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### Nice People Take Drugs

**An investigation into the communicative strategies of  
drug policy reform organisations in the United  
Kingdom from a social movement perspective**

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## **ABSTRACT**

Drug policy reform organisations are civil society actors that seek to influence drug policy developments in countries, and the public discourse surrounding drugs and their users. Collectively, they form a social movement that seeks to promote alternative models of controlling drugs and reducing their harms to individuals and society. This research seeks to understand how they interact with mainstream media, construct internal and external networks of alliances, and subvert dominant drug-related discourses and meanings.

Relying on framing strategies and opportunity structures, this investigation conducted qualitative in-depth interviews with different organisations to determine their communicative strategies, their relationship with the state, and potential avenues of future research into drug policy reform. This research argues that drug policy reform organisations contest entrenched meanings contesting dominant frames in society by promoting new frames, acting collectively and adapting mainstream media representations in their favour. Future research should seek to unveil how novel forces of investment and funding are impacting the direction and actions of reform groups.

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For my Nadine Talaat (2019), who was always there to pull me out of the hole I thought myself into.

For my supervisor, for helping shape this into something worth submitting.

For all the representatives of the organisations I spoke with. Your input was what made this all happen. You are all fighting the good fight; I'll join your ranks soon. Credits to Release for their "Nice People Take Drugs" campaign, which was the inspiration for the dissertation title.

And for all those that have been wronged, frightened, incarcerated, murdered, smuggled, subjugated, shamed, condemned and generally suffered for expanding their minds and seeking different pleasures. This is a small step towards justice.

## 1 INTRODUCTION

Since the end of the Second World War, Western countries like the US and the UK have attempted to instil a global regime of drug prohibition, seeking to eradicate the production, distribution and consumption of illegal drugs worldwide through the brutal criminalisation of all those involved in the drug trade (Nadelmann, 1990). However, the last 10 years have brought about drug policy developments that are radically different from this prohibitionist goal. From drug decriminalisation efforts to cannabis legalisation and regulation, the traditional prohibitionist approach of a zero-tolerance of currently illegal drugs in society is changing (Eastwood, Fox and Rosmarin, 2016). Beyond established policy-makers, drug policy reform organisations (henceforth referred to as DPROs) have been important actors in influencing public opinion and decision-making around drug policies. Acting partly as think-tanks, news disseminators and social movement groups, DPROs aim to change public discourses surrounding drugs and their users, proposing alternative models of drug regulation.

Most DPROs hold at their centre values of social justice and individual freedom (Stevens and Zampini, 2018), and thus promote drug control models that legalise and regulate currently illicit drug markets. Their justifications for demanding policy change are varied, but at their crux is the reduction of drug-related harms for drug-using individuals and the society they exist within. Although drug reform processes have been well documented solely from the policy side (Rogeberg, 2017; Room, 1991; Tieberghein, 2017), an examination into the DPROs promoting legal regulation of drugs has been lacking from academia. This dissertation seeks to fulfil a gap in knowledge by contributing qualitative research into the current tactics of DPROs; this was done by interviewing representatives of five DPROs and asking them how they interact with mainstream media, how they engage with each other, and what sort of public frames particularly resonated in society.

To complete this task, I will employ a social movement theoretical lens to perceive DPROs as groups within a common group seeking to subvert established discourses and notions of how drugs and their users should be treated in society. This will be done firstly by an analysis of the existing literature surrounding the historical development of British attitudes towards drugs and drug-users, followed by a conceptual section that employs social movement theories to make sense of the drug policy reform (DPR) movements' communication and actions. The rationale and operationalisation of this investigation's methodology is then explained in detail. The findings and the discussions have been jointly conducted, unveiling how the different social movement concepts manifest themselves in DPRO's efforts and communications.

Centrally, this investigation seeks to understand *what the communicative strategies that drug policy reform organisations employ to enact policy change*. I seek to provide a snapshot of the current reform environment, before serious regulatory change has happened in the UK. I desire to archive a moment in time where the struggle for reform was reaching its apex and

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acknowledge all the work that has gone to changing entrenched ideas in such a controversial policy area.

## 2 LITERATURE REVIEW

Understanding the current state of the British drug policy system is dependent on its contemporary analysis. Although there is considerable research into the historical development of the British drug policy system (Pearson, 1991; Seddon, Ralphs and Williams, 2008), this investigation is primarily concerned with what constitutes the established dominant frames and languages surrounding illegal drugs and their users, and how particular organisations have deployed forms of resistance to bring about social change through DPR. In this section, I will first give a brief overview of the historical development of the modern British state's approach to drug control, and where resisting DPROs first appear. This will be followed by an explanation of the dominant frames (one minor, one major) through which drugs and their users are currently perceived in British society, which DPROs are actively attempting to reform. A subsequent section will introduce social movement theory and how it will be used to critically analyse DPROs' communication strategies.

### 2.1 Establishing the Modern British Drug Policy Regime

In Seddon's (2011) sociological overview of British drug policy developments, he aptly states that to understand future directions of drug policy reform, one must first reconstitute the events that led to the current social and political formation.

The acute rise of HIV/AIDS cases in the 1980s is the starting point of the establishment's modern drug control system. Misrepresentations of problematic drug users and media-stoked fears about the pervasiveness of heroin and HIV assisted in creating moral judgements about drug-using populations and their threat to social stability and public health (Booth, 2017; Pearson, 1991; Parker et al. 1987). This period also saw the rise in punitive policy measures around crime control. Farral, Burke and Hay's (2016) analysis of Acts of Parliament underscored how the public discourse and policy measures surrounding the state's approach to law and order issues during Thatcher's era considerably increased, which had severe repercussions in the public perception of drug users.

The rise in punitive measures continued through the 1990s, where the carceral system was increasingly employed to contain drug-related harms. Seddon (et al. 2008) expanded on how the British state was greatly preoccupied in containing the societal harm specifically stemming from acquisitive crime conducted by drug (particularly heroin) abusers seeking to "feed their habit". This notion is embodied in the Conservative's 1995 "*Tackling Drugs Together*" national drug strategy, which identified drug-related crime as a major threat to the safety of communities. The prohibition of drugs and the criminalisation of all drug-related activities was maintained in New Labour's government; if anything, it was reinforced. Blair imported the "drug czar" position in 1997 from the American drug policy model<sup>1</sup>; the appointed

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<sup>1</sup> The American drug policy model is the epitome of drug prohibition, and is a system predicated on a zero-tolerance approach to drug use (Glasser, 2000)

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Keith Hellawell was a former Chief Constable who intended to “tackle the ‘menace’ posed by drugs” and help “break once and for all the vicious cycle of drugs and crime which wrecks lives and threatens communities” (Buchanan, 2010: 253). Custodial sentences proliferated; a carceral logic embedded itself in the British way of addressing crime, where prison sentences became the preferred way to control undesirable behaviours in society. The consequences of this logic was the exponential rise in prison populations in the mid-1990s onwards (Sturge, 2019). Between 1994 and 2004, the annual number of imprisoned drug offenders rose by 111% and average sentence lengths by 29% (Reuter and Stevens, 2007: 10).

However, the turn of the century brought with it a noteworthy shift in drug-using populations. Drug use in the UK peaked in the early 2000s, with annual cannabis prevalence among young adults reaching 30% in 2000 (Bryan et al. 2013). Already in the 1990 there was a trend forming of poly-drug use by cross-sectional groups in society, with drug use no longer confined to the most vulnerable or socially deprived communities. There was particularly an increase in experimentation and recreational drug use by youth populations, in drug consumption habits that eroded the “typical” portrayal of a drug user, and portrayed drug use as an intrinsic experience of many youth communities in their search for leisure and pleasure (Parker, Aldridge and Measham, 1998). Academically referred to as the normalisation thesis, (Measham and Shiner, 2009; Pennay and Measham, 2016) the period it demarcates refers to an increasing normalcy not only in drug use -of psychedelic substances like LSD and MDMA, but primarily cannabis- but on the reporting of drugs, even if consistently in an incredibly problematic and exaggerated manner (Coomber, Morris and Dunn, 2000).

