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# Citizen Self-Presentation and Aggression in Ticket Fining Events: A Video Observational Study

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## ABSTRACT

Despite the risk of employee victimization, research on deviant citizen behavior in frontline encounters is limited. When passengers are issued a fine on the bus, they sometimes respond aggressively toward the ticket inspector. This article identifies how citizens present themselves in ticket fining events and examines how their self-representations are related with aggressive acts toward frontline workers. Data comprise video footage of 40 events recorded with occupational body-worn cameras from public buses in Denmark. Using in-depth qualitative video analysis, the study systematically analyzes the encounters for citizen self-presentation and aggression. Five self-presentation types are identified, comprising passengers appearing innocent, honest, wronged, defiant, or superior in the inspector encounters. In aggressive events, passengers in particular perform the defiant and superior self-presentation types and typically perform more types than in the non-aggressive events. The findings yield insights into aggressive frontline encounters with an enlarged understanding of the range of reactions and counterattacks during these events. Recognizing these presentations and changing responses could help frontline workers prevent exposure to aggression on the job.

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Frontline work research has provided important insights into the situational dynamics and organizational context of street-level bureaucracy, emphasizing how different types of frontline workers have to deal with citizens in situ (Lipsky 1980; Muir 1979; Reiss 1971, Van de Walle and Raaphorst 2019). The literature comprises studies on how frontline workers act in citizen encounters (Mastrofski, Reisig, and McCluskey 2002; Reynolds and Harris 2006), how the organizational context of rules and guidelines affects how the employees act in these encounters (Engel 2000), and how citizen behavior is associated with staff behavior (Friis et al. 2020; Mastrofski, Reisig, and McCluskey 2002; Suquet 2019). The literature, however, requires advanced insights into contested encounters between citizens and frontline workers. Employees in human service sectors constitute an occupational group exposed to the risk of citizen aggression in their work life (Andersen et al. 2018). Despite this risk, there is limited research conceptualizing offensive citizen behavior in conflicts with rule enforcing frontline employees. To this end, we propose that the literature would benefit from a focus on interactional dynamics of aggressive events to gain knowledge on interpersonal risk factors of frontline work. As argued in the situational violence literature, it is necessary to examine the situated actions and context in order to grasp how risk factors are constitutive features during conflicts (Whitehead, Bowman, and Raymond 2018).

In this article, we propose that it is necessary to conceptualize how citizens behave in contested encounters with frontline staff in order to examine how different citizen self-presentations relate to

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aggressive escalation. Frontline staff have to cope with people's reactions to their decisions at work (Lipsky 1980). To enforce a rule or penalty without conflict, an employee must analyze every situation, and a citizen's self-presentation provides the employee with information on how to go about the interaction. In an ethnographic study on French ticket inspectors, Suquet (2010, 2019) showed how staff had to respond and make sense of encountered citizen behavior as a part of the job, highlighting the interactional process of enacting deviancy. Here, the inspectors' use of citizen categories such as "gamblers" indicates how self-presentational features are a part of frontline work. Studies on American law enforcement have examined how citizen self-presentational characteristics, such as disrespect and mental and emotional state, are associated with officer behavior (Engel, Sobol, and Worden 2000; Mastrofski, Reisig, and McCluskey 2002, McCluskey, Terrill and Paoline 2005; Todak and James 2018). Engel, Sobol, and Worden (2000) found that officers were more likely to enforce penalty on disrespectful citizens, and Todak and James (2018) found that officers vary their de-escalating tactics depending on the situation and citizen demeanor. The studies demonstrated how conceptualizing self-presentational citizen acts offers insights into the interactional dynamics in frontline work. However, research remains to combine a systematic analysis of how self-presentational types are related to the risk that the encounter intensifies into aggressive citizen escalation.

In an analysis of the differences in citizen behaviors across aggressive and nonaggressive frontline events, the current article aims to address this gap by investigating how citizen self-presentation relates to escalation of conflict in contested frontline encounters. As such, we follow the growing literature emphasizing the necessity to pay attention to the actual conflict encounters in order to explain why some situations escalate when others do not (Bowman, Whitehead, and Raymond 2018; Collins 2008; Felson and Steadman 1983). Recent research has shown the importance of studying situational factors when examining workplace violence during nighttime economy (Graham et al. 2005; Liebst et al. 2019), public transport (Friis et al. 2020), and store robberies (Lindegaard, Bernasco, and Jacques 2015; Lindegaard, De Vries, and Bernasco 2018; Nassauer 2018). In a study on robbery rituals, Nassauer (2018) showed how perpetrator and victim both have parts to play in a robbery to proceed successfully, according to the expected robbery routine. As such, both parties have to express distinct emotions and behaviors to stay in character, and aberrations from this result in a failed robbery.

