

The Formation Mechanism of Ambivalent Occupational Identity among Dirty Workers: A Contradiction Perspective

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Abstract

Stigmatized work refers to occupations that are necessary for maintaining the normal functioning of society, yet are devalued or disliked by the public. The identity construction process for stigmatized work practitioners is relatively complex, as they rarely find themselves at either pole of conscious identification or non-identification, instead harboring ambivalent feelings toward their profession to varying degrees. However, existing research remains unclear regarding when and how practitioners form ambivalent occupational identities. This study proposes a research framework for the formation mechanism of practitioners' ambivalent occupational identity from a paradox perspective. Expected research findings will help resolve the debate in existing literature regarding whether practitioners either identify with or disidentify from their occupation, demonstrating that ambivalent occupational identity is more realistic in the context of stigmatized work; in practice, it can help and guide practitioners in constructing a dignified occupational identity, and provide organizations with insights for improving the management of frontline worker groups.

Full Text

Preamble

A Study on the Formation Mechanism of Ambivalent Occupational Identification among Dirty Workers from a Paradox Perspective

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Abstract

Dirty work refers to occupations that are necessary for maintaining the normal functioning of society yet are belittled or disliked by the public. Dirty workers have complex identification processes and rarely occupy either end of conscious identification or disidentification, instead holding ambivalent attitudes toward their occupations. However, existing research remains unclear on when and how these workers form ambivalent occupational identification. This study proposes a research framework based on paradox theory to explore the formation mechanism of ambivalent occupational identification among dirty workers. The findings are expected to help resolve the controversy in existing literature regarding whether dirty workers identify or disidentify with their occupations, suggesting that ambivalent identification is more realistic in dirty work contexts. Practically, this research can help guide workers in constructing dignified occupational identities and offer insights for organizations to improve management of lower-status worker groups.

Keywords: non-decent work, occupational stigma, ambivalent occupational identification, formation mechanism

Classification: C936

1. Problem Statement

Dirty work refers to occupations that are necessary for maintaining the normal functioning of society yet are belittled or disliked by the public (Ashforth & Kreiner, 1999). Examples include hospital caregivers who tend to patients, morticians who defend the dignity of life's final moments, and sanitation workers who serve as "city beauticians." Despite the significant social value of these occupations, the "tainted image" in the public eye subjects workers to severe identity threats (Ashforth et al., 2017; Zhang et al., 2021, 2022).

Because these occupations violate societal standards of "normalcy or cleanliness," workers frequently face questioning from mainstream social values: "How can you do this kind of work?" (Ashforth & Kreiner, 1999). The impact of dirty work on workers' identity has long been a focal concern for researchers in this field (Ashforth & Kreiner, 1999, 2014; Brown & Coupland, 2015; Kreiner et al., 2006; Rabelo & Mahalingam, 2019; Ji et al., 2022; Zhang & Li, 2017).

In response to this question, existing research has produced two opposing streams of findings under an "either/or" mindset. One group of scholars argues that occupational discrimination and stigma pressure make it difficult for workers to construct positive self-concepts in their work domain, resulting in widespread occupational disidentification (Lai et al., 2013; Schaubroeck et al., 2018; Shantz & Booth, 2014). The other group contends that dirty work can also have positive effects on workers, such as constructing positive occupational ideologies and building highly cohesive occupational groups, which form the basis for occupational identification (Ashforth & Kreiner, 1999; Clarke & Ravenswood, 2019; Dick, 2005; Hamilton et al., 2019; Van Dick & Kerschreiter,

2016).

