The Influence Mechanism of Dirty Work on the Work Meaningfulness of Its Practitioners

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Abstract

Non-decent work refers to occupations or work tasks that may cause physical, social, or moral taint to practitioners, are repulsive, or undermine personal dignity. The sense of work meaning among non-decent work practitioners has always been an important topic of concern in this field. Existing research has primarily adopted an individual or in-group perspective, examining the influence of practitioner work group culture, professional ideology, and individual normalization strategies on their work meaning construction. However, systematic research on the symbiotic dimension and other-oriented dimension manifested by non-decent work practitioners in the process of work meaning construction remains relatively scarce, and the boundary role of social support therein has not been fully revealed. Therefore, this study proposes to adopt a social support perspective, based on a four-quadrant theoretical framework for work meaning construction—the "agency-symbiosis" and "self-other" dimensions, to systematically explore the individual and interpersonal mechanisms of work meaning construction among non-decent work practitioners. The expected outcomes will help understand the construction mechanisms of work meaning among non-decent work practitioners from a more comprehensive perspective, and in practice, inspire employees' work meaning construction through managing individual or interpersonal factors.

Full Text

Preamble

The Influence Mechanism of Dirty Work on Its Practitioners' Sense of Work Meaningfulness

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Abstract

Dirty work refers to occupations or job tasks that may cause physical, social, or moral taint, and are perceived as repugnant or degrading to personal dignity. The sense of meaning among dirty work practitioners has long been a central topic in this field. Existing research has primarily examined how practitioners' workgroup culture, occupational ideology, and individual normalization strategies influence the construction of work meaning from an individual or in-group perspective. However, systematic investigations into the symbiotic and other-oriented dimensions manifested in practitioners' meaning-making processes remain scarce, and the boundary role of social support in these processes has not been adequately revealed. Therefore, this study adopts a social support perspective and draws upon the four-quadrant theoretical framework of meaning-making—comprising the "agency-communion"and "self-other"dimensions—to systematically explore the individual and interpersonal mechanisms through which dirty work practitioners construct work meaning. The anticipated contributions will help understand the meaning-making mechanisms of dirty work practitioners from a more comprehensive perspective and provide practical insights for facilitating employees' construction of work meaning through the management of individual and interpersonal factors.

Keywords: dirty work, occupational stigma, work meaningfulness, "agency-communion" and "self-other" framework, social support

Practitioner Interview Excerpts:

Li Zelin, a professionally trained graduate who resolutely entered the cemetery industry after university, deeply understands the drawbacks of traditional mourning practices and has been committed to promoting green and environmentally friendly alternatives. "I will continue to advocate for the popularization of green mourning, ensuring that every life is treated with respect," Li stated. —Li Zelin, Cemetery Administrator (excerpted from China News Service, 2024-03-20)

"I entered the workforce at 17, working in factories and as a waitress, but none of those jobs filled my heart like being a bathing assistant for the elderly. Every time an elderly person hugs me and says thank you after a bath, it strengthens my belief in continuing this work." —Long Surong, Bathing Assistant for the Elderly (excerpted from China News Service, 2022-05-11)

1. Problem Statement

While no occupation is inherently superior or inferior, certain jobs are perceived as "respectable" or "good work" while others are viewed as "less respectable"

or "bad work" due to individual and societal factors. Academia refers to tasks or occupations that may cause physical, social, or moral taint, and are considered repugnant or dignity-damaging, as "dirty work" [?, ?, ?]. Examples include sanitation work (dealing with waste), funeral services (contact with the deceased), and sales work (potentially involving deception). Despite their societal necessity, the "dirty" nature of these jobs creates negative experiences and perceptions: practitioners experience strong feelings of work dirtiness, and due to public stigmatization, they also perceive significant occupational stigma [?, ?, ?, ?, ?].

Dirty work practitioners face dual pressures from internal experiences (work dirtiness) and external perceptions (occupational stigma), encountering multiple threats such as low wages, limited career advancement, low occupational status, stigmatization, and social exclusion. These threats generate negative emotions including anxiety, shame, and sadness [?, ?, ?], leading to burnout, decreased job performance and satisfaction, and withdrawal behaviors [?, ?, ?, ?]. This phenomenon also reinforces negative stereotypes about dirty work groups and organizations, reducing overall social efficiency [?, ?, ?, ?, ?]. Consequently, scholars emphasize constructing work meaning as a way to counter these threats [?, ?]. Work meaning refers to individuals' overall perception and understanding of their work' s value, purpose, and importance, derived from internal cognition, external evaluation, and environmental support [?, ?].

