

Course: SKOM12
Term: Spring 2020
Supervisor Åsa Thelander
Examiner Marlene Wiggill

[Professional identity enacted at public library

Implications for the organization in the context of digitalization

ALINA BODNAR

Lund University
Department of strategic communication
Master's thesis]



Abstract

Professional identity enacted at public library: Implications for the organization in the context of digitalization

Organizational identity has been mostly researched through a managerial perspective, where employees are given a secondary role. This thesis approaches identity from a dynamic perspective and explores how librarian identity is enacted in daily interactions between librarians and patrons, whilst considering any implications for the organization. The research focuses on a single case where participant observations and online observations are conducted. Goffman's theory of self-presentation and the framework of the organizations' communicational constitution are used to analyze the phenomenon in question. Several roles enacted by librarians have been identified: the Informer, the Personal Assistant, the Guard, and the Buddy, followed by their descriptions and analysis. The implications of the roles enacted by the librarians to the organization are then discussed. This study shows that employee identity is enacted in daily interactions through different roles, and these roles correspond to the different facets of organizational identity. The findings of the thesis also suggest that organizational identity is influenced by the identities of its employees enacted in daily interactions with other organizational members and external stakeholders.

Keywords: employee identity, organizational identity, librarian professional identity, self-presentation, CCO

Wordcount: 19451

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1. Introduction

“Without libraries what have we? We have no past and no future.”

Ray Bradbury

Libraries have long been considered as temples of knowledge, since they play the role of an informal education center (Kranich, 2001; Hicks, 2014). They enhance information literacy and civic engagement, which therefore affirms the role of libraries in safeguarding democracies, especially amongst young people and those with low income (Kranich, 2005; Eckerdal, 2017; Stilwell, 2018; Kargbo, 2014). In addition, according to Audunson (2005), public libraries are crucial in the context of globalization, multiculturalism, and digitalization, because they provide a place where different people can meet. According to the author, this very exposure to differences enhances tolerance in modern multicultural societies. Existing research highlights the role of libraries in the development of smart communities, as well as their support of local economic growth, civic engagement and sustainability (Mersand, Gascó, Ramon Gil-Garcia, Burke, Figueroa & Sutherland, 2018; Noh, Lee & Choi, 2018). Despite the role of libraries in society, this type of organizations has been overlooked by researchers in the field of strategic communication.

According to Nylén (2015), organizations have transformed because of digitalization, and it works for the benefit and the organization’s detriment. Specifically, public libraries are facing a difficult stage of transition to digital products and services. As a result, they need to defend their relevance under the conditions of automation and shrinking budgets (Garcia & Barbour, 2018). As Fabunmi, Paris, and Fabunmi (2009) put it, the funding required for digitization is high, and libraries must advocate the need for it, therefore competing with other municipal expenses. Another layer of the problem is that public libraries are examples of bureaucratic organizations, which have received a great amount of criticism in the scientific literature. This is due to, among others, their inefficiency and ritualism (Alvesson & Thompson, 2006), which may inhibit the change. In this regard, the current trend of new public management with its benchmarks against

the private sector might as well entail challenges for libraries (Düren, Goldstein, Landøy, Repanovici, Saarti, 2019). In addition, according to Smith (2019), libraries are being challenged with the lack of recognition of the services they provide to the digitized society. These issues are relevant not only for libraries but for a multitude of other public and private organizations belonging to the cultural sector (UNESCO, n. d.).

In the digital context, the role of employees is emphasized through their position of being an “analog” connection between their organizations and external stakeholders. In the case of libraries, librarians are those who regularly interact with patrons, thereby representing their organization. Digitalization has affected the role of librarians, which has changed to that of assistants, case, or social workers, and their role has been influenced by the stereotypes about the feminine nature and unapproachability of the professionals (Gibson, Bertot & McClure, 2009; McClellan & Beggan, 2019).

Previous research indicates that identity processes among librarians are situational and occur through their communication with patrons (Nelson & Irwin, 2014; Hedemark & Lindberg, 2017; Garcia & Barbour, 2018), while influencing the work of librarians and, consequently, the perception of their profession and the library. In other words, it means that the professional identity of librarians influences the identity of the library. This very notion is at the core of the present research.

According to McClellan and Beggan (2019), the mentioned stereotypes are challenged by the new wave of “hipster librarians”. These professionals change their organization’s image into something different from quiet places with books because of how they perceive their profession, dress, behave, and assist patrons in a new, stereotype-free way (Jesella, 2007). However, as Garcia and Barbour (2018) put it, a change in professional identity may lead to contradictions related to the new roles and demands of librarians, considering the long analog background of the profession.

What concerns research in strategic communication, it has mostly been focused on the role of communication professionals, while the perspective of coworkers has generally been overlooked, as claimed by Heide, von Platen, Simonsson, and Falkheimer (2018). According to the authors, employees other than communicators are important in relation to strategic communication, as

organizational success largely depends on their actions and communication. For instance, Heide and Simonsson (2011) view coworkers as an important part of communication, occurring during interactions between coworkers, managers, and the employer. The authors highlight the importance of employee communication and consider employees as active communicators who formulate and express their own messages about the organization. However, they stress that coworkership is relevant only for post-bureaucratic organizations. A more recent concept of ambassadorship, which stands for employees representing their organizations, encompasses interactions between employees and external stakeholders (Heide *et al.*, 2018). In addition, the concept acknowledges the influence employees have on how their organization is perceived. To conclude, in the emergent research on coworkers' role in strategic communication, there is a lack of empirical data from organizations other than post-bureaucratic, as well as in-depth qualitative studies on how communication between employees and external stakeholders is connected to organizational identity.

Librarians can be seen as frontline workers who, according to Durose (2009), represent the public sector by being responsible for services and interacting with representatives of their communities in their daily work. More narrowly, librarians are workers of the cultural sector, since their work is related to dissemination of creative products (Frenander, 2012). Cultural sector involves a multitude of different organizations with frontline workers, such as museums, galleries, cinemas, theaters, etc. I argue for such understanding of librarians – as frontline employees – as it puts those professionals in a broader context of professions requiring direct communication between employees and external stakeholders on the premises of the organization.

Considering the growing amount of literature on employee communication (Andersson, 2019b; Mazzei, Butera, & Quaratino, 2019; Young, 2018), the way frontline employees enact their professional identities is of special importance, as they interact directly with external stakeholders and thereby influence the impression about the organization. It is worth noting digitalization creates ambiguity in the role of frontline service workers (Christ-Brendemühl & Schaarschmidt, 2019). It can be concluded that the interactions taking place between employees and external stakeholders are one of the cornerstones of organizational existence (Andersson, 2019a) with frontline workers, which creates a need for more research in this area.

Further, according to Taylor (1999), organizations regardless of their type, are constituted in daily activities and interactions of their employees as they bear organizational identity. The arguments used by Hatch and Schultz (2002) are similar, as they emphasize organizational identity is not the sum of its culture, image, and vision, but is a result of the employees' actions. Other scholars (Johansen, 2017; Puncheva-Michelotti, Vocino, Michelotti & Gahan, 2018; Foreman & Whetten, 2002) also point out a strong connection between employee identity, communication, and organizational identity. However, for Andersson (2019a), there has been little research on how employees enact their identities when communication with external stakeholders. Hence, I conclude that it is relevant to explore the way employee identity is shaped in the daily interactions between employees and external stakeholders. In order to do it, I will use Goffman's (1959) theory of self-presentation.

I take the interactions between librarians and patrons as an essential part of organizational communication in public libraries, by considering the framework of communicative constitution of organizations (CCO) put forward by McPhee and Zaig (2009). In case this link is overlooked, many aspects of organizational identity risk remaining unnoticed while still having an influence on organizational success (Foreman & Whetten, 2002). Following the above arguments, the outlined context leads to the problematization of employee identity as enacted in daily interactions with other external stakeholders, as well as its implications for organizational identity.

The outlined problem is relevant to the field of strategic communication since it is related to employee and organizational identity. Moreover, based on the literature review, it can be concluded that the connection between the two concepts has not been explored much close-up, especially in relation to how professional identity is enacted in the day-to-day interactions with external stakeholders.

1.1 Purpose, aim and research questions

The purpose of this research is to explore how librarian identity is enacted in daily interaction between librarians and patrons against the backdrop of digitalization, as well as the consequences of this process for organizational identity. The aim of this thesis is to add to better understanding

of the employee role in strategic communication, particularly in organizations of the cultural sector. The purpose and the aim envision problematization of the role of communication in the formation of employee identity and the connection between employee and organizational identity in the context of ongoing change, in particular, digitalization. The aim and the purpose served as a basis for the following research questions:

- How do librarians enact their identity in daily offline and online interactions with patrons?
- What are the implications of the librarian identity, enacted in daily interactions with patrons, for organizational identity?

This thesis makes a knowledge contribution to the field of strategic communication by exploring the micro-practices of employees and their shifting roles against the backdrop of digitalization. It also adds to the understanding of the connection between professional and organizational identity in the cultural sector organizations.

1.2 Delimitations

This thesis focuses on one case study, a public library located in Helsingborg, Sweden. Helsingborg city library was founded in 1965 and is now a hub of 11 public libraries in the network “Familjen Helsingborg” (Helsingborgs stadslexikon, 2016; Bibliotek Familjen Helsingborg, n.d.). This organization builds ambitious plans within several areas such as providing free access to information and free formation of opinion, offering a meeting place to everyone, promotion of reading, digitization, and digital literacy (Biblioteksplan 2020-2023, 2019).

This case was chosen as it satisfied the selection criteria (see 4.2. Case selection), and due to the outlined context and the methods chosen for the research. The library strives to adapt to the needs and requests of its patrons and has a multitude of activities, tailor-made for people from different walks of life, including those with the emphasis on digital literacy. It therefore makes the case interesting and relevant in connection to the topic of this thesis.

1.3 Disposition

In Chapter 2, a literature review on identity – organizational, individual, and professional – is presented. In Chapter 3, I explain the selected theoretical framework and argue for my choice of theories. Chapter 4 provides a description of the research design and the methods selected for data collection. In Chapter 5, I present the analysis of empirical material, and discuss the results in the final chapter of the thesis.

2. Literature review

This chapter will focus on previous studies regarding the different aspects of identity. The first section will cover the studies on organizational identity and its connection to employee identity. The second section discusses the role of personal identity and professional identity as one of its aspects. The third section focuses on research about librarian identity as one type of professional identity. In addition, I discuss the influence of digitalization on the phenomena in question. The review ends with my reflections upon the existing research and the areas where this thesis contributes.

2.1 Organizational identity

Organizational identity has been researched abundantly for a long time, and particularly in recent years. The vast amount of research on identity can be explained by the capability of this metaphor to explain the many facets of both organization and employees (Gioia, Schultz, & Corley, 2000; Haslam, Postmes, & Ellemers, 2003; Cornelissen, Haslam, & Balmer, 2007; Gioia, Patvardhan, Hamilton, & Corley, 2013). For instance, Sveningsson & Alvesson (2003) highlight the importance of identity for the very existence of organizations. This is because identity can help strengthen the ties between employees and the organization, positively impact their job success and organizational performance, as well as loyalty to the organization, thereby influencing the organizational identity (Caza, Vough, & Puranik, 2018). Moreover, as Christensen and Askegaard (2001) stipulate, a strong identity can positively influence, among other, investments, which is crucial for all organizations, but perhaps it is particularly relevant for public organizations facing changes in the digital era.

