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## **'Letting the uniform take it'**

*Emotion absenting and its role in institutional maintenance*

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**'Letting the uniform take it': Emotion absenting and its role in institutional maintenance**

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Abstract:	Emotion regulation is essential to the maintenance of institutions. To date, institutional scholars have focused on how individual actors express or suppress emotions according to internalised institutional 'feeling rules.' Drawing on an empirical study of police officers, this article offers emotion absenting as a socially practised, embodied form of emotion regulation. Police officers' shared emotion absenting enabled them to

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	<p>practise fear in unarticulated yet highly coordinated ways in alignment with their institutional role. The practice of emotion absenting is learned through socialisation into policework and the institution of law enforcement. Because police officers learn to regulate emotions together in subtle ways through the coordination of their bodies, emotion absenting can be functionally invisible in social interactions. This suggests that inappropriate emotions are not necessarily suppressed, i.e. removed from the situation. Rather, our study shows that such emotions may function as a resource among members of a group, especially when these emotions are practised in institutionally competent ways.</p>

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4 **‘Letting the uniform take it’: Emotion absenting and its role in**  
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28 **Abstract**  
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33 have focused on how individual actors express or suppress emotions according to internalised  
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35 institutional ‘feeling rules.’ Drawing on an empirical study of police officers, this article offers  
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37 emotion absenting as a socially practised, embodied form of emotion regulation. Police officers’  
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39 shared emotion absenting enabled them to practise fear in unarticulated yet highly coordinated  
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45 officers learn to regulate emotions together in subtle ways through the coordination of their bodies,  
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47 emotion absenting can be functionally invisible in social interactions. This suggests that  
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49 inappropriate emotions are not necessarily suppressed, i.e. removed from the situation. Rather,  
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51 our study shows that such emotions may function as a resource among members of a group,  
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56 especially when these emotions are practised in institutionally competent ways.  
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## Keywords

Ethnography, emotion regulation, institutional maintenance, law enforcement, institutional work studies, emotions

## Introduction

Emotion regulation plays an important role in institutional life as the mechanism through which actors align their emotions in accordance with institutionalised ‘feeling rules’ or social scripts for emotions (Hochschild, 1979, 2012 [1983]). In this view, emotions are intimately connected with structures of meaning and ‘tied up in what it means to be in an institutional setting (identity and embeddedness) and what is right to do in an institutional setting (moral judgments and legitimacy)’ (Zietsma & Toubiana, 2018, p. 434). Because all institutions require ongoing maintenance to survive, especially when subject to threats and challenges (Lawrence & Suddaby, 2006), emotion regulation and its significance for institutional maintenance have been the subject of investigations in organisation studies. For instance, prior scholarship has yielded important insights into how actors feel obliged to maintain institutional order on account of their identification with institutional norms and ideals. Thus, they perform maintenance work through their development of ‘emotional competences’ (Voronov & Weber, 2016), i.e. through actors’ acquired ability to mediate experience and display of emotion following institutional norms and ideals. Misaligned emotions, on the other hand, threaten institutions, because ‘at no time are institutions more fragile than when people no longer feel what institutions prescribe them to feel’ (Lok, Creed, DeJordy, & Voronov, 2017, p. 592).

For decades, studies of emotion regulation in organisations have revolved around the expression of appropriate emotions and the suppression of inappropriate emotions as the main processes through

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4 which individuals either display or hide their emotions. In Hochschild's seminal work on emotion  
5 regulation in organisations (Hochschild, 1979, 2012 [1983]), emotion suppression is the mechanism  
6 that ensures the proper enactment of workers' roles, as they disguise, banish, or mute their displays  
7 of improper emotions in work. Drawing from Freud's psychodynamic terminology in which  
8 suppression is the conscious process of pushing unwanted and unfitting impulses (thoughts,  
9 memories, emotions, and fantasies) out of awareness, Hochschild explains suppressed emotions as  
10 psychologically removed from – and therefore inactive in – social interactions. This assumption  
11 prevails in current scholarship on the role of emotion regulation in institutional maintenance as  
12 evident in propositions that socially misaligned emotion displays simply 'get disappeared' (Voronov  
13 & Vince, 2012, p. 65).

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29 We nuance this understanding of emotion regulation in institutional maintenance and offer a  
30 perspective on emotion regulation as a phenomenon that is not only social and shared but can also be  
31 *socially practised* by members of an institution. The concept of emotion regulation, we propose,  
32 should not only cover the processes through which actors regulate emotions individually according  
33 to specific scripts; It should also cover the processes through which a group of actors can coordinate  
34 their emotion regulation practices among themselves according to the changing scripts as situations  
35 unfold their social context change their meaning. In such cases, as we will demonstrate, institutionally  
36 inappropriate emotions are not constructively understood simply as suppressed and removed from the  
37 situation. Rather, they remain available as subtle, socially learned, and often tacit ways of being and  
38 doing, that group members learn through increased participation.

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55 While calls have been made to move the sociological study of emotions beyond the 'cognitive misers'  
56 (e.g., Creed, Hudson, Okhuysen, & Smith-Crowe, 2014; Friedland, 2018; Hochschild, 2012 [1983];  
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4 Jarvis, 2017; Lok et al., 2017; Zietsma & Toubiana, 2018), empirical studies have primarily been  
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6 based on qualitative data from interviews and texts (e.g. Crawford & Dacin, 2021; Gill & Burrow,  
7  
8 2018; Jarvis, Goodrick, & Hudson, 2019). Most empirical evidence has thus been derived from  
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10 actors' written accounts, spoken words and reflections, with less attention paid to the unarticulated,  
11  
12 interpersonal, and embodied practices of actors 'doing' emotion regulation. Consequently, the ways  
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14 in which actors learn and practise emotion regulation via participation in institutional life remain  
15  
16 underexplored. To address this gap, we proceed from a sociological understanding of emotions as  
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18 social, situated, and embodied practices (Reckwitz, 2002) learned over time through increasing  
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20 participation and interactions with other members of a community of practice (Lave & Wenger,  
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22 1991). Foregrounding embodied interactions in emotion regulation enables us to capture unarticulated  
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24 aspects of 'practices that would remain hidden if we only give pride of place to language and  
25  
26 linguistically articulable thoughts' (Yakhlef, 2010, p. 411). From this, we pursue the following  
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28 question: How do institutional actors regulate emotions together through socially learned and tacit,  
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30 embodied practices?  
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39 To explore unarticulated or seemingly hidden aspects of emotion regulation, we draw on Star and  
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41 Strauss's (1999) concept of 'functional invisibility' to explain how socially learned, embodied and  
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43 socially practised emotion regulation can be visible to some actors and invisible to others. Such absent  
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45 presence is possible because of how the reproduction of social conventions determines what we 'see',  
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47 i.e. understand and recognise as relevant, in social interaction. While practices and their significance  
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49 are most easily recognised by those who have learned to participate in them, the same practices may  
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51 slide into the background because 'the taken for granted status means that [they are] functionally  
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53 invisible' (Star & Strauss, 1999, p. 20). In line with this idea, we propose *emotion absenting* as a  
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55 concept that explains i) how emotion regulation can be socially practiced, and ii) how socially  
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4 regulated emotion can be practised as simultaneously absent ('invisible' to outsiders and taken-for-  
5 granted) *and* present (tacit, embodied and shared). We wish to nuance the concept of emotion  
6 suppression, i.e. the mechanism through which individuals maintain an institution by *removing*  
7 inappropriate emotion from social interaction. We do so by proposing the concept of emotion  
8 absenting and suggests that, when members practice emotion regulation together, inappropriate  
9 emotions are not removed from or inactive in a situation. Rather, they can function as a resource  
10 among members of a group, especially when these emotions are practised in institutionally competent  
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25 Based on 23 months of ethnographic fieldwork in a Scandinavian police organisation, we show how  
26 police officers' shared emotion absenting enabled them to practice fear in unarticulated yet highly  
27 coordinated ways in alignment with their institutional role. Specifically, we demonstrate how police  
28 officers learn to practice and regulate emotions in subtle ways through the coordination of bodies, the  
29 use of material artefacts, and the ongoing collective adjustment to changing situations. By delineating  
30 key modes of emotion absenting such as 'letting the uniform take it' as a way of remaining calm in  
31 the face of hostility, we show how emotion absenting is a competence acquired by officers via  
32 socialisation into what it means to be and act as police officers. Our study contributes to the literature  
33 on emotion regulation as institutional maintenance by demonstrating that emotion regulation can be  
34 shared social practices that maintain the institution through interactions among members. Moreover,  
35 with our ethnographic approach we incorporate the body into emotion regulation research and through  
36 this approach we respond to recent calls from scholars for a more in-depth investigation of the  
37 relationship between absence and presence in institutions (Bento da Silva, Quattrone, & Llewellyn,  
38 2022; Crawford & Dacin, 2021).



