

The Impact of Ambivalent Occupational Identity on Work Engagement in Stigmatized Work: The Mediating Role of Psychological Resilience

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Abstract:

Drawing on an integrated framework of the psychological resilience model and Conservation of Resources (COR) theory, this study proposes a dynamic equilibrium model to investigate the impact of ambivalent occupational identity on work engagement and its underlying mechanisms in stigmatized work. Based on a questionnaire survey (N = 265), this research specifically examines the mediating role of psychological resilience and the moderating effects of material rewards and family support. The results indicate that ambivalent occupational identity has a significant positive effect on psychological resilience, and this relationship is positively moderated by material rewards and family support. Furthermore, psychological resilience mediates the relationship between ambivalent occupational identity and work engagement. This study elucidates the psychological adaptation mechanisms of stigmatized workers in the context of ambivalent occupational identity. It provides practical intervention pathways for organizational management, ultimately contributing to the enhancement of employee work engagement and organizational effectiveness.

Keywords:

Stigmatized Work, Ambivalent Occupational Identity, Psychological Resilience, Material Rewards, Family Support

1. Introduction

Occupations are the product of the social division of labor; intrinsically, any profession that benefits human society should be devoid of hierarchical distinctions of superiority or inferiority [1]. However, in the process of contemporary global social transformation, the construction mechanism of “occupational prestige” rooted in cultural psychology continues to shape the hierarchical order of occupational value through social comparison [2]. Consequently, occupational types involving manual labor, hazardous environments, or social stigmatization (e.g., construction, sanitation,

and domestic work) suffer from systemic devaluation due to their binding with the cultural symbols of “purity/impurity” [3][4]. According to the World Employment and Social Outlook: Trends 2023 published by the International Labour Organization (ILO) [6], approximately 43% of the global workforce (about 1.6 billion people) are engaged in institutionally undervalued occupations. This cohort plays an irreplaceable role in domains such as maintaining public health security and providing urban essential services [7]. Nevertheless, the current social evaluation system persistently attaches stigmatizing labels to these professions. This not only triggers structural contradictions in the public service sector [8] (for instance, 63.8% of domestic workers have experienced verbal abuse from clients, and 71.4% of sanitation workers have faced discriminatory gazes in public), but also reflects a deeper predicament in occupational ethics. Such stigmatization not only compromises the physical and mental health of practitioners but also potentially leads to organizational inefficiency [5][10]. Therefore, delving into the occupational identity of stigmatized workers and assisting them in constructing a dignified professional identity holds significant academic value and practical implications.

The occupational identity of stigmatized workers exhibits salient paradoxical characteristics. They neither fully accept the occupational stigma imposed by society nor completely deny the value of their profession; rather, they largely reside in a middle ground characterized by identity tension [9]. Analyzed through the lens of institutional oppression theory [10], this group faces a dual structural contradiction. First, the social comparison mechanism continuously erodes their self-efficacy via the reference group effect [11], engendering a vicious cycle of ambivalent identity characterized by “occupational stigma–identity fragmentation” [12]. Second, economic dependence forces individuals into a conflictual arena between survival rationality and value rationality; this coercive tension triggers adaptive adjustments in subjects' action strategies [13]. Although existing research has paid attention to the phenomenon of occupational stigmatization, a systematic explanatory framework regarding the identity construction mechanism of this cohort has yet to be established [9]. Furthermore, related studies suffer from the following limitations: ① An overemphasis on negative outcomes (e.g., increased turnover intention and emotional exhaustion) [5][14], which overlooks the “resilient adaptation” strategies exhibited by practitioners (such as occupational boundary restructuring and meaning-system remodeling). This exposes the explanatory limitations of existing theories regarding the mechanisms of institutional oppression; ② Rigid adherence to the binary oppositional paradigm of “stigma vs. resistance,” failing to explore the possibility of identity coexistence within stigmatized contexts [15]; ③ Methodologically, an over-reliance on qualitative studies of single occupations, rendering the cross-cultural applicability of the conclusions questionable [16].

In light of the above, this study draws on an integrated framework of the psychological resilience model and Conservation of Resources (COR) theory to construct a “dynamic equilibrium model.” This model posits that ambivalent occupational identity acts not only as a stressor of identity threat but also as a catalyst for triggering psychological resilience reconstruction. This perspective breaks through the theoretical assumption of traditional research that equates ambivalent occupational identity exclusively with negative consequences, further investigating the impact of ambivalent occupational identity on work engagement and its underlying mechanisms in stigmatized work. Theoretically, this study refines the theoretical framework of the psychological and behavioral responses of stigmatized workers in complex

occupational contexts, offering a novel theoretical pivot to break the vicious cycle of “stigma stress–resource depletion.” Practically, it provides insights for organizational managers to improve the management of lower-status workforce. By enhancing employees' occupational resilience through resilience-cultivation strategies, this research assists stigmatized workers in transforming occupational stigma into intrinsic motivation, thereby offering actionable pathways for organizations to achieve the synergistic development of efficiency and equity, and for society to build an inclusive occupational ecology.

