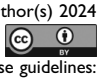
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Does professional identity mediate the relationship between emotional labour and work engagement? A study with Portuguese police officers

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Abstract
Police officers work under demanding emotional, psychological and physical circumstances while interacting with victims, criminals and colleagues. They are faced daily with emotional demands to express positive emotions and, at the same time, are required to suppress negative emotions. Consequently, this influences the emotional regulation strategies (i.e., deep- or surface-acting) they choose to use, which impacts their professional identity and work engagement. We conducted a study to understand whether professional identity mediates the relationship between emotional labour (demands and strategies) and work engagement in a sample of Portuguese police officers. For this purpose, we used a set of four self-administered questionnaires: Emotional Work Requirements Scale (EWRS), Emotional Labour Scale (ELS), Social Identity Scale (SIS) and Utrecht Work Engagement Scale (UWES). 924 police officers from the Portuguese Public Security Police (PSP) participated voluntarily. Our results show that there is a mediating effect of professional identity on the relationship between surface-acting strategies, positive emotion expression and negative emotion suppression demands, and work engagement. Professional identity fully mediates the relationship between negative emotion suppression demands and work engagement. Nevertheless, there seems to be no mediating effect of professional identity on the relationship between deep-acting strategies and emotional variety and intensity demands, and work engagement. To the best of our knowledge, no other study has analysed the aforementioned variables in Portuguese police forces. Meaning that our study is ground-breaking, with clear implications. Further research is needed on this subject to understand better the relationship among these variables in the police population.

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Introduction

Policing activities are focused on supporting and controlling public order (Queirós et al., 2013) under continuous demands, and being forced to make impactful decisions. High-stress levels can arise, leading to job dissatisfaction, absenteeism and negative employee well-being (Testoni et al., 2020). There is global interest in studying the police context, although the number of studies is dramatically fewer when delimiting the Portuguese context. Emotional exhaustion, burnout syndrome, and lower levels of interest, energy, productivity, satisfaction and motivation are some of the topics studied in Portuguese police officers (Oliveira and Queirós, 2012). Here, we develop a study focused on the relationship between emotional labour, professional identity and work engagement in the Portuguese Public Security Police (PSP), an institution that performs internal and/or external services, and in which it is possible to have a career as an officer, chiefs or official.

Emotional labour is associated with work engagement. Emotionally demanding conditions can impact on employees' well-being (Xanthopoulou et al., 2013). Work engagement is not constant by nature, because it varies according to daily tasks (Bakker, 2011). Police officers are required to display diverse emotions to deal with different audiences and to this end, they exert great effort to manage and regulate their feelings to achieve organisationally desired emotions. To maintain this regulation of emotions officers consume energy and resources, while becoming cynical about their work (Kwak et al., 2018). Conversely, highly engaged employees have adequate levels of psychological and physical energy, reducing false emotional displays (Yoo and Arnold, 2014).

Several studies have shown that professional identity is an important work-related aspect (Ashforth and Humphrey, 1993; Birze et al., 2022; Brotheridge and Lee, 2003), having both positive and negative effects. The more employees identify with an organisation, the more they internalise the obligations of that organisation and feel stressed about their inability to fulfil them (Ashforth and Humphrey, 1993). Employees with a stronger professional identity experience less fatigue at work and perform their tasks with reduced mental and physical effort (Schaible, 2006). Employees who identify with their organisation have better psychological and physical health and lower levels of stress and anxiety (Piotrowski et al., 2020), experiencing greater work engagement, even under adverse working conditions (Zhang et al., 2018b).

The professional identity of Portuguese police officers is considered uncertain (Oliveira et al., 2023a) because of continuous political and law changes within the police institution. This inconsistency can help police officers deal with the dualities in their profession (Durão, 2010), because it can act as a personal resource to help them deal with intense and multiple job demands (Guedes et al., 2020).

In following the research problem 'Does professional identity mediate the relationship between emotional labour and work engagement?', we aim to analyse these constructs based on solid information. Two goals for this research emerge, namely to: (a) characterise the Portuguese police sample's professional identity; and (b) assess the mediating effect of professional identity in the relationship between emotional labour and work engagement. We intend to understand better the role played by emotions in police behaviour and to suggest intervention strategies to develop these professionals' skills to improve police well-being, job satisfaction, performance and effective emotional self-management in the several demands they face every day.

Theoretical background

Emotional labour and professional identity

Police work requires strong physical and psychological skills to master the ability to change emotional expression. Mostly, it requires a rigid and neutral emotional position towards offenders and criminals and compassion towards victims (Daus and Brown, 2012). These emotional trials brutally constrain police officers' abilities to perform their work effectively, and have considerable effects on their well-being (Marques and Paulino, 2021). Policing as a profession entails high-stress levels, both operational (e.g. traumatic events) and/or organisational (e.g., discrimination among colleagues, excessive administrative tasks) (Durão, 2010; Maran et al., 2022; Queirós et al., 2020). This stress contributes to negative psychosocial consequences that are increased by the lack of open discussion about mental health within the police institution (Demou et al., 2020).

Job demands, physical tensions and psychological strain promote burnout (Brotheridge and Lee, 2003; Schaible and Six, 2016), an emotional exhaustion syndrome seen among police officers (Maslach and Jackson, 1981). Depleted emotional resources lead employees to feel that they can no longer give their best psychologically (Emsing et al., 2022; Maslach and Jackson, 1981). Policing is among the most

stressful professions, and can lead to mental health problems such as anxiety, depression, post-traumatic stress disorder and substance abuse. Experiencing emotional stress and decreased job satisfaction, police officers quickly develop negative attitudes to their work and their colleagues (Testoni et al., 2020), and develop cynical attitudes and feelings regarding the public they serve (Maslach and Jackson, 1981). For police officers, the use of force may result from high-stress levels, contributing to more difficult assessment of a situation and prompting misinterpretations and aggressive reactions (Queirós et al., 2013, 2020). A study with Portuguese police officers revealed that burnout explains 13–22% of aggressivity (except for verbal aggression), supporting the view that burnout syndrome is a predictor of aggressivity (Queirós et al., 2013). More attention needs to be paid to the emotional stability of police professionals.

