

# [The her ‘general introduction’ defines subcultures as](https://assignbuster.com/the-her-general-introduction-defines-subcultures-as/)

[Art & Culture](https://assignbuster.com/essay-subjects/art-n-culture/)

Themodern image we have of subculture stems from ideas from the late twentiethcentury. Those ideas and theories where formed from the youth subculturalgroups of the nineteen sixties. These groups included teddy boys, rockers, andthe mods. A subculture is defined to be “ a cultural group within a largerculture, often having beliefs or interests at variance with those of the largerculture.”  However, there are variousinterpretations of this definition, which are influenced by different factors.

Later theories regarding subculture go on to question the idea of a postsubcultural state. However, the concept of a subcultural narrative is stillrelevant. Subcultural narrative is based on a person’s opinion of a subcultureand their interactions with the same subculture.

In the films, Trainspottingand The Filth and the Fury, both Danny Boyle and Julien Temple, explore themesof deviance. Deviance is defined as “ the fact or state of diverging from usualor accepted standards, especially in social or sexual behaviour. Thisdefinition lends itself to be easily applied to the subcultures explored inboth films, these being the punks of the 1970s and the skagboys of the 1980sand 1990s, as both subcultures have both violent and criminal tendencies, whichcan be considered acts of deviance.

SarahThornton, author of The Subcultures Reader, in her ‘ General introduction’ definessubcultures as “ designate social groups which are perceived to deviate from thenormative ideals of adult communities” whereas Webster’s online dictionarycomments that “ Members of a subculture often signal their membership through adistinctive and symbolic use of style, which includes fashions, mannerisms, andargot.” This can be applied to Danny Boyle’s film Trainspotting, howeverwhether the ‘ skagboys’ and characters in the film can be a considered asubculture has been questioned recently. On one hand, the early examples ofsubculture, particularly the mods and rockers, are much easier to define, thisis due to them having more noticeable and clear traits, that make them anobvious part of a subculture. One example is clothing, the fashion choices wornby the mods and rockers, act as a uniform and have become common knowledge. This makes it easy for these subcultures to be portrayed in film and televisionover the years. A modern audience is familiar with the smart tailoring worn bythe mods. They are well known for their parkas and love of Italian scooterssuch as Lambrettas and Vespas.

Whereas the rocker had a much more masculinestyle, consisting of Jeans, chains and of course, leather jackets. The rockerspreferred a more powerful and perhaps masculine transport also, favouringmotorcycles such as Harley Davidsons. Phil Cohen, in his essay, SubculturalConflict and Working-Class Community, considers music to be a defining factorof someone’s subcultural identity. A certain genre of music is favoured by asubculture and its members. The mods were known for listening to British beatmusic and ska, such as the kinks and most notably The Who, whereas the rockers, again preferred more powerful sound, listening to a heavier style of rock, including Led Zeppelin and ACDC.

Asubculture that formed later, yet still had an obvious music theme and distinctclothing choices, was that of the punk era. This subculture is presented inJulien Temple’s 2000 film The Filth and the Fury. This is a Rockumentary, likethat of Quadrophenia which followed the mods and rockers.

The Filth and theFury, follows the sex pistols and the attitudes towards them. The word” deviate” is relevant here, as it relates to the mods, rockers, and punksubcultures. Whilst the mods were not particularly well known for any violent, rebellious, or criminal activity, it is however commonly considered as alternative andthere is well documented conflict between the mods and the rockers on theseafront in Brighton, the most notorious example was in 1964. This revealed aviolent side of both the two subcultures and suggests them to be somewhatcriminal and therefore can be considered deviant. The mods, where also knownfor their use of narcotics, including amphetamines, which further fuels theidea of them as deviant. Whereas the punks were explicitly known for theirrebellious and criminal nature, particularly the violence towards mainstreamsociety, making the punk subculture easily identifiable as a deviantsubculture.

