketing need to be seen in terms of "**law and order**". Everyone has an interest in ensuring that "the law" is upheld; therefore, if you can characterise uncontrolled picketing as a threat to "the law" you can effectively ban it without appearing to act in the interests of one particular class.

Whatever the validity of **Clarke's** interpretation, it seems evident from a standpoint of the late 1990's that the era of spectacular subcultures epitomised by youth subcultures such as skinheads or punks is all but over. One explanation for this may be what **Hebdidge** ("**The Meaning of Style**") has termed **incorporation.**

This involves the idea that **big business** and the **media** have quickly learnt how to exploit youth subcultural styles for profit in two ways:

1. **Commodity incorporation** - packaging subcultural styles into "youth commodities".

2. **Ideological incorporation** - for example, the trivialising of subcultural styles.

Thus far we've looked at various basic theoretical principles relating to the development of youth subcultures that can be - and have been - applied to the behaviour of young, working class, males (with a nod towards the behaviour of young females in the work of Griffin and McRobbie and Garber). To redress the balance and draw your attention to ethnic and middle class youth subcultures, Reading 3 from O'Donnell ("Introduction To Sociology", 1997) covers both of these groups. Read this and then answer the following questions.

Exercise 8   **Ethnic Youth Subcultures**

1. Why is it not appropriate to treat Afro-Caribbean and Asian youth exclusively under the label "working class youth"?

2. Identify and briefly explain the main characteristics of two types of Afro-Caribbean youth subcultures.

3. What does the concept of "cultural resistance" mean?

Exercise 9   **Middle Class Youth Subcultures.**

1. Why have middle class youth subcultures received less attention than other types of youth subculture?

2. Briefly explain the concept of "romantic / idealistic" youth movement.

3. What are the main differences between subterranean and formal values?

c. Interactionist Theories of Youth Subcultures.

What?

Hebdidge's argument leads us to consider a rather different **interpretation** of youth subcultures that can most conveniently be categorised in terms of an **Interactionist approach**. One of the most significant concepts in Interactionist analyses of deviance is that of **social reaction** - the idea that, in order for behaviour to be seen as deviant there must be some form of publicly-stated response.

Why?

If we follow this assumption to its logical conclusion, we arrive at the idea - in relation to youth subcultures - that a significant aspect of such "subcultures" is their **manufacture** by powerful social forces (especially the **mass media**).

> The implication of this idea is that "youth subcultures" do not really exist, as such, outside of a small core of adherents ("true punks", "true mods" and so forth). For the majority of people involved in supposedly subcultural behaviour it is little more than the aping of a style or fashion that is transiently "fun" or popular because they are told, through the media, that this is the case. In this respect, two points need noting:
>
> Firstly, youth subcultures are viewed as a media myth.
>
> Secondly, if youth subcultures do not really exist as subcultures then it is pointless trying to construct theories that supposedly account for their existence (an implicit criticism of the types of theory we have considered in this Unit).

How?

This is an argument we can now outline using the work of **Stan Cohen** ("**Folk Devils and Moral Panics**", 1964).

Cohen argues that what is significant about youth subcultures is **not** that they are either **functionally necessary** or indicative of attempts by powerless youths to **resist** "hegemony".
Rather, his basic argument is that youth subcultures are effectively created, maintained and killed-off by the **mass media.**

Cohen argues that sociological attempts to explain youth cultures or subcultures in terms of **structural pressures** forcing a **reaction** amongst young people to their social situation is misconceived, since such attempts fail to recognise that youth cultures are **not** coherent social groupings that arise "spontaneously" as a **reaction** to **social forces**.

> Whether this be hegemony considered in terms of things like:
>
> **a. Social class** (the political and economic leadership of the bourgeoisie / ruling class over the proletariat / working class).
>
> **b. Gender** (the political and economic leadership men over women).
>
> **c. Ethnicity** (the political and economic leadership of whites over blacks).

Rather, he questions the basic assumption that "youth sub-cultures" are really sub-cultures at all.

- The crucial variable involved here is that of the **Mass Media** as a form of social reaction. In this respect, the Mass Media **manufacture** youth subcultures by focusing attention on disparate, possibly-unconnected, forms of behaviour and giving them a shape or structure. The media, in effect, provide an **ideological framework** ("explanations that make sense") for something that may just be a relatively simple collection of individuals.

- In this respect, **media labelling** results in the creation of youth subcultures by **giving a meaning** to the behaviour of people. The media, therefore, provide a "**meaning structure**" ("mods, skinheads, punks", etc.) to behaviour that, **prior to the labelling process**, may not have had any coherent **meaning** to those involved.

For **Cohen**, therefore, the **role of the mass media** was that of a **socialising agency**:

1. **Reacting** to some form of youth behaviour.