Confronted with this research controversy of either identification or disidentification, a few scholars have broken through the debate and forged a new path, proposing that the identity process of dirty workers is actually far more complex, potentially manifesting as ambivalent occupational identification mixed with contradictory psychology (Ashforth, 2019; Ashforth & Kreiner, 1999; Kreiner et al., 2006; Hamilton & McCabe, 2016; Tallberg & Jordan, 2021). Ambivalent occupational identification refers to individuals holding complex emotions toward their occupations, characterized by a fuzzy state that simultaneously contains both occupational identification and disidentification (Ashforth et al., 2013; Kreiner et al., 2006). Kreiner et al. (2006) were among the first to propose theoretical propositions on ambivalent occupational identification among dirty workers by integrating two competing theories—institutional justification and social identity theory—arguing that the combined effect of pervasive occupational stigma and positive defense strategies leads to ambivalent identification. However, their research failed to fundamentally transcend the “either/or” mindset, merely offering a simple additive integration of institutional justification and social identity theories, and thus could not identify the true root of ambivalent occupational identification. Moreover, it lacked in-depth exploration of workers’ occupational dilemmas, preventing a comprehensive and detailed elaboration of the formation mechanism based on revealing these dilemmas. Ambivalent occupational identification essentially embodies a paradoxical mindset, and paradox theory precisely provides the fundamental reasons for the existence of such thinking and a novel perspective. Paradox theory posits that paradox originates from persistent contradictions among interdependent elements and exists in the tension relationships formed between elements with opposing directions of influence (Smith & Lewis, 2011). Paradoxical phenomena appear at both the organizational strategic level (Lewis, 2000; Miron-Spektor et al., 2018; Smith & Lewis, 2011) and the individual psychological level (Ahuja et al., 2017; Gotsi et al., 2010; Petriglieri et al., 2019). After choosing an occupation, individuals inevitably face tensions arising from the individual, organizational, and occupational domains. For dirty workers, these sources of tension trap them in an inescapable occupational dilemma, thereby generating ambivalent occupational identification.

Based on this, the core research question of this paper is: From a paradox theory perspective, to explore the formation mechanism and boundary conditions of ambivalent occupational identification among dirty workers. Investigating this question holds significant research importance. Theoretically, it can resolve the divergence in existing research regarding whether dirty workers identify or disidentify with their occupations, providing a new theoretical perspective for understanding workers’ complex occupational identification states. Practically, it can help and guide workers in constructing dignified occupational identities and offer insights for organizations to improve management of lower-status worker groups.

2. Research Status and Development Trends

2.1 Limitations of “Either/Or” Thinking in Research on Dirty Workers’ Identity

Occupational disidentification refers to the extent to which individuals do not define themselves through their occupational identity, reflecting active separation between the individual and the occupation (Ashforth et al., 2013). Because dirty work is mostly associated with immorality, discrimination, and low status, workers generally exhibit high levels of occupational disidentification (Lai et al., 2013; Schaubroeck et al., 2018). Institutional justification theory posits that people typically have a tendency to believe society is fair and just, which leads disadvantaged groups to accept and internalize social stigma (Jost et al., 2004). When individuals find it difficult to challenge institutional authority, they further accept their relatively disadvantaged position in society (Jost & Elsbach, 2001; Sidanius, 1993). Therefore, when dirty workers accept the legitimacy of occupational stigma, it easily triggers occupational disidentification (Jost & Elsbach, 2001). However, occupational disidentification is generally considered abnormal and unstable (Ashforth et al., 2013), and if workers need to remain in their occupations long-term, whether disidentification can be sustained remains questionable (Ashforth et al., 2013; Kreiner et al., 2006).