2. Research Hypotheses

Duguet (2012)[3] found that additional deductions for R&D expenses can compensate for the costs of hiring high- skilled talent, further incentivizing increased R&D investment and encouraging companies to hire more high-tech R&D personnel. Dai Tianxi (2022)[4] argues that the manufacturing sector, with its significant tangible assets, requires higher levels of skilled human capital. To achieve competitive advantage through independent R&D innovation, manufacturing firms must employ specialized high-tech talent. Therefore, increasing the R&D deduction for manufacturing firms could indirectly influence their human capital investment behaviors, alleviating conflicts between self-interest and altruism in such investments. This would positively impact the optimization of the human capital structure in manufacturing firms. Thus, this study proposes the following hypothesis:

2.1. Theoretical Foundations

The Psychological Resilience Theoretical Model:

Garmezy's psychological resilience model [17] transcends the traditional static conceptualization of “resilience as a trait,” emphasizing instead the dynamic interactive mechanisms through which individuals maintain adaptive functioning in the face of adversity. Its core lies in revealing how protective factors exert a mediating effect on the relationship between adversity and adaptive outcomes via the key construct of psychological resilience. The model highlights that psychological resilience is not an isolated psychological attribute, but rather an adaptive ecological system co-constructed by individuals' internal cognitive resources (e.g., self-efficacy, metacognitive strategies), family ecological systems (e.g., secure attachment relationships, emotional support networks), and socio-cultural contexts (e.g., community institutional resources, collectivist values) [18]. Within this system, protective factors enhance the dynamic equilibrium function of psychological resilience, thereby creating a buffering effect against negative developmental outcomes (e.g., depressive symptoms, job burnout) triggered by adverse events (e.g., chronic stress, trauma exposure) [19]. This elucidates the pivotal function of psychological resilience as a “stress-adaptation” transformer.

Garmezy and colleagues further categorized the psychological resilience model into the compensatory model, the challenge model, and the conditional model. The compensatory model emphasizes the independent pathways of protective and risk factors. Individual internal resources (e.g., cognitive restructuring capacity) function by directly offsetting the negative effects of risk factors (e.g., poverty), exhibiting an antagonistic “trade-off” relationship. For instance, high self-regulation capability can buffer the detrimental impact of economic deprivation on prefrontal cortex development by suppressing the release of stress hormones [20]. The challenge model,

grounded in “stress inoculation theory,” posits that moderate exposure to adversity can generate adaptive gains by activating the psychological resilience system. When environmental challenges fall within an individual’s “zone of proximal development,” cognitive reappraisal and emotion regulation triggered by stress responses can enhance mental elasticity, fostering a positive adaptation pattern of “post-traumatic growth” [21]. The conditional model, also known as the “moderating model” or “immunity model,” introduces the concept of dynamic ecosystem fit, arguing that the effectiveness of psychological resilience hinges on its congruence with the environmental context. The moderating effect of protective factors exhibits non-linear characteristics: when environmental stress exceeds the threshold of an individual’s resources, the resilience system may trigger a “breakdown protection” mechanism, maintaining basic functioning through exogenous interventions such as seeking social support [22].

In summary, the psychological resilience theoretical model delineates a three-stage transmission mechanism of “threat perception – cognitive restructuring – resource generation”: the initial occupational identity conflict (threat perception) activates the cognitive appraisal module of the psychological resilience system, transforming the threat into a developmental challenge through meaning-making; this subsequently triggers the resource generation mechanism, integrating individuals’ cognitive and social support resources, and ultimately culminating in an adaptive increase in work engagement. This process validates the theoretical value of psychological resilience as a “dynamic transformation medium” and provides a theoretical explanatory framework for the dialectical development of occupational identity.

Conservation of Resources Theory:

As a meta-theoretical framework for stress and coping research, Conservation of Resources (COR) theory systematically elucidates individual’ resource management strategies in ecological stress contexts. Hobfoll (1989) [23] innovatively proposed that the preservation and accumulation of psychological resource reservoirs constitute the core motivational driver for individual behavioral decision-making. The dynamic equilibrium of these resources adheres to a dual principle of “loss aversion and resource gain.” When stressors trigger resource depletion, individuals initiate a three-tier defense mechanism: “First, they reduce the perceived intensity of resource depletion through cognitive reappraisal; second, they implement compensatory resource acquisition; and finally, they achieve a rebalancing of the resource system” [24]. Specifically, resource depletion leads to the exhaustion of psychological resources and a subsequent decline in self-efficacy, manifesting as a linear decay in the energetic index of work engagement [25]. Conversely, resource gain generates a multiplier effect through the accumulation of psychological capital, thereby enhancing occupational resilience [58]. In stressful situations, individuals actively acquire new resources to cope with potential resource loss scenarios [26].

By constructing a “resource conservation-gain dual-path mechanism,” COR theory systematically explains the operational laws of individual psychological motivation under ecological stress. As an exogenous resource, material rewards—mediated through a sense of economic security—can effectively buffer the resource depletion pressure brought about by occupational stigma. On the other hand, family support acts as an endogenous resource; through the empowering mechanism of emotional support, it facilitates the intergenerational transfer of psychological resources, fostering a resource value-added effect.

In summary, drawing from the perspective of resource loss and gain, COR theory shifts the traditional orientation from “loss aversion” toward “resource augmentation.” This theoretical shift provides a breakthrough for dismantling the vicious cycle of “stigmatization–resource depletion,” thus offering robust explanatory and predictive power regarding how material rewards and family support moderate the impact of ambivalent occupational identity on psychological resilience among stigmatized workers.

2.2. Identity Ambivalence and Resilience

Existing research has yet to form a systematic explanatory framework for the occupational identity construction mechanism of stigmatized working groups. Theoretically, occupational identity—a core concept in occupational psychology—is defined as the dynamic developmental process of an individual's cognitive confirmation and affective commitment to the intrinsic value of their occupational role. Its essential characteristics are manifested in the multidimensional coupling of occupational value perception, emotional involvement, and behavioral engagement [27]. Current research exhibits a theoretical tension regarding the dual attributes of occupational identity among stigmatized workers.

On the one hand, the symbolic violence attribute of occupational stigma undermines practitioners' self-efficacy through social exclusion mechanisms, forming a vicious cycle of “stigma–identity fragmentation.” Ashforth's (2007) paradoxical identity theory reveals that the structural contradictions of “dirty work” (e.g., role expectation gaps, institutional discrimination, and the devaluation of occupational prestige) can induce cognitive dissonance among practitioners, leading to the fragmentation of self-concept [5]. This identity threat compels individuals to continuously mobilize psychological resources to maintain basic occupational functions, explicitly manifesting as the overload of emotional labor and the persistent depletion of cognitive resources [29][30].

