

Resistance of rituals in youth culture



**ASSIGN
BUSTER**

Write a critical summary of the arguments presented in the chapter, including a concise summary of what you think are the key arguments and points of the chapter and your own views on the strengths and weaknesses of the arguments.

'Resistance of Rituals' was a book written in 1975 by sociologists from the Centre of Contemporary Studies, Birmingham. The book aimed to explain the concept of 'youth culture', and strived to characterise the culture within a post war context. Ultimately, I shall endeavour to compose a critical summary of the key arguments within the chapter, and further point out key critiques of the arguments presented. The term 'youth subculture' is defined as a subculture, characterised with having distinct styles, behaviours, and interests and in part derived from a parent culture. The 1950's were seen as a time of change for the youth within Britain, to the extent of being seen as the "vanguard of social change" (1975, 22). These changes stemmed from the emergence of 'affluence'. Abrams quoted, "as compared with 1938, their real earnings".... "have increased by 50%".... "and their real discretionary spending has probably risen by 100%" (1975, 18). The sense of affluence was seen as a growing characteristic amongst the working class, with a rise in the amount of spending by this social class. A key term that arose was 'embourgeoisement'. Zweig described the working class worker now as the 'new bourgeoisie worker (1975, 21). This demonstrates that youth consumption of material items had increased exponentially in comparison to pre World War 2. Teenagers were characterised by consumption habits and as a, "distinctive teenage spending for distinctive teenage ends in a distinctive teenage world" (1975, 18).

The rise of mass media directed towards teenagers was another important factor. Alongside the consumption increase, was a rise in mass entertainment, art and culture, coined as the 'communications revolution', as it helped to influence youth's perceptions. Johnson (1964) demonstrated that bands were often "bloated with cheap, confectionary and smeared with chain store make up"...." stiletto heels, the shoddy, stereotyped, 'with-it' clothes" (1975, 19). An example was Top of the Pops, which commenced the same year Johnson was writing. These programs not only showed what was now attractive to teenagers, with the 'must have' clothing, but also characterised the change in attitudes and interests of the youth during the 1950's. The use of programmes directed to the young, had a direct impact in the creation of the distinctive style of clothing they adopted within their wardrobe.

The issue of class, once again became an apparent discourse within society during the 1950's, and there was an underlying current that there could potentially be unrest from the working class. Even within the teenage market, which was characterised by affluence, Abrams, was keen to emphasise that in fact it still comprised of youth who were overwhelmingly working class. Working class youth were creating subcultures, which to the wider society, seen as a social problem. These subcultures arose to deal with the problem of 'anomie', which in more basic terms was the "disjunction between middle class goal of success and the restricted means of achieving them" (1975, 28). The sheer feeling of status frustration and failure from feeling rejected by middle class institutions and therefore, not being able to achieve their goals.

Cohen (1972) looked at youth within the east end of London and how the change in the working class community led to the arising of youth subcultures. He found that changes within the working class community, such as the destroying of the local pub, the fragmentation of the extended family and dispersal of the labour force, profound changes occurred, not only effecting adults but the youth also. Through youth experiencing these shifts, they reacted due to wanting to resolve them.

A key issue raised was of 'cultural hegemony'. This term is often linked to the work of the neo Marxist, Gramsci. It is defined as the ideological, economic or cultural power, exerted by the dominant class over the subordinate class within society. Control is exerted through informal social control, therefore, through the use of consensus and not direct physical force. Gramsci affirmed that no regime, how authoritative and controlling it was, could be sustainable. Thus, ideological and cultural control could help to sustain social control through popular support, consequently maintaining the status quo, rather than revolting. Gramsci believed that hegemony was maintained through the myth of 'affluence'. This was adopted within society to cover the real gaps of inequality and sustain the fantasy of a utopian society in which all are equal. However, hegemony is not a monolithic state, but a notion which has to be constantly won. Gramsci further asserted, "[h]egemony can never wholly and absolutely absorb the working-class into the dominant order", and as a result, "class culture never disappears" (1975, 41). Cohen believed that this is how working class youth subculture was created. Youth subculture was a way of dealing with the problems of not

only young, but working class and the contradictions they believed were writhed within society.