Inhis piece, Subcultural Conflict and Working-Class Community, Critic Phil Cohenbegins to analyse subcultures, particularly in relation to the idea of anunrest or conflict between the younger and older generations subculture, herefers to this as ‘ youth’ and ‘ parent’ culture. Cohen implies that a person’sidentity with a subculture forms during their adolescence. When a youth mayfeel an active rift or separation from their parent’s culture, whist remaininga part of their community and having a sense of solidarity with their parentculture. This relates to the mods and rockers subcultures, many of theirmembers are aged in their mid to late teenage years, which further supportsCohen’s studies, as again commented on links to subcultures forming duringadolescence. However, the punk subculture doesn’t support Cohen’s theories asthis subculture is seen to be moving away from the conflict between ‘ youth’ and’parent’ culture, as an allegiance with the punk subculture tended to developin early adulthood, specifically the early twenties, rather than the adolescenceof the mods and rockers, this is highlighted in the film, The Filth, and theFury. Both the Sex Pistols and their fans, are of this age group, as they areshown to attend various concerts during the documentary. Whilst the conflict onBrighton seafront in the nineteen sixties suggest the mods and rockers to bemore violent in natures. A distinctive ‘ them’ and ‘ us’ style divide seems moreappropriate when thinking of the punk subculture, as it further emphasises theviolence and conflict provoked by the punks towards mainstream society.

Thisincludes the police, which would make the punk subculture a deviant one, ratherthan just the member’s parents or parent culture. JulienTemple’s film, The Filth and the Fury, the band, The Sex Pistols are presentedto be the inventors and instigators of the subculture. To some extent they areblamed for the violence and deviance that is associated with it. During thefilm, several news reports are given, the first reports on a “ new teenage cult” and is compared to the subcultures of the nineteen sixties. The reports referto the members as “ troublemakers.” Later in the film, Johnny Rotten, commentson the band’s first few years. He goes on to mention the first lyric they everwrote, which was the infamous “ I am an anti-Christ, I am an anarchist”.

Thefilm continues, following the bands rise in popularity.  As their popularity rises, so does the mediaattention. Most it appears to be negative, this is potentially due to thenature of the band and their lyrics, this arguably creates the punk subculture, which the film presents to be like a cult. Throughout the film, there areexamples of footage of the violence caused at the Sex Pistols concerts, oneband member, describes it as “ a little bit of a scuffle”. This appears to behim accepting the violence as normal and therefore condoning it amongst thepunk subculture. Therefore, to some extent The Sex Pistol’s condoning ofviolence at their concerts, promotes the punk subculture to be a deviant one. This further portrayed them as violent and promoted them amongst the subculture.

The members of the punk subculture can be considered rebellious and deviant, asthey are being deliberately so, however with other subcultures the link isn’tas transparent. One example of this is the ‘ skagboys’ presented in Boyle’s filmTrainspotting, they cannot be considered completely deviant as their actionsare fuelled by an addiction to heroin, rather than a spite for society.  Furthermore, the subculture of the skagboysthemselves can also be brought into question, as whether they can be classed assuch is debatable.

This is due to it developing much later than othersubcultures, as well as having less easily classified characteristics.  Theidea of a Post-subcultural time, stems from Rupert Weinsierl and DavidMuggleton’s essay, what is “ Post-subcultural studies” Anyway?’ In which they describe, how Post-subcultural theories, focus on an individual’s thoughts and feelings, rather than the beliefs formed by a subculture. In their essay they explain “ contemporaryyouth cultures are characterized by far more complex stratifications than thatsuggested by the simple dichotomy of “ monolithic mainstream”. In this quotationthey are highlighting the key idea of subcultures acting as more than just analternative to the mainstream society. They are a fully-fledged culture, thesediscredits earlier theories of a ‘ youth’ vs ‘ parent’ culture.

A point thatfurther supports this is that members of youth cultures in earlier periodswould now be the parents to members of post-subcultural or subcultural groups.  The1996, book to film adaptation of Irvine Welsh’s Trainspotting, directed byDanny Boyle, follows the day to day lives of a group of heroin addicts, commonly referred to as skagboys, living in Edinburgh in the late nineteeneighties. The film follows, Ewan McGregor’s character Mark Renton.

However, what is interesting about this adaptation, is that the audience is given aunique and very personal insight into the lives of the five main characters. Renton narrates most of the film, which is based strongly on the ‘ skagboys’ andthe subculture surrounding drugs and drug use. The online Webster’s Dictionary defines drug subcultures as “ examples ofcountercultures, primarily defined by recreational drug use,” Due to theircontinuous drug use, it is easy to consider the characters in this film ascriminals, and therefore deviant. However, the circumstances that lead them toheroin addiction should be taken into consideration before any sweepinggeneralisations are made about both the characters and the drug subculture ingeneral. Boyle’sfilm opens by introducing Renton and his friend and fellow addict Spud, playedby Ewen Bremmer.

