



Exploring Impression Management Patterns: Interactions of Municipal Guides with Residents in Lund Municipality

A Qualitative Study

Author: Roxana Tehrani-Manesh
Master's thesis SOCM0 30 credits
Supervisor: Charalambos Demetriou
Department of Sociology, Spring 2024
Word Count: 20.289 words

Abstract

Lund Municipality has a citizen center where municipal guides serve as a vital link between residents and the various departments within the municipality. This thesis explores the detailed domain of impression management within the context of municipal guidance interactions in Lund Municipality. The aim was to examine the patterns of impression management that occur in the interaction between municipal guides and residents in Lund Municipality. Through a qualitative exploration grounded in Erving Goffman's theory of symbolic interactionism as an analytical framework, this thesis will conduct a gender analysis based on symbolic interactionism, focusing on how individuals construct and negotiate gender identities, roles, and relationships through social interactions, symbols, and meanings. This research investigates how municipal guides strategically navigate their interactions with residents to shape perceptions and achieve their goals. Fifteen municipal guides participated in semi-structured interviews, providing comprehensive insights into their experiences and practices. This represents the majority of them. The study identifies two main dimensions of impression management: the momentary interactions between municipal guides and customers, and the influence of gender dynamics on impression management strategies, with a closer examination of Raewyn Connell's concepts (2006) of hegemonic masculinity and complicit masculinity.

Author: Roxana Tehrani-Manesh

Title: Exploring Impression Management Patterns: Interactions of Municipal Guides with Residents in Lund Municipality

Master's thesis SOCM05 30 credits

Supervisor: Charalambos Demetriou

Department of Sociology, Spring semester 2024

Keywords: contact center, municipal guides, symbolic interactionism

Popular Science Summary

Have you ever thought about how municipal guides behave when they talk to residents? That is exactly what this study investigates. Impression management is about how we control the image of ourselves in social situations to make others think and feel a certain way about us.

The researcher studied municipal guides in the municipality of Lund and interviewed 15 of them to understand how they think and feel when talking to residents. Municipal guides adapt their behavior depending on who they are talking to. They can be friendly and helpful to some, while being more strict with others. There are also differences in how men and women handle impressions.

By understanding how municipal guides create impressions, we can improve communication and service for residents. It is about creating a positive experience for those who need help. By being aware of how we present ourselves to others, we can become better at communicating and building relationships. By considering gender, crises, and linguistic differences, we can create a more inclusive environment for both staff and residents.

Acknowledgment

I would like to express my deepest gratitude to my supervisor Charalambos Demetriou, for the invaluable guidance and support I have received during the work on this master's thesis. Your insight, expertise and encouragement have been crucial in completing this work.

Your constant willingness to share your knowledge and guide me through every step of the research process has not only improved the quality of this thesis but also enriched my own understanding and competence in the subject area. Without your help and support, this project would not have been possible in the same way. Thank you for being an excellent mentor and an inspiration.

I also want to give a big thank you to my parents for always believing in me and showing me that anything is possible! And to my partner, your support means everything. This journey would not have been possible without all of you.

Table of contents

1. Introduction.....	6
1.1 Aim of the study.....	7
1.1.2 A roadmap of the thesis.....	8
1.2 Delimitations.....	8
2. Literature review.....	10
2.1 Customer Service in Public Administration.....	11
2.2 The Bureaucrat and the Public.....	12
2.3 Citizen, Customer, Partner: Rethinking the Place of the Public in Public Management...	12
2.4 Goffman and Interactional Citizenship.....	14
3. Theory.....	16
3.1 Theoretical framework.....	16
3.2 The symbolic interaction of gender.....	17
4. Methodology.....	22
4.1 Research strategy, approach and design.....	22
4.2 Data selection.....	23
4.3 Data collection.....	25
4.4 Data Processing and Analysis Procedure.....	28
4.5 Research quality.....	30
4.5.1 Trustworthiness.....	30
4.6 Reflexivity and ethics.....	31
5. Analysis.....	32
5.1 Introduction.....	32
5.2 The interaction between municipal guidance officers and customers in the moment.....	33
5.2.1 The initial stage of this interaction.....	34
5.2.2 Language.....	45
5.3 Gender.....	49
5.3.1 Initial Stage.....	50
5.3.2 Continuation.....	55
6. Summary and final conclusion.....	58
6.1 Summary of the analysis.....	59
6.1.1 The interaction between municipal guidance officers and customers in the moment...	59
6.1.2 Gender.....	60
6.2 Conclusion of analysis summary.....	61
6.3 Conclusion of literature review.....	62
6.3.1 Reaction to the literature review.....	63
6.4 Reflections on future research.....	64

1. Introduction

A beloved child has many names. It can be called a contact center, citizen office, or service center. Sometimes it is referred to as a reception, out of old habit. The important thing is not the name. The important thing is that it works well. A contact center should ensure that as many people as possible get the help they need in the most efficient way possible (Lunds Kommun 2024).

Historically, many operations have had their personal contacts scattered throughout the organization. This has created fragile structures. Many are the cases that have been shuffled around without getting answers. A contact center creates entirely different possibilities for professional handling. The contact center is not a separate entity. It represents the municipality, authority or company that created it. The contact center is an extended hand to the outside world. A hand that is ready to help. Behind the contact center are not only the people who work there, municipal guides, but it concerns the entire municipality. Administrations, regardless of their tasks, have good opportunities to sharpen their processes and have more time to focus on their core missions after the establishment of a contact center. By working wisely with incoming contacts, time, energy and money are saved (Irene 2014). An organization that listens carefully to what people seeking help want learns to inform earlier and more accurately. An average organization may have a handful of types of issues that customers or citizens contact them about. A municipality can have up to 2500 variations of incoming issues. They come via phone, email, e-services or visits. It could be about library opening hours, requests for school placements, a reported streetlight fault or an application for financial support (Aamir 2013).

Erving Goffman's theory (2002) of impression management is a fundamental part of his work within the broader scope of symbolic interactionism. Goffman describes how individuals in social contexts actively control and direct the image they present of themselves to others. By using various techniques and strategies, individuals strive to create and maintain a desired impression in front of their audience. This is achieved by adapting their behavior, language, and other means of expression to influence others' perceptions and reactions (Goffman 2002).

Within the context of municipal services, where municipal guides interact with residents,

impression management becomes particularly relevant. Municipal guides must balance professional demands and expectations while meeting residents' needs and expectations in a way that maintains trust and confidence. By studying the patterns of impression management in the interactions of municipal guides and the residents in Lunds municipality, we can gain a deeper understanding of how these professional roles are navigated and how effective service is provided.

The research question is as follows: ***What are the patterns of impression management in municipal guides' interaction with residents in Lund Municipality?***

1.1 Aim of the study

Through my research, I aim to increase understanding of how impression management is used by municipal guides in Lund. By examining how they interact with residents in Lund Municipality, I can uncover new insights and open up discussions relevant to the municipality. The goal is to improve understanding of how impression management affects the relationships between municipal officials and residents, which can help shape future strategies and processes within the municipality.

This question is important because it addresses a gap in existing research. By exploring how municipal guides manage impressions in their interactions with residents, my study provides fresh perspectives that have not been previously examined. Additionally, by analyzing the impact of gender dynamics, crisis situations and language on impression management strategies, my research contributes to a more nuanced understanding of these factors. These will all be discussed in my conclusion chapter.

Having had the opportunity to practice as a municipal guide in Lund Municipality myself during my internship, I possess personal experiences of working in that role and how I adapted to it and interacted with residents. Through my observations, I have witnessed a variety of interactions between municipal guides and residents, which has inspired me to explore how these municipal guides mentally prepare for their role before meeting residents and how their attitude is during outward interactions.

1.1.2 A roadmap of the thesis

In the introduction I provide an overview of the research topic, the research question and its significance, setting the stage for the entire thesis by outlining its purpose and objectives. The literature review explores existing research that takes various directions on contact centers, mostly focusing on organizational behavior within the public sector. These gaps underscores the need for the current research on impression management and establishes the foundation for the research question. The theory chapter delves into key concepts and theories related to impression management, gender dynamics, crisis communication and language use which are essential for understanding the practical applications discussed later.

The method chapter comes directly after the theory chapter, offering a practical application of the theoretical concepts. It details the research design, data collection methods, and analysis techniques used to investigate the research question. Following this, the findings in the analysis chapter presents the results of the research, highlighting key patterns and insights uncovered during the study. Finally, the discussion and conclusion chapters interpret the findings in the context of the theoretical framework and existing literature, offering conclusions, implications and suggestions for future research.

1.2 Delimitations

Geographical Limitation: This research is confined to Lund Municipality and solely focuses on the experiences and interactions of municipal guides within this specific area. Comparisons with other municipalities or regions will not be addressed in the study. By solely focusing on Lund Municipality, the study has the opportunity to delve deeply into the specific challenges present there. This provides the study with a detailed insight into how municipal guides work and interact, which can offer valuable insights and advice for the municipality itself. However, it is important to note that the results may not be generalizable to other municipalities due to their unique structures and cultural differences. Therefore, it is wise to be aware of the study's limitations and consider the need for further research in other contexts to gain a more comprehensive understanding of the subject.

Participant Limitation: The study primarily focuses on the perspectives and experiences of municipal guides, and thus, I have decided not to include viewpoints from other stakeholders within Lund Municipality such as administrative staff or citizens. This decision is based on my desire to delve into the role of municipal guides and how their experiences influence their interactions with residents without incorporating additional perspectives in this investigation. The goal is to highlight the unique insights that municipal guides contribute.

Scope of Impression management : The research examines municipal guides' perceptions and interactions within the framework of their impression management. Although broader political and societal factors may influence their work, these will not be extensively explored. Instead, the study focuses on understanding how municipal guides navigate their specific responsibilities and interact with citizens within the delimited context of their roles in Lund Municipality.

2. Literature review

I have tried to find articles that are identical to my thesis, but so far I have only found similar papers that take different directions. While there are many studies on contact centers, most are focused on organizational behavior within the public sector. However, my analysis uses impression management as a concept within the framework based on Goffman's theory of symbolic interactionism (2021), which is about understanding how individuals create and interpret meaning in their social interactions, as described in the theory chapter. By analyzing the interaction between municipal guides and citizens at an individual level, my research offers a unique insight into the micro-social dynamics that previous studies do not cover. However, I have found an article that does not explicitly address symbolic interactionism but explores similar themes by highlighting how everyday interactions and social relationships shape citizenship. This approach resembles symbolic interactionism by emphasizing the importance of individuals' experiences and interactions in the social context (Goffman 2021).

This literature review explores various aspects of citizenship and public administration with a focus on the role of municipal guides. The first chapter emphasizes the importance of empowerment and participation in meeting citizens' needs. The second chapter analyzes how individuals' positions affect knowledge and perspectives, especially for municipal guides. Chapter three discusses public participation and guidelines for co-production between citizens and administration. Finally, the fourth chapter explores the concept of interactional citizenship and its relevance to the work of municipal guides. By summarizing and analyzing previous research in these areas, the literature review aims to establish a theoretical foundation and context for the subsequent empirical research. It seeks to identify key themes, concepts and insights that can inform and enrich the current study on the role of municipal guides and their interactions with residents in Lund Municipality. In this way, the literature review serves as a valuable tool for understanding the broader research context and for establishing a strong foundation for the overall study.

2.1 Customer Service in Public Administration

Empowerment and participation are crucial for effectively meeting customers' needs and expectations, according to (Wagenheim & Reurink, 1991), which is relevant to my thesis. By empowering employees to make decisions and contribute ideas, organizations can enhance their ability to deliver high-quality service and adapt to individual customer needs. This is particularly relevant for municipal guides in Lund Municipality, where the ability to adapt to residents' needs and preferences is crucial for delivering efficient service. Quality and training are central to ensuring a high level of service and customer satisfaction (Wagenheim & Reurink, 1991). Therefore, by investing in training and development, municipal guides can improve their skills and ability to handle various situations with professionalism and expertise. This can contribute to increasing both the efficiency and quality of citizen service in Lund Municipality.

However, continuous monitoring of citizens' needs and performance is also crucial to ensuring a high level of service (Wagenheim & Reurink, 1991). By carefully measuring performance and gathering feedback, municipal guides can identify areas for improvement and adjust their approach to better meet residents' needs.

