

# HOW ALTERNATIVE IS ALTERNATIVE?

# ADVANCES IN THE STUDY OF ENTREPRENEURSHIP, INNOVATION AND ECONOMIC GROWTH

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**HOW ALTERNATIVE IS  
ALTERNATIVE? THE ROLE  
OF ENTREPRENEURIAL  
DEVELOPMENT, FORM,  
AND FUNCTION IN  
THE EMERGENCE  
OF ALTERNATIVE  
MARKETSCAPES**

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# INTRODUCTION

Matthew M. Mars and Hope Jensen Schau

There is growing interest in marketscapes that offer both producers and consumers with alternatives to dominant market systems and structures. While alternative markets are not clearly defined, the notion of “alternative” broadly centers on entrepreneurial strategies and market models that operate outside of the mainstream. If successful, alternative ventures and marketspaces can be profoundly disruptive. For example, consider ride share apps such as Uber and Lyft that have transformed the personal transportation market and in doing so have mostly displaced conventional taxi services. More often though, alternative ventures and marketscapes emerge as co-existing substitutions to the mainstream, as in the case of local farmers’ markets that operate concurrent to supermarket chains.

The extant literature on alternative entrepreneurship marketspace development examines a vast range of models and initiatives for bringing greater diversity and heterogeneity to dominant, mainstream market structures. Examples of the topical foci of this literature include consumer-led interventions that challenge mainstream practices (e.g., [Gollnhofer, Weijo, & Schouten, 2019](#); [Kozinets & Handelman, 2004](#); [Weijo, Martin, & Arnould, 2018](#)) and industry-driven innovations such as the expansion of online market channels that further embed the local in the global ([Lewis & Cockrill, 2002](#); [Mazzarol, 2015](#)). There is also a robust literature on counter-movements that aim to displace rather than transform global market structures. The most prominent of such movements is that which promotes the hyper-localization of both production and consumption ([Ciuchta & O’Toole, 2018](#); [Kurland & McCaffrey, 2016](#); [Mars, 2020](#); [Mars & Schau, 2018, 2019](#)). The chapters composing the current volume contribute to this literature a unique blend of theoretical and applied perspectives on the entrepreneurial underpinnings of alternative marketspace development and market-based movements. Together, these chapters explore the meaning, unpack the complexities, and challenge the common assumptions of alternative entrepreneurship and marketspaces.

The volume opens with two theoretical perspectives on the nature of entrepreneurial inputs to alternative marketscape development. First, Craig A. Talmage, Kaleb Boyd, and T. Alden Gassert draw on dark side theory to confront the assumptions that alternative entrepreneurship is inherently “good.” By drawing on literary stories from the past and modern-day examples of renegade groups, Talmage and colleagues advance a theoretical view of misfit entrepreneurship. This view illuminates the ways in which alternative entrepreneurship may involve

anti-social strategies that eschew established economic and legal institutions and/or blur the lines of what is and is not considered ethical behaviors and intentions. Provocations for further research into the heroism of alternative (or misfit) entrepreneurship and the ethical boundaries of alternative market movements are provided. Second, Jessica Lindbergh, Karin Berglund, and Birgitta Schwartz delve into the common perceptions of conventional entrepreneurship as a viable approach to addressing the many wicked environmental and social problems that threaten modern day society. They rely on [Gibson-Graham's \(2008\)](#) conceptualization of diverse economies to identify and underscore the incongruences between conventional capitalist models and progressive market movements. Using three case studies as descriptive points of reference, Lindbergh and colleagues illustrate the ways in which alternative entrepreneurs move between various organizational models and practices to advance societal change in alternatively entrepreneurial ways. The result is a compelling foundation on which to expand otherwise surprisingly narrow views of the role entrepreneurship plays in societal progress.