The pair are being chased through the streets of Edinburgh, byfigures of authority. Presumed to be either police or security guards, this isindicated by the suits worn by them. Though is not mentioned explicitly, anaudience presumes the pair to have robbed a video store, as tapes fall fromtheir person whilst running. This initial scene presents the pair as bothdeviant and criminal, traits which are often assumed of someone who is a partof a drug subculture. The film continues by introducing Renton and the otherskagboys.

During which the infamous ‘ choose life’ speech is heard, thishighlights Renton’s distain for the mundane, everyday activities he is nolonger a part off, due to his addiction. Personally, I feel, Boyle chooses tointroduce us on a person level with the characters, so the audience views themas people, rather than just criminals or junkies. Undoubtedly Boyle doesn’tspare any details regarding their criminal activities, however we still learnto view the characters as people, with different strengths and weaknesses. SickBoy, played by Jonny Lee Miller, appears to be the most intelligent, and isparticularly articulate when discussing films, specifically James Bond. The useof Renton as a narrator throughout the film, not only gives more personalinformation an audience may not know otherwise.

It also appears like that of avoiceover in a documentary, he reveals an intimate but mature sense of self. Whilst appearing almost authoritative, similar perhaps to David Attenborough. It’s his voiceover, that makes it easy for an audience to side with him. Therefore, he can’t be considered a representative or archetype of drug cultureand deviance, but rather as a sensitive human being with both negative andpositive qualities. Again, there is definitely a strong argument that Trainspotting, should not beanalysed from a subcultural perspective, as perhaps post-subcultural theoriesare more appropriate. The characters in Boyle’s adaptation, don’t conform tothe typical requirements more traditional subcultures have.

Fashion being agood example of this. The group seem to only share one common interest, thatbeing heroin use, and how it has influenced them to view society from adifferent perspective. Therefore, they should not be considered a subculture, especially not one like the mods or the rockers. Animportant part of Post-subcultural theory, is again individualism. This should beconsidered when analysing Trainspotting. From the beginning of the film, it isclear the different characters all have different opinions on many differenttopics.

To say they didn’t agree on everything, would be a massiveunderstatement. This is symbolized at the end of the film, by Renton’sbetrayal. During which he steals the money the group made from selling drugsand flees to Amsterdam. He only leaves four thousand, an equal cut, to hisclosest friend Spud. The drug deal is the most deviant act during the film.

Itis the most illegal act the group take part in. Therefore, due to this it’sarguable the group are deviant. However, Renton is initially opposed to thedeal, but is forced into it by the most aggressive and violent member, FrancisBegbie. Played by Robert Carlyle. Carlyle’scharacter is perhaps the most paradoxical. The opening scene of the film, reveals how he is completely against taking illegal drugs. His line “ no waywould I poison my body wi’ that shite, all thee fucking chemicals” highlightsthis view clearly.

However, Boyle creates irony here, as a pint, a shot andcigarettes are all present in the foreground whilst he makes this claim. Evenfrom the start of the film, Boyle presents Begbie as being very anti-drugs. This separates him from the rest of the group. However, it also acts to arguethe taking of drugs isn’t criminal, as the biggest criminal is anti-drugs. Thedrugs do not make the skagboys deviant, but rather the act of taking them makesthem deviant. As despite the strong association with the skagboys being adeviant group, there are more deviant people not part of such groups. Therefore, trainspotting should not be judged as a film about subculturaldeviance, but rather as a film from a post-subcultural perspective, who’scharacters all differ regarding deviance and perhaps morality. Boththe Filth and the Fury and Trainspotting reveal an insight into two different subculturesand question whether they should be classed as subcultures.

They also reveal aninsight into themes of deviance regarding said subcultures. In the Filth andthe Fury, the punks are portrayed to aim to be as rebellious and deviant aspossible. Their actions centre themselves deliberately on deviant acts, whereasthe Skagboys in Trainspotting, aren’t centrally focused on deliberate deviantacts. Therefore, Boyle’s film is more about people, than the drug subculture. There has been some critical opinion, that Boyle condones the use of heroin, however he instead gives an insight into the culture. It is the voiceover byRenton that makes the characters feel human.

Therefore, to summariseTrainspotting allows an audience to come to its own conclusion on members of adrug subculture, and where they are in fact deviant.