The overall shift towards a customer service perspective in organizational philosophy emphasizes the importance of putting customers' needs and expectations at the center of operations (Wagenheim & Reurink, 1991). For municipal guides in Lund Municipality, this means understanding and adapting to each individual's unique needs and circumstances to deliver effective and personalized service.

By integrating these principles and insights into the work of municipal guides, Lund Municipality can improve its ability to deliver high-quality citizen service and create a more satisfying experience for its residents.

2.2 The Bureaucrat and the Public

The article "The Bureaucrat and the Public" by Janowitz and Delany (1957) examines how an individual's position within an organization influences their knowledge and perspective. The study analyzes the relationship between bureaucratic hierarchy and knowledge of clients and strategic goals, highlighting how different levels of administration can affect decision-making and interactions with the public. The results show that individuals higher up in the hierarchy tend to have less knowledge of clients' needs but a better understanding of the organization's overall goals. On the other hand, lower levels of staff typically have more knowledge of clients' needs but less insight into the organization's broader goals. Additionally, the study finds that length of employment in the organization does not necessarily increase knowledge of clients, which may be an important factor to consider when evaluating staff's ability to meet the needs of the clients they interact with.

Since municipal guides in Lund Municipality are divided into different response groups with varying levels of knowledge, this article can offer a theoretical framework for understanding how their position within the municipality may affect their ability to meet residents' needs while also fulfilling the municipality's goals and requirements. By applying the results from this study to the work of municipal guides, insights can be gained into how their position within the organization may shape their perspectives and decision-making when interacting with residents. It can also help identify potential challenges and opportunities to improve the ability of municipal guides to provide effective service and handle various situations with professionalism and expertise.

2.3 Citizen, Customer, Partner: Rethinking the Place of the Public in Public Management

The article discusses the importance of public participation and citizen service in administration (Thomas 2013). The author emphasizes the benefits of including citizens in the decision-making process, including increased access to market information, greater likelihood of public acceptance of decisions and improved administrative performance. At the same time, they identify potential problems that may arise with public participation, such as lack of representativeness and higher project-related costs.

To navigate these issues, the article presents guidelines that include considerations of when public participation is desirable, how to define necessary decision criteria and how to minimize decision constraints. An important point highlighted is the importance of sharing decision-making power with citizens and ensuring that the outcome of public participation is actually used in the decision-making process.

To encourage co-production between citizens and administration, the article suggests several guidelines. Firstly, tasks should be simplified to make it easier for people to participate. This may include making processes more accessible and reducing bureaucratic barriers that may discourage the public from participating. By simplifying tasks, more people can be encouraged to engage and contribute to decision-making.

Furthermore, the article emphasizes the importance of providing support and resources to enhance the public's ability to contribute. This may include providing language support for immigrants, education and training to improve citizens' understanding of the decision-making process and their ability to influence it. By investing in such measures, administration can promote a more inclusive and representative participation from all members of society.

Finally, the article emphasizes the importance of activating social norms and networks to motivate public participation. By creating a culture where participation is encouraged and rewarded, administration can increase engagement and contribution from citizens. This may include using social media, campaigns and other methods to raise awareness and create incentives for participation.

This may possibly relate to my thesis through municipal guides, who serve as support for citizens and encourage them to use digital platforms to access information about their cases. This may suggest how citizen centers strive to make it easier for citizens to participate in the decision-making process and access important information.

By providing easier access to decision and case information via digital channels, it may possibly increase transparency and facilitate citizen participation in the administration of municipal roads and other services. This may also potentially contribute to reducing bureaucratic barriers and

possibly increasing public engagement by providing a more accessible and efficient communication channel between citizens and administration.

2.4 Goffman and Interactional Citizenship

The article "Goffman and Interactional Citizenship" suggests that citizenship should be seen in terms of how people interact with each other in everyday life, not just through laws and governments (Colomy & Brown, 1996), which means that citizenship also encompasses interactions and social relationships between individuals in society. The concept of "interactional citizenship" is introduced, which concerns people's rights and responsibilities in their interactions. The authors emphasize that although more people over time have acquired these interactional rights, limitations still exist and problems persist. By understanding both small everyday interactions and large societal structures, we can gain a more complete picture of citizenship in today's society. This perspective contributes to a deeper understanding of the dynamics of citizenship at the individual level and its impact on major societal changes.

This article is relevant to my study of municipal guides' interactions with residents in Lund Municipality in several ways. Firstly, it provides a theoretical framework for understanding the dynamics of interpersonal interactions and expectations of mutual respect and dignity in society. By discussing the concept of interactional citizenship, the article highlights the importance of treating all individuals with respect and dignity, which is central to the role of municipal guides when they meet and assist residents.

Furthermore, the article provides a historical context and discusses how different groups have been treated differently in society based on factors such as race, gender, age and class (Colomy & Brown, 1996). This discussion is relevant for understanding the potential challenges and differences that municipal guides may face when interacting with different residents in Lund Municipality.

By integrating insights from the article on interactional citizenship into the study of municipal guides' interactions, it may contribute to a deeper understanding of how municipal guides can act as agents to promote interactional citizenship in society. By offering an extended hand to

residents and treating them with respect and dignity, it may lead to municipal guides not only fulfilling their impression management but also contributing to creating a more inclusive and equitable societal environment. This integration of theory and empiricism may illuminate how societal norms and expectations influence communication and service delivery in public administration, and thus potentially contribute to improved governance of citizenship dynamics in today's society.

3. Theory

3.1 Theoretical framework

In the following section, I will briefly outline how the theoretical perspectives will be applied in this study. Each theory will then be discussed in detail individually. In my research, I apply several theoretical perspectives to analyze empirical phenomena relevant to my study. My goal is to illuminate and understand the social interactions and dynamics within the municipal guides' work environment.

I will delve into Erving Goffman's theory (2021) of symbolic interactionism and integrate it as a central part of my analysis. This theory examines how municipal guides interpret and respond to residents' needs and expectations. It provides insight into the patterns that influence their interactions and relationships. However symbolic interactionism is not only a theory but also a framework of analysis. By applying this theory, I will conduct a gender analysis based on symbolic interactionism which is centered around examining how individuals construct and negotiate gender identities, roles and relationships through social interactions, symbols and meanings. This contrasts with Raewyn Connell's (2006) power analysis of gender, which is focused on understanding the distribution and dynamics of power within society based on gender. This will be followed by a closer examination of Connell's concepts (2006) about hegemonic masculinity and complicity masculinity to understand how gender power relations are formed and manifested in the municipal guides' work environment.

Subsequently, I also explore Goffman's concept (2002) of impression management to understand how municipal guides adapt to institutional norms to maintain their legitimacy. Additionally, I include a discussion of the concept of stigma (2012) based on Goffman's theory and how it impacts the work and interactions of municipal guides with residents. This comprehensive approach aims to provide a holistic understanding of the multifaceted dynamics at play within the municipal guides' work environment.

3.2 The symbolic interaction of gender

Symbolic interactionism is a sociological theory (Goffman 2021) that emphasizes how people create meaning through interactions and symbols. It is based on the idea that people attribute significance to objects, actions and words based on the symbols and interpretations that are common within a specific social group or culture.

Within symbolic interactionism the focus is on how people construct their social reality through interactions with others. This means that our behaviors, thoughts and feelings are not predetermined but rather shaped and negotiated in relation to other individuals and the social context we find ourselves in. A central concept within symbolic interactionism is that people act based on the meanings they attribute to situations, not solely based on objective circumstances. This means that the same situation can be interpreted and responded to differently depending on the individual's perspective and the symbolic significance it holds for them (Goffman 2021). Symbolic interactionism also focuses on the continuous process of interaction and communication between people. It is about how we interpret and respond to symbols such as words, gestures, facial expressions and other non-verbal signals during our social interactions.

Symbolic interactionism is relevant for understanding the role of municipal guides because it provides a framework for analyzing how they interpret and respond to the needs and expectations of residents. By examining the communication and the significance of symbols in the reception area, we can understand how municipal guides shape their interactions and create meaningful relationships with residents. This theoretical perspective helps illuminate how social meanings and symbols influence the dynamic interactions between municipal guides and residents, which in turn can help improve communication and efficiency in the work of municipal guides (Goffman, 2021). Within symbolic interactionism, social interactions are likened to theatrical performances allowing for a deeper understanding and analysis of social dynamics. In this framework, individuals engage in interactions akin to actors on a stage, assuming various roles and interacting with others in the presence of an audience. By employing theater metaphors in the context of everyday social situations, symbolic interactionism offers valuable insights into how individuals navigate and adapt to different circumstances.

Key concepts within the framework of symbolic interactionism include dramaturgical concepts, which are the notions of the "stage," the "roles" and the "audience." The stage represents the physical or social setting where interactions occur, ranging from formal work environments to informal social gatherings. Roles encompass the behaviors or personas that individuals adopt within specific situations, ranging from professional to friendly or authoritative roles as dictated by the context. The audience comprises those who observe and evaluate the interaction, including colleagues, clients, friends or other participants present in the scenario.

Additionally, dramaturgical concept distinguishes between the "front stage" and the "back stage." The front stage denotes the portion of the interaction where individuals perform their roles in the presence of the audience, while the back stage represents the private sphere where individuals prepare for and reflect on their interactions. By applying this framework to the role of municipal guides, it becomes possible to examine how they adapt their roles and interactions to navigate different situations, including switching between roles and adjusting behavior based on audience reactions.

Through this lens, symbolic interaction offers a deeper understanding of how municipal guides and residents interact and how their behaviors shape social dynamics in the reception area. By analyzing these interactions, patterns and trends can be identified that may contribute to improving efficiency and effectiveness in the role of municipal guides.

Moreover, within this framework, complicit masculinity is discussed based on R.W. Connell's concept of masculinity. According to Connell, masculinity is not a uniform category but rather a complex system of gender power relations that take different forms depending on the context and the individual's position in society. Within this diversity of masculine expressions, Connell identifies two main forms of masculinity: hegemonic and complicit (Connell 2006).

Hegemonic masculinity represents the dominant form of masculinity associated with power, authority and control. This type of masculinity maintains and reinforces traditional gender patterns, norms and those who strive to uphold hegemonic masculinity may act aggressively to defend their status and dominance.

On the other hand, complicit masculinity is a form of masculinity that does not actively challenge the prevailing order but rather supports and benefits from it. Men who identify with complicit masculinity may not necessarily be aggressive or overtly patriarchal, but they still benefit from the privileges that come with the dominant form of masculinity without actively questioning or challenging it (Connell 2006).

In the text, complicit masculinity (Connell 2006) is illustrated through examples of men who despite not necessarily defending traditional gender roles or maintaining hierarchical power structures, still benefit from and contribute to the maintenance of these structures through their passive participation. This may include men who consciously or unconsciously benefit from gender-related privileges while avoiding actively questioning or challenging the structures that give rise to these privileges.

Including a discussion of complicit masculinity is relevant to my study because it can shed light on how traditional gender norms and expectations may influence the behavior and interactions of municipal guides with residents. It can contribute to a deeper understanding of how gender power relations are formed and manifested in the work environment of a municipal service center like Lund Municipality's guides, which can be crucial for improving interactions between staff and residents and creating a more inclusive and gender-equal workplace.

Transitioning to Goffman's concept of impression management, as outlined in his work (2002), is grounded in Gustav Ichheiser's distinction between expression and impression. Expression refers to the objective relationship between a person's inner personality and their outward expression, while impression refers to the symbolic relationship between these outward expressions and how they are subjectively perceived by the surroundings. Goffman modifies Ichheiser's concepts to "expressed" and "transmitted" expressions, where an individual's controlled expressions (expressed) contrast with the environment's interpretation of them (transmitted). For Goffman, this difference is central to understanding social interaction and emphasizes the role of impression management in shaping these interactions (Goffman, 2002).

Impression management involves acting according to existing norms of social interaction and attempting to get others to accept one's own interpretation of the situation. It means that individuals, as both actors and audience, strive for a shared definition of the situation even though their individual perspectives may differ. However, this harmony is often based on temporary agreement and is maintained by each individual suppressing their own opinions in favor of an acceptable facade for the group (Goffman 2002).