On the other hand, drawing upon adaptive preference theory, some scholars posit a counterintuitive view: the existence of occupational stigma may paradoxically activate individuals' meaning-making mechanisms, prompting practitioners to establish a positive self-concept through the remodeling of occupational ideologies [2][5]. Cross-national comparative studies indicate a significant positive correlation between the cognitive flexibility exhibited by stigmatized workers in coping with occupational stigma and the sense of occupational calling formed through meaning reconstruction [31].

Examined through the lens of the dynamic interactive mechanism of the psychological resilience model, occupational stigma acts as an exogenous stress variable whose operational mechanism displays distinct dialectical characteristics. Research by Clough's team at Manchester Metropolitan University [33] suggests that the psychological resilience system, through the activation of protective factors (such as emotion regulation strategies and cognitive restructuring capabilities), transforms the pressure of occupational stigma into a trigger point for the accumulation of psychological capital. The threat-perception state inherent in an ambivalent occupational identity activates a dual-pathway regulatory mechanism. First, through proactive coping strategies (e.g., meaning-making and goal sublimation), it enhances the core dimensions of psychological resilience (e.g., self-efficacy and emotional resilience), forging a positive cycle of “stress exposure–resilience growth” [34].

Second, relying on passive defense mechanisms (e.g., seeking social support), it buffers the emotional depletion caused by stigmatization, thereby maintaining the dynamic equilibrium of occupational identity. This bidirectional regulatory process corroborates the serial mediation effect of the Garmezy model, elucidating the pivotal function of psychological resilience as a “stress-adaptation” transformer [32].

Based on the aforementioned theoretical analysis and empirical findings, this study posits that the ambivalent occupational identity resulting from the pressure of occupational stigma will exert a certain positive impact on the psychological resilience of stigmatized workers. Consequently, the following hypothesis is proposed:

Hypothesis 1 (H1): Ambivalent occupational identity has a positive impact on psychological resilience.

2.3. Moderation of Rewards and Support

As a dynamic adaptation mechanism for individuals coping with stress and adversity, resilience is fundamentally characterized by the adaptive capacity to maintain psychological homeostasis during negative life events. Theoretically, the formation of this construct is driven by the synergistic effects of multidimensional protective factors, encompassing core elements such as the cognitive regulation system (e.g., self-efficacy), the behavioral control system (e.g., self-management skills), the emotional support network (e.g., family and social support systems), and personality traits (Zhang, 2023). Within the localized Chinese context, the family system holds paradigmatic significance in shaping an individual's psychological capital [35]. This phenomenon aligns highly with Kumpfer's resilience framework in an ecological system, which emphasizes that the family, as the core component of the microsystem, interacts with other social subsystems (e.g., community, workplace) to jointly constitute a multidimensional support matrix for resilience development [36].

Empirical studies indicate that the integrity of family functioning exerts a significant positive effect on resilience. Representative research by Tao et al. (2019) demonstrates that family support effectively enhances occupational vitality by satisfying individuals' basic psychological needs (i.e., autonomy, competence, and relatedness); this mechanism is particularly salient among service-oriented occupational groups [37]. Furthermore, based on the dynamic equilibrium framework of COR theory [58], material rewards and family support act as critical resource elements that form a dynamic compensatory mechanism within an individual's mental accounting. The accumulation of material capital (e.g., optimization of salary and benefits) not only enhances the sense of occupational gain but also reinforces the perception of work meaningfulness through the “family-work” resource exchange loop. When practitioners attain a sense of economic security, their occupational behaviors are more likely to transcend instrumental rationality and sublimates into a sense of responsibility for family well-being. This value-reconstruction process significantly bolsters psychological tolerance toward identity ambivalence [5]. Simultaneously, the buffering effect of material rewards is reflected in the disruption of stress transmission pathways; by satisfying basic survival and security needs, it creates the essential physiological and psychological state of readiness for resilience development. Meanwhile, family functioning, through emotional support and the transmission of intergenerational responsibilities, prompts individuals to transform stress perception into motivation for family contribution.

In light of the above, this study posits that material rewards and family support moderate the relationship between ambivalent occupational identity and psychological resilience. Therefore, we propose the following hypotheses:

Hypothesis 2 (H2): Material rewards positively moderate the relationship between ambivalent occupational identity and psychological resilience.

Hypothesis 3 (H3): Family support positively moderate the relationship between ambivalent occupational identity and psychological resilience.

2.4. Resilience and Work Engagement

The theoretical construction of work engagement exhibits interdisciplinary characteristics, with its conceptualization multidimensionally pointing to the activation state of an individual's psycho-physiological system within occupational contexts. The international academic community widely adopts Schaufeli's definitional framework, deconstructing work engagement into a three-dimensional construct comprising affective commitment, cognitive activation, and behavioral persistence, thereby emphasizing its essential attribute as a continuous mechanism for mobilizing psychological resources [38]. In contrast, Chinese indigenous research approaches this from an organizational behavior perspective, positing that work engagement is a concrete manifestation of occupational attitudes. Specifically, it externalizes as a stable, high-arousal emotional state and the level of cognitive resource investment during task execution [39].

The systematic framework of Social Identity Theory reveals that individuals construct dynamic identity cognition through occupational role-playing and social interactions. When confronting identity threats such as occupational stigma, resilience intervenes in the social identity reconstruction process as a crucial regulatory variable. In modern theoretical frameworks, this construct has been redefined as "an individual's cognitive flexibility and behavioral adaptability to maintain psychological homeostasis in adversity" [40]. Its operational mechanism follows a three-stage transmission pathway: "threat exposure–resilience activation–engagement enhancement." The accumulation of such psychological capital empowers stigmatized workers to break free from the constraints of social labels and exhibit unique adaptive behavioral patterns in occupational contexts.