Reuter and Stevens (2008) wrote on how the cultural and social accommodation of extensive and sensible drug use could have been important factors for increasing the normalcy of their use in society. Buchanan (2010: 252) highlighted how the dissonance between the largely trouble-free drug experiences that young people experienced and the punitive enforcement of their prohibition demonstrated the schizophrenic nature of drug laws in society. Drug use was neither as dangerous, deviant, nor as rare as was publicly stated to be.

Perhaps not so coincidentally, several DPROs came into existence in this period. These organisations -commonly non-profit organisations or think-tanks- can be perceived as formalised social movements that acted as intermediaries between regular society and advocated for those who would commonly be branded as deviant outsiders (Mold, 2006). Although DPRO4 is an outlier (founded in 1968), we can see how the foundation of DPRO5 (1996), the Beckley Foundation (1998), DPRO2 (2002) and DPRO3 (2015) all appeared in a period where illegal drug use has become increasingly normalised. DPROs have the dual purpose of stimulating public discussions about drugs’ place in society and generating evidence-based policy proposals of alternative forms of drug regulation that ultimately aim to reduce drug-related harm. Ideologically they all reject the British drug criminalisation approach for ignoring evidence and exacerbating drug harms.

The focus of this investigation lies in examining the actions and the environment within which DPROs are engaged in their mission to reform established drug policies and dominant discourses surrounding drugs and their users in society. To better determine what constitutes this mission, the two dominant frames were distilled from academia and analyses of



mainstream media, in order to understand what sort of challenge DPROs were (and still are) facing.

## 2.2 Dominant Frames

Grounded in Goffman's (1974) work in framing analysis, framing is used by an agent to *focus* one's attention on a particular set of elements related to drug-use, *articulate* the criminal and moral implications of associating oneself to drugs, ultimately seeking to *DPRO* people's attitudes towards their users (Benford and Snow, 2000; Snow, 2013). Thus, meanings surrounding drugs and their users are perceived as entrenched, but not permanently fixed. Understanding the dominant framings of drugs and their users is the first step in determining what must be done to resist the state's systematic control and subjugation. As Foucault believed, where there is power, there is resistance (Krips, 1990).

From a social movement perspective, DPROs are attempting to challenge the state's and society's established symbolic meanings surrounding drugs. Framing drug users in a deviant manner is a historical technique both control "threats" to the state's stability, and reify the moral sanctity of those conforming to the established norms, and to create social barriers (Becker, 1963). Acevedo (2007: 184) is particularly knowledgeable in his deconstruction of the British cannabis user from a Foucauldian perspective, showing that a cannabis -and thus a drug- user is a "sick person in need of treatment, or a criminal deserving punishment.". This articulation of crime and illness around drug use denotes the two main frames that DPROs are contesting in the UK.

### 2.2.1 Medical Frame

Although less significant than the criminal frame, there is still a dominant pathological understanding of why people would use drugs in the first place. This frame focuses on the deleterious impact that drug users, particularly those with problematic drug use, have on society. The costs that dependent drug users create to "feed their habits" (in a quasi-animalistic manner) underlines the harm they incur to society. Their damage is not only physical: Mold's (2008) details how heroin users are seen as suffering from "pathologically impaired moral faculties", alluding to the moral degradation that problematic drug users represent.

The UK Drug Policy Commission (2010) examined public perceptions of drug users: in a poll comparing stigma towards mental illnesses and drug dependency, they unveiled that publics perceived problematic drug users as a burden to society, and 59% of respondents agreed that their drug dependency was a result of their moral or self-disciplining failures. This stigma has been compounded by the media, who has historically proliferated "junkies" and "helpless addicts" discourses since the 80s (Pearson, 1987), a marginalising discourse which is maintained until today, particularly in tabloid news sources (Radcliffe and Stevens, 2008).

The consequences of the medical frame are the portrayal of all drug-taking as "vices", positioning the virtuous Us against the hedonistic Other (MacGregor, 2013), obfuscating any conceptualisation of recreational drug use. The medical frame is tinged with a moral judgement of drug users (Shiner, 2013): illegal drugs are solely to be used in medical contexts; individuals are either mentally ill or need medical help if they use them in non-prescribed

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contexts. The proposed solution for drug users is their permanent abstinence from drug consumption. Abstinence is seen as the only indicator of success for drug rehabilitation programmes, and custodial sentences can be prolonged if previously-incarcerated users fail drug tests (Gulland, 2016).

### 2.2.2 Criminal Frame

Alternatively referred to as the punitive, criminal, or carceral frame, this is the most significant perspective that drug users are seen in the UK. This largely stems from the entire criminalisation of the possession, distribution and production of drugs, and the legal and social consequences of becoming a criminal. As Sampson (2002) noted, drug users are more defined by their offence than their use; drug use is a victimless crime, yet still a crime. This relationship between drugs and crime is an important discursive link that impedes the rationalisation of alternative drug control models in the UK.

The link between crime and drugs has been explicitly drawn by politicians: then-prime minister Blair stated that half of all property crimes in 1994 were caused by drug offenders (Monaghan, 2012; Mills, 1994). His administration (and subsequent ones) ensured that the focus of drug policies was on the crime that drugs and their users produced, and not on the various harms incurred from their use and production (Seddon et al. 2008). By portraying the drug problem in this manner, drug control thusly became a criminal justice matter, where drug using behaviours has to be legally and socially contained lest it become an existential or social threat. The criminal frame thus portrays all drug users as potential criminals or deviants, disrespecting the state's authority or threatening its stability and security. The media exacerbated and reified this frame: the UKDPC (2010) mainstream media analysis showed that in over 1500 news reports on criminal justice system developments (i.e. reports on arrests, trials or sentences), drug use was consistently suggested as their cause. Attributing blame to drugs for crime, or for pushing someone towards crime has been a serious impediment to the rational and unbiased discussion of alternative models to drug-related incarceration (MacGregor, 2013).

This link has been described as *the drug-crime nexus* (Seddon, 2000; et al. 2008) where drug addiction is seen as the primary driver of crime; such an established link is the major reforming challenge that DPROs face in their mission. This means that both policy and attitudinal changes need to occur to truly reform the way drugs and their users will be perceived in society. The drug-crime nexus ensures that legally a drug user will always be seen as an outsider or a threat, even if a considerable portion of the British population has used drugs.

Whilst studies have been conducted into changing British attitudes towards drugs, (Pearson, 1991; Berridge, 2013) or the negotiations occurring within the formal political level, (MacGregor, 2013; 2017) rarely has there been an investigation into the actual actors' actions that bring about said changes. Stevens and Zampini's (2018: 68) Habermasian analysis of the English drug policy sphere provided an interesting overview of the policy environment and its internal discourse within which reform advocates operate; their analysis of the "constellations of power and interest" of links between groups highlights how advocacy organisations can operate to influence legislation. They also wrote on how drug policy actors

must “win legitimacy and support from the media and the...general public”, prompting an investigation into the actual details of *how* this would be done.

To fill this epistemological gap of how reform is being conducted by DPR actors, I employed a social movement approach to deconstruct DPROs’ actions and motivations. This theoretical lens is particularly useful to analyse movements that position themselves antagonistically to established discourses or ways of life. A social movement perspective is particularly useful to understand how oppressed populations like drug users could be empowered to subvert dominant beliefs and established norms (Diani, 1992).

### **2.3 Intersecting Drug Policy Reform and Social Movement Theory**

Defining DPROs as a social movement is not a conceptual challenge; social movements can be shaped in different ways and manifest themselves in multiple manners. Diani (1992: 3) believes that at their heart, social movements are a collection of actors that “elaborate, through either joint action and/or communication, a shared definition of themselves as being part of the same side in a social conflict.” Tarrow (1994) underlines how social movements must have a collective challenge that is common to all members and exhibit social solidarity between themselves and other socially oppressed groups. Specifically referring to social movement’s communication, Cathcart (1980: 269) social movements must challenge “established hierarchical relationships and consensually validated symbols” by proposing a new discourse and conceptualisation of their struggle. DPROs and their mission to reform the criminal approach to drug policy fit perfectly -conceptually and in practice- in this definition.

So far, only Room’s (1991: 39) paper has examined the historical development of the DPR movement, even describing how historically “movements to permit... drug-use have not usually taken the form of a self-conscious social movement.” His paper ends on how the increasing normalcy of the concept of addiction could pave the way for greater public discussion of alternative forms of drug control. My investigation seeks to expand on the other side of Room’s research, exploring how properly organised DPR groups could impact existing drug policies towards legal regulation.