Goffman applies his theater-inspired sociological perspective to various contexts and interactions, where individuals and groups seek to control others' impressions of them. In organizational theory and social movements, this is seen as collective impression management, where organizations and movements adapt to prevailing norms and expectations to appear legitimate. This perspective provides insight into how social interactions and organizations are shaped by people's efforts to control and influence the impressions they give to the outside world (Goffman 2002).

Goffman's concept of impression management is relevant to my study of municipal guide interactions in Lunds municipality. It provides insight into how municipal guides actively manage impressions towards residents and strive to create shared definitions of the situation. Additionally, the theory highlights how municipal guides adapt to institutional norms to maintain their legitimacy within the framework of Lunds municipality's organization.

According to Goffman, people are constantly aware of the impression they make on others and actively work to convey and preserve a desired image of themselves, which he calls their "face." This face represents not only the individual's personality but is also shaped by societal norms and expectations. Therefore, facework is not solely an individual task but also a social process (Goffman 2002). Goffman divides facework into different strategies and tactics that people use to maintain their face. It can involve highlighting positive attributes, concealing weaknesses or adjusting one's behavior according to the situation and expectations present. A central part of the theory is that people fear losing face and thereby their social status and self-esteem. Therefore, facework is a constantly present and dynamic process where individuals adjust their behavior and actions to avoid losing face (Goffman 2002).

Goffman also introduces the concept of the "mask" (Goffman 2002), which represents the facade or role that people adopt to maintain their face. The mask is the external presentation of one's identity that can be tailored to different social situations and expectations. In my thesis, I use Goffman's theory of "facework" and "mask" to investigate how municipal guides shape and adjust their behavior to create a desired image of themselves. By analyzing their strategies and tactics to preserve their "face" and the use of the "mask," I gain insight into how they navigate their professional role and interact with residents effectively.

The preceding theory transitions to concepts mentioned by Erving Goffman (2012), who delves deeply into how society's construction of idealized figures like the "super girl" and "super boy" creates norms and contributes to the stigmatization of those who do not live up to these ideals. The concepts of "supergirl" and "superboy" refer to the idealized figures that represent the high expectations society often places on young women and men. "Supergirl" is expected to be perfect, academically successful, morally superior and socially adept. "Superboy" is expected to be strong, brave, independent and a natural leader (Goffman 2012). These ideals create norms that can lead to the stigmatization of those who do not meet these standards, according to Erving Goffman's theory.

Through careful analysis, Goffman highlights how these ideals often promoted by media and market forces not only define what is considered attractive or desirable but also which characteristics and behaviors are valued and rewarded in society. This fixation on appearance and outward attributes becomes central in creating a hierarchy where those who do not fit the norm risk being stigmatized.

Stigmatization, as the text explains, is a process where individuals or groups are negatively judged or marginalized due to deviant traits, behaviors or belonging to certain categories that diverge from societal expectations. This can include everything from appearance and ethnicity to social status and competence. This stigmatization not only affects the individual's experience of self and others but also their opportunities and access to resources and opportunities in society (Goffman 2012). My thesis on municipal guides and their interactions with residents in Lund municipality provides me with an opportunity to explore how stigma can affect public services. By observing and analyzing my own and the municipal guides interactions with residents, I can

identify potential patterns of stigmatization and work to counteract them. This is crucial to ensure that all citizens have fair and effective access to public services regardless of their background or situation.

4. Methodology

In this section, I will explain the methodology used in my study. We will delve deep into the research strategy, approach, design, how I selected data, collected it, processed it and analyzed it. Each part will provide a clear picture of how I proceeded in the study. By exploring these different aspects, you as the reader will gain a comprehensive understanding of how the study was conducted, from start to finish. So, let us take a closer look at the methodological framework that shaped this investigation and explore the details together.

4.1 Research strategy, approach and design

Since my thesis aims to investigate the patterns of impression management in municipal guides' interaction with residents in Lund Municipality, I have chosen a qualitative method. To gain a deeper understanding of this interaction, interviews with municipal guidance officers in the Municipality of Lund are the most appropriate method for my data collection. I also emphasize how this affects my choice of data material. Thus I will, as a primary interpretation rely on the municipal guidance officers' own experiences of their interactions with residents, which can be associated with an abductive method. The abductive method is best suited for my thesis because it allows me to start from specific observations and experiences from the interviews with the municipal guidance officers and then propose possible explanations or hypotheses for these observations. This method gives me the flexibility to explore and develop understanding based on the specific empirical information I have collected (Bryman 2012, p.401). After analyzing the municipal guidance officers' experiences, I will proceed to explore the specific environments in which these experiences took place. By examining and understanding the circumstances surrounding the interactions, I can gain a deeper understanding of the data, leading to a more comprehensive interpretation of the results. For the tertiary interpretation, the fully developed analyses are linked to relevant theories, and it is at this stage that abductive reasoning becomes crucial. By using abductive reasoning, municipal guidance officers' experiences are meaningfully integrated with theories that align with them. This contributes to a deeper understanding and interpretation of the data, thereby increasing the validity and relevance of the research. One of the major challenges in my research is collecting data that clearly demonstrates interactions between municipal guides and residents that can then be linked to the theories. Therefore, the

interviews are designed to encourage municipal guides to share specific examples and reflections on their interactions with residents. By asking open-ended questions and using many follow-up questions, I can gather rich qualitative data that helps me construct a picture of these social interactions.

Originally, the idea was to compare the work of municipal guidance officers in different municipalities. However, it was challenging to obtain sufficient participation from multiple municipalities, which led to a revision of the study's focus. Instead, I chose to focus on the Citizen Service Centers in the Municipality of Lund, where I had the opportunity to do an internship and thus could easily arrange interviews with municipal guidance officers. Although this means that the study does not directly compare the work of municipal guidance officers in different municipalities, focusing on Lund's Citizen Service Centers provides an in-depth and detailed analysis of municipal guidance officers' work and interactions with residents.

4.2 Data selection

Towards the end of my internship at the Citizen Service Center in the Municipality of Lund, I discussed with the unit manager the possibility of writing my master's thesis about their operations. She supported the idea and suggested that I compare their municipality with another municipality that also had a contact center. She recommended Ängelholm municipality, which despite being small, had made progress in the field. After checking their website, I contacted a municipal guidance officer through email and obtained contact information for their unit manager. Upon contacting the unit manager, he expressed interest in the interview but had difficulty coordinating the staff due to their busy schedules.

"Hi again! I've been trying to persuade my colleagues to participate in an interview because I believe it is important that we support our students. But we are swamped right now, and they are having trouble fitting it in, unfortunately. But if you still want to interview me, I am available. Let me know how you want to proceed. Best regards, Andreas."

Since I needed municipal guidance officers to compare between municipalities, I realized that having only the unit manager was not sufficient. I then decided to reconsider my study and concluded that focusing on the Citizen Service Center in the Municipality of Lund, where I knew I could receive assistance from several individuals due to my internship, was the best choice.

I began by asking my former supervisor, who supervised my internship period at the municipality, for all municipal guidance officers' email addresses. After receiving the list I chose to send out an email:

"Hi [name], Hope all is well with you. I am reaching out to ask if you would possibly be willing to participate in an interview for my master's thesis that I am working on this semester. I am writing about the Citizen Service Center, where I am investigating the patterns of impression management in municipal guides' interaction with residents in Lund Municipality. I would be very grateful; it will take approximately 45 minutes. Please let me know if you are interested and what times work for you as I am flexible. Best regards, Roxana"

After that, responses began pouring into my inbox, with the majority being very positive about participating. It could look something like this:

"Hi Roxana! Of course, I will participate! Wednesdays from 1-3 pm almost always work for me, as well as Fridays from 10-11:30 am. Check if any Wednesday or Friday works for you too. Hugs,J"

While some were very busy with their own additional tasks alongside their role as municipal guidance officers and responded to me like this:

"Hi Roxana! Of course, how are you doing? I hope everything's going well with you too. I just need to check with the supervisor to arrange a slot in the schedule because right now, I have a lot on my plate, and I am studying for a citizenship orientation. I will let you know after I talk to the boss."

I had sent an email to eighteen municipal guidance officers who are full-time employees but only received responses from fifteen. The rest did not respond to me, even though I sent a reminder to them a few weeks later. Most of my respondents who agreed to the interview booked rooms at the municipality building, where we conducted physical interviews while some chose to have them digitally.

Therefore, I chose not to make any preconceived generalizations regarding which municipal guides to interview because I interviewed almost everyone, the majority of them working there. With guidance from my supervisor, I believed it would be most rewarding to interview as many municipal guidance officers as possible to identify any patterns. By maximizing the amount of data from various municipal guides, considering the varied age structure and the fact that the majority are women, I could gain a more diverse and comprehensive understanding of the subject in my study.

4.3 Data collection

I conducted a total of 15 semi-structured interviews with the municipal guides, all from the citizen service center in Lund. These interviews followed a qualitative method and were semi-structured, allowing me to explore various topics and extract all relevant information from their experiences of interacting with residents (Bryman 2012, p.470).

Semi-structured interviews were a suitable choice for several reasons. Firstly, they offered a balance between structure and flexibility. By providing a framework with predefined topics and questions, I ensured that essential areas were covered during the interview. Simultaneously, the flexibility to delve into responses or explore emerging themes enriched the data collection with deeper insights. Additionally, semi-structured interviews facilitated an open dialogue and thorough exploration of the respondents' perspectives and experiences. Without strict question schedules, I could adapt to respondents' answers and follow their thought processes, resulting in more nuanced and rich data.

Moreover, semi-structured interviews fostered a sense of participation from the respondents. By allowing them to freely express themselves and share their experiences in a personal manner, an open and trusting environment was cultivated, encouraging genuine and in-depth responses.

This approach enabled me to integrate interesting insights from each interview into subsequent ones to identify any patterns. It facilitated an iterative process where each interview deepened my understanding and guided future questions. This continuity allowed for a more profound exploration of the topic with each respondent, leading to a holistic understanding of municipal guidance officers' experiences and perspectives.

My interview guide was developed through a pilot interview with my former internship supervisor, who agreed to participate. Initially, I aimed to explore differences between male and female municipal guidance officers and their impact on interactions with residents. However, an intriguing observation emerged during the conversation, indicating that an individual's perception and behavior as a municipal guidance officer were more influential than gender. Consequently, I reformulated my research question to investigate the patterns of impression management in municipal guides' interaction with residents in Lund Municipality. Drawing inspiration from this insight, I crafted new questions and a completely revised interview guide. The new guide included eight distinct topics: 1. Role-playing and emotional expression, 2. Emotional expression and gender, 3. Dealing with difficult questions and emotional expression, 4. Organizational expectations and emotional expression, 5. Fear and risk assessment, 6. Identity and power background, 7. Managing uncomfortable questions, 8. Trust and consequences. For each topic, I had prepared questions but was also ready to inquire about why, when, and how. This approach initiated deeper conversations and prompted respondents to provide clear examples related to their interactions with residents. Some examples of questions that were asked include: *1. Can you provide examples of how you express your emotions in your role as a municipal guide? Your demeanor and how you speak? 2. What criteria do you use to assess whether a person poses a threat or not when someone enters the reception area? 3. How do you handle situations where residents speak different languages? If you know their language, do you interact directly in that language or do you prefer to use Swedish? 4. How do you think you can gain trust from residents in your role as a municipal guide?*

These questions were necessary to answer my research question and were designed to illuminate important aspects of the municipal guides' perceptions and behaviors. Some themes were easier

to discuss while others were more challenging. The more challenging themes included "Emotional expression and gender" and "Fear and risk assessment." For these themes, I needed to ask many follow-up questions to elicit relevant information from the municipal guides. For the female municipal guides, it was sensitive to describe the differences in treatment they receive from visitors compared to their male colleagues, as they often felt frustrated or poorly treated. The male colleagues, on the other hand, had difficulty opening up about their fears, requiring me to really press to elicit their responses.

One of the main reasons they were able to open up and trust me was that I had previously been an intern there and was considered a colleague during that time. This facilitated the conversations and made some topics easier to discuss, such as "Role-playing and emotional expression" and "Organizational expectations and emotional expression". In these cases, the municipal guides were more outspoken and open and their responses came naturally without much hesitation.

