Article

Dirty Entrepreneurship: The Intersectionality of Entrepreneurs' Dirty Recycling Businesses

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Dean A. Shepherd[1,2], Vinit Parida[3,4], and Joakim Wincent[5,6]

Abstract

Although much has been made about heroic entrepreneurs, there is recent interest in less glamorous forms of entrepreneurship. The least glamorous is dirty entrepreneurship. In this study, we used an inductive approach and a sample of entrepreneurs engaged in dirty plastic recycling businesses to develop an intersectionality model of entrepreneurs' dirty recycling businesses. This inductive study offers new insights into how individuals' intersectionality pushes them into dirty entrepreneurship, how they approach their businesses, and who they stigmatize. Interestingly, individuals' dirty place and caste push them into dirty entrepreneurship that collectively cleans the environment despite not intending to do so.

Keywords

sustainable, entrepreneurship, manuscripts: specialty areas, qualitative, research methods, psychology, manuscripts: general areas, decision-making, trust, social capital

Introduction

People engaged in dirty work can be stigmatized by outsiders due to perceptions of such work being physically, socially, or morally degrading (Ashforth & Kreiner, 1999; Hughes et al., 2017; Valtorta et al., 2019). Stigma refers to "some attribute or characteristic that conveys a social identity that is devalued in a particular social context" (Crocker et al., 1998, p. 505). While employees often perform dirty work, so do some entrepreneurs, such

[1]University of Notre Dame, Notre Dame, IN, USA
[2]Stockholm School of Economics, Stockholm, Sweden
[3]Luleå University of Technology, Luleå, Sweden
[4]University of Vaasa, Vaasa, Finland
[5]University of St. Gallen, St. Gallen, Switzerland
[6]Hanken School of Economics, Helsinki, Finland

Corresponding Author:
Dean A. Shepherd, University of Notre Dame and Stockholm School of Economics, Notre Dame, IN 46556, USA.
Email: Dshephe1@nd.edu

as the founders and owner-managers of certain small businesses. For example, research has explored the dirty work of butchers (e.g., Simpson et al., 2014), morticians (Ashforth & Kreiner, 2014), and dentists (Makkawy & Scott, 2017), all of whom are often founders and owner-managers of their businesses (e.g., Katz, 1995). While previous research has alluded to managers (and presumably entrepreneurs) being "above the dirt" and relying on subordinates to perform dirty work (Ashforth et al., 2017; Hansen Löfstrand et al., 2016), entrepreneurs are often Jacks- or Jills-of-all-trades who perform many organizational tasks in their small businesses (Astebro & Thompson, 2011), including dirty tasks. They engage in dirty entrepreneurship. We define *dirty entrepreneurship* as owning and managing a business engaged in physically, socially, or morally degrading activities, stigmatizing the business's owner-manager. Indeed, the stigma of dirty work might mark entrepreneurs more heavily than employees because entrepreneurs' identities are more tightly entwined with their businesses and what they do (Baker & Powell, 2020; Cardon et al., 2005).

However, we do not understand how these entrepreneurs organize the dirty businesses they own and manage. This lack of understanding is problematic because it is the entrepreneurs' organizing of their businesses that generates outcomes that impact their lives (Carter, 2011; Nikolaev et al., 2020), which is particularly salient for impoverished individuals living in developing economies. For these individuals, successfully organizing their businesses can help lift them and their families out of poverty (for a review, see Sutter et al., 2019), whereas underperformance can have substantial negative implications for them and their families including hunger, children not receiving an education, and poor health outcomes (Shepherd et al., 2021, 2022).[1] Therefore, we ask, how does an entrepreneur's stigma from dirt shape the organizing of their business, and to what effect?

We took an inductive approach to address these questions. We chose a sample of entrepreneurs (founders and owner-managers) engaged in the dirty work of plastic recycling in the slum of Dharavi, India. With approximately 15,000 factories dedicated to recycling and sorting garbage, plastic, and heavy metals (Chouksey, 2019), Dharavi is also considered dirty (Jones & Sanyal, 2015). We conducted 70 interviews with entrepreneurs and employees of businesses in the dirty recycling industry. We also collected data through observations, field notes, and news reports to enrich the context of our analysis of the interview data and to triangulate our findings. Based on these findings, we generated an intersectionality model of entrepreneurs' dirty recycling businesses, which offers three primary contributions.

First, we provide new insights into the role of individuals' intersectionality in their entry into dirty entrepreneurship and how it shapes their business. Moving on from focusing on heroic entrepreneurs and their highly impactful ventures, research has begun to explore a range of motivations and outcomes arising from everyday entrepreneurship (Baker & Welter, 2020; Bakker & McMullen, 2023; Welter & Baker, 2021). We extend this research on everyday entrepreneurship to an even less glamorous form of entrepreneurship by exploring individuals mired in the dirt and the ways this dirt shapes their entrepreneurial businesses.

Second, we provide insights into who is further stigmatized within a group of individuals who are all stigmatized and why. Entrepreneurs often depend on relationships with others to access resources (Murray et al., 2020; Zheng et al., 2020) and knowledge (Sahut et al., 2021; Yu et al., 2021) for their businesses' survival (Huggins et al., 2017; Stenholm & Renko, 2016). These relationships are often formed based on reputation (Li & Martin, 2019; Rindova et al., 2007) and depend on trust (Nguyen & Rose, 2009). Accordingly, trust violations can negatively impact these relationships, although some entrepreneurs can quickly recover from them (Bi et al., 2021). We find that among the entrepreneurs of dirty businesses, who themselves are stigmatized by outsiders, it is critical to maintain a "clean" reputation. Those who develop an untrustworthy reputation are further stigmatized and excluded from continuing to operate in this industry because cooperation is essential for survival.

Finally, we highlight the "necessity of dirty entrepreneurship" and the "accident of environmental entrepreneurship." Entrepreneurs are considered to have considerable agency (Goss & Sadler-Smith, 2018; McMullen et al., 2021). Thus, researchers have mainly focused on the outcomes of entrepreneurs desire, whether it is creating a venture (Davidsson & Gruenhagen, 2021; Shepherd et al., 2021), growing a venture (Nason & Wiklund, 2018), preserving nature (for a review, see Vedula et al., 2022), or solving a social problem (Bacq & Alt, 2018). Further, entrepreneurship research has investigated how the social environment can influence entrepreneurs and their journeys (Bullough et al., 2022; Meek et al., 2010). For example, individuals who face discrimination in employment often turn to entrepreneurship, where they can craft their business to minimize discrimination and/or stigmatization (Caldwell et al., 2020; Conti et al., 2022; Hwang & Phillips, 2024). This study provides new insights into how an individual's social environment (i.e., stigmatizing their low caste and dirty place) can push them into dirty entrepreneurship and shape how they organize their business, which can positively impact the natural environment despite not intending to do so.

Theoretical Background: Dirty Work and Intersectionality

Dirty work refers to jobs, tasks, and careers perceived as physically, socially, or morally degrading (Ashforth et al., 2007; Hughes et al., 2017). Dirty work can be degrading when it physically involves trash, effluence, and noxious conditions; socially involves relationships with stigmatized others or relationships that are servile; and morally involves sinful, deceptive, or intrusive tasks (Ashforth et al., 2007; Hughes et al., 2017). Many individuals engaged in dirty work are characterized by a bundle of attributes of intersecting taint (Mavin & Grandy, 2013; Slutskaya et al., 2016). For example, an individual's dirty work can intersect with other sources of taint associated with race (e.g., Soni-Sinha & Yates, 2013), immigrant status (e.g., Orupabo & Nadim, 2020), gender (e.g., Corlett & Mavin, 2014), sexual orientation (Tilcsik et al., 2015), and social class (e.g., Slutskaya et al., 2016).

Dirty workers attempt to manage the stigma of their work by developing a strong culture with others engaged in the same work (Ashforth & Kreiner, 1999; Simpson et al., 2012), reframing the work to highlight its social benefits (e.g., Clarke & Ravenswood, 2019), making social comparisons with those who are believed to be more disadvantaged than them (Hamilton et al., 2019), and engaging in other efforts to construct positive meaning for the work (Dick & Cassell, 2004). These efforts aim to boost the individuals' self-esteem in the face of their dirty-work taint. Studies of dirty work have mainly explored employees of organizations, such as officers in the police force (Dick, 2005), gynecology nurses in hospitals (Bolton, 2005), slaughtermen in abattoirs (Ackroyd & Crowdy, 1990), correctional officers in prisons (Tracy & Scott, 2006), domestic help at labor agencies (Anderson, 2000), exotic dancers in bars (Grandy & Mavin, 2014), and refuse collectors and street sweepers working for public cleaning organizations (Hughes et al., 2017). These studies have informed our understanding of dirty work performed by employees of established organizations.

There are some indications that entrepreneurs engage in dirty work. For example, butchers are often owner-managers of their businesses. Indeed, Simpson et al. (2014) investigated the dirty work of butchery. They found that butchers frame their work to build self-esteem to counter others' stigmatization of them (e.g., the ability to withstand the cold of working in a refrigerator, the skill required to cut down a carcass, and the talent of working with knives). These findings contribute to our knowledge of individuals coping with dirty work. Still, the authors did not consider that some of these butchers might also be owner-managers of these ventures (because it was not the study's purpose). Given that entrepreneurs differ from employees in various attributes that likely impact how they experience and respond to work (Douglas et al., 2021; Van Praag et al., 2013), we are interested in how entrepreneurs experience and respond to being considered dirty.