The next two chapters view alternative entrepreneurship and marketscape development in the context of organizational environments and collective movements. In the first of these two chapters, Gordon E. Shockley uses the concept of organizational centrifugalism to frame the strategies used by late nineteenth and early twentieth century avant-garde artists to create alternative marketplaces alongside the organizational spaces needed to support their innovations. Shockley presents readers with a compelling argument for the importance of balancing public engagement with organizational innovation during periods of alternative marketscape growth and development. In the second of these two chapters, Matthew M. Mars conducts a qualitative discourse analysis of the social entrepreneurship literature and in doing so reveals a paucity of research on the day-to-day realities of social entrepreneurship. This finding leads Mars to propose an ingenuity framework for studying the ways in which entrepreneurial change agents work to persist under the constraints of alternative market movement agendas.

The final three chapters present a series of case studies in which the challenges and opportunities of alternative entrepreneurship and marketscape formation are explored. First, Tyler E. Thorp uses a visual analysis to compare the storylines regarding local food products at farmers' markets with those at chain supermarkets. The findings support Thorp's argument that local food entrepreneurs fail to convey to consumers a compelling understanding of the meaning and value propositions of locally produced products and in doing so leave the identity of their alternative market movement open to corporate co-option. In the next chapter, Chika Kondo and Atsushi Suzuki develop a counter-perspective through four case studies of alternative food networks in Japan. Kondo and Suzuki use the insights generated to suggest ways in which the integration of alternative entrepreneurship with mainstream market models can help to create more collaborative and sustainable food systems. In the final chapter, Liz Pocock describes the emergence and evolution of a community-based incubator that transformed its mission and model from seeking and supporting early-stage ventures with the promise of rapid scalability to a more inclusive approach centered on nurturing

small-scale entrepreneurs with ties and commitments to the economic, environmental, and cultural fabrics of their community.

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# CHAPTER 1

## TOWARD A THEORY OF MISFIT ENTREPRENEURSHIP: INSIGHTS FROM ALTERNATIVE ENTERPRISES AND MISFIT ENTREPRENEURS

Craig A. Talmage, Kaleb Boyd and T. Alden Gassert

### ABSTRACT

*Entrepreneurship is ubiquitous, but it is not unequivocally a human force for social and economic good. Critical perspectives of the entrepreneur, entrepreneurship, and entrepreneurial success (and failure) are evolving in the scholarly literature. Dark side theory has emerged as a language for critiquing the dominant narratives of entrepreneurship portrayed in scholarship, education, planning, policy, and other forms of practice. This chapter draws from dark side entrepreneurship theory, Baumolian entrepreneurship, and exemplars of counterculture to craft language for an emerging theory of misfit entrepreneurship, which consists of misfit entrepreneurs and alternative enterprises. Alternative enterprises and misfit entrepreneurs are conceptualized, and literary examples (i.e., Robin Hood and Song Jiang) and modern-day examples (i.e., Hacker groups) are supplied. The unique actions and impacts of misfit entrepreneurs and alternative enterprises are offered for discussion. This new theory of misfit entrepreneurship leaves readers with exploratory questions that enhance critical perspectives and modern understandings of entrepreneurship today.*

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**How Alternative is Alternative?: The Role of Entrepreneurial Development, Form, and Function in the Emergence of Alternative Marketscapes**

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**Keywords:** Dark side of entrepreneurship; critical perspectives; dark social entrepreneurship; social entrepreneurship; entrepreneurship education; absurd entrepreneurship

Critical perspectives on entrepreneurship are burgeoning in scholarship and popular media in the wake of scandals. News agencies, podcasts, and other mediums have dedicated attention to numerous affairs, from the rises and falls of Theranos and the Fyre Festival to the negative health impacts of epidemic proportions of JUUL Labs and Purdue Pharmaceuticals. While this discourse on the dark side(s) of entrepreneurship is essential to furthering scholarship, policy, planning, teaching, and practice, critical perspectives must also expand beyond the dark side impacts of entrepreneurship gone wrong. In this chapter, we put forward an emerging theory of misfit entrepreneurship for robust exploration and instruction, broadening the field of entrepreneurship. We provide two literary outlaw heroes as misfit entrepreneurs to discuss: Robin Hood of England and Song Jiang of China. We also compare three hacker groups as alternative enterprises: WikiLeaks, Anonymous, and DarkSide.