Occupational identification refers to the extent to which individuals internalize their occupational identity as a positive self-definition (Ashforth et al., 2013). In other words, occupational identification means individuals’ knowledge about belonging to an occupational group and the emotional and value significance derived from group membership (Tajfel & Turner, 1986). Social identity theory posits that people strive to enhance their self-esteem and maintain positive self-concepts (Spears et al., 2001; Tajfel & Turner, 1986). Therefore, to seek and confirm the value of their own group (in-group) relative to other groups (out-groups), individuals tend to develop strong in-group preferences. This provides important theoretical support for understanding workers’ occupational identification. Specifically, on one hand, the dirty stigma of work prompts workers to seek positive narratives about work meaning (Ashforth & Kreiner, 1999), and they resolve self-esteem threats by shaping positive occupational ideologies (Tracy & Scott, 2006). On the other hand, dirty work facilitates the formation of relatively “strong” occupational group cultures. The derogatory labels assigned by society to dirty work create occupational differentiation, and shared occupational stigma pressure gradually fosters “same boat” entitativity among dirty work groups (Ashforth & Kreiner, 1999; Kreiner et al., 2006). Moreover, when workers struggle to obtain social understanding and support, building highly cohesive occupational groups can form a “social buffer” (Ashforth et al., 2007, 2017). In short, constructing a highly cohesive occupational group culture helps workers form a “social buffer” and view societal stigma and prejudice more rationally, while building positive occupational ideologies can highlight group characteristics and ultimately form positive occupational identification (Cruz, 2015).

Notably, occupational disidentification reflects active separation between individuals and their occupational identity, whereas occupational identification signifies active integration. Therefore, occupational identification is not a simple opposite of occupational disidentification, and the relationship between them is rather complex and subtle. This paper argues that the research controversy surrounding occupational identification and disidentification may have overlooked a fundamental theoretical question: whether dirty workers' attitudes toward their occupations are singular and unchanging. In other words, findings based on "either/or" thinking cannot reveal the truth of contradictory attitudes exhibited by dirty workers in their work.

2.2 Breakthrough of "Ambivalence" Thinking in Research on Dirty Workers' Ambivalent Identification

Chinese culture and paradoxical thinking hold that all things in the world have competing tendencies, and societies and organizations naturally accept opposing elements (Chen, 2008). All things, including problems and challenges, are inter-related rather than "either/or." This aligns with the fundamental philosophy of Yin-Yang, where despite contradictory sides appearing opposed, negating, and separate, they are actually interdependent, complementary, and constitute a harmonious whole (Fang, 2012). Therefore, contradictory sides are not absolutely independent but are interdependently connected within a larger system (Fang, 2010, 2012). In short, Eastern approaches to contradiction embrace, integrate, and transcend oppositions (Li, 1998, 2012). For dirty workers, they frequently face various thorny contradictions (Ashforth & Kreiner, 2013). For instance, occupational stigma and occupational value coexist within the occupation, and workers also face the contradictory situation of desiring recognition yet finding it difficult to obtain. In the dirty work research field, Ashforth and Kreiner (1999) were among the first to propose the theoretical speculation that the dirty stigma of work would cause workers to develop ambivalent feelings about their occupations. Kreiner et al. (2006) integrated the opposing theories of institutional justification and social identity to propose theoretical propositions on workers' ambivalent occupational identification. Tyler (2011), based on "abjection theory," described dirty work as "abjection labor," meaning these jobs simultaneously involve both attraction and repulsion. These research findings lay the foundation for this paper's further proposal on the formation mechanism of ambivalent occupational identification.

This study argues that workers' ambivalent identification state toward their occupations primarily stems from the contradictory tensions inherent in dirty work. First, workers face the contradictory tension between occupational stigma and occupational value. Dirty work, due to its tainted nature, suffers from societal questioning and differential treatment, and the "tainted image" in outsiders' eyes subjects workers to severe identity threats (Ashforth et al., 2017; Zhang et al., 2021, 2022). However, as products of social division of labor, dirty work also possesses important social value and is necessary for maintaining society'