In the current article, we examine the verbal and nonverbal citizen acts during encounters with ticket inspectors patrolling public buses in Copenhagen and suburbs in Denmark. The unit of analysis is ticket fining events, defined as the events where an inspector announces a fine to a passenger who does not have a valid ticket. As in robbery situations, fining events are ritualized and imply a certain definition of the situation (Suquet 2019). Here, we conceptualize a successful ticket fining event as one where a passenger simply receives and accepts a fine without any small disruptions. As such, we propose that the citizen self-presentational acts are important for the proceedings of these ticket fining events. In Denmark, ticket inspectors wear uniforms and function as law enforcement agents in the confined space of a bus. The inspectors are entitled to obtain sufficient personal identification about a passenger in order to issue a fine of approximately 100 Euros and to retain an uncooperative passenger until the police arrive. Based on the ticket fining events, we first identify the content of self-presentation types that passengers convey in interaction with the ticket inspector. Second, we examine how the citizen self-presentations are associated with citizen aggression in the encounter.

To examine the interactional dynamics of ticket fining events, we draw on video data of real-life events recorded with occupational body-worn cameras. Video data offer the advantage of giving direct access to the interactional dynamics of conflicts and observing the same actions in a specific event multiple times (Collins 2008; Philpot et al. 2019). The methodological advantage of video data increases the validity of interactional analysis, since researchers can independently pause, play, and replay the same event, enabling a fine-grained analysis of sequential actions and reactions. This method renders the possibility of examining dynamics of social human life as they unfold – something that other social science methods lack the ability to do systematically (Lindegaard and Bernasco 2018; Nassauer and Legewie 2018). Taking advantage of this data source, we investigate self-presentations in contested encounters with and without citizen aggression. We define contested encounters as

interactions where the working consensus of acceptance and support in a collective effort dissolves (Felson 1978; Goffman 1967) and “trouble,” experienced as something unpleasant, irritating, or difficult, is at stake (Emerson and Messinger 1977). By examining both aggressive and nonaggressive contested events, we ensure variance in our dependent variable. This design allows us to explore causal inference of aggression, and, as such, we avoid the common problem of selection bias in qualitative research when only including research observations with the desired value of interest (King, Keohane, and Verba 1994).

### Theorizing self-presentations in contested encounters

Goffman’s (1967, 1959) work on face-to-face encounters has had a great impact on how we perceive and conceptualize actions and interactions in everyday life. He posited that people in face-to-face encounters are motivated to project and reach a common definition of the situation, and they convey self-presentations in order to do so. A self-presentation expresses specific features and can be performed both intentionally and unconsciously, comprising both verbal and nonverbal behavior (DePaulo 1992; Leary 2019). Self-presentations are tied to certain moral characteristics that oblige copresent parties to perceive and treat the person in a certain manner and thus facilitate the cooperation of a shared definition of the situation. The impression management of everyday life, however, also contains conflict interactions, introduced by Goffman (1967:241) as the concept of character contests, in which “each individual is engaged in providing evidence to establish a definition of himself at the expense of what can remain for the other.” In contested events, a moral rule is violated and people’s concerns of restoring honor and saving face shape the interaction and risk of escalation (Deibert and Miethe 2003). The character contest theory has shaped a tradition that conceptualizes the dynamics of honor, status, and power in interactions between order givers and takers (Collins 2014) and disputes of varying intensity (Deibert and Miethe 2003; Felson 1982; Luckenbill 1977). The tradition emphasizes how the projection of self and others is related to loss of face, claim of status, and violent outcomes during contested encounters.

In the current study, we draw on this tradition by investigating how self-presentations in contested events are associated with aggression. In particular, we draw on insights from the impression management theory in which Felson (1978, 1982) conceptualizes how an unfavorable definition of a situation can initiate conflict and aggression between two parties. He posited that when a person projects another party into a negative situational self, and this is perceived as an insult, the other party retaliates with an attack. The retaliating attack is viewed as part of a defensive self-presentation, and here aggression is one type of defensive self-presentational response (Arkin 1981; Felson 1978; Felson and Tedeschi 1993). The consequence of an unfavorable projection of self ultimately corresponds to Kemper’s (2011) theory about status claim and accord in social relations. He proposes that all social relations are influenced by status, and if status is expected or claimed but not given, power “tends to emerge as a fallback option” (Kemper 2011: 22). As such, the exercise of power is a consequence of an unfavorable projection of another party. To investigate the content of defensive self-presentations and their relation to aggression in the context of ticket fining events, we draw on this tradition that perceives conflicts as status claims and power counterattacks.

To conceptualize how people behave, verbally and nonverbally, within the context of fine announcements from frontline workers, we investigate the diversity of defensive citizen self-presentations in these events. Studies on facework in conflicts indicate how an attack on self can lead to an apology or retreat instead of a counterattack (Ting-Toomey 2017). As such, we wish to elaborate on the understanding of different types of defensive impressions. We use self-presentation as a concept to examine the different ways people navigate in contested encounters with a focus on the enacted impression. As such, we adhere to a tradition that emphasizes the interactional agency of self-presentation focusing on both the conscious and unconscious strategies of interpersonal communication (Felson 1978; Leary 2019). With this perspective, we acknowledge a limited focus on symbolic categories such as gender or ethnicity, unconditionally underlying the reception and enactment of

a self-presentation. In our study, we propose a focus on the behavioral impressions unfolding in interactions between ticket inspectors and passengers. This perspective allows for an exploration of self-presentational shifts during contested encounters relating to Goffman's (1959) theory on the breakdown of an interaction. In the progression of a defined situation, modifications and additions can occur, but if the adjustments contradict the established order, this can cause confusion or a breakdown of the interaction. We conceptualize how a perceived unfavorable attack can generate adjustments and even changes of self-presentations during a contested ticket fining event.