## WHY CRITICAL PERSPECTIVES AND DARK SIDE THEORY FRAMEWORKS?

The prevalent orthodoxy of entrepreneurship (as a productive economic function and a positively impactful force in society) deserves much examination (Anderson, 2016; Örtenblad, 2020; Tedmanson, Verduyn, Essers, & Gartner, 2012). Fayolle and Riot (2016) spurred this critique in their edited volume, *Rethinking Entrepreneurship*, and Örtenblad's edited volume *Against Entrepreneurship* (2020) showcases instances where entrepreneurship has failed both socially and economically. In particular, Örtenblad's (2020) volume undertakes a devil's advocate approach rather than a one-sided case against entrepreneurship. Other scholars have challenged the foundations of entrepreneurship by focusing on particularly negative and destructive forms of entrepreneurship including drug cartels (Canales, 2013) and terrorism (Abdukadirov, 2010).<sup>1</sup>Abdukadirov (2010) conceptualizes terrorism as a form of entrepreneurship not based on profit-driven motives, but spurred on to generate public good; thus, terrorism may be better aligned with the social entrepreneurship theory. Additionally, Bandera, Santos, and Liguori (2020) offered an article on the dark side of entrepreneurship education highlighting the unintended consequences for students and institutions. In this light, scholars and educators have created a new framework called dark side theory, through which the social and economic intentions of entrepreneurs and the impacts of enterprises may be evaluated (Montiel Méndez, Clark, & Calderón Martínez, 2020; Opatrny-Yazell, Jensen, &

McCord, 2021; Talmage, Bell, & Dragomir, 2019). Still, dark side theory is relatively nascent, and the critical perspectives discourse warrants much more attention in the field of entrepreneurship.

### *Roots in Entrepreneurship Theory*

The dark side theory builds on well-known economic theories of entrepreneurship and the entrepreneur. First, the dark side theory borrows from critical perspectives leveraging Baumol's (1990, 1996) conceptualizations of entrepreneurship as productive, unproductive, and destructive (see Olaison & Meier Sørensen, 2014; Talmage & Gassert, 2020). As discussed later, productive entrepreneurship is generative innovative behavior, unproductive entrepreneurship is self-serving and wealth-seeking behavior, and destructive entrepreneurship is self-serving, wealth-seeking organization, which harms others (Baumol, 1990, 1996). Baumol's (1990, 1996) work critiques myopic views of Schumpeterian innovation as inherently good in policy and discourse. Baumol (1990) notes the "questionable value" (p. 897) of Schumpeterian innovation.

Continuing Baumol's (1990, 1996) critical trajectory, dark side theory also builds on Schumpeter's (1934, 1942) entrepreneurship theory of creative destruction by examining the unintended or unfortunate consequences of creative destruction. Creative destruction can lead to obsolescence, such as worker displacement and the discarding of still useable capital (Erumban & Timmer, 2012). These unintended consequences of creative destruction may be hidden beneath "persistent unemployment, excess capacities, financial crisis, and recurrent wars" (Chen, 2008, p. 98). Furthermore, creative destruction can further cultural imperialism, eroding local cultures and rendering them obsolete (Mustatea & Iancu, 2014 citing Houston, 2003). For clarity, Schumpeterian creative destruction disrupts equilibriums and can exhibit productive, unproductive, and destructive forms as labeled by Baumol (1990, 1996).

