

# Professional identity and stigma in the context of war

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## Abstract

**Purpose** – This study aims to examine the impact of critical events, such as wars, on the professional identities and stigmatization of academics living abroad. Through the theoretical lenses of stigma and identity research, the study explores the coping strategies of the impacted academic professionals.

**Design/methodology/approach** – This study uses a mixed-methods approach. The findings are based on in-depth, semi-structured interviews with 30 academics of Russian origin residing abroad, along with 265 survey responses from the same population.

**Findings** – The results indicate a significant impact of the war on stigmatized academics' professional identities, due to political and social environments. Stigmatized academics' research, teaching and service/leadership has been impacted with research being impacted the most. We identified four stigma coping strategies – dilution, information management, reconstruction and emotion work. These strategies were the most utilised by academics to reduce the impact of stigmatization through social identification.

**Originality/value** – The study serves as a valuable contribution to the literature on professional academic identity, as well as stigma in international business within the context of war.

**Keywords** Professional identity, Stigma, Coping strategies, Academic professionals, War conflicts

**Paper type** Research paper

## 1. Introduction

War profoundly reshapes not only societies and economies but also the professional identities of individuals, often intensifying stigma and redefining how different identity dimensions are understood (Henkel, 2012; Owens, 2022).

Beyond the devastation, challenges to European security and global economic disruption (Mariotti, 2024; Melin *et al.*, 2023), the Russia–Ukraine war has also highlighted “several



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schisms in the field of management” along micro-macro theory divides (Aguinis *et al.*, 2022, p. 1669).

Within the international business (IB) discipline, the predominant epistemological approaches have followed the application of macro-level country-centric theories (Grellmann *et al.*, 2025; Ratten, 2023). Such approaches have focussed on international trade and investment issues (Mariotti, 2024; Sethuram and Gaur, 2024; Wu and Michailova, 2025) or adjacent topics linked to displacement and diplomacy. This has been further explored through application of firm-level theories centred around multinational enterprises (MNEs) and their responses to exogenous shocks (Ciravegna *et al.*, 2023; Grellmann *et al.*, 2025).

The IB discipline seems to have been thus far less interested in examining current wars, including the Russia–Ukraine war in more micro-level theoretical terms. While some research has been carried on the impact of CEOs’ political ideology on MNE de-internationalization decisions (Thams and Dau, 2023), the application of microfoundations theory and its potential integration with social psychology theories is still rare within IB.

In addition to microfoundational impacts of the current conflict on firm strategy, the war has also had a profound impact on the large Russian population around the world (Voytiv, 2021). Many Russian academics around the world have experienced identity conflict between their national identities and their professional and occupational identities (Duncan, 2005). Internally, the conflict has stricken at the core of their self-construal and self-worth. Externally, many of them have also had to manage the stigma of being Russian in the eyes of judging publics.

The purpose of our paper is to examine the impact of the current war on Russian academic professionals through a stigma lens (Clark and Li, 2023; Lee, 2022). The stigma faced by Russian academic professionals has forced them to develop specific stigma management strategies (Zhang *et al.*, 2021; Lyons *et al.*, 2017). Contrary to examining coping strategies of Russian academic professionals within Russia (Yatluk and Khukalenko, 2025; Smirnov, 2025), the stigma mitigation mechanisms of Russian academic professionals abroad have remained largely underexplored (Iskhakova and Earl, 2025). Focusing on academic professionals might seem niche, however, academic professionals can be good proxies for other types of knowledge workers (Scott, 2007; Lee *et al.*, 2005).

In our paper, we explore the following research question:

RQ. What stigma management strategies do Russian academic professionals living abroad use to deal with event-based stigma brought on by the Russia–Ukraine war?

By answering it, we follow the call by Aguinis and colleagues (2022, p. 1668) in the *British Journal of Management* on the need “to develop programmatic theories that [transcend disciplinary schisms and] provide better explanations and predictions and guide empirical research by adopting multilevel and multimethod approaches”.

Our paper makes three theoretical contributions. Firstly, we advance the theoretical development of event stigma research. So far, event stigma has been predominantly focused on organizational level issues and processes (Clark and Li, 2023) and less on the individual level (Mitchell *et al.*, 2025). Secondly, our findings also help advance our understanding of stigma management strategies at specific levels (Mitchell *et al.*, 2025). Thirdly, our findings also carry implications for the use of microfoundations theory in IB research (Santangelo *et al.*, 2024; Ambos *et al.*, 2025); however not in the context of strategic decision-making but rather in the context of micro-institutional theory (Zucker and Schilke, 2019).

The paper starts with defining the key theoretical concepts underpinning our research: professional identity, stigma and stigma identity management strategies. This is then followed

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by looking at different stigma management strategies and the role that stigma management plays in addressing event-based stigma. We then continue with our empirical results, drawing on 30 in-depth elite informant interviews and a survey of 265 Russian academic professionals around the world. We conclude by discussing the theoretical implications of our research and future research directions alongside acknowledgement of some research limitations.

## 2. The liability of national brand

The Russia national brand has taken a huge hit globally (Stent, 2025) with all things Russian facing a new kind of liability which has spilled into outright animosity from macro to micro levels of society (Akhtar *et al.*, 2024). The war has placed Russia in a precarious position on the world stage, inviting economic sanctions and diplomatic isolation that also indirectly bear upon its intellectual community. These changes exacerbate existing challenges within Russian academia, such as political influence or limited academic freedom, and serve as a catalyst for increased outward migration (Chankseliani and Belkina, 2024; Iskhakova and Earl, 2025). We have chosen to focus specifically on Russian academic professionals living abroad as many of them have more autonomy to publicly oppose the war compared to Russian academic professionals operating in Russia (Yatluk and Khukalenko, 2025; Smirnov, 2025). In social identity terms, they can be considered as kind of outsider-insiders. Understanding how the war has affected this intellectually independent community is crucial, particularly in terms studying multi-level stigma mitigation mechanisms (Mitchell *et al.*, 2025), since they have a greater degree of autonomy and agency. This in turn carries theoretical implications for the interplay between identity and agency of actors at individual and collective levels (Shteynberg *et al.*, 2022).

Many Russian immigrants around the world and those who have more recently emigrated as a result of the war, feel a profound socio-psychological distress bordering on trauma – some even displaying signs of post-traumatic stress. However, while there is a growing body of research on the socio-psychological well-being and distress the war in the Ukraine has had on the people living in the Ukraine and its refugees (Seleznova *et al.*, 2023), neighbouring countries like Finland (Celuch *et al.*, 2024) and Europeans more generally (Scharbert *et al.*, 2024), less attention has been paid to the war's impact on the Russian academic professionals around the world (Iskhakova and Earl, 2025). Such a gap is not just empirical but also theoretical. Unfortunately, it is also a symptom of widespread calls by the public for academic boycotts against any kind of Russian and Russia-related research (Abbasi, 2022), pointing to clear signs of tribal stigma (Zhang *et al.*, 2021).

Many Russians living abroad have had to deal with a sense of shame often associated with moral code breaches (Jacquet, 2017), leading them to question their national identities and even their sense of self. They have been forced to manage their socio-psychological distress in silence, further compounding their trauma, and have sought different ways to manage the stigma. The corresponding management strategies may include conforming to stigma, consolidating stigma, circumventing stigma and self-isolation (Iskhakova and Earl, 2025). Furthermore, specific types of identity work have enabled Russian academic professionals “to create, present, and sustain personal identities that are congruent with and supportive of the self-concept” (Snow and Anderson, 1987, p. 1348). The identity work and supporting stigma management strategies carried out by Russian academic professionals abroad also point to microfoundational stigma management strategies which go beyond reconciling traditional intersectional experiences of race, gender and sexuality. They highlight more nuanced and complex mechanisms than just *unspooling* [1], which Winder (2023) positions as an individual-level dialectical process incorporating unlearning and self-acceptance through “debate, dialogue and teaching” (p. 196).

