Cloward and Ohlin give a theory of there being three types of subcultures that young people might join:

- **Criminal subcultures**
  - These emerge in areas where adult crime is high. The youths follow the behaviour of the adults around them to learn how to commit crimes—negative role models. By committing crimes, the youths can work their way up the criminal ladder allowing them to be successful as adults.
    - Normally concerned with utilitarian crimes that lead to financial awards

- **Conflict subcultures**
  - These emerge in areas where there is little organised crime by adults, so the youths have no criminal role models. Instead, they focus on gang respect through gang violence.

- **Retreatist subcultures**
  - These are subcultures formed by those who failed in the criminal subcultures. Often known as a subculture of ‘double failures’, the youths tend to end up going to drug and alcohol abuse. This is a coping mechanism from being rejected from the other subcultures.