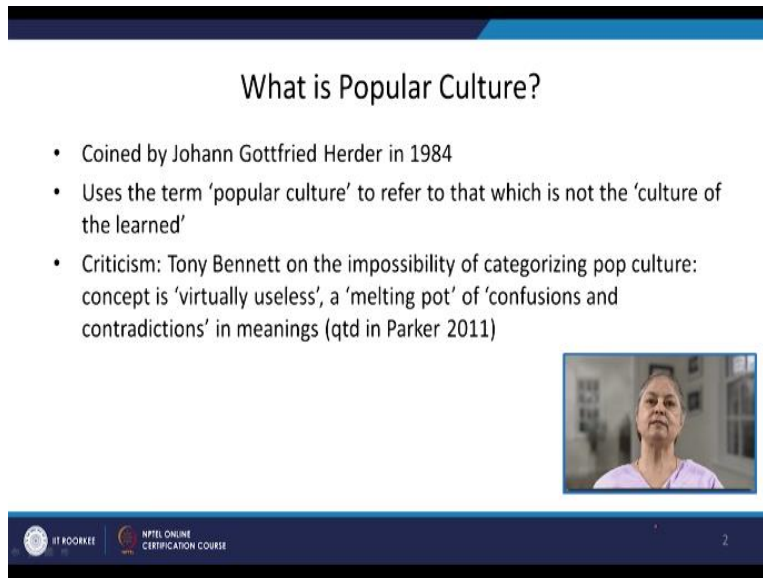


Literature, Culture and Media
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Lecture - 10
Subculture and Counterculture


Welcome dear participants to the fifth module of this week. In this module, we would be discussing popular culture, subculture and counterculture.


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What is Popular Culture?

- Coined by Johann Gottfried Herder in 1784
- Uses the term 'popular culture' to refer to that which is not the 'culture of the learned'
- Criticism: Tony Bennett on the impossibility of categorizing pop culture: concept is 'virtually useless', a 'melting pot' of 'confusions and contradictions' in meanings (qtd in Parker 2011)








The term popular culture was coined in 1784 by Johann Gottfried Herder. The use of the term popular culture was done to refer to that which is not the culture of the learned people. However, we find that the use of this term also came into a lot of criticism. Tony Bennett says that it is impossible to categorize pop culture and in his opinion this concept of popular culture is a melting pot of confusions and contradictions in meaning.

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- Theories of popular culture are 'historically restricted'— The kind of culture which emerged post Industrialization and Urbanization
- Holt N. Parker, "*Toward a Definition of Popular Culture*" (2011) says that the term exhibits a presentist bias—not applied to pre-industrial and pre-capitalist societies. Conceptual difficulties
- Proposes two ways of addressing these issues:
 - Shift from an economic/class/production (Marxist) model to a status/consumption (Weberian) approach
 - Utilizes Bourdieu's "cultural capital" and Danto and Dickie's "Institutional Theory of Art" in defining popular culture as "unauthorized culture"




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Theories about popular culture are historically restricted because they talk of a culture which emerged only in the post industrialization era, the era of urbanization. Holt Parker has highlighted this idea when he says that the use of this term exhibits a presentist bias because it is not applied to pre-industrial and pre-capitalist societies. So there are conceptual difficulties in understanding the universal nature of this concept.

He proposes two ways of addressing these issues. The first is that there would be a shift from the Marxist to the Weberian approach. From the economic class and production related model to a societal status consumption based model which had been suggested by Weber. The second way which he suggests is utilizing Bourdieu's concept of cultural capital and Danto's and Dickie's concept of Institutional Theory of Art should be done to define popular culture as unauthorized culture.

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- Dominic Strinati: "What we call 'popular culture'— a set of generally available artefacts like films, records, clothes, TV programmes etc.—did not emerge in its recognizably contemporary form until the post-Second World War period when new consumer products were designed and manufactured for new consumer markets."
- Problems: "Popular culture can be found in different societies, within different groups in societies, and among societies and groups in different historical periods" (Strinati).
- Existence of popular or common culture in Ancient Greece and Roman Empires
- Medieval carnivals, Folk Cultures, Travelling Troupes



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Strinati has said that what we call popular culture, for example the films, the records, the TV programs, the clothes we wear, etc did not recognize in any recognizable contemporary form until the post-Second World War period when new consumer products were designed and manufactured for new and emerging consumer markets. So we find that this approach that popular culture is rooted in a particular historical time runs into certain difficulties.

It does not take into account the existence of popular or common culture in other times of our history. For example, the existence of common culture during the ancient Greek and Roman empires and at the same time it does not want to take into understanding the significance and role of medieval carnivals, folk cultures and for example travelling troupes which were very popular.

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Storey on Popular Culture

- In *Cultural Theory and Popular Culture: An Introduction* (2006), John Storey presents a discussion of six definitions of the 'popular':
 - what popular culture is not, as an oppositional category
- 1. Quantitative definition: "Popular culture is simply culture which is widely favored or well liked by many people."
 - "non-evaluative, purely descriptive"
 - how do you agree on a figure at which something becomes popular?
 - Problem of inclusion and exclusion



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We find that John Storey has presented a discussion of six definitions of the term popular in this particular context. In his book on *Cultural Theory and Popular Culture: An Introduction* which was published in 2006. Storey has listed these definitions. The first is a quantitative definition which suggests that popular culture is simply culture which is widely favored or liked by many people simultaneously.

And in this sense, this notion is purely descriptive but at the same time there are certain questions also. For example, how can one agree on a figure at which something becomes suddenly popular and can be included as a part of popular culture? He also looks at the issues related with inclusion and exclusion which cannot be defined very easily.

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2. Qualitative : "The culture which is left over after we have decided what is high culture."

- Derogatory, Devaluation of aesthetics of the popular
- Not defining popular culture—how do you constitute what is 'high culture?'
- Is quality trans-historical? Does it mean or remain the same across time and culture?
- The categorization of a cultural product as high or low culture depends on its use
- Fundamental categorical error: high and popular cultures are never mutually exclusive


The second definition is qualitative in his views. The culture which is left over after we have decided what is high culture. In this sense, the use of this term is derogatory, it is a devaluation of the aesthetics of the popular also and at the same time if we are unable to define the term popular culture how can we define for example the high culture? Is quality trans-historical? Does it remain the same across time and culture?