s normal functioning (Hughes, 1971). Because occupational value is socially constructed (Lai & Lam, 2012), individuals also seek their own occupational value by shaping positive occupational ideologies (Ashforth & Kreiner, 1999; Ashforth et al., 2007, 2017). Consequently, workers often oscillate between occupational stigma and occupational value (Ashforth & Kreiner, 2013). Second, workers face the contradictory tension between desiring recognition yet finding it difficult to obtain. People typically seek to view themselves positively, and this positive self-consciousness largely depends on their important role identities (such as occupational identity) and how these identities are perceived by others (Ashforth & Kreiner, 1999). Dirty workers also view their occupation as an important identity marker and desire societal recognition of their work's value. However, occupational stigma is typically attached to dirty work, with the two coexisting (Ashforth & Kreiner, 1999; Helms et al., 2019; Ji et al., 2022). The pervasive nature of occupational stigma makes it difficult for workers to obtain public recognition (Ashforth & Kreiner, 2013). Finally, due to these two sets of contradictory tensions, workers experience the identity tension of being unable to identify yet having to identify, ultimately forming ambivalent occupational identification. Specifically, on one hand, pervasive occupational stigma and negative social evaluations make it difficult for dirty workers to construct positive self-consciousness, as workers face many obstacles in building positive identification (Ashforth & Kreiner, 2014; Lai et al., 2013; Schaubroeck et al., 2018). On the other hand, because people are motivated to view their occupational identity positively and desire societal recognition of their work's value, the dirty stigma of work can actually stimulate workers to shape meaningful occupational ideologies, thereby forming the basis for occupational identification.

Currently, research on dirty workers' identity has reached at least two consensus: First, research conclusions under the "either/or" paradigm—where workers either disidentify or identify with their occupations—cannot explain the contradictory psychology exhibited by workers during their work process. There is an urgent need to focus on the psychological and behavioral reactions where identification and disidentification coexist under a "paradoxical" thinking paradigm, namely ambivalent occupational identification. Second, dirty work research has begun shifting from a "single occupational identification state" to "ambivalent occupational identification," garnering increasing attention from researchers. These two points together lead to a profound insight: ambivalent occupational identification is a new perspective that needs to be integrated into the deepening process of dirty work research. Therefore, exploring how ambivalent occupational identification forms among dirty workers holds important research value.

3. Research Framework

Previous research has mostly been based on "either/or" thinking, concluding that dirty workers either identify or disidentify with their occupations. Some studies have explored workers' ambivalent feelings toward their occupations (Ashforth,

2019; Ashforth & Kreiner, 1999; Kreiner et al., 2006; Hamilton & McCabe, 2016; Tallberg & Jordan, 2021), but the mechanism through which perceived occupational stigma influences ambivalent occupational identification remains unclear. According to paradox theory, paradox originates from persistent contradictions among interdependent elements and exists in tension relationships formed between elements with opposing directions of influence (Smith & Lewis, 2011). Tension reflects the degree of incompatible demands faced by organizations or individuals, such as opposing needs, goals, interests, or perspectives (Smith & Lewis, 2011; Liu et al., 2021), and these tensions may trigger individuals' conflictual cognitions or psychological experiences, namely experienced conflict (Miron-Spektor et al., 2018). Related research indicates that paradox theory is an important theoretical perspective for exploring conflictual psychological mechanisms and boundary conditions (Miron-Spektor et al., 2018; Smith & Lewis, 2011; Liu et al., 2021). From a paradox theory perspective, this paper argues that workers' experienced conflict is an important cause of ambivalent occupational identification. Based on this, this study proposes a research framework for the formation mechanism of ambivalent occupational identification among dirty workers (the research model is shown in Figure 1 [Figure 1: see original paper]). Specifically, this paper introduces experienced conflict as a mediating mechanism and internal motivation (such as family motivation, work calling) and work environment (such as job opportunities, organizational support) as boundary conditions, arguing that the interaction between perceived occupational stigma and internal motivation or external environment will trigger workers' experienced conflict, which will further lead to ambivalent occupational identification.