## Emotion regulation as a form of institutional maintenance

In this section, we review the salient literature on emotion regulation before introducing our focus on emotion absencing. By connecting people to institutions through socially learned norms that regulate ‘what feels right’ or ‘what is appropriate’ in certain situations, emotions constitute the ‘how’ and ‘why’ of institutions (e.g. Hochschild, 1979, 2012 [1983]); Rafaeli & Sutton, 1987; Voronov & Weber, 2016; Zietsma & Toubiana, 2018). A widespread assumption in previous scholarship on emotion regulation in institutional contexts is that workers regulate emotions either through expressing or suppressing their feelings. The prevalence of this assumption can be attributed in large part to the seminal work of Hochschild (1979, 2012 [1983]), who conceptualised emotions as complex psycho-social phenomena that can be shaped and ‘owned’ by organisations. Hochschild drew on a set of psychodynamic, symbolic interactionist and critical theories to formulate a conceptual framework capable of explaining why and how workers comply with institutional norms as they regulate their emotions in accordance with the ‘feeling rules’ of social structures (Hochschild, 1979, 2012 [1983]).

According to this framework, workers’ on-the-job emotional labour requires that emotions be regulated ‘to induce or suppress feeling’ following the needs of a specific job ‘in order to sustain the outward countenance that produces the proper state of mind in others’ (Hochschild, 2012 [1983], p. 7). In this view, emotion regulation can be performed either as ‘surface acting’, i.e. through workers pretending to experience certain emotions, or as ‘deep acting’, i.e. through workers ‘directly exhorting feeling’ or ‘making indirect use of trained imagination’ (Hochschild, 2012 [1983]), p. 38). What Hochschild refers to as ‘privately felt’ emotions are thus typically either suppressed through deep acting, as when a flight attendant suppresses anger or irritation with a demanding customer or expressed in a ‘fake’ manner through surface acting, as when a flight attendant continues to smile and