And at the same time, he says that there is a fundamental categorical error here because high and popular cultures are never mutually exclusive.

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3. The fundamentally aesthetic difference between high and low spills into a substitute for mass culture

- mass culture as homogenized, commercialized and commoditized "culture industry" (Horkheimer and Adorno)
- Popular culture doesn't merely refer to "mass culture" in capitalist societies
- Pre-industrial societies had mass-consumed cultural products: Ancient Greek Theatre, Shakespearean theatre, carnivals, Corpus Christi processions









In his third definition, we find that he wants to tap the fundamental aesthetic difference which spills into a substitute for mass culture. Horkheimer and Adorno have talked about mass culture as being commercialized, homogenized and commoditized. Popular culture also does not merely refer to mass culture in capitalist societies and at the same time we cannot ignore the fact that even in pre-industrial societies we had different cultural products which were consumed by the masses.

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4. "The culture which originates from 'the people'."

- Originates from the suspicion of mass culture as propaganda
- The question of who gets included in the category of 'the people'
- Which individuals/groups are included?
- Division into 'good' or 'bad' culture— "Popular" if the intellectuals term it as positive mass consumption'; "mass" if it is seen as negative
- "Mass culture refers to popular culture which is produced by the industrial techniques of mass production and marketed for profit to a mass public of consumers." (Strinati 1957)
- Popular if it resists the dominant structures
- 'of the people' definition smacks of romantic nostalgia
- Main feature of the popular culture (pre and post industrial) is bricolage: reuse, refashioning, a re-appropriation of the acts and materials



The fourth definition suggests that it is the culture which originates from the people themselves. It originates from the suspicion of mass culture is propaganda and the question of who gets included in the category of the people remains there to be settled and at the same time if we are talking about the people how do we define them and which individuals and groups can be included in our definition of the people.

So we find that this is also an issue of dividing the culture into being good or bad at the same time. Popular if the intellectuals term culture as popular then it is normally considered to be a positive aspect of mass consumption. On the other hand, if intellectuals used the term mass culture, it is often seen as a negative opinion towards the similar cultural artifact. So according to him, the culture is popular if it resists the dominant structure.

And at the same time, he thinks that this definition of culture being produced by the people smacks of a romantic nostalgia and at the same time, he also suggests that the main features of the popular culture are reuse, refashioning, re-appropriation of the acts and materials and these are the features of the popular culture during the pre as well as post-industrial times.

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5. Popular culture as a “site of struggle between the "resistance" of subordinate groups in society and the forces of "incorporation" operating in the interests of dominant groups in society.” (Storey)

- Not an imposed culture
- Not strictly the oppositional culture either
- Territory of mutual exchange and negotiation
- Idea of hegemony explains how high and low culture interact with each other

6. Definition follows from postmodernity: “postmodern culture is a culture which no longer recognizes the distinction between high and low culture”

- Leads to the impossibility of defining popular culture
- No thing as ‘popular’ culture in this scenario because of the breakdown of categories

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In his fifth definition, popular culture has been mentioned as a site of struggle between the resistance of subordinate groups in society and the forces of incorporation operating in the interests of dominant groups of society and here we find that it is not a strictly and oppositional culture either. The sixth definition follows from postmodernity because postmodern culture is a culture which does not recognize the distinctions between high and low culture anymore.

At this aspect of postmodernism would be taken up in much detail in our next modules.

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Debate over Mass Culture

- Origins of the concept go back very far
- Mass culture and mass society received special attention in the mid 20th century
- Criticized for creating a “world with no social institutions mediating between the mass of individual citizens and the centralized structures of power” (Mukherji and Schudson 1986).
- Hannah Arendt, Erich Fromm, Karl Mannheim etc. characterize ‘mass society’ as susceptible to totalitarian regimes (especially after Nazi Germany)
- Isolation from political institutions



There has been a raging debate over what constitutes mass culture and how can we exactly define it. The origins of the concept go back very far in history is still the idea of mass culture and mass society started to receive critical attention only during the middle of the 20th century. It is also criticized for creating a world with no social institutions mediating between the mass of individual citizens and the centralized structures of power.

At the same time, critics have suggested that this idea of mass society or mass culture is susceptible to totalitarian regimes and they have suggested that especially after the experiences of Nazi Germany this aspect cannot be ignored. It is also suggested that it is isolated from the political institutions and therefore the participation of those structures which define and control power is no longer there.

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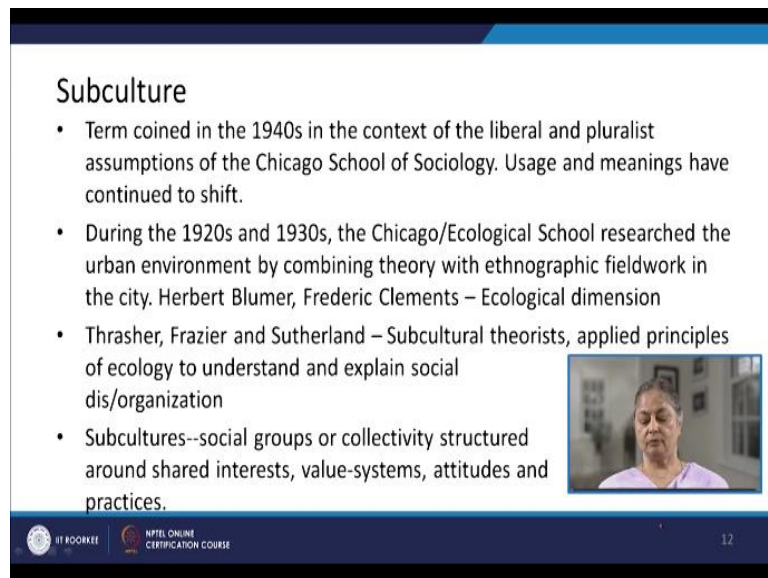
- Culturally, mass society is created through the diffusion of the machinery of the "culture industry" (Horkheimer & Adorno 1972, Benjamin 1968).
- New left-wing criticism rejects both the “extreme positions of the Frankfurt School and the liberal pluralism of Herbert Gans and others.” (Mukherji and Schudson 1986)
- Studies of audiences: how audiences absorb, adapt or resist the products of the culture industry.
- State of individuals: alienated, isolated, privatized.
- Pierre Bourdieu: Inequitable circulation of cultural products across the class spectrum produces and maintains socio-political inequality