Although dirty work practitioners face multiple threats, their self-concept (values, motivations, and beliefs about work) is highly malleable and can adapt to diverse experiences [?, ?]. For instance, the cemetery administrator mentioned earlier, despite facing stigmatization for working with the deceased, chose this career after professional training to promote green mourning and ensure every life is respected. Moreover, interactions with others inside and outside the workplace influence work meaning [?, ?, ?, ?]. According to social information processing theory [?], employees observe others' behaviors and attitudes to obtain social cues that shape their work cognition, attitudes, and meaning interpretation. The bathing assistant' s excerpt further validates how others can influence meaning construction for dirty work practitioners.

Existing research on dirty work practitioners' meaning-making has primarily drawn on social identity theory [?] to examine how occupational ideology and normalization strategies—such as reframing, recalibrating, and refocusing—help practitioners assign positive meaning to their work [?, ?, ?, ?]. These cognitive coping strategies enhance work meaning by influencing self-concept and boosting self-esteem [?, ?]. More recently, scholars have adopted intersectionality frameworks [?, ?] to examine how structural factors like race, gender, and class interact with dirty work attributes, revealing how multiple stigmatizing factors jointly shape practitioners' work and life meaning [?, ?, ?, ?, ?].

Despite this shift toward intersectionality, existing research remains largely focused on in-group perspectives, emphasizing how practitioners build positive identity and meaning through occupational ideology and cognitive strategies to

resist negative social evaluations [?, ?, ?, ?]. However, these studies overlook how social support influences meaning-making mechanisms.

Research on work meaning demonstrates that meaning is not merely an individual construction but also a social one [?, ?, ?, ?, ?], with increasing attention to how others influence meaning construction [?, ?, ?]. Dirty work scholars also call for greater attention to practitioners' complex social embeddedness [?, ?, ?]. Therefore, this study adopts a social support perspective, using the four-quadrant framework of "agency-communion"and "self-other"to examine the mechanisms influencing dirty work practitioners' meaning construction [?, ?, ?]. The "agency-communion"dimension reveals motivational differences in meaning-making, where agency refers to practitioners' pursuit of autonomy and communion refers to their pursuit of connection with in-group and out-group others. The "self-other"dimension distinguishes whether actions target the self or others [?, ?]. Combining these dimensions with dirty work experiences, occupational stigma perception, and normalization strategies (e.g., reframing), this study examines their impact on work meaning and its maintenance mechanisms through three issues: (1) how work dirtiness perception, occupational stigma perception, and reframing influence meaning construction; (2) systematically mapping different meaning-making mechanisms based on the theoretical framework; and (3) examining how social support from out-group others (family and clients) and in-group others (colleagues and leaders) moderates these relationships.

2.1 Dirty Work and Occupational Stigma

American sociologist Hughes [?, ?] initially coined "dirty work" to describe tasks or occupations considered disgusting or dignity-damaging. Hughes [?] identified three dimensions of "dirtiness" —physical, social, and moral—though without systematic elaboration. Ashforth and Kreiner [?, ?] extended Hughes' definition, noting that while dirty work serves essential societal functions, its unpleasant characteristics damage practitioners' social identity and provoke public rejection. Physical dirty work involves contact with filth (waste, death, bodily fluids) or hazardous environments (e.g., cleaners, miners). Social dirty work involves servile interactions or frequent contact with stigmatized groups (e.g., servers, prison guards). Moral dirty work is perceived as unethical or employs deceptive, offensive tactics (e.g., debt collectors, used car sales) [?, ?].

The "dirty" attributes expose practitioners to varying levels of perceived work dirtiness (subjective perception of dignity damage) and occupational stigma perception (awareness of public negative evaluations), triggering negative psychological and behavioral consequences [?, ?, ?, ?, ?]. Dirty work impacts occupational/organizational identification [?, ?, ?, ?], (occupational) self-esteem [?, ?, ?, ?, ?], work meaningfulness [?], cognitive dissonance [?], stress [?, ?], discrimination, negative stereotypes, emotional exhaustion, emotional labor, social isolation, workplace bullying [?, ?, ?, ?], and negative emotions like anger, shame, anxiety, and sadness [?, ?]. These lead to burnout, reduced performance, satisfaction, and engagement [?, ?, ?, ?, ?, ?, ?], lower career commitment [?],

withdrawal behaviors [?], and turnover intentions [?].