### **2.4 Co-opting Opportunity Structures**

As Snow (2013) stated, framing processes and opportunity structures are two key conceptual tools for analysing social movements’ strategies for change. I have already expanded upon the dominant frames that DPROs must reform in society; what is left is to understand how useful opportunity structures could be in critically analysing into DPROs’ actions as activists within their own social movement.

Cammaerts’ (2012) mediation opportunity structure was chosen as an effective conceptual framework that “integrate[s] insights from social movement theories with those from media and communication studies”. It draws from Silverstone’s (2002) process of mediation, which suggests that meaning making is a dialectical and dynamic process, akin to the deconstruction of established frames and discourses. Cammaerts’ work is thus a good lens to understand how activists are subverting entrenched discourses in society.

The three opportunity structures that compose the mediation opportunity structure are as follows:

#### **2.4.1 Media Opportunity Structure (MedOS)**

Borne out of Tarrow's (1994) political opportunity structure, this approach seeks to understand what signals exist in political systems that encourage the formation of social movements and deployment of their subversive actions (Giugni, 2009). Cammaerts (2012: 119) modifies this concept by accounting for "opportunities and structural constraints" that are inherent to media systems. As Gamson (1990: 28-9) stated, the success of social movements is dependent on the established system accepting "as a valid spokesman for a legitimate set of interests". McCurdy (2010) also elaborated on the dynamic between mainstream media and movements, underlining the reality that movements will be portrayed by media, whether they participate in that process or not. Thus, through *MedOS* this investigation is looking to understand how DPROs approach and deal with mainstream media, in their search to provide legitimacy to their claims, widen the scope of potential movement adherents, and mobilise resources for their cause (Gamson and Wolfsfeld, 1993).

#### **2.4.2 Network Opportunity Structure (NetOS)**

Although Cammaerts (2012: 119) is more concerned with the technology's impact on movements, networks here were understood from Diani and McAdam's (2003: 22) perspective as an interconnection of shared "norms and values related to a specific area of political contention". The dimensions of these networks can be both external and internal.

Social movements can benefit from reaching out to other social movements external to them and expand their political support and directions of pressure on the establishment. This approach is greatly informed by Laclau and Mouffe's (1985) "chain of equivalences"; by portraying different movement's struggles as similar or quasi-identical -both in their critique and demands- to the DPR movement, solidarity between movements can be established. This is particularly important for a movement that targets drug-exacerbated social inequalities. Internally to the DPR movement, there are incentives for groups within the DPR movement to specialise in one's communicative advantage and collaborate in knowledge production and tactics dissemination (Wang and Soule, 2012). The *NetOS* thus examines the relationship DPROs have outside the movement and within its constituent groups.

#### **2.4.3 Media Opportunity Structure (MedOS)**

Connected to framing strategies, *DOS* is concerned with movements' ability "to develop interpretive "frames" that can effectively link a movement and its cause to the interests, perceptions, and ideologies of potential constituencies" (Koopmans and Statham, 1999). As McCammon et al (2007) elaborate: "movement framing takes place when collective actors articulate their interpretations of the social or political problem at hand, its solution, and the reasons why others should support efforts to ameliorate the condition". Successful exploitation of *DOS* would entail the reconfiguration of dominant discourses (Ferree et al. 2002), in this case of drugs and their users. Success however, is dependent on DPROs understanding the existing cultural values of the political and social environment they are communicating within,

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and collectively deploying frames that subvert hegemonic discourses. McCammon (et al. 2007: 731) suggests *frame-bridging* as a useful technique to increase movements' chances of success, which entails shaping one's frames to deploy the movement's core beliefs in an aligned manner with the dominant principles in society. An examination into DPROs use of DOS will then analyse how they utilise indicators to show their alignment with society's values, and how then they frame-bridge to supplant existing discourses with their own interpretations of how drugs and their users should be seen, spoken about, and treated.

### 2.5 Research Objectives

This investigation thus seeks to add to the academic understanding of DPROs' communicative actions, through the employment of a social movement theoretical lens.

The employed theoretical framework, elaborated from Cammaerts' (2012) mediation opportunity structure with some additional features, seeks to examine four inter-related aspects of social movements: the social and political environment within which DPROs communicate and mobilise their social movement; and the three components of Cammaerts' mediation opportunity structure (henceforth labelled MedOS, NetOS and DOS). Data collection was conducted through qualitative in-depth interviews with specialist representatives from a selection of UK-based DPROs. The questions

This study seeks to fill the gap in understanding how the actual agents of change in DPR perceive their relationship with the state, and how they intend to reach their goals. It aims to provide DPROs with an opportunity to critically reflect on their communicative efforts, the values of their messages, and the extent of their cooperation between themselves and with other social movements. The central research question is:

**CRQ:** What are the communicative strategies that drug policy reform organisations employ as a social movement to enact policy change?

Additional research questions relate to each of the examined opportunity structures and the political and social environment DPROs operate within:

**RQ1:** To what extent do DPROs negotiate their media representation with mainstream media outlets?

**RQ2:** How do DPROs interact with other intra-movement organisations and external social movements?

**RQ3:** In what ways do DPROs perceive, engage with, and alter existing hegemonic frames of drugs and their users?

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### 3 METHODOLOGY RATIONALE

#### 3.1 Data Collection

This dissertation's focus is on the communicative strategies that are employed by DPROs. This investigation is thus primarily concerned with how communications specialists analyse their environment, and use framing tactics, discourse construction, and network advantages for their objectives. This investigation is concerned with the thought-processes, reflections and rationales behind DPRO's communications; this evidence is best uncovered through a qualitative approach that examines the different interactions, conflicts and contradictions (Duke, 2002) that may appear.

Considering this investigation's focus on the messages that DPROs are producing, it seemed most intuitive to collect data through direct interviews with their communications managers or officers. Rubin and Rubin (2005) described how qualitative in-depth interviews enable a researcher to examine how respondents perceive and respond to their surrounding environment. Brinkmann and Kvale (2015) complemented this, positing that interviews can be a useful method to determine an individual's understanding of the examined issue at a specific time and perspective. The collected data is more elaborate than in surveys or questionnaires, and gives respondents the chance to describe their actions and thoughts in natural, unformal language (Clark, 1998). Face-to-face interviews were preferred over mediated conversations for facilitating synchronous communications and timely follow-up questions, and capture of non-verbal cues (Wengraf, 2011; Sturges and Hanrahan, 2004).

As an elite group, DPROs have "more influence on political outcomes than general members of the public" (Richards, 1996: 199); insights on their decision-making processes, framing strategies and claim-making will be valuable not only for this investigation, but to establish a benchmark for future studies that investigate political communication in this area. This choice had further methodological implications: contacting elites made it unrealistic to coordinate a focus group, and meant that I was dependent on their willingness and availability for an interview (Lilleker, 2003; Harvey, 2010). For this project, have to concur with Ostrander's (1993) comments: gaining access and establishing a good interviewing relationship was not as difficult as expected with this elite group. My past work experience in the drug policy sector and the professional credentials of my institution proved to be enough to at least directly engage with all DPRO professionals. The biggest hindrance was their unavailability to meet face-to-face due to time and work constraints.

#### 3.2 Data Sampling

This study relied on a purposive sampling method, as there is a limited number of DPROs within the UK. The rationale behind this approach was that I was aiming to examine DPROs that are advocating for law and social reform around *all* illegal drugs. This specification limits the possibly examined DPROs, distinguishing them from other drug advocacy groups, such as cannabis advocacy groups or drug-testing organisations.

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5 DPROs were chosen to be interviewed, a sufficiently broad number of interviewees for the data collected to be relevant or representative enough of a movement (Lilleker, 2003). Most have collaborated in the past which made it easier to legitimate my investigation to different organisations and to demonstrate my ideological alignment with their aims. All DPROs are non-profit organisations and, apart from Volteface, mostly rely on grants, consultation projects or donations to operate.

