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COLLECTIVE MOBILIZATION AND IDENTITY FROM THE UNDERGROUND: The Deployment of "Oppositional Capital" in the Harm Reduction Movement

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Within social movement literature, the concept of collective identity is used to discuss the process through which political activists create in-group cohesion and distinguish themselves from society at large. Newer approaches to collective identity focus on the negotiation of boundaries as social movement agents interact with social structural forces. However, in their adoption of a perspective that holds identity as a process, these social movement studies neglect the more tangible cultural elements that actors manipulate when they express collective identity. This research project adopts a subcultural perspective in the Birmingham tradition to address the question of how social movement actors reappropriate symbolic expressions of identity and what meaning systems they draw from that enable them to redefine "stigmatization" as "status." This article offers the concept of "oppositional capital" as a general framework for analyzing the symbolic work that social movement actors perform in their expressions of collective identity. For the purposes of analysis, the primary elements of oppositional symbolic expressions are divided into the four categories of distinction, antagonism, political activism, and popular cultural aesthetics. This article applies the concept of oppositional capital to representations of collective identity of a radical branch of political activism within the social movement of harm reduction. Specifically, it analyzes the zine, *Junkphood* to describe how actors within this social movement cohort are able to present their collective identity as part of an alternative status system by drawing from an economy of signs that are generally recognized as oppositional.

Over the past decade and a half, the area of social movement studies has witnessed the continued interjection of cultural analyses into theoretical models of collective action (Lofland 1985; Melucci 1989; Rucht 1991; Larana, Johnson and Gusfield 1994; Johnson and Klandermans 1995). By and large, this concerted paradigmatic shift away from mass psychology and resource mobilization approaches to the study of social movements has been the result of both the emergence of new forms of collective action in advanced industrial societies and the flourishing field of social scientific interpretations of these "new social movements" (Tilly 1998). This emphasis on culture in the field

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of social movement research has led to an understanding that political grievances are inextricably tied to ideas, ideology, and identity (Marx and McAdam 1994). For example, E. Larana, H. Johnson, and J. Gusfield (Larana, Johnson, and Gusfield 1994, p. 23) explain that "status movements are closely linked with identity issues [in which] the grievances are actuated by perceived threats to how one defines oneself." With this extreme focus on identity, new social movement analysis is built upon the examination of everyday cultural expressions.

In social movement theory, the process of self-definition and boundary construction is discussed through the concept of "collective identity."¹ In contrast to the social psychological approaches to collective identity (Simon, Loewy, Sturmer, Weber, Freytag, Habig, Kampmeier, and Spahlinger 1998), new social movement research proposes that social transformation occurs through the expression of collective identity. New social movement theories focus on the recognition that "one of the most powerful motivators of individual action is the desire to confirm through behavior a cherished identity" (Friedman and McAdam 1992, p. 169). With a focus on cultural values based on cultural (self-identified) categories, new social movement theories use the concept of collective identity to explore global changes. In their attempt to distinguish new social movements from traditional politics of the state, new social movement theories pay particular attention to the politics of identity, or the self-transformation of everyday categories surrounding the individual (Cohen 1985).

More recent discussions of collective identity within social movements have attempted to address the theoretical leap between the emergence of ideological contradictions and collective identity expressions by unpacking the structure- and agent-driven forces involved in identity formation. These perspectives define collective identity as a "process." For example, Alberto Melucci (1995, p.50) "dereifies" the concept of collective identity by conceiving it as "a system of relations and representations." He offers as an alternative the concept of "identization" to express the fluidity inherent within the process of collective identity formation (p. 51). For Melucci, collective identity is fashioned through the avenues of cognition, relationships and emotions.

Other authors have subsequently discussed the process of collective identity formation as constructed through participant interaction. According to Nancy Whittier (1995, p. 15), collective identities "exist only as far as real people agree upon, enact, argue over, and internalize them." In her analysis of the radical feminist movement over time, she describes how the collective identity of the movement (and the individual identities of the actors) became subjected to redefinition through microcohort interaction. Moreover, Belinda Robnett (1996) describes how the identity category of gender played a significant role in the forging of leadership positions within the civil rights movement. In their analysis of lesbian feminist mobilization, Verta Taylor and Nancy Whittier (1992) provide one of the most explicit discussions of the process of collective identity formation within a social movement. According to them, social movement participants become political actors through a process of individual identity transformation. But what is most unique about Taylor and Whittier's argument is their recognition that collective identity is also, by nature, oppositional in its devaluation of what are perceived to be dominant cultural practices. For Taylor and Whittier, collective identity links a social movement community through the affirmation of members' common interest *in opposition to dominant groups*. These expressions of difference and criticisms of dominant systems serve as the foundation upon which the identity of a political community is built.

Therefore, for the lesbian feminist community of their study, sustaining a collective identity requires the formation of norms that vilify the male “as a challenge to the misogyny of the dominant society” (p. 113).

While all of these discussions address the complex nature of collective identity formation, they tend to overlook the material objects and symbols involved in the creation and expression of a collective identity. In other words, if the process of collective identity construction does in fact require “a kind of reverse affirmation of the characteristics attributed to it by the larger society” (Taylor and Whittier 1992, p. 111), how is the “politicalization of everyday life” expressed? If, as Taylor and Whittier explain, expressions of collective identity involve the redefinition of symbols, how is it that a mark of stigmatization can also represent a badge of privilege? What are the mechanisms involved? What meaning systems do social movement actors draw from to construct such an oppositional community?

Answering these questions requires the recognition that social movements must draw from outside the meaning systems of the movements themselves. Social movements need to be situated in a larger cultural field that not only allows for the expression of difference but that also (in some regard) valorizes radical political activism. Therefore, it must be acknowledged that the cultural objects that social movement actors draw from to express their collective identities and to present their collective selves as transformative are, in fact, part of a larger symbolic system. These artifacts have power, and impact; they serve as effective tools for the demonstration of discontent *because* they are recognized by the larger society as demarcations of difference and as part of an alternative, countercultural status system. Without this recognition, such expressions cannot be considered transformative. Without first acknowledging that opposition is viewed by the larger society as a positive attribute, it cannot automatically be assumed that the expression of radicalism may serve as a basis for collective mobilization.

This article uses the example of a radical branch within the social movement of harm reduction to explore the question of how its members actively engage in the processes of boundary construction and boundary negotiation that are necessary for the presentation of their self-concepts as unified and the presentation of the population that they represent (illicit drug users) as worthy of political attention. The article then applies a subcultural analysis (in the Birmingham tradition of the mid-1970s) to social movement studies and introduces the general concept of “oppositional capital” to address the question of how, through symbols, social movement actors express their collective identity. To discuss how oppositional capital works, the article presents an analysis of a publication produced by members of the activist-based harm reduction organization of the Santa Cruz Needle Exchange Program.

THE SOCIAL MOVEMENT OF HARM REDUCTION AND ITS RADICAL COMPONENT

Harm reduction can be defined as “an alternative approach to addressing the failures of incarceration and medicalization as solutions to personal and societal problems associated with drug use” (Bok 1998, p. 3). With a nonpunitive and nonauthoritarian vision of drug use, harm reduction provides a substitute to institutional models of drug policy, drug treatment, and public health for drug users. It offers a “middle-road alternative to the two established traditional approaches favored in this country: the moral model

(war on drugs) and the disease model of addiction" (Marlatt 1996, p. 779). In its tolerance of drug use, harm reduction challenges criminal approaches to drug policy (DuPont 1996; Elovich 1996; Oscapeila 1996; Smart 1996). By not calling for cessation of drug use, harm reduction challenges abstinence-based models of drug treatment (Bradley-Springer 1996; Carey 1996; Rosenbaum, Washburn, Knight, Kelley, and Irwin 1996). In its recognition that therapeutic services for drug users are designed to serve the priorities of providers rather than consumers, harm reduction also challenges existing approaches to public health for drug users (DeLeon 1996; Matteson and Hawthorne 1996).