In the next chapter, I will describe the theories underlying my analysis, including symbolic interactionism and stigma from Goffman as well as hegemonic masculinity and complicit masculinity from Connell. These theories will help me analyze how the perceptions and behaviors of municipal guides shape their interactions with residents and the implications for their professional practice and trust-building. By linking the questions in the interview guide to these theoretical frameworks, I can better understand the complex dynamics influencing the work of municipal guides. This will be crucial for answering my research question and for illuminating how the self-perception and role understanding of municipal guides affect their interactions with residents in the Municipality of Lund.

The interviews typically lasted 45-60 minutes, mostly conducted in person, except for one conducted via Teams. All interviews were conducted in Swedish and recorded with the respondents' consent.

During the interviews, I made sure to take notes on specific situations where I noticed tension in answering the questions or moments where participants expressed various emotions, whether they found the questions challenging or easy to answer. These notes also helped me understand

the influence of each question and was a good way of keeping me structured after the interviews to process my data.

4.4 Data Processing and Analysis Procedure

Out of the total fifteen interviews with municipal guides, I chose to utilize a program within a Word document for transcription. This program allows for the audio file to be uploaded and transcribed, clearly indicating who is speaking as person 1 and person 2. This saved me a significant amount of time and energy, enabling me to focus instead on analyzing interesting and relevant parts of the transcriptions. Before each interview, I asked the interviewees for permission to record the conversation. I also informed them that they would remain anonymous. Since the majority of municipal guidance officers are women and there are few men, I informed the men that they might be recognizable and made them aware of this, which they approved. To do my best to protect their privacy, I changed their names into numbers instead (Bryman, 2012, p.143), but I mentioned their titles and workplaces as they are highly relevant to the study.

After collecting all the data, I chose to code my data, also known as Conventional Content Analysis (CCA), which involves creating codes and categories directly from collected data without using existing theory as guidance. With this method, I could carefully analyze and categorize the collected information from the interviews without being bound to predetermined theoretical frameworks, enabling an in-depth and objective examination of the material.

Therefore, I chose to disregard other methods such as directed content analysis, which uses existing theory as the basis for coding and analyzing data to identify relevant themes or patterns. However, I also chose to disregard summative content analysis, which quantifies specific words or concepts in the text to understand their usage in a given context, enabling an overview understanding of the data.

Sometimes it is beneficial to simplify an idea without losing its essential parts. This is called condensation, making an idea shorter while retaining its core, which was my first step in coding the data. This way, I also gained a deeper understanding of my data by using different codes. The authors also suggest that codes and categories are created by thinking on a larger level. A code is

like a name for the main idea. A category is a group of codes associated with internally homogeneous and externally heterogeneous aspects. If necessary, a category can be divided into smaller parts, i.e., subcategories, which was my second step in coding the data where all interviews with municipal guidance officers were sorted into a common subcategory.

The different categories are as follows 1. The interaction between municipal guidance officers and customers in the moment, with the subcategories *the initial stage of this interaction* and *language* and 2. Gender, that includes both the visitors and the municipal guides, with subcategories *initial stage* and *continuation*.

I chose to use fictitious names when referencing the statements of municipal guides in my research. I did this for several reasons. Firstly, it facilitated the organization of my data and allowed me to easily refer to specific quotes in my analysis and discussion. By assigning each quote a fictitious name, I could effectively reference them in my text, making it easier for the reader to follow my reasoning. Secondly, fictitious names helped preserve the anonymity of the participants. By avoiding the use of their real names and instead referring to them by fictitious names, I could ensure that their identities were not revealed in my research. This was particularly important for protecting their privacy and ensuring that they felt comfortable sharing their experiences during the interviews.

4.5 Research quality

This comprehensive coverage of municipal guides in Lund Municipality constituted a sampling logic - almost all - which allowed me to perform generalization with reliability and confidence within the subject. Including nearly all municipal guides contributed to a broad and representative collection of data, enhancing the credibility and relevance of my study. Therefore, I can confidently state in my analysis what the majority have responded and assert that it truly represents almost all municipal guides.

4.5.1 Trustworthiness

To ensure that this study meets the criteria for trustworthiness, several measures have been taken to ensure that the results are reliable and valid within the given context and research design.

Firstly, a thorough research strategy and design have been chosen to enable an in-depth investigation of municipal guidance officers' perceptions and interactions in Lund municipality.

Credibility has been achieved through the use of a qualitative method with semi-structured interviews. This methodology allows for a thorough and flexible exploration of respondents' experiences and perspectives. Furthermore, collected data has been analyzed carefully and systematically to identify patterns and themes, contributing to ensuring that the study's results are accurate and credible.

To ensure transferability, the study has carefully described the context in which it was conducted, including the choice of the contact center in Lunds municipality as the study area. By providing a detailed account of the research process and participant selection, the reader is given the opportunity to assess the extent to which the results can be generalized to other similar situations or populations.

Reliability has been achieved by following a stringent research process, including meticulous transcription of interviews and systematic data analysis. Additionally, an iterative method of data collection and analysis has been used to ensure that the results are consistent and can be replicated under similar conditions.

Finally, confirmability has been ensured by using a transparent and clear presentation of research methods and results. By providing quotes and examples from the interviews, the reader is given the opportunity to assess how the results are derived from collected data and not from the researcher's personal opinions or biases.

In summary, this study has taken a holistic approach to ensure credibility, transferability, reliability, and confirmability according to Bryman's (2012) criteria for trustworthiness. Through

careful planning, implementation and analysis of the research the study has aimed to produce reliable and valid results that can contribute to an increased understanding of the role and interactions of municipal guidance officers in Lund municipality.

4.6 Reflexivity and ethics

My internship experience has truly enriched my research. Being immersed in its work culture and environment allowed me to pose more precise and relevant questions during the interviews. It also gave me a deeper understanding of the participants' situations and challenges. I could truly empathize with their perspectives and create an open and trusting atmosphere during our conversations. The personal connection I had to the site helped me elicit more honest and detailed responses from the participants. It was as if I could reason with them on their own terms, which truly enriched my research.

Throughout my research, I was diligent in being aware of and addressing any potential negative factors that could influence the results. I realized the importance of limiting any potential bias and preventing my own prejudices or partiality from affecting my conclusions. By being critical and self-reflective, I could identify and rectify any inaccuracies in my research. Being open to questioning my assumptions and actively working to keep my personal opinions in check was a crucial part of my method. I was aware of the risk of bias and actively worked to avoid it by being objective and nuanced in my analyses. By being mindful of the potential pitfalls, I could ensure that my research was as reliable and credible as possible.

In my research, I placed great emphasis on ethical considerations, especially concerning protecting the anonymity and integrity of the participants. An important aspect of this was ensuring that municipal guides colleagues could not ascertain who said what during the interviews. During the process, some information emerged that, if included in my analysis, could have enabled others to identify the participants. To avoid this and preserve anonymity, I chose not to discuss certain details in my analysis, even though they might have been relevant for a deeper understanding of the subject. This was a difficult decision but necessary to protect the participants' integrity and ensure they felt safe to share their experiences and opinions during the

interviews. By prioritizing ethical principles, I could ensure that my research was respectful and adhered to the highest standards of scientific integrity.

5. Analysis

5.1 Introduction

The analysis focuses on two main themes: *The interaction between municipal guidance officers and customers in the moment* and *Gender*. Within each theme, different sub-themes are explored to provide deeper insights and highlight key aspects of the subject using data from interviews with municipal guidance officers from the municipality of Lund. These will then be linked to relevant theories.

In the section on *The initial stage of this interaction*, the analysis emphasizes the municipal guidance officers capacity to adapt and cater to the individual needs of visitors. Additionally, the *Language* section provides an objective description of how municipal guidance officers navigate linguistic barriers to enhance communication. A challenge within this context arises when municipal guidance officers assist visitors in their native language, potentially setting expectations for continued assistance from the same guide in future visits. Furthermore, the *Gender* theme addresses the issue of female municipal guides sometimes not receiving the same level of respect as their male counterparts from visitors. It is crucial to note the risk of generalizing visitors' behaviors based on gender. Conversely, men might encounter challenges in expressing emotions as freely as their female colleagues. So this theme includes both the municipal guides and visitors within gender which will be explained further on.

This analysis aims to contribute to a deeper understanding of the challenges and opportunities faced by municipal guides in their daily work and hopefully contribute to the development of more effective and inclusive strategies in this area.

5.2 The interaction between municipal guidance officers and customers in the moment.

In this theme, I will delve into symbolic interactionism, focusing on its fundamental principles in a simplified manner. While I explore the significance of first impressions, stereotypes, language and past experiences in social interactions, it is important to recognize that symbolic interactionism encompasses more than just impression management. It has a broader scope. The primary objective is to assist individuals without disrupting social harmony. Impression management serves as one strategy toward achieving this overarching goal, facilitating the meeting of needs while averting conflicts. I will discuss how symbolic interactionism achieves this sensitive balance in various social interactions.

5.2.1 The initial stage of this interaction

In the initial phase of this interaction, where municipal guidance officers must quickly analyze and assess visitors arriving at the reception, Erving Goffman's (2021) concept of symbolic interactionism emerges as a guiding principle because it focuses on comprehending how people subtly convey themselves and interpret social signals. As I asked the municipal guides about the complex process they go through when analyzing and assessing visitors at the reception, the majority of them answered that in this critical moment, a complex process unfolds in their minds. Firstly, immediate thoughts about the visitor's identity and intentions arise, including a tendency to categorize them based on perceptions of potential risks or needs. Alex said during the interview that:

"When I greet visitors at the reception, my mind quickly engages in a complex process. I immediately assess their identity and intentions, categorizing them based on perceived risks or needs. It is like deciphering a puzzle in seconds."

This process of categorization and stereotypes reflects the symbolic interaction perspective where people, through social interactions, construct and assign meanings to symbols and behaviors (Goffman, 2021) This passage delves into how people rely on their past experiences, cultural norms and societal expectations to understand the world. It suggests that the immediate thoughts and categorizations made by municipal guidance officers are not just instinctive reactions but are influenced by various social factors and personal experiences. This explains the

symbolic interaction of the past, behavior drawn on experience emphasizing how our understanding of symbols and behaviors is rooted in our collective history. This highlights how human interaction is dynamic, with meanings constantly negotiated and reconstructed through ongoing exchanges. In this phase, guidance officers also mentioned during the interviews without me asking for it that they are also attentive to various factors to make a quick assessment of the situation in the present moment, such as the visitor's appearance, clothing, age and other visible characteristics. This is symbolic interaction at the present, where individuals interpret and assign meaning to symbols and behaviors adjusted to facts and based on immediate cues and social context. For example, an older person with a walking cane may lead guidance officers to assume they need extra support or assistance in getting around, but if a visitor instead has visible tattoos or piercings, it may sometimes erroneously lead guidance officers to believe the person belongs to a certain group or is engaging in illegal activity. At the same time, they assess whether the visitor poses a potential risk or threat, based on factors such as perceived aggressive behavior or other signs of concerning conduct which is the symbolic interaction of the past. This phenomenon can be related to Goffman's (2012) theory of stigma, where individuals may experience stigmatization based on preconceived perceptions and stereotypes. This shows how people's judgments can be swayed by external factors, perpetuating societal biases and misconceptions. It also demonstrates how these biases can affect the interactions between guidance officers and visitors. Moreover, it emphasizes the need for guidance officers to be trained to recognize and address stereotypes and stigma, ensuring fair treatment for all visitors. Thessa said during the interview:

"It is important to pay attention to small details in the visitor's behavior. Sometimes a change in tone or a tense facial expression can indicate a potentially threatening situation."

In parallel with identifying and assessing the visitor, guidance officers also consider any needs the visitor may have. This includes requiring language assistance, guidance or other forms of support, which I will delve into further later in this section. This is part of their assessment to be able to appropriately engage with the visitor.

But one transition that truly surprised me, after I asked the municipal guidance officers about the typical stereotypes they draw upon to identify when a person entering the reception might pose a threat, was that the majority of experienced municipal guidance officers emphasized the importance of avoiding hasty conclusions and instead being attentive to changes in visitors' behavior, while the relatively new ones indicated that there could be typical traits that constitute a threat, such as unusual behavior, nervousness or aggression. Alice who is an older municipal guide said during the interview:

"It can be in the body language or how the person dresses, but what I have noticed is that anyone can be threatening. There is no stereotype or anything. It is mostly men who are absolutely, it is a majority, but I can not point, you know. We also have an older person who is very threatening and aggressive in a very expressive way but this person does not fit the stereotype? No, absolutely not, so it can shock me. But at the same time, I am not shocked by it. So it can be anyone, not just young people but also old."