### 3. Literature review

#### 3.1 Academic professional identity and catastrophic events

Ewan defined professional identity as a “self-image which permits feelings of personal adequacy and satisfaction in the performance of the expected role” Ewan (1988, p. 85). Professional identity is often closely intertwined with personal and political identity and continuously co-evolves through its contextual embeddedness (Clarke *et al.*, 2013). It is underpinned by social structuration processes capturing the interplay between existing social structures and the agency of actors who uphold them and/or challenge them (Giddens, 1986). This duality of identity and agency plays out at both individual and collective levels (Shteynberg *et al.*, 2022) but their cross-level links and mechanisms remain less well understood.

Academics usually display strong meta-cognition and epistemic reflexivity (Guttormsen and Moore, 2023) which reinforces the link between professional and personal identity (Brown and Leigh, 2018). However, academic professional identities are not merely complex. They are also full of specific tensions inherent to the nature of academia (i.e. publish or perish, rigor vs. relevance, creating real impact, social license of academia, etc.). Managing such tensions calls for high levels of emotional resilience (Manky and López, 2024; Yang *et al.*, 2022). The tensions contribute to the increasingly contested nature of academic professional identity and challenges in pursuing wider social legitimacy (Llopis *et al.*, 2022). Academic professional identities also continuously evolve and are shaped by social relations, policy changes, funding allocations, network-building and various internal and external factors (Archer, 2008; Fitzmaurice, 2013). Academic professionals face ongoing pressures to engage with practical applications to create social impact (Dickinson *et al.*, 2022; Llopis *et al.*, 2022) while maintaining scientific rigour and relevance. Higher education institutions must therefore endeavor to develop effective strategies for supporting academic professionals to meet the evolving needs and demands of their roles (Salimzadeh *et al.*, 2021), which calls for different forms of resilience (Yang *et al.*, 2022).

Academic identity has never been a unified and monolithic construct (Manky and López, 2024; Ylijoki and Jani, 2013). Delineated across various disciplines and institutional settings, common parameters of academic identity include specific roles, duties and the centrality of *status* (Kurapov *et al.*, 2023). Hakala (2009) identifies several pivotal shared values intrinsic to academic identity, including *academic freedom*, *freedom of speech* and *autonomy*. These values become particularly crucial during times of conflict and turbulence. As communities of practice, academic professionals through their various disciplinary and research fields, engage in distinct examination, self-examination and analytical practices which are also shaped by specific corporate university practices and cultures (Nagy and Burch, 2009). Such activities influence academic identity and are commonly grouped into three core areas of teaching, research and citizenship/service (Hakala, 2009; Kovoov-Misra, 2020). In practicing and prioritising teaching, research and citizenship/service, academic professionals are also bound by institutional structures and norms (i.e. the so-called 40-40-20 rule corresponding to 40% teaching, 40% research and 20% citizenship and service). However, they also have agency and can prioritize specific activities based on their career stage and personal circumstances. Despite this, balancing teaching and research often comes with tensions and contradictions, which call for high levels of emotional resilience (Yang *et al.*, 2022).

During turbulent periods, the critical self-reflection paradigm permeating academia can further be compounded by questions of meaning and worth (Henkel, 2012). While this might be the case for most occupations, the highly self-reflective and critical-thinking-inclined nature of the academic profession makes such processes particularly salient and strong within academia (Ross *et al.*, 2023). Institutional factors can also have a significant impact on the academic professionals' behaviors and ability to speak up (Lotfi Dehkharghani *et al.*, 2024).

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The construction, evolution and reconstruction of professional identity necessitates adaptation and personal transformation through collectively maintained narratives (Carroll, 2001) and individual identity work (Nästesjö, 2023). Ylijoki and Jani (2013) posit that academic professionals make sense of events and themselves through absorbing, recounting, negotiating, reshaping and co-creating stories. Within such stories and (self-) narratives, academic professionals can be both *objects* and *agents* at individual and collective levels (Shteynberg et al., 2022). Faced with continuous changes, academic professionals must find and redefine their professional identities, reaffirming the key values and moral commitments inherent in academia. This directly points to the importance of identity work (Nästesjö, 2023).

Only a few studies have explored the aftermath of significant events, like, for example, the 1979 Iranian revolution and its impacts on Iranian immigrants in the USA (Mobasher, 2006). Chilean academic professionals were also profoundly impacted by the military coup on 11th of September 1973, which led to the closure of research laboratories and strict control over research topics (Bayle, 2010). The coup spurred a global movement of academic support, fostering research collaborations concerning matters pertinent to the Chilean academic community (Bayle, 2010). More recently, the advent of the COVID-19 pandemic has also increased the interest of exploring how significant and often traumatic events impact the academic professionals' identities (Smith et al., 2022).

Our study focuses on how the conflict in Ukraine has impacted Russian academics' professional identity. Numerous universities and global academic communities have expressed solidarity with Russian academic professionals, as critical voices amid the conflict. Abbasi (2022) has cautioned that by boycotting Russian research and Russia-related studies, global society risks further marginalizing Russian scientists advocating for peace and suppressing critical voices within Russia. Such boycotts could inflict more harm on Russian civilians, many of whom oppose the war (Abbasi, 2022). According to Da Silva (2022), Russian academic professionals may encounter repercussions directly stemming from international sanctions. For example, they might face restrictions on submitting work to journals published by nations that have imposed sanctions. Many academic professionals have further resorted to self-censorship to avoid potential adverse outcomes for themselves and their families living in Russia (Bertelsen, 2016).

Fiialka (2022) investigated the war's effects on the publishing activities and scientific interests of Ukrainian scholars. In total, 28% altered their scientific interests, while 20% experienced a loss of motivation for scientific pursuits and publishing. Western academic professionals focusing on Russia have also felt the impact. Grace (2022) noted that British scholars studying modern Russian history were unable to access libraries and archives in Russia for their research. Jointly, the tentative evidence points to the multifaceted impact of the war on broader academic communities beyond Russia and the Ukraine (Chankseliani and Belkina, 2024; Kurapov et al., 2023; Mobasher, 2006).

### 3.2 *Stigma and stigma management strategies*

Positive social evaluations are important for all societal actors, be that organizations or individuals (Kreiner et al., 2022). For individuals, positive societal evaluations are closely associated with their sense of self-worth, which can be based on normative and non-normative life events (Reitz, 2022). As a core psycho-social concept (Aranda et al., 2023), stigma refers to "an attribute, behavior, or reputation which is socially discrediting in a particular way" (Goffman, 1963, p. 3). As a relational process between the stigmatized and the stigmatizers (including those who support and/or enable stigmatization), stigma spoils the image and reputation of the stigmatized and casts the victims to societal margins (Akhtar

*et al.*, 2024). In marketing terms, it becomes a kind of spoiled brand marking one's lived experiences, too often defining them for their entire lives.