Intersectionality is critical in understanding the impact of dirty work. Dirty work is performed in specific places, which are often linked to other sources of taint (Mavin & Grandy, 2013; Tyler, 2011), including gender (Tracy & Scott, 2006), race (Soni-Sinha & Yates, 2013), class (Gallo & Scrinzi, 2016; Slutskaya et al., 2016), and caste (Mahalingam et al., 2019). For example, in one study on ragpickers in India, the slums were "the place where ragpickers lived [which] intersected with their occupation and caste in tangible ways" (Shepherd et al., 2022, p. 1692).

These sources of dirt can provide a push to entrepreneurship—the necessity of entrepreneurship for individuals born into the lowest caste of a society (Deshpande & Sharma, 2013; Prakash, 2009) and those living in a slum (Rangaswamy & Nair, 2012; Shepherd et al., 2021) with little choice but to enter entrepreneurship. However, we still do not sufficiently understand the nature of the dirty businesses they own and manage, especially in emerging economies where organizing one's business is highly consequential for the entrepreneurs and their families (Bruton et al., 2013; Shepherd et al., 2021; Sutter et al., 2019). Therefore, we need to explore how intersectional dirt shapes an entrepreneur's business approach.

Furthermore, businesses can impact their environment such as by helping to preserve the natural environment. While entrepreneurship research has extolled the social virtues and celebration of entrepreneurs implementing innovative solutions (Avelar et al., 2024; Schaltegger et al., 2016) to environmental problems (Choi & Gray, 2008; Dean & McMullen, 2007), extant research has offered little recognition that efforts to clean up environmental degradation may require rolling up one's sleeves and getting into the dirt. Indeed, much of today's sustainable venturing may not arise from high-tech entrepreneurs but from less glamorous entrepreneurs engaged in dirty work. For instance, take the entrepreneurs who own and manage businesses featured on *Dirty Jobs*. These entrepreneurs are involved in recycling, such as collecting grease from restaurants to make a gasoline alternative, recycling scrap metal, salvaging materials by demolishing mold-ridden buildings, making garden pots out of cow manure, and processing medical waste to be disposed of safely.

In contrast to the picture of celebrated entrepreneurs engaged in sustainable venturing, people engaged in dirty work can be stigmatized by outsiders (Ashforth & Kreiner, 1999; Valtorta et al., 2019) for the dirt associated with their recycling businesses. Therefore, we explore how the stigma from dirt influences individuals' entry into dirty entrepreneurship, the business approach underlying this work, and the impact of these businesses.

Methods

We relied on an inductive qualitative study because we were interested in elaborating on how the stigma from dirt shapes entrepreneurs' businesses and how these businesses impact their environments. This inductive approach is appropriate when there is a substantial gap in the literature that requires new exploration and new theories to address the knowledge void, especially when exploring phenomena that have received little scholarly attention (Edmondson & McManus, 2007). We chose to focus on the dirty work of plastic recycling in a slum in India because this work involves trash that is recognized as dirty (Ashforth & Kreiner, 2014), is based in a dirty location where individuals from the lowest caste of society live and work (Mahalingam et al., 2019; Shepherd et al., 2022), and involves essentially small entrepreneur-led businesses in a fragmented yet substantial industry (McDougall, 2017). Therefore, this plastic-recycling industry represents an exemplified context (see Yin, 2002) in which entrepreneurs are directly engaged in the dirty work of their businesses.

Research Site

Historical Background. Plastic recycling in the Dharavi slum started as a response to the growing waste-management challenges in the area. Currently, 60% of Mumbai's waste is recycled in Dharavi, which has led to the employment of 10,000 to 12,000 workers. Dharavi has transformed into a determined circular economy, with approximately 15,000 factories dedicated to sorting and recycling garbage, plastic, and heavy metals (Chouksey, 2019). These factories specialize in different tasks, creating an ecosystem of production lines in which each entity focuses on a specific aspect of the recycling process. For example, some factories clean and repolish paint cans to be resold to paint shops. This division of labor and specialization has enabled a more efficient and effective recycling process in Dharavi. Further, these recycling factories play a crucial role in processing and repurposing waste materials, creating a sustainable and efficient recycling system (Chouksey, 2019). However, Dharavi's reputation as a slum and its poor sanitation conditions contribute to outsiders' perception that the area has a low Human Development Index (Nair, 2014). Further, outsiders often stigmatize people who live in slums because of slums' physically dirty conditions (Crapolicchio et al., 2022).

Dirty Work. Other than the final stage of the recycling process conducted by big businesses, recycling plastic is dirty work. Indeed, there is dust, dirt, and hard work (Rafiq and Rakesh)—so hard that Rehmat told us he sweats every second at work. (The recycling entrepreneurs' masked names begin with the letter "R," and their employee's names begin with "E"). This work can also be dangerous: "Yes, we recycle everything, but there is a danger for human beings, and if you consider that this is an acid container and if someone uses half of it and the other half is sent for recycling and if we touch it, then it is going to be harmful to us" (Rahat).

Therefore, the work is dirty because it involves "cleaning the garbage of Mumbai" (Rohail), which entails "a lot of dust and dirt" (Ravish) and is physically challenging (Rakeeb). These attributes are consistent with the definition of dirty work provided earlier (e.g., Ashforth & Kreiner, 1999; Hughes et al., 2017; Valtorta et al., 2019). While work may be considered dirty by outsiders and not by insiders, the entrepreneurs we spoke to acknowledged their work as dirty. Furthermore, unlike other studies of dirty work that have assumed (often implicitly) that the owners or managers of businesses do not personally perform dirty work, that is not the case here. Entrepreneurs of small ventures are often considered to be Jacks- or Jills-of-all-trades (Astebro & Thompson, 2011). Indeed, we found that these ventures are small and that the entrepreneurs actively engage in the dirty work themselves and, to a lesser extent, perform additional less dirty tasks, such as clientrelationship management and accounting. Therefore, while the employees often perform dirty work 12 hours per day, six-and-a-half days per week, the entrepreneurs' direct engagement in dirty work is typically not far behind.

While dirty and sometimes dangerous, plastic recycling is simple and easy to learn. An important task that requires some expertise is recognizing the different types of plastic for sorting. Entrepreneurs and employees gain this expertise over time from observation, aided by their specialization in only a few types of plastic.

Plastic-Recycling Industry. The entrepreneurs' ventures are embedded in a local recycling industry. The recycling industry started in Dharavi but has recently moved to other slums within India. The entrepreneurs explained the advantages of locating their businesses in a slum: "[The Dharavi slum is] in the center of Mumbai. The location is very convenient for buyers and sellers. If I get any kind of good, any type of plastic, then all will be sold here" (Ramesh); "[There are] three stations nearby to transport goods" (Rahat); and there are many laborers from Uttar Pradesh (UP), which is essential because "no one else apart from UP people can do such hard work" (Rafiq). However, the entrepreneurs decry Dharavi's electricity and rent prices and are moving to new locations (e.g., Rupesh). For example, Revanth explained why he moved from Dharavi to Vasai: "If I work in the same space as here in Dharavi, I will have to pay a minimum of around 20,000 to 25,000 rupees. Here, I am paying only 10,000 as rent."

Regardless of these changes, the following common characteristics of the industry remain. First, the industry is highly fragmented, so many small firms convert recycled plastic into new products at the end of the recycling process (some larger firms perform the final stages of the recycling process). Second, the entrepreneurs' businesses are highly specialized, so the plastic they receive outside their specialty soon finds a home with a nearby specialist. Third, there are many steps in the recycling process, and few (if any) ventures pursue all of them. Therefore, the entrepreneurs have continued interactions with other entrepreneurs above, below, and horizontally on the value-added recycling chain. Fourth, even with some businesses moving to new locations, they still agglomerate together—the entrepreneurs are near many other entrepreneurs who are competitors, sellers, and buyers. Finally, there is clear and transparent information about the prices of the different recycled plastic products. Therefore, while some price negotiations exist, they are broadly consistent across the industry and can vary daily. Taken together, the entrepreneurs of plastic-recycling businesses actively engage in dirty work and interact with other entrepreneurs in the value-added chain who also engage in dirty work.

Access and Sample

The entrepreneurs (and their businesses) engaged in plastic recycling are typically in slums. We primarily targeted the slum of Dharavi, given its historical importance in the plastic-recycling industry. We recognized and were informed that people who work and live in slums are wary of strangers. Armed with the above knowledge, we formed a team to collect data from entrepreneurs (and their employees) involved in Dharavi's dirty plastic-recycling industry. The second author, a native of India, led a team of three members from a local data-collection agency who were highly familiar with the slum, slum residents, and workers, and the locations of the plastic-recycling businesses. These team members visited the businesses and made appointments to speak to the entrepreneurs, and during each interview, they were also asked to speak to an employee. Our sampling approach changed slightly when we found out how specialized the businesses are concerning the type of plastic (typically specializing in one or two types of plastic) and the stage of the recycling process. Therefore, we purposely sampled (Miles & Huberman, 1994) entrepreneurs of businesses differing in the type of plastic and stage of the recycling process. While we interviewed customers of dirty recycling businesses, we found these customers are themselves dirty recycling business owner-managers (i.e., recycling is a business-to-business endeavor). This recognition required a change in the interview protocol to capture how the entrepreneurs interact and connect with other entrepreneurs specializing in different types of plastic and with entrepreneurs up and down the value chain.