## Methods

### *Sampling procedure*

The current study is based on video-recorded ticket fining events, collected by 19 ticket inspectors when patrolling public buses in mostly Copenhagen and surrounding areas. Data were collected during the first 6 months of 2018 for a project that investigates interactional conflict dynamics between inspectors and citizens. Ticket inspectors carried body-worn cameras on their uniforms as a security precaution that enabled them to document victimizations for criminal proceedings. For the purpose of the project, the inspectors were instructed to switch on their camera whenever they encountered a passenger without a valid bus ticket. Prior to video data collection, both of us attended staff meetings and conducted on-site participant observations during bus patrols for approximately 3 hours each, with five teams in total. These additional methods offered insights into the work tasks and occupational experiences and enabled us to build a level of trust with the ticket inspectors. During data collection, the first author visited the inspectors on a monthly basis to maintain the relationship and remind the inspectors about the recording instructions. The project's data comprise 1,292 clips of video recordings of varying quality. Using video data collected by employees during work requires careful ethical considerations about the analysis of staff and citizens. Therefore, we follow the line of the American Sociological Association's Code of Ethics (Association 2018) using only public naturalistic observations to identify interactional patterns and not to identify participants and sensitive personal information. The Danish Data Protection Agency (ref. 2015-57-0125) approved the current study.

To select a sample, the first author conducted an initial data screening to exclude video clips that did not have adequate technical quality in terms of camera angle, resolution, and audio or did not contain a ticket fining event. A fining event comprises an inspector announcing an invalid ticket to a passenger, independent of whether the passenger is eventually fined. Clips had to conform to the criteria of either capturing the same event with different cameras or capturing the duration of the inspector-passenger encounter, with none or only negligible breaks (see Nassauer and Legewie 2018). Video clips of a successful ticket fining event with no trouble or contest were excluded (Emerson and Messinger 1977). This initial sampling procedure resulted in 165 clips, which was then assessed in VLC Player by the first author to select a sample for in-depth analysis. The second sampling procedure comprised an overview coding of each clip in Office Excel by the first author to identify the content and richness of each event. The coding was focused on descriptive and analytical keywords such as negotiation, aggression, intervention, accusation, provocation, expression of legitimacy, power struggle, group structure, and gendered practice. Given our focus, we selected all events that encompassed aggression. For the purpose of our study, we selected 40 ticket fining events for in-depth analysis. Seven of these events are also included in a statistical analysis of the association between inspector actions and risk of passenger aggression (see Friis et al. 2020). To analyze differences in self-presentations, the sample comprised both aggressive and nonaggressive contested events. To ensure variation in background factors, we ensured to vary on the assessed gender of citizens and inspectors, as well as assessed citizen age and foreign national affiliation. Gender was assessed either by visible markers such as voice, hair, clothes or by verbal gender disclosure during the interaction. National

affiliation was based on whether a passenger used a language other than Danish when speaking to the inspector during the event or expressed foreign citizenship or home address.

### Sample

From the 19 active ticket inspectors during data collection, 18 of them were included in the current analysis.<sup>1</sup> They represent an age span from early twenties to late forties and include 5 female and 13 male inspectors with job experience ranging from less than 1 year to about 10 years of bus patrol. Table 1 shows the sample characteristics of the 40 ticket fining events. Two events included passengers

**Table 1.** Sample characteristics.

Case	Number of passengers	Passenger gender-appearance*	Passenger national affiliation*	Passenger age*	Ticket inspector gender
69	1	Man	Local affiliation	Young adult	Men
171	1	Man	Foreign affiliation	Young adult	Men
421	1	Woman	Foreign affiliation	Young adult	Mix
469	1	Man	Local affiliation	Young adult	Men
464	1	Man	Local affiliation	Adolescent	Mix
100	1	Man	Local affiliation	Young adult	Men
173	1	Man	Local affiliation	Young adult	Mix
403	1	Man	Local affiliation	Young adult	Mix
404	1	Man	Local affiliation	Adult	Men
168	1	Woman	Local affiliation	Adult	Men
435	1	Man	Local affiliation	Adult	Men
439b	1	Woman	Local affiliation	Young adult	Men
405	2	Mix	Local affiliation	Adults	Men
439a	2	Mix	Local affiliation	Young adult and adult	Men
440	1	Man	Local affiliation	Adult	Men
474	1	Woman	Local affiliation	Young adult	Mix
475	1	Woman	Local affiliation	Adult	Mix
466	2	Men	Local affiliation	Young adults	Men
439c	2	Men	Local affiliation	Young adults	Men
456	2	Men	Local affiliation	Young adults	Mix
429	1	Man	Local affiliation	Adult	Men
129	1	Man	Local affiliation	Young adult	Men
410	1	Woman	Local affiliation	Young adult	Men
447	1	Man	Foreign affiliation	Young adult	Men
241a	1	Man	Foreign affiliation	Young adult	Mix
341	2	Men	Local affiliation	Young adults	Women
217	2	Mix	Foreign affiliation	Adults	Men
454	1	Man	Local affiliation	Adult	Men
241b	2	Women	Local affiliation	Young adult and adult	Mix
153	1	Man	Local affiliation	Young adult	Men
120	1	Man	Local affiliation	Adult	Men
136	1	Man	Local affiliation	Young adult	Men
155	2	Men	Local affiliation	Adolescents	Men
158	1	Woman	Local affiliation	Adult	Men
223	1	Man	Local affiliation	Adult	Mix
225	1	Man	Local affiliation	Young adult	Woman
259	1	Man	Local affiliation	Adult	Man
308	1	Man	Local affiliation	Young adult	Mix
340	1	Man	Local affiliation	Young adult	Women
481	1	Man	Local affiliation	Adult	Women

\* These characteristics are based on an assessment from the video data. See Sampling Procedure for the assessment of passenger gender and national affiliation.

