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# NARRATIVE IN POLICE COMMUNICATION: THE ART OF INFLUENCE AND COMMUNICATION FOR THE MODERN POLICE ORGANIZATION

Chelsea Fray

132 Pages

Violence in the City of Rockford, Illinois and surrounding cities has made the Rockford Police Department's communication vitally important for shaping the future of the community. The primary objective of this project was to gain a greater understanding of how the local police department utilizes one particular communication channel: social media. While some research examining law enforcement's use of social media exists, this study is unique as it specifically applies Fisher's (1984) narrative paradigm and key concepts related to public relations functions including relationship building. The analysis revealed that the department does utilize some narrative concepts, but could certainly reevaluate their use of social media to enhance their communication with the community.

**KEYWORDS:** Rockford Police Department, social media, narrative paradigm, public relations

NARRATIVE IN POLICE COMMUNICATION: THE ART OF INFLUENCE AND  
COMMUNICATION FOR THE MODERN POLICE ORGANIZATION

CHELSEA FRAY

A Thesis Submitted in Partial  
Fulfillment of the Requirements  
for the Degree of

MASTER OF ARTS

School of Communication

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2017

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NARRATIVE IN POLICE COMMUNICATION: THE ART OF INFLUENCE AND  
COMMUNICATION FOR THE MODERN POLICE ORGANIZATION

CHELSEA FRAY

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C. F.

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## CHAPTER I

### INTRODUCTION TO THE PROBLEM

In 2016, violence and discord seemed to dominate headlines; the City of Chicago saw extraordinary violence, with 762 murders (Ansari & Flores, 2017). This number is troubling and has caused national concern. Even President Trump has taken notice and threatened to send in “the feds” to restore order to the beleaguered city (personal communication, January 24, 2017). However, the concern about violence, especially in recent years, is more complex than simple numbers show. In several highly publicized cases, the very police officers sworn to protect and serve the citizens of their communities have come under scrutiny for unjustified violence, racism, and intimidation. It seems as though many communities are at a crossroads and the choices both average citizens and sworn officers make about how they relate to each other and work together to keep communities safe will reverberate through time.

These relationships are particularly key in communities that are plagued by extreme violence. Chicago, for example, has an estimated population of 2,717,534 (US Census Bureau, 2015a). With 762 murders, approximately 0.028% of the city’s population was murdered in 2016. However disturbing that notion is, Chicago is not alone in experiencing such violence. Rockford, a much smaller city in northern Illinois known for the Rockford Peaches female baseball team, the creation of the sock monkey, and Jane the dinosaur, is also plagued by incredible violence. In 2016 alone, Rockford experienced 32 murders (Haas, 2017). While that number is much smaller than 726, in proportion, Rockford’s murder rate is nearly as high. With a population of approximately 150,283 (US Census Bureau, 2015b), approximately 0.021% of Rockford’s population was murdered.

These percentages may seem relatively low. However, these numbers are some of the highest that the two cities have experienced in the last decade (Ansari & Flores, 2017; Green, 2017). Additionally, simple numbers do not do justice to the situation. For context, of the 32 lives taken in Rockford in 2016, 14 of the victims were 17 years old or younger, including a five-month-old and an unborn baby (Haas, 2017). Of all the 32 homicides, suspects are in custody in 12 cases, one suspect is deceased, and one instance was self-defense. That leaves approximately 19 cases unresolved. In fact, in 2016, the Rockford Police Department (RPD) had the second lowest homicide solve rate since at least 2005 with only 52% of homicides cleared and a 12-year average of 65% of homicides solved (Green, 2017). Additionally, several of the murders took place in the presence of many known witnesses. People saw what happened and, in some cases, have not been cooperative in assisting with the investigations (Braun, 2016). For example, the murder of 15 year-old Greg Hill goes unsolved despite police identifying at least 20 witnesses present at his shooting death. Family and friends continue to plead for answers, but as of yet no answers have been found.

This level of violence has not been seen in Rockford in about a decade. In fact, the homicides reported in Rockford in 2016 represent the highest number of homicides since 1996 in which 31 homicides occurred (Green, 2017). Depending on which community members you ask, the responsibility lies with the community for not standing up and becoming a part of the solution (Zambo, 2017a), anarchy in the streets (Sweeny, 2017), a revolving door system of releasing violent offenders (Green, 2017), and the state budget crisis (Jones, 2017). However, as the new year and a new beginning dawned on the community, gun violence and crime continued to overshadow joy and hope.

Despite discouraging crime statistics, the 290 sworn officers of the RPD, now under the leadership of Chief Dan O'Shea, continue to serve the citizens of Rockford (City of Rockford, n.d.). According to the RPD's official website, the RPD is "committed to reducing crime and enhancing the quality of life through an active partnership with our community" (City of Rockford, n.d.). The website additionally explains that the organization values "integrity... respect... professionalism... service... and courage" (City of Rockford, n.d.). These publicly espoused mission statement and values seem to point toward a potential for healthy communication and a strong relationship with the community.

The encouraging messages and a new year were a source of hope for the Rockford community. This year could have been a chance to be a community of less crime and less violence. Unfortunately, within the first three hours of 2017, another homicide had occurred in Rockford (Green, 2017). On January 3, 2017, Mayor Larry Morrissey and Rockford Police Chief Dan O'Shea held a press conference to address the violence in Rockford and plead for the community's assistance in not only solving crimes, but also preventing them. Chief O'Shea explained, "When there are violent crimes, there are witnesses. Witnesses need to provide us with information. We can't be everywhere...We cannot do it on our own. It's a community problem. Everybody needs to help out (Green, 2017)." The top leadership of the RPD is willing to work with the community, but is the community willing to work with the RPD?

The Rockford Area Crime Stoppers' 2016 statistics would seem to indicate that at least a segment of the community is willing to take action when the action requires minimal risk and a decent reward. In 2016 alone, 883 individual criminal cases were solved with the assistance of the organization's reports (Mayhew, 2017). The program

allows citizens to report crimes and offer tips that assist local law enforcement organizations in their efforts to solve crimes, recover stolen property, and apprehend fugitives (Rockford Area Crime Stoppers, 2017). This program offers rewards to those who make reports and also allows those making reports to remain anonymous.

However, in many cases, witnesses to the community's most-violent crimes remain silent, fearful of potential consequences if they are to speak to the police (The Editorial Board, 2017). The Rockford Area Crime Stoppers have laid the foundation for cooperation, but more must be done.