Culturally, mass society is created through the diffusion of the machinery of the culture industry as Horkheimer and Adorno and also Benjamin have said earlier. The new left-wing criticism rejects both these extreme positions of the Frankfurt School and the liberal pluralism of Herbert Gans and others. At the same time, popular culture also studies the audience, how do the audiences absorb, adapt and resist the products of the culture industry.

However, state of the audience and these critics remains the same. It is according to them alienated, isolated and privatized. Here it is also pertinent to refer to Bourdieu again when he suggests that inequitable circulation of cultural products across the class spectrum produces and maintains socio-political inequality.

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Subculture

- Term coined in the 1940s in the context of the liberal and pluralist assumptions of the Chicago School of Sociology. Usage and meanings have continued to shift.
- During the 1920s and 1930s, the Chicago/Ecological School researched the urban environment by combining theory with ethnographic fieldwork in the city. Herbert Blumer, Frederic Clements – Ecological dimension
- Thrasher, Frazier and Sutherland – Subcultural theorists, applied principles of ecology to understand and explain social dis/organization
- Subcultures--social groups or collectivity structured around shared interests, value-systems, attitudes and practices.

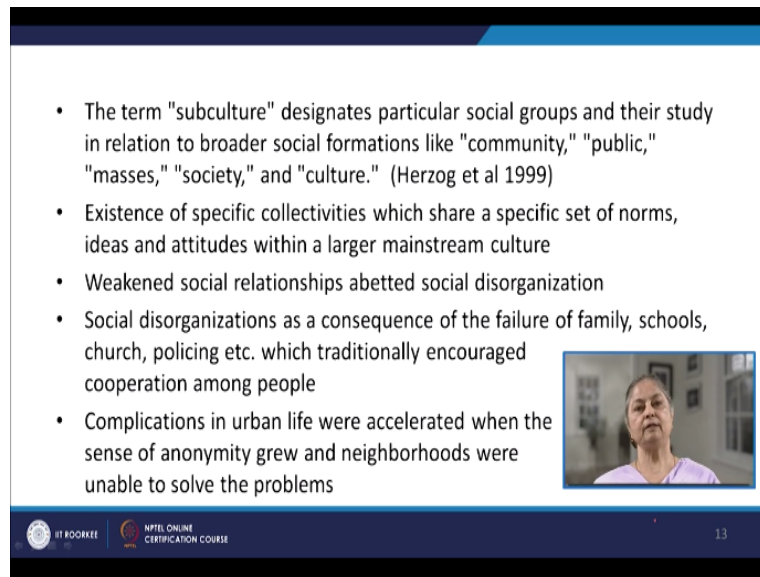
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Another term which started to gain crown around the 1940s is subculture. The term itself was coined in the 1940s in the context of the liberal and pluralist assumptions of the Chicago School of Sociology. Even though the usage of the term as well as associated meanings have continued to shift, we find that the basic approaches have remained more or less the same.

It was during the 1920s and 1930s that the Chicago School which is also known as an Ecological School sometimes researched the urban environment by combining theoretical approaches with ethnographic fieldwork in the city. Sociologists like Blumer and Frederic Clements started to look at the ecological dimensions of urban planning and how planning and the lives of people are related with the ecological environment.

Thrasher, Frazier and Sutherland were the subcultural theorists who applied principles of ecology to understand and explain social organization as well as the absence of social organization and the growing disorganization. The subcultures are understood as social groups which are constituted around shared interests, value-systems, attitudes and practices.

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The slide contains a bulleted list of points and a small video inset of a woman speaking. The text on the slide is as follows:

- The term "subculture" designates particular social groups and their study in relation to broader social formations like "community," "public," "masses," "society," and "culture." (Herzog et al 1999)
- Existence of specific collectivities which share a specific set of norms, ideas and attitudes within a larger mainstream culture
- Weakened social relationships abetted social disorganization
- Social disorganizations as a consequence of the failure of family, schools, church, policing etc. which traditionally encouraged cooperation among people
- Complications in urban life were accelerated when the sense of anonymity grew and neighborhoods were unable to solve the problems

The video inset shows a woman with dark hair, wearing a purple top, speaking in a room with a white wall and a framed picture.


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The terms of subculture designates particular social groups and their study in relation to broader social formations like community, public, masses, society and culture. It refers to the existence of specific collectives which have a specific set of norms, ideas and attitudes within a mainstream culture which it does not want to disrupt. It is also said that the subculture came into existence because the social relationships were weakening and the weakening social relationships abetted a sense of disorganization in the societies.

Social disorganizations were a consequence of the failure of social institutions of family, school, church, policing, etc which had been able to encourage a sense of participation and cooperation among the people. Complications in urban life were accelerated when the sense of anonymity grew among the people and these social institutions were unable to solve the problems of individuals anymore.

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- “Subculture“: Latin root – *sub* means ‘under’; not at odds with the society
- Is able to exist *within* mainstream culture, despite having own beliefs, norms
- fairly transient collectives studied apart from their familial/domestic or private settings
- Voluntary, informal, and organic affiliations formed in unregulated public spaces
- Operating within and against the disciplinary structure of enforced institutionalization (Amy Herzog et al 1999)
- Deviation from the norms of dominant culture (in terms of age, sexuality, race, gender, value-systems, interests)




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The idea of subculture and as the Latin root *sub* suggests under is never at odds with the society. It does exist within the mainstream culture despite having its own set of beliefs and norms. It is fairly transient collective which are studied apart from their familial or domestic or private settings. They are also voluntary, informal and organic affiliations which are formed in public spaces which are and remain to be unregulated.