Each organisation represents different nodes within the same network of drug policy reform which are interlinked in their mission yet have distinct communicative advantages between them. Below they are described in brief:

**Transform Drug Policy Foundation** - Transform has established itself as both a national and international centre of expertise on alternative drug policy models. The organisation produced policy reports and analysis of global drug policy developments, and books that detail diverse regulatory frameworks for alternative forms of drug control. Their participation in parliamentary enquiries and international reach has guaranteed their frequent participation in many mainstream media debates.

**Release** - Release is one of the oldest drug services agencies in the UK. It is primarily focused in providing legal assistance, counselling and professional advice to professionals or individuals with drug-related problems or queries. Similarly to DPRO5, DPRO4 has produced multiple publications concerning the unfair enforcement of drug laws, and advocates for evidence-based drug policies (for the history of DPRO4, see Mold, 2006).

**Volteface** - Volteface is part advocacy organisation, part policy think-tank, that is dedicated to reducing the harms that drugs create to society and individuals. A relatively recent organisation, they produce publications, policy commentaries and podcasts for online dissemination. Their reform focus is on cannabis-related drug laws and changing public attitudes towards cannabis.

**Law Enforcement Action Partnership (LEAP)** - LEAP agglomerates different professionals from the criminal justice system that advocate for reform against punitive drug policies. Originally an American organisation, the UK branch is composed of media trained police commissioners, former officers and military professionals that speak on the costs of current drug policies. Their privileged position from the enforcement side gives weight to their contributions to the debate.

**Beckley Foundation** - Founded by Amanda Feilding, Beckley promotes evidence-based drug policies, producing neuroscientific research on several psychedelic substances and advocating for law reform. Beckley has several publications on the roadmap for drug regulation and has convened their own conferences on the potential regulation of cannabis. The organisation has also advised several countries seeking to create novel drug control systems.

### 3.3 Interview Design

One of the great difficulties research in interviewing for social sciences is for the interview questions to not be transliterated from the theoretical concepts. Communication with



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respondents who are not as academically invested in the topic may struggle to articulate answers in the same terms. Wengraf (2011: 67) recommended tailoring theoretical questions (TQs) into manageable interview questions (IQs) to address this issue in a way that does not merely “echo” the TQs. When conducting the interviews, I elaborated through multiple questions relevant to DPRO’s surrounding political culture and related to my conceptual framework to provide a holistic understanding of the challenges DPROs face.

Initially, general questions about the respondent’s personal path into drug policy reform advocacy were asked, to ease into the more intensive IQs. For this investigation, the TQs seek to determine the political culture that DPROs communicate within (TQ1), and the three features of Cammaerts’ mediation opportunity structure expounded in the literature review: the media (TQ2+3), discursive (TQ4+5) and network opportunity structure (TQ6). An adapted version of Kvale’s (1996: 131) TQ-IQ table below illustrates the relationship between the examined topics<sup>2</sup>:

IQ N <sup>o</sup>	TQ	IQ Formulation
5	TQ1: What are DPROs’ appraisal of existing structure and power dynamics of their communicative environment?	What do you think is the public’s perception of drug policy reform as a field?
9		Are there any groups in society that are impeded from participating in the drug policy debate?
6	TQ2: In what way do DPROs perceive the challenges they face in their message dissemination?	How would you describe the media environment for debating and questioning drug policy?
10	TQ3: What opportunities and constraints do mainstream media present to DPROs?	Do you use mainstream media or opt to make and use your own media?
11	TQ4: How do DPROs, through framing strategies, contest or	Are there limits in what is deemed as an “acceptable way” to talk about drugs in the media?

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<sup>2</sup> This is a sample of IQs; a complete Interview Guide can be found in Appendix A

16	subvert hegemonic discourses surrounding drugs?	Have you found that certain messages resound better in the mainstream media than others?
18	TQ5: how much value do DPROs attribute to employing discursive resistance as a communication tactic?	How important is language, and the language you employ, to the drug policy movement?
19		Do you see all drugs being treated equally by the media?
21	TQ6: To what extent are network affordances perceived as key to success by DPROs?	What are the main points of contention in the DPR world?
23		What kind of non-drug policy organisations do you collaborate with?

For congruency, the same questions were asked to all respondents in the same order; however, I did not zealously adhere to the interview guide by not repeating already-answered questions and using follow-up questions when necessary. As Kvale (1996) clarified, qualitative interview research must adapt to how each participant chooses to provide the required data, rather than asserting a homogenous structure on all respondents. With this intent, I elaborated on questions when prompted and added my perspective to demonstrate I agreed with what a respondent had just said. Responses were recorded and then transcribed by hand.

In some cases, it was necessary to deviate from the question guide to encourage participants to expand and reflect; this is a methodological fault of interviews, where the mood of the participant can impact their willingness to disclose information. To mitigate this, the interview locations were either the DPRO's office or an agreed-upon location; two interviews were conducted over the phone. Regardless of the location, I found it fruitful with every conversation to talk about non-drug policy related topics before recording in order to establish proximity and underscore the commonality of our interests; as previously stated, the comfort of respondents is key to greater self-disclosure (Knox and Burkard, 2009).

### 3.4 Data Analysis Method

Thematic analysis was the main form of data analysis conducted in this investigation, which was greatly informed by Guest et al. (2014) *Applied Thematic Analysis* and will be taking a mix between an exploratory and a confirmatory approach to data analysis, where key trends and themes will be unveiled by reading the data and then will be compared with key themes raised from theories previously expounded in the literature review. Thematic analysis was preferred over thematic discourse analysis because it is not "wedded to any pre-existing theoretical

framework" (Braun and Clarke, 2006), a necessary feature of this investigation's data analysis. In practice this entails looking at how DPROs perceive their communicative environment and manage their various opportunity structures, but also uncovering other themes that were unaccounted for in my conceptual framework.

The advantage of applied thematic analysis is its amalgamation of different forms of thematic analyses. It provides me with enough analytical freedom to employ Cammaerts' mediation opportunity structure as guiding themes to uncover and analyse yet enables me to also highlight themes that were unaccounted for in my conceptual framework. These themes were explored in the Analysis or mentioned as opportunities for further research in the Conclusion.

### **3.5 Data Collection Limitations**

My selection of interviewed DPROs was ideologically one-sided; I chose to investigate organisations that were interested in reforming towards alternative regulation, decriminalisation or legalisation of currently illegal substances. Although most DPROs work from this angle, there are some noteworthy socially conservative organisations that support the status quo or promote the criminalisation of new substances. Stevens and Zampini's (2018) Habermasian analysis provide an excellent and balanced appraisal of the entire British drug policy reform landscape, yet they also note that most DPROs operate from a reform perspective. My choice stemmed from an interest in investigating how organisations organised themselves to that challenge the established order of controlling drugs. The decision to ground my dissertation on social movement theory underscores these intentions.

Transcription is rarely mentioned more than in a passing manner, rather than as a methodological feature (Davidson, 2009). Cues like humour, gesturing, cadence, curtness and other vocalizations are omitted from the final word-centric document and consequently from analysis; these can be important artefacts that demonstrate what arguments DPRO communicators consider the most important, or most vehemently believe. For this investigation, I have chosen to transcribe sentence structures in the way they were orally transmitted yet edited for clarity when quotes were transcribed into the body of my dissertation whilst maintaining true to their original nature.

I was unsatisfied with the two phone interviews I conducted, although scholars seem to be divided about whether this is a methodological disadvantage. Shuy (2003) very importantly remarks that the greatest advantage of face-to-face interviews is the physical proximity of both participants. By sharing the same space and access to each other's non-verbal cues, both interviewer and respondent are equal in their knowledge exchange; there is a comfort that arises from two interested individuals sharing information on a subject they are both very interested within. By being able to communicate with intonation and their bodies, respondents were more verbose and eloquent when interviewed in person.

### **3.6 Ethical Issues**

Participant's comfort in interviews was dependent on the transparency of my investigation. I realised that there was some suspicion from respondents about my research's intentions, a

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common issue with elite interviews (Richards, 1996). One respondent initially refused to be interviewed due to previous academic interviewers misconstruing their responses; three DPROs initially refused to meet in person due to time or availability constraints, until I elaborated extensively on the project's purpose and intentions.