Such spoiled image, however, is not assumed by the stigmatized through specific attributes, characteristics and/or behaviors. Instead, it is *assigned* by the judging audiences through social evaluations and *imposed* on the stigmatized from their positions of power and/or privilege (Augustine and Piazza, 2021). Grounded in a logic of "naming and framing" by those in power (Brown, 1995, p. 34), stigma remains a contested term invoking passive victimhood, which does not convey the true extent of the discriminatory experiences (Pescosolido and Martin, 2015).

Zhang and colleagues (2021) have identified six different sources of stigma, namely: *physical, tribal, moral, servile, emotional* and *associational*. For the purpose of our paper, it is important to distinguish between *tribal* and *associational* stigma. While *tribal* stigma arises from group, clan or category membership (i.e. the LGBTQ community), *associational* sources of stigma stem from proximity, contact and/or affiliation with the already stigmatized. In the case of Russian academic professionals, both sources of stigma are intertwined, since being Russian is primarily a type of group membership. However, for Russian academic professionals living abroad, their mere association with Russia also constitutes a part of their stigma. In terms of the role of critical events in the process of stigmatization, Hudson (2008) distinguishes between *core* (i.e. continuous) and *event* stigma (discrete, anomalous). In the case of Russian academic professionals, while the event stigma is clearly more pronounced as the result of conflict in the Ukraine, the growing animosity of the Global west towards Russia also implies a degree of accumulated core stigma.

While the origins of stigma research can be traced back to Goffman's (1963) individual-level stigma work, the conceptualization of stigma has over the six decades evolved into a multi-level process spanning individual, professional, organizational and industry levels (Mitchell *et al.*, 2025). Despite individual-level origins of stigma research, Mitchell and colleagues (2025, p. 2) point to how "little is known of how actors at different levels respond differentially to the same stigma or how the connections between levels influence stigma responses and management" (cf. Goodrick *et al.*, 2022; Hudson *et al.*, 2022).

Professional stigma is most relevant in terms of the scope of our research. However, it has mostly been informed by the study of various forms of "dirty work" (Ashforth and Kreiner, 1999; Ashforth *et al.*, 2007; Kreiner *et al.*, 2006) imbued with (im)morality judgements (i.e. prostitutes, criminals, etc.). Occupational-level stigma seems to be also particularly related to identity devaluation (Ashforth and Kreiner, 1999), which can have an impact on both professional identity and one's other social identities. Existing occupational-level stigma research has focused on the various strategies of stigma management, which we summarise in Table 1. It has, however, largely overlooked the stigmatization processes themselves and has "treated them as implicit" (Zhang *et al.*, 2021, p. 192). Regardless of the multi-level, multi-dimensional and multi-faceted nature of stigma (Mitchell *et al.*, 2025), its underlying relational nature continues to motivate research on stigma at "the nexus of social interactions among diverse social audiences and is associated with deviance from socially established norms" (Aranda *et al.*, 2023, p. 1340).

Most generally, however, individual-level coping and stigma mitigation strategies can be divided into two categories (Mitchell *et al.*, 2025): disengagement from stigmatized identity and/or stigmatizers *and* engaging with the sources of stigma and addressing its content.

## 4. Methodology

### 4.1 A mixed-methods research design

A mixed method approach allowed those academic professionals who did not feel comfortable participating in in-depth interviews to still have their voices and experiences

**Table 1.** Overview of different stigma coping strategies/mechanisms

Mechanisms/strategy	Operationalization	Levels	Illustrative examples
Boundary management	Actors construct insider-outsider boundaries	Individual, occupational, organizational, industrial	Crafting narratives, peer support networks, social weighting, social buffers, etc.
Dilution	Actors sever, reduce or alter tie(s) to stigma source	Individual, occupational, organizational, industrial	Distancing from work, distancing from clients, assimilation, etc.
Information management	Actors manage information about stigmatized attributes	Individual, occupational, organizational, industrial	Concealing, signalling, revealing, closeting, hiding, distracting, etc.
Reconstruction	Actors try to re-shape values, meanings or interpretations of stigma to repair stigma	Individual, occupational, organizational, industrial	Reframing and recalibrating identity, refocusing, cultivating anti-stigma culture, constructing practices to change perceptions, destigmatization and normalizing practices, etc.
Cooptation	Using/leveraging stigma strategically for specific purposes	Individual, occupational, organizational, industrial	Using stigma to gain identification with stigmatized group, “doing” or “embracing” stigma, appropriation of stigma labels, using stigma to attract attention/resources, exploiting, etc.
Emotion work	Actors using or manipulating emotions	Individual, occupational, industrial	Emotional regulation, performing “abject” labor, rationalizing, emotional politics, moral panic, developing emotional connections with stakeholders, etc.

**Source(s):** Adopted and adapted from [Zhang and colleagues \(2021\)](#), pp. 195–198

heard, at least with regards to the impact of the war on their professional identities. A concurrent mixed-methods research design was deemed most suitable given the complexity and sensitivity of the topic (Leech and Onwuegbuzie, 2009). Such research design also facilitates the development of more robust explanations and the triangulation of findings (Currall and Towler, 2003). Qualitative inquiry provided a more detailed examination of various sources of stigma and the employed stigma management strategies, while the quantitative analysis via a survey questionnaire enabled the examination of the impact of stigma on professional identity in more descriptive terms. A mixed-methods research design also allowed participants to choose their level of involvement without compromising their safety or fear of impact on their loved ones in Russia. Ethical approval for the study was obtained from the institution of the primary researcher, which is one of the leading research universities in Australia.

#### 4.2 Data collection

**4.2.1 Quantitative study.** To identify a suitable pool of Russian academic professionals living abroad (those who left Russia several years ago and those who had to leave Russia after 24 February 2022), the research team reached out to prominent national universities, associations of Russian-speaking scientists, expatriate communities, Russian universities' alumni networks and social media groups comprising Russian-speaking expatriates worldwide. Consequently, a convenience sample of 265 Russian academic professionals abroad was achieved and provides the basis for the quantitative analysis. Given the sensitive and politically charged nature of the topic, we encountered numerous responses in which individuals expressed appreciation for the project but were reluctant to share their opinions.

Individuals aged 30–39 constitute the largest age group in our sample (36.7%), which was almost equally split in terms of gender (44.5% female respondents). PhD students represented 18.2%, followed by almost an equal distribution across other academic tiers and titles. In terms of academic fields 70% of the respondents came from social sciences, with the rest from humanities and natural sciences. Our participants came from over 40 countries, led by the USA, Germany, Australia, Finland and France. The study focused on three main dimensions of academic professional identity related to teaching, research and service/citizenship. The work by Mobasher (2006) and Kurapov *et al.* (2023) informed the research protocol.

**4.2.2 Qualitative study.** The qualitative study comprises of 30 in-depth semi-structured interviews with Russian academic professionals living abroad. Following interview guidelines by Daniels and Cannice (2004), the respondents in our study can be considered elite informants (Aguinis and Solarino, 2019; Solarino and Aguinis, 2021) due to their unique academic profiles, knowledge and professional experiences. While they do not fit the bill of upper echelon elite respondents, their unique experiences and small pool of potential candidates make them an elite group of respondents nonetheless.

Table 2 provides an overview of the respondents' academic position, research field, and continent of work (to ensure anonymity we cannot provide precise countries). We explicitly omitted their gender and further de-identified the field of research, as this could potentially compromise their anonymity. However, we had an almost equally split sample according to gender. All interviews were conducted via Zoom between December 2022 and March 2023, lasting 30–55 min and in the end producing over 20 hours of recordings. As more than three years passed since interview, current views of the participants could have change.