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4 act kindly towards a demanding customer. In this model, emotions originate in a person's private  
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6 inner life and are adapted to the social world through the internalisation of institutional 'feeling rules'  
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8 as individuals interact with other actors. The 'display work' of emotion is thus mediated by  
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10 internalised institutional norms that enforce a process of 'inwardly' changing emotion, either through  
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12 inauthentic expression ('acting') or suppression. The essential function of emotion regulation is  
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14 therefore to avoid the expression of inappropriate feelings and their negative consequences in social  
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16 life by managing bodily emotional expression in alignment with the 'pre-arranged' institutional  
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18 feeling rules that prevail in different social contexts. In short, the primary aim of emotion regulation  
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20 is to prevent people from expressing the 'wrong' feelings or an inappropriate intensity of feelings in  
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22 any given situation (Hochschild, 2012 [1983]). From this premise it follows that the more that  
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24 emotions are displayed on bodies (e.g. as part of a 'service') as opposed to being experienced in  
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26 bodies (as deep and authentic), the more individuals are likely to become alienated from the emotional  
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28 part of their jobs.  
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36 This theoretical framework has been critiqued for underestimating the individual and collective  
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38 agency of workers and the variability of emotions across multiple social roles and contexts (Wharton,  
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40 2009). The distinction posited in Hochschild's framework has since been nuanced in important ways  
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42 with regards to actors' identification with institutional ideals and their willingness to align themselves  
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44 with 'their' institution through 'emotionally competent' actorhood (Voronov & Weber, 2016). For  
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46 example, Jarvis (2017) has revisited the dichotomy between 'authentically' and 'inauthentically' felt  
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48 emotional expression, instead introducing a typology for studying a *continuum* of 'feigning  
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50 behaviors' defined according to the extent to which an actor's displayed emotion matches the  
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52 intensity of their felt emotions. Such feigning behaviours, Jarvis (2017, p. 307) argues, can be used  
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54 both to 'maintain and contest dominant institutional arrangements.' However, Jarvis's framework  
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4 mirrors Goffman's (1969) 'backstage/frontstage' metaphor in relying on the distinction between  
5 publicly displayed and privately felt emotion. The idea that emotion regulation takes the form either  
6 of expressed (and thus socially active) or suppressed (socially inactive) emotions persists in much of  
7 the research undertaken into the role of emotion regulation in institutional maintenance.  
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15 Recent scholarship has further enhanced our conceptual understanding of the disciplinary functions  
16 of emotion regulation and of emotions as resources. Seeking to incorporate emotions in explanations  
17 of institutional reproduction and change, Creed et al. (2014) have theorised that 'systemic shame' can  
18 serve as part of a 'shame nexus' that works to reproduce and maintain the institution. Through  
19 ongoing 'intersubjective surveillance and self-regulation', shame compels actors to suppress  
20 ('extinguish' or 'mask') transgressive behaviour (Creed et al., 2014, p. 276). Similarly, Gill and  
21 Burrow (2018) have shown how the use of 'fear work' can serve to sustain an institution by upholding  
22 excellent performance: that fear can be understood as an 'essential ingredient' in the institution of  
23 haute cuisine. In a study exploring how emotion is 'strategically deployed as part of purposeful efforts  
24 to create, maintain, and disrupt institutions', Jarvis et al. (2019, p. 1358) show how animal rights  
25 advocates strategically suppressed or expressed emotions in accordance with institutional norms  
26 prescribing when to elicit emotional responses from audiences. Voronov and Vince (2012) have  
27 developed a framework that combines Bourdieu's practice theory with psychodynamic theory to  
28 conceptualise institutionalised emotions as unconscious representations of organisational norms  
29 aimed at inducing self-regulating behaviour. But despite observing that 'emotions and emotional  
30 displays that are inconsistent with field-prescribed habitus simply "get disappeared"' (Voronov &  
31 Vince, 2012, p. 65, citing Fletcher, 1999), this framework falls short of explaining how such  
32 'disappearance' happens in practice. Similarly, Voronov and Weber (2016, p. 462) have provided a  
33 useful conceptualisation of 'emotional competence' as 'the ability to experience emotions needed for  
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4 self-regulation and to display emotions needed to elicit authorisation from others.’ However, although  
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6 these authors emphasise the role of others in accomplishing competent emotion regulation it is still  
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8 unclear how practices of emotion regulation are enacted in interactions and how such interactions can  
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10 be studied.  
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16 These key perspectives from the literature on emotion regulation as a form of institutional  
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18 maintenance are summarised in Table 1, highlighting how scholarship to date has focused primarily  
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20 on the expression of emotion as ‘display’ and less on the practices by which actors accomplish ‘non-  
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22 display’. This gap in research particularly blunts our understanding of how institutional actors  
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24 regulate emotion in interactions, including emotions that are deemed inappropriate.  
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30 ----- **Insert Table 1 about here** -----  
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35 Table 1 illustrates two key premises that underlie prevalent conceptualisations of emotion regulation  
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37 in institutional maintenance: (i) the premise that emotion regulation at work is a tactic that requires  
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39 individuals to decouple their expression of emotion from their physiological experience of emotion  
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41 (Hochschild, 1979, 2012 [1983]); and (ii) the premise that the emotions suppressed in this way are  
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43 ‘unfit’ and thus somehow removed or ‘disappeared’ from situations in line with institutionally  
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45 prescribed norms and rules. In the following section we unfold an additional perspective that  
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47 emphasises how emotion regulation is practised as a socially learned, embodied and socially practised  
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49 form of institutional maintenance.  
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55 ***Emotion absenting***  
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4 We define emotion absenting as a socially practiced and embodied form of emotion regulation that is  
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6 learned through increasing participation and socialisation in an institution. In this way members come  
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8 to know how to tacitly coordinate and adjust emotion practices according to each other and to  
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10 situations as they unfold. Thus, our approach to emotions foregrounds that they are social practices  
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12 (Zietsma & Toubiana, 2018) and ‘routinized way[s] in which bodies are moved, objects are handled,  
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14 subjects are treated, things are described and the world is understood’ (Reckwitz, 2002, p. 250).  
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20 Although we draw on Voronov and Weber’s (2016) concept of ‘emotional competences’, we move  
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22 away from the prevailing focus in scholarship on the extent to which actors decouple their expression  
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24 of emotions from their psychological experience of emotions. Instead, we apply an embodied  
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26 approach that understands emotional competences as consisting of ‘habitual bodily skills’ that actors  
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28 can develop into more sophisticated skills by incorporating what they learn from other members of  
29  
30 their group (Yakhlef, 2010, p. 423). These acquired skills include emotion regulation as an embodied,  
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32 tacit and practical competence learned through interactions with other members of a community of  
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34 practice (Lave & Wenger, 1991).  
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41 By exploring emotion regulation as embodied practices that are neither explicitly displayed in, nor  
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43 completely removed from, situations we answer a recent call from scholars of organisation studies  
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45 for research to investigate the relationship between presence and absence in institutions (Bento da  
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47 Silva et al., 2022). A recent study by Crawford and Dacin (2021) of the role of emotions and violence  
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49 in institutional work shows how subtle and even seemingly unarticulated expectations of the actions  
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51 of others – in this case via the implicit threat of violence – can function as powerful mechanisms of  
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53 emotion regulation that prompt specific practices aligned with institutional norms and rules. As  
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55 Crawford and Dacin (2021, p. 1220) argue, while the visible presence of violence reinforces social  
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4 order through written laws, regulations, prosecutions and armed police, violence also has an ‘absent  
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6 presence’. An obvious example of this absent presence in the institution of law enforcement is the  
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8 violence that is implied through the mere presence of armed officers.  
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13 We combine these insights with the concept of ‘functional invisibility’ (Star & Strauss, 1999) to open  
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15 a new avenue for research into the tacit and unarticulated aspects of emotion regulation. With this  
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17 concept, Star and Strauss (1999, p. 15) have demonstrated how many roles and efforts are ignored or  
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19 go unnoticed because certain aspects of people’s work and social status become socially invisible as  
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21 part of unrecognised ‘background’ activities and routines, thereby highlighting that ‘the visibility and  
22  
23 legitimacy of work can never be taken for granted’. The question of which particular practices can be  
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25 defined as ‘invisible’ is highly dependent on context and situation, because ‘some forms of invisibility  
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27 result from the different perspectives afforded by different points of view in the (always)  
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29 heterogeneous world of cooperative work’ (Star & Strauss, 1999, p. 23).  
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37 Our concept of emotion absenting thus builds on the four key insights: (i) that emotions and therefore  
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39 emotion regulation are socially learned and embodied practices; (ii) that emotion regulation can be  
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41 socially practiced via interaction with others; (iii) that emotion regulation can be more or less  
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43 competently practised depending on an actor’s ability to carry out their institutional role; and (iv) that  
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45 emotion regulation practices can become functionally invisible to ‘outside’ actors or because ‘inside’  
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47 actors take them for granted as part of their routinised ways of being part of the institution. Following  
48  
49 these assumptions, we posit that emotion absenting practices may be empirically observable for  
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51 outsiders, even if the meaning of these practices may be far more complex to ascertain. To paraphrase  
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53 Star & Strauss, when we know how and what to look for when investigating functionally invisible  
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55 practices, ‘one could literally see the work being done’ (Star & Strauss, 1999, p. 20).  
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## Methods

While theoretical understandings of emotion regulation in institutions have evolved to bring people into the focus of study, actors remain strangely cut off from their bodies and embodied practices in most such research because data mostly consists of actors' written accounts, spoken words and reflections. To address this shortcoming, we turn to ethnographic methods as being best suited to capture the embodied practices and interactions of individuals learned through social norms and taken-for-granted assumptions in institutional settings (Zilber, 2020).

### *Ethnographic fieldwork*

Our empirical data is selected from an in-depth ethnographic study conducted over a total of 23 months as part of the first author's research into everyday innovative practices among members of a Scandinavian police organisation. From August 2012 to January 2013 the researcher spent six months in a large suburban police district. During this time, she conducted full-time fieldwork in four different police units to obtain a comprehensive account of the varieties of police tasks and work cultures, including crime analysis and strategising, patrolling, investigation work and community policing. This was followed by another 12 months of fieldwork from July 2013 to June 2014, with every other day spent in the field. Finally, the researcher undertook a third period of full-time fieldwork in a large city police district for five months from December 2014 to April 2015.

The researcher wrote up fieldnotes daily throughout her fieldwork, usually by the end of the same day. These notes were recorded in a logbook in the form of a separate Word document used to keep track of informants, to record key themes and learnings from observations and interviews, and for noting reflections in the style of a personal research diary. The researcher also wrote up fieldnotes in

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4 the form of vignettes of situations and events that had made a particularly strong impression on her,  
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6 aiming thereby to capture the rich details of these situations. She conducted daily informal  
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8 ethnographic interviews (Spradley, 1979).  
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### 11 12 13 ***The emergence of emotion regulation as an analytical theme*** 14

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16 Ethnographic methods require researchers to adapt to context-specific emotional practices and social  
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18 codes in which they have received no prior formal or informal training. Through such immersion, the  
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20 first author became highly alert to social codes indicating the ‘proper’ emotional responses. Being  
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22 already aware that emotional control is often a theme in the ‘war stories’ that senior officers tell  
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24 rookies (Van Maanen, 1973), the researcher observed that when codes and norms were articulated by  
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26 officers they were typically shared through metaphors and stories as a way of transferring  
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28 institutionalised ‘feeling rules’ (Rafaeli & Sutton, 1987), as illustrated in the following excerpt from  
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30 her fieldnotes:  
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34 One officer explains how he has learned to ‘do the right thing’ in emotionally challenging  
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36 situations. He recalls how he has learned a lot from a text he read as part of a course at the  
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38 police academy in which there was a reference to an elephant and a mouse. “As an officer,’ he  
39  
40 explains, ‘you’re subject to a lot of hatred from some citizens, but you’re always the elephant  
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42 because you have the big police system behind you.” (Fieldnotes, 2015)  
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44 The researcher’s socialisation into the institution’s emotion regulation practices was crucial to gain  
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46 the officers’ acceptance and to avoid compromising their authority in encounters with citizens.  
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### 49 50 51 ***Data analysis process*** 52