There were some challenges concerning confidentiality that beckon reflection. All DPROs' representatives were aware of the purpose of the interviews, knew which other organisations were contacted, and spoke on behalf of the organisation's view. However, some conflicting views between organisations' positions were unveiled in the interviews, which could compromise their existing relationships (Lancaster, 2016). To minimise this investigation's negative impact without sacrificing its analytical focus, DPROs were randomly assigned a letter in the Findings section.

This investigation relies on DPROs reflecting on their campaigns, relationships and public communications. For theoretical purposes, relational differences between DPROs were accentuated in the Findings; this is not a true reflection of their working relationships. All DPROs still work towards the same objective of reform. But the theoretical framework of this work demands criticality when examining the trade-offs DPROs engage in when negotiating how to subvert the British drug policy regime, and how this could manifest itself in differences on *how* to achieve DPR.

## 4 FINDINGS

Before engaging in analysis, it may be useful to clarify the common stances to all DPROs. All groups are interested in reducing drug-related harm for individuals and communities; this is in line with the current drug policy regime's supposed objective. However, they consensually agree that prohibition and criminalisation is neither effective nor pragmatic; drug use will always occur, and the established prohibitionist system operates on harming users, as research has corroborated (Taylor et al. 2018). Criminalising drugs and their users has only exacerbated social inequalities and stigma towards drug treatment. The best method to reduce harms is unanimously agreed as legal regulation, either decriminalisation or full legalisation. DPROs generally believe that:

*drugs are [...] dangerous, the poison is in the dose.*

(DPRO1)

### 4.1 Existing Political Culture

#### 4.1.1 Confirming the Drug-Crime Nexus

When DPROs were asked what current attitudes towards drugs in society were, the existence of the drug-crime nexus that is underlined in academic literature as a dominant frame was brought up:

*what you have learned is an acceptable behaviour versus an unacceptable behaviour...the idea of the criminal is a really easy and assuring way for the state to concretise negative understandings... about people who are associated with these things [drugs]. Anything that is criminal is immediately fear-mongering.*

(DPRO4)

The majority of DPROs understood the preponderance of the drug-crime nexus, and the normative consequences that it creates for drug users. Social justice-oriented DPROs underscored the power of the criminal frame, highlighting how the criminalisation of all drug-related activities portrays drug users as immoral or as a danger to society. What is the most negative consequence of this portrayal is the resultant stigmatisation and persecution of drugs and their users, particularly problematic drug users. Considering that the state's control of deviants or criminals helps to both ostracise them and reify the state as morally supreme (Durkheim and Fauconnet, 1925), embedding the entire illicit drug market within a punitive and carceral logic has worked to ultimately marginalise users from ever being seen as equal citizens or humans by non-drug users.

Fear is a discursive tool that portrays the normative consequences of the state's drug control effort. Perceiving drug users as the embodiment of an existential threat to society was a

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particularly powerful frame to deploy on non-drug using populations, who cannot personally attest to the misinformation surrounding drugs because they have not personally experienced them. Drugs are portrayed as intrinsically dangerous and evil, even before consumption; their users embody these traits upon ingestion. The social persecution of drug users further ensures that non-drug users are encouraged to maintain their distance or disassociate themselves from those that indulge in their consumption.

In the words of DPRO2: “all anti-drugs rhetoric is based on stigmatising and othering certain sections of our community”; criminalising drugs and their users creates a self-disciplining system within a state’s community, where users must either hide or abstain from their habits, even if drugs are being consumed in a non-problematic manner. The dissemination of the drug-crime nexus and its punitive enforcement further engenders a culture that develops enforcement and disciplining mechanisms, that infiltrates the public’s perceptions of what drugs are, and impedes the discussion of alternative conceptions of drug control beyond total prohibition:

*...the state has actually done a very good job of convincing the population that drugs are dangerous... that [drug users] are the people that are harmful in their very essence to our societies...*

(DPRO4)

*You’re faced with a very sprawling counter-narrative and...propaganda from prohibition that has been going on for 50+ years... it’s not an even playing field when you’re talking to the public...*

(DPRO1)

*in a highly securitised environment it makes it all but impossible to explore a non-weaponised, peaceful, tolerant approach [to drug control]... it’s anathema.*

(DPRO5)

Reforming public attitudes towards those that have been branded as criminals or immoral deviants is thus DPRO’s identified task. As DPRO1 stated, the history and the sprawling nature of drug prohibition means that there are many preconceived notions and portrayals of drugs and their users that must be broken down through evidence, strong discourse and sustained media dissemination to achieve their objectives. Both DPRO1 and DPRO5 highlight how culturally set notions of drugs and drug use must be reformed, with the latter believing that the “hangover of having lived under prohibition” means that attitudes will take longer than policy reform to change.

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### 4.1.2 The Historical Progress of DPR Communication

Some DPROs highlighted the historical progress that had already occurred since the movement had begun.

Only one DPRO considered the contemporary communicative environment as negative; all others believed that there had been considerable progress in legitimising DPR as a social struggle in the past 10 years. DPRO2 emphasised the normalisation of drugs as more and more generations of people have over time used drugs in a non-problematic manner:

*it hasn't harmed me as a historic drug user, and it hasn't protected people in the bottom rung of the socioeconomic scale... rational individuals started to ask themselves why hasn't prohibition made things better*

(DPRO2)

The prevalence and normalisation of drug experiences can successfully subvert the demonization of drugs, through real experiences that contrast with constructed or fear-mongering identities of drugs. Pennay and Measham (2016) had underlined how relatively safe and recreational drug use in youth populations could reform established drug and drug-user identities. In this case, DPRO2 believes that over time, attitudes towards drug policies have begun to reform; this was not only due to ageing drug users, but how non-users had also seen how ineffective established drug policies had been at achieving its own purported objectives. Considering that the age group most opposed to cannabis legalisation are over 65 (Furlong, 2016), there has been a natural growth in drug-friendlier attitudes as time goes by.

Another indicator of historical success mentioned by 4 organisations is that DPR has established itself as a regular and stand-alone news agenda item in mainstream media. This is partly due to culturally similar countries like the US and Canada having legalised and regulated cannabis, which provides media with more DPR news to circulate and subvert doomsday expectations of how the country would look if drugs were legally regulated. Large media outlets and tabloid newspapers are increasingly willing to engage with DPR matters in a serious manner:

*[when] the media has engaged seriously with this rather than ridiculing, or marginalising what we're doing, then it changes the public discourse as well*

(DPRO5)

The gradual acceptance of DPR in the public can perhaps be attributed to its consistent presence in the mainstream media. As Gamson and Wolfsfeld (1993) elucidated, there is an inherent validity that is attributed to one's claims when discussed on public forums. It also provides a platform for DPRO representatives to contest hegemonic discourses with their own interpretation of the unjust treatment of drugs and drug users or elaborate on the multiple movements that are impacted by drug policy concerns. In the above quote, DPRO5 is attesting

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to the importance of a mainstream media platform for the legitimacy of a movement's objectives. As a platform, it provides the opportunity for DPROs to deploy their discursive techniques, strategically address misinformation in the DPR public debate, and widen the scope of the movement's struggle to other like-minded individuals.

### 4.2 MedOS

Negotiating alliances with mainstream media is an important facet for creating the right conditions for subversive communication, and DPROs are aware of this. All organisations understand the necessity of engaging with media actors to expand their claims to wider publics, legitimise their demands and expand their network of linked struggles. Organisations broadly understood that "in order to mainstream, it has to be in the mainstream" (DPRO5).

The reasons for maintaining a close relationship with mainstream media outlets were relatively similar. DPRO5 argued that the consistent and insistent presence of DPROs in media debates presented DPR as a critical item for public discussions and facilitated their involvement in the policy-making process: "we couldn't have had the discussions we have now, with the front bench of the Labour Party, with backbenchers in the Tory Party". DPRO3 firmly believed that research is nothing without a combined media strategy of high media engagement for frame deployment: "all the evidence in the world – until you communicate that to the media, to the greater public, you won't make change."