We also made observations to consider the nature of the dirty work, the activities of the entrepreneurs and employees, the functioning of the machinery, and the locations where they stored raw and processed materials. In some instances, we gained permission to take photographs (e.g., see the Appendix).

Data Collection. Consistent with other inductive qualitative studies, we collected data in multiple ways: semistructured interviews, observations, field notes, and secondary data. While we relied primarily on the semistructured interviews with the entrepreneurs and secondarily on those with their employees to build theory, we used observations, field notes, and secondary data to enrich the context of our analysis of the interview data and to triangulate our findings (Yin, 2002). The semistructured interviews with the entrepreneurs involved the following categories of questions: (1) Questions about their demographics, including their age, gender, education, family, previous job (if any), habitation, and how long they have been in their current business. (2) Questions about their recycling-plastic business, including why they are involved in this activity, the production process and location, how the price is set, who their suppliers and customers are, the role and tasks of the entrepreneur, and their working hours, and what critical skills are needed for this business and how does one build them. (3) Questions about their slum, including the advantages and disadvantages of doing business in this region, who else is involved in recycling plastic locally, critical relationships in doing business, why they are essential, and how they are maintained. (4) Questions about employees and their activities, including their roles, tasks, and working hours. (5) Questions about the social and natural environments, including whether the entrepreneur believes their business benefits the local and natural environments and to what extent they are motivated to do so. We used a similar interview protocol for the employees because they were also engaged in dirty work.

Semi-Structured Interviews. The data-collection team conducted face-to-face interviews at each business's worksite. We initiated the study by interviewing 50 entrepreneurs and 20 employees engaged in the dirty business of plastic recycling. We conducted the interviews in Hindi, the local language. With permission, we recorded the interviews, transcribed them, and translated them into English. The second author, fluent in Hindi and English, ensured the interviews were transcribed and translated accurately. On average, the interviews with the entrepreneurs lasted 31 minutes (28–45 minutes), and those with employees lasted about 10 minutes (6–12 minutes). Although we conducted 70 interviews with entrepreneurs, employees, and customers, the first author responsible for coding found that we reached theoretical saturation at approximately 58 interviews. Despite no new theoretical insights, sparks, or categories, we coded all 70 interviews out of respect to those entrepreneur participants and the efforts of the data-collection team. We used all interviews to select illustrative quotes for the text and tables.

Observations. We observed the entrepreneurs and employees at their places of work and, when applicable, asked the entrepreneurs if we could photograph their worksites, materials, and machinery. While we had field notes, photographs, and other undocumented observations, this information was not part of the formal analysis; it provided context for performing and interpreting our formal analysis.

Archival Data. While these businesses are mostly legal entities, they are small, with only a few employees, and some (or most) transactions occur off the books in cash. They are also located in a slum where the government's role is minimal. Therefore, there were no archival records on the specific businesses—no business plans, presentation slides, company reports, or quotes in the media. However, there were newspaper reports of plastic recyclers in Dharavi. We used these reports, like our observations, to inform our interpretation of our data and analysis but not as part of our formal analysis.

Data Analysis. Our coding and analysis were highly iterative, entailing going back and forth between different stages of coding and between the data and the literature. Although our approach was iterative and somewhat messy, we document it here more sequentially.

We began with open coding, allowing the data to speak to us through the interviewees' voices. When possible, we created codes to reflect the interviewees' information using labels consistent with their ordinary meanings. We began to group similar chunks of text under labels that best reflected their content and the interviewees' language in describing them. For some codes, it became apparent that there was variation in the combined chunks, so we opened these larger, more heterogeneous codes to make additional categorizations. For example, the chunks of texts for the original open code of "trust" were further coded to "trust for credit," "trust for reputation," and "trust fellow villagers." After this initial round of open coding, we understood the scope of the entrepreneurs' and employees' perspectives on the dirty work. We then moved to the next stage of coding, which we used to develop models—versions of figures—going back and forth between the theoretical codes, the emerging figures, and often back to the first-order codes to establish a solid foundation for our model in the data. This analysis indicated that the entrepreneurs had two primary foci—internally organizing their dirty businesses and developing relationships with other dirty businesses. This distinction between the internal and external considerations remained salient throughout the various theorizing stages and emerging figures.

Specifically, during this stage, the first author (who took primary responsibility for coding, recoding, and generating figures of the potential model) involved the second author (with local knowledge), and the third author (not involved in data collection, coding, or the initial stages of data analysis). Our subsequent discussions involving the data, codes, and various literatures (e.g., the literature on dirty work [e.g., Ashforth & Kreiner, 1999], intersectionality [e.g., Thatcher et al., 2023], and alternate forms of entrepreneurship [e.g., Welter et al., 2017]) led to many changes. The resulting model and findings are presented below. For instance, we determined that the codes of "expert in specific plastic," "learned about plastic from family," "learns through observation," and "possible scaling limitations" reflect the theme of "specialized knowledge for a dirty business." Similarly, we concluded that the "make a profit," "make a living," "send money to the village," and "emphasis on the environment" codes represent the theme of "rewards of a dirty business." We also found affect-related theoretical codes. Specifically, the primary codes of "satisfied with work," "satisfied with life," and "positive affect" reflect the theoretical theme of "satisfaction with a dirty business." The other affect-related code entails the absence of negative affect, which is related to "no worries with a dirty business." For this code, the primary code became the theoretical theme. When we reconsidered the primary code of "trust," we became convinced that while related, the entrepreneurs clearly distinguished "trust dynamics" and their "reputation dynamics," so we kept them separated and theoretically coded them as such.

The next stage of our inductive theorizing involved linking the theoretical codes. The authors not engaged in coding (the second and third authors) pushed the first author who was responsible for coding to justify (using data) how the constructs link. That is, we discussed the arrows of the figure. We then stepped back and quizzed the second author with local knowledge about these entrepreneurs, their ventures, and the location to see if the findings made sense. All researchers reflected on the model's validity vis-à-vis press reports. Ultimately, we crafted a model that reflects the data.

Findings

A key challenge with plastic-recycling businesses is the dirtiness of the work. People already considered dirty because they live and work in slums and were born into the lowest caste appear to have few options but to perform dirty work. One of the few opportunities for these individuals is recycling, especially plastic recycling. The nature of plastic recycling is tough, dirty, and only minimally profitable.

First, these businesses are located in the slum because this location allows for the noisy and otherwise polluting work of recycling and provides cheap rent and other advantages (e.g., Ramesh, Ravi, and Rizwan). For example, Ramesh told us that he locates his business in the slum for the following reason: "I cannot work elsewhere because the machine makes sound; the public around us will shout/complain. You cannot even talk due to the sound. If we try to set up in other areas, people would object and complain." The slum is close to large populations of people (the source of materials), low-cost labor (i.e., people move from poor villages to slums for work and cheap housing), suppliers and buyers, and rail transportation for those shipping materials to clients outside the area (e.g., Rahat, Rafiq, Rassol, Rehmat, Ranbir, and Ravish).

Second, without access to sophisticated machinery and operating on a small scale with small profits, the entrepreneurs and their employees face physically challenging and dirty work. For example, Ramesh described the work as "hard work and dirty work"; Rafiq responded to our question about whether people respect him for his work with a one-word answer, "No"; and Rahat described how the work involved "danger for human beings" and how the dirtiness of the work meant that others looked down on him:

> People think that we are collecting trash, and that is a bad thing. Certain foreigners visit this place because it stinks, and the local guy who comes with them also does not introduce us to them because there is nothing too important about us. We are just collecting trash.

Despite the dirtiness of the work, the entrepreneurs must persist with these tasks for most of the day (at least 12 hours [e.g., Rajat, Rahat, Rafi, and Ruhan]), for most of the week (at least six-and-a-half days [e.g., Rahat, Rohail, Raman, and Rehman]), and for most of their lives (i.e., they had no plans to retire [Ramesh] or simply planned to pass their businesses on to their sons [e.g., Rupesh] but only if their sons do not have any other options [Rohail]), with some having a general notion that they may someday return to their villages.

Third, outsiders stigmatize these workers based on their dirty work, which is, in turn, exacerbated by intersectionality. These entrepreneurs are from the lowest caste of society and live and work in the dirty slum. For example, many of the entrepreneurs that we interviewed belong to the lowest caste, known as *Dalits*, or represent other backward castes that have migrated from rural India to Mumbai. People from lower castes are stigmatized and discriminated against by those from higher castes (Mosse, 2018). For example, *Dalits* were previously called "untouchables" (Mahalingam et al., 2019). They are so marked by stigma that people dare not touch them. Furthermore, these entrepreneurs live and work in a slum that both the entrepreneurs and outsiders consider dirty—a place "without access to water and sanitation, garbage collection, or security of tenure… often characterized by residential crowding, exposure to environmental hazards, and social fragmentation and exclusion" (Nolan, 2015: 59)—further exacerbating their stigmatization and discrimination by those living outside the slum. For example, Rudresh told us that "persons seeing it [the recycling business] from outside see it as a dirty business." Over their lifetimes, these entrepreneurs face considerable constraints (cognitive, social, psychological, and physical) arising from their dirty caste (Mahalingam et al., 2019) and dirty location such that entering into a dirty business is one of the few alternatives they have.[2]

Finally, persistence requires efficient internal operations and interdependence with other entrepreneurs (and their dirty businesses) for inputs and outputs. We found that the entrepreneurs' intersectional sources of dirtiness shaped their business approach and external relationships. Specifically, their experience of being considered dirty led them to pursue a *simple business approach* that relies on creating and maintaining a *clean reputation for their dirty recycling businesses*. Given the importance of this simple business approach and a clean reputation for cooperation with business partners, we developed a model that explains how these entrepreneurs persist and, ultimately, benefit the natural environment despite the natural environment's lack of importance to any one entrepreneur.