There has been a theoretical divide between the two main ways of viewing organizational identity, namely, essentialist, or managerial, and social-constructivist (Gioia, Schultz, & Corley, 2000; Sveningsson & Alvesson, 2003; Cerulo, 1997). According to the managerial perspective, identity has a distinct permanent character (Albert & Whetten, 1985; Ashforth & Mael, 1996;

Whetten, 2006), while other scholars tend to explain it as subject to constant change (Gioia, Schultz, & Corley, 2000). Adherents of social-constructionist approach state that organizational identity is emergent and always in the process of becoming (Cerulo, 1997; Johansen, 2017). It is worth noting that in this research, I view identity as a dynamic concept, emergent in the process of constant creation.

Identity has been researched from the perspective of almost all traditions of communication research identified by Craig (1999). For instance, from the semiotic viewpoint, identity means all the signs sent by an organization to its numerous stakeholders, and its interplays between their different interpretations (Christensen & Askegaard, 2001). Such perception is built upon Pierce's model of sign, referent/object and interpretant, and it connects organizational identity and image as referent and interpretant, respectively. In addition to image, researchers within sociocultural approach bring organizational culture into the equation of organizational identity. This understanding of identity also connects to, among other things, the activities occurring within an organization, and the context in which the organization operates (Hatch & Schultz, 2000). Further, Crable (2006) draws on Burke's interactional rhetoric of identity to highlight the role of a purposeful discourse, and stresses it enhances the audience's collaboration necessary for the constitution of identity. The scholar names identity as an "armor against existential anxiety" (Crable, 2006, p. 3). As for the phenomenological perspective, some researchers have noted the connection between organizational identity and sense-making processes of employees (Gill, 2014). All these theoretical inquiries on identity point out at one clear conclusion: there are many ways to understand organizational identity, it is multifaceted and consists of various elements, one of which revolves around employees and their interactions.

One particularly interesting strand of research connects communicative interactions between employees and external stakeholders to organizational identity, applying a narrative perspective (Cheney, 1992; Boden, 1994; Johansen, 2017). Schinoff, Rogers, and Corley (2016) bring this notion forward by stressing that employees are "identity custodians", and, since the organization is unable to communicate itself, employees do it instead. Moreover, having analyzed interactions between different organizational members, Boden (1994) concludes that these very interactions constitute organizations.

Further, an additional layer of research in organizational identity is digitalization. Tripsas (2009) argues that even small changes in technology may drastically influence organizational identity. According to Hicks (2014), information and communication technologies have significantly influenced libraries in recent years. It becomes evident that, since the library provides services to the community, these services change accordingly to the needs of the patrons-citizens (Pierson, Goulding, & Campbell-Meier, 2019) by becoming all the more digital. What is more, digital innovation can create hardships for the coherence of organizational identity (Obwegeser & Bauer, 2016), and it is especially dangerous for bureaucratic organizations that slowly adapt to changes.

As this thesis explores how librarian identity is enacted in daily interaction between librarians and patrons against the backdrop of digitalization, as well as the implications of this process for the organization, I will therefore focus further on the different aspects of employee identity.

2.2 The union between individual and professional identity

For this thesis's purposes, individual identity will be perceived as the meanings that people associate themselves with in the context of interactions with others, while trying to make sense of who they are (Brown, 2014). In this regard, Weick (1995) highlights that interactions evoke identities, and identities, in turn, change along with interactions. According to the scholar, we negotiate our identities in all interactions, which means that the former is never the same. While agreeing with this, Czarniawska-Joerges (1994) makes a point that the identity process, both individual and organizational alike, is first and foremost influenced by communicative interactions. The researcher emphasizes to understand an organization, one must take a closer look at the interactions between its members. Also, it has been recognized professional identity is constructed through social interactions (Sveningsson & Alvesson, 2003).

As Watson (2008) puts it, the construction of identity, or *identity work*, is a process of the interplay between discourse and personal identity. In this research, I adopt Watson's definition of identity work as the process in which individuals "strive to shape a relatively coherent and distinctive notion of personal self-identity and struggle to come to terms with and, within limits, to influence the various social-identities which pertain to them in the various milieux in which they live their lives" (Watson, 2008, p. 129). The researcher offers an approach with three

elements of identity work: discourses, social identities, and self-identities. The discourse of librarianship will be briefly outlined in the next part of the literature review and will serve as a background for the present research. A consideration whilst analyzing the empirical material, will go into the interplay between social or employee, identities, and aspects of their personal identities performed in interactions.

It is acknowledged identity is a complex process, and that it encompasses a multitude of conflicting aspects (Watson, 2008); some of them are related to the tension between personal and professional identities. However, as Sveningsson and Alvesson (2003) suggest, the personal identity processes in organizational settings have not been researched much in-depth. One example of such studies is Andersson's (2019a) research on the perception of employee ambassadorship, which is related to how employees create value by communicating with external stakeholders in a way managers define. The researcher discusses brand ambassadorship in connection to organizational and employee identity. Andersson (2019a) states that there is a multitude of professional roles that employees are expected to fulfill at work and this, in turn, to some extent, shapes organizational identity. In his most recent work, Andersson (2020) concludes that the role of employees has mainly been researched from a managerial perspective, although it transcends beyond job descriptions and manifests in daily interactions with other stakeholders. Considering the standpoint of CCO (see chapter 4), I agree with Andersson and conclude that it is crucial to adopt a more employee-centered approach when researching the role of employees in strategic communication.

The concept of organizational role is interesting in connection to professional identity. Sveningsson and Alvesson (2003) recognize the importance of a professional role in identity formation. However, they see it as a broad set of expectations for any individual taking a particular position in the organization. The researchers conclude one cannot use the notions of role and identity interchangeably, although they are interconnected. Therefore, there is more to identity than organizational roles, such as discourse or other external factors influencing the self. It has also been found that identity is built partly upon rejecting the prescribed role (Sveningsson & Alvesson, 2003). Watson (2008) brings this argument further by stating that employees actively rewrite the prescribed roles while making them a part of their identity. This is an interesting argument, especially in a changing environment. Applied to the library's digital

settings, it can be assumed that employee identity changes even though the job description remains the same. This aspect will also be considered when analyzing empirical data.

According to Brown (2014), most studies of identity processes in organizational settings are focused on the context of change, such as when individuals start or quit their job, or experience identity threats of bullying at their workplace. Therefore, the researcher concludes that identity work is more explicit when taking place in stressful situations, as those require self-examination. I argue that digitalization is one of such situations, although ongoing, especially for the professionals whose role has traditionally been “analog”, such as librarians. Hence, focusing on librarian identity in the context of digitalization is potentially fruitful ground for research.

To sum up, many cross-disciplinary studies focus on organizational and employee identity, and researchers emphasize the relationship and mutual influence between the two concepts. However, the way employee identity is enacted during communicative interactions with other organizational members and external stakeholders, as highlighted by Czarniawska-Joerges (1994), has not yet been explored, although this knowledge may influence how employee roles are perceived in organizational studies. I consider this to be a significant gap in the literature on organizational identity and argue that the present research aims to contribute to a better understanding of the role of employees in organizations.

Employee identity is important in the context of organizational life, not least from a managerial perspective. However, so far topics around employee roles have primarily been researched from the top-down perspective. Employees have been considered in relation to organizational identification, as something to be managed and directed. Moreover, employees have mainly been considered when discussing matters occurring within an organization as opposed to interactions with external stakeholders (Cornelissen, 2017). Some researchers, for instance, have found that employee identity moderates unfairness and counterproductive behavior among employees (Yang, Johnson, Zhang, Spector & Xu, 2013). It has also been acknowledged that employee identities are connected to employee evaluation of their organizations (Puncheva-Michelotti *et al.*, 2018). Also, as mentioned in the introduction, employees send messages to external stakeholders by what they say and do, thereby shaping the reputation of their organization (Andersson, 2019a). Consequently, employee identity is an integral part of organizational communication, although it remains under researched, especially from a bottom-up perspective.

In the next section of this chapter, I will focus on research of librarian identity and connect it to the above arguments in order to create a comprehensive picture of the current state of research on the topic, as well as the area of potential contribution of this thesis.

2.3 Librarian professional identity

Extensive research has been done on the different facets of professional librarian identity, emphasizing digitalization has changed the professional setting. According to Nelson and Irwin (2014), the role of librarians has shifted from that of information manager to the connector between patrons and technology. The researchers point out that professional identity in the digital environment, consists of different identities that manifest depending on the situation.

Hedemark and Lindberg (2017) claim that personal identity is inherent in professional identity, which may sometimes lead to problematic situations. I argue that it is precisely the personal part in the librarian identity that has laid the ground for multiple stereotypes about librarianship, which will be covered further in this section.

Gray (2013) traces the evolution of librarian identity through the roles that librarians fulfilled over time, such as bookkeeper/cataloguer, documentalist, helper and the modern community creation knowledge facilitator. Wilson (1979) and Drabinski (2016) explore the notion of the teacher-librarian, with the former emphasizing that such a perception might have negative consequences for the profession. In my understanding, the librarian-teacher role leads to role ambiguity, as it creates a perception of librarians as extended versions of teachers and not separate professionals. In the same manner, libraries can be seen as extended versions of schools, although without a formal curriculum. Such understanding of librarians can be harmful both for the profession and for the future of the organization because it contributes to the role ambiguity of the library. Walter (2008) adds to this argument by concluding that the teacher identity is not a choice but a part of the librarian identity. In one of the most recent papers on the topic, Martin and Sheehan (2018) claim that the modern librarian should even adopt an entrepreneurial identity and anticipate services instead of passively waiting for patrons to approach them. To me, this indicates the new high expectations towards librarians, which seems to be far from what librarians have been associated with for many years.

As Sare and Bales (2014) stipulate, librarian identity is always in the process of becoming, because librarianship as a professional field is constantly changing. Moreover, Hicks (2014) maintains that librarian identity is shaped by how librarians communicate their role against the backdrop of technology. Agreeing with Hicks, Centerwall (2016) states that the role of the librarian becomes recognized precisely through communication. This seems especially relevant nowadays, since the professions need is challenged in the context of digitalization (Hicks, 2014). According to Garcia and Barbour (2018), librarian identity is not only communicative by its nature but also negotiated daily. The researchers claim that librarians must always establish clear boundaries as to who they are and who they are not as professionals through communication with patrons and other librarians.