Addressing these negative effects is both a practical imperative and research priority. Ashforth and colleagues [?, ?, ?, ?] pioneered this area, arguing that because practitioners cannot obtain recognition from out-groups, they construct occupational/workgroup ideologies and normalization strategies—reframing (assigning positive value to neutralize negative meanings), recalibrating (adjusting evaluation standards), and refocusing (shifting attention from stigmatized to non-stigmatized aspects)—to achieve positive self-views and work role identification. Subsequent research has extended this approach, examining these strategies' effects across different theoretical perspectives and work contexts [?, ?, ?].

2.2 Dirty Work Practitioners' Work Meaning Construction

As noted, work meaningfulness is a key concern for dirty work scholars. Beyond Ashforth and Kreiner, Stacey [?] found that home care workers' job demands (risks and emotional stress) limited meaning experiences, while autonomy and skill development enhanced dignity perceptions. Bunderson and Thompson [?] showed that viewing dirty work (e.g., zookeeping) as a calling strengthens occupational identification and meaning. Shantz and Booth [?] demonstrated that occupational stigma consciousness reduces work meaningfulness, particularly among employees with high core self-evaluations. Mavin and Grandy [?] and Soni-Sinha and Yates [?] revealed that multiple intersecting stigmas (gender, race) create binary outcomes in meaning construction—both positive reshaping and negative deconstruction. Hamilton et al. [?] examined how cleaners use macro-level discourses of dignity and heroism to build individual and collective value identification. Shepherd et al. [?] explored how caste systems, slum contexts, and cultural geography shape Mumbai ragpickers' helplessness and their use of survival, fate, and hope discourses to impart positive meaning.

Overall, existing research offers important insights from four main perspectives: (1) social identity perspective, emphasizing how in-group occupational ideology and cognitive strategies build positive identity and meaning; (2) work orientation perspective, showing how stigmatized occupations can be transformed into valuable social missions; (3) narrative perspective, examining how macro discourses construct individual and collective value; and (4) intersectionality perspective, analyzing how dirty work interacts with gender, race, and institutions. However, given that most dirty work practitioners occupy frontline positions involving interpersonal interaction, and that work meaning is socially constructed through support, organizational environments, and cultural institutions, current research lacks systematic examination of meaning-making mechanisms in interactive contexts.

This gap stems largely from attributing dirty work' s negative effects to stigma pressure, treating out-groups as homogeneous and overlooking their internal heterogeneity. In reality, out-group members like clients and service recipients are important interaction partners whose feedback can be constructive rather

than merely suppressive, potentially triggering symbiotic meaning generation through positive evaluation and support. Recent research increasingly recognizes service beneficiaries' diverse responses, showing they may exhibit positive perceptions and behaviors rather than simple out-group negativity versus in-group positivity [**?**, **?**, **?**]. Additionally, in-group research has not deeply examined how leaders and colleagues influence meaning construction, limiting comprehensive understanding. Finally, while occupational ideology strategies can enhance self-esteem and identification [**?**], how these strategies affect others' evaluations and jointly influence work meaningfulness remains underexplored.

2.3 Four-Quadrant Framework for Work Meaning Construction—The "Agency-Communion" and "Self-Other" Theoretical Framework

Based on the literature review, this study employs the four-quadrant framework of "agency-communion" and "self-other" [**?**] to examine meaning construction mechanisms under social support. This framework originates from Bakan' s [**?**] concepts of "self-other" and "agency-communion." Lips-Wiersma and Morris [**?**] emphasized balancing "self-other" and "being-doing" for work-life meaning. Pratt and Ashforth [**?**] developed a 2$\times$2 model highlighting belonging, authenticity, and transcendence. Rosso et al. [**?**] integrated these perspectives, proposing four pathways: individuation, contribution, self-connection, and unification.

The "agency-communion" dimension captures motivational differences in meaning-making. Agency represents the pursuit of autonomy, control, and creativity—actively shaping environments to achieve self-value. Communion emphasizes connection, solidarity, and shared experience—fulfilling social needs through relationships. Both reflect subjective and social construction of meaning [**?**, **?**, **?**]. In dirty work contexts, agency manifests through occupational ideology and normalization strategies (reframing, recalibrating, refocusing), while communion appears in social support, evaluations, and feedback from interactions.