3.1 The Interactive Effect of Perceived Occupational Stigma and Internal Motivation on Experienced Conflict

In the context of dirty work, eliminating public stereotypes about one's occupation is extremely difficult, and occupational stigma persists as an invisible interfering factor. Even when workers adopt proactive stigma-coping strategies, they may still struggle to construct a meaningful occupational identity (Lai & Lam, 2012). Notably, when we further examine relevant contextual factors, this situation may change. Deci and Ryan (2008) argue that work motivation is a key factor influencing individuals' occupational value judgments. Moreover, the external environment also significantly impacts individuals' occupational choices (Hom et al., 1992), and the availability of job opportunities affects employees' occupational commitment and turnover intentions (Weng & Xi, 2010). Based on this, this paper intends to incorporate important boundary conditions such as internal motivation (e.g., family motivation, work calling) and work environment (e.g., job opportunities, respect from others) into the analytical framework to explore the formation mechanism of ambivalent occupational identification among dirty workers.

This study examines the influence of workers' internal motivation, focusing on the

roles of family motivation and work calling. Specifically, family motivation refers to individuals' willingness to exert effort for family benefit (Menges et al., 2017). In the Chinese cultural context, family identity holds prominent significance for individuals (Yang, 2004). Therefore, for workers with high family motivation, they will choose to endure stigma pressure at work for family benefit. Moreover, when workers' current occupation alleviates family financial pressure, they are more likely to recognize the meaning and value of their occupation (Zhang et al., 2020).

Furthermore, work calling refers to the psychological perception of viewing work as a life purpose and meaning; it is both an autonomous work motivation and a work value orientation (Dik & Duffy, 2009). In the context of dirty work, occupational stigma may also stimulate workers to shape meaningful occupational ideologies, even viewing their occupation as a transcendent calling (Stacey, 2005; Tracy & Scott, 2006). Bunderson and Thompson (2009) found that under strong work calling, zookeepers would sacrifice their own well-being for their career. Hospital caregivers, a daily neglected worker group, tirelessly provided services during the COVID-19 pandemic because of their transcendent calling to the work (Sharma et al., 2022). Therefore, for dirty workers with high work calling, even when facing public prejudice against their occupation, they will choose to endure and persist in their occupation. This paper infers that for workers with high family motivation and high work calling, they may fall into a dilemma of experienced conflict: the dirty stigma of work makes it difficult for workers to identify with their occupation, but they choose to remain long-term for family livelihood and under calling, which further triggers workers' experienced conflict. Based on this, this study proposes Proposition 1.

Proposition 1: The interaction between perceived occupational stigma and internal motivation (e.g., family motivation, work calling) will trigger workers' experienced conflict.

3.2 The Interactive Effect of Perceived Occupational Stigma and Work Environment on Experienced Conflict

Since the external environment also has important influence on individuals' occupational choice process (Hom et al., 1992), this study further examines the influence of external environmental factors, focusing on the roles of job opportunities and organizational support. Specifically, job opportunities are an important situational factor, referring to the amount of alternative job opportunities individuals perceive as available (Wheeler et al., 2005). Hom et al. (1992) found that external employment market conditions weaken the positive effect of job dissatisfaction on turnover intentions. When external employment situations are severe, leaving not only harms career development but may also result in individuals being unable to find similar alternative jobs. In the context of dirty work, the dirty work environment and occupational stigma pressure make it difficult for workers to construct positive self-concepts, and previous research found workers often have high turnover intentions (Lai et al., 2013; Schaubroeck et

al., 2018). If workers perceive high job opportunities, they may choose to leave their current occupation; if they perceive low job opportunities, even though they struggle to form positive occupational identification, they will not easily leave their current occupation. Therefore, environmental pressure may also force workers to remain embedded in dirty work.