As was briefly mentioned before, certain stereotypes revolve around librarianship. Rubin (2016) mentions, for example, the negative perception of female librarians as “afraid of life, socially inept, and more interested in reading a book than experiencing life” (p. 284). This, along with the view of librarianship as a typically female profession and librarian as an “old maid”, has led to the imbalance between gender representation among librarians. Until now, many more women than men become librarians, and male librarians are in the minority because of the feminine stereotypes associated with the profession. It is hard to disagree with Perret (2018), who maintains that there are certain expectations regarding the roles of librarians based on their age and gender, with younger librarians being perceived as more knowledgeable in technology and male librarians being helpful mostly in “manly” topics such as sports. However, as Rubin (2016) holds, male librarians are generally perceived better than female librarians, and it is their own negative perception of the profession being feminine that creates gender imbalance in the profession. These stereotypes not only affect the interest of youth in becoming librarians but also pose threats to the future of the profession. The stereotypical perception of librarianship (Rubin, 2016), can negatively influence patrons’ perception of librarians. As a result, nowadays some professionals are trying to tackle the traditional perception of librarians as unapproachable (McClellan & Beggan, 2019).

In addition, according to Dodds (2009), with the launch of Web 2.0, the ever-present stereotypes have caused a wave of librarians debunking them by claiming that they are different. For some librarians, it means switching the focus from the essence of the profession, to certain external

attributes such as a hipster style of clothing or tattoos. However, such an active resistance to the stereotypes may not do good to librarians (Jennings, 2016), as it belittles the importance of their work. Instead of debunking stereotypes, the researcher suggests that librarians should embrace and appreciate the different facets of personalities within their profession as equally needed, depending on the services provided by the organization.

According to Pierson *et al.* (2019), the technological change in everyday librarianship might influence librarian identity. Hence, the phenomenon of “Librarian 2.0”, as the professional with many new competences and skills is related to the digital shift in the society, therefore adjusting the daily duties of librarians. Since the profession is tightly linked to the services provided to patrons, the latter needs to become the primary focus of librarianship (Hicks, 2014). Hence, if the patrons’ requirements become digital, that is, mainly related to information and communication technologies, the services provided by librarians also shift to digital. I argue that this shift, in turn, shapes new facets of librarian identity related to the new duties they take on.

Another emergent role of librarians is directly connected to the field of strategic communication. According to Fallon and Walton (2017), librarians are active communicators as they, among other duties, promote library services, and work with social media in their daily work. And although this work of the mentioned editors, “Librarian as communicator”, concerns mainly academic librarians, according to Fallon and Walton (2017), written and oral communication skills are one of the core competencies of librarians nowadays. What is more, these skills will be even more demanded in the future so that librarians could promote new services, information literacy, and technology.

2.4 Reflections

Although the reviewed studies come from several distinct fields – organizational studies, strategic communication, and library and information science – there are certain intersections in the understanding of professional identity.

First, identity is perceived as a changing, multifaceted phenomenon. It changes over time and adapts to different circumstances, which is especially noticeable in changing environments.

Digitization is an example of such environments, which in turn makes it interesting to examine identity processes in organizations affected by it.

Second, there is a connection between employee identity and organizational identity. Based on the literature review, I conclude that the library as an organization is, to a great extent, dependent on the librarian identities. Because of this, it is relevant to explore identity work among librarians, as it can significantly influence organizational identity of the library. Besides, this topic is relevant for other organizations with frontline staff, i.e. employees who interact directly with external stakeholders, such as city administrations, tax offices, hospitals, museums, etc.

Third, the role of discourse for identity has been explored in detail in all the three above mentioned fields. One can see that stereotypes are so influential for professional identity that they can even cause resistance and denial from the side of employees. The role of discourse has also been considered in organizational studies, although on a more general level rather than close-up.

Finally, there has been research on communicative essence of identity both in strategic communication and in library and information science. And although the idea that librarian identity is created during communicative interactions is not new, there is a lack of in-depth empirical explorations of how employee identities are enacted in daily interactions. This, in turn, connects to the chosen approach of social constructivism, particularly the performed self and the communicative constitution of organization, discussed in the following chapter.

3. Theoretical framework

In this chapter, I outline the theoretical framework that will be used further in the analysis of empirical data. First, to interpret interactions between librarians and patrons, I will use Goffman's (1959) theory of self-presentation. This theory will enable me to explore the different elements of interactions and look for multiple patterns in them. As a next step, I will try to connect the roles enacted by the librarians with organizational identity with the help of theories that connect communication and organization. Further, I intend to emphasize the role of employees in connection to the organization.

3.1 The interactive constitution of identity

According to Mead (1972), who laid the foundation for symbolic interactionism, the only way to understand oneself is by experiencing otherness and, hence, the self through others. The researcher emphasizes the importance of social experience in recognizing oneself, and this experience is largely constituted in social acts. In turn, these acts consist of conversations, which the researcher explains as an exchange of shared symbols. Mead (1972) proposes one of the first theories of symbolic interactionism, where he stressed that individuals and society develop in constant interactions with one another. For the scholar, humans, unlike animals, use symbols to be able to interact, and the choice of symbols is often mediated by their anticipation of the reactions from others.

Moreover, the researcher concludes that individual selves are only possible in the social context, and that context, in turn, is influenced by individuals, thereby making the two interdependent. Craig and Muller (2007) state that symbolic interactionism unites a range of microsocial theories that belong to the socio-cultural tradition of research in communication. Theories of symbolic interactionism focus on the role of the individual and highlight the importance of interactions for societal processes, whilst acknowledging the role of communication for these processes.

Another researcher within social interactionism who delved deep into the nature of human interactions was Erving Goffman, and he did so by applying a dramaturgical perspective. According to the sociologist, personal identity is created during interactions with others (Goffman, 1959). For the purposes of this research, I chose to focus on Goffman's theory of self-presentation, as it allows us to focus on daily interactions between librarians and patrons close-up and explore the way librarian identity is constituted. Below, I will discuss some of the concepts of this theory based on Goffman's seminal work, "The presentation of the self in everyday life" (1959).

First and foremost, Goffman (1959) acknowledges the fact that identity is a dynamic phenomenon, and that it is constantly changing. The researcher introduces the metaphor of dramaturgy to explore the phenomenon of the self, constructed through interactions with others, and he calls these interactions *performances*. For Goffman (1959), performances are actions of an individual aimed to influence other people. Such a lens, according to Fine and Manning (2003), can be applied to a vast variety of social situations, both formal and informal, in the sense that all interactions can be described metaphorically. Different subsequent interactions, in turn, form a single unit, a social situation. It is worth noting that I consider Goffman's "self" to be the equivalent for "personal identity" and use the two terms as synonyms hereinafter.

Goffman (1959) equates interacting individuals with actors performing on stage. The researcher defines *role* as "the enactment of rights and duties attached to a given status" (Goffman, 1959, p.16), and mentions it many times in the context of different parts of the self that are enacted in different social situations by the performer. These roles are, in turn, parts of the performed self. For the purpose of this thesis, I will define *role* as an aspect of identity enacted at any given social interaction.

Performances, according to Goffman (1959), happen in bounded physical spaces, *front regions*. Front region dictates certain standards that a performing individual needs to meet, both through her interactions and while present at the spot but not interacting. In the context of a public library, it means that librarians need to be visible and ready to assist patrons in a polite and professional way. However, there is also a *back region* or *backstage*, a part of the region where an individual no longer enacts the chosen role, as there is no audience. Together, the two parts constitute *regions* of performance.

For a performance to take place, there has to be a certain *front*, which Goffman (1959, p. 22) defines as a “part of the individual’s performance which regularly functions in a general and fixed fashion to define the situation for those who observe the performance”. In contrast to regions, the front has to do with the appearance of the physical space where an interaction takes place, such as furniture, equipment, etc. that make the region “set” appropriate for a particular performance. Further, Goffman (1959) talks about the *personal front* as a set of expressive means that belong to the performer, namely, *manner* and *appearance* such as age, gender, nationality, tone of voice, gestures, clothing, and facial expressions. As can be seen from the examples, these characteristics can be both stable, such as nationality or age, and flexible, such as clothing or gestures. It entails that performers can consciously and unconsciously, influence some parts of their personal front, while other parts remain outside of their control. Goffman (1959) states that there has to be certain coherence and consistency between the setting, appearance, and manner. During an interaction, according to Goffman, the performer is making efforts to communicate what she aims to convey, for instance, to make an impression of a competent professional. While doing so, the person simultaneously acts according to the values of the group and the society she belongs to, such as professional values, democratic values, etc.

As Jacobsen and Kristiansen (2015) hold, one of the central ideas of Goffman’s theory is that individuals always manage the impression they make on other people in their physical presence. In addition, there is a constant tension between the expected social role and the expression of the identity of the person who fulfills this role. In the process of impression management, individuals achieve their ultimate aim: to avoid embarrassment (Miller, 1995). It means to be treated according to the image they shape by the complex mixture of their language, appearance, social status, position, gender, etc. I argue that this notion is connected to the ideas outlined in the literature review, in relation to the stereotypes librarians feel the need to debunk in their daily work. To me, the embarrassment that librarians try to avoid is that of stereotypical behavior, and therefore they manage impressions by changing their behavior. In addition, it is inevitable that librarians enhance their professional role with their personal interests and strengths (Pierson *et al.*, 2019). This is connected to the personal front, and so it can influence how librarians enact their identities.

For Goffman (1959), performances can only occur face-to-face. However, digitalization has introduced new ways of communication that do not necessarily fall under Goffman's definition of interaction. Nowadays, many interactions occur with the help of in-between hardware and software, such as mobile phones, laptops, or computers, and on the Internet. This, however, does not mean that one cannot apply the metaphor of dramaturgy onto online interactions. On the contrary, Miller (1995) argues that the fear of embarrassment, defined by Goffman (1959) as the main motive for self-presentation, is as relevant online as offline. There has been extensive research on self-presentation in computer-mediated and online settings (Rettie, 2009; Bullingham & Vasconcelos, 2013; Murthy, 2012). What is more, Goffman's concepts can be applied to various kinds of online communication, such as text, audio, images, and videos. According to Miller (1995), the online environment is just as rich in information about self-presentation as its analog counterparts.

Further, Persson (2018) makes a comprehensive analysis of the differences between online and offline interactions and states that it gives more freedom for individual expression due to physical distance between interlocutors, and lures into a greater self-exposure than most offline interactions. Bullingham and Vasconcelos (2013) claim that people tend to not only bring their identities into the online world, but also fine-tune them according to the situation. This, as the researchers conclude, is a sound proof for the applicability of Goffman's theory to online interactions.

Considering the above arguments, I will take into account both face-to-face and online interactions between librarians and patrons for the purpose of the thesis, and will explore the way librarian identity is enacted in daily interactions with patrons by applying Goffman's theory.

3.2 The link between individual and organization

The concept that unites individuals and organizations best is, in my opinion, the communicative constitution of organization (CCO). Cooren and Martine (2016) trace the development of the concept since 1938, although the first conference on this topic took place in 1980. It is worth noting that there are several CCO schools offer slightly different understandings of the concept. Still, their commonalities can be summarized in the following quote by Cooren and Martine (2016), "people in interaction have the capacity to coherently produce new solutions, capacities,

and situations, which means that forms of organizing emerge from communication” (p. 2). This view is relevant for the present research, as I intend to analyze what are the implications for the library as an organization due to librarian identity being enacted in daily interactions with patrons. These interactions are communicative in their nature, hence the connection to CCO.