<sup>1</sup>"The 19th inspector, who is not a part of the final sample, was only present in one of the initial 165 clips. By coincidence, this clip was also not included in the final sample of 40 ticket fining events."

assessed to be adolescents, 22 included assessed young adults in the age group 20 to 30 years old, and 14 events included assessed adult passengers older than 30 years. Two events included both a young adult and adult. Eighteen of the 40 ticket fining events only included assessed male passengers and ticket inspectors. One event only included assessed female passengers and the inspector, and 21 ticket fining events included both males and females. In total, 5 events included passengers that we assessed to convey a foreign national affiliation. In assessing passenger characteristics based on observation, we are aware of the limitation of this analytical strategy, which inevitably relies on somewhat stereotypical markers of age and gender and excludes information about other national and cultural identities. We, however, find that these symbolic characteristics are important to consider in an analysis of self-presentation.

## Analytical strategy

The first author assessed all video clips of the 40 ticket fining events multiple times to become familiar with the course of events in each encounter. The analysis was then executed in several steps. First, the analysis comprised a categorization of the level of conflict in the 40 ticket fining events. Each event was coded for the level of (non)aggressive escalation during the encounter. To encompass all offensive acts, we applied a broad definition of aggression comprising cursing, raising one's voice at the inspector, trying to push through the inspector, dominant gesturing and posturing, threatening, pushing, kicking, punching, and spitting (see Findings for analyzed aggressive events). Second, each passenger in the ticket fining event was described with codes that characterized both the verbal and nonverbal acts during the event. For example, a self-presentational code was "humble" or "knows the rules." Some codes comprised both verbal and nonverbal behavior, such as being superior by saying, "You don't know anything about that" or by ignoring the inspector. In the third phase, the initial codes were grouped into citizen self-presentation ideal types (Halkier 2011). Following our theoretical focus on interactional performances at the expense of more symbolic categories, we conceptualized the types based on how an impression was actively conveyed to the ticket inspector. The analytical focus restrains the self-presentation types to be generated based on interactional strategies and, to a smaller extent, social roles. Subsequently, each ticket fining event was examined to validate the occurrence of the coded self-presentation types. In this phase, each passenger was classified to the one or more self-presentation types that came across as most significant for the passenger's impression management. If a passenger with one sentence implies one self-presentation, but this seems insignificant to the broader presentation of self in the encounter, this one appearance is not encompassed. For further insights into the analytical process, see supplementary material at <https://osf.io/jfa9k>.

## Findings

### *Self-presentation types in ticket fining events*

Across the 40 ticket fining events in public buses, a variety of self-presentational acts were enacted when ticket inspectors announced that passengers did not have valid bus tickets. We identified five ideal types of citizen self-presentations from these acts, which are listed in Table 2 with descriptive

**Table 2.** Citizen self-presentation types in ticket fining events.

Self-presentation type	Keywords
The innocent passenger	Good intentions, disadvantaged
The honest passenger	Genuine, good citizen
The wronged passenger	Unjustly treated, victim in situation
The defiant passenger	Careless, not afraid of authority
The superior passenger	In control, knows best

keywords. These self-presentations involved a more or less explicitly defensive position in the encounter with a ticket inspector.

*The innocent passenger* was the most prevalent ( $N = 24$ ) self-presentation occurring during ticket fining events. This self-presentation was the least defensive type of the five since it was implied to have the best intentions or being disadvantaged in the situation. When a disadvantage was implied, this was typically related to being ill, being in a hurry, or not having the financial position to get and pay a fine. An example of a passenger presenting herself as an innocent type can be found in a case with an assessed woman in her forties who entered a bus with three kids. When a male ticket inspector told her, "You are only allowed to bring two children under the age of 12 years without additional tickets for the children," she replied, "Eh, I didn't know this. It's a playdate. They're not my children. Only my son." The example illustrates how the innocent passenger type typically expressed an inability to understand the situation or the transport rules.

*The honest passenger* resembled the innocent type by expressing a minor defensive response to the fine announcement. However, compared to the innocent type, the honest passenger comprises a stronger appeal of being recognized as a good and decent citizen. This is illustrated with an encounter between an assessed man in his twenties and a male ticket inspector in his thirties. During the interaction, the inspector asked, "Do you have some ID I can see? [The ticket] has just been bought [pointing at the passenger's telephone screen]." The man responded, "I also bought one [ticket] this morning to this bus stop [Scrolling down on his phone while directing the screen toward the inspector]. Look! I always buy a ticket. You can tell how many tickets that I've bought." As illustrated, this passenger type implies being honest and genuine in the inspector encounter. The passenger type does not challenge the inspector's authority but at the same time typically expects the inspector to consider the passenger's circumstances in relation to the inspection.