Despite the Rockford Area Crime Stoppers' efforts to bridge the gap between the RPD and the local community, Rockford's image as a community has suffered. In fact, a trend of high crime rates has landed Rockford on national lists, such as "Crime in America 2017: Top 10 Most Dangerous Cities Under 200,000," where it holds perhaps the least-coveted position as number one (Rizzo, 2016). Lists such as this utilize data from the "FBI's Uniform Crime Report" to analyze trends and statistics for individual cities across the nation, despite warnings from the FBI stating that these types of rankings simply do not provide clear and accurate insight into the complex variables that affect a particular environment and the crime that occurs in it (FBI, 2016). While these lists do not offer a complete and accurate view of the situation, they do nothing to improve the morale in the community, image of the city, or attraction of visitors to the area.

Despite community frustration with Rockford's placement in reports of this nature, the perception of Rockford as a community particularly plagued by violence is, in some ways, the first step in solving the city's issues. In fact, such identification has qualified Rockford for the assistance of the U.S. Department of Justice (DOJ).

In 2015, the DOJ's Office of Justice Programs (OJP) Diagnostic Center completed the *Diagnostic Analysis of the City of Rockford, IL (2015)*. According to the executive summary of the analysis, Rockford identified violent crime, heroin abuse, and community-police relations as the most crucial community issues needing resolution (p. 4). Upon completion of the analysis, the DOJ crafted a strategic plan for Rockford that could be implemented to address these issues. One area for strategic improvement identified through the analysis was meant to address community-police relations through embracing principles of procedural justice and enhancing collaboration within the community. Interestingly enough, the report neither includes any specific strategies for improving relationships nor identifies the causes of poor relationships. Thus, the causes and solutions relevant to Rockford's crime problem remain somewhat obscured.

Personally, the choice of this topic for this project is the direct result of my own fears, joys, and reservations as a member of the Rockford community. I was born and raised in the City of Rockford. I attended schools in Rockford from preschool through high school. I have lived and worked in Rockford for the majority of my life, and I have chosen to return to the community now that my studies are coming to an end and my professional career has begun. When family members ask me why I would make the decision to return to this community, I have absolutely no reservations about my answer: Rockford, for better and worse, is and always has been my home. If I choose to run away from my home because of its many problems, I do a disservice to my community. Rockford has given me many blessings, and now it is time that I give back.

However, despite my optimism that there is a way to make this community stronger, I am exhausted by the constant reminder that I live in a very dangerous community. In the first weeks of 2017 headlines included, "No One Injured After Shots

Fired in Rockford Overnight, Police Say” (Zambo, 2017b), “Body's Identity Remains a Mystery Six Months After It was Found in Rockford Garbage Can” (Kolkey, 2017), and “4 Rob Simply Mac at CherryVale Mall at Gunpoint” (Curry, 2017). People are being caught in the crossfire between angry people, as violent crime is no longer contained to a single neighborhood or section of the community. My parents constantly worry about me shopping at the local mall, driving through certain parts of town, and even working in the part of town that I do.

As a member of the community, I can objectively acknowledge that the DOJ’s report offers a clear and useful starting point for city officials and the RPD. However, as a communication scholar, I also recognize that it seems to ignore many traditional communication strategies that could be easily implemented to create positive change. Understanding the ways that the RPD communicates with the publics it serves and how the relationship between the RPD and the publics could be improved is the first step in reclaiming this community. For example, social media is a communication channel that allows for real-time communication between organizations and their constituents. It could be a valuable resource for the RPD in particular as the organization continues to balance its duty to protect citizens and build relationships with them.

In order to understand these complex issues, I studied the social media communication efforts of the RPD. I specifically examined the ways in which the RPD utilizes Facebook and Twitter to communicate and foster a sense of relationship with the community it serves. By examining this range of discourse, I want to reveal the current strategies utilized by the RPD and areas in which its communication can be improved.

The focus on social media was chosen for several reasons. First, according to the *International Association of Chiefs of Police 2015 Social Media Survey Results*, 96.4%



of the organizations surveyed utilize social media and 73.8% of the surveyed organizations that do not currently use social media are considering adoption of social media. Additionally, 83.5% of the organizations using social media believe its use has improved community-organization relations. Social media is clearly perceived as a useful tool by police organizations and utilized in some form. Specifically, Facebook and Twitter were identified as the two most commonly utilized social media platforms. Second, social media use allows the RPD to exercise control over the specific message that the community is presented as there is no gatekeeper or third-party representative that interprets the message the RPD wants to send and then sends the interpretation to the public (Bučar-Ručman & Gorazd Meško, 2006). Finally, social media have been shown to have affected civic and political communication (Bennett, Wells, & Freelon, 2011; The Education Commission of the United States, 2012; Bennett, Wells, & Rank, 2009).

This particular area of study—police-community communication—is important, and relevant to the field of communication and society as a whole because of the sometimes difficult, but very important role police organizations play in local communities. The use of narrative theory in examining the social media strategies of the RPD is vital in improving the communication between the RPD and the local community. By extension, this study offers meaningful opportunities for police organizations to improve the relationship between the organization and the communities they serve. This study will (a) lead to a better understanding of the how the RPD communicates with the public and (b) generate recommendations for improving communication between police and the public to ensure ethical communication and community safety.

This project will ultimately consist of several chapters addressing a variety of areas. This first chapter introduces the importance of this particular study and provides a road map of sorts for the entire study. It sets the stage for understanding the current situation the Rockford community faces and explains the personal reasons this particular focus has been chosen for this study. The second chapter contains literature relevant to specific study. It explores the public efforts of the RPD to connect with the Rockford community, police communication in general, communication models, social media, mass personal communication, the narrative paradigm and civic and political communication. The literature explored in this second chapter explains the theoretical background upon which my analysis is based. It also justifies the focus for this project. The third chapter explains the methodology I applied to conduct the analysis. Furthermore, the particular sample, methods for data collection, and procedure for analysis are explained. The fourth chapter details the findings of my analysis and presents the themes present in the communication of the RPD. The fifth chapter contains my discussion of the findings and chapter six presents best practices and suggestions for future social media use. Finally, the last chapter ends with discussion of this study's limitations and potential avenues for future research.

## CHAPTER II

### LITERATURE REVIEW

Whether the RPD realizes it or not, the way it communicates with and about the community has the potential to impact the relationship between itself and the community. Communication is at the heart of what every organization and its audiences do every day to stay relevant, build relationships, and influence each other. Understanding communication is, therefore, key to understanding the ways in which organizations view individuals they interact with and, in turn, how the individuals view those organizations. From an organizational perspective, success in today's rapidly changing world is dependent on strong strategies and thoughtful planning. Organizations must be aware of the problems they face, know the publics they interact with, and lay a foundational plan of action to address goals relevant to solving the problems (Botan, 1997). Communicating strategically about the police organization, its goals, its personnel, and its actions is key to maintaining a relationship with the community it serves.

