ORIGINAL ARTICLE

Wear it like armor and it can never be used to hurt you: Reappropriation, identity change, and collective action

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Abstract

Reappropriation has been discussed as an identity management strategy as a means to reevaluate oneself in a context that will not allow for large-scale social change. There are, however, numerous examples of reappropriation of stigmatizing labels as connected to political movements. This research examines whether reappropriation of stigmatizing labels can function as a precursor to collective action. In Study 1, we conducted semi-structured interviews on the reappropriation of *çapulcu* identity with 20 Gezi Park protesters in Turkey. Interviews focused on how they recall the reappropriation of the word to have started, how they gave subsequent meaning, and how *çapulcu* identity predicted their protest participation and their broader politicization during and after the protests. In Study 2, we conducted a cross-sectional survey on the reappropriation of fat identity by collecting data from fat liberation and body positivity activists in North America ($n = 479$). Reflexive thematic analysis (Study 1) and structural equation modeling (Study 2) showed that reappropriation of stigmatizing labels among activists is associated with a greater willingness to participate in collective action through increased agency, empowerment, and identity change. Findings provide important insights on identity management strategies and social change, and open new avenues to discuss reappropriation as a possible political strategy that might mobilize oppressed groups.

KEYWORDS

çapulcu, collective action, fat identity, politicized identity, reappropriation

INTRODUCTION

There is an increasing body of research in social and political psychology focusing on the negative consequences of hate speech and derogatory language targeting in-groups on inter-group relations and in-group power (e.g., Bianchi et al., 2019; Bilewicz & Soral, 2020; Fasoli et al., 2015). Conversely, relatively few studies have investigated the potential positive outcomes associated with self-labeling, the reappropriation of stigmatizing labels, and in-group reclaiming (e.g., Bianchi et al., 2024; Galinsky et al., 2013; Gaucher et al., 2015; Whitson et al., 2017). Slurs and derogatory language have frequently served as tools to denigrate groups in opposition to others, aiming to "otherize" and create distance, sometimes even leading to dehumanization. Once someone is described in these stigmatized terms, this derogatory language can damage self-esteem, sever ties to their community, and trigger a desire to distance themselves from their own group. However, there have been numerous instances where groups have resisted this negative impact and found a way to push back. The reappropriation of slurs and derogatory language emerges as a potent strategy, transforming these negative expressions into badges of honor. What was initially a negative force can be harnessed to not only foster pride but also serve as a source of power and catalyst for change when people wear it like armor through the reappropriation of stigmatizing labels.

In social psychology, reappropriation is interpreted through social identity theory (SIT; Tajfel & Turner, 1979) as a viable avenue for social creativity, a strategy employed to reframe how a group is evaluated, particularly in situations where altering group status is not feasible. However, some research has suggested that reappropriation can foster social change for the group in question (e.g., Becker, 2012). In this article, we turn our attention to this understudied identity management strategy, which should be further explored as a potential catalyst for cultivating positive social identity and bolstering collective action for social change. We do so through two studies: The first evaluates Gezi Park protesters' experience of reappropriation of the word *çapulcu* (looter), and the second assesses the use of the term *fat* by fat liberation activists.

Our decision to explore reappropriation of stigmatizing labels within the contexts of the Gezi Park protests in Turkey and among fat liberation activists is propelled by the unique characteristics of each case, offering valuable insights into the multifaceted nature of reappropriation. Gezi Park protesters, in their reappropriation of the term *looters*, exemplify the dynamics of reappropriation within a sociopolitical movement, highlighting how individuals collectively redefine a label imposed upon them. They are labeled "looters" and within hours or days take a negative term and turn it into something else (Uluğ & Acar, 2019; Uysal & Akfırat, 2022; Uysal, Akfırat, & Cakal, 2022). On the other hand, examination of the term *fat* within the realm of fat liberation activism provides a lens into reappropriation of stigmatizing labels within the domain of fat liberation and identity acceptance, extending beyond a single political event to grasp the process within sustained activism. Moreover, whereas the term reappropriated in the Gezi Park protests was initially used by a single political leader perceived as "a common enemy" (Uluğ & Acar, 2019), the reappropriation of *fat* lies in a historical process that developed within the intersection of feminist, queer, and Black movements (Edison & Notkin, 2023). By scrutinizing these diverse contexts, we aim to uncover the mechanisms of reappropriation, shedding light on its potential as a transformative tool for social identity and collective action across various social and political spheres. By doing so, we aim to contribute to the collective action literature by discovering novel avenues to social change that stem from reappropriation and creative strategies within contextual and dynamic identity processes under repression and marginalization.

Identity management strategies

According to SIT (Tajfel & Turner, 1979), individuals employ social comparison strategies to better understand themselves as compared to relevant others. These comparisons facilitate the evaluation of their group's position in contrast with others, leading to either positive or negative assessments. In situations where negative evaluations or the threat of such evaluations arise, individuals may adopt "identity management strategies" (see Blanz et al., 1998; Ellemers, 1993; Mummendey et al., 1999). Tajfel and Turner (1979) state that identity management strategies consist of (1) attempts to leave the current group and join a higher-status group (individual mobility); (2) collective activities aimed at improving the group's position by changing the intergroup situation, often through collective actions (social competition); and (3) strategies wherein individuals seek to evade unfavorable comparison by creating cognitive scenarios that redefine the evaluation criteria (social creativity).

The social structure of intergroup relations may predict the selection of identity management strategies (Ellemers et al., 1990; Tajfel & Turner, 1979; Turner, 1999; van Knippenberg, 2020). Group boundaries vary in permeability, indicating the ease with which individuals can move between groups. Additionally, intergroup relations may differ in the stability of relative group status, where the perception of cognitive alternatives depends on the ability to imagine alternative outcomes to the current status relations (Tajfel, 1974; Tajfel & Turner, 1979). Finally, the legitimacy of group status, reflecting an assessment of whether it results from fair procedures, also plays a role (Ellemers, 1993). Engagement in social creativity, social competition strategies, or individual mobility is theorized to depend on the interplay of these factors.