### *Dark Side Theory Amidst Critical Perspectives*

The functionalist and solely positive paradigm for entrepreneurship must change, especially when all possible negative impacts or unintended consequences are relegated in economics to a category titled externalities (Anderson, 2016; Anderson, Drakopoulou Dodd, & Jack, 2012; Talmage & Gassert, 2020). Critical perspectives have become part of the evolution of how entrepreneurship is conceptualized in scholarship, policy, practice, and education (Anderson, 2016; Tedmanson et al., 2012). Tedmanson et al. (2012) push scholars to "champion new ways to relocate business within society, not continue to reify business as social life" (p. 532). The paradigm upholds self-interest and individualism as cultural values of entrepreneurship, but these can be counteracted by widening entrepreneurship work to include social lenses (Anderson, 2016; Tedmanson et al., 2012). Anderson (2016) notes, "A social lens enables us to see both how and why people are motivated to become entrepreneurial" (p. 50). This social lens is the very

foundation of the field of social entrepreneurship (Light, 2006; Martin & Osberg, 2007, 2015) and has received critique in dark side theory discourse around social entrepreneurship (Talmage & Gassert, 2020, 2021).

Critical perspectives avoid heralding the entrepreneur as the primary driver of social and economic development (Jones & Spicer, 2009; Tedmanson et al., 2012). Schumpeter (1934) saw the entrepreneur as a main instrument of change, but only an instrument, not the driving force. Gerpott and Kieser (2020) critique the heroization of the entrepreneur calling it a persistent fairytale of entrepreneurial success, which hinders scholarship, policy, and practice. Critical perspectives also caution against promoting unproductive if not counter-productive ideas, such as *entrepreneurs are always well-intended*, and *societies will always benefit from more entrepreneurs* (Tedmanson et al., 2012; Weiskopf & Steyaert, 2009). Critical perspectives help explore how entrepreneurs' characteristics, behaviors, decisions, intentions, and processes connect to enterprises' outcomes, both social and economic (Anderson, 2016; Montiel Méndez et al., 2020). Such dark side factors include micro-level mistakes, misconduct, and corruption, which can lead to macro-level disasters and tragedies (Talmage & Gassert, 2020, 2021).

On its face, the dark side theory is a framework for making the aforementioned connections, while promoting more critical perspectives (Talmage et al., 2019; Talmage & Gassert, 2020, 2021; Zahra & Wright, 2016). Tedmanson et al. (2012) ask scholars to “engage openly with the dark sides – the contradictions, paradoxes, ambiguities and tensions at the heart of ‘entrepreneurship’” (p. 532). Dark side theory expands the dominant narrative of entrepreneurship beyond pro-economic and, often, pro-social (Talmage et al., 2019; Talmage & Gassert, 2020, 2021). Dark side theory provides a vocabulary to question the very definitions of entrepreneurship, entrepreneur, and entrepreneurial success (Talmage & Gassert, 2020, 2021).

Overall, the dark side theory provides a pragmatic and accessible language, especially for those new to entrepreneurship (Opatrny-Yazell et al., 2021; Talmage & Gassert, 2020, 2021). The dark side theory is a value-based theory, where students, scholars, and others strive to connect social and economic values with their respective impacts (Talmage et al., 2019; Talmage & Gassert, 2020; Zahra & Wright, 2016). Critical perspectives highlight how values are rooted in individual experiences, cultural norms, and power structures (Ashdown, Dixe, & Talmage, 2021; Talmage & Gassert, 2020). The dark-light-gray language assists inquirers in linking entrepreneurial intentions, power structures, and impact, specifically harm, whether intended or unintended (Talmage & Gassert, 2021).

The language of dark side theory broadens views of entrepreneurship, as called for by Tedmanson et al. (2012). The language of the dark side theory also helps students, scholars, educators, and others move from interrogating entrepreneurship to exploring entrepreneurs, a well-needed shift requested by Berglund and Skoglund (2016). The expansion to discussing entrepreneurship frees the field of entrepreneurship to look toward countercultural examples of entrepreneurship (discussed later) in addition to dominant cultural examples of small businesses, nonprofits, startups, and social enterprises. Students, educators,

practitioners, scholars, and others can develop the vocabulary off dark-light-gray language in their work. Recent exercises that draw on the dark side of language are found in *Entrepreneurship Education and Pedagogy* (e.g., [Bandera et al., 2020](#); [Opatrny-Yazell et al., 2021](#); [Talmage & Gassert, 2020, 2021](#)).