Since the late 1980s, the United States has experienced a "movement for harm reduction" (Sorge 1990, p. 4). According to Ricky Bluthenthal (1998, p. 1149), harm reduction is practiced as "attempts to reduce the harm associated with drug use without punishing the drug user for illicit drug use." In the United States, such practices have been made up of legalization debates surrounding abstinence-based drug policy, criticism of the war on drugs (Trebach 1987 and Trebach and Zeese 1990), and public health debates concerning the accessibility to health care for drug users (DesJarlais 1995). But the most visible and most publicly contested application of harm reduction in the United States has been the practice of needle exchange. As an exercise that disregards drug and paraphernalia laws, does not use cessation of use as a measurement of success, and focuses on the health needs of users (Stryker 1989; Watters and Guydish 1994), needle exchange has been promoted as a "practical" approach to harm reduction (Ruter 1990).

Harm Reduction as a New Social Movement

The history of modern capitalist societies has recently witnessed dramatic changes in the boundaries of social definitions and in the framing of such previously personal "social problems" as expressions of sexuality (gayness and queer politics), re-definitions of the body (transgendering and cyborgs), the politicization of the body as a site of "choice" (abortion), and marginalization and death associated with "dirty" bodily practices (AIDS). The result has been in the interpretation of a vast range of quotidian practices as "political." In an address to the Society for the Study of Social Problems in 1980, John Kitsuse (1980, p. 3) suggested that various groups have been reacting to "the indignities of moralistic patronization as well as punitive acts of discrimination." In response to such stigmatization, groups of "individuals who have been culturally marginalized, morally degraded and socially segregated by institutionally sanctioned exclusions" (Kitsuse 1980, p. 2) have recently engaged themselves in political activity as they claim their rights of citizenship. With this recognition, Kitsuse highlights a specific phenomenon in the history of contemporary Western societies: the expression of political resistance through everyday practices. Similarly, Jean Cohen (1985, p. 683) explains that we have witnessed the "creation of new meanings, new organizations, new identities, and the social space for these to appear." Harm reduction can be defined as one the new forms of political movements within this recent historical trend of insurgency from the margins.

Through such practices as needle exchange (the act of receiving used syringes from injection drug users in exchange for sterile ones to reduce the risk of exposure to blood-borne pathogens), harm reduction represents a new form of politics surrounding drug users. Specifically, harm reduction has adopted strategies, goals, and tactics from the recent political formations of the new public health movement and AIDS activism. In its application, the harm reduction approach to health care expects drug users to be active

participants in the definition and provision of services.² Among health-care providers that adopt the harm reduction perspective, it is recognized that “the ‘exclusive inside knowledge’ of the user, developed through lived experiences, and often at huge emotional, personal, familial, and financial cost is of paramount importance” (Balian and White 1998, p. 18). Through its advocacy for health programs and services developed by drug users themselves, harm reduction represents an adoption of the new public health movement agenda that stresses the need to focus on the individual patient.³ In this manner, harm reduction, like the new public health movement, challenges dominant medical models of service-provider-as-authority.

As a form of political activism, harm reduction mirrors the tactics and strategies of AIDS activists. The driving principal behind ACT UP practices of civil disobedience is to make it more costly for those in power to resist than to give in.⁴ Similarly, the harm reduction practice of illegally exchanging needles not only provides publicity but also allows harm reduction activists to use the adversarial legal system for drug user advocacy (Pascale 1988; Burris, Finucane, Gallagher, and Grace 1996; Gostin 1997). Through the practice of illegal needle exchange, harm reduction not only challenges paraphernalia laws but also challenges the moral foundation of drug policy. In its tolerance of drug use, harm reduction assumes that “the drug problem is basically and principally a matter of health and social well being. It is not primarily a problem of police and criminal justice” (Ruter 1990, p. 191).

Radical Activism within Harm Reduction

Bluthenthal (1998) applies a social movement perspective to harm reduction in his argument that it represents “rational attempts by excluded groups to mobilize sufficient political leverage to advance collective interests through noninstitutional means” (McAdam quoted in Bluthenthal 1998, p. 1152). Through the example of an Oakland harm reduction program, Bluthenthal shows how actors within the harm reduction movement are divided between those who practice harm reduction through legitimate, acceptable, and “practical” avenues and those who practice harm reduction as political activism and civil disobedience. This division could be categorized (as Taylor and Whittier’s feminist movement) into the fractions of “liberal” and “radical.”

In contrast to liberal actors within the harm reduction movement who tend to address the growth of harm reduction through established institutional avenues (i.e., the expansion of drug treatment facilities, the use of public health and HIV/AIDS outreach workers, and state-funded research), radical activists within the harm reduction movement pursue transformation through the criticism of dominant definitions of social control over drug users and the establishment of drug-user-based health and human rights practices (Sorge 1990). In their positioning of such dominant definitions as criminal approaches to drug use and abstinence-based models of drug treatment, radical harm reduction activists attempt to redirect authority over drug users by challenging drug policy through civil disobedience tactics and by establishing service provision organizations defined and run by drug users themselves (Lurie, Reingold, Bowser, Chen, Foley, Guydish, Kahn, Land, and Sorensen 1993; Bluthenthal 1998). Through the incorporation of the voice of drug users into established institutions and the affirmation that drug users themselves should be the primary agents in the creation of programs and policies, the

radical activist approach to harm reduction places the subject of the drug user in a position of authority.

COLLECTIVE IDENTITY WITHIN THE SANTA CRUZ NEEDLE EXCHANGE PROGRAM

A prime example of a radical harm reduction organization is the Santa Cruz Needle Exchange Program (SCNEP). The SCNEP began in December 1989 as an illegal syringe exchange program run by volunteers. According to a review of needle exchange programs conducted by the Berkeley School of Public Health (Lurie, Reingold, Bowser, Chen, Foley, Guydish, Kahn, Land, and Sorensen 1993) it was started by local drug users and AIDS activists who were also community health outreach workers. In the formation and maintenance of an organization created by and for drug users, actors within SCNEP have been involved in communicative practices surrounding an alternative definition of the subject of "the drug user." Unlike the service provider/client relationship within conventional drug treatment facilities or the authority/subject relationship within institutions of social control, the group formation practices of SCNEP members reflect the pursuit of what Jurgen Habermas (1987, p. 2) refers to as an "ideal communication community":

This utopia serves to reconstruct an undamaged intersubjectivity that allows both for unconstrained mutual understanding among individuals and for the identities of individuals who come to an unconstrained understanding with themselves.

The harm reduction community that SCNEP actively pursues could also be considered resistant. For example, the SCNEP's approach to drug users challenges conventional definitions in that it clearly does not adhere to common drug treatment models (with abstinence as the goal). According to the SCNEP volunteer training manual (N.D., p. 2):

The SCNEP advocates safe drug use, and as a result, a decision was made, based on a group consensus, that treatment would not be suggested to participants unless they voiced an interest and requested information or advocacy in that area.

The practices of the SCNEP truly follow the foundations of radical harm reduction activist strategies by challenging conventional definitions of drug users. In addition to preventing the spread of HIV among injection drug users (IDUs), SCNEP's other primary objective is "to act as an advocacy group and resource for drug users" (SCNEP N.D., p. 1). The training manual (N.D. p. 1) continues: "In advocating for the rights of drug users, our responsibilities range from offering referrals to taking someone to the emergency room and sitting with them to do our best to make sure that they are treated appropriately and with respect." In their construction of a particular ideal for the provision of health services, SCNEP activists challenge dominant definitions of drug users. The environment that drug users experience at SCNEP is not punitive (such as criminal approaches to drug laws) and does not direct them toward established goals as indicators of success (such as abstinence-based treatment programs). In fact, SCNEP's atmosphere is intentionally constructed and practiced as nonjudgmental.