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54 We analysed our empirical material through an abductive process, iterating between data and theory  
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56 (Timmermans & Tavory, 2012). As the first step, we reviewed several vignettes to select the situation  
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58 most conducive for analysing emotion practices in detail. To identify ‘central spaces’ within which  
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4 ‘institutional dynamics unfold’ (Zilber, 2020, p. 16), we mapped out the key institutional locations  
5 on a whiteboard, including ‘inside the police car’, ‘out on the street’, ‘at the station’, and ‘at the crime  
6 scene’. We related the emotion practices observed to the identified central locations, all the while  
7 asking ourselves basic analytical questions such as ‘Which emotion practices are deemed appropriate  
8 or inappropriate where, by whom, and why?’. It was this process of mapping the varying emotion  
9 practices of police officers across key institutional locations that directed our attention to the literature  
10 on emotion regulation as institutional maintenance.  
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23 As a second step of the analysis, we selected an empirical event for in-depth analysis of emotion  
24 regulation practices in which two police officers on night patrol in the city were called to help in the  
25 arrest of a violent suspect. In the findings section below, we present our analysis in the form of three  
26 scenes: 1) *Learning When and How to ‘Let the Uniform Take It’*; 2) *Calling on the Elephant*; and 3)  
27 *The Spectacle*. Unfolding both inside and outside of the patrol car, each of these scenes took place on  
28 the street where the institution of law enforcement meets the public face to face. We then performed  
29 an initial analysis of the three situations comprising the event, exploring how the relationships  
30 between the actors, locations and actions manifested and differed in ways that were significant for  
31 police work and emotion regulation. In this step we also coded all material artefacts of institutional  
32 significance, e.g. patrol cars, body armour, mobile phones, handcuffs, and uniforms.  
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48 In our third step of data analysis, we identified instances of *emotion absenting* through the following  
49 three-stage process.  
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53 1) Our iterations between theory and empirical analysis were driven by the following question: how  
54 was it possible for the officers in our study to regulate their emotions in alignment with institutional  
55 emotion rules *and* as a group? If each officer suppressed inappropriate emotions, they should be  
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4 removed from and thus ‘inactive’ in social interactions. Yet our initial analysis led us to understand  
5 these emotions as ‘still there’ and active, even if they were not explicitly expressed by the officers  
6 during the arrest. This led us to focus on how officers learn institutional feeling rules, when such rules  
7 apply, and how to adhere to them in practice through on-the-job training and participation in the  
8 practice of policing with other officers. Accordingly, we revisited the data to identify instances of  
9 situated learning that could provide us with valuable insights into the transfer of tacit knowledge  
10 (Lave & Wenger, 1991). More specifically, we mapped out examples of formal and informal training  
11 where officers learned the regular, skilful performance of bodies (Reckwitz, 2002), approaching such  
12 purposeful organisational efforts to shape bodies as a form of ‘organisational body work’ (Lawrence,  
13 Schlindwein, Johini, & Heaphy, 2022). It was through this abductive process that we formulated and  
14 continuously developed the notion of emotion absenting.

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30 2) We further explored the tacit and embodied dimension of emotion absenting by comparing  
31 different ways of ‘being’ and ‘doing’ the institutionalised role of a police officer in the different  
32 situations we identified with data from training sessions, briefing sessions, regular patrols and  
33 incident responses that incorporated on-the-job-training for junior officers. This analysis enabled us  
34 to identify practices such as ‘using the body to shield colleagues’ or ‘using calming body language’  
35 as instances of socially practiced embodied emotion regulation through which the officers learned to  
36 work *with* emotions, such as fear, as a group rather than suppressing them individually.

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47 3) We developed three categories to explore the different dimensions of emotion absenting illustrated  
48 in each of the scenes presented in our Findings section, i.e. the categories of *Teaching and learning*  
49 *through participation* (Scene 1); *Collective and coordinated accomplishment* (Scene 2); and *Dynamic*  
50 *ongoing accomplishment* (Scene 3). While this categorisation served as a useful analytical distinction  
51 for capturing the main dimensions of emotion absenting found in this institutional context, it should  
52 be noted that in practice these dimensions are likely to be simultaneously present according to the  
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4 institutionalized norms of a given situation. In our analysis of each scene, we paid special attention  
5  
6 to the institutionally distinct bodily skills that are developed within a community of practice. As the  
7  
8 final step in our data analysis, we invited an experienced police officer from the same unit to provide  
9  
10 a ‘member’s response’ to our account. As valuable sources of knowledge about their social worlds,  
11  
12 members can help researchers by querying and/or corroborating their accounts, including by  
13  
14 identifying any gaps or misinterpretations in such analysis (Emerson & Pollner, 1988).  
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### 20 *Setting*

21  
22 The institutional setting of law enforcement in Scandinavia is particularly well suited for exploring  
23  
24 the essential role played by emotion regulation practices in institutional maintenance. Police work is  
25  
26 permeated with danger and fear due to the very nature of their professional duties. (Henry, 2004). At  
27  
28 the same time, it is crucial for western police organisations and law enforcement institutions that  
29  
30 police officers are capable of regulating their own emotions in coordination with other officers and  
31  
32 of anticipating and responding appropriately to the emotions of others, including potentially hostile  
33  
34 emotion practices on the part of the public. Failing to do so might compromise the ability of officers  
35  
36 to act responsibly under pressure, potentially undermining their authority and endangering  
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38 themselves, their colleagues, and members of the public.  
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46 The event we analyse below took place in a large Scandinavian city in 2015 on a cold Saturday night  
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48 in winter between around 01:30 and 02:30 as the first author joined two police officers on night patrol  
49  
50 during her fieldwork with a centrally located big-city patrol unit. (All places and people in the  
51  
52 following scenes have been pseudonymised.) For members of the public, inner-city nightlife offers  
53  
54 institutionalised opportunities to behave in ways that would not be tolerated during the day. For police  
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56 officers, by contrast, the inner-city nightlife is an often hostile and physically and emotionally  
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4 challenging work environment in which potentially dangerous encounters are more frequent than  
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6 during the day, often exacerbated by people's use of alcohol and drugs. When working the streets at  
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8 night, therefore, officers must carefully adapt their emotion regulation practices to each situation they  
9  
10 encounter and how that situation might develop.  
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## 15 16 **Findings**

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18 Our analysis demonstrates how emotion absenting enabled the police officers to practise fear and  
19  
20 anger in accordance with institutionalised scripts which prescribe that police officers remain calm,  
21  
22 capable of taking any insults thrown at them, and always in control. More specifically, emotion  
23  
24 absenting allowed the officers to render certain emotions such as fear and anger functionally invisible  
25  
26 yet still present and consequential for their collective work. As we analyse each scene, we highlight  
27  
28 how emotion absenting: (i) is a socially learned practice; (ii) enables actors to coordinate their  
29  
30 responses to situations on account of the shared institutional elements of this practice; and (iii) is an  
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32 ongoing accomplishment adjusted to how each situation unfolds.  
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### 40 *Scene 1. Learning When and How to 'Let the Uniform Take It'*

41 Police officers John and Michael are patrolling the streets of the inner city at night. John  
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43 has worked for the local police department for over two years now – long enough to be  
44  
45 considered a veteran in his department where officers typically stay for no more than two  
46  
47 years due to the intensity of the inner-city jobs they have to deal with.