According to Boden (1994), organizations are constituted in daily interactions between its members, by which he means employees of different levels. The researcher maintains that conversations between organizational members create and recreate organizational structure, and the conversations also enable employees to understand their common mission, work through conflicts, generate ideas and agree on their implementation. These interactions, as Boden (1994) puts it, are “the lifeblood of all organizations” (p. 8), and they are both influencing and are influenced by the organization. I argue that in some cases, such as in the case with the library, the notion of organizational members can be extended to external stakeholders. In other words, patrons are external stakeholders of the library, but they are also its members. Therefore, it makes sense to consider interactions precisely between librarians and patrons in order to see how they influence the organization – the library.

Further, day-to-day interactions between employees can be seen as an expression of organizational culture, which is defined by Hatch and Schultz (2002) as “tacit organizational understandings (e.g. assumptions, beliefs and values) that contextualize efforts to make meaning, including internal self-definition” (p. 996). The researchers also make a point that organizational culture is one of the two pillars that influence organizational identity alongside the image. I argue that daily interactions between employees and external stakeholders, being an expression of organizational culture, to a certain degree shape organizational identity.

Further, employee identity has mainly been perceived through managerial lenses, i.e., to understand how management makes employees identify with the organization and share its values (Ashforth & Mael, 1989; Ashforth, Harrison, & Corley, 2008; Frandsen, 2015). However, contrary to the dominant view, some researchers have already connected employee identity and organizational identity, particularly through studies of interactions in case organizations (Johansen, 2017; Heide & Simonsson, 2011).

In addition, McPhee and Zaug (2009) explicitly address the role of employees in shaping their organizations, precisely because they engage in work communication with each other.

Furthermore, Taylor (2009) introduces the concept of coorientation, as the relationship between a task and organizational members responsible for it, as well as between organizational members. Organizational identity then becomes a sum of identities of its employees and “the process that generates organization [...] is isomorphic to that which creates inter-personal relationship” (Taylor, 2009, p. 155). It is worth noting that in the case with library, both librarians and patrons are organizational members, although in different ways. Therefore, to explore organizational identity through communication, it makes sense to take a closer look at these interactions between the different organizational members when performing everyday tasks.

3.3 Reflections

Until today, research on identity has been done mainly with the help of four theories: social identity theory, identity theory, critical theory, and narrative theory (Caza *et al.*, 2018). These theories supported the attempts to understand identity with the help of concepts such as belonging and distinctiveness, resistance to control, the relation between the self and the expectations of others. However, there have been few attempts to examine employee identity close-up, as enacted in daily interactions with other organizational members and external stakeholders in the context of digitalization. Considering the aim and research question, I chose symbolic interactionism as a general theoretical framework for this thesis. More broadly, I understand identity as a social construct, which means that there is no firm and clearly defined identity, but rather dynamic, changing, and multifaceted.

Therefore, considering the chosen theoretical framework, in the following parts of the thesis I will (1) address the way librarian identity is enacted during interactions with patrons with the help of Goffman’s theory, and (2) analyze the implications of the former for the organizational identity with the help of CCO lenses.

In the next chapter, I will describe the chosen methodology and explain how it helped me gain insightful data on the issue in question.

4. Methodology and research design

In what follows, I will explain the methods chosen to collect and analyze the empirical material for this master's research. The chosen theoretical framework of social constructionism is presented in connection to the theories and methods that underpin the following analysis. In addition, ethical implications of participant observations in public places, as well as online observations on Facebook are discussed. The chapter is concluded by an overview of the analytical process where I present how the empirical data was processed.

4.1 Social constructionism

As the previous research and theory suggest, identity is a complex phenomenon, created and negotiated during interactions. That is, from the standpoint of symbolic interactionism, identity is *socially constructed*, as mentioned in chapter 3. Therefore, it makes sense to choose methodology based on social-constructivist and not objectivist epistemology. It means that in the frame of this research, identity will be viewed not as an objective fact, but as a dynamic process, largely situational, dependent on individual perception and interpretation and co-constructed during interactions with others (Burr, 2015; O'Reilly, 2012; Prasad, 2018).

Some scholars who view organizational identity from the standpoint of social constructionism stress that the changing organizational environment deserves special attention from researchers (Czarniawska, 2003). Organizational change provides an opportunity to question and challenge organizational processes that have been taken for granted. I argue that digitalization is one of potentially fruitful grounds to explore certain organizational processes, in particular, how organizational identity is influenced by employee identity enacted on daily interactions with external stakeholders.

In addition, the chosen theories of self-presentation, CCO, and the overall theoretical framework of symbolic interactionism, fall under a distinct branch of social constructionism traditions, namely, interpretative traditions (Czarniawska, 2003, Prasad, 2018). This entails that reality is

not only socially constructed, but it is also influenced by subjective interpretation (Prasad, 2018). For this research, empirical material will be subjected to my interpretation enhanced by the chosen theoretical perspectives. Further, it should be stated that this thesis aims to present one possible way of interpreting the data, while acknowledging that this is not the only way of doing so.

In my interpretations, I will aim for reflexivity, as researchers should acknowledge the context of the observed part of social reality (Burr, 2015). This means that I will at times take a step back from participant observation, consider the settings of the observations, and acknowledge my role in the process. According to O'Reilly (2012), it is natural to have some assumptions on the potential findings before delving into qualitative research grounded in social constructionism. However, one might enter the field of observations with no assumptions at all. In the case of this research, my assumptions are guided by the chosen theories and previous research, which means that I expect to see many different facets of librarian identity enacted in different situations. However, as Van de Ven (2007) holds, the research process is iterative-abductive, which creates a need for critical examination and challenge of the assumptions as the research unfolds. It means that during this research, I might have to return to the participants and to the data to make sure my conclusions make sense (see 4.6 Analytical process).

It is worth noting that, coming from a non-Swedish background, I am and therefore unable to capture as many details of communicative interactions as a native speaker could have captured. It also entails that I could interpret some of the taken-for-granted interactions from an outsider perspective. In addition, it is possible that my age, gender, and nationality influenced the way I interpreted the empirical data.

To conclude, informed by the ideas of social constructionism, participant observation and online observation were chosen as methods to collect empirical material. In what follows, I will discuss the choice of research methods as well as the data collection proceedings.

4.2 Case selection

For this research, I decided to focus on a single case. This is because case study allows for a more in-depth exploration of the phenomenon in question, namely, how librarian identity is

enacted during day-to-day interactions between librarians and patrons, and its implications for the organization. According to Flyvbjerg (2006), it is possible to draw conclusions relevant to other similar organizations based on a single case. Further, when talking about generalization in qualitative research, Kvale (2007) discerns analytical generalization as “a reasoned judgement about the extent to which the findings from one study can be used as a guide to what might occur in another situation” (p. 8). In addition, Halkier (2011) suggests that when applying analytical generalization based on qualitative research, a researcher should try to include similar contexts by simultaneously acknowledging their different nuances. The scholar discusses positioning as a way of analytical generalization when a study is focused on, among other, interactions and conversation, and where identified categories are flexible to the extent that participants can enact and co-construct them. I argue that positioning is suitable for analytical generalization in this study. Therefore, to connect the results of the thesis to a broader context of libraries, and similar organizations, I will apply analytical generalization and positioning based on the roles played by the case organization’s librarians.

Since the research intended to get an information-rich case, purposeful sampling was applied (Siri, 2011). The selection of the case was motivated by several criteria:

- (1) To ensure a large number of interactions, the library provides services to a large number of visitors every day.
- (2) To ensure various kinds of interactions, the library has to provide different services to its patrons, including those related to digitalization.
- (3) There is a large number of interactions between librarians and patrons.
- (4) The library has established pages on social media where employees can engage with patrons via posts and comments.
- (5) The librarians do not have single fixed roles but fulfill a multitude of professional responsibilities in the library.
- (6) The organization allows participant observation for my research. All of the conditions were satisfied by the Helsingborg city library.

One particularly interesting part of the library is Digidel (Helsingborgs stad, 2017). It is a project that occupies half of the second floor of the library where visitors can work with computers and

other equipment, such as printers and scanners. In other words, Digidel functions as a computer laboratory. In addition, library visitors can come to librarians with requests such as how to start their smartphone, install an application, use email, etc., and is advertised in different promotional materials. This part was especially relevant considering the context of digitalization chosen as a backdrop for an exploration of the topic in question.

Having established contact with the library director, I received several documents about the library and librarians that could provide some insights on what is expected from librarians at Helsingborg city library. Among those were promotional leaflets, general candidate profile descriptions, and specific job requirements, service policy for the city of Helsingborg, strategy for the libraries of Helsingborg for 2020-2023, communication strategy, and social media strategy of the Helsingborg city library. These documents will serve as a background for the analysis.

4.3 Participant observation

I chose to conduct participant observation at the case organization to gain insights on how librarian identity is enacted in their daily interactions with patrons. This method is in line with the chosen theoretical framework – symbolic interactionism, as it allows me to focus on the interactional nature of identity. Moreover, participant observation is also a method mainly used by Erving Goffman (Pettit, 2011), who argued for the dramaturgical approach to identity which will be used to interpret the data in the frame of this research.

As suggested by O'Reilly (2012), participant observation is one of the most important steps to establish contact and gain access to the place where participant observations should occur. In this research, access to the organization had been established (in November 2019) before participant observation was chosen as the primary research method. During email correspondence with the library director, this method was approved. In addition, I held a brief presentation of my research in front of the library staff during one of their weekly meetings in February 2020 to make sure that they are aware of the purpose of my presence. Particularly, I stated that I would not observe those who were unwilling to participate in my research, and the names of participants will not be used in the final paper not to disclose their identities.

During the initial meeting with the head of the library and two other librarians, we discussed the aim of the observations, as well as when and where they would be conducted. As a result, the decision was made to conduct as many observations as possible inside the city library at the digital section (Digidel), the section for children and young adults (Barn & Unga), at the reception as well as at the library bus. As the outreach program (library visits to meeting places in the city) provides services similar to those at Digidel, I decided to disregard this part of library activities. The library bus was included in my observations as a mobile extension of the library, and due to the suggestion by the librarians on potentially rich interactions taking place at the bus as opposed to mostly superficial interactions at the library.

Based on these preferences, I was assisted with the best times to conduct the observations to witness as many as possible together with the librarians ready to be shadowed. The schedule for observations was suggested to me by one of the librarians. Most of the observations took place between 11:00-13:00 at the library, and one observation at the library bus took place between 13:40 and 19:00. In total, 15 hours of observations were conducted between February 24 and March 6.

For this thesis, I chose a moderate role of an observer as a participant (Gold, 1958; Spradley, 1980). It means, although I was present at the library, I did not act as a librarian. To the contrary, I had a badge that identified me as a student, and when patrons approached me with requests, I redirected them to the actual librarians. However, I did not distance myself completely and asked questions to librarians whenever there were no patrons.