Thus, by applying a **meaningful label** to behaviour ("hippy", "punk" and so forth), the media effectively create something (a youth subculture) out of nothing. That is, they provide youths with an **ideological framework** in which to locate their behaviour (and live up to **manufactured media myths** concerning that behaviour).

A classic recent example of this is acid house - groups of people who had nothing in common except a desire to party are manufactured by the media into some form of social collective (a youth subculture) with common interests, aims and beliefs

2. Writing about that behaviour **as if** the behaviour was part of a wider, subcultural, phenomenon.

3. By **publicising** the behaviour, two things happen:

   a. The people involved see themselves as part of a wider picture of events - they see their behaviour in a more **structured context**. Thus, individualised forms of behaviour are seen as part of a social movement. The people involved come to see themselves as having something in common and a "youth subculture" begins to take shape.

   b. The attention of "the general public" is focused not on a "few, isolated, youths", but on a full-blown youth movement. This "youth sub-culture" presents a far more troubling scenario, since it implies that the participants share certain values, beliefs and attitudes - such groups likely to be seen as a "threat" about which "something must be done".

4. A form of **self-fulfilling prophecy** takes-over with the media becoming a mediator between wider society and the youths involved. Not only does the media "explain" behaviour for its audience, it also provides **feedback** about how members of the youth subculture are expected to behave (and is suitably outraged when they exhibit such behaviour).In this sense, therefore, the media perform a **socialising role** because:

   a. They give young people a social **identity** (as "mods, skins, punks").

   b. They provide a **structure of experience** for people who are attracted to the phenomenon (for example, they tell the people involved how to be a punk). This is important, since youth cultures are largely **unstructured organisations** (there are no rules of behaviour worked out by the participants, for example - these are provided by the media).

3. They provide the **moral outrage** (**condemnation**) that leads to feelings of **persecution** and **group solidarity** - the social force that binds people together in a "youth subculture" for as long as such condemnation exists…

Decision

Cohen's classic study ("**Folk Devils and Moral Panics**",1964) illustrates the idea of media involvement in the manufacture of spectacular youth subcultures in numerous ways, the most striking being his analysis of the relationship between "mods" and

The basis of this argument, in short, was that these two groups were repeatedly told, through the media, of their total opposition to everything the other stood for .This created a form of **self-fulfilling prophecy**, whereby the media predicted violence between the two and, by so doing, was instrumental in bringing it about.

"rockers". These two groups, he argues, came to see themselves as being implacably - and violently - opposed through numerous media references to their opposition.

Whether or not Cohen is correct, his argument points us away from a concern with explaining spectacular youth subcultures (which, in any case, are relatively few and infrequent) to a more modern concern with youth and youth subcultures as sources of **identity**.

Writers such as Redhead ("The End of the Century Party", 1990) and Muggleton ("From Subcultures to Neo-Tribe", 1995), for example, have leant support to this general argument by suggesting, in their different ways, that perceptions of **coherent youth subcultures** owe more to the **belief** that they exist than to any **real evidence** of their existence **as a subculture**.

Questions of i**dentity** relate to **beliefs** about **what** and **who** we are - or believe ourselves to be. In this respect, we are concerned with the various **sources of identity** in society (social **class, age, gender, ethnicity, family, work** and so forth) that combine and conflict in the creation of both an individual (and collective) **sense of identity**.

Exercise 10	An interesting exercise is to think about your identity and the sources you draw on to create a sense of yourself. Note down as many things as you can that represent sources of your identity.

For example: **Gender** is a source of identity because you define yourself in terms of one sex or the other.

| **What?** | **(Re-)Emphasising the Ordinary over the Extraordinary.** |

| **Why?** | The various theories we've considered in relation to youth subcultures (Functionalist and Marxist) have all, to varying degrees: |

a. Assumed youth subcultures exist as real (as opposed to manufactured) subcultures.

b. Focused on the most noticeable and spectacular aspects of youth behaviour.

In many ways, this approach is a bit like trying to explain industrial relations by only looking at strikes. Strikes are spectacular and indicative of some sort of breakdown in industrial relations, but they hardly tell us the whole story since many millions of employers and employees relate to one another in ways that are not outwardly hostile. n this final section, therefore, we are going to look at two areas related to the concept of identity.

Firstly, we can briefly consider a couple of examples of modern attempts to explain the (spectacular) behaviour of some sections of youth in a way that combines **Structuralist** and **Interactionist** analyses and insights with the concept of **identity**.

Secondly, we can look at look at explanations of youth in terms of young people as a whole; that is, as a group who are **united** in terms of their **age identity** but variously **differentiated** in terms of other sources of **identity** (**class, gender, ethnicity** and so forth).

| **How?** | In terms of the first of the above ideas, writers such Hall et al ("Policing the Crisis: Mugging, the State and Law and Order", 1978) |

and Marsh, Rosser and Harre ("The Rules Of Disorder", 1980) have attempted to combine **Interactionist** insights (**labelling**, **moral panics**, the role of the **media** as "**negotiators of reality**" and so forth) with concepts developed by **Conflict theorists** (**structural** explanations of **power**, **ideology** and the like).

