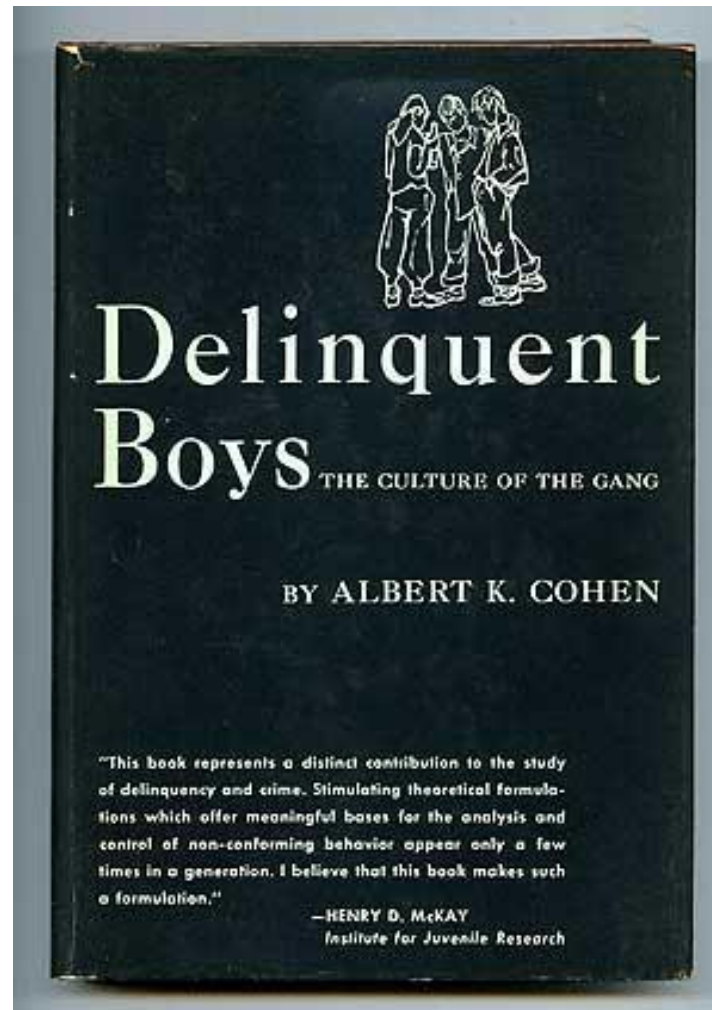
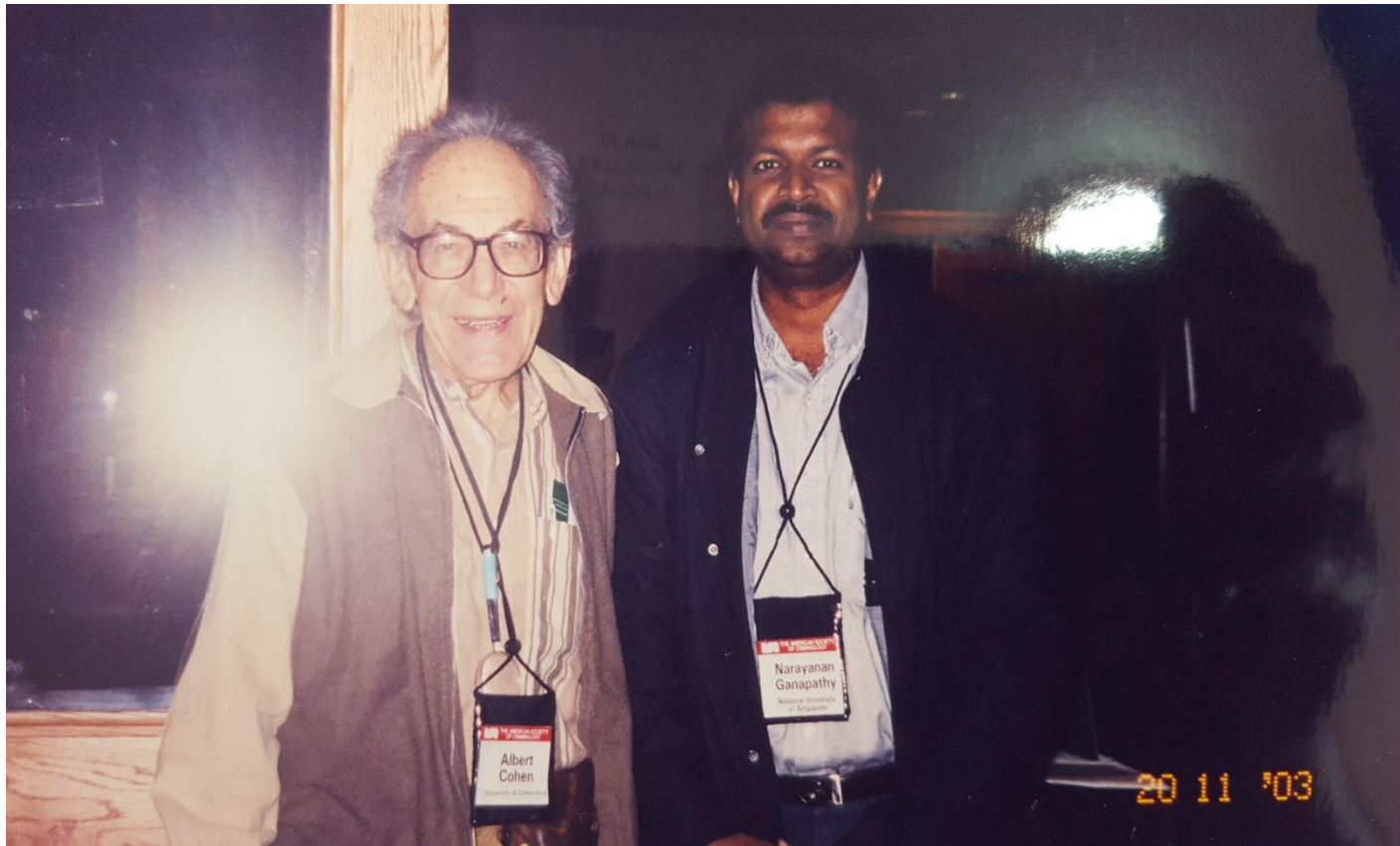