In the case of the RPD, the concept of models of communication can shed light onto the ways in which the RPD is influencing the community through communicative decisions. Furthermore, a combined approach utilizing the concepts of narrative theory will create a robust understanding of how the RPD uses storytelling to make sense of their role in the community. Thus, the literature review that follows focuses on public relations and Fisher's narrative theory. Specifically, the literature will begin with a brief overview of existing literature concerning the RPD, external communication of police departments in general, four models of communication, narrative theory, and civic and political communication.

## **The RPD and its Community**

The RPD has undergone some changes since the DOJ report was completed (Walker, 2016). In 2016, Commander Dan O'Shea of Elgin, Illinois, was named Rockford's new police chief. His predecessor, Chief Chet Epperson, announced his retirement in October 2015 (WIFR, 2015b). However, not all Rockford citizens were convinced that the departure was voluntary. For nearly a decade, the tense relationship between Former Chief Epperson and the police union had been a point of contention (RRSTAR Editorial Board, 2014). As early as 2007, the RPD's officers union voted 276-6 that they had "no confidence" in Epperson.

The relationship between Epperson and the union was damaged by two critical incidents that not only affected the internal relationships at the RPD, but also public confidence in the RPD. Tempers between the chief and the union reached a boiling point in 2009 (Haas, 2014). In late August 2009, RPD officers responded to a call that Mark Barmore, a local man, had threatened a woman with a knife. After he fled from the police, he was spotted near a church. He fled inside the building upon seeing the police officers that were still searching for him. Upon entering the church, Barmore fled to the basement, where a daycare was located, and barricaded himself in a closet. Officers attempted to enter the closet and block Barmore's escape. Barmore attempted to seize one officer's service weapon and was shot several times by the officers. The church had not been evacuated, one of several key missteps during the course of the incident, and, thus, many of those present for the incident were small children. Several costly lawsuits related to the incident and disciplinary measures resulted from investigations that proved the officers involved acted against department policy and the best interests of all involved.

Later in 2013, while conducting a welfare check at the home of the president of the Rockford NAACP unit, three officers were met with hostility (Kolkey, 2015). The president's ex-wife had called to voice her concern that a domestic battery incident may have occurred between the president and his son. The president did not want to let the officers enter the house and called the Epperson on his personal cell phone to discuss the situation. Unbeknownst to Epperson, the call was on speaker. The officers claim that Epperson told the president not to let the officers in and said he would send a supervisor over to the house. Epperson maintains he did nothing wrong; however, the Police Benevolent & Protective Association Unit 6 union filed a complaint on behalf of the officers. Ultimately, although this scandal created additional public tension between the chief and the police union, the Police and Fire Commission decided Epperson's actions did not warrant disciplinary action (WIFR, 2015a). Epperson's tenure as Chief of Police did not last long after that episode.

Dan O'Shea, the new chief of police for the RPD, wasted no time in implementing change in the Rockford region. Within the first two months on the job, Chief O'Shea changed departmental policies, including those dictating when a car chase is permissible (WREX, 2016). Chief O'Shea's efforts seemed to have an immediate impact on the community. In fact, May 2016 saw violent crime at a ten-year low. By July 2016, Chief O'Shea transitioned the RPD scanner to a fully encrypted system, meaning there was no longer immediate public access to crime reports (WIFR, 2016). This measure was met with concerns that the RPD would no longer be transparent with the community in how it responds to crime. In fact, 1,200 individuals who opposed this decision signed an online petition demonstrating their displeasure (Kolkey, 2016). However, the RPD does utilize many methods of communication to keep the public informed.

In addition to public webpages on the City of Rockford’s website, the RPD maintains a Facebook and Twitter account. Their webpages contain a 72-hour dispatch call log, detailed contact information, and various resources (City of Rockford, n.d.). It also details several community programs, including the Strong Neighborhood Houses initiative. This program provides an in-neighborhood resource for those who may not be able to seek out interaction with the RPD otherwise. Several police officers are assigned to each house and offer office hours, per se, during which they provide community resources and interact with the community. However, there are only three established Strong Neighborhood Houses located in two of three districts. Additionally, the RPD does offer a Citizens Police Academy meant to train and educate community leaders and build “cooperative relationships.”

Police organizations across the country all abide by similar, but, in some cases, unique policies and rules for keeping their communities safe. The Commission on Accreditation for Law Enforcement Agencies (CALEA) serves as an accreditation body that standardizes best practices for public safety organizations (CALEA, 2010a). Developed in 1979 by a collaborative effort of the International Association of Chiefs of Police (IACP), National Organization of Black Law Enforcement Executives (NOBLE), National Sheriffs' Association (NSA), and the Police Executive Research Forum (PERF), CALEA was created to “improve the delivery of public safety services, primarily by: maintaining a body of standards, developed by public safety practitioners, covering a wide range of up-to-date public safety initiatives; establishing and administering an accreditation process; and recognizing professional excellence” (CALEA, 2010a). In December 2003, the RPD began the process of gaining CALEA accreditation (City of

Rockford, n.d.). However, it was not until spring 2010 that the RPD officially were awarded accreditation. They received re-accreditation in spring 2012 and July 2015.

CALEA accreditation allows law enforcement agencies to prove that they are following established best practices and regulations. Specifically, the professional standards are:

- Require an agency to develop a comprehensive, well thought out, uniform set of written directives. This is one of the most successful methods for reaching administrative and operational goals, while also providing direction to personnel.
- Provide the necessary reports and analyses a CEO needs to make fact-based, informed management decisions.
- Require a preparedness program be put in place—so an agency is ready to address natural or man-made critical incidents.
- Are a means for developing or improving upon an agency's relationship with the community.
- Strengthen an agency's accountability, both within the agency and the community, through a continuum of standards that clearly define authority, performance, and responsibilities.
- Can limit an agency's liability and risk exposure because it demonstrates that internationally recognized standards for law enforcement have been met, as verified by a team of independent outside CALEA-trained assessors.
- Facilitates an agency's pursuit of professional excellence. (CALEA, 2010b)

These standards address a wide range of areas integral to the ethical and legal fulfillment of public safety responsibilities. Interestingly, these professional standards address both daily function of the organizations and public relations activities in that they are meant to improve relationships and limit liability and risk exposure. In addition to the usefulness of the standards as explicated above, CALEA believes that the standards specific to law enforcement programs “boost citizen and staff confidence in the agency” (CALEA, 2010a). This approach also points to a public relations function.

