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Received: 26 December 2020 | Revised: 9 August 2022 | Accepted: 15 August 2022

DOI: 10.1002/job.2660

RESEARCH ARTICLE

Interpersonal emotion regulation strategies: Enabling flexibility in high-stress work environments

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Funding information
Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada, Grant/Award Number: 151005

Summary

While scholars have demonstrated that emotions play a central role in cognition, behavior, and decision making, most of the studies on emotions in work contexts show that emotions, or their expression, are often suppressed. We thus investigated how workers in high-stress work environments deal with emotions and remain functional by focusing on the range of extrinsic regulation strategies used by workers in these environments. Drawing from participant observations and in-depth, semistructured interviews, we show how police officers are flexible in their choices of emotion-regulation strategies and how contextual factors emerge as the crux of this process. We contribute to the understanding of regulatory flexibility—defined as the process of matching emotion regulation strategies to environmental circumstances as they unfold in real work situations—by identifying two main enabling factors: coregulation and third party interference.

KEYWORDS
coregulation, emotion regulation, interpersonal regulation, police work, regulatory flexibility

1 | INTRODUCTION

Emotions in organizations have received some attention over the last three decades, with scholars demonstrating that emotions play a central role in cognition, behavior, and decision making (Damasio, 1994; Gross, 1998; Mikolajczak et al., 2009; Salovey & Mayer, 1990). Emotions are thus an essential feature of organizational life, although they are still considered as "out of place, contextually inappropriate, burdensome or taboo" in many work environments (McMurray & Ward, 2014, p. 27). Most studies on emotions in organizations show that emotions and their expression are often suppressed (Lam et al., 2021) or transformed (Hochschild, 1979). However, how workers in extreme work environments deal with emotions yet remain functional has not been adequately addressed in the literature. Our interest thus focuses on how individuals regulate their emotions in high-stress or ambiguous work situations. We expect that in these situations, emotions are largely suppressed.

We also expect that the capacity of individuals to regulate their emotions in high-stress or ambiguous environments is relevant, as organizations shift towards an intensification and acceleration of time, performance, ambiguity, and uncertainty (Hardy et al., 2020). Extreme environments thus represent a relevant field of study, as work processes in these contexts are especially exacerbated and amplified by urgency (Hällgren et al., 2018), which tends to contract the decision process. In this study, we observe the emotion regulation processes (Gross, 1998) of police officers in situ (i.e., shadowing during patrol shifts).

Police officers work in uncertain and difficult environments (Bittner, 1970; Henry, 2004; Manning, 1977; Mayhew, 2001), which can trigger various kinds of emotions. Contrary to most studies on emotion regulation that tend to show that police officers mainly suppress emotions or their expression (Lennie et al., 2019; Rivera, 2015; van Gelderen et al., 2007), we expect that they demonstrate a wide range of emotion regulations strategies. In this study, we explore how workers in high-stress or ambiguous occupations regulate their emotions in situ. We aim to provide insights into the different emotion regulation strategies that these individuals use during stressful situations and to identify contextual factors that enable or inhibit regulation processes when using these strategies (Lane et al., 2012).

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We contribute to the literature on emotions by exploring the construct of regulation and its adaptative use, as well as investigating the extrinsic contextual factors that impact this process. We use a constructivist framework to present emotion regulation as a context-dependent and interpersonal process. The constructivist paradigm implies an ontology based on a "local and contextual" reality (Lincoln et al., 2018, p. 110), as well as a subjective epistemology. As Cunliffe (2011) explained, "subjectivist ontologies are usually associated with interpretive approaches to social constructionism, where multiple realities are experienced, constructed, and interpreted in many ways" (p. 656). We investigate emotion regulation processes using the occupational context of police officers, who are expected to modulate their emotions—and the emotions of the persons with whom they are dealing—to reach their occupational goals. We therefore respond to the call to not only address the role of context when appraising the utility of emotional responses (Lindebaum & Jordan, 2012) but also adopt an interpersonal approach to emotions in the regulation of social life (van Kleef, 2009).

We contribute to our understanding of emotion regulation—primarily investigated through quantitative and a posteriori studies—by using a qualitative approach to explore lived experiences (Silverman, 2015). According to Maitlis (2017), "qualitative research is especially important for the exploration of sensitive or deeply personal issues" (p. 319). Since emotion regulation is a subtle phenomenon, participant observation is thus an appropriate exploratory modality. We also contribute to our understanding of unfolding and varied strategies by identifying specific contextual factors that impact adaptative processes of emotion regulation.

We begin by addressing how emotion regulation is defined in the literature and presenting a typology of emotion regulation strategies. We then discuss how emotions are dealt with in work environments and review studies that explore emotion regulation, notably those that distinguish between intrapersonal and interpersonal regulation. We follow with an introduction to our methodology and a presentation of our findings: three extrinsic contextual factors impacting emotion regulation strategies. Finally, we discuss the implications of our findings and our overall conclusions.

2 | EMOTION REGULATION AND REGULATION STRATEGIES

According to Gross (1998), "emotion regulation (…) refers to attempts to influence which emotions one has, when one has them, and how one experiences or expresses these emotions" (p. 275). Emotional responses thus vary in type, intensity, time course, and quality (Peña-Sarrionandia et al., 2015). Adopting a developmental psychology perspective, Lawrence et al. (2011) defined emotion regulation processes as "behaviors, strategies, and skills, unconscious/automatic or conscious/effortful, internal or external, and inhibiting or enhancing emotional experiences and expressions" (p. 220; also see Calkins & Hill, 2007; Cole et al., 2004; Eisenberg et al., 2004).

In his seminal work, Gross (1998) proposed five "families" of emotion regulation strategies: situation selection, situation modification, attentional deployment, cognitive change, and response modulation. *Situation selection* involves choosing to put oneself in certain situations to increase or decrease the probability of experiencing a given emotion. *Situation modification* implies trying to change the situation one perceives as being the source of an emotion. This may be done directly by oneself or indirectly by a third party. *Attentional deployment* is an attempt to influence where one focuses one's attention: either on changing or modulating the intensity of one's emotions (e.g., distraction). *Cognitive change* implies how one modifies the appraisal of a particular situation to alter the consequences of the emotional response. Finally, *response modulation* "refers to directly influencing physiological, experiential, or behavioral responding" (Gross, 1998, p. 285). To capture the richness of our data, we add one further regulation strategy—*authentic expression of emotion without modification* (Lawrence et al., 2011), which occurs when the level of intensity of the expressed emotion corresponds to the level of intensity of the experienced emotion.

2.1 | The importance of emotion regulation and regulation strategies in work environments

Numerous studies have found that emotion regulation is linked to health issues (Brotheridge & Grandey, 2002; Grandey et al., 2005) and work performance (Lam et al., 2021). For example, Grandey et al. (2005) found that some emotion regulation strategies, such as emotion suppression, not only lead to increased stress levels but also "drain cognitive and emotional resources" (p. 894). Emotion regulation also plays a role in burnout and job dissatisfaction (Brotheridge & Grandey, 2002; Brotheridge & Lee, 2002; Grandey, 2003; Pugliesi, 1999). Since expressing fake emotions or regulating nonascribed emotions in work interactions requires tremendous cognitive resources, it can lead to emotional exhaustion. Lam et al. (2021) surveyed engineers working in research and development projects in China to reveal the consequences of emotion suppression in work teams: Workers could negatively impact their perceptions of their colleagues when they suppressed their emotions.

There remains, however, a tendency to suppress some emotions in work environments (Lennie et al., 2019), while others are legitimized (van Gelderen et al., 2007) or rationalized (Lindgren et al., 2014). In one rare account of police work drawn from the management literature, Rivera (2015) showed that border patrol officers believed that their institutional context "encourage[d] them to be stoic" and "professional" (p. 215) when interacting with the public, particularly when fielding criticisms or threats. A common thread in the classical literature on organizations is that emotions are perceived not only as a threat to rationality and efficiency but as a marginalized and out of place phenomenon in work environments (McMurray & Ward, 2014).