Specifically, when encountering occupational stigma, individuals with high resilience trigger a dual defense mechanism. First, they employ meaning-making strategies to reconstruct the meaning system of their work, internalizing external evaluations into a driving force for personal growth. Second, they adopt contextual embedding strategies to adjust goal hierarchies, achieving a dynamic fit between their behavioral patterns and organizational demands. This adaptive adjustment not only alleviates the psychological depletion caused by identity crises but also ultimately achieves a qualitative enhancement in work engagement levels by bolstering occupational calling and organizational embeddedness.

In summary, this study contends that psychological resilience exerts a significant positive effect on work engagement. Therefore, the following hypothesis is proposed:

Hypothesis 4 (H4): Psychological resilience has a positive impact on work engagement.

2.5. The Mediating Role of Resilience

Empirical research by Rice et al. (2016) [41] indicates that resilience is not merely manifested as an individual's homeostatic restorative capacity to recover from negative situations; more importantly, it fosters the development of employee conscientiousness through the dynamic accumulation of psychological capital. When workers are situated in occupational contexts characterized by societal stigmatization, the negative evaluations from the external environment and internal psychological pressure can form a composite threat network, thereby suppressing their mental elasticity reserves intended for proactive situational improvement [42]. Furthermore, the symbolic labeling of occupational stigma weakens individuals' behavioral motivation through a "cognitive-affective decoupling mechanism," leading to a compensatory depletion of psychological resources required for innovative behavior [43]. The superposition effect of such systemic resource loss and structural environmental pressure further amplifies the cognitive load complexity of work tasks and causes a non-linear decay in execution efficacy [44].

Longitudinal research by Shatté et al. (2018) [45] further unveiled the dynamic regulatory role of psychological resilience in work settings. Their findings demonstrate that in challenging occupational environments, resilience levels are significantly and positively correlated with job performance. Specifically, highly resilient individuals can effectively buffer stress perception, mitigate the intensity of stress responses, and transform environmental pressure into a source of self-motivation. Cross-cultural studies indicate that, as a crucial component of psychological capital, resilience holds universal explanatory power in regulating employees' emotional states and steering their behavioral choices toward organizational goals.

Analyzed from the perspective of the dynamic adaptation mechanism within the psychological resilience model, the operational efficacy of occupational stigma—acting as an exogenous stressor—is constrained by the activation threshold of an individual's protective factors. Individuals with high levels of resilience can effectively counter the identity threats induced by stigmatization through cognitive restructuring and strategic adjustments that reinforce positive social identity. This adaptive adjustment is manifested in the innovative reconstruction of work methods, the dynamic optimization of goal orientation, and the flexible switching of coping strategies. Consequently, when facing environmental constraints, they can rapidly restore psychological equilibrium, generate creative solutions, and ultimately elevate their level of work engagement.

In light of the above, this study contends that psychological resilience mediates the relationship between ambivalent occupational identity and work engagement. Therefore, the following hypothesis is proposed:

Hypothesis 5 (H5): Psychological resilience mediates the relationship between ambivalent occupational identity and work engagement.

In summary, the theoretical model of this study is illustrated in Figure 1.

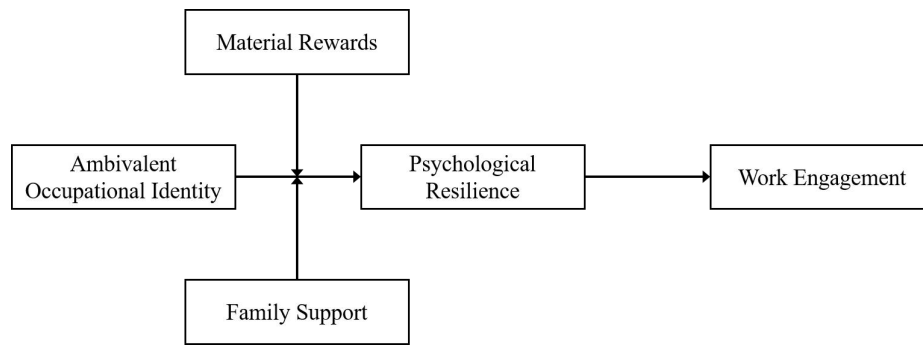


Figure 1. *Theoretical Model.*

3. Research Design

3.1. Data Collection and Sample Description

This study employed a questionnaire survey method to collect data. The questionnaire was designed based on established literature and relevant theories, tailored to the specific characteristics of stigmatized workers, and formally administered after a pilot test and subsequent revisions. The questionnaire consisted of two sections. The first section collected demographic information from the respondents, including control variables such as gender, age, educational attainment, job tenure, industry type, and income. The second section comprised measurement items for the study variables, covering ambivalent occupational identity, psychological resilience, work engagement, material rewards, and family support.

A hybrid approach combining online and offline methods was used for questionnaire distribution. The online component was disseminated widely through professional survey platforms and social media channels. The offline component involved collaboration with relevant enterprises and industry associations to distribute paper-based questionnaires directly to stigmatized workers. To ensure the validity and response rate of the survey, the research team provided detailed instructions for completion and offered on-site guidance to some respondents. Data were collected in March 2024. A total of 300 questionnaires were distributed, and 265 valid responses were returned, yielding an effective response rate of 88.3%.

The stigmatized workers surveyed in this study were primarily middle-aged individuals with relatively low educational attainment and predominantly in the low-to-middle income bracket. This profile aligns with the labor force characteristics of this sector, where practitioners often face significant economic pressure and have limited career options. The sample covered typical "dirty work" sectors such as municipal sanitation (18.1%), domestic services (15.8%), and manufacturing temporary work (17.4%), conforming to the definitional criteria of the research subjects. Additionally, female respondents slightly outnumbered male respondents. This may be related to the industry-specific characteristics of certain stigmatized jobs (e.g., municipal sanitation, domestic services) where female workers tend to concentrate. These positions often feature relatively manageable labor intensity and flexible scheduling, which better accommodates the needs of middle-aged women balancing family responsibilities with career development.