At its very core, the ideological foundations of SCNEP are resistant. According to the SCNEP mission statement in its brochure, this program functions as a "space"

(physical, communal, and communicative) that clearly violates what its practitioners define as dominant ideology:

In the face of depleting social and medical services that benefit those who need them most and a culture that emphasizes punishment and blame over support and compassion, the Santa Cruz Needle Exchange Program strives to promote a sense of community and a belief that all humans should be treated with dignity and respect.

With a definitive concern for “support,” “dignity,” “respect,” and “compassion” for drug users, SCNEP maintains a vision of an ideal community. The slogan for this community is “we, as drug users, are the experts” (*Junkphood*, issue 1, p. 2). According to Heather Edney, SCNEP’s Director, the program’s purpose is not to “help” drug users (for such an approach would automatically require the establishment of an us/them relationship between the service providers and the participants). As Edney explained at the Ninth International Conference on Drug Policy Reform, users “want to learn how to do it for themselves; the program tries to provide them with the services and the tools to do just that” (quoted in Marlatt 1996, p. 782).

Within the loosely organized community that upholds these distinctly unconventional ideologies, a particular collective identity is maintained: Radical activists within the harm reduction movement present themselves as “proud users” and “oppressed.” In their adoption of the identity characteristic of “proud user,” these actors freely and openly discuss the otherwise taboo subject of their drug using practices. They also commonly self-identify with the label of “junkie” (therefore co-opting a conventionally defined stigma and subversively displaying it as a mark of exoticism). In their identification as oppressed, these radical activists present themselves as discriminated against by a dominant culture that punishes drug use, stigmatizes drug users, and neglects the provision of adequate health care to a population at extreme risk of disease and death. Like the radical feminists of Taylor and Whittier’s study (1992, p. 108), ideologically, the actors at SCNEP pursue “social transformation through the creation of alternative nonhierarchical institutions and forms of organization.” And (more important to the argument within this article), these actors play up their Otherness by drawing upon symbolic expressions that serve to fetishize their marginal status.

JUNKPHOOD

One format through which the Santa Cruz Needle Exchange Program members express their resistant ideologies and identities is through the publication, *Junkphood*. In 1995, drug users and drug user advocates at SCNEP began production of a publication that they distributed to local “street” drug users. This series of seven zines⁵ consists of stories and artwork created by drug users.

Each of the issues has a different theme. The first three issues are dedicated to a different drug and titled accordingly: heroin (“Smack!”), cocaine (“Coked-Up Puffs”), and speed (“Amphetamines”). Issue four is by and about female drug users (“True Stories from Girl Junkies”). Issue five is dedicated to the topic of dealing with law enforcement (“Getting Busted”). And issues six and seven are about the risks and losses associated with using drugs (“The Book of Death, Volumes I and II”).

Junkphood is filled with information concerning how to reduce the risks involved in

using illicit drugs. It includes such articles as: "How to avoid accidental overdose" (issue 1, p. 3); "How to Spot a Coke O.D." (issue 2, pp. 25–26) and "How to Spot a Speed O.D." (issue 3, p. 19). It also has illustrations of the proper way to tie off before shooting up (issue 2, pp. 10–12) and descriptions of causes of and methods for avoiding abscesses and bruising (issue 2, pp. 17, 18). The majority of the publication is dedicated to interviews with drug users. The purpose of providing the information in this manner is so that readers can learn from others' experience. As the editor explains in one example (issue 5, p. 35),

"Ray" is a drug user who has been in the life for a long time. . . . Although his perspective might be different from many younger users, we have a lot to learn from him because he talks about the real shit and he speaks from experience.

Other information that exists within these interviews includes suggestions for getting around drug testing, descriptions of being locked up, how users got into drugs, and how different users come down off a high.

Junkphood is unique from typical informational brochures distributed by drug treatment centers and public health providers for drug users. *Junkphood* is clearly noninstitutional. Its content and its style set it apart. *Junkphood's* pages are filled with text written and spoken (in the form of printed interviews) by current illicit drug users. These pages express the heartfelt stories of drug users' lives and descriptions of what it really means to be an addict. *Junkphood* also has a very hip style. It is brightly colored and filled with scanned and cut-and-paste images from popular culture. As explained in *Junkphood*, "It is our hope to keep turning the wise words of users into zines for pop-culture lovin' dopers to read" (issue 4, p. 3).

What also makes *Junkphood* clearly nonconventional is the fact that within its images and text, it often glorifies drug use and celebrates the drug user. According to its producers, this zine is an expression of drug user empowerment:

Junkphood is a series of zines created by [drug] users for users to help eliminate the power imbalances that can arise when we are dependent on someone for information about drug use. (SCNEP brochure, n.d.)

What is so critical about *Junkphood* is that, through it, illicit drug users challenge a number of conventional definitions simultaneously. By celebrating the use of psychoactive drugs, the producers of *Junkphood* attempt to reverse the social stigma attached to drug use reinforced through its dominant definitions as immoral, pathological, and illegal. Through its expressions of difference and opposition to dominant social constructions, *Junkphood* promotes the values and ideas that are incorporated into the construction of what Taylor and Whittier (1992) would refer to as collective identity. In its content, *Junkphood* represents what it means to be a drug user and a radical drug user activist. The producers of *Junkphood* are able to present such representations through the utilization of certain symbolic tools that I refer to as "oppositional capital."

OPPOSITIONAL CAPITAL

It is my thesis that the expression of a radical identity within a social movement can be situated within more general "oppositional" identity fields of meaning. Specifically,

through their expression of political identities, social movement actors also present themselves as subcultural members: They self-identify with varying degrees of commitment to the ideologies of the social movement collective.

The framework that I offer for symbolic analysis of collective identity expressions draws from the Birmingham tradition of subcultural studies. Although there are several definitions of “subculture,” I specifically chose the Birmingham approach because its implications for resistance and cultural production. This distinction is important to note because the Birmingham Center’s perspective on subcultures is much different from (and developed as a reaction against) the structural and interactionist definitions outlined by subcultural theorists at the Chicago School.

In the Chicago tradition of understanding deviance as an ecological response to disorganization, classical American definitions of subcultures viewed these collective formations as responses to structural strains (e.g., Thrasher 1927; Cohen 1955). In the 1960s and 1970s, American subcultural approaches expanded upon this Chicago approach and applied a much more interactionist interpretation by looking at the ways in which subcultural actors respond to others and manage their own deviant status (Becker 1963). For example, the subcultural work of David Matza (1964) and Jock Young (1971), in their comparison of subterranean and conventional value systems, viewed the construction of a subculture as a collective process of norm reallocation. This interactionist approach was further expanded upon by Gary Alan Fine and Sherryl Kleinman (1979) in their definition of a subculture as a common discourse in which actors manage their marginal label through a continual process of identification and collective manipulation.

In the 1970s, social researchers at the Center for Contemporary Cultural Studies (CCCS) in Birmingham took the Chicago School’s definition of subcultures (as collective solutions to status limitations) and imparted it with a critical edge (Cohen 1972; Clarke, Hall, Jefferson, and Roberts 1975). By incorporating the Leftist agenda of the Frankfurt School tradition into their interpretations, writers adopting the Birmingham approach used the concept of subculture to reveal what they saw as the fundamental contradictions symptomatic of modern capitalism. According to perspective of the CCCS, subcultures represented attempts by subordinate groups (e.g., working-class youth) to carve out spaces from within a society in which these actors were powerless. In addition, authors from the Birmingham Center drew upon the Marxian notion of cultural production and focused their attention on the ideological interpretation of symbolic forms of expression (e.g., dress, activities, and leisure pursuits). Researchers saw these spectacular symbols as artifacts representative of attempts at establishing new sets of conventions (Hebdige 1979). From this perspective, subcultural actors were seen as attempting to construct a meaningful world. These new identity boundaries were interpreted as existing outside of, yet in conflict with, those by which the subcultural actors were dominated.