Regarding the types of interactions, I had no specific focus from the beginning. Instead, I decided to stay open and observe all interactions to make sense of them in the future while analyzing the data. However, later I realized that what interested me most was nuanced interactions that will enable rich interpretations (O'Reilly, 2012). Therefore, I did not consider those cases limited to one question and answer. This focus helped me to see more nuances in the performance of librarian identity (see chapter 5).

In addition, I took notes whenever possible, sometimes during the interactions, and sometimes after the scheduled observations were finished (O'Reilly, 2012). I noted down the quotes that were relevant to my research. My notes were handwritten and stored in a notebook, that I kept

with me throughout the time of the observations. Further, I did not intend to note down everything, but rather selected and shortly described the observed interactions as well as added my comments to make sense of what just happened (Eriksson, Henttonen & Meriläubin, 2012).

As briefly mentioned above, I engaged in informal conversations with librarians when there were no interactions between librarians and patrons. This needed to clarify whether my understanding of the situation was correct (O'Reilly, 2012) because Swedish is not my first language, although my command of Swedish allows me to understand conversations. In addition, I conducted one informal interview in order to understand the role of the Helsingborg city service policy for the library.

4.4 Online observations

To explore how librarian identity is enacted in daily interactions with patrons, as well as its consequences for the organization in the context of digitalization, I decided to include online observations, or netnography of interactions on the library Facebook page. According to Kozinets (2015), netnography allows a researcher to explore the identities of the participants as well as the relationships between them. In addition, it is useful when comparing the relationships in real life with those observed online. For Postill and Pink (2012), the offline and online environments often become interwoven, thus it makes sense to consider both when doing qualitative research. The choice of online observations for this research is also underpinned by digitalization as the context of the research problem.

To conduct online observations, I first visited the library page on Facebook to see whether it consisted of interactions between librarians and patrons, and realized most recent posts featured reactions but no comments. I then had an informal interview with the head of the library as well as the person responsible for social media, who helped me understand that during a period between 2015 to 2016 many librarians had access to the page and could post content on it. I used this information as a hint that there might be more interactions during that time, since the content was more spontaneous and coming from different librarians. After the interview, I deliberately checked all the posts on the page starting from 2015 and selected those with interactions.

4.5 Ethical considerations

All librarians were informed about the reason for my presence in the library. In addition, when starting the observations with every new librarian I went through the purpose of my research once again individually to ensure their informed concern (Hammersley & Atkinson, 2019).

Therefore, all librarians whom I shadowed were aware about participant observation conducted for the purposes of this thesis. In addition, I assured the librarians that their names and other information that could potentially reveal their identities will not be used in the thesis. In addition, I did not disclose the names of librarians or patrons who interacted on Facebook, although their names were publicly available.

Patrons, however, were not aware of my role in most cases, unless they explicitly asked about it. This meant that patrons who were interacting with librarians were observed, although they did not give their informed consent to participate in the research (O'Reilly, 2012). From the second observation and on, I made sure that the badge with my photo, name, and status were always visible to patrons. However, the library is a public place, and, according to the Code of Human Research Ethics (2014), "Unless those observed give their consent to being observed, observational research is only acceptable in public situations where those observed would expect to be observed by strangers." (p. 25). What concerns online observations conducted on the Facebook page, it should be noted that this page is public, and this entails that the content and interactions taking place on the page are visible and available to Facebook users, and outsiders. According to Willis (2019), such research method is similar to observations in public spaces, and therefore an informed consent of its participants is not required.

Moreover, the focus of this research is on the identity of librarian and not patron. Therefore, no personal data about the observed patrons was stored or included in the thesis. The notes taken during the research were stored in a paper notebook, transcribed into a Word document, and sorted in Google spreadsheets. All of the documents will be destroyed after the examination seminar.

4.6 Analytical process

As the first step of working with my empirical material, I translated and transcribed all handwritten notes from observations, and descriptions of interactions on Facebook. It was first transcribed into a Word document, and then to a spreadsheet, where every situation belonged to a different cell, to which I then added descriptive keywords in the next column. This way of sorting the data helped me see the key events (O'Reilly, 2012). It is worth noting that all the interactions were made and noted in Swedish, therefore, I needed to translate them to English. It is important to acknowledge, the social-constructivist nature of this research implies that there is no neutral translation, and every language is a way to view the world (Temple & Young, 2004). Given that I am not a fluent Swedish speaker, it might have affected the way I recorded the original quotes of librarians in such a way that the presented material is simplified. This issue, however, is less applicable to the online observations, as there I relied not on my memory and knowledge of Swedish but on the original content of interactions as well as online dictionaries.

To analyze the data, I applied ideal typology as a means of analytical generalization (Halkier, 2011). This choice is relevant considering the chosen theoretical framework of social constructionism because the ideal types are constructs as well. However, while being useful for presenting patterns, this way of analytical generalization entails underrepresentation of multiple nuances and overlaps of the phenomenon under scrutiny. In connection to the chosen theory, I further discuss several ideal types as roles enacted by librarians.

While sorting the data, I look at the situations through Goffman's theory and applied categorization (Spiggle, 1994), to name the roles played by librarians in the described situations. It is worth noting that I looked for descriptive labels when coding the roles in the analyzed interactions to be able to make sense of the enacted roles (O'Reilly, 2012). The labels for the identified roles were written in the columns by the described situation, and often there were several descriptive names under each of them. In the process, it became possible to find a connection between the roles which seemed very diverse at the beginning (O'Reilly, 2012). To do this, I used abstraction and grouped the identified labels into five more general roles (Spiggle, 1994) in the third column of the spreadsheet. At this stage, I tried to examine the relationships between the librarians, and patrons, in different situations in more depth. To make sure that the discerned roles were relevant, I read through the different situations several times while keeping

in mind a particular role. As the next step, I compared the roles to ensure that they do not overlap. As a result, I needed to merge two roles (namely, the Informer and the Tutor) due to a great number of similarities. At the end of the process, four roles remained. At this stage, I have also checked the documents provided by the library and came back several times to job descriptions to see if the identified roles were connected to formal requirements.

After finalizing the different roles, I chose several most illustrative situations for “writing up” (O’Reilly, 2012). In this process, I added parts that were initially missing, such as descriptions of the region or personal front where a particular situation was observed, and added the necessary details from my memory (Hammersley & Atkinson, 2019). This was, to a part, guided by Goffman’s theory (1959), which enabled me to see the importance of physical settings for every interaction. During this process, I contacted one librarian twice via email to make sure my interpretations of a situation were correct.

In accordance with the identified roles, the findings presented in the next chapter are not in chronological, but rather thematic order (Hammersley & Atkinson, 2019).

5. Analysis

In this chapter, I am going to present the roles performed by librarians in the observed situations to illustrate the many facets of their identity enacted in their interactions with patrons. As a result of the observations, four roles were identified: the Informer, the Personal Assistant, the Guard, and the Buddy. Although the observations were conducted in several different places – three sections of the library, the library bus, and Facebook page, it is worth noting that the roles are not completely attached to those places. Instead, the librarians changed the roles they enacted, depending on the situation, and this means they could take different roles at different times at the same place. I will provide a detailed description of each role while giving accounts of where each role was enacted below.

Entering the stage. During the very first day of the scheduled observations, I started the day at the library office separated from the public area of the library. There, one of the librarians, Sofia (here and after I will use pseudonyms instead of the real names) explained to me the structure of the library and showed me the different departments there. We went to her workplace at the office where she took out a small black apron with the library logotype and two front pockets. “I am going to put it on now so that the visitors know I am a librarian”, she said. Sofia put a black smartphone, which I learned later was her work phone, in one of the pockets. “And also this”, and she pointed at a small device with a big red button on it, that was inserted in her second pocket, “for security reasons, we use it in case of emergency”. “Now I am ready to start”, she concluded and followed me to the doors that connected the office with the library.

This vignette shows how, according to Goffman (1959), a performer comes from the back to the front region, or front stage, where the performance will occur. The librarian took on her apron before going out to her stand at Digidel, because this is how a librarian is supposed to look at Helsingborg city library, as a part of the region. In the words of Goffman (1959), there are certain props that make her a librarian in the eyes of a patron, such as the black apron. On the other hand, the alarm that all librarians are equipped with, also acts as a prop, although invisible for patrons. This is a tool that makes a librarian connect with her colleagues in case she needs help, thereby assuring safety for the librarian. Overall, this situation illustrates how the librarians

take on their professional role and get ready for the different interactions with patrons. This includes the readiness to unexpected, even unwanted interactions, considering the alarm they take with them.

The first role performed by the librarian is described and analyzed below.

5.1 The Informer

One elderly woman came to return a CD she had borrowed. Maria, the librarian who worked at the reception that day, told her that she of course would love to help her, and that it was also possible to return the CD using the self-service machine. The woman looked slightly perplexed and told Maria that it was strange that there was just one CD in the box, although it had been stated on the box that it was a course. It felt like she was trying to say that she didn't lose or left home the other CDs that supposedly had to be in the box. Maria looked at the box and carefully examined it for a few moments. She then explained that everything was fine as this was a part of the course and that is why there is only one CD inside. Maria also told her that she can borrow other parts of the course in case she was interested, but the woman refused to do so. She then thanked Maria for her help and left.

In this example, the librarian performed the role of informer, as she briefly explained to the visitor there was no issue with the returned CD. Moreover, she pointed out at the self-service machine, that the patron could use in the future to return borrowed items. While this role seems natural for librarian identity, I argue that it is also determined by the front of the situation (Goffman, 1959). The settings of the reception desks create a formal distance between a librarian and a patron who interact at the opposite sides of the desk. There, the librarian usually awaits the approaching patron, standing by a big monitor that separates the physical space into two, one of which is public, and the other is for the librarians. Further, the librarians stand at the reception, which connects to Goffman's concept of appearance. On the one hand, they show their readiness to help, but on the other hand, it hints that this kind of help is rather prompt. Hence, the personal front is appropriate and allows for brief, to-the-point service, as in the above example.

The role of informer was performed multiple times during observations at the library bus.

A woman came in and expressed her surprise to see the bus in the area where she leaves. "I have never seen the library bus here before", she said. "We are here every Thursday", said Linn, one of the librarians at the bus. "Wonderful! There are so many books here. Can I borrow some?", she

asked. “Yes, sure”, answered Linn. “You can also return books here, no need to go to the library”. “Amazing”, exclaimed the woman. “For how long will you stay here?”, she asked. “Some 40 minutes”, replied the librarian. “Great, then I’ll go grab the books I have at home and be back shortly!”, said the woman and went out. She then came back and brought the books with her.

In this example, the visitor was unaware of several library services that she would be interested in. The librarian unobtrusively introduced the schedule for the library bus and the possibility to return borrowed books close to the place where the patron lives. There is, however, a slight difference between this and the first performance, since in this case the patron did not request all the information provided by the librarian. I argue that this particular region – the bus – predisposes this kind of interaction. Since the bus is smaller in size than the first floor of the library, it naturally brings the patron closer. Even if the visitor only comes up the stairs from the entrance, she is already just one-meter distance from the librarian. The librarians sit on the chairs behind smaller desks than at the reception. The body language reflects a relaxed impression, in contrast to when the librarians are standing.