These studies almost exclusively concern intrapersonal strategies that are part of the fundamental model of Gross (1998). We thus not

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only join Lawrence et al. (2011), who emphasized that it is "concerned with explaining the utilization of strategies for the self-regulation of emotion" (p. 215) but also Dixon-Gordon et al. (2018), who highlighted that "[a]lthough IER [interpersonal emotion regulation] has not been examined directly in much of the extant ER literature, several investigations highlight important interpersonal strategies to consider" (p. 529).

To overcome these limitations, we rely on distinctions between intrapersonal and interpersonal regulation proposed by Zaki and Williams (2013), who defined interpersonal regulation as "episodes (a) occurring in the context of a live social interaction, and (b) representing the pursuit of a regulatory goal, consistent with the broader definition of regulation" (p. 804). According to Zaki and Williams (2013), a person may seek to self-regulate (i.e., intrinsic regulation) or regulate others (i.e., extrinsic regulation) during an interaction.

Interest in the combined regulation of self and others leads us to explore the concept of coregulation. According to Butler and Randall (2013), "coregulation refers to an adult and infant together forming a dyadic emotional system and co-constructing optimal affective states during social interactions" (p. 202; also see Feldman, 2003; Tronick, 1989). Coregulation could also describe a phenomenon experienced between two adults:

> In adults, coregulation emerges as an attachment form and can be defined more specifically as the ways in which one person up- or downregulates the partner's psychophysiological arousal. This regulation is a property of the relationship itself (not either individual alone) and can occur through any of several modalities (e.g., touch, smell, eye contact, cognition). (Sbarra & Hazan, 2008, p. 148)

Coregulation is thus a relevant frame when investigating police patrollers, who work in pairs, spend a lot of time together, and are dependent on each other for their safety in their work environments.

2.2 | Narrow view of emotion regulation strategies

We find two limitations within extant research on emotion regulation strategies: a narrow focus on different types of emotion regulation strategies and a focus on intrinsic rather than extrinsic regulation.

First, studies that focus on emotion regulation strategies mostly investigate emotion suppression. For example, Grandey et al. (2005) explored "suppressing negative emotions or faking positive ones" (p. 897) among research assistants in France and the United States. Lindgren et al. (2014) investigated emotions related to project-based work by interviewing subjects working in artistic organizations, finding that negative emotions were suppressed. Similarly, Chiang et al. (2021) investigated leaders who chose to create a climate of emotion suppression. While Lam et al. (2021) employed a survey approach to study emotion suppression and its consequences on work teams, Sala and Haag (2016) examined both emotion suppression and cognitive change in an elite police unit specializing in counterterrorism and hostage situations in France. Finally, Matta et al. (2014) investigated emotion suppression and reappraisal (i.e., cognitive change), the two "most common emotion regulation strategies that people use in everyday life" (p. 35).

On the one hand, these studies include little or no investigation of situation selection, situation modification, attentional deployment, or response modulation. Furthermore, most determine a priori which strategies will be analyzed. On the other, we expect that people are more flexible in their approaches, particularly in high-stress or ambiguous work situations.

Second, the field of emotion regulation has largely focused on intrinsic emotion regulation and only recently has begun to investigate extrinsic emotion regulation (Nozaki & Mikolajczak, 2020). Amidst a paucity of research addressing extrinsic emotion regulation, Gross (2015) argued that "more work needs to be done—both theoretically and empirically—to figure out how to best apply the EPM [Extended Process Model] to extrinsic emotion regulation, and to determine similarities and differences between intrinsic and extrinsic regulation" (p. 133). We thus focus on unveiling the nature of extrinsic regulation, as it relates to interpersonal processes. Considering the great amount of time patrollers spend together in their patrol cars, as well as the emotional proximity that this implies, we chose this empirical setting to study the dynamics and subtleties of extrinsic regulation processes. We follow the work of Henry (1995) who also argued that the relationship between two police partners is "unique and intense" (p. 103), in light of the time spent together and the experience of extreme events, such as death and disorder. Here, police partners develop special bonds. Similarly, de Rond and Lok (2016) investigated a medical military team, finding that "good interpersonal relationships (…) provide some protection against serious adverse reactions to traumatic experiences" (p. 1968; also see Hatch et al., 2013; Jones et al., 2008).

Extant studies of extrinsic regulation are also mostly theoretical (Nozaki & Mikolajczak, 2020; Zaki & Williams, 2013). Madrid et al. (2019) noted that "empirical tests of the consequences of interpersonal emotion regulation in this literature, particularly for performance-related outcomes, are scarce" (p. 788). While the work of Zaki and Williams (2013) and Nozaki and Mikolajczak (2020) built a process model of interpersonal regulation strategies, these studies focused on the purpose of the regulator rather than the development of contextual aspects or temporal factors, such as the speed of reaction, which is accelerated in emergency situations.

In contrast to these studies, Thompson (1994) defined emotion regulation in terms of its temporal and interpersonal aspects, including "extrinsic and intrinsic processes responsible for monitoring, evaluating, and modifying emotional reactions, especially their intensive and temporal features, to accomplish one's goals" (pp. 27–28). Thompson (1994) also investigated the origin of individual differences in emotion regulation among children and the factors linked to their emotional development. In investigating parents and their children, Thompson (1994) emphasized that regulation includes internal and external

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features, explaining that emotions are not only self-regulated, but they are also regulated by others and that "optimal" emotion regulation is more about responding to the "demands of the immediate social situation and the goals of the individual than as a global, personological construct" (p. 46). In our study, rather than focusing on why an individual may trigger a particular emotional response, we focus on how an individual responds, depending upon the context and how a third party participates in this process.

Because police officers face diverse and unexpected situations, their emotional responses must be context-specific and flexible. We thus focus on how emotion regulation occurs in emergency situations, what influences strategy choices, and why context emerges as such an important component in this process.

3 | METHODOLOGY

3.1 | Research context

Police officers confront situations that involve high-intensity emotions (Daus & Brown, 2012), whether their own or of others. Given our interest in elaborating theory on emotion regulation processes, we focus on police patrollers who answer emergency calls. Frewin et al. (2006) noted that "in police culture, it is not the norm to speak of 'inner feelings' or to 'talk about it'" (p. 256). Observing emotions as they are experienced was therefore a relevant method of inquiry, and participant observation was an efficient means to study this phenomenon, since emotions in police work environments are considered a sensitive issue (Rivera, 2015). In addition to participant observations, we also carried out in-depth, semistructured interviews with police officers, using these data to enrich and support our analysis (Miles & Huberman, 1994).

These data were collected from police officers in two municipalities in Quebec over 2 1/2-year period, from May 2019 to December 2021. In the first municipality where we observed and interviewed patrol officers in action, we gained access through a personal contact who was part of the management team of the police force and who had participated in a previous research project. In the second municipality where we conducted interviews but did not observe, we contacted the Director General of the Police Service to ascertain his interest in participating in our study. We had read his brief on improving police services in Quebec and had decided that our study might be of interest to him. He agreed immediately upon hearing our proposal. In addition to receiving approval from the research ethics board of the educational institution of the first author, we also received consent from the police organization.

Police services in the two municipalities cover numerous districts, both rural and urban, and with distinct sociodemographic profiles. Police services in the province of Quebec are divided into six levels, based on population and the complexity of duties. In the first municipality, our observations of patrollers at work and interviews with police officers were conducted with a Level 3 police force serving a population of nearly 500,000 inhabitants. A Level 3 police force is relatively complex, including patrol and canine squads, as well as numerous types of investigative responsibilities. We also conducted interviews with patrollers in the smaller, second municipality having a Level 2 police force, with no canine squad and slightly less investigative responsibilities.

Study participants from these two police services included police officers working in the *gendarmerie*—namely, emergency patrollers working in pairs in patrol cars. These patrollers develop special bonds with each other, spending many hours in close contact in the patrol car, as well as sharing and facing the same high-stress situations. These patrollers value their ability to not only choose their partner but also work together on a regular basis.

3.2 | Data collection

The first author engaged in participant observations and in-depth interviews. Participant observation allowed the first author to alternate "between emotional involvement and objective detachment" in the field (Tedlock, 2000, p. 465). At times, the first author would share reactions to events with the patrol officers, after which the officers would share their own. On a few occasions, the first author aided the officers (e.g., holding a flashlight as the officers were finding evidence in the dark) or listened (e.g., when patrollers spontaneously vented about what had gone wrong the day before).