Cornerstones of Dirty Entrepreneurship

In the following subsections, we highlight why individuals create and run a dirty business with a simple approach—a simple internal and external approach to the business. We explain the simple internal approach through the cornerstones of an entrepreneur's dirty recycling business—the entrepreneur's modest goals (Cornerstone 1), narrow-scope strategy (Cornerstone 2), satisfaction (Cornerstone 3), and no worries (Cornerstone 4) (with representative quotes in the text and Table 1). We then link (i.e., make explicit the mechanisms underlying the relationships between) the cornerstones of the entrepreneur's simple internal approach to the dirty business. We then highlight the entrepreneur's simple external approach, which is driven by trust and reputation dynamics between the entrepreneurs of dirty businesses. Consistent with most inductive theorizing, we present our model after the findings section.

Cornerstone 1: Modest Goals for a Dirty Business. Entrepreneurs set modest goals for their dirty businesses' outcomes; business goals are the entrepreneur's near-term objectives for business outcomes (Baum & Locke, 2004). Specifically, the entrepreneurs entered this dirty business because they were constrained from attractive employment options outside the

Table 1. The Entrepreneurs' Strategy for Their Dirty Recycling Businesses.

Modest goals for a dirty recycling business
"Money is not fixed. I concentrate on the profit. If I can sell a part and make a profit, I use that, and the remainder has no purpose. The part below the mixer, it is made from a different material than the body, so we know what part will be sold where." (Rajeshwaree, customer) "All this business is in darkness. I mean, suppose there is a person. I take the stuff at the rate of 30 rupees. Another dealer rang him up to say that he'll give him 32 rupees for the same stuff. Then I'll come to know he went to the dealer who was offering 32 rupees and was increasing the price for me." (Rohail) "Prices for plastic are not fixed. Mostly we do business. As the price rises and drops, there is a competitive market. In that, even I have competitors. If they are competing with me, if they reduce the price, clients buy from them. So, nothing is fixed in life. As per me, everything changes." (Raman, customer) "Today, nobody is working just to save the environment. Everybody in the world only thinks about their profit. They may lie about it in public. Not even the NGOs [nongovernmental organizations]. Everybody wants to make a living and money. The NGOs also need money to run their organization. How can you say that they are doing it to protect the environment?" (Ravi)
Narrow scope for a dirty recycling business
"I work with polycarbonate and POM [polyoxymethylene]. Polycarbonate mainly gets produced from electrical switches, and POM mainly gets produced in the engineering line from car parts. They are used for manufacturing hard and soft plastic. We are highly specialized in the plastic business." (Rafi) "There are 50 types of plastic. We deal in Delrin. The material supplied may have different types of plastic in it, we have to sort the material. The plastic that we don't need is waste material. We only need Delrin. This machine that you are seeing here is a grinder. We grind the Delrin in this machine, and then we recycle it in the process machine." (Revanth) "Sorting is not done on the basis of color only but on the basis of quality also. Like, if you decide to prepare a box, then this box cannot be prepared by using this material. Soft and hard materials are different. We understand quality based on our eyes and hands. Even touching gives us an indication of the quality." (Rudresh) "From the beginning, my father used to deal in all these plastic types. He taught us to do that. My father said that if you know how to deal with all these products, you won't have to worry about them in the future. You can deal with anything in the future." (Ravi) "Fluctuation is a reason for profit or loss. In reality, if you have a lot of capital, you can plan things. Big capital is required for making big turnover/profits. You can plan. If you have more capital, you will plan. You will not fail in anything. You will be on top in machinery. You will be on top in labor too. You will have skill." (Revanth) "There is a shortage of space for me to deal with different things. The size of Godown is 1,500 square feet. If I want to deal with other kinds of plastic, I would get the materials, but I don't have adequate space to keep those things and process them." (Ramesh) "Till we are healthy/physically active, we can earn. Once we stop being healthy, everything stops." (Rajeshwaree)
Satisfaction with a dirty recycling business
"Actually, I like this work. We don't just sit at one place; we keep moving, and that's how a workout happens. We work hard, and I enjoy it. For business, we go here and there, purchase and sell the stock, so I liked this business, and that's why I continue it." (Rasool) "Like people succeed after studying, but this business makes an uneducated person a millionaire. Here, uneducated people are millionaires who don't even know how to sign… Those people who have flourished in this business are all uneducated." (Roy) "I am working for this, and in the entire Dharavi, you will get only three laborers for this work I do." (Rafiq) "In 17 years, I made a home, and I am bringing up kids." (Ribhu)

(continued)

Table 1. (continued)

No worries with a dirty recycling business
"I am comfortable right now because I have been in this business for so many years. There are people under me who do the work. At a scrap shop, I would have to run behind people to bring the stuff from garbage pickers. But now, a line has been set; it's in place now. That's why I am sitting comfortably." (Rohail)
"I learned about this and I have learned how to manage everything. My father started this business and it has been there since that time. I don't have to put so much effort that others have to put." (Raheed)
"The labor that we hire, it is difficult for them to work. But there is no difficulty for us. We are four brothers and all of us are skilled workers. So we do the work ourselves. See that is my brother over there and I pack the material myself. So we don't have any worry about labor" (Rupesh)
"If there would be competition then I would have worry but I don't have competition." (Rafiq)
"From the beginning, my father used to deal in all these types of plastic. He taught us to do that. My father said that if you know how to deal in all these types products then you won't have to worry about it in the future. You can deal with anything in the future." (Ravi)

slum and were influenced by their families' and others' recommendations that they could make money from this business. The entrepreneurs emphasized the profit motive (e.g., Rahat, Rajeshwaree, Raghu, and Ravi). However, this profit motive is tempered by the entrepreneurs' knowledge of their competition and the ceiling on the price of products in this dirty industry. With low barriers to entry and little loyalty from clients, it is not surprising that there is considerable competition. For example, Rahat noted, "There are a lot of players in it [recycled materials], and that is why there is high competition." Indeed, we heard from multiple entrepreneurs that the price of loyalty is 1 rupee (e.g., Rasool) and that there are no hard feelings about the lack of loyalty based on the recognition that everyone is doing business and needs to survive. Moreover, with some complicated macrolevel factors affecting the price of their products (e.g., the price of plastic depends on the price of oil [e.g., Raman]), the entrepreneurs and everyone in the market knows the spot price (i.e., the price of virgin plastic—unused material [Raman]). Therefore, considering the constraints of their opportunity set and the intense industry rivalry, the entrepreneurs set modest profit goals for their dirty businesses.

In addition to modest business goals, dirty entrepreneurs gave little thought to environmental or societal goals. Although we tried entering the field and approaching the data without prior expectations, we were surprised at how little these entrepreneurs emphasize or value their role in helping the natural environment through recycling. Some indicated that such a contribution occurs in a stage of the recycling process they are not involved in, so they do not give themselves credit (e.g., Rohail). Others believe it is the government's job to look after the natural environment and that if they do such a service, the government should pay them a subsidy (e.g., Ramesh, Rafi). When we asked Raghu whether his venturing protects the natural environment, he responded, "That is not our kind of work. All we do is sort the material from the rubbish. We get and sell it. That's all." In response to a follow-up question about whether he is protecting the natural environment, Raghu further responded, "No." Similarly, Rupesh said, "Cleaning the environment is not my job." Still, others went along with our questions about helping the natural environment, offering the one-word answer "yes" with no elaboration (e.g., Roy) or acknowledging the potential harm from their dirty work for others (e.g., Rahat, Raman), thus indicating they have given this issue little thought such that it likely does not motivate their dirty entrepreneurship. There was one exception. He was different because he was a qualified lawyer with a late-stage venture.

Cornerstone 2: Narrow Scope for a Dirty Business. The entrepreneurs engaged in the dirty recycling industry pursue a narrow-scope strategy—focus on serving a selective niche (Woo & Cooper, 1981). First, they focus on a specific stage of the recycling process for a specific type of plastic. For example, Rudresh specializes in sorting and grinding materials and then passes them on to the next entrepreneur to add value: "After grinding, I deliver material to a certain person, my buyer. Then he receives it and washes it…and produces granules." Furthermore, the entrepreneurs explained how their dirty businesses only focus on specific plastics—plastic water bottles (Ramesh), soft plastic (Rahat), hard plastic (Raghu, Rupesh, Rasool, Ravi), Delrin hard plastic (Revanth), polycarbonate and polyoxymethylene (Rafi), PPHD (Rajeshwaree), PP (Revanth), silicon polycarbonate (Randhir), nylon (Rafiq, Raman), and white and black plastic (Rehman). This specialization situated the entrepreneur's business in a specific position within the value-added chain, minimizing competition (vis-à-vis a broader scope strategy). While specialized knowledge seems essential to an effective dirty business (Rajeshwaree, Rajinder, and Randhir), it is relatively easy to acquire (although not all agree with this characterization, e.g., Ravi). Indeed, some entrepreneurs told us they had acquired this expertise within a couple of months of observing others perform the related tasks. Even employees can acquire this knowledge "by seeing each other. It's actually learned by seeing other sorters and by experience" (Rudresh); they "learn things with experience and observation" (Ramesh), and there is no additional training required (Rohail).