Toward the end of the encounter between the young man and the inspector, the man changed his self-presentation to *the wronged passenger*. The inspector continued rejecting the man's projection of the situation, and as a response, the man asked, "[While addressing the inspector colleague] Why can't you just be considerate? I have bought a ticket. It's just your colleague who doesn't want to see it." As illustrated in this case, the passenger type implied being treated badly by the ticket inspector. As the innocent type, the wronged self-presentation is prevalent ( $N = 21$ ) in the sample. The wronged passenger type, however, does not necessarily plead innocence, but blames the inspector or the public transport system in general. In extreme cases, a passenger may imply that he or she is a victim of an abuse of power or the system's rigidity.

From the five self-presentation types identified, *the defiant passenger* entailed a more explicitly defensive impression than the three former described. This passenger type conveyed an image of someone who challenges authority, whether it is the inspector or the system. This is illustrated in an encounter between two male inspectors and an assessed woman in her twenties who asked, "Hey, why can't you just let me buy a ticket? Are you weird, huh?" One of the inspectors then replied, "This is our job," after which the woman said, "Just because you get paid to do it." The defiant passenger type claims to be careless about the situation and knows how to cope either with the current situation or in general. In some cases, this is conveyed as knowing the shortcuts of the system.

As the defiant passenger explicitly expressed a defensive self-presentation, so did *the superior passenger*. However, in contrast to the defiant, the superior self-presentation was characterized by conveying an image of being in a higher status position compared to the inspector. The superior passenger implied dominance in the situation, typically expressed by ignoring the inspector, thus implying to know better or not showing respect to the inspector. This is illustrated in a case where an assessed man in his twenties refused to let a male inspector in his thirties hold his ID. The inspector reacted by saying, "I have to see it, you see," after which the man held the ID in front of him and said, "Yeah but I don't want you to touch it." In extreme cases, this type gives the impression of being a dangerous or powerful person.

The five self-presentation types showed that ticket fining events enable very different projections of a situation of rule breaking. In contested encounters, people can draw on a set of context-specific self-



presentations that appear more or less defensive when being addressed with an accusation by another party. The innocent passenger conveys a minor defensive image when projecting a definition of being disadvantaged in the situation. The honest and wronged self-presentations both comprise a defensive account in the expression of being a good citizen that approves of formal rules, thus also implying that not all citizens do. However, these defensive modes are not confrontational since both types are characterized also by the deference to the ticket inspector's profession, without resorting to a degradation of the profession's formal status. In comparison, the superior and defiant self-presentation types are explicitly defensive since both challenge the formal authority that the ticket inspector holds during bus patrols. The defiant passenger does not express deference for authority in the situation, and the superior passenger implies to be the person in control, thus expressing dominance over the ticket inspector.

### **Self-presentational content in aggressive encounters**

To examine how the five citizen self-presentation types are related to the use of aggression in the ticket fining events, we distinguish the aggressive from the nonaggressive events. Fourteen fine announcements unfolded without escalation between the passenger and ticket inspector. These encounters comprised passenger behavior such as negotiating with the inspector, stalling the situation by, for example, signaling to be occupied with something else, or trying to escape without getting in close physical contact with the inspector. These events were thus complicated by a lack of cooperation from the passengers, but without passengers performing aggressive acts of cursing, raising their voice, gesturing, trying to push themselves through, or committing violence. In 26 of the ticket fining events, a passenger aggressively escalated the inspector encounter. In a large part of these events, a passenger raised his or her voice or cursed at the inspector, for example, by saying, "Fuck you" or "I don't want to do that, goddamn it." Other aggressive acts included trying to push through the ticket inspector in an attempt to get away, or using dominant gestures or posturing in the interaction, such as pointing at the inspector, expanding body posture, or moving closer to the inspector while staring or looking angry. In five of the aggressive events, a passenger either pushed an inspector in the chest, threatened an inspector, or kicked and hit several inspectors. The passenger acts during each ticket fining event are summarized in [Table 3](#).

**Table 3.** Ticket fining event characteristics.

Case	Number of passengers	Self-presentation types	Aggressive acts
69	1	Wronged, defiant, superior	Raised voice, threats, posturing, gestures, cursing
171	1	Innocent, honest, wronged	Posturing, pushing
421	1	Innocent, wronged, defiant, superior	Cursing, raised voice, threats, kicks, punches, spitting
469	1	Superior	Threats
464	1	Innocent, honest, wronged, defiant	Cursing, pushing
100	1	Honest, innocent	Gestures, cursing
173	1	Superior, defiant	Gestures, cursing, posturing
403	1	Innocent, superior, wronged	Raised voice, grabbing, gestures, decrease in interpersonal space
404	1	innocent, honest, defiant	Gestures, cursing
168	1	Defiant, innocent	Cursing
435	1	Innocent, wronged, defiant	Cursing
439b	1	Defiant	Raised voice and aggressive gestures
405	1st	Innocent	No aggressive escalation
	2nd	Superior	Cursing
439a	1st	Innocent	No aggressive escalation
	2nd	Honest, superior	Raised voice, cursing
440	1	Wronged	Raised voice, cursing