Emotional labour is the ability to manage emotions at work, regulating emotional expression by following perceived organisational rules (Daus and Brown, 2012; Hochschild, 1983). It can be described based on the intensity, variety, frequency and duration of work interactions (Brotheridge and Lee, 2003; Morris and Feldman, 1996). Emotional labour can be seen from two perspectives: job-focused emotional labour (emotional requirements of a profession) and employee-focused emotional labour (emotional self-regulation performed by workers) (Brotheridge and Grandey, 2002).

Associated with emotional self-regulation, two pertinent strategies emerge to help workers regulate their emotions: deep- and surface-acting (Hochschild, 1983; van Gelderen and Bik, 2016). Deep-acting refers to the self-control of thoughts and internal emotions to meet job demands (Ashforth and Humphrey, 1993; Hochschild, 1983). Employees perceive the job demands as congruent with their feelings, allowing authentic self-expression, personal fulfilment (Brotheridge and Grandey, 2002) and effective task completion (Birze et al., 2022). Deep-acting relates to professional identity, because the more workers identify with their profession, the more likely they are to feel authentic when adapting to work expectations and fulfilling the job demands (Ashforth and Humphrey, 1993). Conversely, surface-acting occurs when workers consciously express the required emotions, while not feeling or making any attempt to feel such emotions (hiding unsuitable feelings and feigning organisation-imposed feelings) (Birze et al., 2022; Brotheridge and Lee, 2003). Suppressing emotions requires psychological and arousal effort, and has a greater resource investment (Brotheridge and Lee, 2003). Surface-acting can cause emotional dissonance (Hochschild, 1983; Morris and Feldman, 1996); that is, stress caused by the difference between felt and expressed emotions (Ashforth and Humphrey, 1993). Providing little support for authentic self-expression, surface-acting can generate strange feelings towards self (Hochschild, 1983) and others (Ashforth and Humphrey, 1993).

Emotional demands can help employees feel compliant with established working rules. Knowledge of the work context is relevant, because several professions require individuals to display emotions while performing their jobs. Such adaptability to emotional demands is relevant, differs from person to person (Schaubroeck and Jones, 2000) and professional identity can play a fundamental role. Professional identity is considered to be the incorporation of organisational models, values and a feeling of belonging translated into participation in collective activities (Gomes and Souza, 2013). Three dimensions characterise this construct: cognitive centrality (the subjective importance of a social group for auto-concept); ingroup affect (emotional evaluation of the belonging group); and ingroup ties (bonds with the group, linking perceptions and similarities with other group members) (Cameron, 2004; Nascimento and Souza, 2017). Employees who identify with organisational rules tend to be more involved in ingroup ties, promoting work resources (Nahrgang et al., 2011), and encouraging better emotional labour management (Guedes et al., 2020) and psychological and physical health (Piotrowski et al., 2020).

When emotional labour demands are in opposition to their felt emotions, employees are more likely to suffer negative consequences (Schaible and Six, 2016). Similarly, the more individuals are required to express or suppress positive or negative emotions that are in opposition to their feelings, the greater the degree of burnout they are expected to experience (Zapf et al., 2001; Zhang et al., 2018a) and the less efficient their perceived performance tends to be (Grandey et al., 2005; Schaible and Gecas, 2010). This is because individuals realise that they are being untruthful to themselves and others, leading to job dissatisfaction (Ashforth and Humphrey, 1993), alienation and cynicism (Zapf et al., 2001). Interpersonal interactions at work are correlated with demands to express positive emotions (Schaubroeck and Jones, 2000). Demands to express positive emotions during work performance are positively related to psychosomatic symptoms (characterised by stress and anxiety) (Jeung et al., 2018) in individuals who report low organisational identification and low work involvement. In addition, when individuals mask their true emotions, it becomes challenging to establish authentic relationships based on trust and mutual understanding (Hochschild, 1983).

Professional identity has no clear benefits or disadvantages and is highly limited by career stage and context (Schaible, 2018). In the early career stages, high identification is beneficial, especially for community-oriented police officers who perform more operational tasks. In the late career stages, individuals with a stronger identity and low work centrality tend to suffer emotional exhaustion. Police

officers' work effectiveness depends on their emotional abilities (Daus and Brown, 2012). Emotional expression and suppression are important for compliance with institutional display rules(Mastracci and Adams, 2020). As a result, individuals may incorporate surface-acting into their professional identity, adopting emotional norms and behaviours that align with organisational expectations, even if they differ from the individual's values (Mastracci and Adams, 2020), thereby balancing authenticity with professional obligations (Grandey, 2000; Hochschild, 1983; Jeung et al., 2018). Nevertheless, professional identity, as a personal resource, can be an important protector against surface-acting, where little support for authentic self-expression is likely to produce more distancing feelings from others (Ashforth and Humphrey, 1993). Emotional dissonance, exhaustion and detachment can be experienced in police work, decreasing spontaneous emotional expression and reinforcing emotional strategies (van Gelderen et al., 2011), and spending emotional resources (Bakker and Heuven, 2006). If genuine feelings are aligned with the professionally displayed rules, less emotional labour is needed (Schaible, 2018), and individuals are expected to feel more authentic and compliant with the expectations and demands of the role (Ashforth and Humphrey, 1993). Otherwise, such aspects may contribute to ambiguous role conflict when dealing with intense and diverse emotional displays (Kwak et al., 2018), abruptly impacting professional identity and work engagement. Accordingly, experiencing emotional dissonance can lead individuals to reassess and possibly modify their sense of identity to alleviate the internal conflict, potentially resulting in further identity-related challenges or discrepancies (Jansz and Timmers, 2002; O'Brien and Linehan, 2019). For that reason, we formulate the following hypotheses:

H1a: Deep-acting strategies are positively associated with professional identity.
H1b: Surface-acting strategies are negatively associated with professional identity.
H1c: Positive emotion expression demands are positively associated with professional identity.
H1d: Negative emotion suppression demands are negatively associated with professional identity.
H1e: Emotional variety and intensity demands are negatively associated with professional identity.