The Birmingham Center approach depicted subcultural actors as attempting to claim ownership of the everyday through style. Such subcultural theorists described the appropriation of symbols utilized by subordinate populations as tools in the creation of alternative status systems. In a more recent application of this theoretical perspective, Sarah Thornton (1995) uses the category of subculture to account for the logic of symbolic practices by youth at dance clubs. Specifically, she offers the concept of “subcultural capital” in order to address the forms of capital that operate within this less

privileged domain: Subcultural capital is the expression of social status among youth through an economy of “hipness.”

Thornton’s concept of subcultural capital is based on the theoretical work of Pierre Bourdieu and his definition of “capital.” For example, with Bourdieu’s application of capital, culture takes on a durable quality in everyday practices. As Bourdieu (1986; 1990) explains, this currency analogy can be applied to various structures of the social world in order to interpret how individuals serve as active agents in the cultural processes of meaning-making. Ideas and knowledge are seen as tangible objects that people may draw upon as they participate in social life. Social interactions are thus viewed as exchanges within systems of value. Bourdieu (1986, pp. 241–242) explains:

Capital contains a tendency to persist in its being . . . And the structure of the distribution of the different types of capital at a given moment in time represents the immanent structure of the social world, i.e., the set of constraints, inscribed in the very reality of that world, which govern its functioning in a durable way, determining the chances of success for practices.

However, in order to apply it to the analysis of social movements, the concept of “subcultural capital” needs to be expanded in order to account for expressions of collective identity for the purposes of political activism. As discussed above, symbols of resistance often belong simultaneously to multiple cultural realms. These symbols are deployed not only for the purposes of distinction but can also serve as a means of attracting members. When we apply a subcultural theoretical scope in the interpretation of radical-political practices, we recognize that there is something more broadly identified as attractive not just about being a member of a group, but about being a member of a marginal group. This is as true for subcultural members as it is for activists. The cultural value placed upon and the affinity toward that which is not only marginal but consciously rebellious in nature are what I call “oppositional capital.”

Oppositional capital can be defined as the broad cultural field of symbols drawn upon by active social critics whose visions of transformation range in scope from the local (subcultural) to the sociocultural (social movement). The same symbols that can be used for subcultural or countercultural expressions can also be tools for political activism. These symbols are part of an economy of signs that are generally held to be oppositional. The concept of oppositional capital is not meant to account for the structural forces that drive social boundary contradictions to the surface of public debate. Nor is it intended to disregard the rational/strategic actions of social movement creators, participants, and antagonists. Rather, by situating social movement expressions within a larger symbolic field, the concept of oppositional capital is intended to serve as an enhancement to existing discussions of collective identity. By borrowing the epistemological assumptions and analytical tools from subcultural theory and applying them to social movement research, we can better understand phenomena that arise from the margins of society. In the analysis that follows, we will see that such a synthesis helps to explain the process of collective identity formation in new social movements. Through an analysis of *Junkphood*, I will show how members of the radical branch of harm reduction, in their presentation of their selves as political activists, draw upon preexisting cultural spheres of opposition.

The aim of this research is to provide a general model for reading social movement expressions as part of a larger symbolic field. To do so, I propose four elements that

serve to demonstrate oppositional capital: distinction, antagonism, political activism, and popular cultural aesthetics. These elements reflect values, beliefs, practices, and goals that radical harm reductionists utilize in the construction and expression of their collective identity. “Distinction” represents the fact that collective actors construct themselves as part of an identity category that is separate and discrete. “Antagonism” refers to the collective identity expression of difference that is articulated against what these actors define as conventional society. “Political activism” represents the manner in which collective actors express themselves as radical in their criticism of dominant social definitions. And “popular cultural aesthetics” refers to the field of artistic and stylistic symbols on which actors draw in order to impart cultural value and status to their expressions of identity. I offer the concept of oppositional capital as a device for analyzing the expression of collective identity as part of an economy of symbols from which marginal populations draw as they present a politically radical voice.

Grounded in exploratory research on the radical activist-based harm reduction organization of the Santa Cruz Needle Exchange Program, the discussion of oppositional capital focuses on the analysis of the seven issues of *Junkphood* that were produced by SCNEP. The following analysis outlines the symbolic expressions presented within the pages of *Junkphood* and describes how these representations serve as one source from which actors draw in the constant (and fluctuating) construction of the collective identity of a social movement. The images, slogans, and descriptions expressed in these zines provide definitions of otherness through which drug user activists express a collective identity that is at once distinct, antagonistic, and politically active. The symbols that they present belong to an economy of aesthetics that are recognized as oppositional within the larger society.

Distinction

According to Howard Becker (1963), drug use is one of the cultural practices by which black musicians of the 1920s and 1930s distinguished themselves from the straight, non-drug-using “square” world. Similarly, the post-WWII West Coast cult of disaffected youth, the beatniks, used drugs as a means of making sense out of a chaotic world. Altered states of reality offered the opportunity to experience a spiritual utopia outside of what was seen as the dark and depressing modern Western society. As James A. Inciardi (1993, p. 147) explains:

Many Beats, in their attempt to more readily attain the realization of setting themselves right with nature, pursued their “true” reality through an effort of the mind and rejected the perceived discontinuities of life in organized society. For most, however, their conceptual reality of the irrational properties of everyday existence was escaped through drug use, and high-frequency, long-duration marijuana and hashish use became a pervasive part of Beat life.

Through their expressions of identity, radical harm reduction activists similarly construct categories of “us” and “them” that serve to distinguish themselves from the larger society. By identifying themselves as members of the drug-using community, these actors mark themselves as perceivably dissimilar from conventional society and present themselves as existing outside of established institutions (Figure 1). In their presenta-



FIGURE 1. SAMPLE PAGE AND ARTWORK FROM #5 ISSUE OF JUNKPHOOD (PAGE 16).

tion of and adherence to a “proud user” collective identity (and in their self-identification with the label of “junkie” as discussed above), radical harm reductionists engage in what Umberto Eco (1972) calls “semiotic guerrilla warfare.” They elevate a stigma to the position of status. This identification with the definition of drug-users-as-exceptional positions these collective actors as not only different from but superior to the “straight” world. As Edith Springer describes in an interview:

Using drugs does not make you not a wonderful person, it doesn’t make you a bad person, it doesn’t make you a sloppy person, a sleazy person. It just makes you a person that likes to use drugs. . . . I am very proud to be a junkie. I really am. Some of the best people I have ever known are junkies, they are so creative in how they survive and struggle and get their needs met. (issue 4, p. 2).

In the pages of *Junkphood*, drug users further represent themselves as a distinct community by describing what it means to be a drug user. As one interviewee explains, "Part of the whole thing for me is the way it makes me talk to people and stuff. . . . I'd never do it alone. I wouldn't be interested, I wouldn't have the urge" (issue 1, p. 14). The expression of a drug user community seems to embody what's referred to as "the mystique of drug use." The community distinctions surrounding the experience of using controlled substances are further enhanced by a shared passion for drug use. For example, in the first issue (p. 4), a whole page is dedicated to quotes from various users describing "the rush of the century." This construction is rooted partly in the physiological, cultural, and spiritual experiences of using drugs, partly in the secretiveness of its illegality, and partly in the dangers and threat of death associated with drug use. Describing the experience of drug using, one individual explains (issue 3, p. 7):

Shooting speed . . . was some sort of magic formula that kind of took me and the people that I was doing it with into another world. . . . We felt like we could read each others [sic] minds. . . . It got to a certain point where we didn't even feel like we had to talk to each other anymore, cause we could read each others [sic] minds. . . . Another really cool thing about it is that we felt like we were a part of a secret society. "I know/you know."