There also seemed to be a common understanding of how particular stories could exploit mainstream media's interests to subvert established interpretations of drug users. DPRO1 underscored how as a media phenomenon, ecstasy-related deaths resounded significantly because: "[media readers] don't see it -drug-taking- as a vice... when it's the death of a child people suddenly think...[this mother is] not asking to light up a spliff". DPRO3 suggested that ecstasy-related deaths received considerable mainstream media attention "because the people that tend to die from ecstasy overdose are young, white, middle-class". Both stories shatter constructed interpretations of what drug overdose victims look like, contrasting greatly with the "medically ill" or "criminally immoral" frames. DPRO5 also lauded how personal stories were especially effective for the DPR movement when deployed in mainstream media:

*...once the human narratives started to play out... [they were] absolutely key for us. And certainly key in terms of shifting some of the more tabloid-oriented populist media outlets, because... they were provided with political cover and... were able to put up bereaved parents calling for legal regulation.*

(DPRO5)

The subversion of drug prohibition's expectations on a public platform through human narratives had considerably more influence than just anonymised evidence on public opinion.



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The DPRO5 quote refers to *Anyone's Child*, a media-friendly campaign that tells the story of bereaved parents and partners whose children or loved ones died from overdose or the criminal logic of the drug control system; these individuals speak with Members of Parliament and media outlets to disseminate their stories; they demonstrate the potential of deploying human narratives for influencing change. Such a story resounds with media outlets that seek to circulate controversial stories, like tabloid media sources, that typically disseminate misinformation about drugs and their users (UKDPC, 2012). By packaging this story in a media-attractive, sensational, easily-reported format, they simultaneously ensure that tabloid media re-circulates their story, and disseminates the DPR message of the unjustness and indiscriminate punitiveness of the current drug control system. Framing strategies that include affective cues have been more successful in enabling political action than merely cognitive discourse (Marcus, 2000).

Both approaches demonstrate how DPROs are maximising the attention they receive from mainstream media through good relationships with key players. This is complemented by creating events and campaigns that are readily packaged and prepared for media distribution (Ryan, 1991). This makes it easy for media outlets to portray them in a positive manner.

### 4.2.1 The Dangers of Abiding by Mainstream Media's Desires

Subversion of established norms and power relations is at the heart of social movements' actions; if one tailors their messages too much to what media currently prioritises, they run the risk of not reforming the underlying punitive and criminal logic and culture that currently characterises the British drug control system.

DPRO3 best embodies the difficult negotiation between DPR aims and media engagement. They describe their approach to reform as pragmatic and incremental; they distance themselves from other DPRO groups that openly advocate for legally regulating all drugs:

*our strategy is that we focus solely on cannabis reform... recreational cannabis market first and then open up the discussion... we wouldn't say [legally regulate all drugs] until we've got some reform over the line, because... that allows politicians in the mainstream to engage in it.*

(DPRO3)

In the interest of not hindering the progress that has been made in cannabis reform advocacy, DPRO3 is compromising on the common DPRO goal of legally regulating all substances, choosing instead to take an incremental approach to DPR. Adjusting one's targets to what mainstream politicians and media deem as tenable and appropriate could indicate that DPRO3 is allowing the movement's interests to be subsumed by the mainstream logic, as they are focusing on "giving what each outlet what they want" (DPRO3) or what would be accepted, rather than what should be done. One can argue that DPRO3's approach to reform is quite pragmatic, understanding that employing the evidence that resounds the most with the wider public is also a legitimate way of bringing about change. McCurdy's (2010) reference to

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Silverstone's elaborations on media complicity, pointed out how the media itself is a site of ongoing struggle; DPROs controlling what is deployed in media is a form of mainstream collusion, but also ensures that they have some control over mainstream representations of their actions.

But the entire point of social movement activity is to subvert and challenge established social beliefs, which in this case refers to the entire British punitive and criminal-based drug policy not accurately reflecting available evidence on reducing drug-related harm, a central tenet of DPROs' demands. By DPRO3 distancing themselves from other DPROs by stating that their beliefs are too unpalatable for the contemporary political and media environment, they are positioning the others as too extreme to negotiate with, which could be interpreted as dismissing other groups' claims and reducing their chances of success. They can further create rifts within the DPR movement, as DPRO3 already alluded when they believed that they are seen by some DPROs as a "PR outfit".

This conundrum is an ongoing debate within social movements regarding the type and depth of the relationship social movement groups should have with the media, and whether they should compromise on their demands when negotiating with the mainstream. When engaging with mainstream media and other institutional players, social movement groups must decide whether to distance themselves from the more extreme members to appear as more moderate or not. This within itself is a strategy for social movements. It also highlights DPROs' need to negotiate relationships, not only with media, but within the DPR movement itself.

### 4.2.2 Establishing Functional Relationships with Media Players

Although most DPROs believed that the media environment was increasingly positive when reporting on them, all organisations (with the exception of DPRO1) explicitly stated the importance of establishing close connections with key reporters and news editors. Having key media figures that will adequately report on DPRO's claims was important to provide sustained coverage for their media events and signal the validity of their claims to other media outlets. DPROs established these relationships either through networking (DPRO3 and DPRO5) or reforming journalists' use of stigmatising language by sharing educational resources with correct terminology to employ when reporting on problematic drug use (DPRO2 and DPRO3).

A particularly unique strategy for this movement was voiced by DPRO4. They operate an alternative media platform that "cover[s] stories that [are] either misrepresented or not spoken about in mainstream media"; the creation of alternative media is a common practice for some social movements, but not prevalent in DPR. In their quest to alter what the public understands as drug policy, DPRO4 proposed the creation of workshops, long-term partnerships with journalists or a journalism fellowship:

*to share best practices on how to write about people who use drugs, how to write about drug policy in a non-stigmatising way... in a way that actually supports models of drug policy that are grounded in social equity*

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(DPRO4)

Although DPRO4 exploits their own media platform for appropriate news coverage, this approach promotes the education of reporters in other mainstream outlets. This is not only a good opportunity to disseminate DPRO's counter-hegemonic discourses, but also to encompass more media actors within DPRO's network of supportive media human resources (Castells, 2009). DPRO4 is thus able to influence the sort of coverage and drug policy knowledge that other institutional media actors will be disseminating; this ultimately contributes to a positive media environment that will be beneficial for increasing the influence of DPRO's public communication.

### 4.3 NetOS

As most DPROs pointed out, the establishment of close relationships with media figures was essential for positive coverage in the media. DPROs are also concerned with establishing closer relationships in their networks of support and social action. There are two major networks that DPROs draw support and resources from: (i) their external networks that work to encompass other movements and individuals into their reform efforts, nationally and internationally; and (ii) their internal networks, that rely on mutual support and specialisation in each DPR target area.

#### 4.3.1 External Support Networks – Widening the Movement's Causes

Just as media can be employed to widen the scope of like-minded individuals, DPROs' communicative efforts also serve the purpose of positioning their struggle against a prohibitionist drug system as aligned or overlapping with other social struggles:

*...there's a huge amount of crossover with organisations that work with vulnerable communities and drug harms are not a singularity... there's a whole plethora of issues that are aligned.*

(DPRO2)

*it's about engaging outside of that [DPR world] and trying to talk to organisations and go 'well a lot of these issues are as a result of drugs therefore we'd like to open dialogue'*

(DPRO3)

*One of the things I said [to civil society groups] was 'you tell me what you do, and I'll tell you how the drug war screws it up'*

(DPRO5)

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Each DPRO understands that other movements have similar target goals or interests to the DPR movement; modifying one's rhetoric or establishing action partnerships become important avenues for converting more individuals into active supporters of the DPR cause. From DPRO5's side, this was done by publishing reports that highlighted the drug war's deleterious impact on eight different policy areas; DPRO4 is particularly keen on intersecting DPR and racial social justice movements, as drug policy is "a main mechanism and driver of disparity within the criminal justice system"; they also foresee "environmental consequences that are a direct result of the war on drugs..." that could also be co-opted as a parallel struggle.

Broadening one's claims to intersect with other movements' will be a key bridging tool to transform other movement activists into active supporters of DPR, which could additionally create more media exposure and the sharing of contentious political resources. The distribution of new resources and knowledge is a significant benefit of external partnerships that only DPRO4 elaborated upon:

*I think [DPR] organisations [...] could be much more active around sharing the information and the knowledge and the skills and the expertise that [they] have access to.*

(DPRO4)

DPRO4 was particularly aware of the danger of "siloining" DPR's communication solely to its adherents. An objective they raised was to make DPR knowledge more accessible to external communities, particularly those most egregiously impacted by the drug war. This motivated their partnerships with racial justice organisers, as they can circulate their produced knowledge to provide more ways of understanding their social struggle and align them with the DPR struggle. The other DPROs also expressed their interest in avoiding "preaching to the converted".