Professional identity and work engagement

Police officers have pre-existing dispositions and histories formed throughout many life interactions, influencing their expected behaviours (e.g., deference to authority and respect for hierarchy). These elements are expressed through explicit tools (e.g., uniform and rank), helping to identify all members as belonging to one group (Campbell, 2012). The professional identity of police officers depends on their self-perception and society's projections of the profession. Society generally attributes a negative connotation to this occupation, largely caused by the media, compromising the image that the police have of their work, structuring their professional identity, and influencing their behaviours and experiences (Gomes and Souza, 2013). Durão (2010) states that assuming a hypothetical cohesive professional identity for Portuguese police officers is wrong, because it is tremendously difficult to develop one in a changing place.

Work engagement is a 'positive, fulfilling work-related state of mind' (Schaufeli et al., 2002: 74). Three dimensions characterise work engagement: 'vigor (high levels of energy and mental resilience while working), dedication (tasks involvement, having enthusiasm doing it), and absorption (being so immersed in their work that the employee feels the time spent working went by quickly)' (Schaufeli et al., 2002: 74). Work engagement is expected to increase employees' positive attitudes or behaviours towards their work and organisation. Engaged workers direct their energy towards organisational goals, achieving better performance results than non-engaged workers (Bakker, 2011). Engaged employees experience more positive emotions contributing to their thought–action amplification, meaning that they work on their personal resources. Overall, they are healthier, meaning they can fully dedicate themselves to their work. They are able to generate their own resources and transfer their engagement to the organisational environment, indirectly improving team performance.

Work engagement is related to the Job Demands-Resources (JD-R) model (Demerouti et al., 2001), which includes two dimensions: job demands and resources. Job demands are the physical, psychological, social and organisational aspects of work that have physical and psychological consequences for employees. Job resources are associated with aspects of work used to minimise job demands (e.g., social support, autonomy, career opportunities, resilience, self-esteem, emotional ability and task identification). According to the JD-R model, personal and job demands can predict work engagement and have a positive impact when job demands are higher. Work engagement can positively influence job performance; based on constant feedback, engaged workers can perform well and create their own resources, contributing to a 'positive gain spiral' (Bakker, 2011). Nevertheless, this is not a linear process, when individuals experience more job resources, higher levels of work engagement occur (Bakker, 2011). Consequently, work engagement increases performance quality and job growth, contributing to higher personal and job resource levels.

Although professional identity is not static during the career path (Miscenko and Day, 2016), it can be seen as a personal resource (Guedes et al., 2020). It allows for an ingroup affect related to work activity, subsequently helping

people to deal with the job demands . Bakker (2011) found that employees with greater job resources (e.g., support from colleagues) have higher levels of work engagement. Accordingly, if individuals identify with their profession, they experience higher levels of work engagement, even under unfavourable working conditions. As a result, they have more energy and enthusiasm for their occupation, eliminating dissatisfaction caused by the work environment (Zhang et al., 2018a) and increasing job satisfaction by showing feelings of belonging to the profession. Job satisfaction is associated with individuals' perceptions that their needs, values and expectations are met in the job, and increases considerably if they have strong professional identities. Professional identity has a positive and moderately significant relationship with job satisfaction, which is a key aspect of employee retention (Sabanciogullari and Dogan, 2015). With this in mind, we formulate the following hypothesis:

H2: Professional identity is positively associated with work engagement.

Emotional labour and work engagement

Work engagement varies daily, depending on work activities, duties and different stakeholders. Police officers who deal with numerous citizens are more likely to display certain emotions, especially due to traumatic situations (Bakker, 2011). In addition, police officers who experience role conflict and engage in several emotional displays need to work harder to manage and regulate their feelings to achieve organisationally desired emotions (Kwak et al., 2018). As a result, their energy resources are drained, making them cynical towards their work.

Employee engagement and the display of positive emotions are statistically significantly and strongly related, both at the individual level and the work unit level (Carrasco et al., 2011). Highly engaged employees have adequate levels of psychological and physical energy, reducing their display of fake emotions, which is connected to deep-acting benefits – a less stressful form of emotional labour (Yoo and Arnold, 2014). Guedes et al. (2020) discovered, in a study with military police officers, that demands for positive emotional expression and deep-acting strategies positively predicted work engagement, whereas surface-acting strategies predicted it negatively.

Nonetheless, there may be a negative relationship between emotionally demanding conditions and employee well-being, as explained by the JD-R model (Demerouti et al., 2001). Emotionally demanding conditions require more energy, depleting employees' resources. Police officers interact with a variety of intense emotions in stakeholders, most often leading officers to hide their true feelings and increasing their exposure to stress-related diseases. Police officers who express more positive emotions are more likely to witness citizen satisfaction and cooperation, contributing to increased interest in their profession and engagement with their work (Kwak et al., 2018). However, police officers cannot experience positive emotions in every situation, especially when faced with negative or violent scenarios. Consequently, negative emotions increase and are particularly difficult to deal with when they need to be suppressed (Xanthopoulou et al., 2013).