Part of the experience shared by the community of drug users is the anxiety surrounding the dangerous effects of use. In response to the question, "How would you describe what it's like, the life, using speed?" (issue 4, p. 10), one user replies, "Hectic, frantic, confusing, aggravating, depressing, sad, crazy. Always on the fucking edge. That's what you have to look forward to. That's it." Or, as another person explains, "When we were getting ready to use heroin, I would get really scared, 'cause we didn't know if one of us was going to die or not!" (issue 2, p. 7) Interviews also often include descriptions of users flirting with death:

Well, this is gonna sound bad, but it's the rush right before you o.d., man, the rush right before you go out. It's like I'm given a choice, and I usually don't want to come back. I love that feeling that, right when you're goin' out, you know. (issue 1, p. 4)

The definite link between drug use and death is also presented through frequent full-page dedications in honor of famous popular cultural figures who have died from accidental overdoses, such as Kurt Cobain, River Phoenix, Janis Joplin, Jean Michel Basquiat, Elvis Presley, Billie Holiday, and Marilyn Monroe. This expressed fear and pain is part of the daily experience specific to drug users. Their lives teeter on the edge of death. And in the pages of this publication, they admit to it so frankly, and so openly, that defying death becomes part of the user community identity. As "Lin" (issue 5, p. 7) explains, "I've seen so many people go down, I've seen people die."

Through the creation of a community in their definition of distinction and their construction of the boundary between themselves and what they define as conventionality, these actors reproduce constructions of drug users as members of a subculture. In social scientific research since the early 1960s, drug users have been categorized as a community based on emotionally positive definitions around their drug-using practices. For example, Becker's (1963) study of the "career" of a marijuana user explicitly details the construction of meaning systems surrounding pot smoking. According to his thesis, a

user must not only learn the techniques involved in the administration of marijuana, but also how to properly perceive the effects and recognize that such effects are enjoyable. This requires the existence of a meaning system outside of conventional experiences.⁶

Therefore, the distinction between user and nonuser that is associated with illicit drugs is not based solely on the physiological effects of administered chemicals, that is, definitions of drug use belong to the cultural realm. Not only is it conventionally defined as morally “wrong,” medically “sick,” and legally “criminal,” but, as a cultural symbol, drug use has become appropriated as a currency of distinction within certain subcultural circles. In the text and images of *Junkphood*, radical harm reductionists prominently express the lived experience of being drug users thus rendering their illicit drug use an indicator of collective identity.

Antagonism

Within studies of drug-using subcultures, it is often recognized that the practice of drug use is culturally defined as “hip” because of its countercultural associations. “Dropping out” of society by “turning on” to drugs and “tuning in” to a new consciousness has long been held as a hip form of retreatism and rebellion. As Jill Jonness (1996) describes, whether it was marijuana and heroin use in the 1950s (by the beatniks and hipsters) or the use of reefer and hallucinogens as celebrations of freedom by the hippies of the 1960s, illicit drug use has been historically associated with an American countercultural critique of the establishment. Like the drug subcultures before them, radical harm reductionists not only present themselves as distinct but also as hostile and defiant (e.g., see the images of figures displaying their middle fingers in issues 2 and 4 of *Junkphood*). Specifically, the deployment of oppositional capital within *Junkphood* is often expressed as antagonistic through its criticism of conventional definitions of drug users. This practice is what Taylor and Whittier (1992) call the “vilification of dominant culture.” The creators of *Junkphood* express their antagonistic selves through the condemnation and censuring of dominant institutions of control. For example, one entire issue is dedicated to “Getting Busted” (issue 5). As one might expect, police are often presented as the enemy. Throughout this particular issue are images of police in riot gear, police in the act of arresting, and various instruments of law enforcement (i.e., handcuffs). As one user explains (issue 5, p. 20), “I think they [the police] were just looking for someone to pick on.” Or, as someone else describes (issue 5, p. 22), “I try to avoid the police at all costs. They are out there to bug people and they sure do like to hassle people and drug addicts for some sort of reason.”

This distinct opposition to authority seems to be a common position that subcultural identities maintain. For example, in his study of working-class kids in a secondary school, Paul Willis (1977) describes the school as a battlefield in which students define their identity boundaries as sites of conflict. The kids that served as the focus of Willis’s study (the “lads”) construct their subculture in direct opposition to the students they see as the school conformists (the “ear `oles”). As Willis (1977, p. 11) explains, “the most basic, obvious and explicit dimension of (the lads’ subculture) is entrenched general and personalized opposition to ‘authority.’”

This oppositional stance is most explicitly represented by the profane subculture of punk. The punk culture of the 1970s expressed an ideology that Mark Hamm (1993, p. 27) refers to as “fuckyouism.” As Griel Marcus (1989, p. 2) describes, punk offered “a

voice that denied all social facts, and in that denial affirmed that everything was possible.” Specifically, punk actors defined their subcultural space through symbols of nihilism, sexism, anarchy, and violence (Hebdige 1979; Laing 1985; Marcus 1989). By discrediting, denying, and destroying, punk was able to stake a claim to a meaningful identity. For the radical harm reductionists of this study (like the “lads” and the punks), opposition to symbols of conventional institutions (authority) serves to further symbolically buttress the boundaries of their collective identity.

Political Activism

Like subcultural actors who distinguish themselves through dress, activities, leisure pursuits, and lifestyles (Clarke et al. 1975), radical activists within the harm reduction movement similarly draw from such “sort-lived” status systems as popular culture. But, unlike youth subcultures, harm reduction is distinctive in the more persistent features of the larger culture: harm reduction supports the “deviant” behavior of illicit drug users, and drug user activists within harm reduction are political actors through their social movement practices. The harm reduction movement does not just require that members be “in the know,” but also that they collectively defy cultural and structural definitions for the purpose of bringing about change. Harm reduction is not simply subcultural (from the margins) but political (in that it defies such social institutions as medicine and, more importantly, the law).

Harm reduction is politically strategic. As a social movement, harm reduction serves as a cultural field from which individuals draw in their expression of collective identity. And radical actors within the harm reduction movement present their expressions of identity as a critique of domination. For them, expressions of a radical, political collective identity are recognized as acts of insubordination. Therefore, the demonstration of identity through *Junkphood* is political in that it is seen as resistant. As the fifth issue (p. 4) explains, “*Junkphood* is a form of action.” It represents an attempt to deconstruct and reconstruct social definitions surrounding drug use and drug users. As one contributor (issue 4, p. 3) explains:

There’s no reason for injectors to get scarred, scabbed, stigmatized, picked out in a crowd. Or there’s [sic] many reasons: laws, fear, access, power, sexism, supplies, status, economics, education, entitlement. There’s power in “sticks and stones” terms to be sure—but only when you have control of who is doing the naming.

Just as illicit drug use and the drug users are celebrated, political activism maintains a sort of “exclusive” status. This ethic is embodied in the quote “We should fight feeling that there is something wrong with us ‘cause we like to get high” (Figure 2). On occasion, *Junkphood* will present rallying points for social activism. The center spread in issue 5 acknowledges the injustice to human rights often associated with the criminalization of drugs with the bold-printed declaration: “**Drug use is not a crime.**” And the back cover of issue 2 displays an image of the Statue of Liberty holding a syringe (thereby juxtaposing the images of freedom and drug use). These sentiments are reinforced by such statements as:

Jail and prison are designed to inflict punishment, retribution, and hurt. They’re harm maximization centers. Is allowing someone to withdraw and suffer the consequence

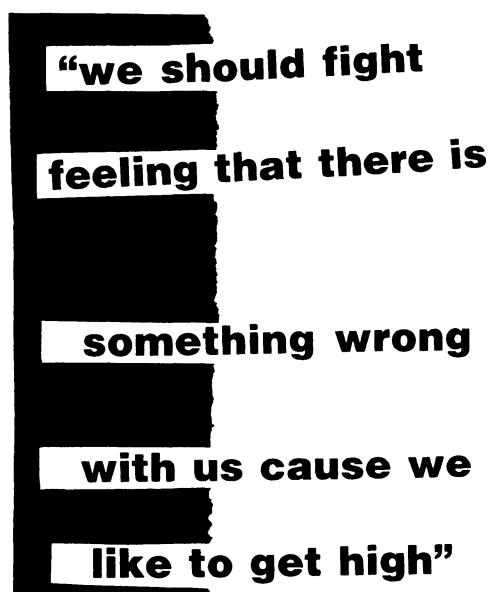


FIGURE 2. SAMPLE PAGE AND ARTWORK FROM #4 ISSUE OF *JUNKPHOOD* (PAGE 44).

of withdrawal in a skanky cell an example of a functioning democracy? What is this need to humiliate and demean? (issue 5, p. 2)

Similarly, the government is often presented as irrational, punitive, and authoritarian through critiques of the war on drugs. One article (issue 5, p. 15) explains that “the ‘War on Drugs’ as we know it now is the biggest, most complex instrument of governmental oppression today.” Another author (issue 5, p. 3) writes:

In the U.S., for being in the wrong place at the wrong time, you can find yourself snatched off the street, locked up, humiliated, subjected to what would be medical malpractice if jail was a hospital and end up with innumerable lifelong personal and social consequences for the possession of drugs.