48 John has recently become a father and is talking about how he's just applied for a day job  
49  
50 in the administration to avoid working nights. As we drive, he refers to the people out at  
51  
52 night as "drunk and lame" (using the slang term 'lame' to mean acting idiotically).

53 Michael has just graduated from the police academy and remains visibly highly alert as  
54  
55 they drive, keeping an eye on the streets while conversing with John. Driving slowly past a  
56  
57 group of loud men, John says "Fuck! Just look at those drunks! You'd better lock the  
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4 doors. We don't want them ripping them open. That happened to me a few weeks ago.”

5  
6 Michael responds by locking the car doors.

7  
8 Soon enough a call comes over the radio for John and Michael to assist in an ongoing  
9  
10 incident in which a man in his mid-thirties has assaulted a young woman outside a bar. The  
11  
12 radio call describes the man as violent. John promptly accelerates and switches on the  
13  
14 flashing blue lights and the siren. People on the street look confused. Two men jump out of  
15  
16 the way, laughing and playfully exaggerating their fear of being run over by the patrol car.  
17  
18 A group of teenagers deliberately walk in the way of the car, slowing it down before they  
19  
20 reluctantly move aside. One of the teenagers throws a beer-can at the car but misses. John  
21  
22 and Michael don't seem to take much notice until another beer-can is thrown and hits the  
23  
24 car this time. This prompts a short pause in John's chatter, which in turn makes Michael  
25  
26 fall silent for a few seconds before the officers resume their conversation.

### 27 *Analysis of Scene 1*

28  
29 In analysing this first scene our focus is on emotion absenting as a socially learned and embodied  
30  
31 practice. From the outset, we see how Michael observes John's reading of, and reactions to, the  
32  
33 situation. By doing so, he learns how to align his emotion practices with his colleague's and to adjust  
34  
35 to the context of inner-city nightlife as an environment that calls for officers to exercise both higher  
36  
37 alertness and greater tolerance. Police officers frequently referred to the emotion regulation practices  
38  
39 they performed in the face of verbal and physical aggression or outright attacks as a matter of 'letting  
40  
41 the uniform take it'. This expression was commonly used among officers in the unit to remind  
42  
43 themselves and each other that while assaults and aggression may be physically aimed at them as  
44  
45 human beings, they are not directed at them *personally*. 'Letting the uniform take it' thus refers to an  
46  
47 important emotion regulation practice for police officers when involved in challenging encounters  
48  
49 with the public, especially as all such encounters are institutional in nature insofar as civilians 'meet'  
50  
51 and respond less to individual officers than the institution of law enforcement they represent. In this  
52  
53 sense, each officer is simultaneously present as a potentially vulnerable body and absented because  
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4 it is 'the uniform' that does the work, especially if there is more than one uniform(ed officer) present.  
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6 If we were to understand John's and Michael's emotion regulation in this scene as individual  
7  
8 suppression, we would assume their emotions to be effectively removed from the situation. When we  
9  
10 understand their emotion regulation practices as absenting, we can see how 'letting the uniform take  
11  
12 it' is a socially practiced form of emotion regulation because it requires the competent  
13  
14 accomplishment of all group members to know when and how to ignore insults or provocations by  
15  
16 members of the public as well as when and how to stop ignoring and to react. Over time, Michael's  
17  
18 training and participation in police work will allow him to practice emotion regulation through  
19  
20 embodied routines. It is through this socialisation that emotion absenting becomes 'natural', i.e.  
21  
22 functionally invisible, for the individual police officer and for the group. Thus, emotion absenting is  
23  
24 a learned practice that requires judgment as to when and how to engage with citizens in relation to  
25  
26 each specific context and situation.  
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34 As a new officer on the job, Michael still needs to learn the practice of emotion regulation and thus  
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36 compliantly follows the older officer's specific instructions and way of being and comporting himself  
37  
38 in this situation. It is through such on-the-job training in emotion regulation that new officers learn  
39  
40 the practices of competently *being*, *acting* and *understanding the world* as a police officer, including  
41  
42 how, why, and when to 'let the uniform take it'. Alert to everything happening on the street, Michael  
43  
44 has not yet developed the selective awareness of the danger that comes with the competent regulation  
45  
46 of fear. While John's instructions to lock the car doors teach Michael to protect himself physically  
47  
48 from a potentially harmful encounter, locking the doors is also a way of proactively protecting their  
49  
50 authority as police officers from being challenged by unpredictable partygoers who might seek to  
51  
52 provoke them. In such situations, the physical and emotional aspects of individual and group  
53  
54 protection are interwoven with efforts to maintain law enforcement as an institution. The extent to  
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4 which officers are guided by the specific degree of danger they perceive in a given situation is  
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6 reflected, for example, in the ways officers in the key institutional location of a patrol car adjust their  
7  
8 emotion regulation practices according to whether or not they are alone or are transporting citizens  
9  
10 under arrest. In Scene 1, the car affords a space in which John can openly express his frustration with  
11  
12 the “drunk and lame” partygoers’ without their overhearing him and thus risking provocation, while  
13  
14 any fear or anger he feels related to the risk of potential confrontation remains latently present and  
15  
16 available as a potential resource should the situation so require. What we wish to draw attention to  
17  
18 here is not so much John’s emotions or the level of their felt or expressed authenticity, however, but  
19  
20 rather his emotion regulation practices that are so essential in teaching Michael how to be a police  
21  
22 officer in situations where institutionalised norms prescribe that officers avoid confrontations with  
23  
24 people on the street. The importance of learning how not to panic and of accomplishing this  
25  
26 collectively as a team of police officers in challenging encounters with the public was strongly  
27  
28 emphasised by the police officer interviewed for their member response to our analysis:  
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34 You can never lose control as an officer. When colleagues are under pressure, they may get  
35  
36 tunnel vision and mess things up for everybody. We have an unofficial term for panicking. It’s  
37  
38 called ‘yellow bucket’. I’ve no idea where it comes from but anyhow that’s what it’s called.  
39  
40 When a colleague loses their mind and reacts without thinking clearly, we’ll say “Don’t get all  
41  
42 yellow bucket on me now and start running around and fighting like a crazy person!” In a hostile  
43  
44 situation we always need to have each other’s back, to rely on each other and *stay together*,  
45  
46 because if we need to get out of that situation two minutes later then we’re going to need to  
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48 move together, right?  
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53 This response further confirms our observation that police officers are *socialised* into emotion  
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55 regulation practices. Such emotion regulation can comprise several finely honed and fine-tuned  
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57 practices aimed at remaining calm and in control while rendering fear functionally invisible to anyone  
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4 who has not been socialised into these practices. Because fear is not suppressed by the individual, it  
5  
6 does not ‘disappear’ (Voronov & Vince, 2012) from the situation and, through the socially practiced  
7  
8 emotion absenting, it is available as a resource to members of the group as they continuously need to  
9  
10 adjust their emotion regulation to the unfolding situation.  
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### 16 *Scene 2: Calling on the Elephant*

17 John and Michael arrive at the scene of the assault. Two of their colleagues, a policeman  
18 and a policewoman, have already arrested the suspect. The street is crowded. Some people  
19 are waiting in queues for bars and clubs while others have gathered to witness the arrest.  
20  
21 The suspect is lying leg-locked face down on the ground. The two police officers who  
22 made the arrest are sitting on the suspect, using their weight to hold him down. Both  
23 officers are silent and highly alert, casting uneasy side glances at the crowd to monitor the  
24 alcohol-infused and increasingly tense atmosphere building around them. Their facial  
25 expressions are concentrated and calm, their body postures exude physical strength and  
26 control. The crowd is growing now, with more and more people drawing closer around the  
27 police officers and the suspect. Some of the newcomers to the scene react with hostility to  
28 the police officers. “Fuck the police!” “Fucking psychopaths!” one yells, and others soon  
29 join in.  
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38 Ignoring the taunts of the crowd, all of the officers remain seemingly unaffected by the  
39 insults raining down on them as they focus on constraining and pinning down the suspect  
40 who is now writhing on the ground. More officers arrive, placing themselves physically  
41 between the crowd and the officers handling the arrestee to shield their colleagues while  
42 calmly but insistently instructing people to back away.  
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### 49 *Analysis of Scene 2*