While entrepreneurs gain highly specialized knowledge suited to a narrow-scope strategy for their dirty businesses, they face two constraints that limit the scope of their businesses, which are unrelated to expert knowledge. The first constraint is space. Slums are cheap but highly populated with high density (running a business and living often happen in the same dwelling). The entrepreneurs do not have the space to expand (e.g., Ramesh, Rohail, Ravish, Ramadin). For example, some need to dry the plastic in the sun to break it down for recycling but have run out of room on their roofs (e.g., Rafiq). They cannot expand to land outside the slum because the dirtiness of the work may be forbidden, and they recognize that their low socioeconomic status would make leasing land impossible. Although some entrepreneurs have started to use dryers (e.g., Rashid), enabling them to overcome the space limitation, they have bumped into the second limitation—access to financial resources. The entrepreneurs reported difficulty accessing capital to expand their businesses (e.g., Ramesh, Rithik, Ruhan), and some are even prohibited from borrowing money because of their religion (e.g., Rafi). With low profits, savings for self-funding a broader scope strategy are minimal.

Cornerstone 3: Satisfaction With a Dirty Recycling Business. Besides acknowledging the work as dirty and hard, the entrepreneurs expressed satisfaction with their venturing and life, where satisfaction is an individual's summary assessment of how much one likes something (Veenhoven, 1996; see illustrative examples in Table 1). For example, when we asked Rahat if he was satisfied with his dirty recycling business, he said, "Yes. It gives me enough to live my life, and I do not have to ask for money from anyone. I am my own businessman, and I can introduce myself as a business owner of a particular business." Similarly, Rupesh reflected that his business "feels good" and stated, "I like it. Now I don't have any other knowledge, so then I will like the thing I have knowledge about."

Indeed, in one way or another, the entrepreneurs expressed positivity with their work, describing it in the following ways: "Yes, very satisfied" (Ranbir); "I like this business, and that's why I continue it" (Rasool); and "I feel good. Yes [I am satisfied]" (Revanth). The only exception to the entrepreneurs' satisfaction with their business (and life) is Rakeeb, who expressed dissatisfaction over the last 10 years of running his business.

Cornerstone 4: No Worries With a Dirty Business

Again, despite acknowledging the dirty work and the limitations to scaling their businesses, the entrepreneurs rarely expressed negative emotions arising from their dirty businesses. Indeed, many expressed the absence of negative emotions and stress—"no worries." Raheed told us he does not worry about his business because "for me, this is easy. I know everything about this business." Rajeshwaree indicated that he has some money-related problems, but "there are no other problems," and Raees indicated that he does not have problems with clients because he refuses to continue working with clients who do not pay on time. Similarly, we had the following exchange with Raghu, who indicated that he does not face any difficulties in his dirty business:

> [Interviewer] And what are the difficulties in procuring material? [Raghu] There are no difficulties for us. [Interviewer] About labor? [Raghu] No, nothing. We deal in rubbish. This is not a company's work that we should have any tension. [Interviewer] Okay, but don't you have any problems at all? [Raghu] No, nothing. [Interviewer] Getting the material and selling it? [Raghu] No, nothing. [Interviewer] And this is a common thing—nothing special about this kind of work? [Raghu] No, nothing like that. We deal with rubbish—things picked up from the street, broken pieces of glass, plastic, or other things used for tea. For example, buttermilk (*chhas*) is made from yogurt (*dahi*) or something like that.

Therefore, the entrepreneurs do not experience many worries about their dirty businesses.

Mechanisms: Dynamics Linking the Cornerstones of a Dirty Business

As detailed above, the cornerstones of the model are an entrepreneur's (1) modest goals for a dirty business, (2) narrow-scope strategy for a dirty business, (3) satisfaction with a dirty business, and (4) no worries with a dirty business. The following bidirectional dynamics are the mechanisms that link these cornerstones.

Attending Dynamics. *Attending dynamics* are the attention-based mechanisms that link the cornerstones of modest goals and narrow-scope strategy for a dirty business (and vice versa). Attention is "the noticing, encoding, interpreting, and focusing of time and energy" on strategic issues and responses (Ocasio, 1997, p. 189). The entrepreneurs' modest goals for financial returns from their dirty businesses reflect a clear-eyed understanding of the high competition in the various plastic-recycling subindustries and the risk of a more ambitious strategy. The entrepreneurs have decided they can best meet their modest goals by focusing attention (i.e., time and energy) on a niche market—a specific type of plastic and a specific stage in the process.

Entrepreneurs are driven to focus their attention on exploiting a niche and building specialized knowledge for their niche because they believe this is the best *response* to ensure a profit without a high risk of loss given the *issues* of high competition (despite their recognition of a modest profit). For example, when we asked why his venture focuses exclusively on plastic bottles, Ramesh told us that "there is one other businessman who deals exclusively in plastic bottles" and that there is little competition between them because "we have an understanding." Such modest goals focus these entrepreneurs' attention (time and resources) on pursuing a narrow-scope strategy that ignores information about opportunities and threats outside the realm of that focus. For instance, the entrepreneurs focus their attention on issues related to operational efficiency arising from labor shortages and costs (e.g., Rafi, Rakeeb, Ramesh, and Rithik), constrained space (Ramesh, Ramadin, and Rehman), increasing electricity (Randir, Rizwan, and Rohail) and rent prices (e.g., Raees, Rafiq, Ramadin, Rasool, and Rohail), and the dynamics of the spot price for virgin plastic (Rizwan, Rohail, Ruhan). These concrete operational issues consume the entrepreneurs' attention, so they give little thought to more strategic issues or macroenvironmental trends.

As the entrepreneurs pursue a niche strategy based on specialized knowledge (i.e., relatively easy to obtain) and recognize that they face substantial obstacles to scaling their operations, it makes little sense to have grandiose goals of substantial profits and take the risk of income loss from pursuing them. For example, Rafi told us how scaling limitations have influenced his business goals: "A loan is forbidden in our religion… Otherwise, our production would increase. If we produce 10 tons of material, it would increase to 100 tons. But I cannot do that. I am happy with 10 tons itself. I am happy with lower-level work." Rajeshwaree made a similar point about access to resources determining reasonable goals: "Whoever has more money will work on a large scale, and the ones who have less will work on a small scale, and the scale of operations determines the earnings."

Indeed, by noticing, encoding, and interpreting others, the entrepreneurs see the niche strategy implemented and the modest returns generated. Unable to pursue a different strategy because of scaling limitations and unwilling to pursue a different strategy because of the risk of competition-related issues (especially the high personal costs of any loss from current income streams), they use their learning to set goals for realistic targets. This way, feedback on their narrow-scope strategy helps the entrepreneurs set modest goals (e.g., Rakeep and Roshan). For example, Rafi explained the relationship between the narrow-scope strategy and his modest business goals:

> The poor remain poor [a small supplier remains a small supplier], and the richer person gets richer. The more turnover you do, the more you would get that much profit. But if you do not have money, you will have less turnover. So, if turnover is lower, profit would decrease. Then the earnings would be smaller. [Interviewer] So, the level cannot increase? [Rafi] No.

Competence Dynamics. *Competence dynamics* are the competence-based mechanisms that link the cornerstones of a narrow-scope strategy for satisfaction with a dirty business (and vice versa). Competence is the degree to which an organization can "reliably meet or exceed" its operational objectives (McGrath et al., 1995, p. 251). Developing and using specialized knowledge based on their dirty businesses' narrow-scope strategy gives the entrepreneurs career satisfaction. Entrepreneurs are satisfied that they have gained knowledge and are gaining competencies that few people have (despite the ease with which they obtained them). For example, Roy indicated his satisfaction with his competencies in categorizing different types of plastic: "We have done the training, so we have enough knowledge about it like people who study a PhD. Slowly, they gain knowledge of their subject. So you can say we have done a PhD in this field." Also, the obstacles to scaling seem so impossible that the entrepreneurs are satisfied to operate within these constraints. Rustam told us he needed more space and money but then responded to our question about whether he was satisfied with his business in the following way: "I have to be satisfied. We don't have any option [to change the situation]."

Satisfied with their dirty businesses, the entrepreneurs are happy to continue using the specialized competences to reinforce their niche position. Furthermore, the entrepreneurs' satisfaction with their businesses does not create the need, urgency, or energy required to acquire competences to overcome scaling obstacles to increase the scope of their dirty businesses. For example, when we asked Rohail if he would grow his business, he responded, "Yes, this business will grow; it is still running." Growth to him meant his business would continue as is (i.e., that it would survive) and he was satisfied with this outcome.