This demonstrates how they view people as individuals with their own unique needs and situations. By being aware of subtle signals and being prepared to reassess their initial impressions like symbolic interaction from the past, municipal guidance officers show an understanding of the role of symbols in social interactions and their ability to change over time, which can help them offer the right kind of support and guidance in the present moment. It is really an expression of their desire to create a welcoming and safe environment for everyone who comes to them for help and guidance. It is part of their mission to be there for the community and to do their best to ensure that everyone feels respected and cared for. By being aware of how they are perceived by visitors, municipal guidance officers engage in impression management as one strategy toward achieving the meeting of needs while averting conflicts. They consciously shape and control the impressions they convey to create an atmosphere of trust and openness by carefully observing both their verbal and non-verbal cues, adjusting their communication style to meet the unique needs of each person and attentively listening to visitors' worries and input. These efforts showcase the officers' dedication to nurturing positive interactions and establishing connections with those they aid (Goffman 2002).

Based on their initial impressions and assessments, municipal guides responded to my question about whether they have a specific strategy for how to approach and interact with visitors. The majority of them were convinced that they wanted to appear as being present and actively welcoming. By displaying confidence and empathy, they signal to residents that they are both competent and responsive to their needs. By being present and welcoming, they strive to create a safe and positive environment for residents. This strategy, built on an understanding of symbols and the importance of interactions (Goffman 2021), aims to create a positive and meaningful experience for visitors. This involves implementing various communication techniques, such as maintaining eye contact, using open body language and employing active listening skills. Additionally, officers may adapt their tone of voice and choice of words to convey warmth and understanding, further enhancing the welcoming atmosphere. Through these deliberate actions, municipal guides ensure that their interactions with visitors are not only effective but also contribute to a sense of trust and comfort. John said during the interview:

"I always stand up, for example, because I do not feel comfortable sitting down. There is something about having a bit more presence, maybe because you are standing up and can see more of what is happening. You seem more accommodating and service-minded, I think."

This indicates that the guidance counselors are aware of the visual interaction in the reception area, compared to the audio-based communication on the phone. By welcoming visitors in a relaxed manner and with a smile, they can make residents feel welcome. Most municipal guides try to avoid sitting and hiding behind the computer screen because they get a sense that they actually want to be accessible. This is not just a practical strategy but also a way to communicate symbolically with visitors. By choosing to display a certain attitude and behave in a particular way, they use symbolic interaction to create an atmosphere of trust and openness (Goffman 2021). Through these actions, municipal guides ensure that their interactions with visitors are not only effective but also contribute to a sense of trust and comfort, thereby fostering positive connections and a welcoming environment. This also makes them more attentive to who enters the building and keeps an eye on them.

After initially assessing the residents and trying to place them in a suitable category, most female municipal guides expressed in response to the question about their adaptability in interacting with diverse individuals, that they are highly adaptable. This ability to adapt to various situations and personalities is crucial for creating a positive interaction and experience for the customer. As one of the women guidance counselors Linda expresses:

"I adapt a lot to the customer. If an old lady who is slow comes in, then I play with the soft or slightly friendlier approach, then I comment on something. But if someone comes in who is very agitated, then I mostly listen until they calm down, so I adapt a lot depending on the person in front of me. But I think I have pretty open body language, so this calmness spreads to the angry customer."

It is clear that this adaptability is not just about changing their way of communicating, but also about radiating a certain energy or calmness that can affect the customer's mood. It demonstrates a high level of awareness and empathy towards other people's needs and feelings.

This understanding of symbolic interaction is also crucial when it comes to dealing with different types of visitors, including those who may be perceived as threatening or challenging. In my question about how the municipal guidance officers handle threatening situations where they feel afraid, the majority of them responded that they do not try to show any signs of being threatened or scared because they know that the person they are dealing with will exploit this situation to try to overpower them and believe they can get their way by acting in any manner. By maintaining their composure and handling situations in a low-affective manner, the counselors not only show respect towards the visitors but also use symbolic behavior to transform the interaction into a more positive and constructive experience (Goffman 2021). They achieve this by attentively hearing out the person's worries, validating their feelings and responding to their requirements with a composed and empathetic approach. Through this display of empathy and comprehension, they strive to calm the situation, build confidence, and encourage teamwork and cooperation, effectively converting a potentially adverse interaction into a constructive conversation. However, most municipal guides continued to express frustration to me without me encouraging them about situations where visitors may indeed try to provoke them. I sensed during this time

that they felt easily irritated and perhaps a sense of hopelessness during these moments, but they noted that the important thing is not to try to overcome this by informing them that if they do not calm down, they will have to call for help. In this context, municipal guides act on the "front stage" when interacting with visitors. Their role requires them to carefully manage their emotions and reactions to maintain a professional demeanor, despite any provocations they may encounter. The frustration and hopelessness they feel are emotions they typically must conceal while performing their duties. Instead, they present a calm and composed outward facade to visitors. Informing visitors that they will call for assistance if they do not calm down is part of their "front stage" performance. This is a controlled and deliberate response aimed at de-escalating the situation while maintaining their authority and the reputation expected in their role. Margot said during the interview:

"I remember one time when a visitor became very upset and started raising their voice at me. Instead of responding with anger, I tried to understand what caused their upset and communicate clearly to solve the problem."

David said during the interview:

"I keep calm even for those who are aggressive, so I try not to use so much body language or show in any way that I am scared. I try to listen clearly to what the person has to say but sometimes it is also necessary to tell people who continue to threaten or be aggressive that unfortunately, I have to call for help if they do not calm down."

The municipal guides agree that it is not their place to lecture or educate or provoke any person, but it is about gaining respect. They can see that the person is stressed and they see that it is very difficult for them so they adapt their behavior as much as they can without compromising based on their professional standpoint.

A recurring issue that emerged between the lines in the interviews concerns threatening residents. There are residents who come to the reception and confuse the municipal guides with the social workers in the municipal building. They have sensitive and urgent matters that they demand the municipal guides to resolve on the spot. When the municipal guides try to explain

that it is not their role, but that they can forward messages to the respective social workers via their encrypted system, the residents can become very aggressive and angry, especially when the social worker is not available that day. These moments, when residents cannot get what they want due to various reasons, become critical for impression management. When municipal guides cannot meet residents' immediate demands, they must balance managing the situation with preserving their professional reputation. By showing empathy and understanding, the guides seek to reduce residents' frustration and demonstrate that they take their situation seriously. They clearly explain their role and what they can do while maintaining a calm and composed demeanor. This impression management helps calm the situation and shows that the municipal guides are competent and responsible, which is crucial for managing conflicts and ensuring a safe working environment.

Luna said during the interview:

"I sometimes feel that many who come into the reception, well, they do not really know what we do or what they can expect. Some expect us to just be receptionists, while others expect us to be able to save their lives. There are really highs and lows, and there I find it difficult to show what I can do as a municipal guide because not many know what I can and cannot do."

Isabella said during the interview:

"You know, those customers who just demand and demand and think everyone else is an idiot and they have their rights to get emergency help immediately. Repeat visitors who just demand from you. They have a special style that they go on about every time. Their attitude is that they should just have it and everyone else should serve, everyone else should help now. It is different when someone says, 'Could you please help me, I am really stressed,' then it's much nicer and more enjoyable to help someone than to be met with, 'This is really important, you have to help me now!'"

These situations are described as some of the most challenging because not only do they have to try to calm the person down but also find a solution. In many cases, the message reaches social workers who take over the case, but when they are not present and the resident shows significant frustration and threatening behavior, municipal guides must call an emergency number to get help with issues related to the case. If it is impossible to resolve the situation immediately

because it must be handled by social workers, municipal guides prepare to deal with potential physical aggression from the threatening resident, which may be linked to symbolic interaction in the past since they have experienced this before, and it's a recurring problem. By keeping experiences from similar incidents in mind, they develop strategies to handle threatening situations effectively. Their preparations often involve creating a calm and safe environment, maintaining a safe distance and communicating respectfully to avoid escalating the conflict further. By leveraging their past experiences and applying the principles of symbolic interactionism, municipal guides can navigate through these challenging situations and protect both themselves and the residents from harm. The physical aggression may not be directed towards the municipal guide but could also involve damaging items in the reception area or kicking objects. However, it seemed that the municipal guides, when talking about this, were a bit nervous about the physical violence being directed at them. Although not all municipal guides have experienced this, they have heard about specific incidents affecting some of their colleagues, making them vigilant. In threatening situations, this is always in the back of their minds, that a similar incident could happen right now. This may mean they stay close to the alarms in the reception or use the panic button while not showing this fear to the threatening visitor in front of them. Thomas said during the interview:

"I have heard that visitors here have spat on colleagues but also thrown things and threatened them. It is difficult to see what triggers people to become threatening, but what I can say is that these individuals are in a situation where they are vulnerable and they need help, but sometimes when they are denied assistance from social services, they can act in a negative way. Then, they direct their actions towards the municipal guides at the reception."

However, something that I did not expect which emerged during the interviews regarding threatening situations was that not every threatening situation may necessarily be directed towards the municipal guides, but that there may also be intentions behind it as described in this quote also by Thomas:

"I felt it was a threatening situation. An example of this is when a user wanted to throw a chair over the reception counter. And he did not do it because he was angry at me personally. He wanted to do it so that we would sound the alarm. So there was an intention behind that action. He wanted us to sound the alarm because he was dissatisfied with the decision he had received and he wanted to talk to the police."

Since the alarms sound throughout the building and can escalate the situation, the two individuals at the reception use a code word for one of them to discreetly step out and inform a colleague to call the police. This is to avoid escalating the situation and putting themselves in greater danger if the visitor discovers that they have alerted authorities. In this scenario, two individuals at the reception use a code word to discreetly signal to a colleague to call the police when a situation escalates. This is not just about managing immediate danger but also about protecting their own face and social status. According to Goffman's theory of facework, it is important for people to avoid losing face, which can impact their self-esteem and social standing. By using strategies to avoid publicly acknowledging risks or weaknesses, they demonstrate how they navigate the situation considering both safety and preservation of their own status. This illustrates how the theory of facework can be applied in real-life situations where individuals deal with threatening or risky situations.

A question that was not initially planned in my interview guide but came up during my initial interviews, I continued to ask it in my subsequent interviews. It is about whether municipal guides feel safe wearing their personal alarm when they are at the reception. The majority of municipal guides described that they do not feel safer with the alarm, as it takes time for help to arrive and the alarm also sounds very loudly. Cláudia said during the interview:

"I know I can press the alarm, but then I think it takes so long for someone to come, and it is pretty easy to jump over our desk if someone wants to, so I am not sure if it makes me feel really secure. But it depends on what it is, if it is just someone being generally rowdy and yelling and starting to throw things, then you can press the alarm, but if it is someone coming at you with a sword or a weapon and starts swinging, then it is not as simple."

Especially if you have to go out from the reception to the visitors' printer in the lobby, there is always a risk of being exposed."

Patricia said during the interview that:

"The alarm does not specify the exact location of where I am attacked, it just says it is on the ground floor. There must be alarms that show where exactly you are. Otherwise, there is no point in even having them."

One person pointed out without me even asking this specific question, that unfortunately there is not a guard available all the time in the foyer in front of the reception, as this could have deterred residents from behaving as they please. They compared it to another large municipality that has a security guard there constantly, and it is evident how much calmer their environment has become. The majority of municipal guides also described how during the COVID-19 period, they had plexiglass shields between the resident and the municipal guides at the reception, and that is when they felt safest standing at the reception. The stress was less about preparing for potential physical aggression and they felt that residents were more grateful for the help they received and felt more respected. However, this is not something that remains in the reception today. This was something I had no idea existed and therefore had not thought to ask them how it affected them, but it emerged during my interviews and I continued to ask them further to other municipal guides who worked there during the COVID-19 period. David also said during the interview:

"I myself have written to my boss several times about this with plexiglass, but the boss wanted it to be open and welcoming in the reception."