3.2. Measures

The measurement scales used in this study were all adapted from established literature published in leading international journals, most of which have demonstrated good validity in the Chinese context. With the exception of control variables, all scales used a five-point Likert-type format.

Ambivalent Occupational Identity: We used a 4-item scale developed by Ashforth et al. (2013) [5], with reference to the occupational identity theory of Greenhaus et al. (2006) and the ambivalent identity model of Bergmann & Ali (2016). A sample item is, “I have very complex feelings about my current profession.” The Cronbach's α for this scale was 0.889.

Psychological Resilience: We adapted the resilience subscale from the Psychological Capital Questionnaire (PCQ) developed by Luthans et al. (2007) [46]. This scale consists of 5 items. A sample item is, “Even when facing significant work pressure, I can remain calm and focused.” The Cronbach's α for this scale was 0.908.

Work Engagement: We employed the 9-item short version of the Utrecht Work Engagement Scale (UWES-9) revised by Schaufeli et al. (2002) [47]. A sample item is, “I can fully concentrate on the tasks at hand.” The Cronbach's α for this scale was 0.952.

Material Rewards: We measured this variable using items from the Pay Satisfaction Questionnaire (PSQ) [48], Lawler's (1971) equity theory of pay [49], and Gerhart's (1990) three-dimensional model of pay satisfaction [50]. This scale includes 5 items. A sample item is, “I am satisfied with my current level of pay.” The Cronbach's α for this scale was 0.905.

Family Support: We adapted the family support subscale from the Multidimensional Scale of Perceived Social Support (MSPSS) developed by Zimet et al. (1988) [51]. This scale comprises 4 items. A sample item is, “Even when facing significant work pressure, I can remain calm and focused.” The Cronbach's α for this scale was 0.896.

Control Variables: Consistent with prior research, we controlled for participants' gender, age, education, job tenure, industry type, and income. The coding for these variables was as follows: Gender (1 = male, 2 = female); Age (1 = 18–25, 2 = 26–35, 3 = 36–45, 4 = 46 and above); Education (1 = junior high school or below, 2 = senior high school, 3 = associate degree, 4 = bachelor's degree, 5 = master's degree or above); Job Tenure (1 = less than 1 year, 2 = 1–3 years, 3 = 3–5 years, 4 = 5 years or more); Industry Type (1 = municipal sanitation (e.g., street sweeping, waste management, restroom cleaning), 2 = domestic services (e.g., cleaners, maternity matrons, caregivers), 3 = logistics and delivery (e.g., couriers, food delivery riders), 4 = catering industry (e.g., kitchen assistants, servers), 5 = manufacturing temporary work (e.g., temporary laborers, assembly line workers), 6 = other); Income (1 = ¥3000 or less, 2 = ¥3001–5000, 3 = ¥5001–8000, 4 = ¥8001–10000, 5 = ¥10001 or more).

4. Empirical Analysis

4.1. Confirmatory Factor Analysis (CFA)

Discriminant validity refers to the extent to which different constructs are distinct from each other in empirical measurement. In this study, we conducted a Confirmatory Factor Analysis (CFA) using AMOS 26.0 to test the discriminant validity of the five key variables: ambivalent occupational identity, psychological

resilience, work engagement, material rewards, and family support (see Table 1). A comparison of structural equation models revealed that the fit of the five-factor model ($\chi^2/df = 1.593$, CFI = 0.967, TLI = 0.963, RMSEA = 0.047, SRMR = 0.0353) was significantly superior to that of all alternative models. This indicates that the constructs are empirically distinct, and the discriminant validity of our research model is well-supported.

Table 1. Results of Confirmatory Factor Analysis (N=265).

Model	χ^2	df	χ^2/df	RMSEA	SRMR	TLI	CFI
Five-factor model (AOI, PR, WE, MR, FS)	500.358	314	1.593	0.047	0.0353	0.963	0.967
Four-factor model (AOI+PR, WE, MR, FS)	631.155	318	1.985	0.061	0.0404	0.938	0.944
Three-factor model (AOI+PR+WE, MR, FS)	932.827	321	2.906	0.085	0.0556	0.881	0.891
Two-factor model (AOI+PR+WE+MR, FS)	1754.121	323	5.431	0.130	0.1373	0.722	0.744
One-factor model (AOI+PR+WE+MR+FS)	2277.260	324	7.029	0.151	0.1511	0.622	0.651

Note. AOI = Ambivalent Occupational Identity; PR = Psychological Resilience; WE = Work Engagement; MR = Material Rewards; FS = Family Support. The "+" symbol indicates that the constructs were combined into a single factor.

4.2. Descriptive Statistics and Correlation Analysis

The means, standard deviations, and correlation coefficients for all variables are presented in Table 2. Ambivalent occupational identity was significantly and positively correlated with psychological resilience ($r = .454$, $p < .01$), material rewards ($r = .195$, $p < .01$), family support ($r = .178$, $p < .01$), and work engagement ($r = .704$, $p < .01$). Similarly, psychological resilience was significantly and positively correlated with material rewards ($r = .364$, $p < .01$), family support ($r = .384$, $p < .01$), and work engagement ($r = .475$, $p < .01$). These correlations are consistent with our research expectations and provide preliminary support for the subsequent hypothesis testing.

Table 2. Means, Standard Deviations, and Correlations (N = 265).