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51 In Scene 2 we focus on emotion absenting as a collective and coordinated accomplishment performed  
52 by officers while they manage the crowd as members of a community of practice representing the  
53 institution of law enforcement. The need for such collective efforts arises as more and more people  
54 gather around the arrest and as the officers begin to apply stronger and more coordinated efforts to  
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4 prevent things escalating beyond their control. Whereas ‘letting the uniform take it’ had proven an  
5  
6 adequate emotion regulation practice for John and Michael in response to the provocations they  
7  
8 encountered in the car in Scene 1, the incident unfolding on the street in Scene 2 – and especially the  
9  
10 growing hostility among the crowd of onlookers – calls for ‘heavier’ emotional ‘armour’. In this  
11  
12 situation, such ‘armour’ took the form of collective and coordinated efforts of absencing emotion  
13  
14 through practices we categorise as ‘calling on the elephant’.  
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20 As outlined earlier, the phrase ‘calling on the elephant’ refers to a metaphor used to teach recruits to  
21  
22 remember that “you’re always the elephant and they [members of the public] are the mice, because  
23  
24 you have the big police system behind you, and they don’t.” In this metaphor the ‘elephant’ represents  
25  
26 law enforcement as an institution, alluding to the popular understanding of elephants as big, strong,  
27  
28 and thick-skinned. ‘Calling on the elephant’ is thus commonly used by officers as a way of describing  
29  
30 their coordinated emotion regulation practices in especially tense situations where it is crucial to  
31  
32 remember that individual citizens are mere ‘mice’ compared to the collective might and power of law  
33  
34 enforcement. Below we refer to this metaphor in describing the emotion absencing practices  
35  
36 continually performed by the officers in Scene 2 as they collectively attempt to embody the institution  
37  
38 – i.e. the big thick-skinned elephant – in the face of increasing challenges from the crowd. The  
39  
40 significance of collective emotion and emotion regulation practices in police work was confirmed by  
41  
42 the member’s response to our analysis:  
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48  
49 It’s all about groupthink. I train colleagues in this, unofficially, because I think it’s really  
50  
51 important. I always say to them, “Think about when you’re at the theatre and how if one person  
52  
53 starts applauding then the others follow. If one laughs, the laughter spreads like wildfire. It’s  
54  
55 the same with anger and violence. If one person in a crowd of demonstrators goes bananas,  
56  
57 others might follow.” The public expects us to be professional and they have to believe we’re  
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4 in control. If we don't believe in our uniform, who will? If people lose faith in us and start  
5  
6 feeling insecure they could start to panic.  
7

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9 In this light, the primary task of the officers in Scene 2 can best be understood as that of avoiding the  
10  
11 spread and intensification of unwanted emotion in the crowd.  
12  
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14  
15 Tensions are already escalating at the scene of the arrest when John and Michael arrive, with shouts  
16  
17 of "Fuck the police!" and "Fucking psychopaths!" suggesting that at least some of the onlookers  
18  
19 assume the man being arrested is a victim of police brutality. These insults not only directly challenge  
20  
21 the institution of law enforcement but also potentially threaten the safety of each and all of the officers  
22  
23 at the scene. An important constraining factor for officers in this situation is that whereas the people  
24  
25 in the crowd can explicitly enact verbal aggression, the officers on the receiving end of these insults  
26  
27 must practise their work collectedly as one institutional body, i.e. 'the elephant'. The officers  
28  
29 accomplish this primarily by relying on the implicit potential for violence inherent in their state-  
30  
31 mandated use of force and by drawing on the training they have received in not engaging with  
32  
33 provocations, remaining calm and working together in such situations. As such, Scene 3 not only  
34  
35 serves to illustrate how the 'constant absence and presence' of violence can be used as a powerful  
36  
37 resource in upholding an institution (Crawford & Dacin, 2021, p. 1220) but also how the officers'  
38  
39 ability to practice emotion absenting in hostile situations relies on their collective emotional  
40  
41 competence, i.e. their socially learned habitual skills. This emotional competence is evident in the  
42  
43 ways in which some officers try to manage the crowd through the use of calm and non-escalatory  
44  
45 body language while others use their bodies to shield their colleagues from potential harm.  
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55 In this situation it is the collective and tacitly coordinated aspects of emotion regulation practices that  
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57 enable the officers to act together as a body of professional thick-skinned professionals who can be  
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4 trusted to remain calm in the face of danger and threats, including by collectively ‘ignoring’ insults  
5  
6 from a hostile crowd. Through these embodied de-escalatory practices, anger and fear are at once  
7  
8 absented yet still implicitly present and consequential in the situation, as evidenced by the officers’  
9  
10 uneasy glances as they monitor the crowd. Nonetheless, if things should escalate into a physical  
11  
12 confrontation the police could ultimately resort to stronger means of force than the public, including  
13  
14 the use of truncheons and tear-gas. In other words, everyone involved understands that the elephant  
15  
16 could and if necessary would trample the mouse. Such an explicit use of force would be especially  
17  
18 harmful to the institution of law enforcement in Scandinavia, where the relationship between police  
19  
20 officers and the public, in general, is characterised by a relatively high level of trust (Mésko &  
21  
22 Tankebe, 2015). This trust is repeatedly renegotiated and re-affirmed in every new encounter where  
23  
24 the institutional maintenance depends above all on the officers’ competent emotion absenting.  
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### 29 *Scene 3: The Spectacle*

31 The suspect is pinned down on the ground by a female officer, Susan, who is sitting on top  
32  
33 of him and telling him to calm down. When he continues struggling, Susan leans in to put  
34  
35 more weight on his body. At this point, John jumps in to help his colleagues, holding the  
36  
37 suspect’s arms and cuffed wrists so Susan can focus on constraining his kicking legs.

38 The young woman whom the arrestee is suspected of having assaulted has been abandoned  
39  
40 by her friends for the warmth of the bar and stands now sobbing and visibly shaking,  
41  
42 whether from the shock or the cold or both, a thin line of blood running from her lips. She  
43  
44 seems to attract no attention from the crowd. A police officer offers her a tissue as he  
45  
46 interviews her for the crime report.

47 The arrested man starts to scream – a weird and sinister kind of screaming that jangles  
48  
49 every nerve. The screaming triggers renewed attention from the crowd. Some onlookers  
50  
51 loudly protest while filming and photographing the officers and the scene with their  
52  
53 phones. A young man yells “What are you doing? Stop that! Can’t you see you’re hurting  
54  
55 him?”

56 The suspect continues screaming in short, jarring bursts. The three police officers now on  
57  
58 top of him glance at each other silently as they constrain him, tightening their lips and  
59  
60 clenching their jaws. All of the officers continue to scan the crowd.