Social creativity and reappropriation

Arguably, the strategy that has received the least attention is social creativity, leading to ambiguities about its conceptualization, as well as uncertainties regarding its antecedents and consequences (for some important exceptions, see Becker, 2012; Blanz et al., 1998; Galinsky et al., 2003, 2013; Jackson et al., 1996; Lalonde, 1992; Yaffe et al., 2018; Yzerbyt & Cambon, 2017). Despite more than 40 years since its proposal, very little research has focused on this, resulting in limited clarity on its antecedents, consequences, and role in social stability and change more generally (see Niens & Cairns, 2003; van Bezouw et al., 2021). Scholars have made a clear distinction between social mobility and social competition as individualistic vs. collectivistic identity management strategies. Social creativity strategies were not included in this individualistic versus collectivistic taxonomy but are mostly referred to as a third type of strategy (e.g., Jackson et al., 1996; Kessler & Mummendey, 2002; Tajfel & Turner, 1979; Turner, 1999). However, some researchers have classified social creativity as a collectivistic identity management strategy (e.g., Blanz et al., 1998; Niens & Cairns, 2003). Furthermore, Kessler and Mummendey (2002) found that social competition, as a collective identity management strategy, is strongly correlated with creative strategies (from $r = .43$ to $r = .60$), unlike individual strategies. Ellemers and van Rijswijk (1997) showed that social creativity strategies can be individualistic and collectivistic, and the level of in-group identification determines whether individualistic or collectivistic creative strategies will be adopted. In an experiment, they found that high identifiers adopted a collective creative strategy (i.e., in-group favoritism on another dimension where the in-group has higher status), whereas low identifiers used an individual creative strategy through accentuation of in-group heterogeneity.

In its original conceptualization, Tajfel and Turner (1979) identify three primary forms of social creativity, although they emphasize that this strategy is not limited to these three forms.

First, the in-group can seek comparison on a new dimension. Second, the in-group can compare themselves to a different out-group. Third, individuals can alter the values assigned to attributes of the group (i.e., reappropriation).

Among these three forms, our focus is on reappropriation of stigmatizing labels. Although reappropriation of stigmatizing labels may have different consequences related to different domains of life—such as well-being, positive interpersonal relationships, post-traumatic growth, and resilience—we are focusing on the impact of reappropriation of stigmatizing labels on political domains such as politicization, identity, and engaging in social change. We argue that reappropriation of stigmatizing labels serves as a collective identity management strategy with the potential to facilitate social change. Research has demonstrated that reappropriation can enhance a sense of empowerment within one's group (Galinsky et al., 2003, 2013), foster a perception of group-based control (Fritsche & Jugert, 2017), and possibly contribute to the development of more assertive social identities (van Bezouw et al., 2021). Our particular interest lies in understanding how reappropriation of stigmatizing labels may lead to, or be linked with, collective action. Notably, Becker's (2012) work suggests that, unlike other social creativity strategies that inhibit intentions for collective action, reappropriation neither increases nor decreases collective action.

Nevertheless, ample evidence from political events suggests that the reappropriation of negative stigma can significantly escalate political action (e.g., Jeshion, 2020; Romano, 2022; Striley & Hutchens, 2020; Sturaro et al., 2023; Uluğ & Acar, 2019; Uysal & Akfırat, 2022; Zeng, 2021). We contend that, under specific circumstances, reappropriation of stigmatizing labels holds the potential to not only shape but also politicize an existing social identity. When coupled with a strengthened sense of group control and empowerment, this dynamic may prompt a critical examination of the system's stability, fostering a proactive drive for social change. This contrasts with the typical expectation associated with social creativity strategies, which often predict an inclination toward accepting the status quo.

This research adopts the conceptualization of social creativity as any collective cognitive strategy aimed at mitigating the adverse consequences of identification with a specific group or social category. Our objective is to elucidate the potential relationship between reappropriation of stigmatizing labels and engagement in, or continuation of, collective action. To achieve this, we conducted two studies utilizing qualitative and quantitative methods in distinct political contexts. The first study qualitatively explores the reappropriation of the "looters" identity among Gezi Park protesters in Turkey, examining its links to identity change, empowerment, and, ultimately, participation in protests. In the second study, employing a cross-sectional survey, we tested a structural equation model positing that the reappropriation of the "fat" identity predicts the politicized activist identity and willingness to participate in future collective action.

STUDY 1

The Gezi Park protests occurred in the summer of 2013 as a reaction to urban development projects threatening to demolish Gezi Park, one of the few remaining green spaces in central Istanbul. What initially started with a handful of environmental activists camping in the park evolved into thousands of protesters establishing a commune in Gezi Park and the surrounding Taksim area, with millions engaging in solidarity protests in 79 out of 81 provinces in Turkey. A few days into the protests, Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdoğan referred to the protesters as "a few looters," or *çapulcu* in Turkish. The term was swiftly reappropriated by the protesters, transforming its meaning from "looter" to individuals actively opposing the government party AKP, advocating for anti-discrimination, and supporting democracy (Acar & Uluğ, 2016; Odağ et al., 2016; Uluğ & Acar, 2019).

Our first study utilizes semi-structured interviews to engage with participants from the Gezi Park protests. In Study 1, our particular interest lies in understanding what it means for activists to reappropriate words or phrases, and how these symbolic engagements in politics empower them to politicize and engage in further collective action. To achieve this, our focus centers on the identity of *çapulcu*, which gained popularity during the Gezi Park protests in Turkey.