The RPD’s accreditation by CALEA implies that the RPD’s policies and regulations meet the standards set forth by CALEA. However, there are two versions of

CALEA standards for law enforcement programs — the Law Enforcement Accreditation Program and the Advanced Law Enforcement Accreditation Program — and it is unclear which version the RPD utilizes (CALEA, 2010b). Regardless of the version, there is not a standard title that specifically addresses external communication between the organization and the community, with the exception of news media. Additionally, there is no specific mention of social media. Even on the CALEA website, there is little guidance about social media use or external communication.

Despite the lack of guidance on social media and external communication on the CALEA website, the RPD has specific policies about the two and must abide by local, state, and federal laws regarding any release of information via any communication channel. Additionally, outdated versions of the RPD's general orders regarding social media and news media relations are publicly available through an Internet search. They were previously available on the RPD's official webpage. However, the link is now broken. I was able to access current versions of the orders through a Freedom of Information Act (FOIA) request. The general orders of a law enforcement organization are integral for the safety of the community and the officers. These orders are a series of written directives that "clearly states a police department's policies and procedures and governs the agency's general activities" (Rockford Police Department, 2011, p.1). Basically, these policies are standing orders that apply to all officers employed by the RPD. The series that is currently available online was originally issued February 6, 2004. It was reissued April 18, 2011. All orders remain in effect until they are officially revised or rescinded.

I requested access to two specific orders potentially relevant to this study. First, order 1.16 — News Media Relations. This order was originally issued July 15, 1977, and



was last revised April 6, 2016. As stated in the order itself, this relates directly to CALEA standards 12.2.1, 54.1.1, 54.1.2, and 54.1.3 (Rockford Police Department, 2016). While this order does detail how the RPD should interact with the news media it does not directly address online or social media based communication. However, the second requested order, 60.13 — Social Media, does directly address the manner in which the RPD communicates with the community via channels including Facebook, MySpace, and Twitter (Rockford Police Department, 2013). The order explains that social media should be used to “enhance communication, collaboration, and information exchange” (Rockford Police Department, 2013, p. 1). The order does not align with any specific CALEA standards. Potential uses for these media as outlined by the order include use as an investigative tool, manner of community outreach and engagement, and method for communicating time-sensitive notifications. The majority of this order explains the rights and responsibilities of officers using social media personally during their off duty hours.

Legally, the RPD is not allowed to release certain information. Order 1.16 — News Media Relations explains that the RPD may not release information concerning prior criminal records of anyone accused of a crime, opinion as to the guilt or innocence of an accused person, information relating to the identity of anyone killed or injured prior to notification of next of kin, or the identity of juveniles accused of a crime (Rockford Police Department, 2016). Other stipulations including the release of details are also included in the order. Essentially, the RPD may release general information about an incident but no specific information as outlined above.

## **Police Organizations and Communication**

Police organizations and their communication have been studied in various contexts, however the research has typically remained outside of the context of communication specific scholarship. Much of the available research seems to focus on their use of mass media, responses during large-scale crises, and use of strategic communication through the lens of law enforcement scholarship. However, limited research has pointed to best practices and potential means for organizational improvement.

Mass media has played a pivotal role in the distribution of information to targeted audiences. In the case of police organizations, mass media's representation of an organization, its activities, and its personnel can have consequences for the perception of the organization (Bučar-Ručman & Gorazd Meško, 2006). While it is true that personal experience adds context to each individual's perception of the police, "public opinion is on the long run greatly shaped by media presentations of police and estimations of police efficiency" (Bučar-Ručman & Gorazd Meško, 2006, p. 224). Mass media has historically served as a key source of information for the public. In the case of police organizations, mass media typically reports about crime-related incidents and the steps the police took to investigate the crime. Additionally, mass media provides information about safety campaigns and potential threats and requests for information. However, the media also tends to discuss police organizations in terms of public criticism and abuses of power. Journalism in particular seems to serve as a checks and balances system for the police, both reporting on the police organizations and ensuring that misconduct is brought to light. This level of transparency, meaning "the ability to find out what is going on inside a public sector organization through avenues such as

open meetings, access to records, the proactive posting of information on Web sites, whistle-blower protections, and even illegally leaked information” (Piotrowski & Van Ryzin, 2003, p. 308), comes with both negative and positive effects (Cooke & Sturges, 2009). External communication has associated indirect costs, such as staff hours. Additionally, high levels of transparency could alert criminal elements to the actions of the police to a degree that the safety of the community is jeopardized. However, transparency in mass media can also lead to a greater relationship with the public and greater opportunity for dialogue between the police and community members.

## **Dialogue**

Dialogue between the police organization and the community it serves seems to be of the utmost importance in times of large-scale crises. For that reason, unsurprisingly, police communication in times of crisis is studied quite extensively. Events such as the UK riots in 2011 and active-shooter situations at schools are just two occasions in which police organizations utilized external communication to manage the public perceptions of the situation and attempt to remain in control (Denef, Bayerl, & Kaptein, 2013; Mazer et al., 2015). In both cases, social media was used to disseminate information and gauge community response to the incidents. Social media offers a quick and effective way to facilitate dialogue between the police and the public in times of crisis. Especially in the case of the UK riots, scholars note that there is more than one way to communicate with the public and, ultimately, manage the relationship that exists between the two. The police may prefer to create more or less distance between the public and police during these high-stress events. Public relations is key in strategically building relationships. Consistency in building and maintaining relationships with community members leads stakeholders to perceive the organization as effective (Balsler

& McClusky, 2005). Demonstration of a strong commitment to organizational mission and values also impacts the perception of the organization's effectiveness. This perception of effectiveness is one key element in developing the bond between organizations and their supporters. Strategic communication leads to effectiveness, which, in turn, results in gains for the organization. Communication is key in managing that distance. If the police choose to bridge that gap, they will likely take a more expressive approach, gain a greater reach, and create a greater tolerance for police mistakes (Denef, Bayerl, & Kaptein, 2013). However, this approach requires a more hands-on approach, creates ample opportunity for police to over-share information, and can create a very polarizing sentiment. This approach can be detrimental if communication is improperly managed; however, it ultimately has a better chance at strengthening the relationship between the police organization and the public.