The first author accompanied patrollers on a total of 12 rides as they responded to 911 calls, the universal emergency number used in North America. Three, two-officer patrol units were shadowed for 4 days each, giving the first author the opportunity to establish a relationship with them and to better understand their working methods. The duos were selected according to their seniority in the police force (i.e., less than 2 years on the road, 3 to 5 years, and nearly 10 years). Two out of three duos were composed of two men, and the longest serving duo included one man and one woman. The duo with the fewest years of service was also the youngest officers in the group, aged 23 and 24. The middle duo was composed of men approximately 25 and 30 years old, and the most experienced duo was composed of a woman, approximately 35 years old, and a man approaching 40. Table 1 summarizes key information for each of the participants who offered insights relevant to the focus of our study.

At the end of each shift, the first author took notes in a logbook, producing 60 pages detailing daily cases, patroller reactions, and general observations about the work of the police officers, including the various roles and emotions that these officers experienced.

The first author also conducted 23 in-depth, semistructured interviews (i.e., 19 patrollers, one dog trainer, and three sergeants), focusing on the expression of emotions at work. Formal interviews lasted approximately 1 h and were conducted with all observed police officers except for one who was on maternity leave (see Appendix A for the interview guide).

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TABLE 1 Study participants

Pseudonym and interview number	Partner	Gender	Age and start date	Illustrations
Level 3 police force				
Sean Interview 1	Austin	Male	25 years old 2015	Car with tinted windows Family dispute Ex-gang member
Austin Interview 9	Sean	Male	Early 30s 2017 (second career)	Car with tinted windows Ex-gang member
Frank Interview 4	Ryan; previously, Izzie	Male	23 years old 2018	Boys with pellet guns Situation modification Difficult suspect
Ryan Interview 3	Frank	Male	23–24 years old 2018	Boys with pellet guns
John Interview 5	Sean	Male	20s 2015	Family dispute
Nick Interview 6	Steven	Male	30 years old 2017 (second career)	Difficult suspect Situation modification
Roy Interview 8		Male	30 years old 2011	Detailed knowledge of a partner
Frederick Interview 11			30 years old 2012	Delayed emergency calls
Level 2 police force				
Timothy Interview 15		Male	Approx. 30 years old 2013	Sensitive issues
Clara Interview 19		Female	23–24 years old 2019	Report writing
Lucy Interview 21		Female	40 years old 2003	Sensitive issues Rioters

Note: $n = 23$ participants; descriptions are given for only those participants referred to in the text.

3.3 | Data analysis

Table 2 presents our five-step data analysis process, which follows the model of Harrison and Rouse (2014).

The first step consisted of a preliminary analysis of the data, which revealed that police officers experienced a wide range of emotions, such as anger, pride, joy, guilt, interest, satisfaction, hope, contempt, surprise, fear, concern, and disgust. The second step consisted of choosing relevant episodes, which tended to be complicated and long, as the intensity of the emotions tended to run higher in these types of cases. We then identified the emotional triggers and analyzed the emotion regulation strategies observed during these episodes. Table 3a presents the various emotion regulation strategies identified during our observations over four episodes: “car with tinted windows” (Episode 1), “boys with pellet guns” (Episode 2), “family dispute” (Episode 3), and “ex-gang member” (Episode 4).

We drew upon the inventory of regulation strategies proposed by Gross (1998), with the first and second authors coding the regulation strategies and with three of the five types of regulation strategies emerging naturally. We also incorporated the strategy of Lawrence et al. (2011)—namely authentic expression of emotion—in our analysis, as it emerged as a prevalent regulation strategy among the police officers. This was a first, surprising finding, since previous studies had shown that police officers were more inclined to suppress emotions than to express them. A second, surprising finding was that several strategies were sometimes used consecutively during the same event and amidst the same emotion. Since our study employed an inductive approach—in contrast to other studies that typically determined a priori the emotion regulation strategies of interest—we had the opportunity to analyze naturally occurring data (Silverman, 2015).

In parallel with participant observations of patrollers, we carried out in-depth, semistructured interviews with police officers to complement our observational data. At times, we asked questions to gain insights on the emotion regulation episodes we observed in the field. From these 23 interviews, we chose representative excerpts of the emotional experiences of police officers at work that complemented our analysis (i.e., based on the inventory of Gross, 1998) and that provided instances of situation selection and of attentional deployment, which we could not directly observe. This approach allowed us to include examples for the whole range of strategies proposed in the literature, including those of Lawrence et al. (2011).

Although we did not directly observe all the situations described in the interviews, police officers recalled the events naturally without specific prompts by the researchers. Our analysis was thus based on a combination of data drawn from participant observations and interviews. We went back and forth between the observational and

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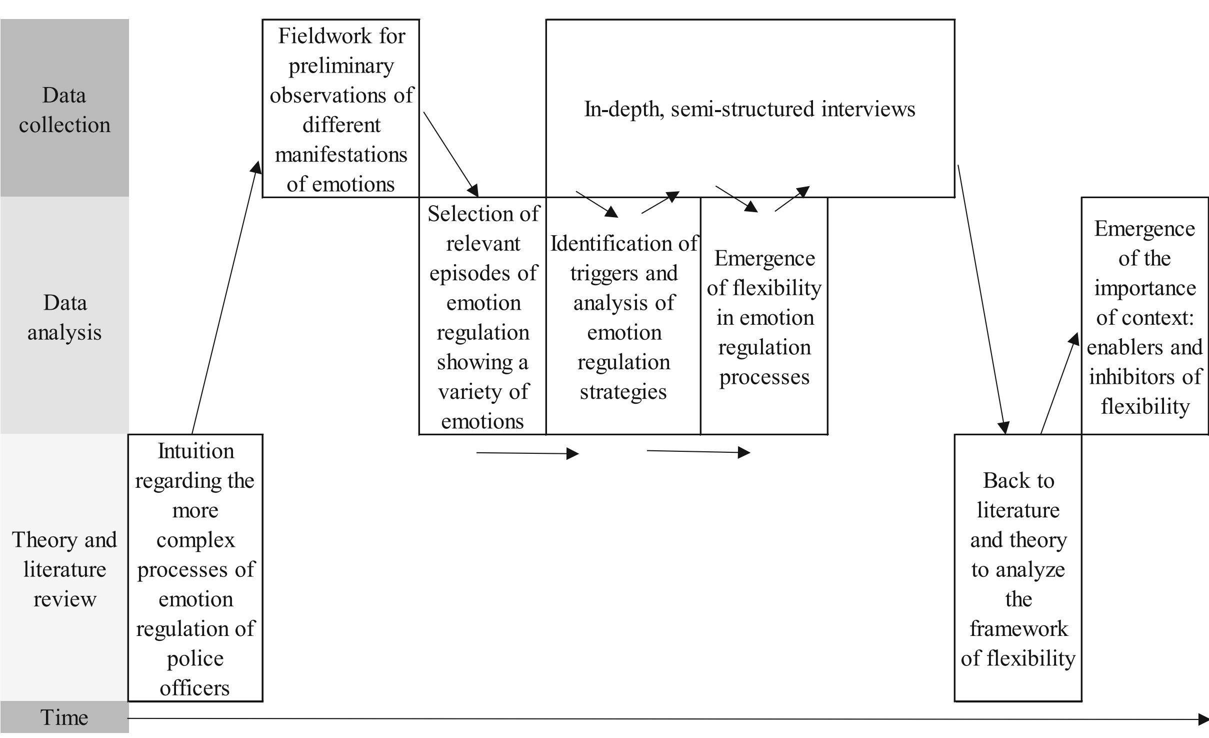
TABLE 2 Process of data analysis



interview data to add depth to our selected episodes and to corroborate our understanding of the emotions at play and the regulation strategies used during police work. The second author, who was familiar with the work of police officers in France, also provided an international perspective during analysis, adding further depth and experience to facts and themes that emerged from these data. From these analyses, the notion of flexibility in emotion regulation processes of the police officers also emerged. We then investigated regulatory flexibility within the literature, to help provide a theoretical framework for our data.