Method

Participants and procedure

Both studies were approved by the ethics committee at the University of Dundee. Participants were recruited through snowball sampling. Twenty interviews were conducted with individuals actively engaged in the Gezi Park protests. Interviews were conducted in 2020, seven years after the protests. Ten interviewees self-identified as women, nine as men, and one as nonbinary. Most of the interviewees were between 25 and 35 years (ten were 25–29, eight were 30–35, and two were 36–45). All interviews were conducted online via Skype; interview lengths ranged from 14 to 58 min ($M = 31$). Participants were invited to reflect on their experience with the reappropriation of *çapulcu* during the Gezi Park protests. Interview questions focused on (1) the inception of the reappropriation of the term, (2) subsequent meanings attributed to the word, (3) the impact of the identity of *çapulcu* on their protest participation, and (4) retrospective reflections on how the Gezi Park protests were influenced by the reappropriation of the label. Upon completion of the interviews, participants were debriefed, thanked, and compensated for their participation (worth $5).

Analysis

Reflexive thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2021) was employed to analyze the data, following a six-phase analytical process: (1) familiarization with the data, (2) generation of initial codes, (3) identification of themes, (4) review of themes, (5) definition and naming of themes, and (6) report production (Braun & Clarke, 2006). The interviews encompassed both inductive and deductive approaches. Participants' narratives provided insights into the occurrence of reappropriation and their experiences of its consequences (inductive), with an overarching exploration guided by a social identity framework (deductive).

Results

We developed two primary themes from our analysis of the reappropriation process and its consequences. The first theme elucidates the process of reappropriation of the stigmatizing label and initial engagement of the protests. The second theme explores the impact of reappropriation of the stigmatizing label on the protesters, psychological and political changes, and the broader protests.

Theme 1: It brought us together

Theme 1 delineates the first impact of the *çapulcu* label on the protesters and process of reappropriation, encompassing three subthemes: (1) *he could have called us anything*, (2) *created connection*, and (3) *created an identity*.

Subtheme 1: He could have called us anything

When questioned about the origin of the label "*çapulcu*," participants pointed to Erdoğan's use of the term to describe the protesters. They emphasized the almost instantaneous acceptance of this label, attributing it to the preexisting antagonistic relationship with Erdoğan. Participants expressed that the significance lay not in the word itself but the person using it; any derogatory term employed by Erdoğan could have been transformed into a badge of honor for protesters.

> This identity was built in the process [of the protests]. If Erdoğan hadn't said we were looters—and anyway he was calling us so many things—and I think we could have built another identity with any one of them. So, what the important thing was there was the building of something. (P7)

The term *çapulcu* served as a foundational element, prompting the protesters to construct a collective identity starting from their opposition to Erdoğan and going beyond this. The act of labeling by Erdoğan, according to participants, provided a unifying force by making their shared opposition to him salient.

> I did identify with "*çapulcu*." Because Erdoğan said it. Because what Erdoğan does is to position us against himself, he defines us as a group against the 50% [referring to Erdoğan's crowd]. I identify with "*çapulcu*" in that regard. (P4)

Subtheme 2: Created connection

Participants emphasized that once the label "*çapulcu*" was employed, it served as mechanism to connect individuals who, under different circumstances, might have little in common. The protest exhibited a cosmopolitan base, initially driven by a small group opposing the Gezi Park demolition plan. As the protest expanded, encompassing opposition to police brutality and Erdoğan's repressive policies, the diverse participants found themselves united under the label "*çapulcu*." Despite their varied backgrounds, this term provided a common ground. The protests initially drew individuals with distinct motives, but Erdoğan's use of *çapulcu* gradually molded these disparate identities into a collective whole. One participant said that it not only brought them together but also further distinguished them from the people who were *not* at the protests.

> [Erdoğan] involuntarily succeeded in putting all the identities that stood together— and even this took 2–3 days, it happened gradually—in one place into one mould. I mean, even though people would say, "oh we're not one of them we're not like them," in the eyes of that man [Erdoğan], you are one, if you go out on the street, everyone is a *çapulcu*. He divided it as 50–50% and I think that the consciousness of the unity in the 50% spread to the 2015 elections. We went out on the street, we don't think like that, but yes, we came from this [action]. We are against the one-man regime. It almost prepared a ground for itself; if we are not from it, it is involuntary. Actually, maybe most of us in the streets were less a member of a group than him, but he turned everyone into *çapulcu* and gathered everyone in one area. (P1)

Thus, the subtheme highlights that the term *çapulcu* initially served as a stark reminder of the protesters' opposition to a common adversary. However, beyond this initial impact, it evolved into a unifying force that fostered a shared sense of identity among individuals with diverse backgrounds. The label not only brought people together but also acted as a powerful symbol, connecting those who might otherwise have little in common, thereby contributing to the collective strength of the protests.

Subtheme 3: Created an identity

After establishing a sense of connection with others, the term *çapulcu* quickly transformed from a mere label to a robust identity. Participants frequently emphasized the significance of this identity, outlining its multifaceted meanings for them.

> If we are *çapulcu*, if we are *çapulcu* people, if we are in a *çapulcu* group, yes, we are against dictatorship, we are against the one-man regime, we want to overthrow the government, we are intellectuals, we do not accept the things that should be accepted in the country already, we are the opposite, we are different, so I think it has turned into a process in this way. (P9)

Importantly, participants highlighted the voluntary embrace of this identity, swiftly turning it into a positive and empowering force.

> *Çapulcu* became an identity, it turned into a process of appropriation of yes, we are *çapulcu*, we are so beautiful, we are so wonderful, we love ourselves like this, we are a group of *çapulcu*. We have embraced this very well because, as people say for a long time, Gezi came out as a result of very serious oppression. (P9)

> When hundreds of young people who have never been political in their lives, and whose only concern is their personal life and freedoms, kidding around this "*çapulcu*" label and internalising it, it really affected me. If what he [Erdoğan] meant by looting was this collective objection, I accepted it and got involved in it. (P4)

Within a few days of being branded as *çapulcu*, a diverse group of individuals, initially united by their opposition to the government, not only utilized the insult to forge common ground and connection but also transformed it into an identity imbued with pride and positive distinctiveness.