The choice for how to communicate with the public must be made strategically in every situation. Using a focus rooted in marketing, some scholars have focused on the concept of external communication from police organizations to the public that is more focused on the consumer or benefitting public (Bohan & Yorke, 1987). This view of police organizations has been treated as somewhat radical, as it encourages the public to be involved in shaping the communication patterns of the police organization. This conceptualization of the relationship between the police and the public focuses more clearly on the needs of the community rather than just focusing on producing police work in the community. Further research indicates the a turn towards marketing the police organization is a result of governmental focus on the public as consumers, an increasing reliance on mediated communication, public outcry about the competency of the police, and high demand for police involvement at community events (Mawby &

Worthington, 2002). Because of these pressures, marketing has been identified as a means of making the police organization's voice heard, especially at times when the community may have a poor perception of the organization.

### **External Communication and Social Media**

External communication from the police organization is clearly a complex and important topic. Researchers have identified some best practices to ensure that the organizations are represented in the best way possible. First, Mawby and Worthington (2002) studied the use of marketing by police organizations and identified the embodiment of a police *service* rather than a police *force* as integral to a shift in public perception and a strengthening of the relationship between the police and the public. This shift will require a complete rebranding of existing police organizations to focus less on the organization's brute strength and power in the community and more on the services that benefit the individuals and the community. Second, much of the research into police communication focuses on social media use as an effective way to manage external communication, especially during crises. Denef, Bayerl, and Kaptein (2013) point to this tool as an important means for developing relationships between the police and the public. They recommend that police organizations should use this tool to communicate frequently and consistently with the public.

Additionally, the *International Association of Chiefs of Police 2015 Social Media Survey Results* indicate, "77.8% of agencies surveyed have a social media policy and an additional 11.7% are in the process of crafting a policy" (p. 1). Additionally, the Global Justice Information Sharing Initiative (2013), a federal advisory council on advising on justice information sharing, has created an informational booklet for use in developing a social media policy. The booklet specifically states, "social media tools and resources can

be used to prevent, mitigate, respond to, and investigate criminal activity” (Global Justice Information Sharing Initiative 2013, p.5). The organization focuses on social media as a tool for interacting with the public as well as gaining and disseminating information. In addition to providing recommendations about how these social media tools can be utilized, the booklet also reminds policy makers that there are key legal issues at stake for (a) the gathering of information via social media and (b) the potential for a lack of policy to create opportunities for unprofessional conduct. However, the focus of this particular resource is protecting the Fourth Amendment rights of the community the police organization serves, rather than indicating how social media should be used. Essentially, this booklet emphasizes the potential for social media to aid the police department’s investigations rather than interact with the community.

This particular perception of social media as a tool for investigation rather than communication is not rare within the law enforcement community. *International Association of Chiefs of Police 2015 Social Media Survey Results* identifies Facebook and Twitter the social media platforms most used by police organizations and indicates that 96.4% of the agencies surveyed utilize social media, but the most common use of social media is for obtaining information to be used in criminal investigations. The next most common uses of social media include notifying the public of crime and, then, ranked third, is community outreach/citizen engagement. Utilization of a communication platform for outreach and engagement—hallmarks of the platforms themselves—was ranked third. Despite the focus on information gathering and dissemination in social media use, police agencies find social media to be improving the police/community relations in their jurisdiction, although the respondents were not asked to explain the basis for this opinion. It is interesting to note that in the cases of

police organizations that were surveyed and did not have social media accounts, the top three activities the respondents anticipate their organizations will use social media for include providing emergency or disaster-related information, notifying the public about crime problems, and addressing criminal investigations. Community outreach/citizen engagement was ranked fifth.

It would seem as though the current best practices and perceptions surrounding social media use by law enforcement focus on one-way communication. However, this conclusion seems to contradict the idea of police organizations serve as partners in interactions between themselves and the communities they serve.

Police organizations' use of communication tools for external communication with their communities tends to utilize many tools, including mass media, social media, public relations, and marketing. However, little research examining the narrative quality of the external communication has been completed. The focus has almost exclusively been on mass media and crisis communication.

Social media can be an integral tool for external communication. However, social media can also present a unique challenge as the typical power structure previously inherent in the public relations models is often reimagined in such a public sphere as social networks. Initial review of the RPD's communication practices revealed prominent use of two social media channels (Facebook and Twitter) through which narratives can be constructed.

### **Communication Models**

Communication is by no means a simple field. Grunig and Hunt (1984) identified and applied four key models of how organizations relate to their publics. Essentially, communication between organizations and their publics can be explained using one of

four models: press agency, public information, two-way asymmetrical, or the two-way symmetrical model (Grunig & Hunt, 1984). These models differ based on the presence or absence of dimensionality and symmetry in the communication between the organization and its publics. Press agency is characterized by one-way communication from the organization to its publics, which is crafted in such a way as to persuade or manipulate the public into agreeing with the message of the organization. It embodies one-way, asymmetrical communication, as it does not take the publics' desires into account. The earliest examples of public relations in this model are typically considered to be some of the least ethical approaches to public relations, as the publicity can embody the manipulative propaganda function that was deeply entwined with the early conceptualization of public relations. The public information model also utilizes a one-way communication stream from an organization to a public. However, while the organization does not allow the public to offer direct feedback to the messages it receives, the organization applies audience analysis to selectively craft the messages it transmits to meet the expectations of its publics.

The two-way asymmetrical model and two-way symmetrical model require radically different preparation when considering the message design (Grunig & Hunt, 1984). The two-way asymmetrical model requires the organization to conduct primary research about its publics in order to craft a message that will be better tailored and, thus, be more apt to persuade the publics. Finally, the two-way symmetrical model takes the perspectives and goals of both the specific public and the organization into consideration. This model allows the specific public and the organization to enter into a dialogue with particular two-way communication channels about the specific issue at hand.



The two-way symmetrical model has typically been identified as the most ethical model of public relations because it allows both the organization and its audience to actively participate in the interaction (Grunig, 1992). Including publics in a sort of dialogue with the organization requires more resources to constantly facilitate two-way communication, leads to a more transparent communication process and, thus, results in a less manipulative model of public relations.

Scholarship on communication models does extend beyond these four basic models. However, at the heart of external organizational communication, these elements are sufficient and salient. Engagement via social media is an important and debated topic. In the case of Facebook, there are several engagement features that can be tracked at the post level, including the like, share, and comment features. By analyzing these features, researchers determined that the comment feature requires the highest level of engagement because this requires users to not only read a post, but also create a personal message back to the organization's original post (Cho, Schweickart, & Haase, 2014). Utilizing the four models of public relations as proposed by Grunig and Hunt (1984), researchers examined the three engagement features to determine whether the organization's message strategies would impact the level of engagement. Unsurprisingly, organizations that utilize the highly praised two-way symmetrical form of communication, meaning that both the public and the stakeholder communicate their messages in an egalitarian manner, typically see their stakeholders having a higher level of engagement through Facebook posts. However, research has revealed that nonprofit organizations use their profiles asymmetrically to disclose information about their organizations rather than engage in two-way communication (Waters, Burnett, Lamm, & Lucas, 2009). The common use of one-way communication methods does not

necessarily indicate that users are not internally engaging with the messages of the organization (Ihm, 2015). However, one-way communication does not result in easily discernable engagement patterns because any communication could potentially be singular in occurrence and never excite a response from another party.