In our study, we did not extend the number of strategies previously identified in the literature but rather we determined which ones were used or preferred and what enabled or inhibited their flexibility. We analyzed converging and diverging aspects at play when multiple strategies were used, and each author re-analyzed the data to propose categories for the flexibility process. As a result, three contextual factors emerged as core themes, all related to the presence or absence of interrelations. Each author worked with the data independently, with group discussions reserved for refining findings and resolving any interpretive differences. Finally, all quotes were translated from French to English by the authors and were verified by a professional translator.

4 | FINDINGS

Drawing from our analysis of the various episodes and interviews, we reveal a wide repertoire of emotion regulation strategies that the police officers used to regulate their emotions at work but also a capacity of the officers to adapt these strategies to the context. We also identify the contextual factors that impacted the process of emotion regulation, either enabling or inhibiting emotion regulation flexibility.

4.1 | Wide repertoire of emotion regulation strategies

The police officers we met regulated their emotions by adopting a wide "repertoire" of emotion regulation strategies (Bonanno & Burton, 2013). Over the course of the selected episodes, the strategies of cognitive change, situation modification, and authentic expression of emotion emerged most frequently. These three strategies are surprising since extant police research presents emotional suppression as the most common strategy (Berking et al., 2010; Lennie et al., 2019; Rivera, 2015; van Gelderen et al., 2007). In addition to Table 3a, which presents the emotion regulation strategies identified during observations over four episodes, Table 3b presents the initial conditions and regulation strategies identified during the interviews.

The interviews demonstrated variations in the strategies that the officers employed during the same event, as well as strategies of situation selection and attentional deployment. We also found that authentic expression of emotion could take place during interventions when police officers were challenged or during private interactions in the patrol car. Showing anger during an intervention is consistent with police culture, which allows this emotion (Lennie et al., 2019). However, showing genuine emotion with a partner—whatever that emotion might have been—was a surprise.

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TABLE 3a Emotion regulation strategies identified during observations over four episodes

	Initial conditions and triggering events	Regulation strategy (T1)	Triggering event	Regulation strategy (T2)	Triggering event	Regulation strategy (T3)	Triggering event	Regulation strategy (T4)
Episode 1: Car with tinted windows	Motorist quickly rolls down heavily tinted car window when he sees police officers (POs). They deem this suspicious behavior.	*Cognitive change* and *coregulation*: POs are upset by suspicious behavior of the driver and agree that it is unacceptable that he tries to deceive them.	After checking the database, POs discover the motorist has a prior conviction for sexual assault. More intense anger is triggered.	*Situation modification* and *cognitive change:* POs do not want to compromise on the behavior of the driver and his prior conviction. POs reinforce each other's interpretations and feelings. *Coregulation:* POs "tune into" their interpretation of the situation, agreeing to issue the driver the maximum number of tickets.	PO calls the prosecutor, who says that the driver cannot be arrested, even though he is not allowed to have a cell phone connected to the internet (i.e., the driver incriminated himself by answering the questions of the POs). The prosecutor reproaches the PO for lack of knowledge of certain laws.	*Authentic expression of emotion (T3a):* PO releases tension by expressing his emotions, while his partner listens, helping to regulate. *Coregulation (T3b):* Partner acknowledges the emotion of the other PO following his call with the prosecutor. The partner is also outraged by her comments. POs reinforce each other's interpretations.	POs prepare to let the suspect go. One of the POs goes to the driver to tell him he can go, while the other PO walks away to take a deep breath. Back in the patrol car, the POs discuss the incident.	*Response modulation:* PO takes advantage of his solitude to take a deep breath and dispel his frustration. *Authentic expression of emotion* and *coregulation:* POs complain about the entire event and coregulate their emotions as they "tune into" their interpretation of the situation.
Emotion	Upset		Upset to anger		Offended and anger		Frustrated and anger	
Episode 2: Boys with pellet guns	Teenage boys pull out pellet guns in a mall parking lot.	*Authentic expression of emotion:* PO scolds the boy for his irresponsible behavior and the potentially serious consequences.	PO decides to seize the pellet guns. The boy gets angry and insults the PO. The anger of the PO increases in intensity.	*Authentic expression of emotion:* PO shouts angrily and grabs the arm of the boy. The emotion is expressed at a high intensity, causing the PO to *"tune out"*.	PO issues the boy a ticket for insulting behavior and returns to the patrol car.	*Authentic expression of emotion* and *regulation by partner:* The PO tells the story to his partner who legitimates the anger. The partner recalibrates his partner's emotional state by showing support and welcoming emotion. The emotional intensity is reduced.		

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TABLE 3a (Continued)

	Initial conditions and triggering events	Regulation strategy (T1)	Triggering event	Regulation strategy (T2)	Triggering event	Regulation strategy (T3)	Triggering event	Regulation strategy (T4)
Emotion	Upset		Intense anger		Less intense anger			
Episode 3: Family dispute	Intervention during a family dispute. The son is angry when the POs arrive. PO authoritatively scolds him to control the situation.	*Situation modification:* PO wants the son to calm down. He uses the expression of anger to impose his authority and restore order.	The son does not calm down and calls the PO a "pig". The mother slaps the son for disrespecting the PO. The PO is surprised and adjusts his strategy.	*Cognitive change:* PO accounts for an external element (i.e., the slap), adjusting his behavior and adopting a calming/soothing tone to diffuse tension.	Situation calms down. After a discussion and display of empathy by the PO, the son thanks them.POs discuss the behavior of the son in the patrol car.	*Authentic expression of emotion:* POs discuss the gratitude of the son and the pride this generates. They share the event to intensify the emotion (i.e., upregulated emotion).		
Emotion	Anger		Surprise		Pride			
Episode 4: Ex-gang member	POs stop a car with a burnt-out brake light. The driver is a young girl (temporary driver's license), accompanied by a boy (no valid driver's license). After checking the database, POs realize she is driving illegally. The girl begins to cry, and one PO shows empathy, comforting her. POs also learn that the boy is an ex-gang member trying to rehabilitate. POs are concerned about the safety of the young couple, since they are in the gang's neighborhood.	*Cognitive change:* POs notice several offenses, then discuss the situation, and finally are worried about the safety of the boy. *Coregulation*: "Tuning into" and upregulated emotion (i.e., worry)	After discussing the situation in the patrol car, POs decide to show support and issue only one ticket instead of three.	*Situation modification and coregulation:* POs decide to show support as the boy is trying to rehabilitate. Issuing only one ticket for driving without a valid license, they protect citizens but avoid an overly harsh penalty.	POs park the car of the couple on a street in a safe place where it will not be towed. Each PO plays the role of the good Samaritan.	*Situation modification:* POs discuss and decide to be helpful. Choosing to take care of the car instead of towing it, the POs go above and beyond the call of duty. *Coregulation:* "tuning into" emotion (i.e., satisfaction) while taking the time to help the couple. POs also describe their actions to the first author.		
Emotion	Worry		Hope		Satisfaction			

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TABLE 3b Initial conditions and regulation strategies identified during interviews