Junkphood also presents itself as political through its echoing of the arguments of drug policy reformers and drug legalization activists. In this manner, *Junkphood* directly criticizes dominant institutions that define drug users as morally inferior. Contributors to *Junkphood* (issue 5, p. 3) present such criticism through the adoption of a perspective that recognizes drug use as a “victimless crime”:

People who commit crimes against other people or against property end up with lighter sentences than drug users. Does the punishment fit the crime? What’s the crime? Wanting to have fun? Stupidity? Correcting an adverse personal physical condition? Seeking relief from pain? Spiritual quests? Just hanging? If someone is busted for drug and disorderly they have (theoretically) violated the neighborhood

peace. But what's your crime when it's a simple possession situation? That you *might* do something after ingesting your drugs? How is this an example of a functioning democracy?

Junkphood also valorizes political activism. The representations contained in the interviews in *Junkphood* not only present social activism (particularly in regard to drug use) as a form of distinction but cast it positively as a status. For these politically active members of the subculture of drug users, the deployment of oppositional capital (through their expression and celebration of marginality) is a strategy aimed at transforming dominant definitions of drug users. *Junkphood*'s text and images function much like subcultural signifiers in that both forms of symbolic capital are deployed with the intention of disrupting the dominant cultural definitions that surround marginal populations. For example, Kobena Mercer's (1994) research on subcultural expressions of hair as an ethnic signifier reveals that symbolic displays (identities) represent social relations of power. Hair has symbolic value in that its style is encoded with dominant ideologies of race. As Mercer (1994, p. 104) explains, the Afro and dreadlocks hairstyles "counter-politicized the signifier of ethnic and racial devalorization, redefining blackness as a desirable attribute." Therefore, the expressions of identity of radical activists can be compared to political subcultural communications in that both represent attempts to revalorize signifiers of oppression.

Popular Cultural Aesthetics

Junkphood's topics, symbols, text and images can be read as expressions of rebellion. *Junkphood* is an underground publication. Its format is intentionally unconventional and noncommercial. Its content is loaded with voices from the margins. These characteristics also make it hip. *Junkphood* embodies, embraces, and celebrates multiple forms of opposition. Thornton writes (1995, p. 208) that "the social logic of subcultural capital reveals itself most clearly by what it dislikes and what it emphatically isn't." According to *Junkphood*'s statement of purpose (issues 1, 2, and 3, p. 1), the zine is positioned as a product of self-empowerment by its creators (drug users). It is decidedly non-authoritarian:

The reason why we started this project is 'cause we are sick of being told what to do by the "experts." They give us information we have no use for and usually it is mixed up with messages about how we should quit using drugs because drugs make us fucked up. . . . Instead of asking adults for help, we make our own information and our own ethics (ibid).

Junkphood's hipness is carried out in its aesthetics. With a limited budget it was produced for small-scale distribution. The easily-accessible tools of its creation are obvious in the final product: a computer and printer, magazines and comics, a pen, scissors, and a copy machine (Figure 3). Its cut-and-paste construction follows the style of fanzines that have been in circulation in the British and American punk scenes since the mid to late 1970s. This form of image borrowing embodies the do-it-yourself (DIY) punk ethic. In her description of British and American punk and hardcore zines, Tricia Henry (1989, p. 93) explains:

They were direct, uncensored expressions of the punk sensibility, by punks and for punks, in effect, open letters shared by the members of the punk community. In style,

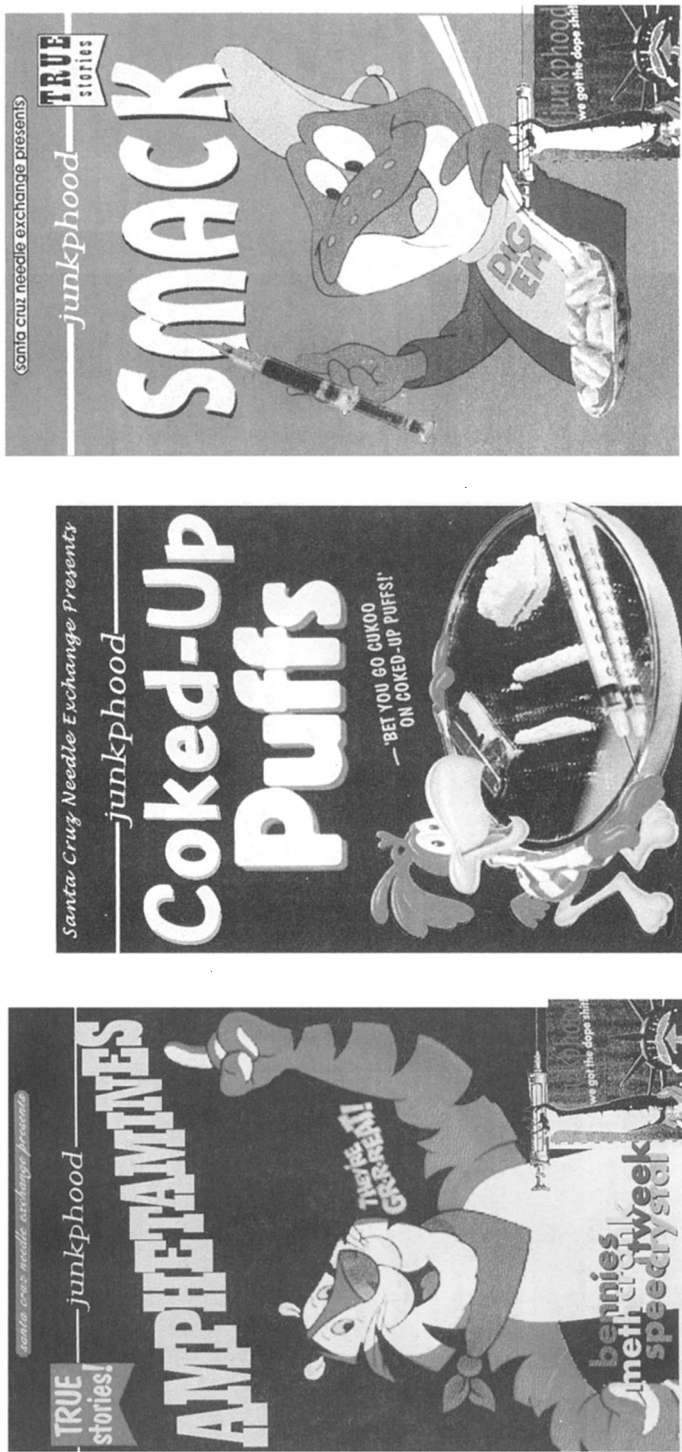


FIGURE 3. COVER ART FROM FIRST THREE ISSUES OF JUNKPHOOD.

content, graphics, and overall tone of writing, the fanzines present a mirror image of the punk lifestyle.