Understanding the differences between one-way and two-way communication is of particular importance because research has demonstrated that interactivity, implicitly fostered by two-way communication is integral to relationship-building (Saffer, Sommerfeldt, & Taylor, 2013; Cho, Schweickart, & Haase, 2014). Ultimately, one-way communication cannot be effective in relationship building as it does not demonstrate that the message sender or organization has a commitment to partnership with the community. However, two-way communication strategies can be a drain on time and resources (Lovejoy, Waters, & Saxton, 2012; Botan, 1997). Additionally, in some cases, the audience may simply not be interested in engaging with the organization via two-way communication (Botan, 1997). Ultimately, the organization should determine which messages would align best with each communication model as situations arise. For example, The RPD may choose to use one-way communication when alerting the public that a crime occurred so that all tips are funneled through one source.

On social media, these types of communication models are characterized by specific traits. One-way communication models typically utilize emoticons, pictures that symbolize a variety of concepts, and words to express emotions (Waters & Williams, 2011). Additionally, these types of posts include updates or announcements from the organization itself or information or reports from other agencies. Two-way posts, on the other hand, ask for feedback, participation in a survey or poll, or ask the audience to somehow interact with the organization via the social media channel. These posts may

also use direct messaging features, direct replies, or mentions. Waters and Williams (2011) categorize these posts based on the original content of the message, rather than public response to the messages. For example, if the organization posts an informative message, it is not inviting interaction and, thus, is a one-way communication.

### **Social Media**

Ever-evolving technology has created the double-edged sword of social media. Public relations professionals have had to evolve their practices as fast as these new media have come into existence. Social media have revolutionized the ways in which organizations are able to communicate with their publics and, in turn, how publics are able to communicate with and about organizations. For public relations practitioners, this technology fosters a uniquely transparent communication flow. Beneficially, social media allow organizations to quickly and easily distribute information about their organizational identity, identify available products or services, and encourage engagement with publics. However, an unfortunate consequence of the ease of communication is the ease with which publics can express displeasure with an organization and its offerings. Additionally, social media use is not as simple as it can seem. Like any communication effort, a great deal of thought and strategy is required to generate a successful social media campaign. Although social media are complex, scholars have arrived at a specific definition of social media. Carr and Hayes (2015) explain that social media are “Internet-based channels that allow users to opportunistically interact and selectively self-present, either in real-time or asynchronously, with both broad and narrow audiences who derive value from user-generated content and the perception of interaction with others” (p. 7). The key portion of this definition for social media is the *perception* of interaction. While social media are

based on social interactions, the interactions themselves do not have to be truly interactive as defined by communication scholarship. Those using social media only need believe that they are.

Social media embody a unique form of communication. Communication scholars have come to refer to this as masspersonal communication (Carr & Hayes, 2015). Masspersonal communication is characteristically “interpersonal communication, interpersonal channels are used for mass communication, and when individuals simultaneously engage in mass and interpersonal communication” (p. 13). As explained by O’Sullivan and Carr (2017), masspersonal communication is “defined as communication activities high in personalization yet highly accessible” (p. 7). Masspersonal communication occurs when a personalized interaction to one individual is accessible to a wide audience. An example of this would be if User A posted a message on User B’s Facebook wall discussing an inside joke. The message would be personal and crafted for interaction only with User B; however, other individuals would have public access to the content and be able to add their own comments to the post. In this way, masspersonal communication occupies a space between interpersonal and mass communication.

There are a multitude of social media networks constantly providing their users with an outlet to share information and engage with the information shared by others. The top five most popular networks in the United States by unique visitors are: Facebook, LinkedIn, Instagram, Twitter, and Pinterest (Ad Age, 2016). Engagement on social media has been hotly debated. Measuring these usage statistics is not an easy task, especially across networks whose user characteristics can differ greatly, making comparisons among them nearly impossible.

For organizations, social media presents a unique opportunity for community creation, promotion distribution, and reach expansion. Organizations and brand are able to create their own pages and launch promotional campaigns of any sort to wide audiences quickly and efficiently (“Facebook pages,” 2016). By creating a page, an organization can gain access to advertising tools and data explaining the success of individual posts across time. Research seems to suggest that many users interact with organizations via social media primarily for information (Valentini, 2015). This finding betrays the weakness of the publics’ relationship with the organization. While an organization likely wishes to foster a strong, long-lasting relationship with its publics, the publics may not reciprocate that feeling.

Perhaps social media is not necessarily the best option for public relations, which Valentini (2015) argues. Ultimately, there is very little to prove that social media are effective for relationship building or engaging publics. In fact, Valentini (2015) argues that there is little to say that social media efforts influence the attitudes or behaviors of publics. Plus, as more and more individuals have flocked to social media and other digital technologies, the demand for content, whether the information is true or false, has only muddied the waters. For example, the 2016 U.S. presidential election has raised great concern over “fake news” that is circulated via social media. These news stories offer sensational stories that sway individuals’ opinions by offering believable, but false claims (Allcott & Gentzkow, 2017). Valentini (2015) also explains that the technical use of social media by public relations practitioners does not seem to mirror the idealized two-way symmetrical model of communication. The two-way symmetrical model has typically been identified as the most ethical model of public relations because it allows both the organization and its audience to actively participate in the interaction

(Grunig, 1992). Including publics in a sort of dialogue with the organization requires more resources to constantly facilitate two-way communication, leads to a more transparent communication process and, thus, results in a less manipulative model of public relations. According to Valentini (2015), the public relations activities actually tend to embody one-way communication and undermine the relationship building efforts of public relations professionals.

Despite the potential gains associated with social media use, there are some inherent risks. Transparency or openness and authenticity or truthfulness of voice are considered of the utmost importance for publics (Ott & Theunissen, 2015). Content creators must find a balance between honestly and clearly releasing information to the public not only to keep them informed, but also to manage the reputation of the organization. Ultimately, the organization's leadership should create a strategic plan to clearly outline the organization's objectives and measurement tools so that the effectiveness of the organization's communication can be measured and tracked over time (Smudde, 2015). These plans are typically in flux and must adapt as the organization's environment changes.