*Mapping Enterprises as Light, Dark, and Gray*

Relevant to the discourse at hand, [Talmage et al. \(2019\)](#) examined how different enterprises mapped based on perceived social and economic impacts via having individuals participate in an online public poll. This exercise was adapted by [Talmage and Gassert \(2020\)](#) for use in a college classroom showcasing the utility of the dark-gray-light language. Four categories of enterprises were identified after asking respondents to rate various enterprises found in dominant and counterculture across two scales: anti-social to pro-social and anti-economic to pro-economic. [Table 1](#) illustrates the four categories (or quadrants) elucidated from both occasions with examples used. Moreover, we contend that more exploration of entrepreneurship’s grayness will benefit future endeavors regarding critical perspectives. Grayness is the primary language of misfit entrepreneurship, misfit entrepreneurs, and alternative enterprises. These countercultural misfits are often economically underground, but they can hold pro-social aims; thus, showcasing the alternative type. However, misfits’ tactics can vacillate across the four light-gray-dark types. It is important to note that not all countercultural examples are inherently gray, but misfits discussed in this piece will be first located as alternative types.

As reflected in [Table 1](#), readers find different forms of entrepreneurship, which have all received various attention in scholarship, education, and practice. The traditionally taught forms of entrepreneurship, from small business development to technology entrepreneurship, fall in the first category. This first category also includes the burgeoning fields of social entrepreneurship and social enterprise. The second category contains the niche subfield of taboo entrepreneurship and

**Table 1.** Light-Gray-Dark Enterprise Types.

| Category/Type                       | Perceptions of Economic Impact | Perceptions of Social Impact | Exemplars                                   |
|-------------------------------------|--------------------------------|------------------------------|---|
| (1) Traditional enterprises (Light) | Neutral to pro-economic        | Neutral to pro-social        | Family-owned restaurant<br>Tech Start-up    |
| (2) Taboo enterprises (Gray)        | Neutral to pro-economic        | Anti-social to neutral       | Pornographic Film Studio<br>Vaping Retailer |
| (3) Destructive enterprises (Dark)  | Anti-economic to neutral       | Anti-social to neutral       | Drug Cartel<br>Terrorist Group              |
| (4) Alternative enterprises (Gray)  | Anti-economic to neutral       | Neutral to pro-social        | Hacktivists<br>Noble pirates or saboteurs   |

Source: Adapted from [Talmage et al. \(2019\)](#) and [Talmage and Gassert \(2020\)](#).

later discussed as absurd entrepreneurship; however, the neither categories nor do this chapter do justice to the important cultural factors examined by scholars in those subfields. The third category encompasses dark side forms of enterprise as well as corruption scholarship. Particularly in this work, we highlight the particularly gray, fourth category of alternative enterprises as an under-examined but essential area for future entrepreneurship scholarship and education.

Talmage et al.'s (2019) map shows the ease of using dark side theory language (see also Talmage & Gassert, 2020, 2021), but the quadrants may actually be more nuanced than immediately apparent. Some enterprises vary little in their location, such as terrorist groups and child labor organizations (i.e., dark only), while others spanned across categories, such as pornographic film studios (i.e., dark and taboo). Also, different groups of individuals varied in where they located enterprises on average. For example, men were more likely to rate pornographic film studios as more pro-economic and less anti-social than women.

The quadrant approach showcases the ability of enterprises or industries to span or move across quadrants (Fig. 1), which relates to culture, values, power structures, social conditions, and impacts. In Talmage and Gassert's (2020) use of the quadrants with undergraduate students, the participants discussed power structures and cultural norms at play when evaluating pornographic film studios, noting moral stances, ethical challenges, legal issues, and potential exploitation in