The interview questions focused on major challenges academic professionals encountered following the onset of the war and how those experiences impacted their professional

**Table 2.** Respondents' background

No.	Position	Research field	Continent of work	Left Russia before or after war in Ukraine	Interview length
1	PhD Candidate	Social sciences	Europe	before	42:00
2	PhD Candidate	Natural sciences	Australia, Asia	after	39:14
3	Senior lecturer	Humanities	Australia, Asia	before	38:31
4	Professor	Social sciences	Australia, Asia	before	43:57
5	PhD Candidate	Social sciences	Europe	before	44:53
6	Research fellow	Social sciences	Australia, Asia	before	42:08
7	Lecturer	Social sciences	Australia, Asia	before	39:03
8	PhD Candidate	Social sciences	Europe	before	42:29
9	Associate lecturer	Social sciences	Australia, Asia	before	37:14
10	Professor	Natural sciences	Australia, Asia	before	42:14
11	Research fellow	Natural sciences	Australia, Asia	before	42:04
12	Professor	Social sciences	Europe	after	47:31
13	Associate professor	Social sciences	Europe	before	43:35
14	Professor	Social sciences	Europe	after	48:51
15	Associate professor	Social sciences	Europe	before	43:18
16	Professor	Humanities	Australia, Asia	before	40:35
17	PhD Candidate	Natural sciences	Australia, Asia	after	44:25
18	Professor	Social sciences	Europe	after	47:31
19	Associate professor	Social sciences	Europe	before	37:11
20	Lecturer	Social sciences	Australia, Asia	before	37:45
21	Lecturer	Social sciences	Europe	before	37:15
22	Lecturer	Social sciences	Europe	after	37:06
23	PhD Candidate	Natural sciences	Australia	before	41:05
24	Senior lecturer	Social sciences	Europe	before	40:45
25	Professor	Humanities	Australia, Asia	before	45:33
26	Senior lecturer	Natural sciences	Australia, Asia	before	38:03
27	Senior lecturer	Social sciences	Europe	before	44:32
28	Research fellow	Social sciences	Australia, Asia	after	45:03
29	Senior lecturer	Social sciences	Europe	after	44:38
30	PhD Candidate	Social sciences	America	before	36:89

identities including, research, teaching and citizenship/service. Additionally, we also inquired about the role of universities in providing support.

#### 4.3 Data analysis and findings

Below, we discuss the quantitative and qualitative parts of our analysis. In particular, we present the findings on how the war impacted academic professionals teaching, research and citizenship/service, as well as four stigma management strategies that we identified based on the typology laid out by [Zhang and colleagues \(2021\)](#), namely, cultural disassociation, narrative reframing, identity reconstruction and emotional negotiation.

**4.3.1 Data analysis.** We used both narrative and thematic analysis of data. Narrative analysis focuses on understanding real-life experiences of participants, using their stories to make sense of data ([Rosenthal and Fischer-Rosenthal, 2004](#)). Thematic analysis allows the categorization of individual narratives into themes ([Clarke and Braun, 2017](#)). Thematic analysis was carried out in three stages. Firstly, we employed manual open coding using a theme colour-coding system. The data reduction was based on processing the raw data, interpreting participant quotes and applying the codes to the interview transcripts ([Miles and](#)

Huberman, 1984). Different patterns of stigma management strategies were identified with the help of literature and data. Having inductively developed our first-order codes, we then used an abductive approach to examine the links between literature and data in accordance with the Gioia method (Gioia *et al.*, 2013).

Secondly, the open codes were then developed into second-order codes and organized into themes based on an axial coding approach which linked them to specific theoretical concepts. We followed Zhang *et al.* (2021) typology of stigma management strategies and linked them to war and event-based stigma. Thirdly, following an abductive approach, we engaged in an iterative process of going between the data and the literature to finalize our results. We focused on examining and analyzing how the war impacted participants' stigma around professional identity and what strategies the academics used. We present our findings in the next section based on the identified themes.

Given the exploratory nature of our research, the quantitative study's aim was to provide a descriptive overview of how the war impacted Russian academics' research, teaching and citizenship/service. Based on the analysis of 265 questionnaire responses, the results complemented the findings from the qualitative analysis and enabled us to examine similarities and differences in genders and professional performance by academic status (i.e., junior, mid-career, senior).

**4.3.2 Findings.** **4.3.2.1 Academic professional identity.** Nagy and Burch (2009) found that academic identity is commonly accepted and segmented into areas of practice associated with teaching, research and citizenship/service (Hakala, 2009; Kovoor-Misra, 2020). Table 3 shows how the Russian academic professionals' research identity has been relatively most adversely impacted by war, whereas their teaching identity has been relatively least affected. Our findings are in line with findings by Suchikova *et al.* (2023), who found that 80% of their academic respondents also reported that the war had the most severe impact on their research performance. Given that research performance and research indicators are the most critical for promotions and academic career advancement (Cadez *et al.*, 2015), the short-term impact of the war on research productivity can in fact have long-term career consequences via reduced research productivity. This can quickly turn into a vicious career spiral, especially against the backdrop of ongoing restructuring processes at many universities around the world following the COVID-19 pandemic.

Next, we examine the impact of the war on all three dimensions of academic professional identity.

**4.3.2.2 Impact on teaching identity and practice.** Teaching constitutes a pivotal aspect of academics' profession and identity (Dickinson *et al.*, 2022). Teaching performance relates to the number of students, the quality of provided education and the number of completed degrees (Bogt and Scapens, 2012). The teaching context has a profound influence on the educators' approach to teaching (Younis and Elbanna, 2023). We measured changes in academic professional teaching identity with teaching performance indicators related to

**Table 3.** Impact of the war on different dimensions of academic professional identity

Field	Min.	Max.	Mean	SD	Variance
Teaching identity	1.00	5.00	3.20	0.63	0.40
Research identity	1.00	5.00	3.54	0.89	0.79
Leadership identity	1.00	5.00	3.35	0.84	0.71

**Note(s):** Impact measured on a five-point ordinal scale corresponding to: 1 – significantly increased to 5 – significantly decreased

several aspects of teaching. [Table 4](#) summarizes the impact of the war on specific aspects of teaching practice, revealing that *involvement in teaching activities with Russian universities* (mean score of 3.81) and *enthusiasm for teaching* (3.24) were the most affected among the dimensions, while both student evaluations (2.99) and the quality of feedback to students (3.02) were relatively least impacted on a five-point ordinal Likert-type scale.

By examining a subject-specific perspective of teaching performance, we expand on the notion that social sciences, arts and humanities – where culture and societal changes are integral to the teaching of content – were more profoundly impacted compared to STEM (i.e. science, technology, engineering and mathematics). The quality of teaching delivery experienced a more pronounced decline in the arts and social sciences, with 18.18% of academic professionals reporting a decrease in their teaching quality. Similarly, involvement with Russian universities was significantly more affected in the arts and social sciences, with 55.04% of respondents indicating a decrease in involvement. One participant from a business-related discipline noted: “I lost connections and relevant knowledge regarding supply chain operations in Russia” (P14).

Our results support findings of [Younis and Elbanna \(2023\)](#) that the changed context of teaching impacts the quality of teaching delivery. We build on this and add that events, such as wars, significantly impact not just the quality of teaching but also the teaching identity of academics as an integral part of their professional identity. The new identities depend on the stigma management strategies that these academics use.