Working under these exhausting emotional circumstances negatively impacts police officers' motivation and work engagement (Oliveira et al., 2023b). Perceived organisational support can potentially decrease stress and increase resilience and work engagement among police officers (Brunetto et al., 2023; Nahrgang et al., 2011; van Gelderen and Bik, 2016). Personal values are important for understanding how individuals engage with their work (Basinska and Dåderman, 2019). These values represent employees' highest priorities, as cognitive representations of basic motivations. They determine what is important for individuals and what they want to achieve in their work. Furthermore, institutionally oriented emotions and shared values are expected to provoke less emotional dissonance and greater well-being (Ashforth and Humphrey, 1993; Schaubroeck and Jones, 2000). We therefore consider the following hypotheses:

H3a: Deep-acting strategies are positively associated with work engagement.
H3b: Surface-acting strategies are negatively associated with work engagement.
H3c: Positive emotion expression demands are positively associated with work engagement.
H3d: Negative emotion suppression demands are negatively associated with work engagement.
H3e: Emotional variety and intensity demands are negatively associated with work engagement.

Emotional labour, professional identity and work engagement

As far as we know, few studies have linked these three constructs in the police context. Guedes et al. (2020) analysed the relationship between emotional labour (positive emotional expression demands, and deep- and surface-acting strategies) and work engagement, mediated by professional identity, with 302 military police officers in the state of Bahia (Brazil). They verified that professional identity plays a crucial role in police contexts, positively affecting work-related variables, increasing satisfaction levels, and decreasing levels of stress and burnout. Specifically, these authors verified that professional identity mediates the relationship between emotional labour (positive emotional expression demands, and deep- and surface-acting strategies). Oliveira et al. (2023a)) conducted a study with Portuguese police officers in which the relationship between these

constructs was analysed, and verified that both work engagement and professional identity were correlated to emotional labour.

Following such findings, we intend to verify the hypotheses presented below:

H4: Professional identity mediates the relationship between deep-acting and work engagement.
H5: Professional identity mediates the relationship between surface-acting and work engagement.
H6: Professional identity mediates the relationship between positive emotion expression demands and work engagement.
H7: Professional identity mediates the relationship between negative emotion suppression demands and work engagement.
H8: Professional identity mediates the relationship between emotional variety and intensity and work engagement.

Methods

Procedure and sample

We conducted a non-experimental cross-sectional study, using self-administered questionnaires that we had previously adapted to Portuguese (Hill and Hill, 2016). This adaptation was conducted by a five-member professional committee using the think-aloud protocol (Ericsson and Simon, 1993). Once the questionnaires had been adapted to Portuguese, we converted them into a link on the LimeSurvey platform, distributed on the PSP intranet.

924 Portuguese police officers from PSP participated voluntarily. PSP is a public service-oriented security force, whose mission is to ensure internal security and civil rights, and to legally defend democracy, always under the law and the Portuguese Constitution (Law 53/2007). The majority of respondents were male (89%) and aged between 20 and 63 ($M = 45.70$; $SD = 8.52$), with 67.10% having high school as their highest education level. Some 70% were officers, 18.7% were chiefs and 11.3% were officials. Of the respondents, 495 worked in the external service (53.57%). On average, they had nearly 23 working years in PSP ($M = 22.83$; $SD = 8.87$), mostly in the Lisbon Metropolitan Command ($N = 350$; 37.9%).

Measures

We used the following self-report measures: Emotional Labour Scale (ELS; Brotheridge and Lee, 2003), Emotional Work Requirements Scale (EWRS; Best et al., 1997), Utrecht Work Engagement Scale (UWES; Schaufeli et al., 2002; Schaufeli and Bakker, 2004) and Social Identity Scale (SIS; Cameron, 2004). To characterise the sample, we added a sociodemographic questionnaire (e.g. gender, age, education).

The ELS and EWRS were adapted to a Portuguese version applied to the Brazilian military police context by Alves et al. (2017). ELS measures emotional labour demands and strategies (Brotheridge and Lee, 2003), comprising seven items in three dimensions: deep-acting, surface-acting and emotional expression variety and intensity during work (Alves et al., 2017). The EWRS measures employees' demands to camouflage their emotions at work (Best et al., 1997). It includes six items organised into two dimensions: expressing positive emotions and suppressing negative emotions (Alves et al., 2017). Both scales use a 5-point Likert-type response scale, from 1 (never) to 5 (always).

The UWES, translated and adapted to Portuguese by Simães and Gomes (2012) measures dimensions underlying work engagement: vigour, dedication and absorption (Schaufeli et al., 2002; Schaufeli and Bakker, 2004). It contains 17 items, measured using a 7-point Likert response scale, ranging from 0 (never) to 6 (always).

The SIS, an instrument translated and adapted for the Brazilian professional context by Nascimento and Souza (2017), is designed to measure professional identity: centrality, ingroup affect and ingroup ties (Cameron, 2004). Nine items are included, measured on a 5-point Likert scale, between 1 (totally disagree) and 5 (totally agree).

Regarding the reliability analysis, the scales have excellent Cronbach's alpha reliability, with a value closer to or higher than 0.70 (DeVellis, 2003): $\alpha_{ELS} = 0.70$, $\alpha_{EWRS} = 0.91$, $\alpha_{UWES} = 0.96$, and $\alpha_{SIS} = 0.85$.