### 4.3.2 Internal Networks – Specialisation and Conflict

Internally to the DPR movement, DPROs have come to appreciate the operational and communicative advantages that each organisation holds, seeking to collaborate and circulate each other's publications and produced knowledge.

*DPRO4 are the most influential and strongest on legal matters... DPRO5 are extremely influential in an international development level...DPRO1 [are more] influential from a more scientific space...I think we all complement each other*

(DPRO3)

*we all work in the same networking circles, we attend the same events and campaigns... I think we're most effective where we coordinate our events and coordinate our voices*

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(DPRO2)

DPROs specialising in their respective communicative and research advantages ensures that each organisation is focused on producing new evidence. In DPRO3's quote we see the benefits that the movement as a whole can have when each network node is committing its resources to creating the type of evidence that they are specialists within. With the DPRO maxim of advocating for an evidence-based drug policy, their multi-dimensional approach to creating evidence is crucial to ensuring that their concerns are accounted for in the policy-making process. In turn, individual contributions add to the cumulative pool of evidence, tactics and resources that all other DPROs can rely upon to corroborate their individual work and collectively further the cause.

Intra-DPRO events, joint publications, coordinated campaigns and collectively producing media products (like podcasts) were all suggested as different manners that DPROs collaborate amongst themselves with the purpose of networking and exchanging knowledge about the state of the social movement. Supporting each other's actions, particularly at the national level, is important for coordinating pressure on different facets of the state's resistance to DPR. The Scottish Drugs Forum was an event referred to by two DPROs where multiple organisations convened to provide different evidence and recommendations to provide a variety of DPRO-generated solutions to the ongoing drug-related death epidemic in Scotland.

Disagreements still exist within the movement. DPRO5 described that their advocacy for the legal regulation of all drugs was initially seen by some DPROs as "a threat" to the success of the movement; DPRO3 also stated that they are perceived as "a PR outfit" by others due to their media-centric approach to DPR. A common concern that exacerbated differences within the movement was DPRO's understanding of the commitments and compromises that DPRO's funding could create for the movement's objectives.

*...if your funding comes from a certain sector and if it comes with certain commitments, I guess that's where your area of focus is going to be.*

(DPRO2)

*...there are issues now to do with organisations that are funded by cannabis money. That creates tensions for those organisations who have an explicitly social justice agenda and feel compromised, by getting in bed with the industry...*

(DPRO5)

*...[there] is also going to be the financial incentive where someone would say 'right actually you could be making a lot of money if you've invested in cannabis'*

(DPRO1)

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Concerns about the impact that elite funding can have on social movements have commonly been raised in social movement scholarship (Corrigall-Brown, 2016). On the one hand, DPRO2 raises the funding difficulties that DPROs that are established as charities may face, especially when they are contesting for funding from the same funders as other organisations. This is not a specific problem to DPR; most organisations funded by elite institutions have their actions conditioned to an extent by the political orientation and history of the fund-giving organisation (Ostrander, 1995).

What is particularly interesting in this social movement is the entrance of corporate funding into the now-legal drug markets. As DPRO5 suggests, large pharmaceutical corporations with cannabis-derived products have begun to intervene in DPR, choosing to either establish or fund specific organisations' lobbying efforts to influence public perceptions about substances. Going back to DPRO3's example in the MedOS section, choosing to focus on the legalisation of cannabis whilst omitting other substances' policy reform from their public communication could be interpreted as working in favour of the interests of a specific industry. Considering that this DPRO is funded by a Canadian cannabis pharmaceutical firm, one can understand why they primarily focus on reforming that substance's policies.

The DPR social movement environment is becoming increasingly complicated with the appearance of capital, which is a new challenge that was not previously around before the Western legal regulation of cannabis. On the one hand, DPROs efforts to reduce the taboo around supporting DPR has been successful at increasing their funding streams from philanthropic and grant-making sources. But the presence of interest and funding from international firms that understand the potential revenue from a legal cannabis market in the UK will bring in an unprecedented force of influence on the policy-making process. In the process, corporate-funded DPROs could inadvertently (or not) prioritise corporate profit-making motives for other drug policy considerations like social justice concerns for egregiously impacted communities, as social-justice DPROs lose clout on the reform process. Additionally, the co-option of DPR efforts by corporations could create the perception "that the NGO push for reform was laying the ground for capital" (DPRO5) to move in. This outcome would merely perpetuate the power-relations and inequalities that most DPROs set out to resolve in the first place.

### 4.4 DOS

The deployment of counter-frames in accordance with underlying values in British society are a key indicator for social movement's success (Koopmans and Statham, 1999) and are also a feature of DPRO's public communication.

Their erosion of hegemonic discourses surrounding drugs have followed this pathway. The advantage that DPR activists face in their struggle is that the hegemonic structure of meanings that drugs are embedded in have remained relatively stable: discourse surrounding addiction refers back to the same historical ideas, and conceptions of the drug market are still focused on how "all criminals are bad". Although these are anachronistic views from the DPROs' perspectives, this facilitates the long-term task of deploying and refining counter-frames over time.

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### 4.4.1 The Power of Institutional Support

The deployment of counter-frames in accordance with underlying values in British society are a key indicator for social movement's success (Koopmans and Statham, 1999) and are also a feature of DPRO's public communication. This has been operationalised by garnering support from the institutions that have traditionally enforced and informed British drug policies: law enforcement and medical professionals.

*I think cops have been absolutely key to this... it's the counter-intuitive nature of these constituencies...*

(DPRO5)

*...British Medical Journal have called for full legalisation and regulation [...] we have police and crime commissioners in the team, in our membership. So it's the fact that all these credible institutional voices who have traditionally been supporters of prohibition in the means to control something dangerous i.e. drugs, have come out and said 'prohibition laws are doing more harm than good, more danger than the drugs themselves'*

(DPRO2)

The unlikely support of law enforcement officials for DPR is a considerable discursive advantage that underlines the alignment of the movement's demands with the interests of those traditionally portrayed as the protectors of communities. Houborg and Bjerger (2017) concur that the support of medical and law enforcement actors are essential signposts of validity and legitimacy for one's claims in reforming drug policy. There is considerable *gravitas* that society gives to evidence provided by medical professionals in the drug policy field (Lancaster, Treloar and Ritter, 2017); their contributions are particularly significant in the discussion, provided they are received by audiences in the first place.

Law enforcement support corroborates the idea that the current prohibition regime is ineffective at curtailing crime and protecting communities from drug-related harm, as several police and crime commissioners have publicly stated (Sullivan, 2018). It also enables social justice-oriented DPROs to deploy interpretive frames that address other drug prohibition-related social problems like the disproportionate policing of black and ethnic minorities in England. Support from the medical community reifies the public health arguments that DPROs rely on when advocating for public health-focused reform; it lends additional credibility to DPR activists when the producers of peer-reviewed and unbiased evidence are supportive of their proposed drug control models. Both groups signal to the rest of society the futility of the current drug policies and may be key to influence individuals that still perceive DPR as a threat to one's way of life.

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### 4.4.2 The “Suffering Family” Frame

Although an internal critique from the institutions that uphold and execute the established drug policy is powerful, deploying new interpretive frames lends legitimacy to the DPR movement’s call for reform, portraying their demands as aligned with the interests of society. In the interviews, DPROs stated that their interests in reforming drug policy stem from reducing drug-related harms and stigma associated with drug use; their communicative mission is then to portray “another perspective [on drug control] that... might be less harmful (DPRO1).

The framing technique that all DPROs (except one) explicitly concurred was the most effective was the “family and bereaved parents” frame. This is significant, as *collective* frame-making, either directly or by supporting others, is an essential prerequisite for DOS success. As demonstrated in the MedOS section, research is crucial to inform policy changes, but its influence on public perception is maximised when retold through a human narrative with relatable values and decisions.