4.3.2.3 Impact on research identity and practice. The workload of most academic professionals evolves around two main activities: research and teaching. Despite the dual nature of academic work, career advancement usually depends more on research performance ([Cadez et al., 2015](#)). Research constitutes a significant aspect of an academic role and identity, especially given institutional pressures to publish. Studies focusing on academic professionals in war-zones or relocated from war-zones show that the academics' research declined dramatically during the war period. In the most recent research on Yemen and impact of the war on Yemeni academic professionals, [Alawadhi \(2024\)](#) showed that the diminished state of research is a general country-level symptom and that negative externalities were observed across the entire region. He reported that research life has been completely paralyzed in Yemen.

Our study illustrates that research was impacted the most in the context of war, with significant pressure placed on the Russian academic professionals' research identity and performance. [Table 5](#) overviews various research performance indicators and indicators related to research practice. It shows that *collaboration with Russian co-authors in Russia*

**Table 4.** Impact of the war on specific aspects of teaching identity and practice

Field	Min.	Max.	Mean	SD	Variance
Quality of teaching delivery	1.00	5.00	3.11	0.52	0.27
Classroom teaching dynamics	1.00	5.00	3.09	0.57	0.32
Enthusiasm in teaching	1.00	5.00	3.24	0.70	0.50
Students' evaluations after the course	1.00	5.00	2.99	0.47	0.22
Teaching involvement with Russian universities	1.00	5.00	3.81	0.98	0.95
Innovations in your teaching this year	1.00	5.00	3.12	0.69	0.47
Quality of communication with students	1.00	5.00	3.10	0.57	0.33
Quality of feedback to students	1.00	5.00	3.02	0.49	0.24

**Note(s):** Impact measured on a five-point ordinal scale corresponding to: 1 – significantly increased to 5 – significantly decreased

(3.66) and *overall research productivity* (3.54) were most affected, measured on a five-point ordinal Likert-type scale.

The research performance of academic professionals who left Russia after February of 2022 was most significantly impacted on every single dimension: lost research productivity, diminished motivation to conduct research, decreased relevance of the research, missed funding opportunities, and reduced publication opportunities. This illustrates the significant and multi-faceted impact of the war on Russian academic professionals abroad. It also underscores the need for universities employing academic professionals affected by critical events to develop appropriate measures and support mechanisms. The findings are in line with [Nästesjö \(2023\)](#), who states that academic professionals who are faced with continuous changes and shocks, must find and redefine their professional identities, reaffirming the key values and moral commitments. However, our study further adds that some institutions have themselves contributed to the erosion of social relations by suspending ties with stigmatized nations ([Webber, 2022](#)). This adds another layer of social complexity for stigmatized individuals, especially academic professionals, because they engage in higher level of self-reflection and critical thinking ([Ross et al., 2023](#)). This may compound their self-judgement which is a natural part of stigma judgement process ([Clark and Li, 2023](#)).

4.3.2.4 Impact on academic citizenship/service identity and practice. Academic citizenship/service identity encompasses roles beyond direct teaching and research. Examples include mentoring junior colleagues, participating in professional communities of practice and committees and engaging in educational management and administrative activities ([Barbato, 2023](#); [Söderhjelm et al., 2018](#)). The findings indicate that senior and middle-career academic professionals who left Russia less than a year ago were the most affected. These academic professionals experienced a significant loss of informal academic leadership, positions of power and influence within academia, professional connections and relationships with businesses, professional bodies and governmental entities. This illustrates that such event stigma can significantly influence social connections crucial for identity building ([Fitzmaurice, 2013](#)).

P14, for example, stated: “*Due to relocation, I had to relinquish my current managerial academic position. I stepped down from a leadership role at a Russian university and resigned from several committees*” P6 added: “*I lost my leadership position in Russia due to my change of citizenship.*” The two quotes illustrate a significant impact on leadership and service roles, which are crucial for the professional identities of academic professionals, especially more senior ones. When such roles are lost, there is a profound sense of loss in professional identity because the academic professionals can no longer lead or mentor colleagues, which is also associated with social status.

**Table 5.** Impact of the war on specific aspects of research identity and practice

Field	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	SD	Variance
My research productivity	1.00	5.00	3.54	0.90	0.81
Motivation to conduct research	1.00	5.00	3.39	1.00	1.00
My publication opportunities	1.00	5.00	3.22	0.63	0.40
Research collaboration with Russian co-authors in Russia	1.00	5.00	3.66	0.96	0.91
Relevance of my previous research projects	1.00	5.00	3.14	0.80	0.64
The range of academic journals to which I target my research	1.00	5.00	3.07	0.47	0.22
Research funding opportunities	1.00	5.00	3.30	0.67	0.45

**Note(s):** Impact measured on a five-point ordinal scale corresponding to: 1 – significantly increased to 5 – significantly decreased

Mazurkiewicz (2021) believes that educational leadership should be contextualized and reflective. Critical thinking about the context and the state of the environment is a mandatory element of academic citizenship identity and leadership roles. Despite the loss of many connections, Russian academic professionals also feel they have an obligation to act in the best interests of their students and associations that they belong to. Hence, safeguarding the ability of Russian students to complete their studies at overseas universities is an essential leadership activity that also helps protect the professional identities of Russian academic professionals. However, if institutions encourage breaking existing social ties (Webber, 2022), stigmatized academic professionals lose their voices and often turn to silence, particularly women (Aiston and Fo, 2020).

4.3.2.5 Stigma management strategies of academic professionals in the context of war. We add to existing studies on stigma management strategies (Zhang *et al.*, 2021) and exploration of their multi-level nature (Mitchell *et al.*, 2025) by identifying four stigma management strategies used by Russian academic professionals dealing with event, namely: cultural disassociation, narrative reframing, identity reconstruction and emotional negotiation. Table 6 presents each strategy, with illustrative examples and link them to stigma type.

Next, we unpack each of the four stigma management strategies.

4.3.2.6 Cultural dissociation. Cultural dissociation is a stigma management strategy where academic professionals use practices to alter their association with Russia. In this regard, this can be considered a disengagement-type strategy (Mitchell *et al.*, 2025). While dilution is a stigma management strategy when academic professionals sever, reduce or alter a tie to the stigma source (Zhang *et al.*, 2021), we found that the participants do not want to in any way associate themselves with all things Russia. The culture itself was not the source of stigma, but being Russian was associated with the conflict, which represents the source of event stigma. The majority of academic professionals in our sample chose or were pushed to follow a cultural dissociation strategy based on moral grounds. We observed that this strategy has been either internally selected or externally implemented (e.g. P4: “All cuts between our Universities were stopped”) – pointing to a dual *locus* of control (Mitchell *et al.*, 2025).

We found instances where teaching was negatively impacted because students questioned the academics’ cultural identity and disregarded their professional identity. For example, P16 noted:

My lecture had been planned, but some participants requested a replacement lecturer as they didn’t want to be taught by a Russian lecturer. It forced me to clarify who I am and that I condemn the war. [...] They said, ‘Thank you very much for stating your position,’ and only one out of 17 students didn’t show up for the lecture.

In addition, many reported a significant loss of relevance, for example, P19 stating that:

You wonder why you are teaching these topics when there is so much crazy stuff happening in the world. It feels as if everything should be about the war and not about what you’re doing.

We can see that regardless of internal motivation or externally-imposed decision, the cultural disassociation strategy has emotional implications pointing to a heavy toll in terms of emotional resilience (Yang *et al.*, 2022).