Data analysis

After validating the scales (Oliveira et al., 2023a), we proceeded with the statistical analyses using IBM SPSS Statistics, version 25 (IBM Corp, 2017). To perform the mediation analyses, we used the Process macro for this statistical software (Hayes, 2009, 2017). We conducted reliability studies for each scale in the questionnaire, as well as descriptive analyses to characterise the sample. We tested compliance with the assumptions required for multiple linear regression. To identify the relationship between study variables, we analysed Pearson's correlations. To test hypotheses H4, H5, H6, H7 and H8, we used simple mediation, which needs to meet several assumptions: (a) a significant relationship between the independent variable and the mediating one (a), (b) a significant relationship between the mediating and the dependent variable when controlling for the independent one (b), and (c) the mediating effect must be statistically significant ($a \times b$) (MacKinnon, 2012). For this purpose, we used model 4 and bootstrapping with 95% confidence intervals (with 1000 bootstrap estimates to construct that same interval) for the indirect effect (Hayes, 2009, 2017).

Table 1. Mean, standard deviation and correlations between emotional labour (demands and strategies), professional identity and work engagement.

Variables	*M*	*SD*	*1*	*2*	*3*	*4*	*5*	*6*	*7*
1. Deep-acting	3.30	0.92	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
2. Surface-acting	3.24	0.95	0.24**	—	—	—	—	—	—
3. Positive emotion expression	3.65	0.74	0.28**	0.12**	—	—	—	—	—
4. Negative emotion suppression	3.19	0.95	0.27**	0.45**	0.44**	—	—	—	—
5. Emotional variety and intensity	2.87	0.83	0.26**	0.22**	0.11**	0.16**	—	—	—
6. Professional identity	3.85	0.73	0.05	−0.28**	0.16**	−0.14**	0.02	—	—
7. Work engagement	3.91	1.34	0.06	−0.31**	0.22**	−0.10**	−0.44	0.73**	—

Note: $N = 924$; **$p < 0.01$ (two-tailed).

Results

Pearson's correlation results for the variables under study are shown in Table 1. Surface-acting is negatively correlated with professional identity ($r = -0.28$, $p < 0.01$) and work engagement ($r = -0.31$, $p < 0.01$). Meaning that the more the surface-acting individuals do, the lower their professional identity and work engagement. It is worth noting that, according to Cohen (1992), the first correlation is small and the second is medium. Positive emotion expression is positively and small correlated with professional identity ($r = 0.16$, $p < 0.01$) and work engagement ($r = 0.22$, $p < 0.01$). The more police officers display positive emotions, the greater their professional identity and work engagement. Negative emotion suppression shows a negative and small correlation to professional identity ($r = -0.14$, $p < 0.01$) and work engagement ($r = -0.10$, $p < 0.01$). This means that the more negative emotions individuals suppress, the lower their professional identity and work engagement. Professional identity is positively and strongly correlated to work engagement ($r = 0.73$, $p < 0.01$). In other words, the greater an individual's professional identity, the greater their work engagement. The remaining variables (deep-acting and emotional variety and intensity) show non-statistically significant correlations. We confirm that results support hypotheses H1b, H1c, H1d, H2, H3b, H3c and H3d, whereas H1a, H1e, H3a and H3e have not been corroborated.

Following are the simple mediation results for each dimension of emotional labour (Figure 1 and Table 2).

Deep-acting and professional identity (Figure 1(a) and Table 2) explain 53.80% of work engagement variance: $F_{(2,\ 291)} = 536.33$, $p < 0.001$. Nevertheless, no significant relationship is observed between deep-acting and work engagement, either directly or indirectly through the professional identity mediator. Hypothesis H4 is not supported by our results.

Surface-acting (Figure 1(b) and Table 2) explains 7.93% of professional identity variance: $F_{(1922)} = 79.41$, $p < 0.001$. Surface-acting and professional identity explain 54.93% of work engagement variance: $F_{(2,\ 291)} = 561.27$, $p < 0.001$. The regression of surface acting and professional identity is significant ($a = -0.21$, $p < 0.001$). The regression of professional identity and work engagement, when controlling the predictor (surface-acting), is significant ($b = 1.293$, $p < 0.001$). The regression of surface-acting and work engagement is significant ($c = -0.16$, $p < 0.001$). The results indicate a partial mediation of professional identity in the relationship between surface-acting and work engagement ($c' = -0.28$; *boot SE* $= 0.035$, 95% confidence interval $= [-0.351, -0.209]$). In other words, the relationship between surface-acting and work engagement is direct and indirect; higher surface-acting levels are associated with lower work engagement levels, both directly and through professional identity. Our results support hypothesis H5.

Positive emotion expression (Figure 1(c) and Table 2) explains 2.66% of professional identity variance: $F_{(1922)} = 25.20$, $p < 0.001$. Positive emotion expression and professional identity explain 54.84% of work engagement variance: $F_{(2,\ 291)} = 559.24$, $p < 0.001$. The regression of positive emotion expression and professional identity is significant ($a = .16$, $p < 0.001$). The regression of professional identity and work engagement, when controlling the predictor (positive emotion expression), is significant ($b = 1.320$, $p < 0.001$). The direct effect of positive emotion expression on work engagement is statistically significant ($c = -.19$, $p < 0.001$). The results indicate a partial mediation of professional identity in the relationship between positive emotion expression and work engagement ($c' = 0.21$; *boot SE* $= 0.049$, 95% confidence interval $= [0.116, 0.306]$). Hypothesis H6 is supported.