They operate within and against the disciplinary structures of institutionalization and there are deviations from the norms of dominant culture.

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- Often disenfranchised, subordinate or marginal, underground
- Subcultures, and those who study them, usually designate themselves as oppositional, alternative, and countercultural
- Defined in relation to the mainstream
- Hierarchies of knowledge, participation and taste exist within subcultures
- Despite it, they are not violently outspoken
- United by common aesthetics, interests and experiences
- Eg., *Goth* – short term for Gothic Rock, experimental underground music and hardcore punk, identify themselves by dress colors and makeup



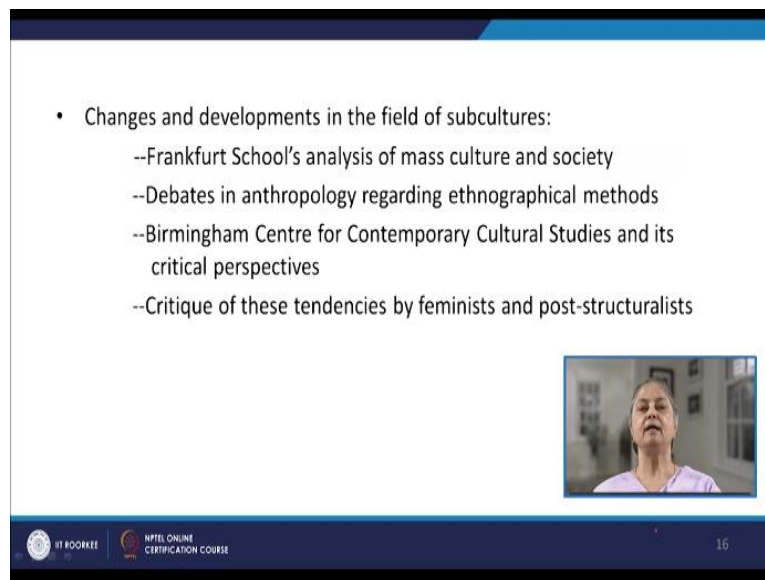
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They are often disenfranchised, subordinate and marginal but they are always defined in the context of the mainstream. These subcultures also have their own hierarchies of knowledge, participation and taste also. Despite it they are never violently outspoken. They are united by

common aesthetics, interests and experiences. A particular example which can be quoted here is the Goth which is the short term for the Gothic Rock.

These are the experimental underground music and hardcore punk which identify themselves by colors of their dresses, the makeup colors, etc.

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The slide contains the following text:

- Changes and developments in the field of subcultures:
 - Frankfurt School's analysis of mass culture and society
 - Debates in anthropology regarding ethnographical methods
 - Birmingham Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies and its critical perspectives
 - Critique of these tendencies by feminists and post-structuralists


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There have been changes and developments in the field of the studies of subculture. For example, Frankfurt School analyzed mass culture and society. There have been debates in anthropology regarding different models of ethnographical studies. Birmingham Center for Contemporary Cultural Studies and its critical perspectives also contributed to our understanding of what may constitute a subculture.

And at the same time, we find that critique of these tendencies by feminists and post-structuralists are also important to put the idea of subculture in a specific context.

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- Subcultural studies involves:
 - Participant-observation (survey, in-depth interview)
 - Analysis of collective behavior
 - Analysis of subcultural media (movies, underground magazines, literature, poems, music etc.)
 - “Sociological, anthropological, or semiotic analysis in order to address the organization and production of relational, material, and symbolic structures and systems” (Amy Herzog et al 1999)



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A subcultural study involves participant, observation for example surveys and in-depth interviews. The analysis of collective behaviour at the same time an analysis of subcultural media, the underground magazines, the movies, the literatures, poems and music which is popular among these groups. The sociological, anthropological or semiotic analysis in order to address the organization and production of a relational, material and symbolic structures and systems is also encouraged to understand this phenomena.

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Problems of Defining Subculture

Hans Sebalds (1975) points out that sociologists have failed to reach a consensus on the concept of subculture:

- Proposes a list of generic features and dimensions that constitute a collectivity as subculture
- Two important questions arise from a lack of a definition of subculture
 - (1) what are the characteristic dimensions of a collectivity that sociologists can designate a subculture?
 - (2) how can these elements be measured?
- Need of consensus on various generic elements of a subculture required for assessing whether the behavior of a particular group meets the criteria of a subculture

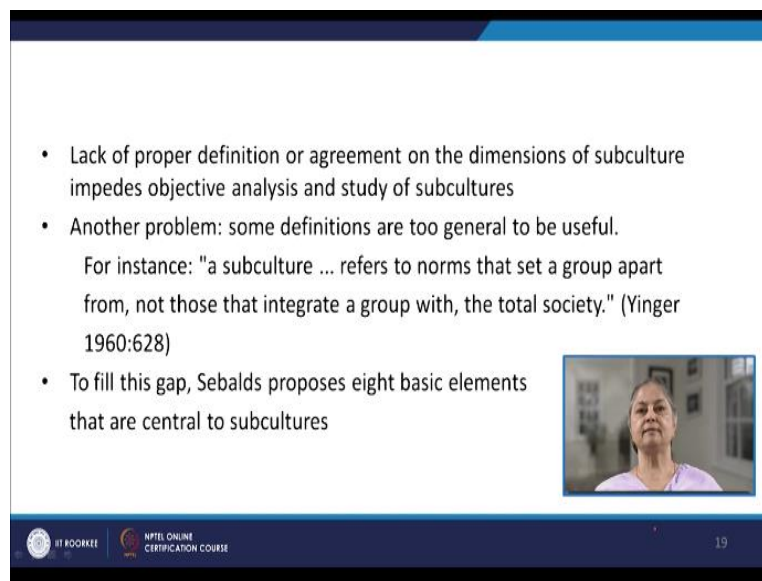


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However, we find that there are certain problems in defining the terms of culture. Hans Sebalds has pointed out that sociologists have failed to reach a consensus on the concept of subculture. He has proposed a list of generic features and dimensions that should constitute a collectivity as a subculture. He also suggests that in the absence of a very clear definition of subculture, two important questions arise.