(Continued)

**Table 3.** (Continued).

Case	Number of passengers	Self-presentation types	Aggressive acts
474	1	Innocent, wronged, defiant	Cursing
475	1	Innocent, defiant, wronged	Raised voice and cursing
466	1st	Innocent	Cursing
	2nd	Innocent, wronged	No aggressive escalation
439c	1st	Innocent	Pushing through
	2nd	Honest	No aggressive escalation
456	1st	Defiant	Raised voice
	2nd	Defiant	No aggressive escalation
429	1	Innocent, superior	Pushing through
129	1	Honest, wronged	Cursing
410	1	Honest, wronged	Cursing
447	1	Honest, wronged	Cursing
241a	1	Innocent, wronged	Pushing through
341	1st	Defiant	Decrease of interpersonal space
	2nd	Defiant	No aggressive escalation
217	1st	Wronged	No aggressive escalation
	2nd	Innocent	No aggressive escalation
454	1	Wronged, superior	No aggressive escalation
241b	1st	Honest	No aggressive escalation
	2nd	Wronged	No aggressive escalation
153	1	Innocent, superior	No aggressive escalation
120	1	Superior, wronged	No aggressive escalation
136	1	Innocent	No aggressive escalation
155	1st	Innocent	No aggressive escalation
	2nd	Defiant	No aggressive escalation
158	1	Innocent	No aggressive escalation
223	1	Innocent	No aggressive escalation
225	1	Innocent, wronged	No aggressive escalation
259	1	Honest	No aggressive escalation
308	1	Wronged	No aggressive escalation
340	1	Honest	No aggressive escalation
481	1	Honest, wronged	No aggressive escalation

Note: Cases are sorted by the intensity of aggression in the event ranging from events with threats and/or physical violence to events without aggressive acts.

Examination of the self-presentation types and aggressive acts shows that the innocent, honest, and wronged self-presentations appeared across aggressive and nonaggressive ticket fining events, whereas the defiant and superior self-presentations were most prevalent in the aggressive events. The finding indicates that the less explicitly defensive self-presentation types are not related to an aggressive escalation of the inspector encounter. The more explicitly defensive self-presentation types, however, appear to be closely related to an aggressive escalation of conflict. Here, aggression emerges during the event as a counterattack in the struggle to define the situation (Felson 1978), as we found that the conflicts typically did not start with citizen aggression. Likewise, citizens with a superior or defiant self-presentation did not necessarily start with those impressions; they instead emerged during the encounter. This is shown in the following case with a passenger assessed to be a man in his late twenties. The man was physically caught by an inspector for trying to escape from the bus, and he immediately implied being wronged. The ticket inspector, however, did not acknowledge the wronged self-presentation but challenged the projected definition of the situation. Because of this, the passenger changed self-presentation and deployed intensified aggression.

### Case 69

A man tries to get out through the back door of the bus as two male inspectors enter the front door. One inspector walks toward him in a quick pace and grabs him by the coat to prevent him from getting off the bus. The passenger ends up sitting down on the floor with the inspector leaning over him. The inspector colleague also

comes and stands behind the primary inspector. At first, the passenger loudly says that he had to get off the bus. Then he repeatedly asks the following in a controlled tone of voice:

Passenger: Why do you tear my jacket?

Primary inspector: Yeah, because you are not getting out. Why did you press the emergency stop [pointing toward the emergency stop button next to the door while still leaning over the passenger]?

Passenger: Because I have to get out. [The bus driver] was about to drive, wasn't he?

Primary inspector: No [shakes his head], he wasn't [says repeatedly].

Inspector colleague: Do you have something with your name on it?

Passenger: Hey, are you supposed to tear my jacket like that [staring into the inspectors eyes]?

The two parties continue to repeat the same arguments, and the inspector colleague asks for the passenger's ID multiple times. After a back-and-forth where the passenger is still sitting on the floor and the inspector still leaning over him, the passenger says the following:

Passenger: What I wouldn't do to you if you weren't at work [says something unintelligible].

Inspector colleague: Do you have something with your name on it? Do you have some ID on you?

Passenger: Why are you tearing my jacket like that?

Primary inspector: Because you pressed the emergency stop [pointing toward the emergency stop button again].

Passenger: Hey, are you stupid, huh?

The two opponents continue their back-and-forth arguments. The passenger repeatedly asks if the inspector is stupid while pointing to his own forehead and scowling at the inspector who is still leaning over him. The passenger then says the following:

Passenger: Yeah, but I have to get off here [points out of the door with a gesture implying that they should all get off]. Come, let's get off the bus, and then I can have the fine.

The escalation of conflict between the passenger and ticket inspector revolved around a claim of status that neither party was willing to give the other. The case illustrated the interactional dynamic of establishing a definition that involved the other party's loss of face and a contest to regain respect and honor (Felson 1978; Goffman 1967). As the inspector did not accept the man's projection of the situation, the passenger intensified his defensive self-presentation to both defiant and superior acts while also threatening the inspector. The shift in impression and use of intensified aggression became a reaction to a negotiation that had ended in a deadlock. The case illustrates how superior self-presentational acts can be closely related to aggressive act. Here, superiority and dominance were intertwined in the comment, "Come we're getting off the bus," and the threat, "What I wouldn't do to you if you weren't at work."