The "self-other" dimension distinguishes whether meaning-making actions target the self or others. Research shows both are crucial [**?**, **?**]. Combining these dimensions reveals four mechanisms: individuation (agency-self), contribution (agency-other), self-connection (communion-self), and social unification (communion-other). According to identity theory [**?**, **?**], identities comprise multiple social roles, and in supportive contexts, core identities emerge through interactions with beneficiaries, clients, leaders, and colleagues. This study examines how support from workplace others influences meaning construction and maintenance.

3. Research Framework

Work meaningfulness is the belief that one' s work has a unique and important purpose connected to personal values and life goals [**?**]. Employees may

define this purpose through valuable achievements, team belonging, or helping others, with importance reflecting perceived significance [?]. Rosso et al. [?] identified four pathways: individuation (uniqueness and autonomy through capability demonstration), contribution (positive impact on others/society), self-connection (alignment with core values and authenticity), and social unification (emotional connection with organizations, colleagues, and society) [?, ?, ?, ?].

This study proposes that work dirtiness and stigma perceptions affect meaningfulness, moderated by agentic reframing and significant others' recognition. First, work dirtiness perception is an internal negative evaluation, while stigma perception reflects awareness of external negative judgments. Both may hinder task completion, reduce agency, and negatively affect meaning through individuation and social unification pathways. Second, under social support, recognition from clients, leaders, and colleagues may mitigate these negative effects. Third, when practitioners reframe work as beneficiary-oriented and employ this strategy in supportive contexts, it may elicit gratitude and positive impact perceptions, enhancing meaning through contribution or social unification. Additionally, in the "agency-self" quadrant, self-connection is activated through interpersonal interaction—when individuals pursue valued goals and receive key others' affirmation, authenticity is reinforced [?, ?]. However, given dirty work' s inherent "taint" and external stereotypes, obtaining others' recognition while achieving self-identity is challenging, so this path is not elaborated here. The preliminary theoretical framework is shown in Figure 1 [Figure 1: see original paper].

3.1 Paths for Dirty Work Practitioners'Work Meaning Construction

(1) The Influence of Work Dirtiness and Stigma Perceptions on Meaning Construction

Dirty work practitioners experience perceived work dirtiness and occupational stigma perception. Work dirtiness perception refers to subjective awareness of job tasks' "dirty" features and their damage to personal dignity, while occupational stigma perception is the overall cognition of external groups' negative evaluations and social devaluation [?, ?]. Although job "dirtiness" is considered the source of occupational stigma, this attribute is socially constructed. As Ashforth and Kreiner [?, ?] stated, "dirt is not an inherent property of the job but a cultural judgment made by social actors based on purity/pollution norms." Thus, individuals differ in their perceptions of the same tasks [?, ?, ?].

Work meaning research indicates that purposeful action is crucial for experiencing meaning. When individuals view purposeful action as demonstrating a "valuable and respectable self," they construct meaning through the "individuation" pathway [?, ?]. In dirty work contexts, high levels of work dirtiness and stigma perceptions hinder practitioners from defining themselves as valuable and respectable. As these perceptions intensify, work is more likely seen as dignity-damaging rather than self-value enhancing. Higher work dirtiness perception

also indicates challenging, uncontrollable tasks, making agentic strategies like occupational ideology less effective at preventing internalization of dirtiness [?], thus reducing experiences of being valuable and respectable. Therefore, work dirtiness and stigma perceptions negatively affect meaning by weakening the individuation pathway.

Individuation operates through self-efficacy and self-esteem mechanisms. Given extensive research on self-esteem, this study focuses on self-efficacy, which comprises competence and autonomy [?, ?]. In dirty work contexts, this manifests as occupational self-efficacy—perceived capability to successfully complete tasks [?]. Occupational stigma perception undermines positive self-experiences and dignity identification by inhibiting occupational self-efficacy and limiting autonomy. Low self-efficacy reduces work motivation, triggers helplessness and frustration, and further weakens meaning construction. For example, Shepherd et al. [?] found that Mumbai ragpickers experienced helplessness from their dirty, intractable work, unable to avoid dirty tasks or seek change, leading to negative meaning construction. Therefore, work dirtiness and stigma perceptions negatively affect meaningfulness by constraining the individuation pathway, specifically by weakening occupational self-efficacy.

Proposition 1: Work dirtiness and stigma perceptions negatively affect practitioners' work meaningfulness by reducing occupational self-efficacy.

