SUBCULTURE OVERVIEW

Whenever a group of people identify themselves as different from the rest of their society and are seen by others as being distinct, they form a subculture to the dominant culture. Members of a subculture may distinguish themselves by certain beliefs, attitudes, norms, or styles of life. Ethnic or religious backgrounds, occupational activity, socio-economic orientation, or age grouping may explain a subculture.

Immigration can produce a subculture, as can the alienation of individuals and groups within a society. Spanish-speaking Latinos are the fastest growing—in size and influence—subculture in the U.S. The hippies of the 1960s are an example of a subculture produced by contradictions within a culture and the consequent isolation experienced by many.

Adolescence was not always a subculture. Modern society has so segregated young people by age and grade, prolonged their adolescent status and restricted their adult activities, that youth have produced their own special life and world.

When contrasting a subculture to the dominant culture, do not assume the homogeneity of that main culture. U.S. culture today is a mixture of values and styles, but there tends to be some general consensus as to who we are, "what goes", and what is not appropriate and permissible.

Young people, blacks, and other minorities have also objected to being called SUBcultures. A better term might be special-culture, but "subculture" is used in reference to a larger sociological system and not meant to imply inferiority.

Within the adolescent subculture are other special groups or subcultures. "Surfers", "druggies", "punks", "juvenile delinquents", and "street kids" are examples in this country as are "teddy boys", "mods", and "skinheads" of Britain. Gangs and cliques are better used as narrower terms. "Jocks", "brains", "artsies", and such important high school groups, may or may not distinguish themselves as subcultures. How their values and styles give identity to members still needs to be considered.

IMPLICATIONS

1. Young people develop their self-image and identity in reference to their peers. It is important to know how society makes it seemingly impossible for some young people to find self worth and direction within the mainstream and to study that subculture.

2. Education fails when it does not start with the immediate world of the learner and lead to the broader world of universals and diversity.
3. Youth work serves the needs of young people. It must be done, therefore, within the subculture of youth. Youth work involves cross-cultural communication. Since subcultures exist in larger cultures, the youth leader or adult without cross-cultural sensitivity may be heard by young people but not really listened to.

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