On that day, both librarians in the bus chose not to wear their apron (librarians can decide themselves whether they want to wear it or not), and this action suggests their personal front is similar to the visitors, and symbolically reduces the distance between them. I argue that those aspects of the region, and the performers are an invitation for more informal exchanges.

The role of informer is enacted in online interaction on the library Facebook page. However, this role is fulfilled not only in an explicit way as in the example above, but in a subtle manner (Goffman, 1959). For instance, an interaction that took place in comments to the post with a photograph of all the different library cards in chronological order:

(Patron 1): Yeey I was so happy when I got my nice yellow [card] and could bike to the library in Rydebäck myself and borrow [books]!

(Librarian): You are not alone in that! Many were amazed that they could borrow anything completely free of charge! Are you still borrowing books in Rydebäck?

(Patron 1): No, now it is Bjuv, Helsingborg or Kristianstad university!

(Patron 2): Great to see! I have all except for the one up on the right. I am guessing it is the latest? Stopped using my last wine-red [card] and use the machines nowadays!

(Librarian): Yep, this is the latest one, [name]. If you only borrow print media, it works without a card, but there were of course many things that you were earlier forced to have the card to use, for example, Biblio. In addition, it makes it a lot easier for us who work here if you have your card with you in case you need help from librarians. It is a little faster to find your profile then.

(Patron 2): I only borrow print media. I have perhaps missed Biblio. Is this to borrow digital media, such as ebooks and audiobooks?

(Librarian): Yes, [name], that's right!

In this example, the librarian performed the role of informer and introduced some of the rules of library use in an implicit way. In the first interaction, the librarian informed others that the library services are free of charge for all patrons. It is worth noting that this comment is public, and therefore even those who are not yet using the library to borrow books can see it. Then, the librarian explains that although it is possible to use some of the library services without having a library card, it is still better to have it at hand when visiting the library in case a patron needs help. In addition, the librarian mentioned the library app where it is possible to borrow ebooks and audiobooks, which was new information for the patron.

The region and front are different in interactions, than of the library and in the bus. None of the commentators can see the face of the person who responds on behalf of the library, as the librarian is using the library account and does not mention her name. This part of personal front, the appearance, according to Goffman (1959), calls for a respective manner, which means that the librarians speak as the library and not herself. It also allows for more space for the librarian to present the library's rules and services due to two reasons. First, this region is not meant for face-to-face interactions and is mediated by Facebook. Second, it allows for time to think and formulate a more fine-tuned response, because the personal front (the name of the account and the profile picture) indicates that the response comes from the library as an organization. I conclude that in this case, there is no difference between the librarian and the library, because librarians enact the role of informer on behalf of the library.

I started with this role as it seems very common, even traditional to librarians (Rubin, 2016). Moreover, it is tightly connected to the core mission of the library to provide access to information. Without this central role enacted by librarians, the library mission would not be fulfilled. In the next section, I will introduce a contemporary, non-trivial role that librarians enact in the digitalized environment.

5.2 The Personal Assistant

A middle-age man approached the librarian at her stand at Digidel to scan a pile of his private documents. Susanne followed him to his computer and took a seat by his side to start explaining how he should go about it. The librarian moved slowly and explained her actions along the way, and at some point she stopped to let the patron do the scanning while she was there observing and ready to help if needed. She helped him to scan all the documents one by one, and then opened the folder with the scanned files. The man asked her to help him check if the documents were scanned correctly, and so the librarian looked carefully at every original to make sure they corresponded the copies. Then suddenly he realized that he needed all the documents in a single file and not separately as they were saved at that point. Susanne started a new scan and explained which box to tick so that the files get collected in a single document. At the end, she offered him to send the document to his own email address so that he could easily access it afterwards. For that, the man needed to log into his own email from the library computer first. He didn't know how to make the "@" sign on the keyboard. Susanne was there to help him with this, too. She did it all patiently and with due respect, although the whole procedure, together with the second round of scanning, took around 30 minutes. She stayed with him to scan the documents together as he didn't have any prior experience of scanning documents, and was anxious to have all the documents scanned properly.

In the outlined situation, the librarian played the role of personal assistant. Her personal front (Goffman, 2019) included the appearance of a library staff, as she had her black apron on, and the manner of a professional with slow movements, firm tone of voice and calm, confident attitude when explaining the process of scanning step-by-step. At the same time, her manner was not authoritative or superior, but rather serving in the sense that she followed the needs of the visitor and repeated the process when the document turned out to be saved in a wrong way. This personal front appeared to make the librarian trustworthy, and the patron allowed her to check whether his private documents were scanned correctly, and corresponded with the original.

When it comes to the front, or the settings (Goffman, 1959), in this interaction they were different than in the one mentioned above, when the librarian performed the role of informer. This time it was the librarian who followed the man to the computer he used, took a seat by his side, and explained the process on the computer selected by the patron. The front region was different, as the librarian sat down together with the patron in front of the same screen, and there was much less physical distance between them than in the case of the informer role. In other words, there was no physical prop separating the librarian from the patron, such as a stand or a desk with a big computer screen. In addition, I observed that for this role, the librarian performed

in a different, more informal manner. It can be seen that the settings of this front influenced the nature of the interaction, which shifted gradually from its more formal initial phase at the stand, when the patron came to the librarian, to a more trustful, informal and supportive second phase, after the librarian came to the patron.

As a region, Digidel is different from the reception desk. Although it is also situated at the library, it is designed in such a way that librarians stand facing the whole department. At the same time, they are close enough to approach, as there is not as much free space separating them from the rest of the library. In fact, they are the first to be seen when entering the second floor. In addition, just as at the bus, at Digidel librarians have chairs and often sit on them. I argue that this very prop, as Goffman (1959) puts it, enables this kind of interaction, when a librarian can allocate much time to just one patron rather than promptly answer her question. Moreover, such settings as at Digidel enable a more dedicated service, which sometimes meant that a librarian spends half an hour helping one person.

As in the above example with scanning of documents, it happens that librarians enact roles that are not typically associated with the profession. The role described in this section of the chapter is new, and it can be explained by the adoption of service policy for the whole city of Helsingborg (Servicepolicy, 2019). During an informal interview on the role of service policy in the library, one librarian explained:

“We can’t just leave visitors if they need help. If a person comes with a request that the library can’t satisfy, the librarian has to lead the person to the right information and not just redirect to another place. We take the problem all the way and try to give as good service as possible. We have to answer all questions, even if we don’t know the answer directly.

Such service-mindedness means that sometimes, to satisfy one request, the librarian has to spend a substantial amount of time together with one patron. In some cases, the librarian starts working with one request and gets several subsequent from the same patron, playing the role of a personal assistant. What is special about this role is that it often has very little to do with the “classic” library services, such as in the example below.

A man on a wheelchair approached Susanne, a librarian at Digidel, saying that he needed to print out some documents. Susanne asked how many pages he wanted to print out, since the price of a print card depends on that. He then bought the card for 10 pages. Susanne figured out that the man hadn’t yet printed anything at the library, logged out of her computer and followed the man

to show him how to do it. When he asked which computer he could use, she pointed at an available place and held the chair for him so he could sit on it from his wheelchair. The man thanked, and Susanne turned on the computer. She also took a chair for herself and sat close to the man.

While starting a browser, she asked him which bank he was using. He answered, and Susanne typed that name into the search field. As the bank's website opened, Susanne told the man that he should now log into his bank account. She turned her head away while the man typed in his password. Now, the web page required a Mobile Bank-ID validation. The librarian then said that in order to log in, he needs to open his Mobile BankID app and confirm that it is him who is trying to access his bank account. As he did so, Susanne asked for which months he needed the bank statement. He said, "I only need my income for the three last months". "Then we will filter the data in such a way that the page displays only your income. Do you want to do it yourself or do you want me to do this for you?". The man chose the latter option, and so the librarian extracted the needed information into pdf-files and sent them for printing. While doing this, Susanne explained why she made every single action at his page. She then logged out of his bank account and the computer, helped the man sit back onto his wheelchair and they headed to the printer.

When it was their turn to print, she explained to the man how to print his documents by typing in the code on the print card. Then she took the papers out of the printer, quickly flipped them upside down and handed them to the man so that nobody else could see them. She then asked, "Did you receive the help you needed?" and wished him a nice day upon his nodding and good-bye.

In this situation, the librarian played the role of personal assistant by figuring out the actual needs of the patron behind his request. In addition, it was not the librarian's responsibility to help the man to move from his wheelchair. However, by performing the role of personal assistant, she did that in a friendly manner (Goffman, 1959). On the one hand, it can be connected to a part of the librarianship discourse in that it is a feminine profession (Rubin, 2016). On the other hand, the librarian demonstrated a holistic understanding of the patron's request, and it is characteristic of the professional role, and not that of gender.

The last part of the performance, when the librarian flipped the print outs to hide the bank information from other visitors, can be interpreted as extra effort to protect the data of others, even if she was not asked to do that. This shows her manner as caring, which is coherent with the role of personal assistant. By asking her final question, the librarian also demonstrated her willingness to help even further if there was anything else the patron needed. As in the example

above, the front fitted to the performance since there were no barriers between the librarian and the patron that could inhibit a long session of personal assistance.

A woman approached Alice at her stand at Digidel. She needed help accessing the photo of her CV from the library computer, because, as she explained, previously she used to access it from her phone. Alice left her computer and came to the one occupied by the woman. She took a chair to sit near the woman, suggested to her to scan the CV instead of sending the photo and asked her where the file was stored. The woman said that she had previously sent job applications with the pdf version of her CV via her mail. Alice explained to her how to download the CV on the computer and said that she could send it to herself via email with the subject line "CV" so that it would be easy to access it in the future. As there were around 1300 emails in her inbox, Alice suggested the woman flag the email and showed how to quickly access her flagged emails. She also showed her several ways to get rid of the emails. The woman then told Alice that she wanted to send her CV to a couple of email addresses she had written down on a piece of paper. Alice showed her how to forward the email to another address. The woman was just about to send the email as Alice stopped her by saying "Are you going to send an empty email? Maybe consider writing something in the body? Something like, "Hi, I am interested in your job. My CV is attached. Looking forward to hearing from you!". And the woman did so.

As the librarian noticed that the patron applies for jobs mainly from her email, she asked "Do you know that there are job search websites where you can just upload your CV and look for relevant job openings?". As the woman said "No", Alice showed her one such website. She asked the woman, "What kind of job are you looking for?". The woman answered, "Personal care attendant". "I have also worked as a personal care attendant before", shared Alice. "I know that some companies in the region hire through their websites. Let me show you how you can apply", she added. The librarian then opened one such website and guided the woman through all the steps of filling an application. A cover letter was required in this form, so Alice showed the woman how to open a text editor and write her text. The woman thanked her for all her help and apologized that it took so long. "Don't worry", said Alice, "I have enough time. Just approach me if there's anything else I can help you with" and left to her work stand.