Negative emotion suppression (Figure 1(d) and Table 2) explains 1.99% of professional identity variance: $F_{(1922)} = 18.71$, $p < 0.001$. Negative emotion suppression and professional identity explain 53.76% of work engagement variance: $F_{(2921)} = 535.44$, $p < 0.001$. The regression of negative emotion suppression and professional identity is significant

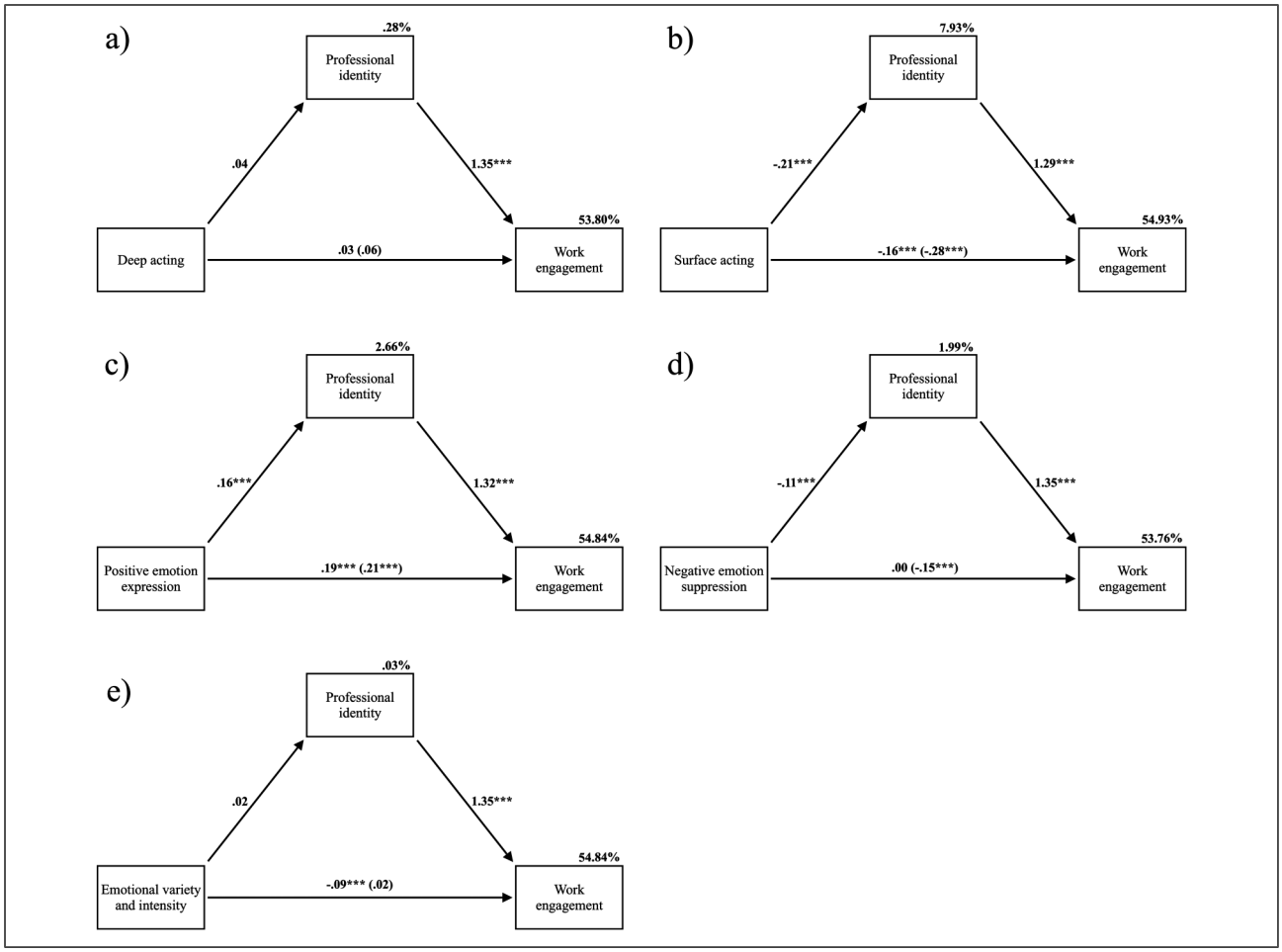


Figure 1. Simple mediation models of professional identity regarding emotional labour dimensions and work engagement: (a) deep-acting; (b) surface-acting; (c) positive emotion expression; (d) negative emotion suppression; and (e) emotional variety and intensity.

($a = -0.11$, $p < 0.001$). The regression of professional identity and work engagement, when controlling the predictor (negative emotion suppression), is significant ($b = 1.35$, $p < 0.001$). The results indicate full mediation of professional identity in the relationship between negative emotion suppression and work engagement ($c' = -0.15$; *boot SE* = 0.036, 95% confidence interval = [−0.218, −0.080]). Hypothesis H7 is supported.

Emotional variety and intensity (Figure 1(e) and Table 2) explain 54.08% of work engagement variance: $F_{(2921)} = 542.35$, $p < 0.001$. The regression of professional identity and work engagement, when controlling the predictor (emotional variety and intensity), is significant ($b = 1.35$, $p < 0.001$). Nonetheless, the results indicate that there is no mediation of professional identity in the relationship between emotional variety and intensity and work engagement ($c' = 0.02$; *boot SE* = 0.048, 95% confidence interval = [−.074,.116]). Hypothesis H8 is not corroborated by our results.

Discussion

With this study, we intended to analyse the mediating role of professional identity in the relationship between emotional labour and work engagement for a sample of Portuguese police officers. Working as a police officer is constantly demanding and complex (Kaiseler et al., 2016; Toscano, 2010). Police officers are required to be versatile, having to ensure public safety while protecting their own needs. Emotional labour, work engagement and professional identity play an important role in police work-related aspects, having significant impacts on individuals' health and well-being. We discuss below the results obtained based on previous literature.

Our results show that professional identity does not mediate the relationship between deep-acting and work engagement, contrary to results found by Guedes et al. (2020). Perhaps because its influence is weak and it does not have enough strength to produce any effect on this

Table 2. Summary of the simple mediation model: emotional labour strategies and demands.