Initial conditions	Regulation strategies
Interview 11: Delayed emergency calls	
One morning, one of the partners feels sad. The other partner evaluates the situation and believes that his partner is not in the right emotional state to work, which can be dangerous. He calls his sergeant, explaining that his partner needs some quiet time until he is emotionally fit for work. The sergeant gives them 2 h without emergency calls. *Emotion regulation*: Worry/sadness	*Authentic expression* and *cognitive change*: One partner takes the time to deal with the situation, by helping his partner express what is wrong and discussing the situation to cheer him up. *Recalibration*: One partner recalibrates the emotion of the other (i.e., downregulate sadness). *Situation selection*: One partner prevents problematic situations by helping regulate the emotions of the other, rendering the emotional state of his partner fit for emergency situations. He consequently regulates his own emotion of worry for their safety.
Interview 4 and Interview 6: Difficult suspect	
During an arrest, one partner begins to lose his temper, because the suspect is repeatedly making things overly difficult. The other partner sees that the situation is heating up and that his partner has reached his limit, so he comes in and takes over. *Emotion regulation*: Anger	*Situation modification*: One partner sees the other is beginning to become upset. He looks at his partner, they exchange glances, and understand each other without talking. The one partner steps in to take the other's place. *Recalibration*: One partner recalibrates the emotion of the other (i.e., downregulate anger) *Response modulation*: The partner that is upset is able to downregulate his anger due to the substitution, which allows him to walk around the patrol car and take a few deep breaths.
Interview 15 and Interview 21: Sensitive issues	
Depending on their background, experiences and sensitivity, police officers may be especially impacted by some issues (e.g., drunk women in Interview 21 and child abuse in Interview 15). In Interview 21, a police officer recalls that she has more difficulty with women who are drunk, and she is more likely to insult them. Her partner knows this tendency and intervenes when required, ensuring that the situation does not escalate. *Emotion regulation:* Anger	*Situation modification*: When one partner sees the other is beginning to get tense when facing a situation that involves a sensitive issue, he steps in to take her place, calming down the situation. *Recalibration*: One partner recalibrates the emotion of the other (i.e., downregulate anger) *Response modulation*: The partner that is upset is able to downregulate her anger due to the substitution, which allows her to walk away and detach herself from the sensitive situation.
Interview 21: Rioters	
A police officer sees her colleague/boyfriend receive a head injury when a bottle is thrown by rioters. She is worried for his life. She carries him unconscious to the paramedics and then returns to work to help her other colleagues. *Emotion regulation:* Fear	*Attentional deployment:* After being overwhelmed by the fear of losing her boyfriend during an assault, the police officer is able to shift her attention back to her colleagues and the events around her. She is able to do so once her boyfriend is with the paramedics and regains consciousness.
Interview 19: Report writing	
A police officer explains how she makes the transition from an emotional moment (i.e. an arrest) to writing the report afterward. *Emotion regulation*: Multiple emotions/high intensity	*Response modulation*: The officer vents with her partner about the emotionally intense arrest. *Cognitive change*: While debriefing, she begins to use humor to downregulate her emotional state, which allows her to write a factual report.

In Interview 21, a female police officer related how she had been overwhelmed by the emotion of fear concerning the life of her colleague, who was also her partner in her personal life. During a riot, he had been hit on the head with a bottle, which knocked him unconscious. She recounted her intense experience of fear and powerlessness:

> I remember, we carried him, his limbs were hanging behind, all floppy, his head was bleeding a lot. (…) I had blood on me too. On my way, carrying him, I was wondering if I was leading him to his end. Then I left him to the paramedics, I looked at them and told them, "Promise me that …". We were being outflanked by the road, we asked for all possible backups from all police services, we were short of men. I looked at my boyfriend who was now conscious, and I said to him, "Would you mind if I go back there and help the others, I'll catch up with you at the hospital?" I regret that, I should have gone with him to the hospital, but at that moment, the policewoman I was wanted to take revenge, I do not know. Actually, I did not take revenge (laughs), I just wanted to help my colleagues, I did not want to give up on them, particularly because we just had lost one of us. (Interview 21)

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Once her boyfriend was with the paramedics, her attention could then return to her colleagues and her duty as a police officer. The strategy of attentional deployment allowed her to downregulate her emotion of fear: Her attention shifted from her injured boyfriend to her colleagues who were still experiencing difficulties due to the riot. Attentional deployment also allowed her to overcome a feeling of powerlessness regarding her injured boyfriend and to then feel useful. As she related to us: "I wanted to help my colleagues".

We also observed varying strategies during the same event (i.e., the strategy was modified over time) or varying strategies in similar events. Three episodes, Episodes 1, 3, and 4, show regulation strategy changes during an intervention. When comparing Episodes 1 and 4, we observed that a seemingly similar event (i.e., intercepting an offending motorist) led to the use of varying strategies and diverse penalties. In Episode 1, the misconduct, attitude, and previous convictions of the motorist led the police officers to issue the maximum number of tickets. In Episode 4, which could have also led to three tickets, the officers chose a more lenient penalty due to the attitude of the young people and their desire to rehabilitate. The initial regulation strategies in Episodes 1 and 4 were identical (i.e., cognitive change followed by situation modification), but Episode 1 required more extensive regulation of emotions, with the police officer also using authentic expression of emotion, followed by response modulation, and a return to authentic expression of emotion. These two types of variation—varying strategies during the same event or varying strategies in similar events—are what we term "flexibility."

Our findings also illustrate that there is no universal strategy at the outset of an intervention. Although we might view police officers as changing a situation through their presence, our cases show that they also use cognitive change at the outset of an intervention, as well as authentic expression of emotion.

Situation modification was observed in Episode 3, when police officers were sent to intervene in a family dispute. When they arrived, the father and his teenage son were having a heated argument, screaming at each other. The father left the house when the police officers arrived. The son was still very angry, and one of the police officers scolded him authoritatively (i.e., showing moderate anger) to take control of the situation (i.e., upregulated anger for situation modification).

Cognitive change occurred in Episode 1, an intervention when two police officers intercepted a motorist driving a car with heavily tinted windows. The police officers observed that the driver quickly rolled down the window when he noticed the police officers. They became upset by the suspicious behavior of the driver and agreed that it was unacceptable that the driver was trying to deceive them. Cognitive change was also observed in an intervention (i.e., Episode 4), which began with the interception of a driver for a burnt-out brake light. Since the driver was a young girl with a temporary driver's license, and the boy accompanying her did not have a valid driver's license, the girl would not have been allowed to drive under these conditions. The girl began to cry, and one of the police officers showed empathy, comforting her. The police officers obtained more information from the police database and learned that the boy was an ex-gang member trying to rehabilitate. From this moment, the police officers became concerned, worried about the safety of the young couple (i.e., cognitive change), since they were in the gang's neighborhood.

In Interview 19, cognitive change was also observed between two tasks performed by a single patroller. The patroller explained how she vented with her partner to take her mind off the recent intervention (i.e., arresting a suspect) so that she could write a factual report:

> Usually, we take the defendant to the station, put him in a cell. Before I write the report, this is really my favorite time to vent, because I couldn't write a report with all of this in my head. I'm going to need to do a quick emotional debrief. We're just going to gossip a little bit about what happened, often turn it into a joke. We make jokes with inappropriate things, but anyway. (Interview 19)

The patroller used two sequential strategies to help her feel better after an intervention. First, she used response modulation when discussing the event with her partner, and second, she used humor to facilitate cognitive change so that she could focus on the task of writing the report.

Finally, the authentic expression of emotion was observed in Episode 2, an emergency call for armed people in a shopping mall parking lot. When the police officers arrived on site, they discovered that the situation was less serious than expected. It involved teenagers with pellet guns having fun scaring people. After scolding the boys for their irresponsible behavior, one of the police officers decided to seize the guns. He was upset (i.e., authentic expression of emotion) due to the irresponsible and dangerous behavior of the boys.

Each of these interventions evolved according to its own context. That is, the emotions and the regulation strategy changed according to the course of events, which is consistent with Bonanno and Burton (2013), who defined emotion regulation flexibility as a dynamic process of matching emotion regulation strategies to environmental circumstances.

4.2 | Emotion regulation flexibility

Flexibility appeared in the variety of emotion regulation strategies that the police officers used but also in their capacity to adapt these strategies to the context. In Episode 1 (i.e., "car with tinted windows"), the emotion regulation strategy continued to evolve following the initial, regulation strategy of cognitive change. After deciding to stop the driver, the police officers checked their database and discovered that the driver had a prior conviction for sexual assault. The driver had a cell phone connected to the internet, which was not allowed under the conditions of his probation. Seeking clarification, one of the police officers called the prosecutor in charge of the driver's probation. During the conversation, the prosecutor reproached the police officer for his lack of knowledge about certain laws (i.e., directly questioning the

driver whether he had a cell phone led to self-incrimination). The police officers allowed the driver to leave, issuing him the maximum number of tickets they could in the context.

In this episode, we observed one main emotion (i.e., anger)—with varying triggers and fluctuations in intensity—over five different moments of emotion regulation: cognitive change, situation modification, authentic expression of emotion, response modulation, and authentic expression of emotion (see Table 3a). Episode 1 also revealed the salience of coregulation in how the two officers functioned as a duo. We observed that each police officer tended to "tune into" the emotional state of the other officer, and the process of emotion regulation became simultaneous. We observed that the phenomenon of coregulation occurred during most regulation strategies.

In the case of the pellet guns in a shopping mall in Episode 2, the police seized the weapons, which led one of the boys to disrespect one of the police officers. The police officer issued the boy a ticket due to his behavior. When the police officer got back into the patrol car, he complained about the behavior of the boy to his partner, who helped him regulate his emotions.