The first is what are the characteristic dimensions of a collectivity that sociologist can designate as a subculture. The second is about the measurement of these elements. So the need of consensus on various generic elements of a subculture required for assessing whether the behaviour of a particular group meets the criteria of being a subculture or not. Another problem which is often faced is that most of the definitions are too general to be useful and they do not suggest any particular idea.


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• Lack of proper definition or agreement on the dimensions of subculture impedes objective analysis and study of subcultures

• Another problem: some definitions are too general to be useful.
For instance: "a subculture ... refers to norms that set a group apart from, not those that integrate a group with, the total society." (Yinger 1960:628)

• To fill this gap, Sebalds proposes eight basic elements that are central to subcultures



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To fill this gap we find that Sebalds has proposed 8 basic elements that are central to subcultures.

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Sebald's Eight Elements of a Subculture

1. Existence of fairly unique or different set of values and norms relative to the broader mainstream culture
2. Dominance of a specific lingo or jargon not shared with the larger society.
3. Existence of discrete channels of (mass) communication not reliant upon "outsiders."
4. Unique styles, taste and fads (grooming, fashion, gesture, and other behavior patterns) often resulting in subcultural ritual.

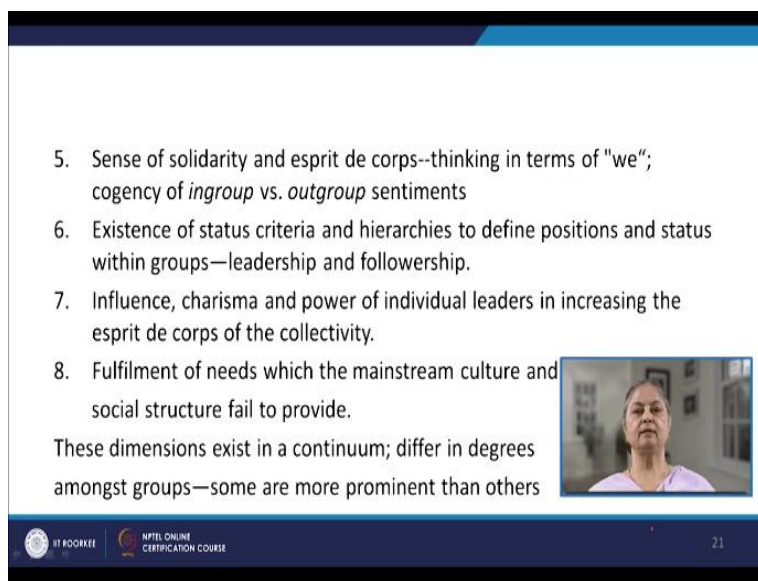


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The elements which he has suggested are listed here. The first element is the existence of fairly unique or different set of values and norms which are but at the same time they are also slightly different. Second is a dominance of a specific lingo or jargon which is not shared with the larger society and which is specific to a subculture. The third is the existence of discrete channels of communication which are not reliant upon outsiders.

That is the mainstream culture cannot understand it. Fourth is related with the unique style, taste and fads related particularly with grooming, fashion, gestures and similar other types of behaviour patterns.

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5. Sense of solidarity and esprit de corps--thinking in terms of "we"; cogency of *ingroup* vs. *outgroup* sentiments

6. Existence of status criteria and hierarchies to define positions and status within groups—leadership and followership.

7. Influence, charisma and power of individual leaders in increasing the esprit de corps of the collectivity.

8. Fulfilment of needs which the mainstream culture and social structure fail to provide.

These dimensions exist in a continuum; differ in degrees amongst groups—some are more prominent than others

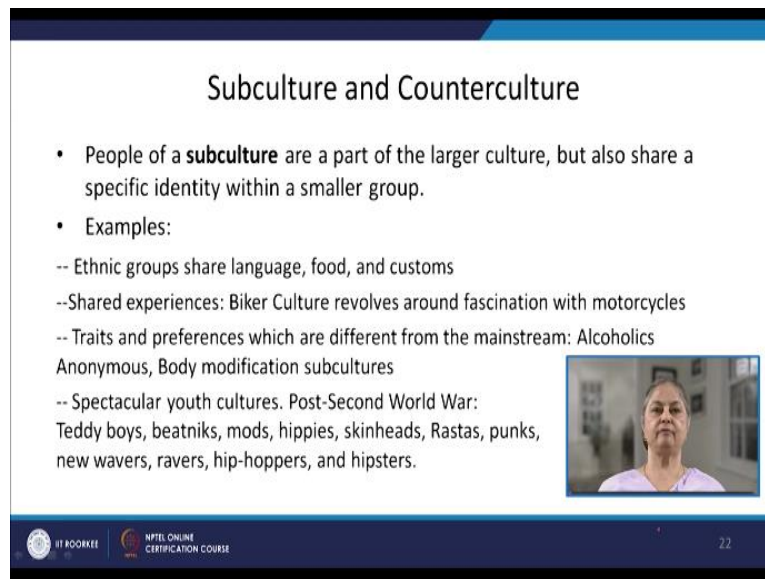
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A sense of solidarity, thinking in terms of we against those, so a cogency of ingroup versus outgroup sentiments is also important for this formation. The existence of status criteria and hierarchies which define positions and status within groups are also important for example the issues of leadership and followership are very important to understand a subculture. The influence, charisma and power of individual leaders should also be studied to understand the increase in the feeling of collectivity which exists in the subcultural groups.

And lastly he suggests that there should be fulfillment of needs which the mainstream culture and social structure fail to provide. So these dimensions exist in a continuum. They may differ in degrees amongst groups but let us say even though some may be more prominent than others. All these requirements must exist so that we can call a particular group subcultural.