Variable	M	SD	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11
Gender	1.540	0.499	1										
Age	2.760	0.933	-.031	1									
Education	2.420	1.122	0.025	-.331**	1								
Job Tenure	2.250	0.862	-.039	.301**	-.153*	1							
Industry Type	3.540	1.766	0.050	0.019	0.017	-.033	1						
Income	2.190	1.176	0.066	0.083	-.13	0.068	-.01	1					

					9*		13						
AOI	3.2 93	1.2 30	- 0.0 18	0.0 72	- 0.0 31	- 0.0 21	- 0.0 40	- 0.0 17	1				
PR	3.2 40	0.8 12	- 0.0 68	0.0 15	0.0 05	- 0.0 23	- 0.0 36	- 0.0 19	.45 4**	1			
WE	3.2 95	1.2 11	- 0.0 59	0.0 19	0.0 17	0.0 06	0.0 00	- 0.0 22	.70 4**	.47 5**	1		
MR	3.3 57	0.9 46	- .12 9*	- 0.0 24	- .18 7**	- 0.0 77	- 0.0 04	- 0.0 07	.19 5**	.36 4**	.13 8*	1	
FS	3.3 70	0.9 90	- .15 0*	- 0.1 18	- 0.1 06	- 0.0 60	- 0.0 35	- 0.0 14	.17 8**	.38 4**	.19 2**	.68 7**	1

Note. $N = 265$. AOI = Ambivalent Occupational Identity; PR = Psychological Resilience; WE = Work Engagement; MR = Material Rewards; FS = Family Support. Values in parentheses on the diagonal are Cronbach's alpha coefficients. For brevity, correlations are shown without the leading zero.

* $p < .05$. ** $p < .01$.

4.3. Hypothesis Testing

This study employed a moderated mediation model to systematically examine the dynamic mechanisms among ambivalent occupational identity, psychological resilience, and work engagement. We focused on validating the mediating role of psychological resilience in the relationship between ambivalent occupational identity and work engagement, as well as whether this mediation is conditional upon the influence of moderating variables.

As an initial step in model construction, we first used Ordinary Least Squares (OLS) regression to test the main effects among the core variables (see Table 3). The results revealed that ambivalent occupational identity had a significant positive predictive effect on psychological resilience ($b = 0.299$, $p < .001$), suggesting that the higher the perceived level of identity ambivalence, the higher the individual's level of psychological resilience. Therefore, Hypothesis 1 was supported.

Building on this, we further analyzed the mediating role of psychological resilience in the relationship between ambivalent occupational identity and work engagement. We employed the Bootstrap method for this test, with 5,000 resamples and a 95% confidence interval (see Table 4). The results showed a significant direct effect of ambivalent occupational identity on work engagement ($b = 0.6049$, $SE = 0.047$, $t = 12.8691$, $p < .001$), with the 95% confidence interval $[0.5123, 0.6974]$ not containing zero. This indicates a significant direct positive impact of ambivalent occupational identity on work engagement. Concurrently, the indirect effect explained by psychological resilience as a mediator was 0.0877 ($SE = 0.0231$), with its 95% confidence interval $[0.0465, 0.1371]$ also excluding zero. This suggests that psychological resilience plays a partial mediating role in the relationship between ambivalent occupational identity and work engagement.

In summary, resilience not only directly influences work engagement but also further impacts it through its mediating effect. Therefore, Hypothesis 4 and Hypothesis 5 were supported.

Table 3. Results of Regression Analysis for Psychological Resilience ($N = 265$).

Variable	Psychological Resilience	
	Model 1	Model 2
	<i>b</i>	<i>b</i>
Control Variables		
Gender	-0.107	-0.098
Age	0.025	-0.008
Education	0.007	0.011
Job Tenure	-0.031	-0.010
Industry Type	-0.017	-0.007
Income	-0.012	-0.004
Independent Variable		
Ambivalent Occupational Identity		0.299***
Model Summary		
R ²	0.007	0.210
Adjusted R ²	0.007	0.203
F-statistic	0.321	9.781***
(Constant)	3.477	2.461

Note. $N = 265$. Unstandardized regression coefficients are reported. * $p < .05$. ** $p < .01$. *** $p < .001$.

Table 4. Results of Mediation Analysis ($N = 265$).

Effect Pathway	Estimate	SE	<i>t</i>	<i>p</i>	Bootstrap CI	
					LLCI	ULCI
Indirect Effect						
AOI → PR → WE	0.0877	0.0231	-	-	0.0465	0.1371
Direct Effect						
AOI → WE	0.6049	0.0470	12.87	<.001	0.5123	0.6974
Total Effect						
AOI → WE	0.6926	0.0431	16.06	<.001	0.6076	0.7775

Note. $N = 265$. AOI = Ambivalent Occupational Identity; PR = Psychological Resilience; WE = Work Engagement. Bootstrap sample size = 5,000. CI = confidence interval; LLCI = lower-level confidence interval; ULCI = upper-level confidence interval.

We further employed OLS regression analysis to test the interaction effects of ambivalent occupational identity with material rewards and family support on psychological resilience. As shown in Model 4 of Table 5, the interaction term between ambivalent occupational identity and material rewards had a significant positive effect on psychological resilience ($b = 0.125$, $p < .001$). Similarly, Model 4 of Table 6 revealed that the interaction term between ambivalent occupational identity and family support also had a significant positive effect on psychological resilience ($b = 0.162$, $p < .001$).

To visually illustrate these moderating effects, we plotted the interaction graphs for both material rewards and family support. The plots show that the positive relationship between ambivalent occupational identity and psychological resilience is stronger when material rewards (or family support) are high. Conversely, this positive relationship is weaker when material rewards (or family support) are low. Thus, Hypothesis 2 and Hypothesis 3 were supported.

Table 5. Regression Results for the Moderating Effect of Material Rewards ($N = 265$).