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4 John bends down to speak into the suspect's ear, though loudly enough for his nearest  
5 colleagues to overhear: "Come on! This is silly! Get a hold of yourself! You know we're  
6 not hurting you! If you'd just lie still, we wouldn't have to hold you so tight."  
7

8  
9 The suspect gasps for breath, exhausted by his own screaming. In a hoarse whisper he  
10 promises to be calm. The three police officers loosen their grip and ease off a little, though  
11 still holding his head and his arms, hands, and legs. The suspect immediately starts  
12 squirming again, shouting "Let go of my hands! It hurts, goddammit! Let go of my hands!  
13 They can't breathe!"  
14

15  
16 Rolling his eyes, the officer holding the suspect's wrists briefly signals to his colleagues  
17 that he is stopping himself from smiling at this nonsensical complaint. "Well, my friend,"  
18 he says, "I can't let go of your hands, but if you lie still it won't hurt." But the suspect  
19 continues shouting, now suddenly redirecting his protests to Susan: "You! You there,  
20 holding my legs! I know you're a bitch. You're a woman. I heard you before. You're a  
21 fucking whore! You know what I'm gonna do? I'm gonna fucking beat the fuck out of  
22 your husband. I will... I will fuck you... I will fuck your husband..."  
23

24  
25 Susan clenches her jaw and looks down at him, replying in a low voice, "So you want to  
26 fuck my husband, huh?"  
27

28  
29 The police officer holding the suspect's head leans in and pushes the man's face to the  
30 ground. "Keep quiet!" he commands harshly, glancing impatiently over his shoulder to  
31 check whether the police van has arrived to transport the arrestee to the station.  
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### 41 *Analysis of Scene 3*

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43 In analysing this third scene, our focus is on the officers' embodied practice of emotion absenting as  
44 a dynamic and ongoing accomplishment that is adjusted according to how each situation unfolds. As  
45 tensions mount between the officers and the suspect and the people on the street, the situation now  
46 turns into a 'spectacle'. The suspect's screaming, for example, is possibly an attempt to win the  
47 'audience' over to his side as a victim of police brutality. The actual victim of the assault, meanwhile,  
48 draws no attention from the crowd. And despite the officers' best efforts to remain in control, their  
49 interactions with the suspect are only attracting growing attention from the increasingly agitated  
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4 crowd, including civilians monitoring and recording the officers' use of force. Shouts of "Stop that!",  
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6 "What are you doing?", and "Can't you see you're hurting him?" indicate the suspect has indeed  
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8 convinced some onlookers of his version of the situation.  
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13 The situation depicted in Scene 3 is further complicated by the presence of phones among the crowd,  
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15 adding another key factor for officers to consider in their emotion regulation practices. This is because  
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17 the video footage captured by members of the crowd filming this 'spectacle' could prove a powerful  
18  
19 weapon on 'the institutional battlefield' (DiMaggio, 1983), especially if used as evidence in trials  
20  
21 where police officers are accused of applying disproportionate force. From the perspective of police  
22  
23 officers, such footage constitutes a threat in that it can be used for 'framing' them by people filming  
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25 and editing only selective and incriminating aspects of situations and then using these 'out of context'  
26  
27 as the basis for false accusations. The ubiquity of smartphones and the ability of citizens to record  
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29 and share clips of their encounters with the police not only poses a potential threat to individual  
30  
31 officers but to the institution of law enforcement as a whole. In the presence of so many recording  
32  
33 devices, emotion regulation practices take on even greater importance since officers must now  
34  
35 practise their work in a manner that allows as little room for misconstructions as possible. Such efforts  
36  
37 to control the interpretation of the situation are evident in Scene 3 when one officer explicitly tries to  
38  
39 call out what he perceives to be the arrestee's attempt to frame the situation as an instance of police  
40  
41 brutality, commanding him to "Get a hold of yourself! You know we're not hurting you!" Highly  
42  
43 alert, the officers coordinate their physical restraint of the suspect as carefully as possible to stay  
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45 within the bounds of the institutional mandate they are given as officers.  
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55 The arrestee's threats of sexual violence are aimed not only at Susan but also her family, though the  
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57 fact that these misogynistic insults are not voiced loudly enough to be heard by the crowd suggests  
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4 they could be understood as attempts to provoke Susan into reacting forcefully in a way that might  
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6 be witnessed and recorded and ultimately used against her. Susan's fellow officers confirm and  
7  
8 reproduce her deliberate absencing of anger by remaining calm. Their emotion absencing practices are  
9  
10 dynamically adjusted to the situation by mirroring each other's body language, i.e. by acting on and  
11  
12 mirroring cues such as each other's tone of voice, tightened lips, and clenched jaws. This body  
13  
14 language can function as a signal to the crowd that they remain calm (for now) while at the same time  
15  
16 indicating among themselves that they are reaching the limits of their tolerance. If we interpret their  
17  
18 intolerance as suppressed emotion, we would not see 'the gamut of indicators' (Star & Strauss, 1999,  
19  
20 p. 14) of absencing by which the officers implicitly make their intolerance functionally invisible to  
21  
22 the crowd through subtle, volatile and minimally dosed embodied practices exclusively directed at  
23  
24 each other. This situated aspect of emotion absencing is especially evident in one of the officer's  
25  
26 responses to the provocations aimed at Susan, as he explicitly and harshly commands the arrestee to  
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28 "Keep quiet!". In this situation, the officer signals with a brief, targeted, and angry command that the  
29  
30 arrestee has crossed a line, but his overall body language still mirrors that of his colleagues. From the  
31  
32 impatient glances of the officer looking out for the arrival of the van to transport the arrestee, we can  
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34 assume that the officers at the scene are unsure as to how much longer they can remain in control of  
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36 the situation.  
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46 Our analysis of police officers' emotion regulation in these three scenes shows how crucial the  
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48 socially practiced emotion absencing practices are both as resources for officers in responding  
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50 dynamically to tense situations and for maintaining the institution of law enforcement as a whole.  
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## 54 **Discussion**

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4 By identifying emotion absencing as a form of institutional maintenance we advance several  
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6 conversations in the existing literature. Most prior research on emotion regulation in institutional  
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8 maintenance has assumed that emotions are regulated either through the expression of emotions  
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10 deemed appropriate or the suppression of emotions deemed inappropriate, attributing such regulation  
11  
12 to actors' efforts to comply with and conform to institutional norms. With our study of emotion  
13  
14 absencing we nuance this assumption and contribute to the literature in the following ways.  
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20 First, we argue that it is overly simplistic to treat publicly expressed emotion as decoupled from  
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22 private experience. Previous accounts have generally proceeded from the premise that actors maintain  
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24 institutions by accepting self-imposed limits on their behaviour as a consequence of their embodiment  
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26 and internalisation of institutionally appropriate emotion (Voronov & Vince, 2012). Scholars have  
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28 argued that such emotion regulation is facilitated through the 'mechanism of ongoing intersubjective  
29  
30 surveillance and self-regulation' (Creed et al., 2014, p. 275). Consistent with this argument, there has  
31  
32 been a tendency in the literature to view the 'successful' display of institutionalised emotion as  
33  
34 'feigning behavior' (Jarvis, 2017; Jarvis et al., 2019). To these accounts, Voronov and Weber (2016)  
35  
36 have offered an alternative perspective that views institutional maintenance as depending on  
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38 'emotional competence', i.e. the ability of individuals to align their emotion regulation competently  
39  
40 and deliberately with institutional norms. However, the literature to date does not fully engage with  
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42 the tacit, embodied and social aspects of viewing emotion regulation primarily through such  
43  
44 'displaying' or 'removing' practices. As a consequence, little has been known of how institutional  
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46 actors regulate emotions in interactions with each other through situated and social learning that is  
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48 practiced and coordinated in interaction.  
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4 The approach we take in this study goes some way to address these gaps by understanding emotion  
5 regulation as a socially embodied practice (Reckwitz, 2002), i.e. as a form of emotion regulation that  
6 is learned by and through the body in sophisticated ways (Yakhlef, 2010) via participation in  
7 communities of practice (Lave & Wenger, 1991). This conceptualisation enables us to explain how  
8 certain emotion regulation practices can be ‘functionally invisible’ (Star & Strauss, 1999) yet still  
9 very much active and consequential in a given situation. We contribute to the emergent stream of  
10 literature on the absence and presence of emotions in institutions with our novel theoretical  
11 conceptualisation of ‘emotion absenting’ as a socially learned, embodied and socially practised  
12 emotion regulation that can be simultaneously absent and present in a situation, depending on actors’  
13 socialisation, i.e. what they have learned to ‘see’, understand and recognise as relevant. As such, we  
14 argue that emotion regulation can be studied as a social interaction practice through which members  
15 of a community of practice learn how to *be* and to *be part of* a given institution and contribute to its  
16 maintenance through such participation. This insight helps explain how actors learn to regulate their  
17 emotions aligned with other members according to institutional norms and how they collectively fine-  
18 tune and adjust this practical competence as different situations unfold.