Patricia also said that:

"I usually say that something has to happen before they understand the danger we are exposed to. We are waiting for it, unfortunately, someone has to be affected first."

When the plexiglass was taken down after the COVID-19 period calmed down, almost all municipal guides were very sad about this, this was something I could see very clearly in their

facial expressions when they described this. They have even complained to higher-ups in hopes of getting the protection back. Right now, they feel very exposed in an environment where they can not predict who might become aggressive and who might not. Some were frustrated and argued that there is a fear that something very dangerous might happen one day and it seems like something serious has to happen for their need for extra protection in the form of a guard and plexiglass to be taken seriously. Patricia expressed further during the interview that:

"I have thought about the idea that the day someone comes in here with a weapon, what do we do then? It has not happened yet as far as I know, but I have thought about it. Then you are pretty screwed because many people think we are social services, but we only represent them."

When municipal guides express concern that their need for extra protection is not taken seriously, it highlights a deeply rooted sense of vulnerability and fear of being stigmatized, according to Goffman's concept of stigma. In Goffman's theory, stigma is linked to the negative labeling or deviation that an individual or group may experience due to a certain trait or condition deemed deviant by societal norms. In this case, municipal guides may feel that their need for extra protection is considered less important or not taken seriously by their superiors. This experience can lead to a feeling of their voices being ignored or not given the attention and respect they deserve. They may feel that their concerns for their safety and well-being are not taken seriously, creating a sense of powerlessness and insecurity.

They themselves further delved into the discussion during the interviews about how they are currently very vigilant when residents come in with large bags or leave their bags at the reception to go to the bathroom. They never know what it might entail and if there might be a weapon in the bag. If the bag is left unattended for a longer period, they must report it and possibly call for a guard. This highlights how they interpret and react to symbols and actions in their work environment. By being vigilant about such actions, they try to anticipate potential risks and manage them safely. Their experiences and reactions are shaped by the symbolic significance of these actions in their work context. Although many were not comfortable talking about this specifically, I could still sense that they wanted to convey their viewpoints. Many described it as

particularly difficult when there are many visitors in the reception and they do not always have time to monitor everything happening outside the reception in the foyer while helping other visitors. Therefore, a guard circulating there all the time would be very helpful and make these municipal guides feel even more relaxed. Sophie said during the interview:

"When you are busy with someone, you do not always think about it, so then it could be something quite unusual or they come in and shout and so on. Then it is a bit more obvious. But otherwise, I think you might put the tag on maybe until they reach the desk before you notice that it is important."

When municipal guides express a desire for a continuously circulating guard in the reception to increase their sense of security, it indicates their efforts to create a symbolically safe environment by relying on institutional measures and the physical presence of authorities. Furthermore, when they emphasize the importance of feeling safe in the company of their colleagues, it reflects how social relationships and collaboration contribute to their symbolic perception of security and support in the work environment. Since there is not a guard circulating there constantly, I asked them what their solution to feeling less insecure in the reception is, and they were all very quick to respond that instead, they feel safer in the company of their colleagues. Because there are two municipal guides in the reception, they can rely on each other to help in threatening situations, for example, one going behind the reception to alert the police and then helping the other colleague to also come in and then closing the door from the inside.

5.2.2 Language

As I mentioned earlier, guidance counselors consider the potential needs of visitors in the initial stage of identifying and assessing them, where language plays a crucial role. Since the majority of visitors are foreign, many municipal guides employed at the citizen center possess various language skills. The primary languages spoken by visitors are Arabic and Afghan, but other languages such as Tigrinya may also occur. In this interaction, we can see how symbolic

interaction (Goffman, 2021) comes into play as guidance counselors interpret signals and behaviors to shape symbolic meanings around communication.

In the initial interaction between the municipal guides and the resident, the municipal guides, in response to my question about their experience when they see visitors come into the reception, explained that they already assess which language is needed to assist the visitor in the best possible way. Sometimes the municipal guides may already have knowledge of the required language and recognize the person from previous encounters or typical features in their appearance. In other cases, the municipal guide may not speak the needed language and feel that this could be problematic, mentally preparing themselves for how to handle the situation.

Typical features that municipal guides rely on to determine if extra language assistance is needed are when the person has a foreign appearance with dark features. In some cases, however, the visitor may communicate in Swedish or fluently, but since the majority of those who need language assistance are foreign, it is common to draw that conclusion. I realized that the majority of the municipal guides who stated that they could anticipate which language the visitor might speak were themselves multicultural. However, those who only spoke Swedish and English did not find it as easy to predict which language the visitors spoke, but they could still sense the need for language assistance if the visitors had dark features. This interpretive moment reflects symbolic interaction where meaning is created through social interaction and how individuals interpret each other's signals (Goffman 2021). The municipal guides interpret these visual cues based on their past experiences, cultural background and societal norms. For example, they may have learned through previous encounters that individuals with certain physical characteristics often require language assistance.

When municipal guides assess the language needs of a resident, symbolic interactionism, as described by Goffman, can explain the process. The counselor uses symbolic cues, such as the resident's appearance and past interactions, to interpret their language needs. These cues are socially constructed symbols that help the counselor predict whether assistance is needed. This interpretive act reflects how meanings are created through social interactions and influenced by societal norms. By preparing for potential language barriers, the municipal guides manages the

interaction to maintain a positive and helpful impression, illustrating Goffman's concept of impression management.

When I asked the municipal guides which language they primarily communicate in, the majority of them responded that they often try to communicate in Swedish first. However, when I inquired about what they do in cases where the guidance counselor does not speak the visitor's language, they are prepared to adapt and utilize various communication strategies to ensure that residents understand. This may involve using simpler words, gestures, or translation tools like Google Translate. This adaptation and flexibility can be seen as an expression of impression management (Goffman 2002), where they strive to create and maintain a positive image of themselves in front of visitors. Alternatively, they may fetch colleagues who are not as multilingual but speak the visitor's language. They modify their behavior to ensure effective communication, aiming to present themselves as competent and helpful. This effort to manage impressions includes using gestures, simplifying language or seeking help from colleagues. All these actions are part of their strategy to maintain a positive image and ensure that the interaction goes smoothly, reflecting their professional role and commitment to assisting residents effectively. Sophie said during the interview:

"I point a lot so that they understand what I mean and also speak slowly. Then I can go and get a colleague if that person is available. But I have tried to learn some phrases primarily in Arabic since it is the primary language that the residents who come in speak."

It was evident that there was a concern in the municipal guides tone when they explained that if they cannot find an available colleague who speaks the visitor's language, they may feel concerned about how to resolve the situation. Despite their willingness to assist the visitor, they are faced with a dilemma about how to proceed. Many municipal guides who do not speak multiple languages try to somehow prepare themselves for visits they know may be problematic. The municipal guides who are not multilingual explained that they have collectively created a list of words and phrases in the most common languages, which they have prepared on a list at the reception. These can serve as a solution to trying to help residents understand that they do not speak their language but can refer the visitor, for example, to a time when there are more guidance counselors with different language skills available to assist them.

In cases where municipal guides have knowledge of multiple languages, they get a feeling right away when they see visitors with a foreign background. They can quickly determine and categorize them, either that they speak other languages, but even more clearly that they speak their common language. At that moment, they can decide whether to interact directly with the visitor in their common language or to let the visitor ask for help in that language. My question was, "If you know their language, do you interact directly in that language, or do you prefer to use Swedish?" Most municipal guides responded that they let the visitor first communicate in Swedish to see if they can express themselves; it can also be good practice for them to become more confident in the Swedish language and try to communicate. But in many cases, when communication becomes difficult to understand, they let the visitor first ask if the municipal guides understands their language and if so, if they can get help in that language. Then, municipal guides are quick to switch to that language. This smooth transition reflects impression management (Goffman 2002), where municipal guides adjust their behavior to facilitate communication and create a positive experience for visitors. This shows their flexibility and commitment to effective communication. By doing so, they ensure the visitor feels understood and respected, which helps build a positive rapport and reinforces the municipal guides image as helpful and competent. Thomas said during the interview:

"For residents who speak my own language, I think it positively affects communication from their perspective because it gives them an opportunity to perhaps talk a little more and communicate more with me. It also gives them a chance to feel comfortable with me, which can lead to them seeing me more as a friend than a service person or a bureaucratic person helping them. I think it is very human to be attracted to what you are comfortable with. They become happy and even say; I'm so glad it is you who is here and can help me."

However, what emerged during the interviews after asking this question was that it also becomes problematic for these municipal guides who assist visitors in their language when visitors expect to receive help from the same municipal guides next time they come to the reception. By then, they have already built up a sense of comfort and know they can get help more quickly without

exerting much effort. If the municipal guides is not available at the reception desk at that moment, the visitor may still come in very determinedly and ask to speak only with the same municipal guides who helped them last time. This puts the municipal guides who actually have reception hours in a difficult situation because they naturally want to try and see if they can help the visitor first, but it becomes challenging when they do not have any other choice. I could sense that it felt uncomfortable for them to talk about this, and I had to press a bit to get information about it, perhaps because it made them feel that they cannot perform their job properly when they need to try to see if the colleague who helped them before is available, but it becomes even more problematic when that municipal guides gets stuck in the reception for half an hour due to a demanding issue the visitor had. If the municipal guides then left their phone hours to come to the reception, it means that other colleagues who had phone hours are left alone to answer all the calls. So it would be best if these visitors do not exclusively seek assistance from municipal guides who speak their language but also try to get help from other guidance counselors who are available at the reception desk at that time, as best as they can. Anna said during the interview that:

"In many cases, they want to talk to colleagues who already know their language. Then it is easy to just go and get the colleague who can come out to the reception and talk to them. But I usually handle it so that I know that sometimes some can understand considerably more Swedish than they think because they are also comfortable with having a colleague who speaks their language."

Most of the time, municipal guides believe that visitors understand more Swedish than they themselves think. This was expressed during the interviews and felt in a way that they were trying to convey that visitors can take advantage of the situation by choosing comfort over trying. Most had witnessed situations where they have said, "Let us try together," and visitors become happy when things eventually work out. Municipal guides aim to show compassion by expressing their willingness to help and acknowledging the difficulty with the Swedish language, but emphasizing that together, they can assist each other. This helps visitors perceive themselves in the role of someone who shows compassion. It also gives a sense of satisfaction to municipal guides since they constantly have to focus on providing service and assistance, aiming for

visitors to become independent and not reliant on them, which they also expressed with a smile and a sense of pride.

5.3 Gender

Understanding the role of gender in municipal guidance requires looking at both the experiences of citizens seeking assistance and the practices of the municipal guides. Gender can shape interactions, perceptions and the overall effectiveness of the communication and support provided. This section explores two key aspects of gender in this context: gender as it relates to the citizens and gender as it pertains to the municipal guides. By examining these two aspects, we can better understand how gender dynamics influence the provision and reception of municipal guidance, ultimately leading to more equitable and effective support for all residents.

5.3.1 Initial Stage

In the initial stage when visitors enter the reception area, it does not matter whether they are women or men; the municipal guides instinctive reaction is the same - to be ready to help and guide in the best possible way. However, it is impossible to determine how visitors perceive municipal guides based on their gender, but I will delve into that further later.

Municipal guides tell me that they are being prepared to assist visitors in the reception area regardless of their gender when I ask them how they position themselves in their role as a municipal guide in the reception. Despite that it is still important to understand their thoughts and feelings about how they perceive different visitors based on past experiences in the reception area. Something that the majority of municipal guides brought up in response to that question was that the majority of incidents that escalate in the reception involve male visitors, it is natural for municipal guides to feel a certain level of concern or need to be extra attentive when male visitors enter. Elsa said during the interview that:

"It is definitely men who most often are involved in incidents that escalate in the reception. So, we always strive to treat everyone with the same respect and professionalism, but our past experiences influence how we mentally prepare when men enter. We have learned to be extra vigilant and ready to handle potential conflicts, which unfortunately can lead to a certain prejudice. But our goal is always to create a safe and welcoming environment for everyone."