During Episode 2, the police officer duo was often separated: One partner interacted mainly with the teenagers, while the other took the deposition of a witness. We observed that emotion regulation became increasingly difficult as the intensity of the anger of the police officer increased. The officer first became upset due to the irresponsible behavior of the teenagers (i.e., authentic expression of emotion) and then showed intense anger, shouting, and grabbing the arm of one boy, pulling him to the side after the boy insulted him. While this was another example of the regulation of authentic expression, the intensity of the emotion in this moment was very high, which tended to prompt the officer to "tune out," disrupting the relationship between the officer and the boy. The police officer then returned to the patrol car, discussing the event with his partner and complaining about the behavior of the boy. At this moment, the police officer was able to downregulate his anger by talking to his partner, who recalibrated his emotional state by showing support and by welcoming his expression of emotion.

In Episode 3 (i.e., "family dispute"), the police officer began by authoritatively scolding the son to control the situation. However, this strategy did not work; the son did not calm down, and he ended up called the police officer a "pig." At this moment, the mother slapped her son for disrespecting the police officer. This created a moment of surprise, and the police officer re-evaluated the situation (i.e., cognitive change), adjusting his behavior and adopting a calmer, soothing tone to defuse the tension of the moment. After the situation was settled, the son thanked the police officers and shook their hands in gratitude. This behavior triggered pride in the police officers as they felt rewarded for their professionalism. They discussed the reaction of the teenager (i.e., authentic expression of emotion), which upregulated the emotion of pride as they "tuned into" their emotional state.

In Episode 4 (i.e., "ex-gang member"), the police officers discussed the situation in the patrol car, while the young girl was trying to reach relatives to come and pick them up. The police officers then decide to show support and issue the girl just one ticket instead of three. They also decided to go above and beyond the call of duty: Instead of towing the car, they parked it in a safe place on a nearby street where it would not be towed, each playing the role of the Good Samaritan. After parking the car, they explained to the first author: "We didn't have to do that. We could have had the car towed".

In Episode 4, we observed a succession of different emotions exhibited by the officers: worry (i.e., concern for the safety of the couple), hope (i.e., showing support and helping the couple), and satisfaction (i.e., each playing the role of the Good Samaritan, and going above and beyond the call of duty). Two distinct types of regulation strategies were used: one instance of cognitive change and two instances of situation modification. During the entire episode, the regulation strategy process was strengthened by the presence of each partner and by the two police officers "tuning into" their emotional state and coregulating their emotions.

The next two excerpts are moments recalled by police officers (i.e., in Interviews 11 and 4), which depict chronological moments when one partner helps the other regulate his emotions. One morning, at the beginning of a shift, one of the officers was feeling sad, as he had just broken up with his girlfriend (i.e., Interview 11, "delayed emergency calls"). The other officer decided to take time to deal with the situation, evaluating that his partner was not in a suitable emotional state for work and the emergency situations they might face. The aiding officer called his sergeant, asking for a delay so that they would not be sent to risky cases until his partner was emotionally fit for work. The sergeant offered 2 h without emergency calls.

In this excerpt (see Interview 11 in Table 3b), one police officer was able to downregulate the emotion of sadness of his partner by talking with him, helping him to re-evaluate the situation through authentic expression of emotion and cognitive change. Similarly, this officer employed situation selection as he recalibrated the emotions of his partner to render them more suitable for police work, while regulating his own emotion of worry. In high-stress work environments, an inadequate emotional state of a partner may have serious consequences on behavior and put the other partner at risk in the case of life-or-death decisions. In this excerpt, we thus observed the use and variation of different regulation strategies of one aiding partner to achieve an adequate emotional state of the other, ailing partner and to ensure each other's safety within potentially risky environments.

Interview 4 (i.e., "difficult suspect") involved an officer recalling a moment during an arrest when his partner began to lose his temper with a suspect, and he intervened and took over. His partner was losing his temper because the suspect was repeatedly making things overly difficult. As he saw the situation heating up, they exchanged glances (i.e., they understood each other without speaking), and he stepped in and took over. After working closely together every day, they knew each other well, having created close linkages and developing a knowledge of each other's behavior and temperament. In other words, they were "tuned into" each other. When the officer saw that his partner has reached his limit, he knew what to do: regulate the emotional state of his partner by giving him the space to step away and release his frustration (i.e., situation modification and response

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modulation). While the anger of the one partner was increasing—and the authentic expression of emotion became inadequate due to the intensity of the emotions—the other partner then created space for flexibility, so that his partner could appropriately regulate his emotions.

Table 4 presents the contextual factors impacting the process of emotion regulation and either enabling or inhibiting flexibility. During four episodes (see Table 3a), our observations of the selected situations and associated regulation strategies reveal three contexts influencing emotion regulation flexibility: (1) solitary regulation in social contexts, (2) coregulation, and (3) regulation facilitated by others. While the first context inhibits flexibility, the second and third enable flexibility.

4.3 | Solitary regulation in social contexts

The first category of contextual factors impacting (i.e., interfering in) the process of emotion regulation is solitary regulation in social contexts, which can be further divided into two subcategories, namely, intrinsic regulation and extrinsic regulation (Zaki & Williams, 2013). In the first subcategory, intrinsic regulation, two examples from Episode 1 (i.e., "car with tinted windows") illustrated that one police officer is focused on his own emotions. In the first case, the officer sought to appease his anger, whereas in the second case, he simply expressed it. In the first case, the officer also took advantage of a moment when he was alone to go behind his patrol car and breathe. As he explained in a follow-up interview:

> "The look on my face must have shown I was angry. Backing up from the car a little, I did some breathing. … I think I must have done it. I must have gotten away from the car for a bit in order to get some air. … Take a walk—that happens. We breathe a little, and then we come back." (Interview 9)

In the second subcategory, extrinsic regulation, three examples illustrated one police officer trying to regulate the teenage boys. In Episodes 2 and 3 (i.e., at time one, T1), the police officer was directive and authoritative. In Episode 2 (i.e., boys with pellet guns), the officer attempted to make the boys realize the consequences of their actions, taking the young men aside to explain why their actions were dangerous and that they could have caused panic in the mall. The officer explained to the boy: "but if you'd taken out a gun, I could have thought it was a real one and then shot you. What you were doing could have created confusion and been very dangerous". In Episode 3 (i.e., "family dispute"), the police officer also used his authority to defuse the situation. In both Episodes 2 and 3, the police officer sought to regulate others as an extrinsic strategy. The third instance of extrinsic regulation also occurred in Episode 3 (i.e., "family dispute"), when the demonstration of anger of the officer did not really work. After the slap of the mother, the officer revised his strategy to neutralize the situation and halt the escalation of anger.

4.4 | Coregulation

The second category of contextual factors impacting (i.e., interfering in) the process of emotion regulation is coregulation, which occurred in Episodes 1 and 4. Although these episodes differ in course and outcome, they are similar in the common regulation strategy adopted by the two officers. On the one hand, Episode 1 (i.e., "car with tinted windows") involved anger and disapproval of the behavior of the driver in the car, resulting in three tickets. On the other, Episode 4 (i.e., "ex-gang member") involved empathy and support for the girl and boy, resulting in a single ticket instead of a possible three.

Similarities are also evident in the ways the officers jointly analyze and share an understanding of situations. While their anger could have escalated further in Episode 1, their anger was limited by one partner bolstering and showing support to the other, reacting officer, who could then find an appropriate response. In Episodes 1 and 4, the police officers were also isolated in the patrol car at various times. In Episode 1, they waited for a road safety specialist with a photometer to confirm that the window tinting was too dark, and in Episode 4, they waited for the girl to call her mother to pick them up. These moments provided the officers with opportunities to withdraw from

TABLE 4 Contextual factors impacting the process of emotion regulation and enabling or inhibiting flexibility

Solitary regulation in social contexts			Regulation facilitated by others	
Intrinsic regulation	*Extrinsic regulation*	Coregulation	*Partner*	*Third party interference*
Car with tinted windows (T4)		Car with tinted windows (T1, T2, T3b)		Car with tinted windows (T3a)
Boys with pellet guns (T2)	Boys with pellet guns (T1)		Boys with pellet guns (T3)	
	Family dispute (T1, T2)			Family dispute (T2)
		Ex-gang member (T1, T2)		
			Interviews 4 and 6	
			Interview 11	
			Interviews 15 and 21	

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the situation and to share thoughts and emotions. The partners shared a dyadic emotional system (Butler & Randall, 2013), which allowed them to coregulate each other. This emotional closeness was possible because they had spent a lot of time together and regularly lived through extreme situations in their work environment.