4.3.2.7 Narrative reframing. Narrative reframing implies re-writing the identity narrative of who an individual is, triggered by a critical event. In our case, this would be the war. Similar to the information management strategy, when the stigmatized actors manage information about stigmatized attributes (Zhang *et al.*, 2021), narrative reframing is about using information to change a story. While some participants emphasized the importance of discussing Ukraine and matters related to the conflict, the majority avoided discussing the war with students during classes. We found that students, on the other hand, were keen to

**Table 6.** Overview of stigma mitigation strategies, specific stigma types experienced by Russian academic professionals and examples in the wake of the Russian–Ukraine conflict

Proposed theme (refined)	Illustrative example (from data)	Link to stigma types
Cultural disassociation	“Because of the war, I stopped watching Russian movies and speaking Russian in public.” (P12) “I have to cut all ties with Russian Universities” (P12)	Event stigma - triggered by war leading to cultural distancing. Tribal stigma - rejection of imposed group identity as being “Russian”
Narrative reframing	“My lecture had been planned, but some participants requested a replacement lecturer... It forced me to clarify who I am...” (P16) “Now I present more broadly my international research identity.” (P1)	Event stigma - navigating heightened sensitivity after invasion. Tribal stigma - negotiating audience perceptions of Russianness
Identity reconstitution	“We used to primarily teach Russian as the language of Russia. Now we’ve shifted our perspective and teach Russian as a language of post-USSR countries.” (P3) “I want to excel at my job to compensate for the damaged image of Russians.” (P10)	Event stigma - transforming professional focus after the war. Core stigma - addressing long-standing associations of russianness with authoritarianism.
Emotional negotiation	“When the war started, it became very difficult to teach because 70% of your brain would be screaming in horror from reading the news.” (P13) “I started crying in the classroom.” (P21)	Event stigma – emotional toll from acute geopolitical crisis. Tribal stigma – empathy and shame tied to group identity

**Source(s):** Authors’ own work

engage in discussions about the war. This helps them inform their judgement during the stigmatization process (Clark and Li, 2023). It also allows the affected academic professionals to reframe their story based on the stigmatization of the students, as the judging audience. This points to the important role of understanding stigmatization in terms of specific stakeholder audiences and the level of audience agency.

The narrative reframing management strategy was commonly used by the participants because it allowed them to control the information and present the information during teaching that they thought was relevant. Furthermore, several participants questioned their teaching expertise and the relevance of their teaching materials and case studies. P9, for example, stated: “I used an excellent case study of a Russian ballet company. Who on Earth wants to talk about Russian ballet now?” Such doubts have led to the questioning of the academics’ professional identity and rethinking the information they use to reframe their teaching narratives and cutting down on any negative associations (i.e. linked to associational stigma).

Narrative reframing translated into a coping strategy for research, when actors managed information about stigmatized attributes in relations to their research. They began to question and engage in reframing their research associations, research themes and even their research brand. When actors manage the narrative about stigmatized attributes in relations to their leadership and service roles, they reflected on their values as academic professionals and focused on supporting colleagues from other nations. According to P24: “I started sharing values of my Finnish colleagues, where I could, I have been supporting my Finnish, international, and especially Ukrainian peers affected by the war”. Sharing knowledge is a crucial part of academic identity (Nagy and Burch, 2009). We found that by reframing a

narrative and focusing on different attributes academic professionals were able to manage stigmatization and maintain some level of control and agency.

4.3.2.8 Identity reconstitution. Identity reconstitution occurs when the stigmatized academic professionals question stigmatization, the source of stigma and re-shape their identities by focusing on different values and priorities. Similarly to the construction stigma management strategy, different actors try to re-shape values, meanings or interpretations of stigma to repair it (Zhang *et al.*, 2021). Our study also found that identity reconstitution is focused on specific priorities, for example, changing teaching techniques or prioritizing. Such a strategy was among the most widely adopted by the participants. For many, it turned to be the most effective stigma management strategy.

We found that some participants focused on gaining new perspectives and expertise, as well as exploring new topics for their teaching. Several academic professionals mentioned that being Russian allowed them to share their expertise and understanding of processes in Russia, discuss the war in the classroom, and serve as experts on war-related topics. In that regard, P20 highlighted: “In one of my courses where students can choose their presentation topics, they proposed discussing the war in Ukraine and the refugee crisis [...] as additional topics”.

Some academic professionals took a proactive approach in their research and sought new opportunities to contribute to global science rather than limiting themselves to Russian science. P8 also pointed out that: “I have established connections all over the world, through my studies in Europe. Although these collaborations differ, they are more valuable and beneficial than connections in Russia”. P22 further remarked:

After leaving Russia, we took our international research workshop with us and installed it at our new university. It was very important for some participants to participate. It wouldn't be possible in a Russian institution.

Some academic professionals demonstrated a stronger work ethic, as part of their reconstruction stigma management strategies, which points to a form of compensation. For example, P11 stated that: “I felt more energy and a desire to live and help other people through leadership and service”. Some also reported a reinvigorated sense of agency, like, for example, P1: “I was motivated to become more active in my work community and organise events to enhance wellbeing”. Several other respondents also expressed a desire to engage in more impactful and socially significant research topics. The war encouraged Russian academic professionals to reassess their research topics and contributions – for example, P1 pointed out that: “While previously the main motivation was to publish outcomes, now the social importance of research became (much more) critical”.

We can see from all the abovementioned examples that the identity reconstitution strategy is one of the most powerful and effective in the context of war across the various sub-identities making up an academic's professional identity (i.e. teaching, research and academic citizenship/service), because it is focused and based on individual priorities. Such a strategy, however, requires a high level of meta-cognition and a higher degree of agency often found among knowledge workers.

4.3.2.9 Emotional negotiation. Emotion negotiation occurs where the actors use or manipulate emotions to manage the stigma. While this management strategy was not among the most frequently used, female academic professionals more often used it than male academic professionals.

Numerous participants pointed to experiencing diminished energy levels in the classroom, feelings of apathy, lack of enthusiasm, distractions during preparation and reduced time for reading, consequently leading to less preparation time for lectures. Many interviewees also

spoke of pervasive stress, loss of motivation, and a sense of meaninglessness. The emotional burden of interacting with Ukrainian students and staff, including feelings of grief and compassion, was highlighted as a particularly sensitive issue. P21 highlighted this by saying: “I didn’t know how to manage the situation when the war started. I spoke about it with my students”.

Our findings point that academic professionals in the area of humanities, tend to use more emotion work in their research domain than their counterparts in STEM domains. Research topics and themes of academic professionals from art, culture, history, social science and business shifted significantly more comparing to STEM academic professionals. Some reported a sense of danger, particularly in social science – for example, P6 noted:

It concerns population health and the imperative for people to live longer. It’s quite complex for me because, over the past 15 years, all our work has been focused on reducing mortality, but now our efforts are moving in the opposite direction due to the war, stated an academic from Asia-Australia-Oceania.

Further reflecting on the psycho-emotional burden of stigma, P14 commented:

I tried to compartmentalise my thoughts. Revising a paper to meet a tight deadline, forces one to focus on the job at hand. For a brief period, you don’t think about the news. However, it inevitably comes back once you stop working. During those moments, I force myself to focus on something else.

Emotional negotiation in the academic citizenship/leadership domain turned to be very resource-consuming and demanding, as highlighted by P15: “I was a member of various academic committees in Russia. I had to terminate my membership and withdraw my name from committees in Russian universities”. Maintaining a professional focus became more important after the onset of war. In this vein, P30 noted: “I realized that even though I’m stressed, and my relatives are directly influenced by the conflict, I still need to work. So, you just have to be strong”.