Moreover, organizational support, as an important work resource, helps dirty workers cope with stigma pressure (Lai et al., 2013; Bentein et al., 2017; Zhou & Huang, 2018). Numerous studies show that derogatory labels given to dirty work by the public prompt workers to gradually develop “same boat” entitativity (Ashforth & Kreiner, 1999; Kreiner et al., 2006; Lyons et al., 2017; Ruebottom & Toubiana, 2021). This means that positive organizational environments can help workers effectively cope with work stigma pressure to some extent (Roca, 2010). More importantly, when dirty workers find it difficult to obtain social recognition, organizational support helps build “strong” occupational group cultures and form a “social buffer” (Ashforth et al., 2007, 2017). Therefore, when workers have high organizational support perception, they may view occupational stigma as public prejudice unrelated to group members themselves. This paper infers that when workers are in environments with low job opportunities and high organizational support, they may endure occupational stigma pressure and choose to remain long-term, which further triggers workers’ experienced conflict.

Proposition 2: The interaction between perceived occupational stigma and work environment (e.g., job opportunities, organizational support) will trigger workers’ experienced conflict.

3.3 The Effect of Experienced Conflict on Ambivalent Occupational Identification

Ambivalent occupational identification refers to individuals simultaneously holding high identification and high disidentification with their occupation, or identifying with some aspects while disidentifying with others (Ashforth et al., 2013). Ambivalent occupational identification reflects employees’ complex emotions toward their occupational identity, such as liking certain aspects of the occupation while being dissatisfied with others. Conflictual or fractured situations are closely related to ambivalent identification (Kreiner & Ashforth, 2004). Experienced conflict refers to conflictual psychological experiences arising from incompatible demands (Miron-Spektor et al., 2018), and identity tension is an important source of experienced conflict (Liu et al., 2021). When individuals’ experienced conflict becomes more pronounced, they are more likely to develop ambivalent emotions toward their occupation (Shepherd et al., 2021). Therefore, experienced conflict may be an important cause of ambivalent occupational identification among workers. Moreover, related research also found that variables with conflictual nature such as intra-role conflict, occupational instrumentality, and identity inconsistency are closely related to ambivalent identification (Kreiner & Ashforth, 2004; Ashforth et al., 2013). Based on this, this study

infers that experienced conflict is an important cause of ambivalent occupational identification among workers. In other words, experienced conflict is an important mediating mechanism through which perceived occupational stigma influences ambivalent occupational identification.

This study proposes Proposition 3 and Proposition 4.

Proposition 3: Workers' experienced conflict leads to ambivalent occupational identification.

Proposition 4: The interaction between perceived occupational stigma and internal motivation or work environment triggers workers' experienced conflict, which further leads to ambivalent occupational identification.

4. Theoretical Construction

This study proposes a research framework for the formation mechanism of ambivalent occupational identification among dirty workers based on the reality that these workers hold more or less ambivalent feelings toward their occupations and from a paradox theory perspective. This study breaks through previous research's one-dimensional perspective (either identification or disidentification), focusing on examining the influence mechanisms and boundary conditions of how perceived occupational stigma affects workers' ambivalent occupational identification. This research framework not only provides a new theoretical perspective for understanding dirty workers' complex occupational identification states but also points the direction for empirical research on ambivalent occupational identification. The theoretical construction of this study mainly includes the following aspects:

- (1) This study explores the formation mechanism of ambivalent occupational identification among dirty workers from a paradox theory perspective. Ashforth and Kreiner (1999) were among the first to propose that workers hold more or less ambivalent feelings about their work roles, but they did not deeply explore how ambivalent occupational identification forms. Ashforth and Kreiner (2013) pointed out that dirty workers often face a thorny contradiction, oscillating between occupational stigma and occupational value. Kreiner et al. (2006) proposed theoretical propositions on ambivalent occupational identification among dirty workers by integrating the opposing theories of institutional justification and social identity, arguing that the combined effect of occupational stigma and stigma-coping strategies leads to ambivalent identification. While this research pointed the direction for understanding ambivalent occupational identification, it failed to fundamentally transcend "either/or" thinking and thus could not identify the true root of ambivalent occupational identification. Related research shows that paradox theory is a theoretical perspective for exploring conflictual psychological mechanisms (Miron-Spektor et al., 2018; Smith & Lewis, 2011; Liu et al., 2021). This study, from a paradox theory perspective, points out that multiple tensions from individuals, organiza-

tions, and occupations are important sources of experienced conflict and proposes that experienced conflict is an important mediating mechanism through which perceived occupational stigma influences ambivalent occupational identification. This provides a new theoretical perspective for understanding the formation mechanism of ambivalent occupational identification.