### ***Self-presentational consistency in aggressive encounters***

In events without aggressive escalation, a passenger either sticks to the immediate self-presentation conveyed when encountering the inspector or alternatively just once changes appearance during the event. Contrarily, aggressive encounters tend to involve two to three and sometimes even four self-presentations. The finding indicates that in situations where a passenger resorts to aggressive acts toward the ticket inspector, there is also typically a larger variety of defensive impression management going on during the event. The aggressive events involve more adjustments of the defensive practices, where a passenger is willing to turn to aggressive actions and change self-presentation at the same time. The pattern of multiple self-presentations during aggressive events is illustrated in the following Case 464, with an assessed adolescent boy.

## Case 464

A female ticket inspector checks tickets in the back of the bus. She stands next to an adolescent boy who is sitting at the window seat looking straight ahead. She greets him; he briefly turns his face towards her, smiles, and nods, and she asks to see a ticket. He then gets up and says, “I have to get off now,” pushing himself through to escape. A male colleague stands behind the female inspector. When the boy tries to get away, he gets into close hand-to-hand, physical contact with the male inspector. The scuffle ends in front of the door in the middle of the bus with the boy pushing the male inspector on his shoulder. The boy then speaks to the bus driver:

Passenger: Open that door.

Male inspector: [While placing himself in front of the boy and looking into his eyes] If we called the police now, that would be an assault. Do you have some ID I may see?

Passenger: [While walking toward a seat away from the door] Assault? What the fuck are talking about? It’s you who grabbed me.

The male inspector then yells to the bus driver that he has to hold still, and the passenger says the following:

Passenger: [While looking at the male inspector who is looking toward the bus driver] I’m getting off, and you grab me. Are you stupid?

The two parties continue this back-and-forth while the passenger sits down. The male inspector takes a breath and asks for ID with a less strict voice than the moment before. The female inspector calls the police for support to force the boy to provide his ID. Then the bus is emptied for other passengers and the boy sits calmly looking out the window. While waiting for the police to arrive, the male inspector again asks for ID, and the boy rejects by swearing at the male inspector while looking up at him. About 10 seconds later, he then looks at the female inspector and says the following:

Passenger: It has nothing to do with me being one of those types who just . . . [raises his right hand in a brief and causal gesture while shaking his head gently to the sides] because you are ticket inspectors. I don’t have disrespect for you [raises hand again]. But when you are standing like that [motions towards the back of the bus with his thumb] and don’t let me get out [makes an open hand gesture], then it is your own fault [then puts his right hand in the pocket of his trousers and looks away towards the window].

At the beginning of the encounter, the boy briefly implied innocence by acting calmly and saying that he needs “to get off now.” The attempt to get away as an innocent passenger, however, escalated into a physical confrontation, and he subsequently appeared defiant. After the bus had been emptied for other passengers, the boy and the two inspectors waited for the police, and the boy again shifted self-presentation to honest. The waiting time was more than 20 minutes; thus, it is worth considering whether the pattern of multiple self-presentations in aggressive encounters is due to the fact that these events typically last longer than nonaggressive events. We find that the aggressive events ( $N = 26$ ) on average last around 8 minutes and 58 seconds, whereas the events without aggression ( $N = 14$ ) on average last around 4 minutes and 23 seconds (see Table D in supplementary material at <https://osf.io/jfa9k>). A part of the explanation for this time difference relates to the waiting time for the police in the aggressive events ( $N = 6$ ), which is more common than in the nonaggressive events ( $N = 1$ ). When passengers use aggression, the encounters tend to last longer and enable self-presentational shifts in an attempt to define the situation. In these encounters, inspectors and passengers face each other for a longer time, and this may encourage both parties to work together to reach a common definition of the ticket fining event.

## Discussion

Ticket fining events are troubled interpersonal encounters between passengers and inspectors who try to enforce their view of the situation upon the other in order to reach a common definition (e.g., to issue a fine or to avoid one). We analyzed how passengers in such ticket fining events present themselves toward inspectors on public buses in Copenhagen and surrounding areas, as well as how these presentations relate to the risk of passenger aggression toward inspectors in these encounters.

For this purpose, we analyzed actual conflict encounters as they unfolded in detail on body-worn camera recordings of 40 ticket fining events. This material offered a unique opportunity for a fine-grained examination of both verbal and nonverbal actions, indicating variation in self-presentations as well as in how these presentations are associated with aggressive acts.

We found that passengers perform an innocent, honest, wronged, defiant, or superior self-presentation in ticket fining events, with the innocent and wronged types being the most prevalent in our sample. This typology illustrates how certain modes of enactments are available within the context of fining announcements, exemplifying how people draw on cultural repertoires of skills and strategies in interactional encounters (Swidler 2001). The five self-presentation types exhibit a diverse yet limited set of accounts and bodily acts available in the context of ticket fining events.