## 5. Discussion

The first theoretical contribution from our study relates to a more nuanced understanding of event-based stigma in terms of context, its nature and its processes. So far, event-based stigma has been predominantly explored in the context of organizational misconduct (Clark and Li, 2023; Bilgili et al., 2025). Studying organizational misconduct, Clark and Li (2023) have outlined a linear three-stage process of the formation of event-based stigma driven by intuitive stigma judgement (i.e. positive vs negative event), cognitive stigma judgement (i.e. based on internal-external responsibility *locus* and the degree of intentionality) and practical stigma judgement (i.e. linked to strength, breadth and duration). These three stigma judgement processes in turn contribute to the “stickiness” of organizational-level stigma, which impacts corporate reputation and organizational culture.

Organizational stickiness holds implications for understanding the relationship and delineation between event-based and core stigma (Hudson, 2008). Our findings, for example, shed light on how the lines between event-based and core stigma can easily become blurred (Hsu and Grodal, 2021). The best example of this can be found under the *identity reconstruction* strategy in Table 6, where our respondents highlighted how the war deepened already existing long-term associations of anything Russian with a high degree of authoritarianism. Future research can explore in more detail the potential compounding and additive effects of specific types of events on stigma (Hudson, 2008).

In departing from organizational context, what happens if we change the context of the event, its nature and also examine its drivers and impacts at different levels or across levels?

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Does the process remain the same? An unprovoked aggression on a sovereign state by another state is not merely a negative event but a morally abhorrent one. Its consequences cannot be captured in monetary terms alone but also in human life. As a violation of international law and basic human rights, war cannot simply be labelled as misconduct. It takes on a much more sinister nature. Such an emotional context is precisely what transcends the ethics of organizational misconduct. It strikes at the very core of a universal human morality, which is why it resonates so powerfully across diverse stakeholder groups – transforms the nature of the event-based stigma itself (Jacquet, 2017).

Our findings point to a need for a more nuanced classification of events that trigger event-based stigma than offered by Clark and Li's (2023) intuitive stigma judgement of "positive" or "negative". Such a classification needs to account for both the depth and breadth of violations, as well as the specific type of violation (i.e. ethical vs moral norms). It also needs to categorize the consequences of those violations relative to the number of and type of impacted stakeholders.

In terms Clark and Li's (2023) process model, the practical stigma judgement phase which comes at the end of their three-stage linear process and captures *strength*, *breadth* and *duration* seems to be much more important as a driver of war event-based stigma from the very start. Drawing parallels between stigma and legitimacy research (Ashforth, 2018), while we recognize that stigma and legitimacy do not occupy the same continuum but are conceptually distinct concepts (Helms et al., 2018), we nonetheless still think event-based stigma research can learn from the theoretical distinction of legitimacy as either a *process* (i.e. legitimacy-as-process perspective) or as a type of *perception* (i.e. legitimacy-as-perception perspective).

In a seminal review and synthesis of legitimacy research, Suddaby and colleagues (2017) have shown that we need to better explore the stakeholder side of social evaluations by teasing out the degree of their agency and the specific mechanisms driving (negative) social evaluations. It is abundantly clear that society is much more actively involved in stigmatizing Russian academic professionals (i.e. which would correspond to a stigma-as-perception logic) due the centrality of the war in the lives of people involved (i.e. which corresponds to a stigma-as-process logic).

Before focusing on the different stigma levels, which constitutes our second theoretical contribution, we want to first make two high-level observations from looking at the specific stigma management strategies summarized in Table 6. Our findings highlight two important theoretical observations. Firstly, they point to a deep moral pain, not just shame (Kvåle and Murdoch, 2022). This challenges the notions of a temporary, collateral-type stigma according to Clark and Li's (2023) typology. Secondly, it is this deep emotional pain that challenges the notion of stigma management being self-interested (Goodrick et al., 2022) and points to also altruistic and broader motivations for managing stigma in specific cases (Mitchell et al., 2025).

Exploring specific stigma management strategies brings us to our second theoretical contribution related to the multi-level nature of stigma, especially stigma mitigation strategies and cross-level explanations of stigma management strategies. While the title of Zhang and colleagues' (2021) stigma review paper in the *Academy of Management Annals* seemingly calls for research to move "beyond levels" (p. 188), their point was actually not to ignore the multi-level nature of stigma. On the contrary, their key point was that "stigma has primarily been examined at a single level of analysis" (p. 188). Mitchell and colleagues (2025) have subsequently picked up this argument and called for a better understanding of the multi-level processes and cross-level effects of stigma in a variety of management contexts.

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Looking at the four specific stigma management strategies highlighted in [Table 6](#) and the illustrative quotes supporting them in the subsequent sub-sections, we can observe two things: a clear micro-messo-macro dynamic between individual, professional and national level stigma, as well as specific cross-level explanations of stigma management. In terms of the multi-level dynamics, one example would be the use of cultural disassociation, where stigmatized Russian academic professionals use both individual-level cultural distancing and group-level rejection of Russian cultural identity. In terms of emotional negotiation, on the other hand, our respondents highlighted the painful emotional toll the stigma of being Russian has had on them personally, which has at the same time evoked both a mixture of collective shame and profound empathy for the victims of the conflict at the group level.

But what about specific cross-level explanations and effects? Drawing on the agency-identity link at both individual and collective levels ([Shteynberg et al., 2022](#)), we can observe how our respondents use cultural disassociation, narrative framing and particularly identity reconstruction stigma management strategies to switch from being *objects* to *agents* at and across individual and collective levels. One example would be cultural distancing from all things Russia (i.e. individual-level objects) and public rejection of an imposed group identity of being Russian (i.e. collective-level agency). Another example would be actively negotiating audience perceptions of being Russian (i.e. collective-level agency) and addressing long-term associations of Russianness and authoritarianism (i.e. collective-level agency) with transforming their professional identities as scholars no longer focusing on Russia (i.e. individual-level objects). We believe that the two-by-two matrix of the individual/collective self and self as object/agent proposed by [Shteynberg and colleagues \(2022\)](#) can be helpful in teasing out cross-level identity-agency mechanisms. This then also better balances internal and external mechanisms of stigma management strategies between and across different levels ([Mitchell et al., 2025](#)). Such cross-level explanations at the same time also point to the usefulness of employing microfoundations theory ([Ambos et al., 2025](#)).

Our third theoretical contribution is connected to the use of microfoundations theory more generally in IB research to uncover complex factors that either drive or influence IB phenomena ([Ambos et al., 2025](#)). Despite stigma research originating from [Goffman's \(1963\)](#) individual-level relational perspective, most contemporary stigma research has focused on either meso-level organizational research or macro-level industry, country-centric research ([Zhang et al., 2021](#); [Aranda et al., 2023](#)). It is precisely for this reason, that [Mitchell and colleagues \(2025\)](#) have called for a stronger theoretical grounding of multi-level stigma research in microfoundations theory. In the case of stigma, our results point to clear interfaces between individual agency and lived experiences of Russian professional academics (i.e. based on their generational background) and their handling of event-based stigma as a professional community of practice. The modularity of the microfoundations' theoretical approach allows IB scholars to isolate and separately examine cross-level processes without losing sight of their complexity and the fact that meso- and macro-level IB phenomena is nested in micro-level processes and determined by micro-level factors ([Ambos et al., 2025](#)).