In the interviews, several metaphors were used to describe the bond between patrol partners; "a pair of butt cheeks" (Interview 6) and "a couple" (Interview 1) were particularly enlightening. The first was used to explain that "it spreads but it doesn't separate" (Interview 6), while the second revealed the importance of partners and the closeness or comradery that develops between two patrol officers:

> This is the person who'll understand me the most because they'll experience the same thing. It's a bit like in a couple. … A partner is like a confidant. They're someone in whom you develop an almost absolute trust. That's the most important thing, or almost the most important thing. (Interview 1)

Another police officer also explained how interventions were facilitated by having a detailed knowledge of a partner:

> But now, with my partner, we don't need to talk to each other anymore, we know how it'll be, I know how he'll act. I have 100% confidence in him. If I see him struggling with someone, in my head it's 100% justified and I'll ask him questions afterwards. I'll help him, we'll do what we have to do, and he'll explain it to me afterwards. (Interview 8)

One of the police officers that intervened in Episode 1 stated that just one look between the two was enough to indicate that his partner had reached his limit:

> Just seeing what's going on. We've been working together for three years, so we know each other. We spend more time together than we do with our girlfriends, it's normal, we're at work together all the time. We know when something will get to us, and we know what kind of behavior will trigger a reaction in the other. (Interview 9)

Their proximity facilitated "tuning into" each other in high-stress situations.

4.5 | Regulation facilitated by others

The third and final context affecting emotion regulation is regulation facilitated by others, which can also be divided into two subcategories: (1) partner regulation and (2) third party interference. Three examples illustrated partner regulation, whereby the officer who was not caught up in an emotional situation offered a response that helped the other partner regulate their emotions. In two examples, the officer did not need to seek help from his partner; help was offered spontaneously, which reinforces our contention that partners share a dyadic emotional system (Butler & Randall, 2013). However, coregulation was also observed when partners did not experience the same situation simultaneously or when one partner did not have the same emotional trigger. In these cases, the interpretation of the situation by each partner could differ. In Episode 2 (i.e., "boys with pellet guns"), the partners were busy with different persons (i.e., one with the person who reported the event and the other with one of the boys with pellet guns). One partner thus did not personally experience the rudeness of the boy, so he was then able to help his partner, regulating his anger once they were both back in the patrol car.

In Interview 11 (i.e., "delayed emergency calls"), the one police officer requested a delay, which assured the emotional well-being of the other. According to the aiding police officer:

> You know, we have (personal) lives. The partner's relationship is breaking up. It's not easy… Wait a minute, we'll take some time to talk. You have to be fit for work. There's no point rushing to a call if the partner is not in the right state of mind. We'll talk to each other. The partner doesn't feel well… I'm going to call the sergeant: today, I'm going to tell him that it's not working. How will he react? (…) The sergeant trusts me enough that if I call him to tell him that it doesn't work today… forget about me… (…) The sergeant is able to say… it's 8 o'clock… I'll give you until 10 o'clock. (Interview 11)

In this example, the partner was empathetic but had no direct connection to the situation experienced by his partner. In contrast, Interviews 4 and 6 (i.e., "difficult suspect") recounted situations where the one police officer, who took the place of his partner when he was showing signs of impatience and anger, also experienced what was affecting the other.

In Interview 21 (i.e., "sensitive issues"), a female police officer acknowledged that she had more difficulty with women who were drunk and was therefore more likely to insult them. Her partner knew this tendency and intervened when required, ensuring that the situation did not escalate. According to another male patroller with 8 years of experience:

> I notice it myself when I get angry too quickly… Often you have the other person next to you who is there to bring you back to order, wait a little, we'll start again from a different angle, we'll start again on the right basis. When you work with a partner with whom you have good complicity, you realize it's time for you to back off. Often, your partner will step in and say "Perfect, I take over from now". (Interview 15)

The second and final subcategory of regulation by others is third party interference. In Episode 1 (i.e., "car with tinted windows"), the officer

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had a conversation with a third party, the prosecutor in charge. The prosecutor provided more clearly the conditions related to this ex-convict but also berated and offended the officer due to his apparent lack of understanding of certain laws. The officer became increasingly angry, and when he hung up, he stated: "She's dreaming in technicolor", inferring that the position of the prosecutor was unrealistic and did not take the realities of the field into account. In this context, the emotion of anger was upregulated (i.e. increased frustration and anger). The police officer was already upset because of the heavily tinted windows, which was only to be followed by the realization that the motorist had a past conviction and by the reproach of the prosecutor. The angered officer then used the strategy of authentic expression of emotion, venting and regulating his emotions as he spoke with his partner who, in the process, showed support.

Finally, in Episode 3 (i.e., "family dispute"), the mother who slapped her son acted on the emotion regulation of the officer. The slap interrupted the officer's anger, which was replaced with surprise. Her third party intervention thus allowed emotion regulation flexibility, creating space for a change in the regulation strategy used by the police officer.

5 | DISCUSSION

In a work environment known for censuring the expression of emotions (Lennie et al., 2019; Rivera, 2015; van Gelderen et al., 2007), our analysis reveals that police officers tend to express their emotions more than they tend to suppress them. Our analysis also shows that officers tend to not only express their emotions but also do so in a flexible manner. We thus contribute to theory by shedding light on two factors enabling flexibility: coregulation, which stems from the special bond that develops between two police officers who are partners, and regulation, which is facilitated by others. Considering these two factors, we also contribute by extending the notion of "repertoire" offered by Bonanno and Burton (2013). We show not only how police officers modulate their emotional intensity but also how multidimensional repertoire are expressed through interpersonal interactions and amidst contextual factors.

5.1 | Enablers of emotion regulation flexibility

Our results show that regulation facilitated by others, either through partner regulation or third party interference, is favorable for emotion regulation flexibility. Our findings thus respond to the call of English et al. (2017), who claimed that "studies that examine emotion regulation as it unfolds during interactions with different types of partners (e.g., close friends, romantic partners, work colleagues, strangers) may provide a more nuanced understanding of how the social context shapes regulation efforts" (p. 239). English et al. (2017) contended that goals were one factor determining whether social context could influence emotion regulation, varying according to the phase of a relationship (e.g., the beginning of a relationship or a consolidated relationship) and the type of a relationship (e.g., friendly or professional). Our results show that a close relationship with a work partner influences which repertoire of regulation strategies is accessible to the two police officers.

Coregulation is thus ensured by special bonds. As gleaned from the interviews, several metaphors (e.g., "a pair of butt cheeks" and "a couple") were used to not only describe the close bond that develops between two partners who work together for a long time but also to show how partners influenced each other when regulating their emotions. We thus observed partners exhibiting an "oscillating pattern of emotional interdependency" (Butler & Randall, 2013, p. 206), which was made possible by a safe space (i.e., the patrol car). We also reveal that coregulation can be experienced not only in adulthood but also outside a romantic relationship, which, to our knowledge, has not yet been demonstrated in the literature (Butler & Randall, 2013).

Our results complement the model of emotion regulation flexibility of Bonanno and Burton (2013), who addressed emotion regulation mainly at the individual level. Since the police officers in our study were sensitive to each other's emotional state, we found that one partner could regulate the other who was experiencing an emotion. The partner experiencing an emotion could have an impact not only because the two police officers were close as people but also because their work could involve dangerous or sensitive situations that required each officer to be at their emotional best. Each police officer thus ensured that their partner was emotionally fit for the professional situation that they were facing or might face if they had to answer an emergency call.