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41 Second, we have made the case throughout this study for understanding the regulation practices of  
42 emotion absenting as a form of ‘emotional competence’ in the sense developed by Voronov and  
43 Weber (2016), i.e. as a set of skills acquired through socialisation into the job and through continuous  
44 social learning. We have demonstrated how emotional competence is an especially important aspect  
45 of emotion regulation in institutional maintenance. With our cinematic analysis of scenes from a  
46 public arrest, we demonstrate that ‘letting the uniform take it’ and ‘calling on the elephant’ represent  
47 two key emotion regulation practices by which police officers can competently regulate emotions,  
48 not by suppressing or feigning but by acting *on* and *with* emotions as a group. We propose that the  
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4 practice of emotion absenting enables actors to adjust their regulation practices dynamically and  
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6 collectively to the changing requirements of situations.  
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11 Third, our study contributes to research into emotion regulation as institutional maintenance by  
12 demonstrating how ethnographic approaches and cinematic analysis can yield crucial insights into  
13 the institutional embeddedness of emotion regulation practices. In our case, these approaches enabled  
14 us to shed valuable light on how people practice emotion regulation together as part of their work.  
15 We would like to see more emphasis on studying peoples' interactions, their embodied skills, and  
16 how signifiers on bodies can be essential aspects of competent institutionalised emotion regulation.  
17 This entails including phenomena such as clothes, uniforms and make-up, and capturing the embodied  
18 aspects of emotion regulation evident in changes in facial muscles, such as smiles and tightened lips,  
19 and the positioning of people's bodies relative to others (e.g. in our case to 'shield' fellow officers).  
20 As a promising avenue for future research, scholars could explore similarities and differences in how  
21 actors embody the same institution across different communities of practice or investigate the  
22 organisation of formal and informal ways of socialising newcomers into emotion regulation practices  
23 in different institutional contexts.  
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43 Finally, although the focus of our study has been on how actors practice emotion regulation together  
44 to maintain their institution, it is vital not to overlook the 'dark side' of such socially learned  
45 emotional competences and practices. In particular, researchers should be alert to the institutionally  
46 disruptive potential of emotion regulation practices that may evolve and proliferate as new members  
47 learn unofficial and illegitimate ways of being institutional members through their socialisation.  
48 Emotion absenting does not necessarily work for 'good' and can have adverse consequences,  
49 especially if developed and maintained in the 'shadows' of an organisation as practices no-one  
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4 discusses, questions, or improves. As such, the concept of emotion absenting can help inform research  
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6 into actors' emotion regulation practices that are misaligned with the institutions that these actors are  
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8 members of and thus render that institution more fragile (Lok et al., 2017). Future studies could apply  
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10 this concept to focus specifically on how institutional actors learn and practise emotion regulation  
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12 through emotion absenting in ways that are disruptive or destabilising to institutions in society.  
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## 18 **Conclusion**

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20 We have shown how emotion absenting enables actors to practice emotion regulation together to  
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22 maintain the institution they are part of. We argue that, alongside the expression and suppression of  
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24 emotion, emotion absenting is available to actors via their shared socialisation into what it means to  
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26 'be' and act as members of an institution. Alongside the expression and suppression of emotion,  
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28 emotion absenting is available to actors as a socially practiced form of emotion regulation via their  
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30 shared socialisation into what it means to 'be' and act as members of an institution. In sum, we  
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32 contribute to scholarship by demonstrating that institutionalised emotion regulation is a dynamic,  
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34 social, and embodied practice that can be drawn upon as a valuable resource for actors tasked with  
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36 institutional maintenance.  
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**Table 1:** Perspectives on emotion regulation in institutional maintenance

	<b>Emotion expression as display</b>		<b>Emotion suppression as non-display</b>
<b>Individual regulation practices</b>	<p>Emotion expression is the regulated display of emotion through which individuals adapt their behaviour to ‘pre-arranged’ institutional feelings (Hochschild, 1979, 2012 [1983]).</p> <p>Emotions are regulated either through deep acting or surface acting (Hochschild, 1979, 2012 [1983]).</p> <p>Displays reflect internalizations of rules and norms prescribing the appropriate ways to be and act ‘to generate self-imposed limitations on behavior’ (Voronov &amp; Vince, 2012, p. 64).</p> <p>‘Feigned emotions’ displayed in compliance with institutional norms differ from actually experienced emotions and can be used as a strategic resource by actors to maintain their institution (Jarvis, 2017; Jarvis et al., 2019).</p>	<b>Individual regulation practices</b>	<p>Emotion suppression aims to prevent display of emotions to ensure the appropriate enactment of one’s institutional role (Hochschild, 1979, 2012 [1983]).</p> <p>Actors may suppress inappropriate emotions by disguising, banishing, or muting their display (Hochschild, 1979, 2012 [1983]).</p> <p>Emotion displays that are not aligned with the institution, are removed from the situation and ‘get disappeared’ (Voronov &amp; Vince, 2012).</p> <p>‘Emotional competence’ implies actors’ ability to comply with institutional norms that stipulate which emotions <i>not</i> to display in particular roles and situations (Voronov &amp; Weber, 2016).</p> <p>Institutional emotion rules and norms govern not only display but also the <i>non-display</i> or suppression of emotion (Jarvis, 2017).</p> <p>Suppression of emotion can function as a strategic tactic to maintain institutional order (Jarvis et al., 2019)</p> <p>Institutionalized emotion is a form of ‘emotionally driven maintenance work’ (Gill &amp; Burrow, 2018) whereby emotions such as fear is hidden, disguised or suppressed in accordance with institutional norms and practices.</p> <p>So far as people commit emotionally to their institution, they do not express emotion in ways that compromise it, because doing so would compromise their identity and membership (Zietsma &amp; Toubiana, 2018).</p>

<b>Social regulation practices</b>	<p>‘Systemic shame’ can work as a disciplinary, institutional ‘shame nexus’ through ongoing intersubjective surveillance that creates a bond of emotion between actors and institutions (Creed et al., 2014).</p> <p>Based on the authorization of others, ‘emotional competence’ is the ability to display appropriate emotions in an institutional role (Voronov &amp; Weber, 2016).</p> <p>Actors can attempt to elicit or prevent specific emotions in themselves and others to maintain or disrupt institutions (Gill &amp; Burrow, 2018).</p>	<b>Social regulation practices</b>	<p>Emotion suppression can be understood as compliance, undertaken to suppress transgressive behavior in oneself and others. Anticipated negative experiences of social rejection compel actors to avoid or hide transgressions (Creed et al., 2014).</p>
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