Variables	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3	Model 4
Control Variables				
Gender	-0.107	-0.098	-0.036	-0.024
Age	0.025	-0.008	0.015	0.031
Education	0.007	0.011	0.060	0.062
Job Tenure	-0.031	-0.010	0.014	0.009
Industry Type	-0.017	-0.007	-0.010	-0.006
Income	-0.012	-0.004	-0.002	0.007
Main Effects				
AOI		0.299***	0.261***	0.254***
MR			0.259***	0.265***
Interaction Term				
AOI $\times$ MR				0.125***
Model Summary				
R ²	0.007	0.210	0.292	0.325
ΔR^2	0.007	0.203	0.082	0.033
F-statistic	0.321	9.781***	13.193***	13.652***
(Constant)	3.477	2.461	1.389	1.273

Note. $N = 265$. Unstandardized regression coefficients are reported. AOI = Ambivalent Occupational Identity; MR = Material Rewards.
 $p < .05$. ** $p < .01$. *** $p < .001$.

Table 6. Regression Results for the Moderating Effect of Family Support ($N = 265$).

Variables	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3	Model 4
Control Variables				
Gender	-0.107	-0.098	-0.020	0.004
Age	0.025	-0.008	0.042	0.049
Education	0.007	0.011	0.049	0.050
Job Tenure	-0.031	-0.010	0.000	-0.014
Industry Type	-0.017	-0.007	-0.005	-0.009
Income	-0.012	-0.004	-0.002	0.000
Main Effects				
AOI		0.299***	0.260***	0.263***
FS			0.267***	0.257***
Interaction Term				
AOI $\times$ FS				0.162***
Model Summary				
R ²	0.007	0.210	0.306	0.368
ΔR^2	0.007	0.203	0.096	0.062
F-statistic	0.321	9.781***	14.103***	16.508***
(Constant)	3.477	2.461	1.304	1.277

Note. $N = 265$. Unstandardized regression coefficients are reported. AOI = Ambivalent Occupational Identity; FS = Family Support.
 $p < .05$. ** $p < .01$. *** $p < .001$.

Subsequently, this study further tested the mediating effect of psychological resilience in the relationship between ambivalent occupational identity and work engagement, concurrently considering the moderating roles of family support and material rewards within this mediation process. The empirical results (see Table 7) indicate the following:

(1) When family support served as the moderating variable, the index of moderated mediation for psychological resilience was significant ($\theta = 0.047$, 95% CI [0.017,

0.083], $p < .05$). This demonstrates that elevated levels of family support can significantly enhance the mediating role of psychological resilience between ambivalent occupational identity and work engagement.

(2) When material rewards served as the moderating variable, the index of moderated mediation was also significant (

$\theta = 0.036$, 95% CI [0.012, 0.066], $p < .05$), although the effect magnitude was approximately 23% weaker than that in the family support scenario. This suggests that an increase in material rewards similarly strengthens the mediation pathway of psychological resilience in the relationship between ambivalent occupational identity and work engagement.

In the constructed moderated mediation model, the confidence intervals under both moderating conditions did not include zero, confirming the significance of the moderated mediation effects. Furthermore, the estimation precision was higher in the family support context (BootSE = 0.017, compared to 0.0139 in the material rewards context). Consequently, Hypotheses 2, 3, 4, and 5 were all supported.

Table 7. Moderated Mediation Analysis of Psychological Resilience.

Moderator Level	Estimate	Boot <i>SE</i>	Bootstrap CI	
			LLCI	ULCI
Family Support (FS)				
Low (-0.9899)	0.0316	0.0164	0.0012	0.0654
Mean (0)	0.0781	0.0215	0.0393	0.1234
High (+0.9899)	0.1245	0.0350	0.0606	0.1982
<i>Index of Moderated Mediation</i>	<i>0.0470</i>	<i>0.0170</i>	<i>0.0173</i>	<i>0.0834</i>
Material Rewards (MR)				
Low (-0.9457)	0.0406	0.0189	0.0089	0.0820
Mean (0)	0.0751	0.0206	0.0386	0.1178
High (+0.9457)	0.1095	0.0290	0.0557	0.1694
<i>Index of Moderated Mediation</i>	<i>0.0364</i>	<i>0.0139</i>	<i>0.0119</i>	<i>0.0664</i>

Note. $N = 265$. Estimate refers to the conditional indirect effect. Boot SE = bootstrap standard error; CI = confidence interval; LLCI = lower-level confidence interval; ULCI = upper-level confidence interval. Bootstrap sample size = 5,000.

5. Conclusions

By integrating psychological resilience theory and Conservation of Resources (COR) theory, this study constructed a dynamic equilibrium model delineating how ambivalent occupational identity affects work engagement in stigmatized work. The study found that ambivalent occupational identity exerts a significant positive predictive effect on psychological resilience. This conclusion challenges the assumption prevalent in traditional research, which typically equates ambivalent identity with a negative psychological state [5][14].

Theoretically, by triggering meaning-making strategies, ambivalent occupational identity prompts individuals to transform identity conflict into an opportunity for psychological capital augmentation. On the one hand, through social comparison strategies that reconstruct the frame of reference, occupational stigma symbols are transformed into narrative resources of moral superiority (e.g., associating the identity of a "city beautifier" with social responsibility) [5]. On the other hand, through the

symbolic integration of instrumental and ontological values, a multidimensional occupational evaluation system is formed. This cognitive restructuring process not only alleviates the psychological depletion caused by identity fragmentation but also enhances stress resistance through the proliferation effect of psychological capital, thereby forging a dynamic equilibrium mechanism of “threat perception–resilience activation” [40].