The idea of subculture and counterculture is also presented sometimes as being oppositional phenomena which it is. So people of a subculture are a part of the larger culture.

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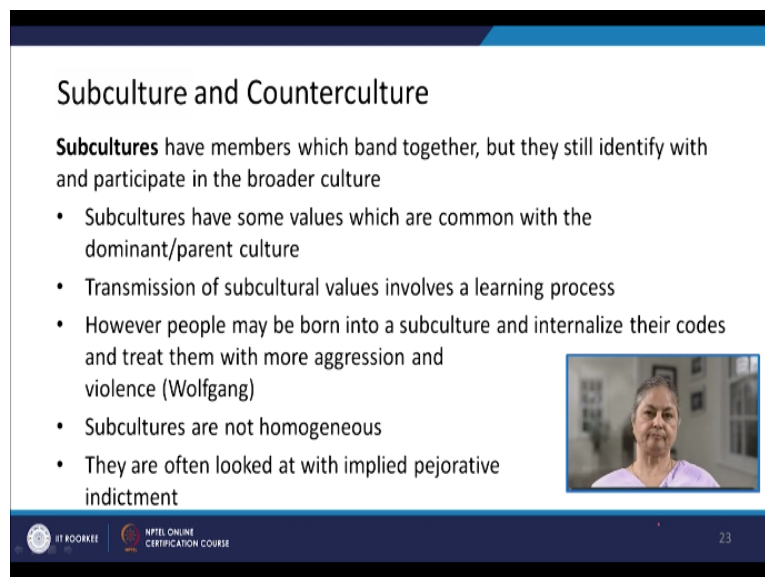
Subculture and Counterculture

- People of a **subculture** are a part of the larger culture, but also share a specific identity within a smaller group.
- Examples:
 - Ethnic groups share language, food, and customs
 - Shared experiences: Biker Culture revolves around fascination with motorcycles
 - Traits and preferences which are different from the mainstream: Alcoholics Anonymous, Body modification subcultures
 - Spectacular youth cultures. Post-Second World War: Teddy boys, beatniks, mods, hippies, skinheads, Rastas, punks, new wavers, ravers, hip-hoppers, and hipsters.

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But they also share a specific identity within a smaller group. For example, ethnic groups which share a particular type of language and particular preference for food, customs, etc. Shared experiences, traits and preferences which are different from the mainstream and those spectacular youth cultures which may proliferate from time-to-time.

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Subculture and Counterculture

Subcultures have members which band together, but they still identify with and participate in the broader culture

- Subcultures have some values which are common with the dominant/parent culture
- Transmission of subcultural values involves a learning process
- However people may be born into a subculture and internalize their codes and treat them with more aggression and violence (Wolfgang)
- Subcultures are not homogeneous
- They are often looked at with implied pejorative indictment

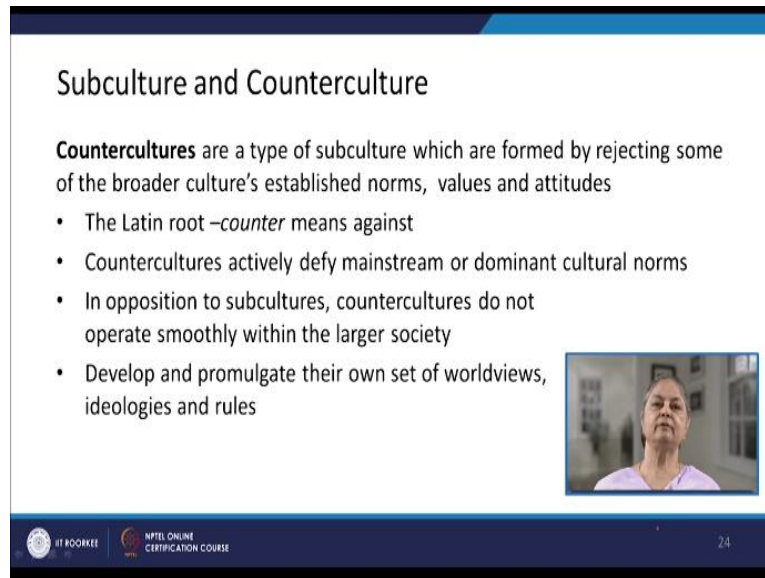
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Subcultures also have members which band together but despite it they identify with the broader culture and also participate simultaneously in the broader culture. So subcultures still have certain values which are common with the dominant and the parent culture. The

transmission of subcultural values involves a learning process and here we find that Wolfgang has raised a very pertinent question.

He thinks that people who have been born into a subculture and therefore they have internalized the course of that subcultural group are able to treat them with more aggression and growing violence. Subcultures are also not homogenous.

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Subculture and Counterculture

Countercultures are a type of subculture which are formed by rejecting some of the broader culture's established norms, values and attitudes


- The Latin root *-counter* means against
- Countercultures actively defy mainstream or dominant cultural norms
- In opposition to subcultures, countercultures do not operate smoothly within the larger society
- Develop and promulgate their own set of worldviews, ideologies and rules

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Counterculture on the other hand is a type of subculture which is formed by rejecting some of the broader culture's established norms, values and attitudes. The Latin sub root counter means against here and counterculture actively defies mainstream or dominant cultural norms. Unlike the subculture, it is in opposition to the mainstream culture and often it develops and promulgates its own set of worldviews, ideologies and rules which are never in consonance with the dominant ideologies of the main culture.

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- Create communities that operate at the margins or outside of the bounds of mainstream society. Eg: Hippie Communes
- Countercultures might actively defy larger society by developing their own set of rules and norms to live by, sometimes even creating communities that operate outside of greater society.
- Cults (derived from culture) are also considered as counterculture groups--informal, transient movements, deviation from orthodoxy or established norms, often involve following a leader




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They also create communities which operate at the margins or outside of the bounds of mainstream society, for example the Hippie Communes. Countercultures might also actively defy larger societies by developing their own set of rules and norms to live by and sometimes even creating communities which may operate outside of greater societies and do not maintain any direct link with them.