## Topic 5: **Subcultural** Theory of Deviance

- Subcultural Theories of Deviance and the Work of Albert Cohen (1955)
- Deviance as Process
- Social Class, Schools and the formation of Gang Subcultures

# Albert Cohen (1955)





# Subcultures

- What are subcultures?
- When are they formed?
- Who are the members?
- What functions do subcultures play?
- What is the relationship between mainstream/dominant culture and subculture?

# Subcultures

- Subcultures arise/emerge whenever there are contradictions and imperfections posed by the **dominant culture**
- Analytically these contradictions can be conceptualized in terms of the structural variables of social class, race/ethnicity, age, gender, sexuality, religion, nationality, geography

# Subcultures

“The crucial condition for the emergence of new subcultural forms is the existence, in effective interaction with one another, of a number of actors with similar problems of **adjustment**” (Cohen 1955: 59)

- Deviant subcultures as a response to the structural conditions/contingencies that delinquents face

# Subcultures

- Deviance is not the abrupt transition between different permutations of goals and means
- **Acquiring a criminal or deviant identity** involves “the process of progressive involvement in, commitment to, and movement among social roles” out which a deviant identity is finally established (Cohen 1955)
- Deviance as Process

# Subcultures

- Examining the relationship between social class (socialization), **school system** and the formation of gangs
- Gangs are the empirical/analytical equivalent of subcultures
- Gangs as an alternative social system and social status

can focus on the lived experiences, on the



# Subcultures

different class excursion destinations for different class abilities

- Individual responsibility
- Academic Achievement
- Rationality in time budgeting
- Good manners and sociability
- Control of aggression
- Constructive use of leisure time
- Respect for other people's property