Despite Russian academic professionals being a distinct community of practice and an epistemic community, their geographically dispersed nature and disciplinary heterogeneity highlight the crucial role of individual-level mechanisms, such as cultural disassociation, identity reconstruction and especially emotional negotiation. This observation raises important implication for the increasing popularity and application of microfoundations theory within the IB discipline ([Ambos et al., 2025](#); [Santangelo et al., 2024](#)). Santangelo and colleagues highlight three types of fundamental questions which establish the relevance of

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microfoundations theory, namely the: *who-what* questions, the *when-where* questions and the *why-how* questions.

In terms of the *who-what* questions, Santangelo and colleagues explicitly emphasize the theoretical value of exploring intersectionality. Our findings relate to this call in the way of highlighting the identity conflicts between individual, professional and national identities of Russian academic professionals living abroad, which in turn shapes their stigma management strategies. In terms of the *when-where* questions, Santangelo and colleagues emphasize the importance of understanding how historical context and past personal histories influence microfoundational processes and decision-making responses. In looking at stigma management strategies of our respondents, we see some evidence of generational differences which are undoubtedly informed by specific personal histories of living in Russia within specific periods of time. In terms of *why-how* questions, our findings challenge the simple notion of stigma management strategies being driven by external factors and largely motivated by self-interest. The deep emotional pain and sense of profound moral shame point to the importance of better understanding also intrinsic and more altruistic motivations, which we believe are also influenced by dialectic, critical and self-reflective nature of academia as a distinct type of epistemic community, even more so within the IB discipline which prioritizes context (Guttormsen and Moore, 2023).

## 6. Limitations and future research

Our study has focused solely on Russian academic professionals living abroad. Such professionals are a distinct group from their academic counterparts still living and working in Russia (Smirnov, 2025; Yatuk and Khukalenko, 2025). They have either actively decided to leave Russia or have been forced to leave Russia. Hence, one would expect they experienced strong social judgements in their host environments, which might have impacted their stigma experiences and recollections of social judgement. In our study, we did not focus too much on *why* our respondents left Russia. Future research could explore how the war impacts stigmatized academic professionals who decide to leave their home countries, when they left their countries and compare them to those who have stayed. It would also be interesting to contrast Russian academic professionals living abroad who condemn and support the Russian regime.

Professional identities are in a constant state of co-evolution with their environments (Clarke *et al.*, 2013; Ylijoki and Jani, 2013). Our study was a cross-sectional one and as such subject to all the limitations around causal inference. Future research could adopt a longitudinal perspective to examine both the evolution of professional identities and the possible cross-over effects between *core* and *event* types of stigma. A longitudinal approach can also shed light on the process of stigmatization, because stigmatization stages and strategies change during the different stages of geopolitical tensions. Hence, the responses to manage stigma can also evolve. A longitudinal approach can shift the thinking and strategies employed by academic professionals in rebuilding their professional identities, as well as the compounding and/or additive effects of event stigma in relation to core stigma.

Another key area for future research could be the examination of specific outcomes associated with particular stigma management strategies. Our study focused on four specific stigma management strategies at a given point in time and against a very specific event. However, we did not examine the effectiveness of those strategies in general, let alone in relation to specific outcomes (i.e. legitimacy, resolved role conflict, etc.).

## 7. Recommendations

Insights from our study can empower academic professionals affected by the war to navigate its aftermath through self-reflection, proactive assistance seeking and transforming challenges in

teaching, research and service as opportunities for professional and personal growth. To manage their stigma, Russian academic professionals can form support groups and help each other. They ought to also advocate for and actively seek support from their departments, schools and universities, as well as social networks outside of academia which can help further reduce the impact of stigma. Employee resource groups can also be a particularly useful way for academic institutions to support their Russian employees, as would be scaling up existing and providing more targeted employee assistance programmes with better equipped professionals able to handle stigma and trauma issues. At the same time, Russian academic professionals also need to engage in self-reflection (Henkel, 2012), which can help them to manage stigma by increasing their self-worth and educate themselves about emotion work.

Secondly, academic colleagues from the same university and other academic institutions ought to strive to understand the complexity of the situation faced by Russian academic professionals living abroad. Colleagues should imagine themselves in their Russian colleagues' shoes and refrain from falling into the trappings of using any form of moral disengagement mechanisms (i.e. attribution of blame, dehumanization, diffusion of responsibility, etc.) or ecological fallacy. They might not necessarily voice their concerns or views for fear of retribution and negative consequences for their families and friends back home in Russia. Open communication is another way that academic colleagues can provide opportunities for dialogue by creating safe spaces for Russian colleagues to share their experiences and perspectives, which can help with working on their emotions as well as information management. Continuing collaborations and intellectual exchange based on individual merit rather than nationality is another important and symbolically powerful contribution.

Thirdly, academic institutions should establish and provide both formal and informal support systems for academic professionals affected by war. Academic professionals may belong to a number of academic institutions and communities (e.g., university, academies, professional boards, etc.) (Barbato, 2023; Söderhjelm *et al.*, 2018). Hence, academic institutions can help to develop platforms for academic professionals that have been affected by external shocks, like wars. Universities have a responsibility to create a supportive and inclusive environment for all their staff, including academic professionals who face judgement. Universities may wish to reconsider blanket suspensions of ties with Russian institutions. While acknowledging the gravity of the situation, institutions should carefully consider the impact of blanket bans on individual academic professionals who may oppose the war. Instead of blanket exclusion and knee-jerk reactions, universities would be better advised to develop clear(er) guidelines and policies on working with Russian counterparts and to address stigma and discrimination based on nationality, such as the creation of a handbook for universities outlining strategies to support academic professionals impacted by war. Academies, such as the Academy of International Business (AIB), could also develop taskforces, providing opportunities for affected academic professionals to reconstruct their identities by sharing information and being more involved in research, teaching, and service/citizenship.

## 8. Conclusion

The IB discipline is uniquely equipped to study professional identities of specific groups of professionals operating as particular types of knowledge communities, communities of practice and also epistemological communities. In case of extreme and adverse events which induce event-based stigma, the rules, norms and practices governing such communities might come to odds, creating an internal identity conflict which can be further compounded by external societal judgement.

Focusing on the stigmatization of Russian academic professionals living abroad, the sources of their stigma and the various stigma management strategies they use, we have joined the call

for IB scholars to better integrate identity politics into examination of IB related phenomena (Beugelsdijk and Luo, 2024; Rašković, 2021) and to help advance multi-level understandings of related IB phenomena through microfoundational thinking (Ambos *et al.*, 2025).

Our study has focused on the impact the Russian–Ukrainian conflict has had on the ostracized nature of Russian academic professionals around the world and their mental health and professional well-being, as they have had to endure event and tribal stigma. As scholar and members of a common epistemological community, we believe IB scholars need to engage in critical reflexivity to advance a social justice case through our research where inclusion should never be bounded by politics or ideology (Rašković *et al.*, 2025). We call on the IB scholarly community to not ostracize and instead support our Russian colleagues living abroad who have been adversely impacted by the current conflict. They have largely had to deal with their internal identity conflicts and external stigma in silence for fear of not having the right to speak up or fear of retribution and adverse impacts on their careers and professional lives.

## Note

- [1.] *Unspoiling*, in a social stigma sense, refers to “the process that a stigmatized individual undertakes to learn and express an unstigmatized and self-accepted presentation of self” (Winder, 2023, p. 196). So far, it has been mostly applied to study stigma management experiences of gay black men based on an intersectional logic of gender, race and sexual orientation.

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