Negating Dynamics. *Negating dynamics* refer to counteraction-based mechanisms that link the cornerstones of modest goals for and no worries with a dirty business (and vice versa) where one construct overcomes the potential impact on another construct. Specifically, by setting modest business goals, the entrepreneur can likely meet these expectations, providing little scope for disappointment (and other negative emotions)—the modest business goals counteract the potential worry that could otherwise arise from such a marginal business. For example, Rudresh reflected on his goals and the future:

> We have been working hard in this business, eating food and meeting basic needs, and our family is happy. Marriages are happening here. I am able to save some money, and marriages within the family are happening here. I have been managing my family's expenses. I do not need anything else.

Because their modest goals set expectations with little room for disappointment, the entrepreneurs experience no worries with their dirty businesses.

However, without any worries or the associated negative emotions over their business performance, the entrepreneurs are not motivated to change their current situations by adjusting their ventures' goals to achieve more. They lack a sense of urgency or need to stretch themselves by setting higher goals (financial or nonfinancial [Rahat, Raghu, Rajat, Ranbir, Rehan, and Rohail]). In this way, the no worries counteract the potential motivators to broaden the scope of the business. For example, when we asked Ramesh about his business's future, he said, "The business is set. I don't need to do anything else." When we asked about five or more years into the future, he responded, "I will do this only." Similarly, Raheed told us that for him, running this business is

> …easy. I know everything about this business. Yes, I learned about this, and I have learned how to manage everything. My father started this business, and it has been there since then. I don't have to put in as much effort as others. [Interviewer] When it comes to earning money, are you satisfied with that? [Raheed] 100% satisfied.

Affective Dynamics. *Affective dynamics* are the emotion-based mechanisms that link the cornerstones of satisfaction and no worries with a dirty business (and vice versa) where emotion "encompasses the general phenomenon of subjective feelings (Barsade, 2002, p. 646) of pleasure or displeasure (Barrett et al., 2007)" (Cardon et al., 2012, p. 2). The entrepreneurs' satisfaction with their dirty businesses can impact their experience of no worries through the mechanism of affective dynamics. Rupesh told us that he was earning money and paying off debt, and we asked him how he felt. He told us, "It feels good." He also told us, "Right now, the market has been a bit slow for a few months; that is why there is not much income. But then, if it is bad today, it will be good tomorrow." His positive feelings for his business seem to help negate negative impressions about his current earnings.

Moreover, the entrepreneurs' no worries about their dirty businesses can impact their experience of satisfaction through the mechanism of affective dynamics. Having no worries is associated with the absence of negative emotions, suggesting that the entrepreneurs feel there are few, if any, obstacles to them maintaining a sense of satisfaction with their dirty situations (business, place, and caste). Therefore, the affective dynamics mean the entrepreneurs' satisfaction and no worries are mutually reinforcing.

Connecting Entrepreneurs of Dirty Businesses

While the findings above focus on the entrepreneurs' simple internal approach to their dirty businesses, they also depend on external relationships to the bounds of their businesses. Specifically, given their narrow-scope strategy of handling a specific type of plastic and operating at a single stage of the recycling process, the entrepreneurs depend on connecting with entrepreneurs in the preceding (i.e., suppliers) and subsequent (i.e., customers) stages of the value-added chain. These relationships are formed and maintained through trust and reputation.

Entrepreneurs Trusting Other Entrepreneurs of Dirty Businesses. The entrepreneurs trust other entrepreneurs of other dirty businesses in the value-added chain. Trust is the "willingness of a trustor to be vulnerable to the actions of a trustee based on the expectation that the trustee will perform a particular action" (Colquitt et al., 2007, p. 909) and is necessary for these entrepreneurs because sometimes the plastic materials are exchanged based on credit—the focal entrepreneur receives or gives credit—without formal contracts or enforcement mechanisms. Instead, the entrepreneurs rely on each other's words and flexibility based on established relationships. For example, Revanth talked about the importance of trust when things do not go as expected:

> Let me explain to you. I know that you are the supplier of the Delrin and will supply only the material we need. We have formed good business connections. We pay them in cash or by bank, and they supply the material. Sometimes, some other material gets mixed in with the material we need, and we inform them about it. If the person says to remove it by washing it, we will do that, and if that is not possible, he will ask us to return it. We have that trust in each other.

While trust may be built over time, even new clients are afforded trust. For instance, Ramesh said, "I can also do this for new people. There is no contract at all, and this is all about relationships. If you keep a good relationship with me, I will give you more goods. If I trust you, I will also give you the credit." These entrepreneurs trust clients (other dirty business owner-managers) by making themselves vulnerable to opportunism, but clients also trust them. Indeed, Raghu emphasized the importance of one's word in this dirty work: "You should pay them at the promised time. If you promised them after 1 month, you must pay them accordingly. Your word must have value."

Entrepreneurs Maintaining a Clean Reputation With Other Entrepreneurs of Dirty Businesses. Trustworthy behavior contributes to the reputation of dirty businesses among the entrepreneurs of other dirty businesses in the value-added chain, that is, reputation dynamics. Reputation is the "perceptual representation of a company's past actions and future prospects that describes the firm's overall appeal to all its key constituents when compared to other leading rivals' (Fombrun, 1996, p. 72). These entrepreneurs value their good reputations and are motivated to maintain them. While entrepreneurs express the importance of a strong reputation, it is not a distinctive attribute that gives their businesses an advantage. Instead, it is necessary to attract clients for their businesses to survive. As Rasool explained, a strong reputation is essential but does not buy much loyalty in terms of price (perhaps 2 rupees):

> Everyone has their own rates. Some don't have a good name in the market, so people are scared. So, people think it is fine if we buy or sell it for less than 2 rupees, but our money should not get stuck. There is a sort of trust that our money will not get stuck. Because it happens often, their money gets stuck, and they incur a heavy loss.

In contrast, a negative reputation largely excludes an entrepreneur from the industry, in which word of mouth is quick and effective. For example, Rahat explained how he was conscious of "not rocking the boat" to maintain a clean reputation:

> Sometimes we feel like disagreeing, but we cannot do that because if I disagree with one person, then all the other people would come to know about it, and it's not good for me… If my name is spoiled in the community, no one would come to me to sell anything.

Indeed, Rajeshwaree explained the consequences of an entrepreneur's spoiled reputation:

> There is nothing much here. Jagdish, an IPS pass-out, did not work as an IPS officer and started making these plastic grains in Mulund; he passed away. No one wants to work with his wife. If she agrees to 50 rupees, she will then only pay 47 rupees. I told her I wanted to earn 2 rupees. If you take that also, how will I earn? Whereas, with Jagdish [the husband], things were very different…full trust and transparency.

Therefore, a positive reputation does not generate business or provide much, if any, price premium, but a negative reputation causes one to lose business. Those with a spoiled reputation find surviving in the dirty industry difficult.

Trust and reputation mutually reinforce each other in the entrepreneurs' relationships with entrepreneurs of other dirty businesses—trust and reputation dynamics. To develop and maintain a strong reputation, entrepreneurs are willing to trust others, be trustworthy themselves, and even remain flexible when others may have breached their trust. This willingness to trust others helps build trust and a reputation as a good partner worth working with. Similarly, by displaying trustworthiness—paying on time, keeping one's word, and delivering what is expected—the entrepreneurs gain a reputation as good partners. A strong reputation is necessary for a dirty business in this industry. Indeed, those with a spoiled image find it challenging to establish relationships, which are critical for purchasing the inputs for and selling the outputs of their dirty businesses. For additional illustrative examples, see Table 2.

Table 2. Relationships Between Dirty Recycling Businesses in the Value-Added Chain.

Building and maintaining trust with other dirty recycling businesses
"Yes, that goods do not come on an agreement, but they come on our trust. You will only call me at that time because you have trust that I am not going to run away with your money." (Rahat)
"No, no new customers. We don't always do business with new people. Only when you are connected with them, it is better to do business with them." (Raghu)
"If they feel that the outside party is good and trustworthy, then they will not hesitate to invest 1 or 2 or even 300,000 Rupees." (Rupesh)
"That depends on trust. If they have trust, then they will come anytime to take, and who doesn't have trust, they take cash. Like we don't know each other, so I won't lend to you; rather, I will take cash. Then later on, when we get to know each other, then we can lend." (Roy)
Building and maintaining a clean reputation with other dirty recycling businesses
"My responsibility toward my business is to produce the material, make the turnover, try to earn more money. Keep your records/reputation clear in the market. Keep your transactions transparent. The name should not be spoiled." (Rupesh)
"My production is only about 50 tons. It is obvious that I cannot feed anyone with it because that 50 tons will hardly make any difference. But if you say my name in any fiber industry starting from Daman to Ankleshwar and tell them that you need Rajat's fiber, everyone would know about me. That is the respect that I am talking about. Even if they have not seen my face, still they know what product I make here." (Rajat)

Discussion

The purpose of this study was to explore how an entrepreneur's stigma from dirt shapes the organizing of their business and to what effect. The above findings lead to an intersectionality model of entrepreneurs' dirty recycling businesses.