**Middle-class Values** (Source: Albert Cohen, *The Delinquent Boys*, 1955)

problem comes when working class children, who during their socialisation, are not taught these values

1- ill equipped to meet these middle class expectation, did not have the luxury of that kind of socialisation = their structural position in the social structure, has denied the kind of socialisation they would need to meet the expectation of the school system (assume kids want meet but are unable to

working class socialisation as less

# Subcultures

“The delinquent subculture...permits no ambiguity of the status of the delinquent relative to that of anybody else. In terms of the norms of the delinquent subculture, defined by its negative polarity to the respectable status system, then the delinquent's very non-conformity to middle-class standard sets him above the most exemplary college boy” (Cohen 1955)

concerted cultivation  
- middle class privilege  
- intergenerational

there are elements of:

- 1) distinctiveness
- 2) determinism

ignore choices/alternatives exist

# ALBERT COHEN

- status frustration A concept developed by Albert Cohen in *Delinquent Boys* (1956), and used to explain working-class male delinquency as being a reaction formation towards middle-class values of success, as embodied in the school. Delinquent boys experience status frustration and invert the middle-class values of the school to create a delinquent subculture. Cohen's argument forms part of the anomie and strain traditions of delinquency and subcultural analysis.

# Masculinity and Gangs

- ...the result of a collective awareness of a hegemonic, masculine future that is, in terms of social possibilities, almost entirely unobtainable. It is a form of transcendence limited by class and race divisions of labor and power where individuals become aware of their position in society by perceiving what future is and is not possible for them. For many lower-working class, racial minority boys, the street group has become both a collective solution to their prohibitions and a life-style that sometimes takes the form of street crime. For these youths, then, street crime becomes a “field of possibilities” for transcending class and race domination and an important resource for accomplishing gender (Messerschmidt, 1993, p. 103).

## A Retort...

“...the essential point of our findings is the very close association of lax parenting methods with severe social handicap. If these factors are ignored, and parental laxness is seen as an “attitude” which by education or by punitive measures can be shifted, then our findings are being misinterpreted. It is the position of the most disadvantaged groups in society, and not the individual, which needs improvement in the first place” (Wilson 1980: 233-4)

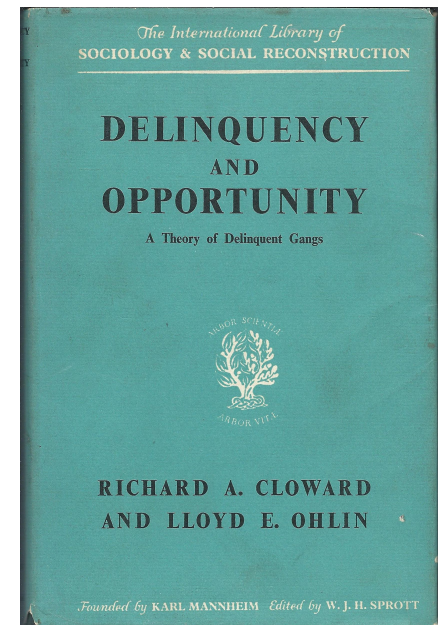
# Sociological Significance of Tattooing

- Self-inscription / has a social context and function (Susan Benson, 2000)
- Defines the self against an outside world and at the same time inscribing the individual onto a social group
- Clinton Sanders (1988) tattoo is “both a mark of disaffiliation’ from the conventional society and symbolic affirmation of personal identity and association
- Frankie Johnson (2006) “autobiographical statements”, “personal objects, symbolic expressions of personality, biography , interests and individual fantasies”.