In this interaction, the manner of the librarian in the role of personal assistant showed the depth of her involvement. Not only she helped the woman to do what she wanted to do, she also came up with suggestions on how to manage her emails, how to make a better impression on her employers, and advised alternative ways to look for jobs. Furthermore, the librarian demonstrated curiosity, and asked about the job interests of the woman. In other words, this manner helped her to show that she cared enough to tailor-make her help to this patron. The librarian also tried to reduce the distance between them by sharing that she herself had had the same position that the woman was applying for. In other words, although in fact their social statuses were different at that moment, since the librarian was employed young Swedish woman,

and the visitor was black immigrant woman in her fifties, she tried to make a part of her personal front (Goffman, 1959), her social status, appear similar to that of the visitor. In addition, at the end of the interaction she demonstrated her approachability and openness by stating that she is ready to deal with further requests of any kind.

This role of personal assistance, as in the example above, is not common or traditional for the librarians, as is the role of informer (Gibson, Bertot & McClure, 2009). As the title entails, it has to do with *personal* assistance, and it distinguishes from technical or any other kind of assistance. Perhaps not surprisingly, this role is sometimes connected to oversharing. However, such attitude is appreciated by the patron to the extent that they accept it. Patrons are ready to act in this play together with librarians in the sense that they are comfortable revealing their incompetence. Further, this role encompasses not only digital help but also help with soft skills, such as how to write an email and introduce oneself to employers. Hence, this role is important for informal education of adults who do not have access to the Internet otherwise. In addition, it can be concluded that this role is very personal, and it is focused on meeting specific, personal needs of patrons, but it is also connected to the personal identity of the librarian who shares her personal experiences with the patron. It also means that this role can manifest differently when enacted by different librarians. To conclude, when enacting the role of personal assistant, the librarians act on behalf of the library, but their role is much closer to their personality rather than their organization.

5.3 The Guard

At the reception, when there were no patrons coming with requests, Ebba also went around the library. She told me that this is what she was supposed to do sometimes, to make sure that everything was fine. So, Ebba took several returned books and went around the library to place the books back on their shelves, simultaneously asking questions about the purpose of my research and checking what was going on in the first floor. While answering Ebba's questions, I noted some of the patrons, who were reading newspapers, looking at us. Two visitors who were discussing something rather loudly, switched to whispering when Ebba approached the shelf nearby.

This role is partially connected to the stereotypes discussed in the literature review. The idea about the old, stiff “shusher” librarian is still present at certain occasions. As such, there is no

written requirement in the librarian's job descriptions to occasionally check the library. Although this situation was observed outside of a face-to-face interaction between librarians and patrons per se, it is telling in the sense of enactment of the role of the guard. The librarian I shadowed did not explicitly check the floor and did not have an appropriate appearance (Goffman, 1959), meaning that she looked like a librarian with her black apron, and not like a guard. Interestingly, her manner was such as if she fulfilled that duty rather alongside her main activity – she was placing the books on the shelves. As she also talked to me at the same time, the role of the guard was enacted, however in an implicit way. Still, the patrons noticed her presence by looking at her and changing their behavior accordingly by becoming quieter. It can be stated that the audience (Goffman, 1959) reacted as intended. Although the librarian did not have the appearance of a guard, she was still perceived in such a way by the audience.

A man approached Helen at her stand at Digidel. He explained that he needed to call his son from the son's phone, as his own phone was now at his son who was somewhere close to the library but outside. There was no money to make a call on the phone. He humbly asked Helen if he could borrow a phone to make a call. Helen said that it was unfortunately not possible for her to lend her phone to visitors at the library. She then asked if he had WhatsApp to make calls using the library's free WiFi. As he didn't have one, the librarian showed him how to install it on his phone. At some point while Helen's colleague was helping the man to install WhatsApp, the man noticed his son, thanked the librarians for their help and quickly went away.

It is worth noting that the nature of the request – to borrow a phone – seems irrelevant to be made at the library. In this situation, the librarian had a work phone with her. In the role of guard, the librarian set a clear limit to what was possible by refusing to borrow her phone to the man. In this interaction, one can notice a protective manner (Goffman, 1959) of the librarian. She remained at her desk while talking to this patron, as if staying in the boundaries of her front region – her desk – where she has her authority. This interaction shows how librarians in the guard's role protect the possessions of the library from an unsanctioned access. To a certain degree, this performance contradicts with the above quote on the service policy where the idea is that librarians cannot say “no” to a patron. However, the librarian found another way to satisfy the patron's request, which is coherent with the settings and the appearance of a service worker standing ready to help. This suggests that even in situations when there is no possibility to assist the visitor in the way she desires, the librarians still follow the letter of the city's service policy.

One of the two teenage girls sitting on a sofa at the section for children and young adults played out loud on their phone. Then they both started singing to this song. Lovisa approached the girls

and asked them to listen to music in their headphones instead. After some time, the music did not stop, and Lovisa, her face rather tense, went to the girls again to ask them to turn the music off. Instead of doing this, the girls walked away. As Lovisa went around the section to see if everything was fine, she told me that she didn't like doing it, because she felt like she was the old-fashioned librarian who couldn't stand the noise. "It doesn't have to be completely quiet all the time, but they need to understand that it is not OK to have parties here", said Lovisa as I followed her to the shelves with teenage literature with several armchairs between them. "Sometimes adults come and sit here, and I understand it because it is a very nice spot. But I must ask them to sit elsewhere at the library as this area is designated for children and young adults", she said somewhat ruefully, as we went back to her stand.

As can be seen in the above example, the guard's role is not the one that some librarians enjoy enacting. According to Goffman (1959), the person performing a role aims to make a positive impression to its audience. This example is an illustration of the opposite, because the librarian inevitably triggers the visitor's negative reactions when asking to turn off the music or sit elsewhere, no matter how polite they are. In contrast to the example above, the alternative that the librarian offered to the girls was perceived as inappropriate to them. In addition, the notion of the librarian as a helpful person seems to conflict with the role of guard. In this case the performer must stay on the side of the common good, which is not always favorable for a patron. According to Goffman, there are cases when an individual is "not taken in at all by his own routine" (Goffman, 1959, p. 17), when the performer does not believe in her role. However, I argue that it does not entail the cynical attitude of the performer, as Goffman stipulates, but a frustration of the librarian who does not feel that this role is for her. On the other hand, since in this situation there were no other visitors except for the two girls, they might well have an impression the librarian had disliked their music and perceived her performance as insincere.

One can also notice that this is a very particular region compared to other parts of the library, which is a place for everyone. As shown in the last comment of the librarian, the children's section is dedicated exclusively to children or teenagers, hence other visitors get an impression that they are not welcome in that area. Yet this is a role that librarians must enact to make sure that the library serves as a meeting place for everyone.

To some extent, the guard's role can be observed online, as explained below.

The photo in the post shows a torn page of a children's book, negligently put together with thick pieces of dark-yellow tape. The text to the photo reads as follows: "It surely happens that books

get worn out when you borrow and read them. It is therefore not quite unusual for picture books to be taped. But not all tape suits for fixing a torn page. Think about it, as this way books live longer and more people can enjoy them”. The first comment to the post also comes from a librarian who writes, “Of course the idea was good ;), but it would have been better to let it be, so we could fix it at the library”. Some of the comments from the followers take the situation with irony, “😂What did this person think, though of course it is sad with the book. Silver tape would have looked better 🤔”, or “I like it!”, while some others left negative comments such as “Bungler...”, “Well..😞” or sarcastic “Of course the idea was good...”.

In a similar way as in the role of informer, the personal front in the guard’s role is the same as of the library as organization. This is because as the librarians do not state their names under their posts or comments. The settings of the Facebook page allow them to hide their real selves behind the personal front of the library, because users can only see its logotype and name, and not that of the librarian who created the post and wrote comments. By incorporating a smiley emoji, and the ironic tone of the comment, suggests the patrons did not take the post seriously, which is one of the signs of an unsuccessful performance (Goffman, 1959). In this performance, the librarian showed herself in a more positive light than the patron who mistreated the book. Some patrons did not want to identify with this patron who does not have a basic knowledge regarding the proper treatment of books and needed to be taught how to fix torn book pages. In other words, this role was not accepted by parts of the audience, which is indicated by the irony in the words of patrons.

5.4 The Buddy

Merriam-Webster dictionary defines the word “buddy” as a friend, partner, or companion (buddy, n.d.). This word describes best the role observed multiple times in the library bus, as it is characterized by a special bond between librarians and patrons. This is, to part, due to the nature of the region (Goffman, 1959) provided by the bus: it has the same route and stops every week, and the librarians who work there know most of the patrons by name, because usually it is visited by the same people. In addition, as was mentioned above, librarians at the bus sometimes choose to not wear their aprons, which was the case during my observations. They also sat down on their chairs most of the time when interacting with patrons.

What concerns the front, or the settings (Goffman, 1959) of the library bus, it offers limited space and limited capacity to host several people at the same time, thereby creating a feeling of

proximity to the librarians, even intimacy of this small, cozy space. Because most of the time there was only one or a few patrons in the bus at the same time, they could relax in an atmosphere where nobody is in a rush and it is possible to have a friendly chat with librarians.

One woman came to the bus with her child, and the young boy immediately ran to the sofa at the back of the bus where the children's books were located. Jonathan greeted her, and, without asking her name, placed several books reserved for the woman at his desk. In turn, she picked up several books out of her bag, and Jonathan asked if she liked one of them. The woman nodded and said "Was it you who suggested this book to me last time? Yes, I think it was you. It was very good, I enjoyed it". Jonathan smiled, checked in the books, and mentioned the name of another book to ask if the woman had read it. She said, "No, but I trust your choice, and if you say that the book is good, then it is really good!". Jonathan answered, "Well, if you liked that book then you might as well like this one" and proceeded with desensitizing the new books. As the desensitizing machine didn't work properly from the third try, Jonathan half-jokingly, half-irritated said "Hello!" to the machine and made a facial expression as if he berated a nasty child. "Maybe you should sing to it, so it starts working", said the patron cheeky and they both laughed. Then, the book was desensitized, and the woman left with her child.

As can be seen from the above example, the librarian in the role of buddy employs a special manner (Goffman, 1959) to express a range of emotions. For instance, by smiling back, the librarian showed that he was pleased to hear the compliment made by the patron. The role of buddy enabled the librarian to show his irritation over a dysfunctional machine, which was not observed in the library where all librarians kept their reactions to themselves. At the end of the interaction, both the librarian and the patron laughed, which is an interesting example of how the audience accepts the performance to the degree of mirroring the performer's emotions. I argue that it indicates a deeper connection between the librarian and the patron than in most other cases.

The buddy's role also implies trying to please even the most fastidious visitors as part of the performance, to attract the audience by providing good service. In addition, this performance is possible because the front region (Goffman, 1959) enables longer interactions due to its settings. A patron visiting the library bus often gets an opportunity to have exclusive attention of one, and sometimes two librarians, only to herself, unlike in the library where there are often queues in front of the librarian stands. It should also be noted that the appearance of the librarian without the library apron is more similar to that of the patron (non-librarian) and therefore the formal distance in social roles of librarians and patrons becomes reduced. In addition, the friendly

atmosphere created by the manner of librarians allows for deeper interactions focused on patron's satisfaction, as shown in the following example:

The woman who came to the bus was dissatisfied with the book she had just returned, but she turned to the shelves with crime fiction and Jonathan started giving her some suggestions. As he took one book from the shelf and showed it to the woman, she said that she has already read it and didn't like it that much. Jonathan offered the next book, and it was, according to her, "mediocre". This situation repeated several times before the patron got interested in one of the books and left satisfied.