Junkphood's style is a mixture of popular culture images with drug symbols. For example, the covers of the first three issues are manipulated cereal box graphics and characters. This look borrows from the antiaesthetic of Dada-inspired pop art (in the style of Andy Warhol). *Junkphood* also utilizes enlarged comic book images (Figure 4), a style made famous by the pop artist Roy Lichtenstein. The pastiche/parody of images of both pop art and *Junkphood* create an oppositional gestalt that conveys a message of lifestyle as rebellion. Opposition is also represented aesthetically by a writing style that is more "common." It is conversational and assumes that the reader has an understanding (and therefore acceptance) of street drug user terminology (as well as popular cultural expressions and swearing). This incorporation of popular cultural images is part of the praxis of social movements that Ron Eyerman (1999, p. 119) refers to as the prepolitical, (sub)cultural dimension. He describes this dimension as

the processes of meaning construction, where art and music can be important sources of (sub)cultural identification as well as the "framing" of reality; thus they can provide a latent and even invisible resource upon which political movements can draw.

According to this perspective, art plays a significant role in politics because artistic expression provides images and meanings that can serve as a source of motivation for action. Eyerman echoes the Birmingham subcultural theorists by asserting that social groups develop distinct patterns of life partly through symbolic practices, such as the production of images and texts, and give expressive form to their social and material life experience (Hall and Jefferson 1975).

Overall, *Junkphood* is oppositional in its expression of the fears and triumphs of individuals. These points of discussion mirror postwar popular cultural themes. With articles, essays, images, and editorials that present expressions of deviant, illicit lifestyles, of fear, death, and euphoria as experienced by drug users, *Junkphood* captures the existential themes that Norman Mailer wrote about in "The White Negro" (1959, pp. 337–358). Subcultural "hipness" goes against conformity and its associations of boredom, habitual tracing, and defeat. In our culture, deviance has been constructed as courageous. Hip deviance is intentionally unconventional. The identity expressions and style of *Junkphood* are hip deviance (Becker 1963).

Junkphood's oppositional meanings are made intertextually within the marginal practices of social activism and illicit drug use. The social movement of harm reduction overlaps the fields of drugs and activism. Indeed, *Junkphood* gives expression to this integration by combining and presenting them as expressions of status through its celebration of hip deviance. An analysis of the text, reveals the circulation of symbols that are part of an oppositional economy. Opposition is a system of classification. Although it can quite easily be argued that it belongs to one that serves to reinforce the definition of "conventionality," this is not an adequate reason for neglecting it. Within the study of social change (in this case, social movements), it is necessary to perform cultural analyses that reveal the paradoxes of language and logic. As Bourdieu (1984, pp. 475–476) explains:

The logic of the stigma reminds us that social identity is the stake in a struggle in which the stigmatized individual or group, and, more generally, any individual or

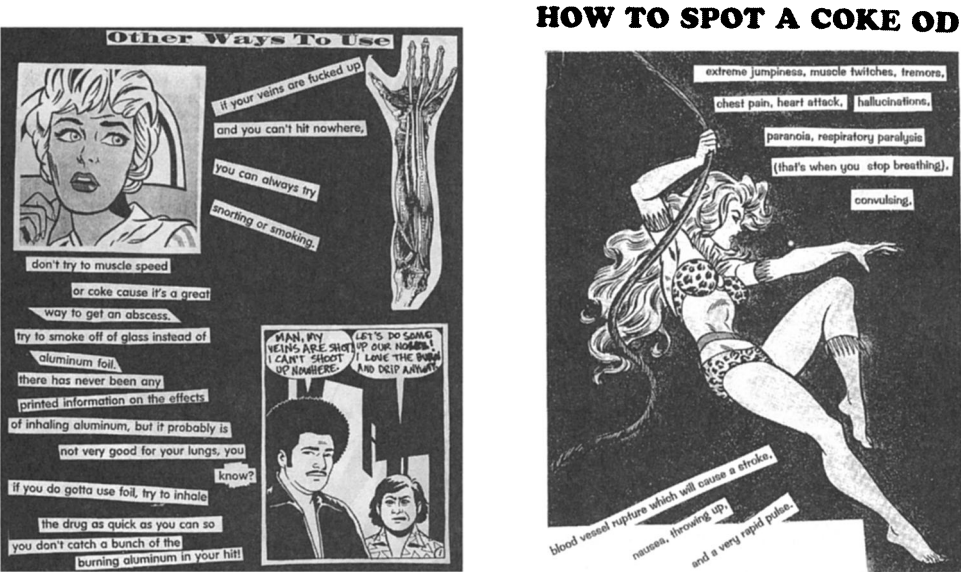


FIGURE 4. (LEFT) SAMPLE PAGE AND ARTWORK FROM #3 ISSUE OF *JUNKPHOOD* (PAGE 11) AND (RIGHT) FROM #2 ISSUE (PAGE 25).

group insofar as he or it is a potential object of categorization, can only retaliate against the partial perception which limits it to one of its characteristics by highlighting, in its self-definition, the best of its characteristics, and, more generally, by struggling to impose the taxonomy most favorable to its characteristics, or at least to give to the dominant taxonomy the content most flattering to what it has and what it is.

Harm reduction activists intentionally draw influence from models of revolution and images of the hipster heroin user. Opposition is a celebrated theme. Such expressions (e.g., *Junkphood*) in turn provide “outsiders” with a glimpse into the “secret” worlds of users and user advocates. The deployment of oppositional capital is a strategy for promoting collective identity within the social movement of harm reduction.

DISCUSSION: DRUG USER ORGANIZATION AS A SOCIAL MOVEMENT

Through the introduction of subcultural analysis to social movement research, this article expands upon the discussion of collective identity construction within the social movement literature by situating the symbolic economy of social movement actors within a larger field. By introducing the concept of oppositional capital and by applying it to the symbolic expressions of activists within the harm reduction movement, this research also fills a gap in the literature on drug users. Specifically, by looking at drug users as social movement actors, this research presents drug users as political activists. Unlike research on the social construction of the drug user that tends to focus on the external forces that define drug users as marginal (Cohen 1972) or studies on the subcul-

ture of drug use that describe how actors respond to such stigma through the creation of a retreatist community (Young 1971), this project presents drug users as active constructors in the definition of their political identity boundaries. The analysis of *Junkphood* helps explain how drug user activists within the harm reduction movement are operative agents in the process of redefining the social problem of drug use. The concept of oppositional capital, as applied to harm reduction, presents drug users not as inactive or reactive but as proactive agents in the construction of their collective identity.

The United States has witnessed very few instances of drug user community mobilization. Even in the age of AIDS, when drug users have been identified as the second highest risk population, the formal organization of drug users and their attempt at claims-making through political activism are extremely rare occurrences. With few material resources, drug users must be creative in the tools that they rely on to construct a radical identity. In their attempt to alter cultural and institutional definitions, drug user activists fight for the rights of a population that has been socially labeled as “criminal” and “deviant.” Drug users are culturally defined as members of the lower stratum of society under conventional assumptions and values.⁷ According to such definitions, the cultural capital of drug users is negative. From such a perspective, it can be assumed that the stigma of “drug user” can only serve as a great hindrance in attempts at self-organization.

Materially, the majority of drug users tend to be members of the poorer classes of society. As Lisa D. Moore and Lynn D. Wegner (1995) explain, since many habitual users are members of the so-called “underclass,” they lack adequate economic and political resources. The U.S. welfare system is such that it often does not cover basic needs such as housing, food, and health care. Drug users within this structure are apt to experience the lack of a reasonable safety net more intensely than non-drug-users since addiction compels the user to require more money to get through the day (Moore and Wegner 1995). As Frances Fox Piven and Richard Cloward (1985) describe, the full and driven days of the drug user have only been made more difficult by the Reagan-Bush decimation of social services in the 1980s and early 1990s. In addition, hardships that are the result of the economic difficulties experienced by illicit drug users in the United States are only worsened by the legal status of drugs in this country. Moore and Wegner (1995, p. 592) write, “current legal statutes criminalize the users of illicit drugs and, in doing so, drive them underground.” The economic and legal barriers experienced by illicit drug users in the United States serve as structural impediments to user self-organization. Citing Ethel Klein (1984), Moore and Wegner (1995, pp. 592–593) continue:

Individuals who are exploited and oppressed, but have no collective identity, do not organize for political action. As long as people individualize oppression, they tend to blame themselves for their hardships. As Klein states, “Group consciousness is a critical precondition to political action.”