This strongly relates from the municipal guides to Goffmans symbolic interaction in the past because of how social interactions are influenced by societal norms and past experiences. The municipal guides perceptions and reactions are shaped by their cumulative interactions, which create a framework for understanding and responding to various situations. In the reception area, the municipal guides are extra watchful with male visitors to keep things under control and make sure everyone is safe. This is part of what Goffman calls "impression management." It means they adjust how they act to create a certain impression or image. They do this because of past experiences where male visitors have sometimes been difficult. So, municipal guides change how they do things based on what they hve seen before, to make sure everyone feels safe and supported, and to avoid conflicts. Through the residents point of view explanation based on Connell's (2006) theory of hegemonic masculinity, where men may feel pressure to display dominance and control in social interactions. In an environment like the reception, where power dynamics and status play a role, some male visitors may react with challenging behaviors to affirm their masculinity (Connell, 2006). This can lead to increased incidents that guidance counselors have to manage.

Something that the majority of municipal guides agreed on after I asked if there was any difference in how visitors approaching the reception interact with municipal guides based on their gender, they responded that female visitors often tend to be more direct in their requests for help and may have urgent matters, especially if they have children with them. However, male visitors may be more reserved and avoid eye contact, making it harder for guidance counselors to assess their needs and how best to assist them. It can be a challenge to balance being attentive and cautious without letting biases affect the treatment of visitors. Women's direct behavior and men's reserved behavior in the reception can be seen as expressions of social norms and

expectations within symbolic interactionism. Connell's theory of hegemonic masculinity explains how norms of masculinity influence men's behavior, while women's behavior may be linked to caregiving and responsibility.

But a recurring response from municipal guides during the interviews on the same topic was that there are returning visitors who are known to be more demanding in terms of having a fiery temperament and low stress tolerance, so one does not really know what to expect from them this time but to keep an extra eye on them. But what touched me during this discussion was that the majority of guidance counselors themselves explained that despite this, they do not associate the incident with the person but rather with the situation that the person was in. Luna said during the interview that;

"It is something I've learned when you have so much contact with people that everyone can have bad days, and I now choose to think that maybe that person had a really bad day. Then I think, well, now we have a new day and it can be as good as anything, and then I become more relaxed about it. But I also think in a way that it is more fair to that person because that person is so much more than the stress reaction they showed once with us. It would be really stupid if that one time or maybe two times also should influence how it will be in the future."

In this situation, we can apply both Goffman's dramaturgical perspective, which is part of symbolic interactionism, and Connell's theory of hegemonic masculinity to understand how municipal guides handle recurring visitors with challenging behaviors. Goffman's perspective likens social interaction to a theater where everyone plays different roles, which explains why municipal guides may expect certain behavioral patterns from returning visitors. Connell's theory of hegemonic masculinity is also relevant here because visitors' aggressiveness and low stress management can be interpreted as following norms of masculinity that emphasize dominance and aggression. By not associating visitors' behavior with their personal characters, municipal guides avoid stereotypes about masculinity and instead see the individual behind the behavior.

Regarding whether municipal guides believe their gender plays a role in how they are treated by visitors, the majority of both male and female guidance guides believe that gender plays a role in how residents interact with them. Regarding safety aspects, most female guidance note that their male colleagues may have advantages, as clients sometimes are more alert towards them and do not behave in the same manner as they would with a woman. This response came a bit irritated in tone, and I could sense a certain sense of injustice in it. Linda said during the interview that:

"I notice with my colleagues that if one of my male colleagues answers a very simple question, it is almost like; wow, thanks for being so competent, but if I had done the same thing, I might even be perceived as unfriendly, and it does not matter what gender the resident is to perceive us like this. Then I think that if you get to know all of us, I do not think you make that judgment, but at the first beginning, you might."

This quote can be linked to Connell's theory of complicit masculinity (Connell 2006), which emphasizes how gender power dynamics affect interactions in the workplace. Through this example, it illustrates how gender patterns and expectations can influence assessments of competence and kindness. Even though some male guides may not actively defend traditional gender roles or power structures, they may unconsciously benefit from gender-related privileges without challenging them (Connell 2006). This in turn, can contribute to perpetuating inequalities and reinforcing traditional norms in the work environment. In order to create a more inclusive and gender-equal workplace where assessments are based on competence rather than gender, understanding these power relations between genders is important.

What I didn't expect to emerge during the interview from the female municipal guides was that they all, at some point during their time working here, have encountered cases with well-educated visitors that speak in a condescending manner towards them. Despite sensing their sensitivity to discuss this, they felt comfortable opening up to me because I had been their colleague during my internship, and they could feel that sense of security in confiding in me. They explained that these men may hold preconceived notions about their competence and ability to provide the help they need, and it becomes a challenge for female municipal guides to address such situations, but they still strive to do their best to demonstrate that they are competent and capable of providing excellent service. Linda also said during the interview;

"It can be at the beginning of a conversation that they belittle me. They would never do that to a male colleague, for example, and that says more about gender stereotypes than it has to do with me, because as a woman, I can surprise them with factual knowledge. I try first to overcome this obstacle to convince that it pays off to talk to me and it pays off to ask me questions because I can answer, or I can help you."

The female municipal guides experience stigma related to their gender. Sometimes, they are confronted with condescending remarks from well-educated visitors, likely due to preconceived notions about their ability based on gender. This highlights Goffman's theory of social distancing and diminishment of stigmatized characteristics. To manage this stigma, they use strategies described by Goffman as "stigmatic work." They actively strive to prove their competence and capability, which serves as an attempt to control their impression and counteract the negative consequences of their stigmatized status. Their stories provide insight into how they navigate and confront prejudice and discrimination in their professional lives, demonstrating the importance of understanding and addressing gender stigma in the workplace. Additionally, Connell's theory of power and status is used here to explain behavioral patterns in some visitors. According to the theory, men who perceive a threat to their own status may react by demeaning women in authoritative positions. This reaction can be a way for them to restore their own sense of power and status in the interaction. Thus, when well-educated visitors speak condescendingly to female guidance counselors, it may partly be a consequence of these visitors' perceived threat to their own status. By demeaning female authorities, these visitors may attempt to restore their own power and status in the interaction. This pattern of behavior can explain why some visitors react in a condescending manner towards female guidance counselors, further reinforcing gender stigma and challenges in their work environment.

Female municipal guides can only do what they can and showcase their competence through their work. It is important for them to remain aware of all aspects of their communication and presentation, from how they stand to how they speak, to create a professional and reliable experience for visitors. This can be linked to Goffman's concept of the "front stage," which represents the part of the interaction where individuals perform their roles in front of the

audience (Goffman 2021); in this case, it becomes the visitors. By demonstrating their expertise and willingness to help, they can earn respect and trust from even the most skeptical visitors.

When I asked how they feel during these interactions and what emotions arise, the majority of them responded without hesitation that during the actual interaction with the resident, municipal guides often do not have time to reflect on how stressful the situation might be. Instead, their focus is primarily on resolving the situation as quickly and efficiently as possible. It is only after the interaction that they may realize the emotional strain and the need to take a short break to recover. However, they pointed out that handling demanding situations and conflicts can be mentally exhausting for them. It can be challenging to manage all the emotions and stress that arise during an interaction with a difficult resident. Therefore, it is important for them to be able to take time to gather themselves and recover afterward. By taking a few minutes for themselves and perhaps talking to a colleague, municipal guides can give themselves the opportunity to process the situation and regain their mental balance, which can be linked to Goffman's concept of the "back stage," which is the private sphere where individuals prepare for and reflect on the interaction (Goffman 2021). This allows them to return to their work with renewed energy and clarity, ready to face the next challenge with calmness and professionalism. This was something that I heard from the majority of the female municipal guides who experience similar feelings. However, they found it reassuring to have a supervisor on-site for the day whom they could turn to when they needed extra support or to talk things over after a tough case.

5.3.2 Continuation

When it comes to the approach of municipal guides, male and female colleagues responded that they work differently in their interactions with visitors. The male municipal guides mentioned that they perceive their female colleagues to tend to be soft and welcoming in their initial interactions with visitors, while the female municipal guides noted that their male colleagues may sometimes be more concise in their communication. The women also acknowledged that they themselves may face a different type of pressure when it comes to being warm and nurturing. This is something I also noticed during my internship, and I can admit that I leaned

towards the softer side compared to my male colleagues. On the other hand, David said during the interview:

"I see it as an advantage to be a male receptionist sometimes because the majority of receptionists in the reception are women and are very friendly, so if residents see us, they might think differently and take it a bit easier."

This could also be because these male municipal guides responded by noting that they perceive themselves as more action-oriented by taking initiative and leading conversations. They believe that if they show emotions and perhaps compassion as a woman, visitors are likely to believe they can manipulate them or that they have more room to be tough and override them. This type of behavior can be seen as a way to uphold hegemonic masculinity, where masculine traits such as decisiveness and authority are rewarded and idealized (Connell, 2006). However, what was not as straightforward to extract, and I had to press a bit, was that male municipal guides may be unwilling to show emotions or compassion because they fear it could undermine their position within the masculine hierarchy. This fear of showing vulnerability may be rooted in the norms of hegemonic masculinity, which dictate that men should be tough and controlled in all situations (Connell, 2006).

One expected observation was when male municipal guides mentioned that they have witnessed visitors who are aggressive or dissatisfied preferentially seeking out the female municipal guides, even though a male colleague is also available beside her. They also argue that intervening to help would not be helpful as it might provoke the visitor further, with the visitor yelling that they do not speak to him but to her. However, the male colleagues expressed frustration with large hand gestures during the interviews when they told me that they have tried to advise their female colleagues not to be too kind, that is, not to show too much emotion in their approach but instead set boundaries.

During the interviews, I noticed when asking questions about how municipal guides handle their emotions when they feel scared or uncomfortable during interactions with visitors in the reception area, where women were very quick to describe their emotions, while the majority of men claimed they had never felt scared on any occasion and that there is almost nothing that

could cause them to feel these emotions. So, therefore I did not further ask them questions about this because it was not entirely comfortable for them to answer that question, resulting in very direct and firm answers from the men. I believe this also indicates Connell's theory of hegemonic masculinity (Connell 2006), where men are often encouraged to suppress emotions like fear or vulnerability to maintain an image of strength and control. By denying or minimizing their own emotions, male municipal guides conform to the hegemonic norm that dictates men should be unaffected and unwavering in the face of challenges or dangers (Connell 2006). This is further underscored by this quote from David:

"We men are born as boys and then immediately become men, but we do not get the same opportunity as women to explore different emotions and expressions. This is because societal expectations and norms about how men should behave often limit our ability to be open and authentic when it comes to our feelings."

Despite the expectation for municipal guides to greet residents warmly and with a smile, many male municipal guides have stated that they still struggle with this as they find it challenging to pretend to be someone they are not. It was perceived as burdensome in their gaze when they mentioned that they are working on improving their approach but also consider how they would have wanted to be treated if they were the visitors seeking help; they would have preferred straightforward answers instead of pity. However, on the other hand, a male municipal guides can be seen as more authoritative and practical, which may suit a visitor seeking concrete advice or solutions.

In response to my question about whether visitors' gender can significantly impact their interactions with municipal guides, it emerged that it can. The women mentioned that if they fail to assist a visitor and answer their question, a male visitor may attribute it to her gender, assuming she cannot keep up. This is because they have heard comments about it, although when I tried to get examples of such comments, it wasn't as forthcoming, but it could be more responses like, Thessa said during the interview:

"Maybe if you spent less time braiding your hair and more time giving advice, I wouldn't have to wait so long."

Goffman's theory of stigma and social roles applies to these situations where female municipal guides encounter comments about their appearance or stereotypical expectations of their competence. Comments focusing on women's appearance rather than their professional expertise illustrate how these women can be stigmatized based on gender and expectations of how they should behave or look in the workplace. This creates a sense of social distancing and minimization of their professional capacity based on gender. However, male colleagues also pointed out that there have been situations where female visitors may prefer speaking with female municipal guides as they feel safer opening up about sensitive matters or perceive female counselors as more empathetic and understanding of their needs and problems. In such cases, male colleagues can realize the impact of gender on how citizens perceive them, despite appreciating the citizens' honesty and respecting their preferences.