Cohen saw subcultures as an ideological dimension, resultantly giving rise to a number of youth subcultures. He went further, describing the role of subcultures as, “ to express and resolve”...” the contradictions which remain hidden or unresolved in the parent culture”... “ retrieve some of the socially cohesive elements destroyed in the parent culture” (1975, 32). Many forms of resistance, created by the parent culture in their encounters with dominant institutions within society, were adopted in part by the working class subcultures. However, a number of critiques can be detected of this complex and highly sophisticated analysis. Such as how is the influence of the parent culture adopted by youth cultures, secondly, how do we approach the concept of youth subcultures? My own approach, is that subcultures is a fluid and highly fragmented approach when looking at it in practise, as different subcultures show the different paths of resistance taken by working class youth.

Moreover, fashion and style was another element examined. Youth subcultures tended to adopt styles of dress dependant of their milieu, deriving from school, work and leisure. Cohen believed that style was made by, “ the organisation of objects with activities and outlooks”....” in the form and shape of a coherent and distinctive way of being in the world” (1975, 54). This was done was through music, ritual, dress and ‘ argot’. Therefore, even though the objects were available, groups would constructively make distinct styles. Furthermore, style and fashion was also used to alter meaning of clothing, such as the Teddy Boys, who adopted Edwardian dress, <https://assignbuster.com/resistance-of-rituals-in-youth-culture/>

which was historically a style of dress worn by young wealthy men. Working class youth subcultures were able to create styles that were meaningful to themselves. Another reason why style was deemed as important was that it could show the resistance and experiences youth were going through and at the same time, could create a self image. Skin heads adopted shaven heads, boots and short jeans, as they sought to portray a sense of masculinity, ‘hardness’ and sense of being working class, hence, a way of expressing meaning to wider society and creating meaning for themselves.

The penultimate concept of importance within youth cultures is the analysis of youth cultures from a middle class perspective. This aspect of youth cultures was demonstrated within the mid 1960’s, and was based upon ‘disaffiliation’. The middle class youth subculture was also associated to folk revival and Bob Dylan. The roots of the middle class culture can be detected to the hippie culture, affecting styles, attitudes, dress and music. Its creation was due to the division of intermediate white collar, and those within lower managerial employment, which Gramsci saw as “‘ the organic intelligentsia’ of modern capitalism” (1975, 63).

The mass media could be seen as integral, as it was, an overwhelming factor in forming public perceptions. On the forefront, the media worked together with politicians, residents and the police, to help to curb the permissive activities of youth. Nevertheless, the media were often seen to glamorise youth subcultures during when different events happened. For example, the violence between the Mods and Rockers at Brighton beach led to the media publishing reports which supported social anxiety and moral panic surrounding youth. However, this concurred at the same time as press

releases on Mod fashion style, and the way it was becoming popular.

Therefore, it clearly holds to the view that the media portrayed a 2 sided face regarding youth, on the one hand supporting social anxiety and fear, and on the other, showing positive publicity towards youth.

Nonetheless, there are some further shortfalls in this chapter. Firstly, it can be argued that class never went away during the 1950's, but poverty did, so class wasn't mentioned, but when poverty again emerged, so did discourse on class. Secondly, within the chapter, nothing was written about the experiences working class youths go through in relation to these institutions (eg. School and work), and how it affects their response to the dominant culture. A key example of this would be the work of Willis (1977), who researched working class boys within a school and the culture they formed. Thirdly, upon reading the text, it is clear to see that empirical evidence is not demonstrated within any of the chapter. From a quantitative perspective, this can be seen as a vital critique. Furthermore, the authors seemed to be gender specific, constantly referring to youth culture surrounding males, with an underwhelming amount written on females. Lastly, not all youth cultures were delinquent, such as the hippies, who were for socialisation purposes.

Upon conclusion, it is clear in no uncertain terms, that the 1950's had a profound effect within society whole through the rise of affluence, in which Cohen believed hegemony, was maintained. However, during the late 1950's, both working and middle class youth were seen as causing anxiety to wider society. The rise in subcultures was seen to be due to the youth realising the contradictions within society, and sought to amend them. The subculture affected styles of dress, attitudes and behaviour of the young,

<https://assignbuster.com/resistance-of-rituals-in-youth-culture/>

and the role of the media played an integral part in not only attacking subcultures, it also glamorised elements of cultures.