Theme 2: It changed us

In Theme 2, we explore how the reappropriation of *çapulcu* impacted protesters both during and after the Gezi Park protests. Theme 2 comprises three subthemes: (1) solidarity and trust between groups, (2) it changed my politics, and (3) it empowered us.

Subtheme 1: Solidarity and trust between groups

As highlighted in Theme 1, participants initially felt otherized or marginalized in society. However, through their collective participation in the Gezi Park protests, they realized that their marginalization was shared, and they were collectively labeled as "others." Hence, reappropriation of the stigmatizing label and identification with the reappropriated identity serve as a unifying force against the marginalization imposed upon them.

> I can't say this very clearly, but at first, we felt that we were the "other" in every part of that [collective] action. In fact, we realized how "other" we are in society. We realized how big the borders are. The *çapulcu* expression matched exactly that. In other words, he put upon us a role that we couldn't put ourselves in, I think he gave us a title. By calling us *çapulcu*, we have become the "other," grouped together as the separated, marginalized or different-minded segments of society. I think we used that *çapulcu* identity, the identity *he* established, against him. (P9)

This collective identity afforded participants an opportunity to reassess their connections with other groups, fostering a renewed sense of connection. A participant noted that although she already supported the rights of marginalized groups, the *çapulcu* identity allowed her to feel more deeply connected to their causes.

> I felt much more sensitive especially about the Kurds. Because it wasn't about speaking on the issues, I was talking about it already. I was also talking about LGBT rights, but I had obvious problems with really feeling it. The [*çapulcu*] identity really made me feel all of these. (P3)

The process of reappropriation and identity formation facilitated common ground among diverse groups and fostered the politicization and formation of superordinate politicized identities after the protests, as expressed by one participant:

> But that [*çapulcu*] identity had a great function, as it made people feel that their problems were on a common ground. It also opened up space for people to meet. I think its influence was reflected in the aftermath as well. If something like Gezi hadn't happened, if Demirtaş hadn't carried out Turkeyification, we wouldn't have been able to talk about the HDP's passing the threshold.[1] I think even here the *çapulcu* identity is very important. Because people saw what happened to each other…[for example], being Alevi has similar problems as being LGBT, and so on. Even in many demonstrations, before Gezi, people didn't know that LGBT people were so *delikanlı*[2] but LGBT individuals took care of so many people at Gezi. That even the most masculine [protesters] would say, "Oh the LGBTs, they are our mothers and fathers," they really held them in high regard. So [*çapulcu*] took people out of being freaks. I think this is a good thing. It provided us contact with one another. That's why I think it's very important. (P3)

Additionally, participants noted a two-way increase in trust between minority and majority group members, emphasizing the transformative impact of Gezi on minority–majority relations:

> I think it (Gezi) definitely transformed [our identities]. For example, I have an identity in this country that would not be considered a minority identity. When I encounter minorities, I was accepted by those minority communities immediately when they learnt that I participated in Gezi. It is like "Okay, you are one of our brothers, we can talk with you." (P2)

The reappropriation of the term *çapulcu* not only served as a powerful mechanism for protesters to unite against external marginalization but also fostered solidarity, trust, and newfound connections among diverse social groups, thus contributing to a transformative and inclusive social landscape that holds the potential for the emergence of superordinate politicized identities.

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[1]Selahattin Demirtaş was the co-chairperson of the pro-Kurdish People's Democracy Party (HDP). Under Demirtaş, the party attempted to expand its base and become a more mainstream party of Turkey rather than one focused solely on pro-Kurdish issues. This expansion resulted in a pro-Kurdish party passing the then 10% threshold to get into parliament.

[2]While the primary meaning refers to young men, the secondary use of the word refers to people who are honest, honorable, and virtuous.

Subtheme 2: It changed my politics

Participants noted that as a result of their newfound solidarity with others and their experience at the Gezi Park protests, they began to reconsider their stance on other issues. Their political perspectives, thoughts, and views underwent significant transformations, mirroring the collective shift experienced by many participants in the aftermath of the Gezi Park protests.

> And this is something we cannot change again. We are *çapulcu*, we are the other, we are against you and we have adopted this identity and now we are standing here. Of course, what happened? Along with this *çapulcu* identity, all my political perspective, thoughts, political views, everything changed places, just like everyone else in the Gezi Protests. (P9)

Not only did the *çapulcu* identity bring them together for the protests, but it also had a lasting impact on how they engaged with politics on a broader scale in the aftermath.

> Gezi made me believe in the streets and protests. I have come to believe that some things can really be solved on the streets with a social movement. And I do not only mention the government. I mean, even if we are in the same political camps, I can protest you now. I can protest the social democrats or leftists, I can be in the streets again. (P2)

The transformative power of the *çapulcu* identity extended beyond the boundaries of protest engagement, shaping participants' broader political perspectives and fostering a belief in the efficacy of street activism to bring about social change across various political realms (see Drury & Reicher, 2009; Vestergren et al., 2019).

Subtheme 3: It empowered us

Different individuals who felt marginalized came together in community at Gezi, learning about each other's issues and, in many ways, embracing the social justice concerns of other groups. Through the reappropriation of a derogatory term and this collective experience, the protesters realized that the government did not hold as much power as they initially believed. Reflecting on the early days of the protests, participants expressed skepticism about the government considering environmental factors or their demands. Initially anticipating a brief and futile stand at Gezi Park, the participants perceived the government's ability to impose its will, a sentiment that persisted until 2013. However, the events at Gezi demonstrated that mass mobilization could constrain governmental actions, challenging the assumption that police power always surpassed mass power. This realization marked a transformative shift, undermining the perceived invincibility of the government (see Drury et al., 2020).