Similarly, a male visitor may prefer speaking with a male municipal guides, believing they can relate better and offer a more pragmatic and authoritative perspective on issues. On the other hand, female municipal guides may create a more open and supportive atmosphere, making a male visitor feel comfortable sharing their feelings and problems. By being aware of these dynamics, municipal guides can better meet visitors' individual needs and provide a more inclusive and supportive service. Male colleagues' reflections on visitors' preferences when it comes to choosing between male or female municipal guides can be explained using Connell's theory of power and status. When female visitors choose to speak with female municipal guides based on their perceived increased empathy and understanding, it reflects how social power dynamics influence interactions. Female municipal guides are often seen as more empathetic and understanding due to stereotypes and expectations of women as caring and attentive. On the other hand, male visitors may prefer to speak with male counselors because they believe they can offer a more pragmatic and authoritative perspective, reflecting stereotypes of men as rational and authoritative.

6. Summary and final conclusion

In the concluding chapter of this thesis, the analyses are summarized, and conclusions are drawn from both the analysis and the previously reviewed literature. Furthermore, potential avenues for future research are explored.

6.1 Summary of the analysis

The aim of this article has been to examine the patterns of impression management in municipal guides' interactions with residents in Lund Municipality. In total, fifteen municipal guides from Lund Municipality participated in semi-structured interviews, representing the majority of municipal guides there. Thus, the study can draw well-founded conclusions that represent almost all municipal guides in the municipality. By thoroughly investigating how municipal guides interpret and respond to residents' needs and expectations within the framework of symbolic interactionism, it captures something that has not previously been addressed within this framework. It provides insight into the patterns that influence their interactions and relationships. The research question is as follows:

What are the patterns of impression management in municipal guides' interaction with residents in Lund Municipality?

This research question is answered through first implementing a qualitative content analysis that primarily relies on the municipal guides own experiences of their interactions with residents, which can be associated with an abductive method. By using abductive reasoning, municipal guides' experiences are meaningfully integrated with theories that align with them. However, Goffman's theory of symbolic interactionism is not only a theory but also a framework of analysis. By applying this theory, a gender analysis based on symbolic interactionism was conducted. According to my findings in my analysis chapter, there are patterns of impression management in municipal guides' interaction with residents in Lund Municipality through 2 aspects: 1. The interaction between municipal guides and customers in the moment and 2. Gender. In the following section, the analysis conclusion will be presented:

6.1.1 The interaction between municipal guidance officers and customers in the moment

Municipal guides face a multitude of challenges and situations due to various factors that affect their work and interactions with visitors. Many people have different personalities and behaviors, stereotypes that can influence expectations and reactions, gender, which can play a role in perceptions and interactions, as well as different life experiences and crises that visitors may have undergone. Disappointment and language barriers are also factors that affect communication and interaction in the reception area. Impression management is a tool within symbolic interactionism to explain one aspect, whereas symbolic interactionism encompasses a broader scope, aiming to facilitate social harmony while addressing individual needs. Handling this diversity of factors requires that municipal guidance officers are attentive, adaptable, and aware of both verbal and non-verbal communication to create a positive and meaningful experience for visitors.

6.1.2 Gender

Gender plays a significant role in the work and experiences of municipal guides. Women and men work differently and manage impressions differently; the management of their impression is different, which affects their experiences with different situations. For female municipal guides, challenges may arise where their competence is sometimes questioned, while male municipal guides may experience advantages by being perceived as more assertive and authoritative. This differentiation is reflected in how they manage impressions, where female municipal guides may focus more on being warm and empathetic, while male municipal guides may strive to give a more authoritative impression. These gender patterns can be linked to hegemonic masculinity, where masculine traits are rewarded, and feminine traits are expected to be warm and nurturing. However, female municipal guides officers may perhaps be stigmatized for not meeting expectations of authority and power, while male colleagues may be stigmatized for not showing enough empathy and warmth.

Despite these expectations, it is crucial for municipal guides officers to take care of their own mental health by taking breaks and reflecting on their interactions to create a more inclusive and supportive work environment. By integrating insights from these gender patterns into the development of future strategies and actions, we can work towards a more efficient and supportive environment for both female and male municipal guides. This includes continued promotion of adaptability, empathy and awareness of gender patterns to create a workplace where everyone feels welcome and respected. By addressing these challenges and building on existing successes, we can continue to improve the quality of service we provide and increase the well-being of both municipal guidance officers and visitors in the reception area.

6.2 Conclusion of analysis summary

In concluding the analysis, it becomes clear that impression management is a sophisticated and deliberate practice used by municipal guides in Lund Municipality to shape perceptions and achieve their goals. By skillfully managing their self-presentation, municipal guides navigate social interactions with residents, enhance their professional image, and handle challenging situations effectively. This analysis also highlights how gender, crisis situations and language intricately influence the strategies employed in impression management.

Gender dynamics significantly affect how municipal guides manage impressions. Societal norms and expectations around gender roles shape how they present themselves, from adopting stereotypical traits to adjusting their communication styles. These nuances reveal the complex interplay between gender identity and impression management tactics, especially in contexts where gender norms exert considerable influence.

In times of crisis, the role of impression management becomes even more critical as municipal guides work to manage perceptions amid uncertainty and adversity. Prompt and strategic communication is essential, with efforts focused on minimizing reputational damage, instilling confidence, and maintaining stakeholder trust. Effective crisis communication, characterized by transparency and strategic framing, is vital for maintaining the resilience of the municipal services.

Language also plays a crucial role in impression management, with linguistic choices serving as powerful tools for self-presentation and influencing interpretations. From persuasive rhetoric to subtle linguistic cues, municipal guides use language strategically to shape narratives, frame arguments, and create desired impressions. Understanding the subtleties of linguistic manipulation improves communicative effectiveness and helps achieve personal and professional objectives.

In summary, this analysis emphasizes the complex relationship between impression management strategies and factors like gender, crisis, and language. By adeptly recognizing and navigating these dynamics, municipal guides in Lund Municipality can enhance their communication skills, foster positive perceptions, and achieve desired outcomes in their interactions with residents.

6.3 Conclusion of literature review

This literature review emphasizes the need to integrate a customer service perspective in organizations, understanding the impact of positions on knowledge and perspectives, and the importance of public participation and an interactional view of citizenship to effectively meet the needs of both customers and citizens in various societal contexts.

This literature review highlights the importance of embracing a customer service perspective within organizations to enhance the efficiency and value of their services. Wagenheim and Reurink's (1991) work underscores the need for a cultural shift that includes output measurement, engagement from all employees, and support from management to prioritize the needs and expectations of customers. Furthermore, Janowitz and Delany's (1957) work shows that an individual's position within an organization matters for their knowledge and perspective. The study emphasizes that individuals at different hierarchical levels may have different insights into clients' needs and the organization's overall goals, which is relevant for municipal work to effectively meet the needs of residents. Thomas (2013) emphasizes the importance of public participation and citizen service in governance. By involving citizens in the decision-making process, access to market information can be increased, general acceptance of decisions can be achieved, and administrative performance can be improved, even though it entails potential

challenges. Finally, Colomy and Brown's (1996) work introduce the concept of "interactional citizenship," which emphasizes people's rights and responsibilities in their everyday interactions. This perspective contributes to a more comprehensive understanding of citizenship dynamics at the individual level and its impact on societal changes.

6.3.1 Reaction to the literature review

In reacting to the literature review, I find myself drawn to the idea that impression management serves as a tool for something broader, a notion that seems to have been somewhat downplayed, perhaps even by Goffman. I see my research as a response to this oversight, a way of contributing to the ongoing debate within this field of study.

While Goffman's work laid a foundational understanding of impression management, I believe there's more to it than meets the eye. My analysis of municipal guides' impression management practices in Lund Municipality delves into how gender dynamics, crisis situations, and language intricacies influence the strategies employed.

By recognizing these nuances, I aim to deepen the understanding of impression management and its broader implications. My research not only builds upon existing literature but also challenges prevailing theories, emphasizing the multifaceted nature of impression management within organizational contexts. Additionally, it's worth noting that the analysis might have taken a different direction had I not adopted a symbolic interactionist approach. Through this exploration, I hope to contribute meaningfully to the ongoing scholarly discourse on this subject.

6.4 Reflections on future research

An exciting direction for future research is to compare several municipalities' citizen service centers with each other, including both small and large municipalities. By conducting a cross-sectional study of different citizen service centers, we can gain a deeper understanding of best practices, challenges, and differences in the provision of public services. This type of comparative research could explore multiple dimensions, including service quality, accessibility, efficiency and customer satisfaction. By analyzing factors such as response times, service availability, staff competence and customer feedback, we can identify common patterns and differences among different citizen service centers. Including both small and large municipalities in the comparison would provide a diverse picture of how various resource constraints, population sizes and organizational structures affect the performance and efficiency of citizen service centers. This could contribute to a better understanding of the critical factors for creating successful citizen service centers and improving citizens' experience of public services.

8. References

Aamir, M. (2013). *Role of Contact Center for Smart Cities*. Pakistan Journal of Engineering Technology & Science.

Alan Bryman. (2012). *Social Research Methods*. 4th ed. Oxford.

Colomy, P & Brown, J. (1996). Goffman and Interactional Citizenship, Vol. 39, No. 3 (Autumn, 1996), pp. 371-381 (11 pages)

Connell, R. (2006). *Masculinites*. Second edition, University of California Press Berkeley and Los Angeles, California

Goffman, E. (2021). *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life*. University of Edinburgh Social Sciences Research Centre 39 George Square, Edinburgh S Monograph No. 2.

Goffman, E. (2002). *Jaget och maskerna: en studie i vardagslivets dramatik*. Enskede: TPB, 2002. 4 uppl. 2002. 238 sidor.

Goffman, E. (2012). *Stigma: den avvikandes roll och identitet*. Norstedts Akademiska Förlag. 3 uppl, första tryckningen. 176 sidor.

Irene, B (2014). *Local e-Government in Sweden: Municipal Contact Center implementation with focus on Citizens and Public Administrators*. Journal of Community Informatics, E-ISSN 1712-4441, Vol. 10, nr 1

Janowitz, M & Delany, W (1957). *The Bureaucrat and the Public: A Study of Informational Perspectives*. Vol. 2, No. 2 (Sep., 1957), pp. 141-162 (22 pages)

Lunds kommun (2024). *Välkommen till medborgarcenter! Hur kan jag hjälpa dig?* Updated: 2024-05-30

Thomas, J. (2013). *Citizen, Customer, Partner: Rethinking the Place of the Public in Public Management*, Vol. 73, No. 6 (NOVEMBER/DECEMBER 2013), pp. 786-796 (11 pages)

Wagenheim, G & Reurink, J. (1991). *Customer Service in Public Administration*. Vol. 51, No. 3 (May - Jun., 1991), pp. 263-270 (8 pages)

9. Appendix

9.1 Interview questions

Role-playing and emotional expression:

Describe how you embody your role as a municipal guide. How do you immerse yourself in it?

Do you see it as a form of theater?

How do you transition into the role of a municipal guide from the back office to the reception area?

Can you provide examples of how you express your emotions in your role as a municipal guide?

Your posture and manner of speaking?

Emotional expression and gender:

For female municipal guides:

Do you believe you show more emotions than your male colleagues? Why or why not?

Does age influence this?

For male municipal guides:

What advantages do you think you, as a man, have when standing at the reception and interacting with residents?

Do you think residents perceive it as uncertain when female colleagues show more emotions in their work? How does this affect your approach?

Dealing with difficult questions and emotional expression:

How do you handle situations where you don't have the answer to a resident's question? How does this affect your emotional expression and behavior?

Organizational expectations and emotional expression:

Are there any organizational expectations on how you should express emotions or act in your role as a municipal guide?

Fear and security assessment:

What criteria do you use to assess whether a person poses a threat when someone enters the reception area?

How do you manage fear or concern when someone enters the reception area?

Cultural awareness and language barriers:

How do you handle situations where residents speak different languages? If you know their language, do you interact directly in that language or do you prefer to use Swedish?

How would you react if a colleague "revealed" that you speak the same language as the resident?

Identity and power background:

How does your own identity and background affect your role as a municipal guide?

How do you handle situations where you feel that your "swedishized" identity may affect residents' trust in you?

Handling uncomfortable questions:

How do you react to uncomfortable questions? Do you answer directly to avoid showing uncertainty and losing face?

Trust and consequences:

How do you think you can gain trust from residents in your role as a municipal guide?

What do you think would be the consequences if you did not play your role correctly? Do you think you would be judged based on your background or identity?