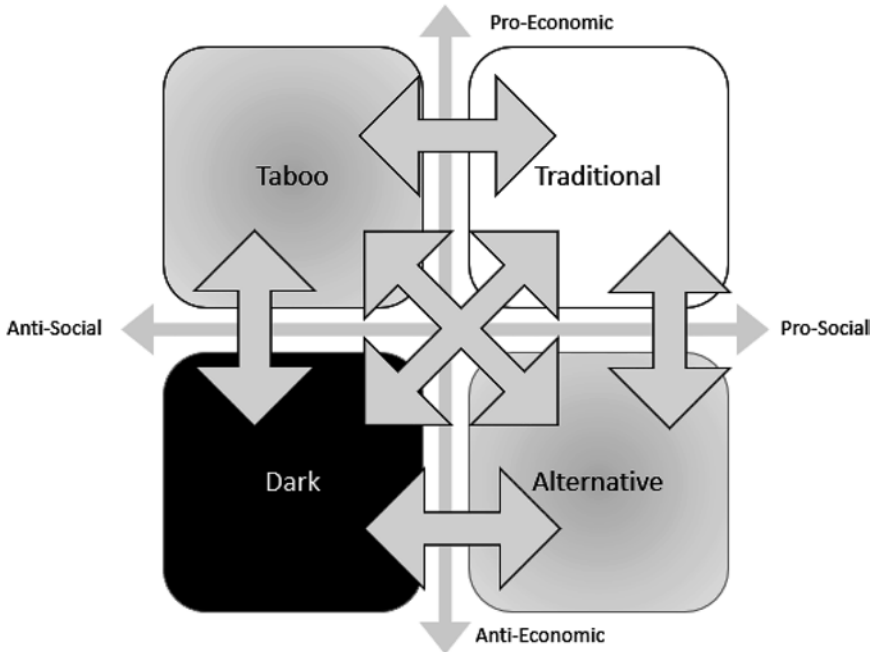


Fig. 1. Potential Movements Between Talmage et al.'s (2019) Quadrants.

the industry. Students mostly concurred that fast food restaurants were pro-economic but disagreed on whether these restaurants had pro- or anti-social impacts, referencing impacts on long-term health as well as the sustainable production of food. Many students expressed surprise when thinking through how enterprises and their impacts might span the quadrants. Perhaps, they were simply unaware of the nuanced or countercultural force entrepreneurship (i.e., grayness) can assume in social and economic systems. [Talmage and Gassert \(2020\)](#) write:

By making the variation of opinions visually explicit, there is a natural inclination to investigate, if not understand, why these differences [between classmates' perceptions] exist. The resulting discussions often expose political, cultural, gendered, moral, and ethical beliefs. Even with a cursory dip into these topics, one sees that entrepreneurial success is not defined simply by net profit and gross production, nor is success encapsulated by a single political position, ethical stance, or cultural norm. (p. 336)

### *Mapping Entrepreneurship, Dominant Culture, and Counterculture*

This chapter continues the trajectory toward more critical entrepreneurship perspectives by introducing readers to misfit entrepreneurship and its cultural nuances, misfit entrepreneurs, and alternative enterprises. Misfit entrepreneurship like all other forms of entrepreneurship concerns individual actors, power structures, social conditions, and cultural norms, which have lasting impacts on communities. This chapter puts forth a case for understanding how entrepreneurship can demonstrate countercultural expressions, which we call misfit entrepreneurship, before exploring alternative enterprises and misfit entrepreneurs as exemplars.

To make this case, the quadrants from [Talmage et al.'s \(2019\)](#) work are adapted to showcase how culture is reflected among different forms of entrepreneurship. The horizontal axis spans from social harm to social benefit, and the vertical axis spans from aboveground economic activity to underground economic activity. The new quadrants leverage [Baumol's \(1990, 1996\)](#) entrepreneurship terminology (discussed earlier), but also adds the *alternative* category to the mix ([Fig. 2](#)).

*Productive Entrepreneurship.* Productive entrepreneurship represents product innovations benefiting consumers (e.g., faster, cheaper, or better) and/or process innovations benefiting firms (e.g., input substitution or technological invention). Products and services introduced by entrepreneurs enter traditional (aboveground) marketplaces looking to compete based on differentiation in price, quality, service, or distribution. Niche audiences reflecting subcultures of the dominant culture may be targeted, but eventually, the entrepreneur aspires for growth and ubiquity in their product or service offering.