In contrast to the impression management theory (Felson 1978, 1982) that conceptualized aggression as part of a defensive self-presentation, we analyzed aggressive acts independently from self-presentational acts. This analytical distinction allowed for an inquiry about minor defensive self-presentation's association with aggression, and here we found that the less defensive self-presentations (i.e., the innocent, honest, and wronged types) also appear in aggressive events, although not exclusively. We argue that this finding highlights how empirical investigations of defensive attacks must also incorporate a focus on the more subtle defensive self-presentations. The diversity in self-presentational defensive reactions contributes to an enlarged understanding of the range of reactions and counterattacks in contested encounters. These types of protective selves are comparable with the dominating, obliging and avoiding facework styles conceptualized and studied across cultures (Ting-Toomey 2017). We found that the superior and defiant self-presentations, characterized by being explicitly defensive in their challenge of formal authority, were associated with aggressive passenger escalation. This confirms theories positing that conflicts arise when ranks are challenged or ambiguous (Gould 2003) and tend to escalate as a way of restoring honor when claims for status are unaccepted (Felson 1978; Kemper 2011). Our analysis thus offers support to the well-established rapport of status and honor as key mechanisms for the initiation and escalation of interpersonal conflicts (Black 1993; Collins 2008; Deibert and Miethe 2003; Gould 2003; Jackson-Jacobs 2013; Kemper 2011).

During the contested frontline encounters, passengers were likely to shift their self-presentational acts as the event progressed. Aggressive passengers typically shifted between multiple self-presentations, whereas nonaggressive passengers conveyed one or two self-presentation types during an event. The self-presentational shifts are a consequence of not reaching a common definition of the contested event (Goffman 1967). Based on our analysis, we propose a conceptualization of self-presentations as a dynamic and less static characterization of people in contested face-to-face encounters. Our study shows that passengers will typically adjust or change self-presentational acts when facing the ticket inspector's announcement about a fine. We propose to refine the concept of self-presentations to encompass a dimension of interactional agency in order to appreciate a neglected dimension of Goffman (1967). This is in line with recent critique of the discarding of personal agency within radical situationism (Smith 2015). By emphasizing the interactional agency of self-presentation, we thus show how conscious and unconscious self-presentational acts shape the progress of contested encounters.

### ***Crime-preventive implications***

The main implication of our findings is that, for occupational aggression prevention, ticket inspectors should learn how to read passengers in order to recognize self-representation types for their risk assessments. Rather than profiling according to personality characteristics (Boon 1997), frontline workers should learn how to profile based on citizens' self-presentational acts. A description of the methods through which citizens present and position themselves during frontline encounters offers the employee tangible clues about how to perceive and respond to a citizen in order to avoid further escalation of a troubled encounter. Particularly, the defiant and superior self-presentation types pose risks of aggression. Additionally, shifts in self-representation types pose risks of aggression and escalation.

Conflict management programs for frontline workers should teach awareness about risk types of self-presentation, the risks of frequent shifts in self-representations, and offer suggestions for how to respond. We suggest that ticket inspectors can be aware of verbal and nonverbal cues that are associated with aggression and adopt certain strategies to respond to these self-presentations. For example, a passenger ignoring the inspector and implying to know better are both cues that the inspector may need to respond to with a different strategy than initiated. This also encompasses the finding of multiple shifts in self-presentational acts during aggressive inspector encounters. The finding indicates more adjustments of defensive practices during aggressive events, which highlights the importance of situation-based employee strategies on how to deal with citizens at work.

### **Research implications**

In the current study, we have directed our analytical focus on passengers' self-presentational acts in order to characterize and analyze how citizens behave in a type of contested frontline encounter. As such, we recognize the limited attention on ticket inspectors' behavior during these events, which have been found to be associated with passenger deviancy (Suquet 2019) and aggression (Friis et al. 2020). Our contribution to the frontline work literature is a categorization of uncooperative and defensive citizen behavior to use as perceivable risk factors of aggression in situ for frontline staff. Future studies should systematically examine staff responses to different self-presentations in order to gain advanced insights into the use of de-escalating tactics applied to the different self-presentations. This focus would allow for further exploration of ticket inspectors' impact on passengers' self-presentations during contested events. For example, staff mentioning a camera recording might change the self-monitoring of a citizen's presentation (Grimshaw 1982). In our data, mentioning the camera mainly seemed to reinforce the current self-presentation (see Table A in supplementary material at <https://osf.io/jfa9k>). This is likely to be because the camera worn on the uniform is already a natural prop in these inspections, carried with symbolic meaning (Turner 2010). Yet studies (Ariel et al. 2016; Friis et al. 2020) have found association between use of body-worn camera and aggression and future studies could further examine the association between self-presentation shifts and use of body-worn camera.

We additionally propose that future studies should examine citizen self-presentations and their shifts during other types of contested frontline encounters. A comparison of defensive citizen self-presentations during other types of fining situations would inform on the similarity of these types of contested frontline events. How do citizens respond to a traffic warden issuing a parking fine? How do drunk drivers respond when being caught by the police? Drunk drivers and other law violators have been examined for their retrospective accounts about their deviancy (Fynbo and Järvinen 2011, Maruna and Copes 2005), but future studies should also examine their real-life behavior in the contested frontline encounters. Comparative studies of different kinds of encounters between citizens and frontline workers will get us closer to understanding and preventing the risks of work aggression.

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