In addition, as the tendency to include online technologies in the communication process increases, so does the potential to alienate others. Human physical contact continues to be replaced with virtual reactions (Oliver, 2010). This switch not only creates a sense of isolation between individuals, but also increases the chances for a miscommunication to occur and damage relationships. Public relations practitioners must be aware of the potential for messages to be taken in by a variety of individuals from a variety of backgrounds that may attach different values, intonation, and context to certain words, phrases, or images.

Social media can be a valuable resource for organizations. However, public relations practitioners may put too much stock in its ability to build relationships between the organization and the community.

## **Facebook**

Facebook has emerged as the leading social media network in the United States (Ad Age, 2016). Based on preliminary research into the communication channels the RPD actively uses, Facebook is a primary channel through which the RPD communicates with the Rockford community. Originally offered only to college students, Facebook now is available to anyone with an email address and boasts that 1.71 billion users access the network monthly (“Investor relations,” 2016). Facebook consistently dominates advertising revenue among social media networks (Ad Age, 2016). In particular, Facebook seems to enjoy a wide reach and the financial benefits that reach brings.

According to its mission, Facebook is meant to allow users to connect with family and friends, provide a way to stay up to date and interconnected with global events, and share information about the things they are passionate about (“Investor relations,” 2016). Users do this by creating text posts about their opinions, experiences, and thoughts, uploading photos and videos, checking in at various locations and “friending” those they know. Users can even “like” products, companies, and organizations or create and join groups meant to unite likeminded users.

Users can post and interact with posts at any time day or night through a variety of actions. Essentially, there are low, medium, and high-level engagement actions available on Facebook as the “like,” “share,” and “comment” functions respectively. First, users can like a post. Facebook’s “like” feature allows a user to demonstrate their approval of

or agreement with a post without creating a verbal message (Cho, Schweickart, & Haase, 2014). Secondly, users can share a post. The “share” function allows a user to distribute another’s message to their particular friend group by essentially reposting the same content. Finally, users can comment on the posts of others. The “comment” feature allows users to craft their own message in response to someone’s post. This particular feature is seen to represent the highest level of engagement, as users must put much more effort into this action than simply clicking the like or share buttons.

## **Twitter**

The micro-blogging tool known as Twitter has also generated quite a bit of engagement for nonprofit organizations. Essentially, Twitter allows users to send real-time messages of 140 characters or less, creating a short public message (Lovejoy, Waters, & Saxton, 2012). Similar to Facebook, Twitter also has many ways for users to engage with individual messages including replying, retweeting, and liking messages. Lovejoy and Saxton (2012) analyzed organizations’ use of Twitter and found that organizations primarily use Twitter to disseminate information, foster dialogue, and build community among supporters. Yet, as in the case of Facebook, organizations focus on information dissemination above all else. This usage represents a key weakness in nonprofit organizations’ use of Twitter. Despite the complexity and potential of Twitter, organizations are primarily communicating using a one-way communication channel and, ultimately, neglecting to invite their stakeholders to join in any sort of two-way dialogue (Lovejoy, Waters, & Saxton, 2012; Waters & Jamal, 2011). Effective use of this communication channel requires strategy and, to an extent, story-telling (Valentini, 2015).



## **Narrative Paradigm**

People in organizations craft messages in various discourse forms that explain a strict view of the world they would like their targeted publics to know. The importance of narration in the human experience is not a new concept. In fact, the study of communication can trace its roots to the early study of rhetoric (Fisher, 1984). Walter Fisher used the foundation of rhetoric to construct his “narrative paradigm.” Fisher explained that this paradigm is “a theory of symbolic actions — words and/or deeds — that have sequence and meaning for those who live, create, and interpret them” (Fisher, 1984, p. 266). This paradigm holds that most conceptualizations of humanity are based upon understanding the human experience by accounting for or recounting the decisions that individuals make. Essentially, to understand the human experience, individuals tell stories. They try to understand the truth of the human condition narratively.

Fisher (1984) based this paradigm on several underlying principles. First humans are, at the most basic levels of their existence, storytellers. Storytelling is a fundamental experience that crosses cultures and time. Second, individuals typically make their decisions based on what they consider to be good reasons. People do not act without a reason to do so. Third, good reasons are completely subjective and entirely dependent on context and the situation. Good reasons change with time, place, and experience. Fourth, the rationality of a narrative is based on the principles of “narrative fidelity” and “narrative probability.” Essentially, these concepts explain that a narrative is not rational if the story told is not reliably and effectively told. Finally, individuals must

choose which narratives to act upon. Individuals must choose from the available narratives which reality they will create for themselves.

Narration clearly plays a pivotal role in the human experience. Not only does it allow for a rational and reasonable way to determine the best course of action, but it also creates a method of understanding the decisions of others (Fisher, 1984; Burke, 1985). All humanity relies on the same basic stories to make sense of the world around them. In fact, narration is “intimately connected to the ways that people think and act” (Heath, 2004, p. 175). Thus, if individuals use good reasons to act upon a particular story and the actions create a rational story, it should be relatively simple to understand why a person would do a certain thing (Fisher, 1984; Burke, 1985). Being that individuals represent and act upon the interests of organizations, it should be relatively easy to understand the actions of an organization using the same principles. Understanding the actions of individuals and organizations is a step towards building relationships (Gray, 2009). In all cases, the narratives themselves must be rational to be understood. However, every individual will develop a subjective view of the world and their role in it through exposure to narratives and the fit of their own experiences to those narratives.

The notion of subjectivity is particularly important when considering organizations. Essentially, all organizational narratives can be considered constructions, formed for specific reasons, in that they are strategically created, rather than spontaneously occurring (Barry & Elmes, 1997). With that in mind, the idea of using narratives becomes substantially more complex as individuals must decide with which narratives to engage based on similar aspects that draw attention to a great story of any kind or size. Basically, “the successful strategic story may depend less on tools like comprehensive scanning, objective planning, or meticulous control/feedback systems

and more on whether it stands out from other organizational stories, is persuasive, and invokes retelling” (Barry & Elmes, 1997, p. 6). At the heart of telling a believable story lie two concepts similar to those identified by Fisher as being the hallmarks of a rational narrative: credibility and defamiliarization.