Notably, [Baumol \(1990, 1996\)](#) comments that entrepreneurs are likely more motivated by profit than by invention or innovation (see also, [McCaffrey, 2018](#)). We acknowledge that [Baumol's \(1990, 1996\)](#) productive category did not consider the work of social entrepreneurs nor commentary on the field of social entrepreneurship. Still, the productive form of entrepreneurship reflects what is typically taught in entrepreneurship classrooms (e.g., [Blank, 2020](#)); however, critical

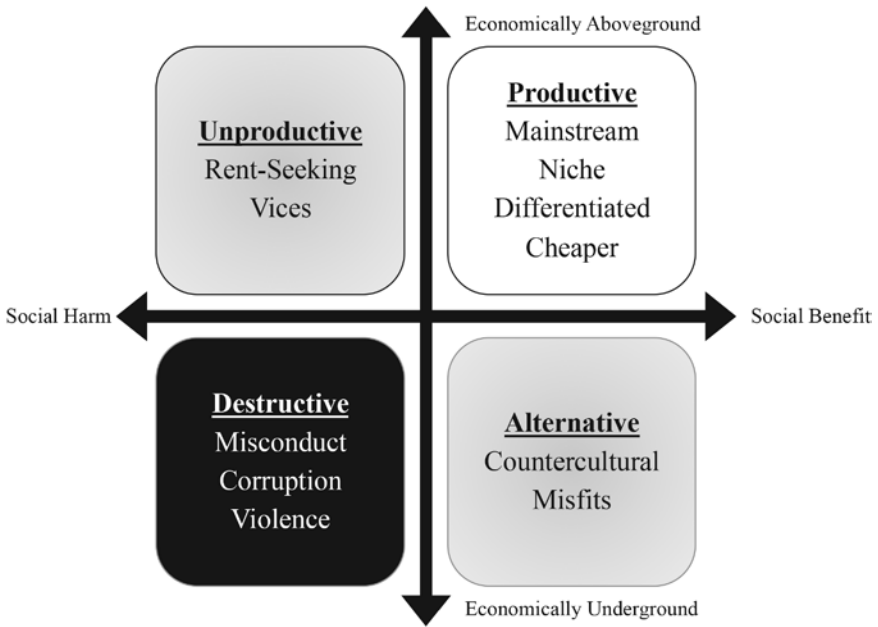


Fig. 2. Mapping Culture, Power, and Enterprises Using Dark Side Theory.

perspectives like the dark side theory have emerged to challenge that paradigm pushing for the teaching of other forms (e.g., Talmage & Gassert, 2020, 2021).

*Unproductive Entrepreneurship.* Baumol (1990, 1996) sees rent-seeking as unproductive due to its potential long-term, negative effects on societies and cultures. Rent-seeking includes garnering individual benefits through non-market avenues, such as lobbying, special regulations, takeovers, litigation, and tax evasion. Baumol (1990) expresses that such unproductive behavior has helped executives amass “spectacular fortunes” (p. 915). This conceptualization is a fair, yet economic-centric view; it does not include socially unproductive enterprises or practices that maintain a mediocre or neutral status quo. We contend that the unproductive quadrant in Fig. 2 also includes enterprises that leverage consumer vices (e.g., casinos, fast food restaurants, tobacco companies, and robo-callers) or those that take advantage of weaknesses in the government’s ability to care for their citizens (e.g., for-profit prisons). This form of entrepreneurship reflects the outskirts or failures of the dominant culture, specifically regarding individual and community well-being. Like productive entrepreneurship, many entrepreneurs in this category are individualistic in their profit-seeking intentions, and they can threaten culture by not distributing economic resources and not enhancing the social welfare of their customers and those they employ. These notions reflect pathways to the Baumol’s destructive entrepreneurship as well as dark sides of