The mediation effect test revealed the partial mediating role of psychological resilience, indicating that the impact of ambivalent occupational identity on work engagement exists not only through a direct pathway but is also indirectly realized via the buffering mechanism of psychological resilience. This dual operational mechanism suggests that organizational management practices should focus on direct interventions for occupational stigma governance, while equally emphasizing the systematic cultivation of employees’ psychological capital. Notably, the direct effect accounts for 87.3% of the total effect, highlighting that the direct impact of ambivalent occupational identity on work engagement remains dominant. This may be attributed to the objective existence of structural contradictions within stigmatized work contexts [52].

Regarding the moderating effects, the positive moderating roles of material rewards and family support validate the core propositions of COR theory. Material rewards buffer the pressure of resource depletion through the mediating effect of a sense of economic security. Its moderating effect estimate is 0.125 ($p < .001$), indicating that the optimization of compensation and benefits can significantly enhance the efficacy of converting ambivalent occupational identity into psychological resilience [53]. Meanwhile, family support facilitates the intergenerational transfer of psychological resources via emotional empowerment mechanisms. The moderating effect estimate reached 0.162 ($p < .001$), reflecting the paradigmatic significance of the family system—acting as a micro-ecosystem—in shaping individuals’ psychological capital [37].

5.1. Theoretical Contributions

This study achieves a threefold theoretical breakthrough by constructing an integrated analytical framework for the relationship between ambivalent occupational identity and work engagement in the context of stigmatized work:

First, it enriches the theoretical perspective on ambivalent occupational identity. By transcending the traditional binary oppositional paradigm of occupational identity research, this study constructs a dynamic equilibrium model of ambivalent occupational identity. This offers a novel lens to understand the psychological adaptation mechanisms of stigmatized workers [5].

Second, it refines the explanatory framework for the psychological adaptation mechanisms of stigmatized working groups. By integrating the psychological resilience model with Conservation of Resources (COR) theory, we construct a multi-level analytical model encompassing “stressors—mediating mechanisms—moderating effects.” This reveals the synergistic mechanisms of material rewards and family support, and substantiates the differentiated roles of institutional resources and emotional resources in building psychological resilience. Consequently, it offers a fresh theoretical perspective to untangle the “stigmatized work–low engagement” paradox.

Third, it innovatively expands the application boundaries of psychological resilience within occupational contexts. By empirically validating the buffering mediation effect of psychological resilience in stigmatized work settings for the first time [54], this study uncovers the underlying mechanisms through which practitioners transform occupational stress via cognitive reappraisal strategies. This provides a dynamic analytical perspective for future research on psychological resilience in the workplace.

5.2. Practical Implications

This study provides systematic solutions for enterprises to optimize their management practices concerning stigmatized workers:

First, construct resilience intervention mechanisms [40] to mitigate the ambivalent occupational identity effects induced by occupational stigma. Corporate managers and social policymakers should attach great importance to the mental health of stigmatized workers, paying close attention to the psychological pressure they face. By providing professional psychological counseling [2], conducting targeted occupational training, and establishing supportive work environments, organizations can help employees enhance their psychological resilience and alleviate the negative impact of occupational stigma.

Second, optimize the portfolio strategy of material and psychological incentives. Managers must prioritize the optimization of the work environment and compensation systems for stigmatized workers [2], focusing on their needs for material rewards [49]. Enhancing compensation and improving working conditions can strengthen employees' identification with and engagement in their work. Simultaneously, organizations should foster a positive work environment to minimize the adverse effects of occupational stigma. For instance, through advocacy and education, companies can elevate employees' awareness of the value inherent in their stigmatized work, thereby boosting their professional pride. For high-risk positions, organizations should implement risk premium compensation (e.g., high-temperature allowances, hazardous duty pay) and establish long-term incentive mechanisms by linking compensation with skill certification [55].

Third, innovate family support embedding mechanisms to construct a social support system capable of neutralizing stigma. Strengthening family and social support systems can transform occupational stigma into intrinsic motivation for enhancing organizational effectiveness, thereby facilitating the synergistic development of efficiency and equity [47]. Managers can heighten employees' sense of family support through family care programs and flexible work arrangements [56]. Concurrently, society should bolster its support and recognition for stigmatized workers, reducing occupational prejudice to cultivate a more equitable social environment. The implementation of "family-friendly" management systems—such as establishing family open days, providing child-care services, and offering family care allowances [57]—can effectively alleviate work-family conflict, ultimately reinforcing employees' organizational identification and sense of belonging.

5.3. Limitations and Future Research Directions

Although this study has yielded valuable theoretical and practical insights, three limitations remain to be addressed.

First, the sample structure is subject to industry selection bias and sample size constraints. The concentration of participants in stigmatized working groups within specific industries may compromise the external validity of the findings. Despite the employment of validated measurement tools, the self-reported nature of ambivalent occupational identity and psychological resilience still poses inherent limitations regarding reliability and validity. Future research is encouraged to employ a cross-industry stratified sampling strategy and integrate qualitative methods, such as in-depth interviews. Adopting a mixed-methods research design would significantly enhance the generalizability and explanatory depth of the conclusions.

Second, the research design exhibits temporal limitations. The cross-sectional data paradigm struggles to capture the dynamic evolutionary mechanisms of ambivalent occupational identity, as well as its interactive temporal characteristics with psychological resilience and work engagement. Future studies should construct longitudinal panel datasets and utilize Latent Growth Curve Modeling (LGCM) to analyze the non-linear temporal relationships among these variables.

Third, theoretical gaps exist within the analysis of moderating mechanisms. This study primarily examined the buffering effects of material rewards and family support, falling short of systematically integrating the synergistic effects of the broader institutional environment and individual agency. Future research should develop multi-level moderation models that integrate perspectives from organizational behavior and social support theories. By elucidating the synergistic mechanisms between the institutional environment and individual agency during occupational adaptation, scholars can further deepen the systematic understanding of the occupational psychology and behavior of stigmatized workers.

Conflicts of Interest

The authors declare that there is no conflict of interest regarding the publication of this article.

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