Another pathway to meaningfulness is social unification, where purposeful action is interpreted as harmonious connection and interaction with others [?]. Unlike individuation, this pathway derives less from task achievement and more from interpersonal connection and psychological intimacy in work-related networks [?]. In dirty work, higher work dirtiness and stigma perceptions increase awareness of external negative evaluations [?, ?, ?], reducing experiences of relational harmony and psychological intimacy. Occupational stigma as social evaluation pressure may thus weaken social unification by disrupting positive interactions, hindering the perception of work as purposeful action.

Social unification is strengthened through social identification and belongingness mechanisms [?, ?]. Social identification creates shared identity, beliefs, and attributes that foster purposefulness. Belongingness—the emotional and cognitive experience of being part of a group—originates from non-aversive, frequent interactions [?]. In dirty work, negative occupational image concerns lead practitioners to distance themselves from others and perceive greater social exclusion and isolation, weakening belongingness. Negative stereotypes may also trigger dissatisfaction and aversion, directly affecting positive social support and belongingness, thereby reducing meaningfulness. Therefore, work dirtiness and stigma perceptions negatively affect meaningfulness by constraining the social unification pathway, specifically by reducing belongingness.

Proposition 2: Work dirtiness and stigma perceptions negatively affect practitioners' work meaningfulness by reducing belongingness.

(2) The Influence of Occupational Ideology/Normalization Strategies

–Reframing–on Meaningfulness

In dirty work contexts, work dirtiness and stigma perceptions weaken meaningfulness by constraining individuation and social unification pathways, especially in highly dirty occupations where internal evaluations and external social support may interactively affect meaning construction [**?**]. Practitioners' agentic normalization strategies (reframing, recalibrating, refocusing) and important others' instrumental and expressive support constitute complex contextual factors. Since meaning construction is temporally negotiated through different strategies and cues [**?**, **?**], this study integrates the "agency-communion" and "self-other" framework to examine meaning construction and maintenance mechanisms.

Among the three normalization strategies, Ashforth and Kreiner [**?**] argue that reframing is most effective against stigma because it transforms work' s intrinsic meaning by reasserting purpose, mission, or tasks. For example, caregivers may reframe their mission as "helping elderly live dignified lives," while cleaners may reframe their purpose as "providing clean living environments." Reframing is purposeful action that generates impact through helping others [**?**, **?**]. When practitioners perceive positive impact on beneficiaries (social impact perception), the contribution pathway significantly enhances meaningfulness [**?**, **?**]. In dirty work, reframing increases the likelihood of experiencing positive impact on others. For instance, salespeople' s positive behaviors enhance customer satisfaction, and customer gratitude reinforces reflective self-evaluation, making work feel like valuable social contribution and strengthening meaningfulness [**?**].

Proposition 3: Practitioners' reframing strategies positively affect work meaningfulness by enhancing social impact perception.

3.2 Paths for Dirty Work Practitioners'Work Meaning Construction Under Social Support

(1) The Moderating Role of Instrumental Support from In-Group Others (Leaders and Colleagues)

Dirty work research shows that practitioners actively seek to construct positive meaning even when meaning is severely challenged [**?**]. Higher perceptions of work dirtiness and stigma reduce the likelihood of using in-group occupational ideology for positive meaning construction [**?**]. However, social support may serve as a contextual cue influencing meaningfulness. Work meaning research identifies others (colleagues, leaders, family) as sources of meaning [**?**], and relational self research shows that significant others profoundly influence self-cognition through reflective self-evaluation—forming or adjusting self-concept by interpreting others' views [**?**, **?**]. In dirty work contexts, workplace others (leaders, colleagues, beneficiaries, clients) constitute social support cues that jointly influence the relationship between dirty work and meaningfulness [**?**].

Since the valuable, respectable self in the individuation pathway relates to ca-

reer success, instrumental resources—including advice, training, career guidance, and funding—help develop skills, control work activities, and enhance competence and autonomy [**?**, **?**, **?**]. In dirty work, instrumental resources more likely come from in-group others who share similar occupational experiences with dirty attributes. Their instrumental support better mitigates the negative impact of work dirtiness and stigma on occupational self-efficacy, thereby weakening the negative effect on meaningfulness. With high instrumental support from colleagues or leaders, practitioners gain learning and growth opportunities that enhance competence and autonomy, reducing the negative impact. With low support, reduced capabilities and autonomy exacerbate the negative effects. Therefore, instrumental support moderates the relationship.

Proposition 4: Instrumental support from in-group others (leaders and colleagues) moderates the negative relationship between work dirtiness/stigma perceptions and occupational self-efficacy, such that the relationship is weaker when instrumental support is high.