In this situation, the role of buddy entailed, first of all, knowing what the patron might like, second, being of the temper of the patron, and third, proceeding with suggestions even despite several rejections until the patron chooses something she likes. This manner is distinct for the role of buddy because it also provides room for the patron to behave picky and still be treated well, which was not observed in other roles. The settings of the bus were also suitable to enable this performance, as there were many books of the necessary genre at hand. However, I would argue that this performance was successful due to the personal front of the librarian who gave suggestions, as he enjoyed reading crime fiction in his free time and this very characteristic of his enabled him to quickly come up with book tips. It should be noted here that not all librarians I shadowed can give personalized advice on books due to their lack of interest towards literature or non-librarian educational background. Therefore, this performance would not happen or would be unsuccessful if it were a librarian with a different personal front acting as buddy.

Similar situations occur, albeit seldom, on the library's Facebook page. Below is one of the examples of such situations.

The post features a cover of an audio book with a text "Today is the World book day! Celebrate it by reading a little extra. Today I am reading this exciting crime fiction. And what are you reading today?/[Name] PS Add the photo of "your" book in the comments". Several comments with book covers followed the post, and one of the patrons commented, "Took a short walk to the park to read "Garden for dissidents" by Johathan Trädgård. Highly recommended!". The librarian liked all of the comments and also responded to the last comment with a book cover in the thread saying "I believe you would like my book ;) [Name] from the library".

It is worth noting, the librarian whilst writing from the library page, used her name to sign the post. This way, although her appearance (Goffman, 1959) remained largely hidden behind the library page, she made herself visible and personally connected to the post. In addition, she chose

an open manner and initiated the exchange of book covers by sharing hers first. I argue that this became possible due to the mediated nature of Facebook as a region for performances, and it would not occur offline at the library or bus. The manner of the performance seemed appropriate as the audience not only accepted it but also reacted in a respective manner by sharing their book covers. In addition, the librarian used a smiley face when suggesting a book in the last comment, which indicates a friendly manner appropriate for the role of buddy. In this last comment, the librarian used her name again while responding from the library page, which is appropriate considering the situation where the role was different from the informer.

Exiting the stage. In a similar manner to the beginning of this chapter, I would like to finish with a short anecdote describing the way librarians stop performing their roles. At the last station of the library bus, close to the end of the workday, Linn and Jonathan started to collect the reserved books that were not checked out to one box. They finished several minutes before the official end of their shift, closed the entrance, and sat at the front seats of the bus, one minute before the end of the day. Both were looking somewhat tense – I could see Linn casting a glance through the window, and Jonathan was impatiently mumbling a song. As the clock showed 19:00, Jonathan, who was driving the bus, sighed in relief and started the bus. I laughed and told the librarians that it seemed very Swedish to me as a foreigner. “You won’t believe it, but there is often someone who comes at 18:59 and stays here for another 15 minutes. And because we must stay, there are lights in, and some more people come in, and we must explain that we are closed, and it causes so much inconvenience. So, it is better to be prepared and leave on time”, explained Linn.

This situation describes how the librarians stop enacting their professional role as they get ready to end the day. It is important, because if the transition from librarian to non-librarian does not start shortly before the end of the work day, the librarians might get into situations when they no longer have to enact their professional identity; at the same, they have to do it unwillingly because patrons keep coming in. This transition also indicates a clear boundary between the professional and personal identity, dissociated from that of librarian.

5.5 Implications for organizational identity

A large part of organizational communication occurs on the premises of the organization between its members, which in turn shapes the organization (Boden, 1994; McPhee & Zaugg, 2009; Taylor, 2009; Johansen, 2017). Therefore, it is important to consider the interactions between organizational members when discussing organizational identity.

As it can be seen from the above roles, the library in the context of digitalization becomes a place where different requests of patrons are satisfied at different regions and with different fronts, settings, personal fronts, appearance and manner (Goffman, 1959). Connecting this to the theory of CCO, it can be stated that what the organization is depends largely on the different roles played by organizational members at the different physical parts of the organization, as well as online. It is worth noting the organizational identity of the case organization, Helsingborg city library, encompasses all the above-mentioned roles (the Informer, the Personal Assistant, the Guard, and the Buddy), hence is broad and flexible. It also means that often there are no clear boundaries between what a librarian, and therefore the library, is, and what they are not. Partially, this is due to the service policy that lays the foundation for their work and demands the librarians to satisfy diverse requests from their patrons. On the other hand, it can also be related to the expectations of new public management, especially with regard to less traditional roles.

Further, the roles enacted by librarians vary due to the region of their interaction (reception, Digidel, children's section, the library bus, Facebook page), which in turn connects to the different facets of organizational identity shaped in its several departments. For instance, the role of buddy was not performed at the reception where the settings assume distance, and a more formal service is appropriate. I argue that the role of informer, which was enacted at the reception as well as on the library page on Facebook, connects to the side of organizational identity of the library being a place where one can receive information. The role of guard was not played at the bus, as due to its size, there was less distance between librarians and patrons, and the librarians were able to control the situation even without enacting such a role. In addition, the atmosphere created by the settings of the bus is more informal than in the library. The bus, then, becomes a place where a more entertaining and informal facet of organizational identity is enacted, which manifests in the role of buddy played by the librarians. Finally, the role of personal assistant was not observed on the library page on Facebook, although it proved to be in high demand due to digitalization and many patrons who needed help with digital literacy. I argue due to the nature of the region, while personal assistance requires face-to-face interactions, which is not the case on Facebook. Hence, the side of librarian identity, connected to personal assistance, and digitalization, is constituted in one of its physical regions (Digidel) but does not transcend into the online environment. Although all these premises belong to the library, the nature of interactions taking place there is very different. This, in turn, causes a diverse and

multifaceted organizational identity, no longer related only to books. Yet, despite all the variety of services that the library provides in the digitalized environment, this organization is relevant for the society.

6. Discussion and conclusion

The purpose of this thesis was to explore how librarian identity is enacted in daily interaction between librarians and patrons against the backdrop of digitalization, as well as the implications of the librarian identity for organizational identity. This research problematizes the connection between multiple dimensions of librarian identity, enacted in the four distinct roles – the Informer, the Personal Assistant, the Guard, and the Buddy – to organizational identity. These roles manifested in different sections of the library, as well as on its Facebook page. The results showed that the roles are versatile and changing depending on the requests of patrons. These findings indicate that organizational identity of the library is also broad and multifaceted and dependent on the roles enacted by librarians.

6.1 Contributions of the study

This thesis explores the different roles the librarians perform while they interact with the patrons. It illustrates how professional identity is enacted, and its relation to organizational identity. The identified ideal types demonstrate that the employees of the library do not have a static identity, but instead continuously shape it through different roles while interacting with external stakeholders. Those roles are related to location where they take place, as well as the patrons' requests. This finding is coherent with previous research that indicates the dynamic and multifaceted nature of professional and individual identities (Watson, 2008), and that they are shaped in social interactions (Sveningsson & Alvesson, 2003, Garcia & Barbour, 2018).

It is worth noting that the role of informer is perhaps the most expected and traditional, while other roles are less expected in the settings of the library. Interestingly, librarians are aware of the stereotypes as a part of the discourse about their profession (Rubin, 2016; Perret, 2018). Sometimes they acted in relation to those stereotypes, as in the guard's role, and sometimes tried to change this discourse by enacting new, non-stereotypical roles. For instance, the role of

personal assistant is very new to the field (Rubin, 2016), and it entails a more tailored service to each patron. The services provided in this role revolve around digitalization, as librarians help the patrons to gain skills to operate computers and navigate the Internet, but also with social skills required for the digital environment. This finding confirms the notion that digitalization changes the daily duties of librarians (Pierson *et al.*, 2019) who now approach patrons' problems with holistic understanding. The role of personal assistant is problematic from the viewpoint of the new public management (Düren *et al.*, 2019) with its emphasis on efficiency, but the findings show that it is highly demanded and appreciated by the patrons. In addition, this role is crucial for the fulfillment of one of the purposes of the library – to strengthen democratic society by providing access to information.

Regarding organizational identity, this thesis advances the idea that it is connected to employee identity and interactions between employees and external stakeholders on a micro-level (Boden, 1994; Schinoff, Rogers & Corley, 2016; Johansen, 2017; Andersson, 2020). Further, the results indicate that the organizational identity is dynamic and multifaceted (Gioia, Schultz & Corley, 2000), shaped in micro-practices of employees. The findings show the organizational identity of the library changes in relation to the demands of digitalization and the expectations of patrons, which is coherent with previous research (Hicks, 2014).

In relation to strategic communication, this research indicates that the idea of static identity (Albert & Whetten, 1985; Ashforth & Mael, 1996; Whetten, 2006) – both professional and organizational – is becoming outdated. For many organizations no longer have monolithic, easily defined identities, as they used to have several decades ago. However, even though the roles of employees, emerging from their micro practices, hence the functions of their organizations, become more versatile in digitalization, many traditionally analog organizations remain relevant. Therefore, a multifaceted identity, must not be considered as a weakness, but a strength in such organizations.

Furthermore, this research adds to a view of identity as evolving through micro-level interactions, as opposed to the mainstream managerial approach. In this context, the role of employees becomes increasingly important, as in many organizations where there are interactions between external stakeholders, employees to a large extent influence organizational

identity. Therefore, I argue that research in strategic communication should consider the role of employees on the same level as communicators and managers.

6.2. Contributions of the case

Helsingborg city library illustrated an example of a public library with many different services, some of which are related to digitalization. Therefore, the results of the thesis could be used in relation to the understanding of how librarian identity is enacted in daily interactions with patrons in other libraries providing a multitude of services internationally. The case study insights also show that organizational identity can be explored through interactions between employees and external stakeholders, since the two phenomena are related.

As discussed in the introduction, librarians are but one example of frontline workers of the cultural sector. Therefore, the results of this research can be applied to other organizations in the cultural sector, where employees interact with external stakeholders. Such organizations could benefit from applying similar ideas on how employee identity is enacted and its implications for organizational identity.

6.3 Limitations

The duration of observations conducted for this study, was affected by the global pandemic of Covid-19. Although the library was not closed, I was not able to conduct participant observations due to the risk of infecting myself and others, since it is a public place. It is therefore possible that there are more roles than the ones presented in this research, although the presented roles are diverse, and they enabled me to explore the topic of this thesis.

6.4 Suggestions for future research

As this thesis is based on a single case, it can be suggested that many similar cases need to be explored to understand how librarian identity is enacted in different types of libraries. In addition, longer observations conducted during special, not only daily interactions (celebrations, lectures, workshops, etc.) could help identify other facets of librarian identity. Further, a qualitative study based on interviews could provide insights on how employees perceive their identities as enacted in interactions with others.

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