	Deep-acting strategies						Surface-acting strategies					
Direct and total effects	*B*	*SE*	*T*	*p*	LLCI	ULCI	*B*	*SE*	*T*	*p*	LLCI	ULCI
Effect X-M (a): Deep/surface-acting on professional identity	0.042	0.026	1.621	.105	−0.009	0.093	−0.215	0.024	−8.911	<.001	−0.262	−0.168
Effect M-Y controlling for X (b): Professional identity on work engagement	1.349	0.041	32.644	<.001	1.268	1.431	1.293	0.043	30.428	<.001	1.210	1.376
Direct effect c′ X-Y: Considering professional identity	0.030	0.033	0.913	.361	−0.034	0.094	−0.158	.032	−4.888	<.001	−0.222	−0.095
Total effect c X-Y: Deep/surface-acting on work engagement	0.086	0.048	1.810	.071	−0.007	0.180	−0.436	0.044	−9.909	<.001	−0.523	−0.345
Bootstrap for indirect effect: Professional identity	0.057	0.040			−0.019	0.137	−0.278	0.035			−0.344	−0.208
	Positive emotion expression demands						Negative emotion suppression demands					
Direct and total effects	*B*	*SE*	*T*	*p*	LLCI	ULCI	*B*	*SE*	*T*	*p*	LLCI	ULCI
Effect X-M (a): Positive emotion expression/negative emotion suppression on professional identity	0.161	0.032	5.020	<.001	0.098	0.224	−0.108	0.025	−4.325	<.001	−0.157	−0.059
Effect M-Y controlling for X (b): Professional identity on work engagement	1.320	0.041	31.904	<.001	1.239	1.401	1.352	0.042	32.412	<.001	1.270	1.434
Direct Effect c′ X-Y considering professional identity	0.192	0.041	4.692	<.001	0.112	0.272	0.003	0.032	0.103	.918	−0.060	0.066
Total effect c X-Y: Positive emotion expression/ negative emotion suppression on work engagement	0.405	0.059	6.917	<.001	0.290	0.520	−0.143	0.046	−3.086	.002	−0.234	−0.052
Bootstrap for indirect effect: Professional identity	0.213	0.051			0.116	0.313	−0.146	.036			−0.218	−0.076
	Emotional intensity and variety demands											
Direct and total effects	*B*	*SE*	*T*	*p*	*LLCI*	*ULCI*						
Effect X-M (a): Emotional intensity and variety on professional identity	0.015	0.029	0.535	.593	−0.041	0.072						
Effect M-Y controlling for X (b): Professional identity on work engagement	1.353	0.041	32.877	<.001	1.273	1.434						
Direct effect c′ X-Y considering professional identity	−0.091	0.036	−2.529	.012	−0.161	−0.020						
Total effect c X-Y: Emotional intensity and variety on work engagement	−0.070	0.053	−1.323	.186	−0.174	0.034						
Bootstrap for indirect effect: Professional identity	0.021	0.048			−0.074	0.116						

Note: The data are reported in non-standardised *B* coefficients based on a 5000 bootstraps sample size. *SE* = standard error; *LLCI* = lower limit confidence interval; *ULCI* = upper limit confidence interval (bias-corrected bootstrap confidence interval 95%); $p < 0.01$.

relationship. Police officers who are more engaged and identify with their job tend to use more deep-acting strategies (Yoo and Arnold, 2014). Deep-acting strategies are considered better for regulating emotions (Brotheridge and Grandey, 2002), because they prevent the depletion of individual resources (John and Gross, 2004) while strengthening individuals' professional identity (Brotheridge and Lee, 2003). Deep-acting strategies are associated with controlling internal thoughts and emotions to meet job demands (Brotheridge and Grandey, 2002; Hochschild, 1983). Such strategies can have positive outcomes, especially when employees perceive the job demands as congruent with their feelings (Birze et al., 2022). When a discrepancy occurs between the felt and demanded emotions, employees decrease spontaneous emotional expression, reinforcing deep-acting strategies (Bakker and Heuven, 2006). A stronger identification with their profession is expected to be more authentic and compliant with the role expectations and demands (Ashforth and Humphrey, 1993), with employees experiencing higher work engagement levels (Zhang et al., 2018b). Although Guedes et al. (2020) propose that professional identity acts as a protective factor for police officers, facilitating the use of deep-acting strategies, our findings suggest a contrasting perspective.

Our results also indicate that professional identity partially mediates the relationship between surface-acting and work engagement, similar to Guedes et al.'s results (2020). Surface-acting is related to faking emotions that are organisationally desired (Birze et al., 2022; Brotheridge and Lee, 2003). However, faking an emotion is not easy, requiring plenty of effort (Brotheridge and Grandey, 2002; Morris and Feldman, 1996). When exacerbated, it generates intense psychological arousal and a greater investment of personnel resources (Brotheridge and Lee, 2003), increasing feelings of disinterest and detachment from others (Ashforth and Humphrey, 1993). Furthermore, if authenticity is undervalued, individuals may feel compelled to conceal their true selves, fostering an environment of distrust and disengagement (Pech and Slade, 2006). Surface-acting can harm professional identity (Brotheridge and Lee, 2003), because individuals misrepresent the emotions they feel. It is worth noting that when using these strategies, police officers are unable to predict their reactions (Mastracci and Adams, 2020). Police officers deal with intense emotional strain, leading them to mask their true feelings and increasing their exposure to stress-related illnesses. Working under these emotionally stressful circumstances can damage police officers' work engagement (Brunetto et al., 2023). Professional identity can reduce these the negative effects of these strategies on work engagement. It benefits from being a personal resource to help police officers deal with the intense and multiple job demands (Guedes et al., 2020), incorporating a strong ingroup affect and ties (Nascimento and Souza, 2017). This is compatible with Bakker's (2011) findings, in which employees experiencing more job resources reported higher levels of work engagement.