Proposition 5: Instrumental support moderates the indirect negative effect of work dirtiness/stigma perceptions on meaningfulness through occupational self-efficacy, such that the effect is weaker when support is high.

(2) The Moderating Role of Expressive Evaluation/Support from In-Group and Out-Group Others

In-group (leaders/colleagues) and out-group (beneficiaries/clients) others constitute important contextual factors. Work meaning theory suggests that enduring expressive support facilitates social unification [**?**]. Expressive relationships characterized by frequent interaction, mutual respect, and psychological intimacy promote belongingness and social identification [**?**]. Beyond work dirtiness and stigma perceptions, practitioners may receive recognition (e.g., gratitude) or derogation [**?**, **?**]. Given this uncertain social support context, meaning perception is situationally influenced. High expressiveness promotes similarity and relational identification [**?**] and demonstrates positive respect and trust, enhancing belongingness [**?**]. Given dirty work' s uncertain interactions and mixed evaluations [**?**], expressive support from both in-group and out-group others likely moderates rather than directly affects social unification pathways. High expressive support may buffer the negative impact of stigma on relational identification and belongingness.

Proposition 6: Expressive evaluation/support from in-group (leaders/colleagues) and out-group (beneficiaries/clients) others moderates the negative relationship between work dirtiness/stigma perceptions and relational identification (6a: with leaders/colleagues; 6b: with clients/beneficiaries), such that the relationship is weaker when expressive support is high.

Proposition 7: Expressive evaluation/support from in-group and out-group others moderates the negative relationship between work dirtiness/stigma perceptions and belongingness, such that the relationship is weaker when expressive support is high.

Proposition 8: Expressive evaluation/support moderates the indirect negative effect of work dirtiness/stigma perceptions on meaningfulness through relational identification (8a: with leaders/colleagues; 8b: with clients/beneficiaries), such that the effect is weaker when support is high.

Proposition 9: Expressive evaluation/support moderates the indirect negative effect of work dirtiness/stigma perceptions on meaningfulness through belongingness, such that the effect is weaker when support is high.

4. Theoretical Construction

This study draws on the four-quadrant framework of meaning-making [**?**, **?**, **?**] to address a central question in dirty work research: How do practitioners construct meaning when it is fundamentally challenged? By integrating the "agency-communion" and "self-other" frameworks, this study systematically examines key antecedents, mechanisms, and boundary conditions of meaning construction in dirty work contexts. The theoretical contributions are threefold:

(1) Investigating mechanisms of dirty work practitioners' meaningfulness under social support using the four-quadrant framework. While existing work meaning research often ignores specific job characteristics, this study focuses on dirty work practitioners to explore their meaning construction mechanisms and boundary conditions. Current dirty work research emphasizes individual or in-group influences on meaningfulness through identity mechanisms [**?**, **?**, **?**]. However, meaning construction is also social, shaped by internal and external others [**?**, **?**, **?**]. This study treats work dirtiness and stigma perceptions as contextual constraints and occupational ideology (e.g., reframing) as agentic strategies, examining their combined effects on meaningfulness. Incorporating social support mechanisms like relational identification and social impact perception enriches dirty work research beyond its traditional focus on intra-individual or intra-group identity processes.

(2) Revealing how workplace others' (leaders, colleagues, beneficiaries, clients) evaluations moderate relationships between work perceptions and meaningfulness. While most research focuses on individual and in-group influences, it inadequately considers how social support contexts affect meaningfulness. Although scholars call for attention to practitioners' relational embeddedness [**?**, **?**, **?**], no studies have focused on how these factors influence meaningfulness. This study examines how instrumental and expressive support from in-group and out-group others moderate the relationships between work/stigma perceptions and meaningfulness, demonstrating that meaning construction is not static but continuously shaped by contextual factors.

(3) Exploring mechanisms for maintaining meaningfulness in dirty work. While meaning construction is social, individuals remain the ultimate agents. Dirty work research shows practitioners use normalization strategies to impart positive meaning [**?**, **?**], but these primarily affect internal cognition to prevent negative evaluation internalization [**?**, **?**]. How these strategies influence

out-group perceptions and subsequently affect meaningfulness remains unclear. This study examines how practitioners, as core meaning-making agents, use purposeful reframing actions to counter external stereotypes and shape social impact perception, demonstrating how they leverage positive relational cues to reshape self and occupational cognition, thereby maintaining meaningfulness.

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