Cults which are derived from culture are also considered as counterculture groups. They are informal, transient movements are there. There is a deviation from orthodoxy or established norms and they often involve following a particular leader.

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- Countercultures are large movements that cause social change
- Suffragettes and feminists were also countercultures at a time
 - They had specific beliefs and values and fought to affect an essential change in the mainstream culture – right to vote
 - Hippies broke down previously held gender stereotypes and protested against the Vietnam War
 - Punk movement of the seventies and early eighties sought to be anti-establishment and anti-capitalist
- Public stances of these groups change
- Acceptance of demands in the main culture is instrumental in changed perspectives towards a culture being a sub or a counter



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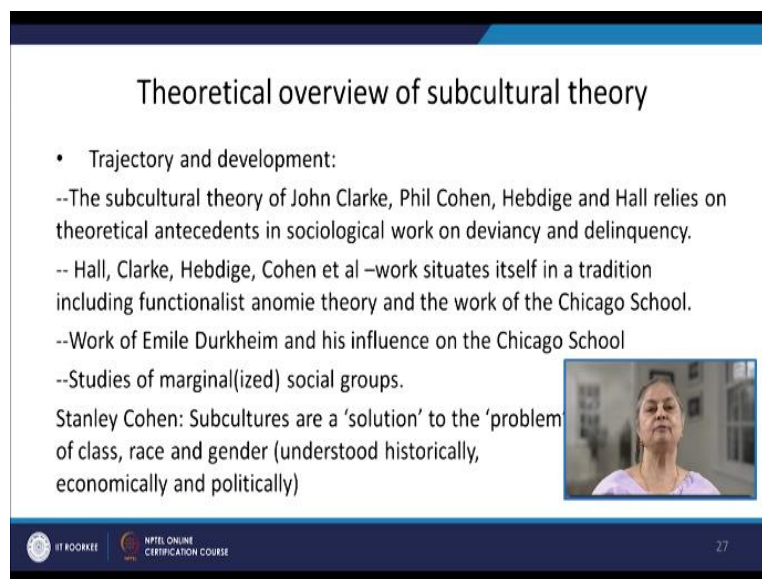
Countercultures are large movements that cause social change. At the same time, we have to understand that our perceptions about what constitutes a counterculture can also undergo a

shift with the passage of time. There was a time when suffragettes and feminists were also considered as countercultures. They had specific beliefs and values and they fought to affect an essential change in the mainstream culture.

Because they were demanding the right to vote for woman. Hippies also broke down gender stereotypes which were held very dear earlier and they protested against the Vietnam War. Similarly, we can also say that the Punk movement of the 1970s and early 80s sought to be anti-establishment and anti-capitalist. So we have definitely seen the public stance of these groups changing over a passage of time.

And acceptance of demands in the main culture is instrumental in our changing perspective towards a culture being a sub or a counter one.


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Theoretical overview of subcultural theory

- Trajectory and development:
 - The subcultural theory of John Clarke, Phil Cohen, Hebdige and Hall relies on theoretical antecedents in sociological work on deviancy and delinquency.
 - Hall, Clarke, Hebdige, Cohen et al –work situates itself in a tradition including functionalist anomie theory and the work of the Chicago School.
 - Work of Emile Durkheim and his influence on the Chicago School
 - Studies of marginal(ized) social groups.

Stanley Cohen: Subcultures are a 'solution' to the 'problem' of class, race and gender (understood historically, economically and politically)

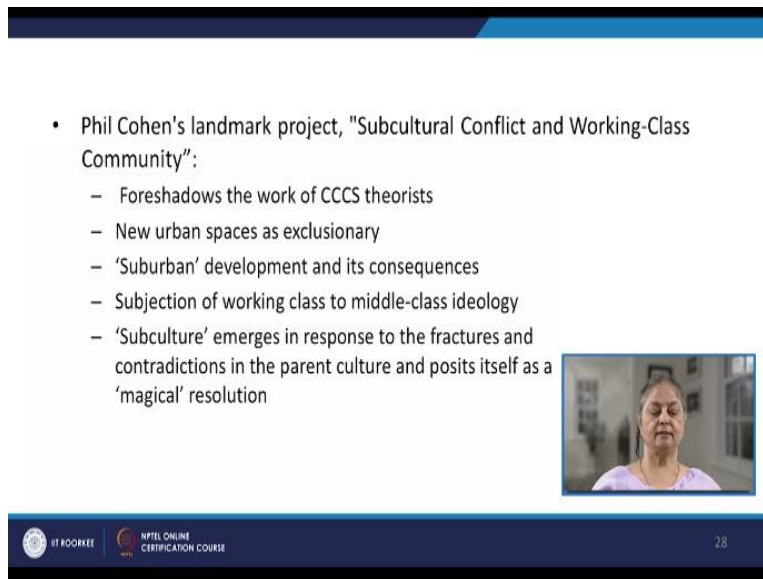


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The subcultural theory of John Clarke, Phil Cohen, Hebdige and Hall relies on theoretical antecedents in sociological work on deviancy and delinquency. Hall, Clarke, Hebdige and Cohen have situated their work in a tradition which included functionalist anomie theory as well as the work of the Chicago School critics. The influence of Emile Durkheim on the Chicago School is also an important theoretical influence on our understanding of the subculture.

The studies of marginalized social groups as well as Stanley Cohen's understanding of subculture as a solution to the problem of class, race and gender are also important to be referred to at this point.

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- Phil Cohen's landmark project, "Subcultural Conflict and Working-Class Community":
 - Foreshadows the work of CCCS theorists
 - New urban spaces as exclusionary
 - 'Suburban' development and its consequences
 - Subjection of working class to middle-class ideology
 - 'Subculture' emerges in response to the fractures and contradictions in the parent culture and posits itself as a 'magical' resolution


The slide features a list of bullet points on the left and a small video inset on the right showing a woman with her hands clasped in front of her. At the bottom of the slide, there are logos for 'HT ROOHRKE' and 'NPTEL ONLINE CERTIFICATION COURSE', along with the number '28'.