In addition, our results reveal that expressing positive emotions influences work engagement through professional identity, similar to Guedes et al.'s (2020) findings. Positive emotions displayed by employees have a mutual effect, following a continuous contagious process and increasing citizen satisfaction (Kwak et al., 2018). Police work is highly stressful, meaning that officers must use positive emotions to alleviate the impact of negative ones (Lan et al., 2020). Similarly, expressing positive emotions seems to facilitate problem-solving (Bakker and Heuven, 2006), as well as supplying individuals with resources (e.g., psychological capital) to deal effectively with daily work-related stress (Siu et al., 2015). Interpersonal interactions at work, a cornerstone of professional identity, are correlated with the need to express positive emotions (Schaubroeck and Jones, 2000), being a positive predictor of work engagement (Guedes et al., 2020).

According to our results, professional identity plays a key role in the relationship between negative emotion suppression demands and work engagement. Emotional suppression is necessary to comply with police display rules when officers are performing their duties (Mastracci and Adams, 2020). When not aligned, demands to suppress negative emotions can contribute to stress (Chen and Wu, 2022), specifically emotional dissonance (Brotheridge and Grandey, 2002; Hochschild, 1983; Morris and Feldman, 1996), emotional exhaustion and detachment from work (Bakker and Heuven, 2006), which is contrary to work engagement (Schaufeli et al., 2002). Employees with high professional identity tend to be less exhausted during work, because they expend less mental and physical effort while performing their tasks (Schaible, 2006). This might be inconsistent with the emotional exhaustion resulting from suppressing emotions. Nonetheless, there is a negative relationship between emotionally demanding conditions and employees' well-being because they require more energy, depleting employees' resources (Xanthopoulou et al., 2013). Something that is not aligned with the state of mind provided by work engagement (Schaufeli et al., 2002).

Lastly, our results show no mediating role for professional identity in the relationship between emotional variety and intensity demands and work engagement. Police officers must master the constantly varying emotional expressions with which they are confronted (Bakker and Heuven, 2006). During their working shift, police officers may need to express emotions consistent with public protection, show empathy and sympathy towards victims, and display negative emotions to affirm

authority with suspicious and criminal individuals (Guedes et al., 2020) and correct offenders (van Gelderen et al., 2017). Although these intense and diverse emotional displays (Schaible, 2006) can contribute to ambiguous role conflict (Kwak et al., 2018), they can lead to personal accomplishment (Brotheridge and Grandey, 2002). Diverse, intense, frequent and lasting emotional interactions can strengthen police identity, allowing authentic emotions to be displayed (Schaible and Six, 2016). Accordingly, police officers can use behavioural–cognitive strategies to attenuate any emotional pressures they may be under (Ashforth and Humphrey, 1993).

Theoretical and practical implications

As far as we know, no other work has analysed the variables under study, for which reason our research is a pioneer in Portugal, with undeniable theoretical and practical implications. The theoretical implications are substantial. This work contributes to producing new knowledge in this research area, highlighting the importance of studying these three constructs in the organisational environment. It confirms that professional identity is a complex construct, requiring more studies in the police field.

Regarding practical implications, this research highlights the importance of incorporating programmes that focus on improving these three constructs in the police workplace. Applying risk assessments should clarify the job demands and risks of the job in a particular setting. Supervisors could analyse the results and use the information to design targeted interventions (Nahrgang et al., 2011) on emotional regulation, organisation and task identification, and work engagement.

Police institutions should consider creating programmes that increase resilience and promote appropriate coping strategies (Queirós et al., 2020), as well as investing in training in emotion regulation. Police officers must learn to regulate their emotions in a healthy way (Bakker and Heuven, 2006), to be able to reduce aggressive behaviour and calm victims. Similarly, supportive environments for employees should be considered and encouraged to promote social support among employees (Moore et al., 2022; Zhao et al., 2022). Support is beneficial, especially in increasing work engagement, motivation and well-being (Nahrgang et al., 2011). In addition, police candidates should be carefully selected, requiring them to have proper training that provides a clear understanding of police work and its philosophy and values (Schaible, 2018). Career development measures should also be considered and encouraged to enhance police officers' motivation and work engagement (Moore et al., 2022).

Human resources should develop policies based on the work engagement model, helping to assess the levels of this work-related positively rewarding state (Schaufeli et al., 2002) in individuals, teams and departments, and subsequently, conduct adequate interventions focused on increasing positive work engagement (Bakker, 2011). In short, it is extremely important to develop interventions focused on changes at the micro-social and macro-organisational levels, namely making organisational environments more resourceful and encouraging positive self-belief among employees (Xanthopoulou et al., 2013).

Limitations and future research

This study has some limitations. First, based on the literature review, many constructs could influence the relationship between these variables (e.g. work engagement seems to be affected by work conditions) (Britt, 2003). It would be pertinent to establish a relationship between the variables tested and others, producing relevant police content. Second, sociodemographic variables (e.g. age) were not used in the inferential statistics, although this might have helped understand their impact on the constructs and their relationships under study. Third, a simple mediation model can be rudimentary, because it can oversimplify complex dynamics (Hayes, 2017). Proportionally more complex statistical methods should be explored.

We conclude this work with further research directions. Future research should focus on analysing these constructs across police forces worldwide to determine the generalisability of our results and should analyse cultural differences between police forces worldwide. Further studies should analyse the relationship between emotional labour dimensions, professional identity and work engagement among the different stakeholders. The results can provide greater insight into these constructs, allowing better organisational interventions in police institutions. In addition, further studies should explore some organisational practices, such as recruitment and selection, to analyse their suitability.

Data availability

This study data is available from the corresponding author upon reasonable request.

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