

Subcultures

&

Crime and Deviance

Subcultural Theories

- Explain deviance in terms of subculture of particular groups
- Some groups develop norms & values different from those of wider society
- “amended values”
- Draw on interactionist ideas, Chicago school & Merton’s strain theory

Cohen (1955)

- Interest in crime committed for thrills
- Deviance as collective rather than individual
 1. w/class boys strive for m/class values & goals
 2. Lack of means – “status frustration”
 3. Rejection of values, anti-social behaviour = delinquent subculture
 - Especially in school

Criticisms of Cohen

- Only looks at boys
- Box (1981) – only applies to minority, others accept mainstream values
- Is it that calculated?
- Is school really so key?

Cloward & Ohlin (1960)

- “illegitimate opportunity structure”
 - Parallel to legal one
 - Eg Hobbs (1998) Doing the business
- 3 possible versions of subculture
 - Criminal – organised
 - Conflict – eg. Gang warfare
 - Retreatist – failure to succeed legitimately or illegitimately

Evaluation of Cloward & Ohlin

- South (1997) – increasing relevance of the theory – drug trade covers all 3

Criticisms

- Are distinctions so neat?
- No discussion of female deviancy
- Taylor, Walton & Young (1973) – assumption that all are committed to same goals

Miller (1962)

- “focal concerns” of w/class male subculture
 - Smartness
 - Toughness
 - Trouble
 - Autonomy
 - Excitement
 - Fate
- Drift towards crime

Evaluation of Miller

- Gill (1977) – study of w/class area, residents believed some crimes not wrong

Criticisms

- Little evidence that these are values of w/class
 - Box (1981) – could apply to all young males
- Braithwaite (1989) – crimes of direct harm seen as wrong in all classes

UK

- Limited evidence of distinctive subcultures
 - Parker (1974) – yes
 - Downes (1966) - no

Matza (1961)

Critique of subcultural theory

- **Subterranean values** shared by all
 - No distinct subcultural values
 - Most control deviant desires
- When desires emerge – ***techniques of neutralisation*** employed

Techniques of Neutralisation

- Denial of
 - Responsibility
 - Victim
 - Injury
- Condemnation of condemners
- Appeal to higher loyalties

Marxist Subcultural Theory

- Only groups on margins of society not controlled by ideology & finance - resistance
 - Brake (1980) – w/class youth
 - Clothes, language - Disdain of capitalism & position in it
 - Resistance as “magical” – illusionary
 - Eg. Willis (1977) “Learning to Labour
- BUT – Cohen (1980) – bias of analysis**