An Intersectionality Model of Entrepreneurs' Dirty Recycling Businesses

Figure 1 illustrates our intersectionality model of entrepreneurs' dirty recycling businesses. The model starts with outsiders stigmatizing individuals because of their dirt—their intersecting sources of dirt in caste and place. This stigma pushes individuals into dirty entrepreneurship and shapes how they run their dirty businesses. The cornerstones of the simple internal workings of these entrepreneurs' dirty businesses are their (1) modest goals for their dirty businesses, (2) narrow-scope strategy for their dirty businesses, (3) satisfaction with their dirty businesses, and (4) no worries with their dirty businesses. Dynamics connect these cornerstones. Attentional dynamics connect the entrepreneurs' modest goals to their dirty businesses' narrow-scope strategy (and vice versa). Competence dynamics connect the dirty businesses' narrow-scope strategy to the entrepreneurs' satisfaction with their dirty businesses (and vice versa). Negating dynamics connect the entrepreneurs' modest goals and no worries with their dirty businesses (and vice versa). Finally, affective dynamics connect the entrepreneurs' satisfaction with their dirty businesses to no worries with their dirty businesses (and vice versa).

The cornerstones of the entrepreneurs' simple external approach to their dirty businesses involve cooperation with other dirty businesses based on the dynamics of trust and reputation. This cooperation allows an entrepreneur's dirty business to specialize its operations to

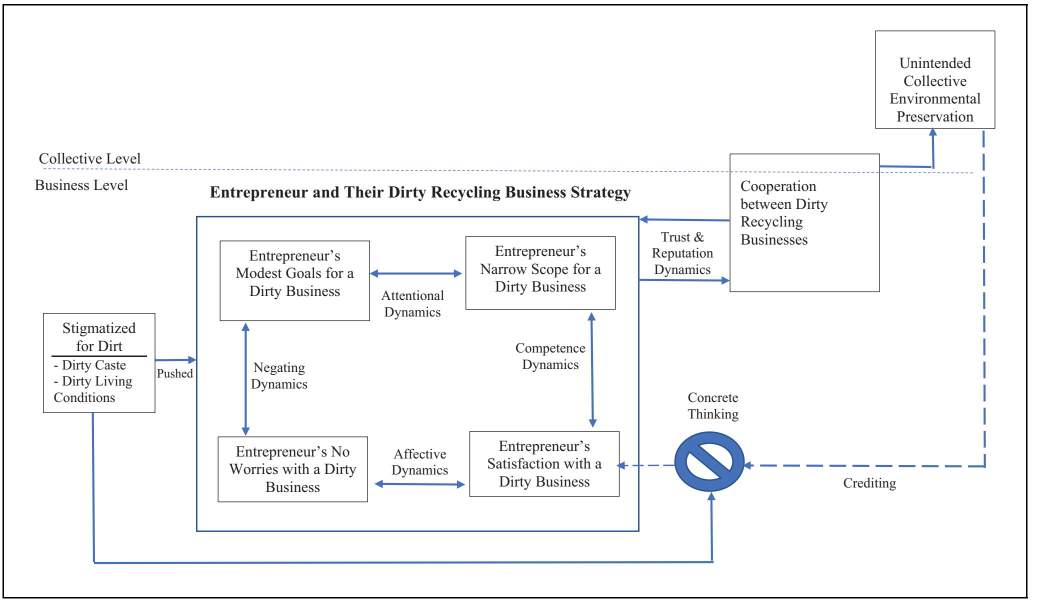

Figure 1. An intersectionality model of entrepreneurs' dirty recycling businesses.

achieve the entrepreneur's modest goal—a modest profit. The cooperation also produces a collective social good that none of the entrepreneurs intend or desire.

A Collective Outcome Desired by None

The collective engaged in the dirty recycling industry delivers the social good of helping preserve the natural environment, an outcome not directly desired by any of these entrepreneurs. Indeed, each dirty business can be considered a cog. The cogs must fit together for the entrepreneurs to generate some profit (their modest goals) through their dirty businesses (narrow-scope strategy). This fit is achieved through the entrepreneurs' trustworthiness and clean reputations. With numerous cogs interlinked, something substantial is achieved. Indeed, while the entrepreneurs are not motivated to work as a means of improving the natural environment (with one exception), in performing their small part (turning the cog) and connecting with other entrepreneurs (fitting one's cog to other cogs) and with the other entrepreneurs all doing the same, the collective achieves an outcome that the individual entrepreneurs do not conceptualize—namely, preserving the natural environment.

There are numerous studies highlighting the positive impact that recycling businesses in slums in developing economies have on the natural environment (e.g., Agarwal et al., 2005; Elrayies, 2016). Indeed, Dharavi's recycling impact has been described in the following way:

> Dharavi is a fully functioning economy. With 5,000 businesses and 15,000 single-room factories (many of which focus on the recycling and sorting of Mumbai's waste), the slum earns a total of U.S. 1 billion annually, allowing most of the workers to earn well above the country's minimum wage of 150 rupees a day…Nothing is wasted in Dharavi, from plastics and car batteries to computer parts, fluorescent lights, ballpoint pens, plastic bags, paper, cardboard boxes, wire hangers and any scrap material. Its economy runs on recycling and reusing waste…In Mumbai alone, 9,400 tons of waste is generated daily. With 15,000 factories

> dedicated to recycling and sorting Mumbai's waste, Dharavi employs 250,000 people just for this. Eighty percent of Mumbai's solid waste is recycled and given new life within Dharavi, an awesome recycling machine without which Mumbai would choke in its piled-up trash. Dharavi has connections and relationships with most operations and restaurants around the city to send them their waste to be dealt with. Consider it a little like a recycling mafia chain. Sixty percent of Mumbai's plastic waste is recycled at Dharavi. Compare that to Singapore's mere 19% recycling rate (and that's with proper government recycling initiatives), and it's pretty impressive. (Mascarenhas, 2018).

While entrepreneurs often capitalize on their businesses' action to preserve the natural environment to enhance their own reputations (Mrkajic et al., 2019; York et al., 2016), this is not the case with these entrepreneurs of dirty businesses.

The entrepreneurs of dirty recycling businesses do not try to capitalize on the good they are doing for the natural environment because they prefer not to think about the "others" outside the slum who may benefit from their recycling work. Interactions with these clean others—outside their dirty businesses, caste, and place—exacerbate stigmatization issues, including reinforcing or further diminishing the entrepreneurs' self-esteem, generating more social rejection, and increasing problems with their physical and mental health (Mutiso et al., 2018; Nolan, 2015). The entrepreneurs believe they are helpless to remove their constraints (e.g., Rajat, Raheed, and Ranbir), so there is little purpose in trying to change the minds of those who stigmatize them. Therefore, when possible, they try to avoid thinking about these others, including the benefits to others arising from one's recycling efforts.

Furthermore, the entrepreneurs' social exclusion and preference for isolation compounds the "us versus them" mentality. The entrepreneurs of dirty businesses do not want to consider their dirty businesses as helping the people who stigmatize them (e.g., Rohail, Raghu, and Rupesh). This apathy toward "others" also extends to the government. The entrepreneurs of dirty recycling businesses believe it is the government's job to preserve the natural environment. They feel the government has abandoned them and, with considerable distrust of the government, do not want to be doing the government's job—at least for free (e.g., Ramesh, Rafi).

Finally, entrepreneurs likely have a scarcity mindset that obstructs their thinking about abstract business outcomes. In particular, poverty can induce a scarcity mindset—namely, when the "poor face tight budgets and income volatility, which requires them to juggle with current and upcoming expenditures. These urgent demands consume elementary cognitive resources, such as attention, executive control, and working memory, leaving fewer resources for non-pressing demands. As a consequence, financial scarcity forces the poor into counterproductive behaviors that may perpetuate the condition of poverty" (De Bruijn & Antonides, 2022, p. 6; see also Morris et al., 2020; Morris & Tucker, 2023; Mullainathan & Shafir, 2013). Therefore, in the scarcity context, entrepreneurs focus on specific concrete details rather than the big picture, which requires abstract thinking. Although some argue that the scarcity mindset leads to biased decision making (De Bruijn & Antonides, 2022; Morris et al., 2020; Morris & Tucker, 2023), perhaps it is rational. These entrepreneurs focus on plans for the business that are simple, modest, and executable and on maintaining a clean reputation with stakeholders. This approach to business operations and relationships is the foundation for generating a reliable (albeit small) income. When facing poverty, a reliable income seems critical to the entrepreneurs' well-being.

While concrete thinking may facilitate reliability, it requires thinking abstractly to consider the role of recycling in climate change, to think about a strategy with a longer time horizon, and to consider who benefits from abstract changes that occur over an extended period. It also takes abstract thinking to consider implementing a broader-scope business strategy, more extensive operations and markets, and changing the institutions that have maintained one's oppression. Instead, these entrepreneurs are focused on the concrete business activities of today—the items coming in, the sorting and processing, and selling to earn money for food tonight and to keep their children in school tomorrow. Therefore, the entrepreneurs of dirty businesses do not consider the benefits of collective recycling (i.e., the Dharavi slum's recycling machine). They are not "open" to any potential *credit* for preserving the natural environment and thus experience no satisfaction from their contribution to this collective outcome. Instead, they focus on their dirty businesses (the cogs) to coordinate with other dirty businesses (intersecting cogs) to achieve their modest business goals, which they are satisfied with and experience few worries about. We hope future theoretical and empirical research explores the scarcity mindset as an antecedent to the cornerstones of a dirty business and other possible antecedents.