# Delinquency and Opportunity

- Richard Cloward and Lloyd Ohlin (1960)
- Concept of Differential Access to Illegitimate Opportunities
- Understanding Criminal, Conflict and Retreatist Subcultures
- Efficacy of Subcultural Theories of deviance

overworld /



# Illegitimate Subcultures and Differential Access

- Richard Cloward and Lloyd Ohlin (1960)
- Illegitimate society as a reflection of the legitimate society
- Three different types of Illegitimate subcultures
- Criminal Subcultures
- Conflict Subcultures
- Retreatist Subcultures

criminal subcultures as the apex of subcultures  
- yakuza  
- mafia  
- hk triads



# Differential Opportunity Theory

## ➤ Gang types:

- Criminal gangs: develop in areas where conventional and illegitimate values are integrated.
- Conflict gangs: develop in neighbourhoods characterized by transience and instability, where there are few opportunities to get ahead in organized criminal activities.
- Retreatist gangs: members of these gangs are double failures as they have been unsuccessful in both the legitimate and illegitimate worlds.

# Illegitimate Subcultures and Differential Access

- Illegitimate Subcultures, Illegal Entrepreneurialism, and the Performance of Masculinities
- Focal Concerns of Gangs (Walter Miller)
- Relationship between working class socialization and gang orientation

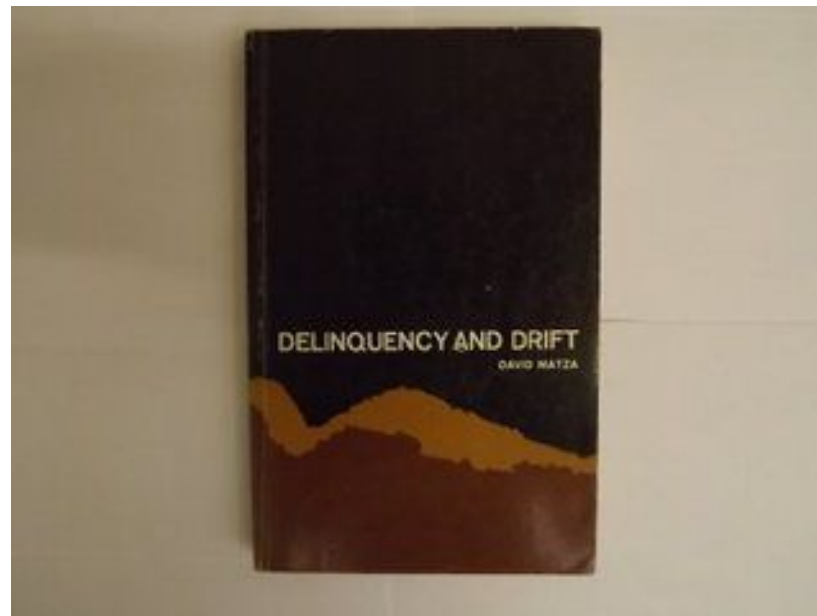
# David Matza and the Concept of Delinquency Drift

- The theory posits that an individual subscribes to both conventional as well **subterranean values** simultaneously
- Deviance is not an extraordinary phenomenon or pursuit
- Definitely not a pathological phenomenon!

liminality

# David Matza and the Concept of Delinquency Drift

- Deviance/crime is 'normal' but because they are often expressed in the most inappropriate of situations that they acquire their "deviant"/ "criminal" label
- All individuals are known to engage in techniques of neutralization



| TECHNIQUE                      | EXAMPLE  |
|--------------------------------|--|
| DENIAL OF RESPONSIBILITY       | "It wasn't me" / "it wasn't my fault".   |
| DENIAL OF INJURY               | "It didn't hurt" / "they have insurance".  |
| DENIAL OF THE VICTIM           | "You deserved it" / "what did you expect?"                                       |
| CONDEMNATION OF THE CONDEMNERS | "You're just as bad" / "You're only blaming me because...".                      |
| APPEAL TO HIGHER LOYALTIES     | "I had to help my friends/family" / "I did it for my country / race / religion". |