- (2) This study reveals the occupational dilemmas of dirty workers and fundamentally examines the causes of ambivalent occupational identification. Specifically, this study reveals workers' occupational dilemmas from three aspects—individual, organizational, and occupational: when workers are pressured by the need to support their families (high family motivation) and limited external job opportunities (low job opportunities), they find it difficult to accept but also cannot refuse the stigmatized occupation. Moreover, when workers themselves have high work calling or organizations provide high work support or emotional support, this can also mitigate the negative impact of perceived occupational stigma on workers (Bunderson & Thompson, 2009; Lai et al., 2013). In other words, dirty workers' identity process is inevitably influenced by multiple factors from occupation, organization, and workers themselves (Petriglieri et al., 2019), and workers' experienced conflict is precisely the result of multi-party wrestling among occupation, organization, and workers. This study focuses on examining two types of boundary conditions—internal motivation (e.g., family motivation, work calling) and work environment (e.g., job opportunities, organizational support)—arguing that the interaction between perceived occupational stigma and internal motivation or external environment triggers workers' experienced conflict, which further leads to ambivalent occupational identification. Examining the boundary conditions of ambivalent occupational identification clarifies under what situations workers' experienced conflict is more likely to be triggered and further leads to ambivalent occupational identification, pointing the direction for exploring the formation conditions of ambivalent occupational identification.
- (3) This study proposes a research framework for the formation mechanism of ambivalent occupational identification based on the “ambivalence” thinking paradigm. In the Chinese context, dirty workers' identity process may be more complex, and it is difficult for them to form absolute occupational identification or disidentification based on “either/or” thinking. Fan (2000) listed “enduring hardship and hard work” as one of the important national characteristics of Chinese culture. Chan and Chan (2001) also believed that Chinese people have strong endurance for difficulties. Family holds important value and status in individuals' work motivation and needs (Zhang et al., 2020). Often, workers view engaging in dirty work as a contribution to their family or an expression of self-worth. However, Chinese people also tend to associate dirty work with personal “face,” as whether one can find a decent job concerns the face of the worker and their fam-

ily (Zhang et al., 2021). Therefore, ambivalent occupational identification can essentially embody a “both/and” paradoxical mindset, and a paradox theory perspective can fundamentally reveal the formation mechanism of ambivalent occupational identification among dirty workers.

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English Abstract

A Study on the Formation Mechanism of Ambivalent Occupational Identification of Non-decent Workers from a Paradoxical Perspective

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Abstract: Non-decent work refers to occupations that are necessary for the functioning of society but are belittled or disliked by the general public. Non-decent workers own complicated identification processes and hardly identify or disidentify their occupations. Thus, they are more or less ambivalent about their occupations. However, existing research has not figured out when and how dirty workers form their ambivalent occupational identification. To bridge this gap, this study stands from the perspective of paradox and constructs a formation mechanism of practitioners' ambivalent occupational identification. Theoretically, it is expected that the results would help to resolve the controversy in literature whether dirty workers identify or disidentify their occupation by proposing a more realistic argument that non-decent workers ambivalently identify their occupations. And in practice, it could help and guide non-decent workers to construct a dignified occupational identification, and inspire the organization to improve the management in the non-decent worker group.

Keywords: non-decent work, occupational stigma, ambivalent occupational identification, formation mechanism

Note: Figure translations are in progress. See original paper for figures.

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