Specifically in terms of policy influence, such lack of organization implies the absence of any formal means of presenting a political voice. As Jeff Stryker (1989, p. 731) explains, “IV drug users are without the trappings of a recognized interest group or voting bloc, and their political power is feeble at best.” There are few spokespersons for the interests of IDUs; clinicians, public health officials, and treatment center staff are perhaps the few exceptions. Yet even under these extreme conditions, some small groups of

drug users and drug user activists have not only organized, but have emerged as significant actors in the social movement of harm reduction.

CONCLUSION: THE POWER AND LIMITS OF OPPOSITIONAL CAPITAL

As presented above, it is not just through letter-writing campaigns, political rallies, or alliance-building strategies that harm reduction activists express themselves as oppositional. They also do so more broadly through popular culture. Popular culture has often been recognized as political in its expression of a social criticism. For example, Lyman G. Chaffee (1993) describes how street art can be a significant tool for the communication of political information. Attributing much more influence to artistic expressions, Murray Edelman (1995) explains that popular culture is a powerful and often overlooked system of political signs. According to Edelman (1995, p. 2), art serves as "the fountainhead from which political discourse, beliefs about politics, and consequent actions ultimately spring."

Situating collective action within a larger field of oppositional expressions serves as an effective means of studying the discourses deployed by a social movement. By viewing social movement, subculture, and popular cultural expressions as part of a mixed and overlapping field of oppositional signs, analysts are not only able to account for the frequency with which these practices are often confused but can also better understand multiple sources for expression of contention. As the analysis of *Junkphood* presented here has revealed, oppositional capital provides the means by which an otherwise disenfranchised group is able to gain an affirming social presence. Through their deployment of oppositional aesthetics in a distinctive, antagonistic, and political manner actors have given a resistant voice to drug users. As revealed, the application of a subcultural perspective allows for the recognition of an oppositional field from which social movement actors can draw to express their collective identity in a stylized manner. However, by focusing only on a small group, this research also inherits the limitations of a subcultural approach. One major weakness of applying a subcultural perspective to the expressions of radicalism within a social movement is that such an analysis utilizes clearly one-sided assumptions about power. With a focus on resistance, the power that such an analysis assumes is the *empowerment* of drug users. What such a discussion fails to consider is the ultimate question of who controls definitions of marginality. By situating the concept of oppositional capital within the social movement framework we quickly realize that symbolic analysis alone cannot account for larger processes of social changes. Nor are symbolic gestures in and of themselves structurally transformative.

As discussed above, the radical publication of *Junkphood* and the mobilization of active drug users have occurred within a particular sociohistorical context. Radical harm reduction activists have essentially been provided with the space to present themselves as distinct, antagonistic, and politically active during a period in which social, cultural, medical, and legal definitions surrounding the subject of the drug user were in a state of contention. As a social movement, harm reduction does not exist wholly outside of "legitimate" institutions. Although activists tend to present themselves as against governmental involvement, the success of the movement itself depends upon the apparatus of the state. The growth of harm reduction centers and needle exchange programs across the country has required legal approval and has relied upon state funding sources. So, although the radical cohort within the movement has continued to present

itself as oppositional, harm reduction has gained small steps toward legitimacy within a period of structural flux and by way of institutional consensus.

It is also important to note that although *Junkphood* began as an effort to extend the presence of the collective identity of radical activists and to reach the growing population of young illicit drug users in the Santa Cruz area, only seven issues were ever produced. The Santa Cruz police and health departments requested the SCNEP to cease local distribution. This request was made following the accidental overdose death of the son of a local, high-profile family (an issue of *Junkphood* was found in his bedroom). The activists had to comply, and in the summer of 1998 production of *Junkphood* ended. *Junkphood*'s forced cessation bears witness to the fact that there are institutions much more powerful than radical harm reduction activists, and these institutions control the space in which activists are allowed to express their collective identity. SCNEP had not gained legal approval to distribute sterile needles and syringes and was only able to do so through an informal agreement with local law enforcement officers (Lurie et al. 1993). Also, SCNEP depended upon the department of health for funding to support its existence. Thus, we see that the ability of radical harm reductionists to express their oppositional capital was limited locally by the power that state institutions held over the needle exchange program.

Overall, the discussion presented here reveals the necessity for contextualizing expressions of resistance. The oppositional capital from which radical drug user activists may draw in their construction of collective identity was only significant for these individuals *in the context of the harm reduction movement*. As discussed earlier, the social movement of harm reduction emerged within a sociopolitical context that was witnessing an expansion of the definition of the subject of the drug user. Also, harm reduction practitioners found themselves adopting political strategies that were proving effective in the fields of the new public health movement and AIDS activism.

In a postmodern world, political beliefs and action emerge from the translation of images and models (Edelman 1995). Political communications are laden with cultural artifacts and symbols. And, as Chaffee (1993, p. 4) reminds us, "Those who dominate political clichés maintain the edge." The deployment of oppositional capital is one means by which social movement expressions can be positioned with such an edge.

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NOTES

1. For example, Gamson (1992) and Friedman and McAdam (1992) define collective identity as both a public pronouncement of status and an individual announcement of affirmation.
2. For example, the education and life skills course for addicts, ARRIVE, is staffed by former addicts. According to the program's founder and executive director, Howard Josepher, "The peer driven approach creates a receptive learning environment. Individuals who believed themselves to

be failures in school and unteachable not only complete the cycle of classes but go on to secure employment as outreach workers and even organize other peer-driven community based organizations. Students are encouraged and supported to actively participate in community building and political advocacy. The ARRIVE model, learning from the success of the gay community in mobilizing and educating itself around AIDS, views addicts as members of a constituency that needs to be empowered to survive" (Elovich and Cowing N.D.).

3. Tulchinsky and Varavikova (2000 p. 48) explain "The philosophical and ethical basis of modern public health is a belief in the inherent worth of the individual and his/her human right to a safe and healthful environment. The health and well-being of the individual and the community are interdependent. The New Public Health addresses both the social and physical environment as well as the personal services that address individual health needs. It brings together those elements of public health that are community-oriented with personal care that is individual-oriented."

4. According to ACT UP (ACT UP/NY "Why We Get Arrested" pamphlet), this is done in one of two ways: (1) create problems for those in power that will not go away until they give in, and/or (2) educate the public in ways that both cause embarrassment to those in power and cause them to be fearful that the popular movement for change may grow strong enough to threaten their power.

5. I refer to Tricia Henry's (1989) term used to define the British punk "fanzines" of the 1970s.

6. The meaning systems distinctive to illicit drug users have been subsequently defined as sub-cultural by such researchers as Johnson (1973) and Weppner (1977).

7. As D. DesJarlais, S. R. Friedman, and D. Strug (1986, pp. 112–113) write: "IV-drug use clearly constitutes a deviant subculture within the United States. Possession and sale of the drugs are violations of the law, as are many of the activities undertaken to obtain money for purchasing the drugs. In addition to legal differences between IV-drug users and members of conventional society, there is an empathy barrier. Most members of conventional society, even though they may use illicit drugs, have great difficulty imagining themselves doing what IV-drug users are believed to do to obtain money for drugs. Most members of conventional society find it easier to empathize with victims of drug-related crimes than with IV-drug users. Thus, IV-drug users are not merely considered different, but are often objects of fear, mistrust, hostility, scorn, and to a limited extent, pity."

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