There were two approaches taken when deploying the family frame. The first refers to the impact of Anyone’s Child campaign:

*...we had bereaved parents who we could take into discussions [with media and policy-makers]... which completely humanised the whole issue...it was absolutely key for us to have those very human voices to bring into the mix... you don’t forget those people when you’ve met [them].*

(DPRO5)

Anyone’s Child presents parents and families as the victims of the drug war, and the punitive drug laws that impede the regulation and control of illegal drugs as the perpetrator of this harm. They subvert the idea of who is most negatively impacted by the war on drugs and who suffers the most from the lack of barriers of access to drugs. Many of the family’s stories involve under-age drug use or accidental overdoses; the lack of regulatory barriers to drug use and the societal stigma preventing the access to drug treatment are two considerable take-aways from their narratives. These outcomes portray the state’s drug policies -not those using drugs- as the cause of the individuals’ deaths and the families’ suffering. The protection of both the child and the family is framed as central to the DPR movement.

The second approach refers to how framing the avoidable suffering that families and ill individuals helps erode established beliefs related to drug-taking:

*...people respond to [suffering families] more because they don’t see it, drug-taking, as a vice... when it’s the death of a child people suddenly think ‘oh wait hang on, what’s this mother asking for, she’s not asking to light a spliff’... they’re suffering, nothing else is working for them, these are substances that are far safer than anything else we currently prescribe or give.*



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*(DPRO1)*

This example alludes to the underexplored medical benefits that illegal substances have, told through children's suffering and maternal instincts. The reference to "vice" and the casualness of "a spliff" is interesting to show the dominant discourses and meanings surrounding drug consumption that DPRO1 is trying to undermine. The dominance of the "vice" discourse was already highlighted by MacGregor's (2013) research into politician's drug discourse. DPRO1 here argues that the palliative properties of substances, and thus the alleviation of individual's harm, is being impeded by the dominant rhetoric of drug-taking hedonism. A drug user here is not a deviant nor an "addict", it is a suffering child; their trafficker is their mother. DPROs are thus seeking to reduce the harms related to drugs; as Nadelmann (1993: 37) rightly states: "who, in their right mind, could oppose the notion of reducing harm?".

Framing the harms of the current drug policy through a relatable family frame is effective at contesting entrenched meanings of both what a drug user looks like, and whether those harms are deserved; humanising the harms of the drug war enables greater audiences to empathise with DPR's mission. The new frames demonstrate the many identities that "drug users" have, that are neither entrenched in a medical nor a criminal perspective. Although DPROs recognise the importance of statistical evidence and research, the movement is reliant on these stories of personal suffering and injustices to transcend ideological boundaries or entrenched beliefs about drugs that may be impeding non-adherents from empathising with the DPR movement. From the audience's perspective, it challenges established notions of who suffers from punitive drug policies; from the DPR activist perspective, it provides a face and a story to motivate one's actions.

## 5 CONCLUSION

This dissertation aimed to unveil the communicative strategies that different DPROs employed in their drug reforming mission through in-depth discussions with representatives from key groups. The social movement lens employed for theoretical analysis in this investigation was quite fitting for deconstructing the communicative challenges and actions that the DPR movement faces in the UK. Through in-depth interviews, this dissertation unveiled several interesting findings that contribute to our understanding of what tactics that DPROs have deployed are being successful, and what challenges lay ahead.

Briefly summarised, the MedOS section, much like social movement scholarship, corroborated the fact that mainstream media will inevitably portray a movement. In their aim of reforming public attitudes, DPROs understood that they must be fully engaged with media players to have an impact on the outcome of their representations. This can, and should be, complemented with the development of alternative news reports that fill the epistemological gaps of mis-portrayed or underreported drug policy topics or users.

Within the NetOS section, the widening of DPR's scope of aligned movements was commonly perceived as essential to success; it was also interesting to confirm that each DPRO was aware of each other's communicative advantage and employed these advantages to maximise public influence with their available resources. Internal disagreements between DPR groups raised potential avenues for further research, as there are not many academic pursuits into understanding how the presence of capitalist firms and corporate funding will impact this social movement's actions and demands.

Finally, the DOS section brought together all the scholastic work on dominant drug frames and their subversion. DPROs seem to have understood how best to align their core beliefs with hegemonic principles of law, order and public health by garnering support for DPR from law enforcement and medical professionals. The deployment of the "suffering family" frame was a good example of frame-bridging in action, which simultaneously contested the image of a conventional drug user and reasons for using drugs beyond the medical "addiction" frame.

### 5.1 Avenues for Further Research

Further work into DPR as a social movement could be beneficial for the movement itself. The social movement lens is particularly useful at examining how DPROs could further exploit their antagonistic relationship with the state, and when should they employ a closer relationship with the establishment's agents. Visualising DPROs as a common movement could also increase the cooperation and collaboration of organisations to expand their repertoire of common tactics and actions (Tarrow, 1994; Wang and Soule, 2012).

The rich interview data also highlighted potential avenues for further research, most notably the issues that DPRO funding will create for the movement. Corrigan-Brown (2016) has forayed into the complexity that corporate or elite funding has on altering group's actions and commitments to the movement. Deeper analysis into how corporate funding has altered

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DPRO's actions, and how this is perceived by other DPROs, could produce some interesting research into the future developments of drug policy reform in the UK.

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## APPENDICES

### APPENDIX A - INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

1. How did you get into the drug policy world? Previous interests?
2. What do you find particularly special or unique about communications in this area?
3. What information was available to you about drug policy? What did you know coming into the field?
4. What do people generally say to you when you tell them you work in your line of work?

On the political culture of the British debate on drugs

5. What do you think is the public's perception about DPR as a field?
6. How would you describe the media environment for debating and questioning drug policy?
7. Who are the main players in the British drug policy debate? i.e. actors with most influence on DP outcome
8. Do you work with any government institution? What's your relationship like with the government?
9. Are there groups in society that are impeded from participating in the drug policy debate?
  - a. Is the DP field ensuring marginalised populations are included in the DP conversation? –voice left out of conversation

The deployment of mediation – drugs and crime nexus

10. Do you see the mainstream media talk about drugs in a particular way?
  - a. What about drug policy reform efforts? How does the mainstream media approach your industry?
  - b. How is the DPR industry portrayed in mainstream media?
11. Are there limits in what is deemed as an “acceptable way” to talk about drugs in the media?

12. Do you think there's conflation of different issues, like drugs and crime, that make it difficult for the drug policy conversation to go down different paths?
13. A lot of research points out to the connection of drug use and crime. Do you feel that this, or another connection, stands out as a dominant framing strategy in media?
14. Do you use mainstream media or opt to make and use your own media? Be it platforms, campaigning, ways of self-representation?

Discourse: deployment of frames, changing ideas of how drugs are seen

15. What kind of messages do you try to advocate for through your publications/communications?
16. Have you found that certain messages resound better in the mainstream media than others?
  - a. What sort of evidence is most powerful for making your case?
17. Are there dominant messages in mainstream media or in the public that you're trying to change?
18. How important is language, and the language you employ, to the DP movement?
19. Do you see all drugs being treated equally by the media?

Networks: partnerships, competition and collaboration between movements and interests.

20. Do you commonly work together with other drug policy orgs? Is collaboration natural/logical choice?
21. Are there groups of interest that divide the drug policy reform movement?
22. What are the main points of contention in the DPR world? Are there shared core beliefs?
23. What kind of non-DP organisations would you partner with and why?
24. How are you using your alliances and partnerships to achieve your objectives?
  - a. What about breaking the drug-crime nexus?

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## APPENDIX B - ANONYMISED CONSENT FORM

### PARTICIPATION IN THIS RESEARCH STUDY IS VOLUNTARY

I have read and understood the study information dated [__/__/__], or it has been read to me. I have been able to ask questions about the study and my questions have been answered to my satisfaction.	Yes No
I consent voluntarily to be a participant in this study and understand that I can refuse to answer questions and I can withdraw from the study at any time, without having to give a reason.	Yes No
I agree to the interview being audio recorded	Yes No
I understand that the information I provide will be used for my dissertation and that the information will be anonymised.	
I agree that my information can be quoted in research outputs	Yes No
I understand that any personal information that can identify me – such as my name, address, will be kept confidential and not shared with anyone	Yes No

Please retain a copy of this consent form.

Participant name:

Signature: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Interviewer Name:

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Signature: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

For information please contact: \_\_\_\_\_@lse.ac.uk