

# FUNCTIONALIST EXPLANATIONS OF SUBCULTURAL FORMATION

Functionalist explanations of subculture formation focus on how these groups emerge as responses to social structures and transitions, ultimately serving important roles in maintaining societal stability. Eisenstadt and Parsons emphasize the role of youth subcultures in navigating the transitional phase from childhood to adulthood, offering identity and social integration. In contrast, Cohen and Cloward & Ohlin highlight how subcultures form as adaptations to social inequality, with alternative norms or illegitimate opportunities providing ways to address frustrations and achieve status. In the spaces below, outline the different functionalist perspectives on the formation of youth subcultures



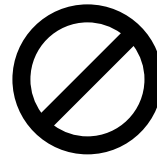
## EISENSTADT

Youth as a  
transitional  
stage



## PARSONS

Youth as a  
social role



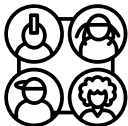
## COHEN

Status  
frustration



## CLOWARD AND OHLIN

Illegitimate  
opportunity  
structures



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## EISENSTADT

Youth as a transitional stage

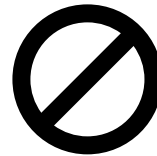
Eisenstadt viewed youth subcultures as a response to the **transitional phase** between childhood and adulthood. He argued that this period is marked by a degree of uncertainty and instability, as young people move away from their families and prepare for their adult roles. Subcultures provide a way for youths to cope with this transitional phase. They offer a sense of **belonging and solidarity**, acting as a “safe space” where young people can experiment with their identities.



## PARSONS

Youth as a social role

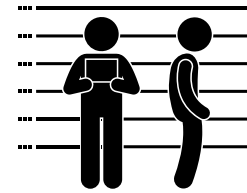
For Parsons, youth subcultures emerge because adolescence is a distinct social role. This role allows young people to develop independence and transition from the **particularistic values** of the family (such as loyalty and tradition) to the **universalistic values** of wider society (like meritocracy and achievement). Parsons saw youth subcultures as a temporary phase where individuals test boundaries and develop their identities.



## COHEN

Status frustration

Cohen argued that subcultures form in response to the **status frustration** experienced by young people who fail to achieve success through mainstream norms, such as academic achievement. In Cohen's view, these youths reject the values of the dominant culture and create **alternative norms** within their peer groups. These subcultures often invert mainstream values; for example, behaviors considered deviant or delinquent in wider society (like vandalism or theft) may be celebrated within the group.



## CLOWARD AND OHLIN

Illegitimate opportunity structures

Cloward and Ohlin argued that young people from disadvantaged backgrounds face limited access to legitimate means of achieving success, such as education or stable jobs. In response, they turn to illegitimate opportunity structures—such as crime or deviance—to achieve their goals. Cloward and Ohlin identified three types of subcultures: criminal subcultures (focused on organised crime), conflict subcultures (characterized by violence and gang rivalry), and retreatist subcultures (centered around drug use and withdrawal from society)