> [When the protests started] I did not think that environmental factors, or our demands, would be taken into account. In other words, we would take action there [at Gezi Park] for 2–3 days at the most, but after that, I was looking at it as if the government would do what it wanted and force us to do what they wanted. This was the case until 2013. Erdoğan has always done whatever he wanted, no matter how much anyone opposed it. Together with Gezi, we saw that if we can become massive enough, he can't do whatever he wants, mass power can still be more important than police power. I think this changed for me in 2013 with Gezi…. So I saw that it was not impossible. (P18)

The realization that they could effectively resist the government not only offered empowerment in the moment but also established a reference point for future activism. Participants recognized that the events at Gezi were not an isolated instance; rather, they became a historical moment demonstrating the potential impact of collective action. This awareness led individuals to view future opportunities for activism with a sense of possibility, fueled by the precedent set by the Gezi Park protests.

> Now here too, when people say, "Who will hear my voice if I come out tomorrow," there was a thing called Gezi, people made their voices heard, and one might say that this changed a lot of things. (P4)

The collective experience of the Gezi Park protests not only united diverse individuals under the common identity of *çapulcu* through the reappropriation of the term but also served as a transformative catalyst, illuminating the potential of mass mobilization to challenge governmental authority and fostering a lasting sense of empowerment and hope for future activism.

Discussion

Study 1 reveals how the term *çapulcu*, which was initially used to derogate the Gezi Park protesters, swiftly became a tool for connection, forging a collective identity, and cementing solidarity and collaboration, when people wear it like armor. Notably, participants emphasized that the word itself held little significance; what truly mattered was that then Prime Minister Erdoğan had used the term against them. They asserted that any derogatory term from him could have later been employed to unite people; what mattered was that it originated from Erdoğan's remarks about them. The *çapulcu* identity delineated clear boundaries, distinguishing between Gezi protesters and those who were not, with opposition to Erdoğan's policies at its core. Hence, it can be argued that reappropriation of the stigmatizing label required a bonding that afforded oppressed individuals a reminder of their initial connections and highlighted previous shared experiences. In many cases, this condition manifests as pre-politicized in-group identities awaiting the reappropriation of terms that define their in-group.

Moreover, the *çapulcu* identity stimulated participants to reflect on their political perspectives and further engage in politics beyond the initial protests. This aligns with research by Acar and Uluğ (Acar & Uluğ, 2016; Uluğ & Acar, 2018), which found that protest participants connected to the Gezi Spirit sought other groups embodying the values experienced at Gezi, subsequently joining different groups, organizations, or activities. These experiences were empowering, instilling hope for future change.

Participants acknowledged that the identity was tied to a specific time and place, and its continuity was not ensured. It underwent transformations, either evolving as individuals found new political engagements or becoming a relic of its time to be revisited in the future. This observation aligns with previous research demonstrating that collective action, particularly through shared grievances and a common enemy, can lead to changes in beliefs and norms, including becoming more politically radical or progressive (Vestergren et al., 2017).

Overall, Study 1 indicates that reappropriation of the stigmatizing label took place during the Gezi Park protests, fostering closer bonds and establishing an identity for those already engaged in collective action. Notably, this group had not historically borne the stigma of the label "*çapulcu*"; rather, they experienced it simply in the moment of opposition to the government. To delve deeper into the implications of reappropriation, particularly with a group enduring historical stigmatization, Study 2 focuses on fat liberation activism.
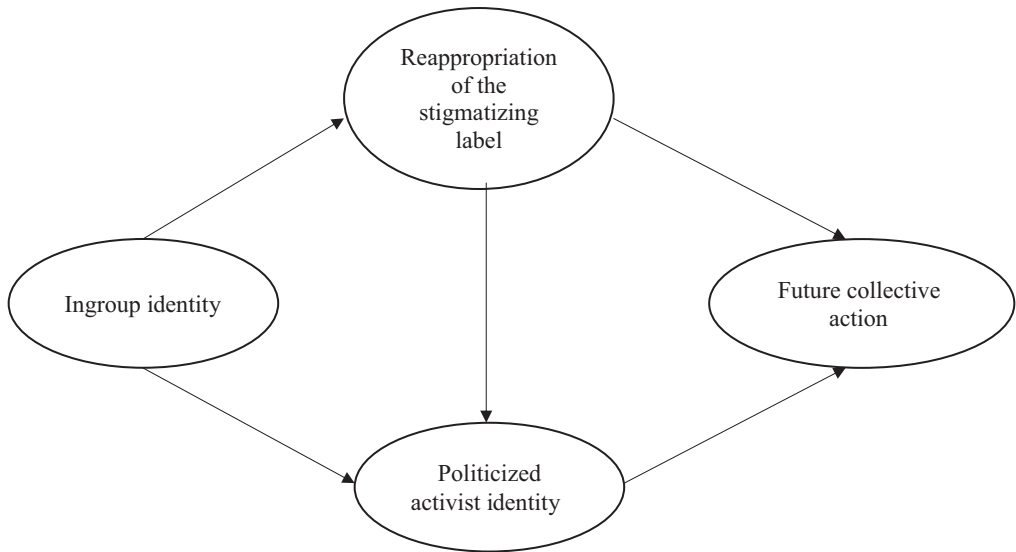
FIGURE 1 Conceptual model.

Study 2 examines the reappropriation of a stigmatized label with a longer historical back-drop and enduring effects on the oppressed group, building upon the contextually focused Study 1, which centered on a series of events and short-term effects. Consequently, in Study 2, within the context of fat liberation activism, we explore the roles of key variables identified in the themes of Study 1—such as in-group identity, politicized identification, and reappropriation of the stigmatized label—in predicting willingness to participate in future collective action. Specifically, we aim to test two indirect paths signaled in the findings of Study 1: (a) initial pre-politicized in-group identity will predict politicized activist identity through reappropriation of the stigmatizing label, and (b) reappropriation of stigmatized terms will predict participation in future collective action through identification with politicized activist identity (see Figure 1).