It is also significant for us to refer to Phil Cohen's landmark project on "subcultural conflict and working class community". This work has foreshadowed the work of the cultural theorist associated with the Birmingham Centre for study of contemporary culture. He has looked at new urban spaces as being basically exclusionary in nature which have resulted in suburban development and then he has tried to understand the sociological and cultural consequences of this development.

He has also commented on how the working class is being subjected to the middle class ideology and he has tried to look at the changes which this phenomena is bringing about. He says that subculture emerges in response to the fractures and contradictions in the parent culture and posits itself as a magical resolution.

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- John Clarke, Stuart Hall et al view youth subcultures through the prism of class; they are doubly articulated to a parent culture (the working-class) and the dominant culture.
- Difference between subcultures and other **resistant or alternative** cultures:
 - Working class cultures: home of subcultures
 - Middle-class cultures create counter-cultures
 - Subcultures exist in relation to the hegemonic forces of the dominant culture
 - 'Winning spaces'—appropriation of dominant culture; a negotiated territory; creative response to alienation and marginalization




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Clarke and Hall view youth subcultures through the prism of class and they say that it is doubly articulated to a parent culture the working class and the dominant culture. The differences between subcultures and other resistant or alternative cultures are also important for us to view. It has been studied that working class cultures are homes of subcultures whereas the middle-class cultures create countercultures.

Subcultures exist in relation to the hegemonic forces of the dominant culture. Winning spaces are appropriation of dominant culture, a territory which is negotiated, a creative response to alienation and marginalization felt by many in the growing spaces of urban area.

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- Discourses of style (dress, music, rituals) attempt to study the relations between the subculture, the parent culture and mass culture.
- Members of subculture invest their own meanings and values on dominant culture through a semiotic reconfiguration of objects, icons and symbols
- For Dick Hebdige, in *Subculture: The Meaning of Style*, class is only one dimension of subcultural formation
- Subcultural style—deliberately arranged sartorial /semiotic warfare—is crucial to making the "noise" essential to the success of a given subculture (Stahl)



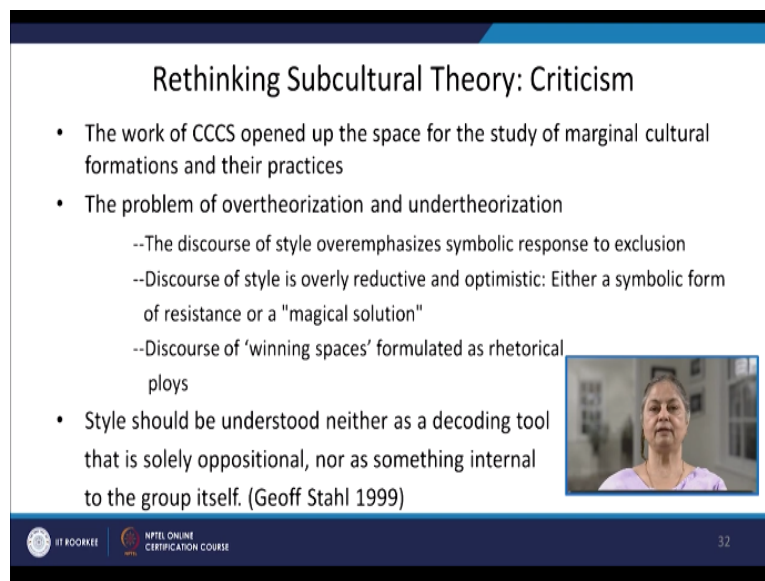
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At the same time, we find that the discourses of style which include a study of the dress patters, preferences for music and practiced and focused rituals, these discourses of style

attempt to study the relations between the subculture, the mass culture and the parent culture. Members of the subculture often invest their own meanings and values on dominant culture through a semiotic reconfiguration of objects, icons and symbols.

For Dick Hebdige, in subculture the meaning of style, class is only one dimension of subcultural formation. The subcultural style which is a deliberately arranged sartorial and semiotic warfare is crucial to making the noise essential to the success of a given subculture.

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Rethinking Subcultural Theory: Criticism

- The work of CCCS opened up the space for the study of marginal cultural formations and their practices
- The problem of overtheorization and undertheorization
 - The discourse of style overemphasizes symbolic response to exclusion
 - Discourse of style is overly reductive and optimistic: Either a symbolic form of resistance or a "magical solution"
 - Discourse of 'winning spaces' formulated as rhetorical ploys
- Style should be understood neither as a decoding tool that is solely oppositional, nor as something internal to the group itself. (Geoff Stahl 1999)

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If we look at the critical perspectives towards subcultural theory, we have to take into consideration that the CCCS had opened up a new space for studying the marginal cultural formations and their practices. It also in a way sensitized us to the problem of overtheorization and undertheorization. The discourse of style overemphasizes symbolic response to exclusion.

Discourse of style at the same time is overly reductive and optimistic too. Either it is a symbolic form of resistance or a magical solution, so it goes to the extremes. Discourse of winning spaces is formulated as rhetorical ploy. Style therefore as Geoff Stahl has alerted us it should be understood neither as a decoding tool that is solely oppositional nor as something which is internal to the group itself.

These two extremes should be avoided as the truth perhaps lie somewhere in the middle of these two extremes.

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- Stress on a linear model of class as the primary factor in the emergence of subcultures excludes other determinants like age, sex, race, gender and ethnicity
 - The discourse of "winning space" often overlooks the complexities of identity formation
- Subcultures and countercultures are integral part of cultural diversity. Their considerations and understandings also altered as new critical stances emanate



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The stress on a linear mode of class is the primary factor in the emergence of subculture excludes various other determinants which are perhaps much more important. For example, determinants like age, sex, race, gender and ethnicity. So the discourse of winning space often overlooks the complexities which lie in our identity formation.

Having said that I would say that the understanding of subcultures and countercultures is an integral part of understanding our cultural diversity. Their considerations and understandings also altered as new critical stances emanate and we have to look at them rooted in a particular discourse and still their interconnections with present day cultural studies are to be taken seriously. Thank you.