Contribution to the Entrepreneurship Literature

The above model makes several contributions to the entrepreneurship literature. First, we extend the recent trend of researching more common (e.g., every day [Baker & Welter, 2020; Welter et al., 2017]), unconventional (Bakker & McMullen, 2023), and underdog (Miller & Le Breton Miller, 2017) entrepreneurs and their businesses. Indeed, these studies have highlighted the importance of understanding the less glamorous forms of entrepreneurship. We take this trend further to explore the least glamorous form—dirty entrepreneurship. While Shepherd et al. (2022) showed how the intersectionality of dirty work, dirty places, and low caste impact how individuals make positive meaning in their lives (see also Mahalingam et al., 2019), we extend this intersectionality to the dirty entrepreneurship of recycling. This extension from the individual to entrepreneurs' businesses is important because we provide new insights into how the dirt pushes individuals into entrepreneurship and shapes their strategic decisions, experiences, and relationships.

In our study, the entrepreneurs' intersecting sources of dirt lead to a minimalist strategy that delivers them a satisfactory and sufficient life. Instead of setting stretch goals (Baron et al., 2016; Sitkin et al., 2011), the entrepreneurs in our study set modest goals that allow them to succeed by making or exceeding expectations. Indeed, instead of pursuing a broad-scope strategy (Robinson & McDougall, 2001), these entrepreneurs pursue a narrow-scope strategy that enables them to build expert knowledge and set modest goals within which they can work and experience no worries. Through their moderate goals and narrow-scope strategy, these entrepreneurs create a situation in which they can venture for satisfaction. Therefore, we highlight how intersecting sources of taint (from dirt—dirty work, place, and caste) can push individuals into a dirty business, shape their dirty businesses' approach, and provide entrepreneurs satisfaction with a minimalist outcome that offers survival but little more.

Second, for research exploring the impact of a social environment on pushing the discriminated into entrepreneurship (e.g., Caldwell et al., 2020; Conti et al., 2022; Hwang & Phillips, 2024), we highlight how individuals who are stigmatized because of their dirtiness, can be pushed into entrepreneurship in which they own and manage a dirty business. While the entrepreneurship literature has highlighted how some people are pushed into entrepreneurship (Noorderhaven et al., 2004; Schjoedt & Shaver, 2007)—namely, into necessity entrepreneurship (for a review, see Dencker et al., 2021)—our model represents an extreme case of necessity entrepreneurship that requires additional theorizing. Unlike the other cases of necessity entrepreneurship in the literature, we highlight the role of intersectionality for the entrepreneurs we studied. Multiple intersecting sources of taint (i.e., dirty places and low caste) necessitate entrepreneurship for these individuals, specifically dirty entrepreneurship. Therefore, unlike the necessity entrepreneurs in previous studies who are pushed into entrepreneurship by economic necessity driven by unemployment, the entrepreneurs of dirty businesses in our sample are surrounded by stigmatization that constrains their options, directing them into dirty entrepreneurship. Furthermore, this necessity of entrepreneurship from the constraints of intersecting sources of taint is likely distinct from entrepreneurs pursuing stigma-based opportunities (e.g., Ruebottom & Toubiana, 2021; Werner et al., 2023). However, future research will need to explore the distinction between the push and pull of dirty entrepreneurship and other (i.e., nondirty) forms of stigmatizing businesses.

Third, we offer new insights into the social aspects of entrepreneurship. Entrepreneurship research has highlighted the role of trust (Nguyen & Rose, 2009; Welter & Smallbone, 2006) and reputation (Rindova et al., 2007; Shane & Cable, 2002) in promoting entrepreneurial performance. Indeed, trust and reputation are of increased importance in informal settings that lack contracts and legal enforcement mechanisms (Pathak & Muralidharan, 2016), such as those in the slum-based recycling industry. We found that dirty businesses need a clean reputation to survive; reputation is a threshold concept in that businesses with a clean reputation can form relationships critical to business survival, while those with a dirty reputation cannot. Interestingly, among this group of entrepreneurs of dirty businesses who are also dirty from their place and caste, the only dirt unacceptable to them is that assigned to reputation (i.e., a reputation characterized by a lack of trustworthiness). Therefore, we provide new insights into why a group of stigmatized entrepreneurs further stigmatizes some of their ingroup members.

Finally, this study provides insights into how entrepreneurs may need to venture into the dirt to clean up the natural environment. Indeed, research on sustainable entrepreneurship has focused on entrepreneurs who engage in new technologies to provide clean solutions for dirty problems, where the dirty are the problems and the clean are the saviors (Schaltegger et al., 2016; Shrivastava et al., 2016). We show that, at least in the current context of plastic recycling in India, to understand the entrepreneurial solution to the environmental damage of plastic waste, researchers need to understand the dirt involved in offering this solution. We wonder if researchers focus on shiny, clean technologies and entrepreneurs, ignoring the entrepreneurs of small-scale businesses working in the dirt, they miss out on essential contributions to the natural environment and society. We hope researchers find a way to deepen our understanding of dirty entrepreneurship. For example, studies of "clean" proenvironmental businesses typically assume entrepreneurs' agency (Dean & McMullen, 2007; Vedula et al., 2022), but the entrepreneurs of dirty recycling businesses we studied neither desire nor intend to help preserve the natural environment but collectively achieved this outcome (i.e., recycling plastic is critical to environmental protection [Hopewell et al., 2009]). Therefore, desire and intention to protect the environment are not always essential for entrepreneurship to generate sustainable outcomes.

Limitations and Future Research

The current study shares the issue of transferability with all inductive qualitative studies aimed at building and elaborating theories. Another study limitation is that we did not track the entrepreneurs or their dirty businesses over time. If we had, we could have detected changes in goals, strategies, emotions, and activities and how these changes impact the entrepreneurs' satisfaction, their businesses' performance, and the collective impact on the local and natural environments. Furthermore, our explanation of the entrepreneurs' external approach to their dirty businesses is coarse-grained compared to our exploration of their internal approach. However, our purpose was not to elaborate on the theory of trust, reputation, or interorganizational relationships; instead, our findings link single entrepreneurs with other entrepreneurs of dirty businesses (necessitated by their narrow-scope strategy) to achieve their modest goals through trust and reputation dynamics. Future research can explore each level in more detail, especially the interorganizational and collective levels of analysis.

Conclusion

This study offered an intersectional model of dirty recycling businesses that offered new insights into how an individual's dirt (dirty place and low caste) can push them into a dirty form of entrepreneurship: a dirty business with modest goals and a narrow-scope strategy that generates satisfaction and no worries for the entrepreneur. Such entrepreneurs want their dirty businesses to remain small. We also highlighted the importance of a clean reputation for the coordination critical to these dirty businesses' survival. Even with their intersecting sources of stigma from dirt, the only thing these entrepreneurs cannot afford to be dirty is their reputation for trustworthiness. Our study also highlighted how a collective of dirty businesses can generate a positive social outcome without any of the entrepreneurs desiring or intending to produce it.

Appendix. Slum recycling business observations plastic raw material storage.

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ORCID iDs

Dean A. Shepherd https://orcid.org/0000-0003-4269-1826
Vinit Parida https://orcid.org/0000-0003-3255-414X

Notes

1. For studies on the businesses created by impoverished people in developed countries see Morris et al. (2023) and Santos et al. (2022).
2. Although many people who face constraints are pushed into self-employment (for a review, see Dencker et al., 2021), many necessity entrepreneurs are not necessarily pushed into a business that is dirty. In contrast, individuals who are considered by others to be from a dirty caste and/or from a dirty place are often pushed into a dirty business out of necessity—the dirt compounds the dirt such that it becomes an inescapable part of their lives. Indeed, rag pickers in slums have been found to feel helpless to change their dirty situation (Shepherd et al., 2022).

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Author Biographies

Dean A. Shepherd is the Ray and Milann Siegfried Professor of Entrepreneurship at the Mendoza College of Business, Notre Dame University. His research and teaching are in the field of entrepreneurship; he investigates the cognitive-emotional mechanisms of potential opportunities (noticing, evaluating, and constructing), new ventures (creating, growing, and terminating), entrepreneurial responses to adversity (events, chronic, and failure), and entrepreneurial creation and destruction (personal, social, and ecological value).

Vinit Parida is a Chaired Professor for Entrepreneurship and Innovation at Luleå University of Technology (Sweden) and the University of Vaasa (Finland). He is the Associate Editor for *Journal of Business Research*, Member of Swedish ministry's high-level group on digital transformation of Swedish industry, Scientific Leader for NorrlandsNavet- A Kamprad Family Foundation Center for SMEs Growth and Innovation in Northern Sweden, and Board member for RE:Source Strategic Innovation Program (SIP) Vinnova.

Joakim Wincent is a Professor in Entrepreneurship and Management at the University of St. Gallen and Hanken School of Economics. His current research focus largely on entrepreneurs and innovation processes in new and existing organizations. Joakim is interested in the psychological challenges of entrepreneurs and how to improve their individual conditions, but also the general challenges with developing high potential and highly innovative start-ups. He is identifying factors that promote entrepreneurship in new and existing organizations and future challenges for companies that aim to be innovation leaders during the next ten-year period.