STUDY 2

The fat acceptance movement began in the late 1960s with the foundation of the first organizations in the United States such as the National Association to Advance Fat Acceptance (NAAFA) or the more radical Fat Underground (Wann, 2009). In general, fat acceptance aims for acceptance of fat bodies when they are otherwise medicalized through the "obesity epidemic" or considered a result of a moral deficit (see Fikkan & Rothblum, 2012). The movement pushes back against the idea of a "normal" body and against the dehumanization of people in larger bodies.

Jumping off from the themes found in Study 1, Study 2 utilizes a cross-sectional survey with fat liberation activists asking about their understanding of reappropriation around particular phrases related to weight and weight stigma and how this has influenced their potential politicization. This study utilizes measures from Becker (2012), adapted and reformulated to better reflect what social creativity is and how reappropriation is understood, as well as themes from Study 1 to understand the politicization process and whether it can be connected at all to reappropriation of the stigmatizing label.

Method

Participants and procedure

We aimed to collect data from those who self-identify as fat and can speak English. We distributed the link to the survey on Twitter and Instagram with the help of body positivity and fat liberation activists' accounts. Data were collected in 2021. A total of 479 activists were recruited. Participants' ages ranged from 14 to 60 ($M = 29.88$, $SD = 8.00$). Thirty-eight participants self-identified as male, 228 as female, and 164 as nonbinary, gender-fluid, and agender; 49 participants preferred not to say. Most participants were residing in the United States (76%), Canada (6%), the United Kingdom (5%), and Europe (4%).

Measures

We used 7-point response scales (1 = *completely disagree*; 7 = *completely agree*) for all items listed below. Dependent variables are reported in Table 1. The descriptive statistics and zero-order correlations between variables are depicted in Table 2.

Reappropriation of the stigmatizing label

To begin, we created six items according to prior conceptualizations and findings of Study 1 for assessing reappropriation of the term *fat*. As a result of the principal component analyses, we excluded two items that cross-loaded to identity measures and used four items to measure reappropriation of the stigmatizing label ($\alpha = .91$). Items were loaded into a single component with factor loadings from .87 to .90 and explained 78.65% of total variance.

TABLE 1 Items of dependent variables and their factor loadings.

Items	Reappropriation (30.92%)	Fat identity (24.04%)	Activist identity (19.80%)
Reappropriation			
1. Using the word *fat* as opposed to any other term (e.g., *curvy*, *plus size*) is important to me as a political statement.	.80		
2. Using the word *fat* signals my views on fat liberation.	.85		
3. Labeling myself as fat indicated my willingness to engage in activism on behalf of fat people.	.84		
4. Since fat activists reappropriated the word *fat*, I feel more powerful.	.81		
Fat identity			
1. Being fat is important to me.		.82	
2. I have a strong tie with other fat people.		.59	
3. Being fat is an important part of my self-image.		.82	
Activist identity			
1. Being a fat activist is something that reflects who I am.			.79
2. Being a fat activist is important to me.			.80
3. Being a fat activist is an important part of my self-image.			.85

Note: (1) Explained variances are reported in parentheses for each construct. For ease of reporting, the table does not show factor loadings less than .40. (2) Kaiser–Meyer–Olkin Measure of Sampling Adequacy = .88; Barlett's test of sphericity: $\chi^2(45) = 2705$, $p < .001$.

TABLE 2 Means, standard deviations, and correlations between variables in Study 2.

Variables	M (SD)	1	2	3	4
1. Fat ıdentity	4.93 (1.35)	–	.53***	.48***	.27***
2. Reappropriation of stigmatizing label	5.59 (1.58)		–	.58***	.46***
3. Politicized activist ıdentity	4.89 (1.61)			–	.48***
4. Collective action	6.12 (1.17)				–

***$p < .001$.

Identity

We used three items adapted from Leach et al. (2008) to measure fat identity ($\alpha = .72$). Items were loaded into a single component with factor loadings from .70 to .86 and explained 64.40% of total variance. Politicized activist identity was measured with three items that were adapted from the same identification scale (Leach et al., 2008; $\alpha = .86$). Similarly, items were loaded into a single component with factor loadings from .86 to .90 and explained 77.97% of total variance.

Collective action

Activists' intention to engage in collective action to protest prejudice against fat people was measured with four items (Uysal, Acar, et al., 2022; Uysal, Uluğ, et al., 2022): "I would share a photo on a social media campaign to protest prejudice against fat people," "I would join a social media campaign to protest prejudice against fat people," "I would boycott a store/company to protest prejudice against fat people," and "I would attend a peaceful demonstration/meeting to protest prejudice against fat people" ($\alpha = .80$).

Results

First, we conducted a series of principal component analyses (PCA) to ensure construct validity, as our variables are theoretically similar and potentially have high levels of shared variances. By doing so, we also tested the psychometric features of the newly developed reappropriation scale. In the first PCA, we added all items of the dependent variables (fat identity, activist identity, and reappropriation of the stigmatizing label) to the model to test to what extent items from the reappropriation scale create a distinct construct from the identity measures. As can be seen in Table 1, items of respective scales were loaded to their scales and created separate constructs. As the wording of reappropriation items is closely related to activism, we then conducted an additional PCA to test whether reappropriation of the stigmatizing label and collective action items create distinct constructs. Items of both scales were exclusively loaded into their constructs. While reappropriation of stigmatizing label items loaded into one component with factor loadings between .82 and .89 (explained variance = 38.87%), collective action items loaded into the other component with factor loadings between .68 and .86 (explained variance = 32.37%).