We also found that one partner could also lead the other to legitimize what they were experiencing (e.g., anger and frustration, in Episode 1, "car with tinted windows"), to share their emotion (e.g., concern, in Episode 4, "ex-gang member"), or recognize and act on their emotion to ensure their respective safety during urgent calls (e.g., worry/sadness, as part of situation selection, in Interview 11, "delayed emergency calls"). Thus, we found that if one partner helped the other to adequately regulate their emotions, it was not done for only egoistic reasons, which is in contrast to the findings of Campo et al. (2017), who argued that, in team sports, "when a player tried to regulate his teammates' emotions, approximately three times out of four did so to modify his own feelings, or to avoid negative consequences of the teammate's emotion on performance" (p. 320). Our results rather show that there was a genuine desire to help one's partner.

The coregulation episodes (Episodes 1 and 4) also tended to demonstrate that, in the presence of their partner, officers expressed their emotions rather than suppressed them. Partner proximity—in conjunction with the safe space afforded by the patrol car—facilitated the expression of emotions and thus enabled emotion regulation flexibility. These findings are also in contrast to those of Lennie et al. (2019), Rivera (2015), and van Gelderen et al. (2007), who rather found emotion suppression to be the norm. Our results thus reflect that "greater access to social resources helps individuals to perceive stressful events as less threatening, and thus alleviates their negative emotional reactions" (Williams et al., 2018, p. 243).

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5.2 | Extension of emotion regulation repertoire

Partner interactions during emotion regulation affect both regulating processes and regulating repertoires. We find 13 occurrences of regulation strategies (see Table 4) that can be changed through interactions, whether between partners (e.g., including processes of coregulation), with an external partner (e.g., prosecutor, in Episode 1), or with a "client" (e.g., mother, in Episode 3). These partner interactions allow multiple, available emotion regulation strategies.

Flexibility in these episodes occurred in both the type of emotion regulation strategy employed and the intensity of the emotion experienced. For example, the slap of the mother in Episode 3 changed the emotion of the officer from anger to surprise, as well as the regulation strategy from situation modification to cognitive change. A third party could also lead to increased emotion (e.g., anger, in Episode 1, "car with tinted windows") and changed strategies (e.g., from coregulation to authentic expression of emotion, and then back to coregulation, in Episode 1).

We also extend two dimensions of emotion regulation repertoire (i.e., size and categorical variability) proposed by Bonanno and Burton (2013) by adding the dimension of interaction, which impacts different regulation strategies in varying ways. For example, one partner shared his emotions with the other, one partner helped spontaneously, one partner adjusted to the other (i.e., through processes of coregulation), and a third party involuntarily helped or harmed. By extending our understanding of emotion regulation repertoire, we reveal that individuals are able to rely on an even larger pool of strategies, thus contributing to a "better understanding how individuals flexibly draw on the broad array of strategies that they have at their disposal in order to best regulate their emotions based on the current situational demands" (English et al., 2017, p. 15).

Repertoire thus emerges as a complex and multidimensional concept in terms of width, or the repertoire of different strategies (i.e., size, following Bonanno & Burton, 2013), depth, or the modulation of emotional intensity (i.e., extending Bonanno & Burton, 2013), and velocity, or the capacity to quickly change emotional states (i.e., following Bonanno & Burton, 2013). We shed light on the multidimensionality of repertoire through the influence and presence of interpersonal interactions. We also complement the model of emotion regulation flexibility of Bonanno and Burton (2013) by revealing how contextual factors and emotion regulation repertoire are not necessarily sequential but are interactional and interdependent as coregulation unfolds. We also show the importance of "the social environment in which regulation naturally occurs rather than only focusing on features that are easily manipulated in lab settings" (English et al., 2017, p. 15).

5.3 | Limitations

While the number of patrol shifts we followed may pose a limitation, since it restricts the number of observed emotional situations, our relatively small sample still offers the entire range of emotion regulation strategies. Further, the different types of emergencies that were experienced by the first author revealed that there is a limit to the intensity of emergencies that can be observed by a researcher. For example, when a firearm is involved and police officers must establish a security perimeter, precautions prevent researchers from having access to the site and thus to the emotions of the officers in situ.

Given the human aspects of qualitative data collection and reporting, we also recognize that our analysis may be biased by our own perceptions of the observations, as well as the interpretations recounted by the police officers during the interviews. Further, we also acknowledge that the presence of the first author during patrol shifts may have had an influence on the behavior of the police officers (Devereux, 1967).

Finally, the importance of the partner in effective emotion regulation emerges from our observations of this phenomenon. In other instances, it could have been analyzed differently, leading to alternate conclusions depending on the researcher. For example, Briskin et al. (2019) differentiated between emotional support and instrumental support.

5.4 | Future research

In light of our approach and findings, future research could investigate the emotion regulation of the other, as it represents one of the fundamental dimensions of emotional intelligence. Since extant studies mainly address self-regulation at the individual level, we suggest that future research investigate the emotion regulation strategies individuals use in regulating the emotions of others and their capacity for flexibility. The collective dimension of emotion regulation could also be developed, since emotional contagion (Hatfield et al., 1993) has attracted research attention in working environments that not only tend to increase pressure on workers but also lead to hyperconnectivity, which tends to destabilize and reduce the spaces where emotion regulation occurs.

Given that the majority of our informants were men, we encourage studies that investigate whether gender (Fischer, 1993) impacts emotion regulation processes and the capacity to be flexible. Finally, emotion regulation occurs at the end of the emotional intelligence process (Haag et al., 2021; Mayer & Salovey, 1997). Although we begin to investigate triggers of emotions and observe police officers evaluating their emotional state and the emotional state of their partner (or persons involved in an intervention), we encourage further investigation of emotional diagnosis, as part of the emotional intelligence process, and how a reliable or faulty diagnosis can impact flexibility and efficiency in emotion regulation processes.

6 | CONCLUSION

We investigate how workers in high-stress environments regulate their emotions in situ and find that interpersonal dimensions of the regulation process are a significant factor in creating space for

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emotion regulation flexibility. We demonstrate how emotion regulation is impacted by partner interactions and how emotion regulation is facilitated by others, either through partner regulation or third party interference. We also extend our understanding of emotion regulation flexibility by expanding the notion of emotion regulation repertoire and addressing further nuances concerning contextual factors as proposed by Bonanno and Burton (2013). Overall, we emphasize the social and interpersonal dimensions of emotion regulation processes and how they enable the unfolding of flexibility.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

The authors are very grateful to the participating organization and the police officers for their collaboration in this research. They also thank the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada for the awarding of the grant 151005. They also want to thank David Courpasson for his helpful feedback on earlier versions of the paper.

DATA AVAILABILITY STATEMENT

Data available on request due to privacy/ethical restrictions.

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How to cite this article: Gagnon, S., & Monties, V. (2023). Interpersonal emotion regulation strategies: Enabling flexibility in high-stress work environments. *Journal of Organizational Behavior*, *44*(1), 84–101. https://doi.org/10.1002/job.2660

APPENDIX A

Interview guide

EMERGENCY AND EMOTIONAL MANAGEMENT INTERVIEW GUIDE

Background to the research

Objectives of the semistructured interviews

Instructions

Duration

Ethical aspects

- Remind participants of the confidentiality of the data collected
- Have participants sign the consent form

1.0 Socio-professional background

1.1 I would like you to tell me about your work at the xxx Police Department

- ○ How many years have you been with the organization?

1.2 Why do you do this job?

1.3 How would you describe the job of a police officer?

- ○ Is "police officer" what you are, or what you do…

2.0 Identification of "emotional" emergency situations

2.1 How do you know how to act/proceed when you respond to an emergency call?

2.2 How do you gauge the urgency of the situation?

2.3 What kind of event occurs during a call that evokes emotions? What makes the situation okay?

2.4 What makes the situation go wrong?

2.5 What brings about the feeling that you need to manage your emotions?

2.6 What brings about the need to deal with the emotions of others?

3.0 Management, for oneself and for others

3.1 How do you deal with emotions that arise during a significant event?

3.2 Your own emotions? The emotions of others?

3.3 Can you tell me about interventions that have had the greatest impact on you (positively or negatively)?

3.4 Why was this event significant?

3.5 Has the way you deal with situations/manage emotions changed over time?

3.6 What has changed (or in what way have you changed how you deal with emotions)?

3.7 At the end of a workday, what would make you rate it as a good or bad day?

4. Divers

- ○ Do you have any other comments on emotions and the management of emotion at work?
- ○ Is there anyone else in the Department you recommend that we interview?

Thank you for your cooperation.

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