Hall et al's basic argument, for example, is that the **mass media's** role in the creation / manufacture of youth subcultures / moral panics etc., can only be explained in terms of the media's **structural relationship** to other institutions within contemporary capitalist society. In this way we can understand two things:

1. The actual **processes** involved in the development of youth cultures (the basically Interactionist account of their manufacture).

2. Why **regularities** occur in this process - that is, why regular moral panics occur around the "problem" of young people.

In this respect, Hall et al argue that when **crises** occur within capitalism (widespread unemployment, for example), explanations are needed to account for why things are "going wrong".

- Since such explanations cannot involve questioning the capitalist system itself (for various economic, political and ideological reasons), "folk devils" are required to **distract** people's attention away from what Hall et al see as the real causes of the crisis (Capitalism). In this way, "youth" can be targeted as a handy (and powerless) **scapegoat** for **social problems** - and Hall et al discuss the moral panic surrounding "**black muggers**" as an example of the way in which the **powerless** are used to "take the blame" for social problems.

Marsh, Rosser and Harre's attempt to explain the football "hooliganism" (a subcultural phenomenon that links neatly into the concept of identity, since the "fan" finds a source of identity through their support for and identification with "their team") sought to combine insights into how the "hooligans" saw and defined their behaviour with an understanding of the social processes involved in the creation of deviance, social order and the like. They termed this approach a combination of "**outside**" and "**inside**" analysis.

> "**Inside**" in the sense of trying to understand the fans' behaviour from their viewpoint and "**outside**" in the sense of looking at the various ways the behaviour of football fans comes to be defined as deviant (the central role of the media, for example) and the consequences of these definitions.

Marsh, Rosser and Harre emphasise the fan's understanding of their behaviour while acknowledging the need to understand how **structural elements** (for example, the "basic need of any society to possess social mechanisms by which aggression among its members can be controlled and managed"), affect both the fan's perception of themselves, how others see them and, of course, the **social reaction** to their behaviour. In this respect, "hooligan" youth subcultures are seen as:

1. An "organised" resistance to social changes that affect the group's members (where the group are excluded from official decision-making processes concerning such changes).

2. **Subcultures** (mainly but not exclusively involving youth) in the sense that life within the hooligan group conforms to certain **rules** or **norms** of association and behaviour. **Social status** can be achieved via acts that win approval from other group members (which suggests that these groups involve some kind of **status hierarchy** and for this to occur the group must have devised some way of allocating **status** to its members).

> This latter point is significant in relation to official media labels that characterise football hooligans as "mindless, disorganised, violent, rabbles" when, in fact, "hooligan" groups are probably the closest we come to finding an **organised subcultural grouping** with a sense of its **own identity** and the means to continually **socialise** and **reproduce** new members around that **clear identity** and sense of **common purpose**.

In terms of the second of the ideas we noted earlier, writers such as **Paul Willis** ("**Common Culture**", 1990) argue that we should, as sociologists, view the concepts of **youth culture** and **subculture** as a relatively loose descriptive category in the

How? sense that young people are both united in terms of their common age group (and the social connotations associated with age), but divided by concepts such as class, gender and ethnicity. Thus, youth as a social category involves both **homogenous** (that is, **similarities**) and **heterogeneous** elements (**differences**).

- For example, young people share certain **cultural similarities** in our society (that can be expressed in terms of, for example, educational, work and family-related problems and concerns), but they also have marked **differences** in the sense of being divided along **class, gender** and **ethnic** lines (the **life chances** and experiences of a while, upper class, male are, for example, very different to those of a black, working class, female).

- Willis, for example, characterises youth subcultures in terms of the **cultural creativity** of young people as both **producers** (styles of dress, music and the like that are picked-up and exploited by commercial concerns) and **consumers** (people who, in turn, consume the products of the modern mass media (music, film, magazines, television and so forth)).

- **Reimer** ("**Youth and Modern Lifestyles**", 1995) develops this basic idea further when he argues that a **central feature** of youth in modern societies is the preoccupation with "**fun**" - the constant search for excitement and stimulation that cuts across all other sources of identity (class, gender, ethnicity and so forth).

To conclude this Unit we can note that modern analyses of youth have tended to focus on the idea of youth as a **cultural** phenomenon, within which we can discern a wide range of **Decision** **stylistic diversities** (dress, appearance, music and so forth) that change so quickly that they defy easy categorisation.

While theories of **spectacular youth subcultures** may have their place in both the sociological and wider cultural sense, it appears that greater emphasis is now being placed on attempts to explain the "**ordinariness**" of modern youth, (concerned as it seems to be with the problems and concerns of work, family, environmentalism and the like) in terms of young people being both consumers of popular culture and, in turn, the originators (producers) of that culture.

You have now completed this Unit.