Second, we conducted a descriptive analysis. Inspection of the means through a one-sample *t*-test shows that, on average, participants reported higher levels of fat identification ($M = 4.93$, $t = 15.60$, $p < .001$), activist identification ($M = 4.89$, $t = 12.09$, $p < .001$), reappropriation of the stigmatizing label ($M = 5.59$, $t = 22.05$, $p < .001$), and willingness to participate in collective action ($M = 6.12$, $t = 39.77$, $p < .001$) compared with the scales' midpoints. Bivariate correlation analysis showed that higher fat identification, politicized activist identification, and reappropriation of the stigmatizing label correlated with greater collective action intention. Bivariate correlations also indicated that greater reappropriation of the stigmatizing label positively correlated with higher fat identification and politicized activist identification.
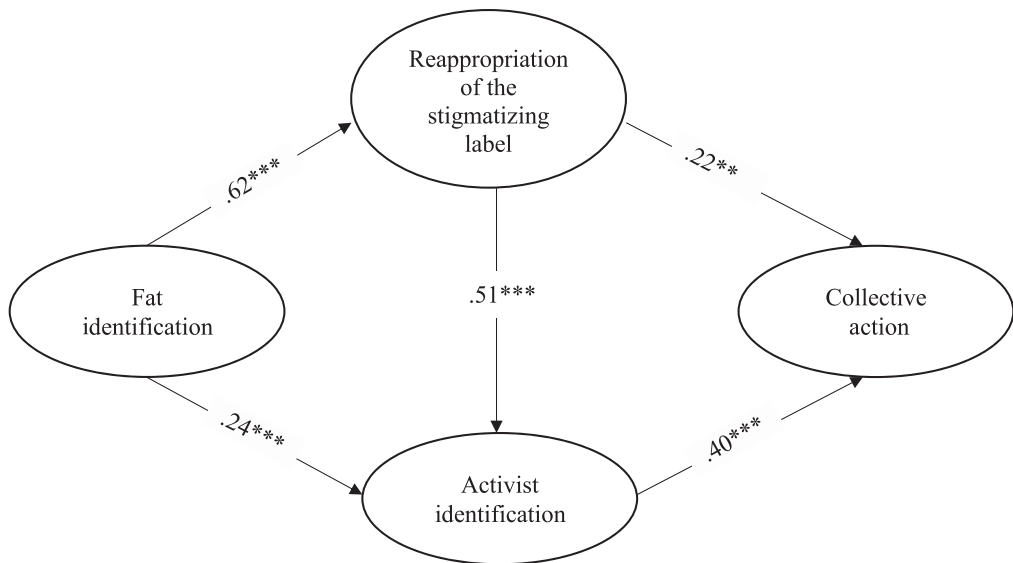
FIGURE 2 Simplified model and summary of SEM results.
***P < .001; **P < .01.

Next, we performed structural equation modeling (SEM) using maximum likelihood estimation in the *lavaan* package of R (Rosseel, 2012) to test whether (a) reappropriation of the stigmatizing label will be predicted by fat identification, (b) activist identification will be predicted by fat identification and reappropriation of the stigmatizing label, and (c) willingness to participate in collective action for fat liberation will be predicted by reappropriation of the stigmatizing label and activist identification. Overall, fit indices indicated our model showed very good fit with the data: $\chi^2 = 253.548$, $df = 72$, $p < .001$, goodness of fit (GFI) = .928, comparative fit index (CFI) = .949, Tucker–Lewis index (TLI) = .935, root mean square error of approximation (RMSEA) = .073, standardized root mean square residual (SRMR) = .052. As shown in Figure 2, fat identification predicted greater reappropriation of the stigmatizing label ($b = .62$, $SE = .08$, $p < .001$). Moreover, fat identification ($b = .24$, $SE = .08$, $p = .001$) and reappropriation of the stigmatizing label ($b = .51$, $SE = .06$, $p < .001$) predicted greater politicized activist identification. Finally, reappropriation of the stigmatizing label ($b = .40$, $SE = .07$, $p < .001$) and politicized activist identification ($b = .22$, $SE = .06$, $p = .005$) predicted more willingness to participate in collective action to protest prejudice against fat people.

Last, we conducted mediation analyses to test indirect effects of (a) fat identification on activist identification through a mediating pathway of reappropriation of the stigmatizing label and (b) reappropriation of the stigmatizing label on collective action through a mediating pathway of activist identification. We used a bootstrap resampling method with 10,000 repetitions. Reappropriation of the stigmatizing label significantly mediated the relationship between fat identification and politicized activist identification, $\beta = .28$, SE = .08, $p < .001$. Moreover, reappropriation of the stigmatizing label indirectly predicted collective action through activist identification, $\beta = .27$, $SE = .04$, $p < .001$.

Discussion

Study 2 showed that reappropriation of the stigmatizing label is an important mediator in the relationship between identification with stigmatized or discriminated identity and identification with politicized reappropriated identity, therefore supporting the initial

findings of Study 1. Identification with a stigmatized identity (i.e., fat identity) predicted the reappropriation of that label; in turn, reappropriation of the stigmatizing label predicted a greater politicized identity (i.e., activist identity). Finally, more reappropriation of the term *fat* and greater activist identification were associated with more willingness to participate in collective action to protest prejudices and discrimination against fat people.

The indirect effects of fat identity on activist identification through reappropriation of the stigmatizing label, as well as reappropriation on collective action through politicized activist identity, showed the crucial function of reappropriation for social change. Our findings imply that reappropriation of the stigmatizing label is a strategy that will lead to seeing their group as having greater power (Galinsky et al., 2013) and being more willing to participate in future political actions to challenge the status quo by empowering stigmatized and oppressed groups collectively.

GENERAL DISCUSSION

Tajfel and Turner (1979) proposed social creativity strategies as individual attempts to overcome unfavorable intergroup comparisons using cognitive scenarios without engaging in social competition and social change efforts. Among them, reappropriation is a strategy that is used to reframe the way a group is evaluated, and it can take something initially negative and stigmatized and create something positive and empowering. Although initial conceptualizations and research argue that reappropriation is an individual attempt whereby a group cannot change their status or challenge the stigma or hierarchy, historical examples from queer movements to Black is Beautiful intuitively indicate that the reappropriation of negative stigma can empower political action. Across two studies, we argued and tested that reappropriation of the stigmatizing label is associated with the formation of a more assertive social identity or politicizes an existing social identity (see van Bezouw et al., 2021), thus leading to a sense of empowerment and social change efforts.

Across both studies, reappropriation of the stigmatizing label emerged as a powerful mechanism for marginalized groups to reclaim control over stigmatized labels, transforming them into sources of empowerment, unity, and politicized identity. The initial derogation of the term *çapulcu* during the Gezi Park protests and the reappropriation of the label "fat" in fat liberation activism both exemplify the collective nature of this strategy. The findings highlight that reappropriation of the stigmatizing label is not confined to specific forms but manifests as a multifaceted process capable of fostering positive social change.

In the first study, we conducted semi-structured interviews with Gezi Park activists in Turkey on the reappropriated *çapulcu* (looter) identity. We showed that reappropriated identity can be a tool for showing opposition against powerful oppressive majorities or figures. The reappropriation of stigmatized negative identities or labels creates political spaces whereby oppressed groups enact their identities in a politicized way, which transforms the rhetoric that forces them to repress or hide these identities. In the Gezi Park case, previous studies showed that political humor and slacktivism have an important role for transforming established rhetoric and opening new political spaces through reappropriation of a stigmatizing label (see Odağ et al., 2016; Uluğ & Acar, 2019).

Moreover, opening and transforming political spaces where oppressed groups can represent themselves through reappropriation of a stigmatizing label bolsters the emergence of and identification with politicized activist identities. In Study 2, we replicate and extend our findings by conducting a cross-sectional survey study on the reappropriation of fat identity, and we supported the results of the first study by showing reappropriation of the stigmatizing label mediates the relationship between preexisting in-group identity and politicized activist identity.

To create politicized or emergent identities, the role of reappropriation in the creation of a connection among people who are coming from different social backgrounds but share the same stigmatized identities is crucial. Study 1 showed that the reappropriation of a stigmatized negative label increases trust and inter-minority solidarity and facilitates the alliance-building process among these activists from different groups. Reappropriation can therefore allow people to find out whether they share views and opinions with others they may not have previously felt close to; reappropriation of the stigmatizing label may also, therefore, facilitate opinion-based group membership (Bliuc et al., 2007; McGarty et al., 2009). Our results from both studies suggest that increased connection and alliance building are coupled with empowerment and the emergence of an overarching politicized identity through shared opinions; hence, the sense of empowerment and the overarching reappropriated identity predicted a greater willingness to engage in collective action for the goals of the stigmatized groups.

Together, our studies underscore the transformative potential of reappropriation in reshaping stigmatized identities into sources of empowerment and politicized unity. From the Gezi Park protests in Turkey to fat liberation activism, our findings elucidate the collective nature of reappropriation as a strategy for marginalized groups to reclaim agency over stigmatizing labels. Our results highlight the crucial role of reappropriation in forging connections among individuals from diverse social backgrounds, ultimately fueling collective action efforts aimed at challenging oppressive structures and advocating for the rights and recognition of stigmatized groups.

Limitations and future directions

There are a few limitations to consider in terms of this research. First, Study 1 was conducted in 2020, about seven years after the Gezi Park protests took place. Participants' responses may be affected by the time that has passed, both in terms of their exact recollection of events and the nostalgia that has built around the Gezi Park protests, which may impact the way they view the protests when looking back. One issue, possibly related to the amount of elapsed time, is the recollection of empowerment. Empowerment was discussed as both a result of reappropriation and as a result of protest participation more generally. In some cases, participants discussed these interchangeably. We took participants' discussions of empowerment at face value, but we believe there may be an important difference between these two that warrants further study.

It is also important to note the cross-sectional nature of the data. Although there are benefits to a mixed-method study, it is difficult to generalize from our findings, and there is a need for longitudinal research to see the impact of reappropriation as it relates to collective action over time (see Vestergren et al., 2018, 2019).

More broadly, there are important considerations around the cause-and-effect relationship between self-labeling with a derogatory group label and preexisting stigma. Neither study necessarily addresses how it is that people come to adopt and embrace the labels they espouse. In both cases, participation in the research was contingent on their already holding these identities. Future research ought to more closely examine the way reappropriation of stigmatizing labels comes about—what processes exist that turn an identity that is derogated to one that is a source of pride?

In addition, future work ought to consider the ways activists engage in activism more specifically. To what extent does reappropriation influence—if at all—the ways people choose to engage in collective action, and to what extent does their reappropriated identity influence their sustained involvement? Relatedly, to what extent is reappropriation different from politicization? Are these interrelated concepts, or does politicization result in reappropriation (if there is a stigmatizing label)? Previous research suggests that collective action participation can lead to politicization (see Drury et al., 2003; Drury & Reicher, 2000; Thomas et al., 2014),

and that becoming politicized (or becoming an activist), in turn, could lead to sustained commitment to a cause (Vestergren et al., 2018). Future research should examine what role, if any, reappropriation has in this process.

CONCLUSION

Social creativity and reappropriation in particular may serve an important role in motivation for collective action. Rather than accepting a negative evaluation of their social identities from the advantaged group, disadvantaged group members can find strength in taking that evaluation and turning it on its head, using it as a source of empowerment and, ultimately, as a means to continue to push for social change. Reappropriation ought to be further studied to better understand its potential strength as a means to increase collective action participation.

DATA AVAILABILITY STATEMENT
The data that support the findings of this study are openly available in OSF at https://doi.org/10.17605/OSF.IO/DV763.

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