Credibility relates closely to the concepts of narrative fidelity and narrative probability. Fisher identified narrative fidelity as the idea that a story “rings true” with the audience’s personal experiences (Fisher, 1984). For example, if an individual knows that apples grow on trees and a story explains that apples grow on stalks like corn, the audience is unlikely to consider that rational, as it does not correspond to their personal experiences. Narrative probability simply refers to coherence or whether or not the story as a whole is probable or “hangs together.” For example, if throughout a story the main character is depicted as a staunch vegetarian and then the story ends with them casually eating a steak dinner, the story is no longer coherent and the ending is improbable. Similarly, in this case, credibility refers to believability (Barry & Elmes, 1997). This result can be achieved through several devices, including materiality, voice, perspective, ordering, setting, and readership targeting. Through these devices, credibility especially affects ethical decision-making for and in the narrative (Barry & Elmes, 1997).

Presenting a credible narrative is key in ensuring that audiences adopt the narrative as truth. Several devices work together to create this effect in a narrative (Barry & Elmes, 1997). Materiality refers to the physical element of the narrative, both literally and figuratively. Literally, materiality refers to the physical expression of the narrative. Whether it is the length of the narrative, a doctor’s poor handwriting, or even the use of a tangible rather than abstract concept, the physical representation of a narrative is a powerful element. This can be seen in the strategic choice of a media

channel. A recorded interview shown on the local news could have a greater impact on a targeted audience than a letter to the editor in the local newspaper. Similarly, the voice and perspective utilized in presenting the message can influence the perception of the message. These features have been described as “who says” and “who sees” (Barry & Elmes, 1997, p. 8). A letter to the editor of the local newspaper from the CEO of a local business as the first source announcing a massive layoff may have a different effect than the local manager of the business meeting with the employees to announce the layoff. Organizations must be careful that the perceived author and audience are appropriate for the situation in context.

Ordering, setting, and plots relate closely to the concept of probability (Barry & Elmes, 1997). The overall structure of the story must be consistent and should evoke an immediate recognition by the audience. The use of commonly known myths is useful for evoking a consistent and specific response. Narratives typically follow a plot that is easily recognizable, if not present in every culture. These archetypal stories are part of the fabric of humanity’s identity, yet are shaped by the specific cultures they are found in (Kent, 2015). These stories can include archetypes, such as the quest, which has been a fixture in every culture and is easily recognized in works such as *The Odyssey*, the rivalry, or the sacrifice. The plots that are considered archetypal are immediately recognizable to most cultures. Finally, readership explains how the interpretation of a narrative lies not only in the way the narrative is written, but also in the context the audience brings to the narration (Barry & Elmes, 1997). Basically, the “interplay of text, author, and reader suggests that the interpretation of a text is both pluralistic — reflecting the author’s intent and the reader’s construction of meaning — and dynamic”

(p. 10). All of these devices work together to create a story that is rational in the minds of the audience.

Defamiliarization is radically different from the abovementioned concepts and devices. This concept refers to the narrative's novelty (Barry & Elmes, 1997).

Defamiliarization points to the idea that, regardless of a narrative's coherence, in order to remain relevant to the audience, the narrative must offer something new and exciting to grab the audience's attention. Narratives can be particularly useful in building relationships, if the narrative is effectively created and managed. Probability, fidelity, and defamiliarization are key concepts to utilize when organizations are attempting to utilize the concept of narration to influence their audience.

The use of narrative can shape the perception of reality. This characteristic allows narrative to be linked to the creation of identity and power (Hartelius & Browning, 2008). This means that the way stories are told and the story itself shapes the way an individual conceives of themselves and sees their position in the world relative to others. Individuals and organizations tell stories to make sense of and shape the reality around them by positioning them in relation to others. Bourdieu (1985) explains that every person is born into a world in which their identities are shaped by their culture, family, and social class. For organizations, leaders use language to create analogies that explain how organizations fit into reality (Hartelius & Browning, 2008). The identity of an organization is essentially explained through stories about its relationship to others. However, this explanation can be particularly problematic as the identity itself could be manipulated to fit the needs of an organization at a particular time. For example, in order to understand a dishwashing liquid, the manufacturer may create advertisements that demonstrate how the liquid compares to other brands in terms of smell, ability to

clean greasy messes, and effect on the environment, regardless of how the product actually compares to another brand in its effectiveness.

However, beyond that, narrative also has power to elevate particular entities and individuals to a position of power (Barry & Elmes, 1997). Additionally, narratives have the ability to point to structures of power inherent in the process of communication. The leader of any organizations is elevated to a position of power when they speak on behalf of the organization. Furthermore, not every member of the organization is consulted in the crafting of every aspect of the narrative. Thus, the creation of the narrative itself betrays the distances in power that exist within the organization. Additionally, not every narrative is made public to every member. Thus, the very act of granting access to the narrative demonstrates a further power structure.

Power, especially in terms of public relations, a form of strategic communication that seeks to directly influence key publics in order to persuade or inform, can be negatively perceived (Botan, 1997). Typically, it seems that power is considered to be a phenomenon based in community interactions (Smudde & Courtright, 2010). It is based on the relationships we form and hierarchies that are held as a result.

Smudde and Courtright (2010) explain that there are three dimensions of power that make public relations and power compatible. First, power is hierarchical. This refers to the idea that within an organization, each individual has a rank and position, which is associated with a certain prescribed amount of power. Second, power is rhetorical. This dimension of power is perhaps most closely related to the study at hand. The rhetorical dimension of power refers to the ability to use language to influence and persuade. This type of power can very easily do either good or harm. Finally, there is a social dimension of power created by the relationships among people. For organizations

this power is impacted by the interactions between community members and the organization. In terms of the RPD all three types of power are at play. First, within the RPD, various organizational members have different amounts of power relative to their rank. This influences the narrative concept of voice as only certain members of the RPD are allowed to speak via social media on behalf of the organization. Second, the rhetorical dimension of power of the RPD refers to the organizations ability to utilize messaging via social media to influence and persuade the community. Finally, the social power of the RPD makes it so that the messages crafted by the RPD carry a certain weight and that weight makes it possible for the messages themselves to affect public perception.

Grunig believes that public relations should act primarily, but not solely in the advocate role (Grunig, 2006, p. 165). Grunig (2006) explains, “public relations should be able to improve the ethics and social responsibility of organizational behaviors” (p. 165). In this manner of understanding, public relations practitioners would be responsible for providing and maintaining ethical framework within the organization. Grunig argues that this is only possible when public relations practitioners are able to be members of a dominant coalition of their organization.

The dominant coalition of an organization refers to “an informal coalition, whose members can be both inside and outside the organization and who can come from different levels of an organizational hierarchy” (Grunig, 2006, p. 164). This coalition is not necessarily the sole source of power within the organization; however, a dominant coalition has a certain amount of power over at least a limited scope of decisions.

Smith and Place (2013) feel similarly about the power of public relations within an organization. They say, “power for practitioners comes down to autonomy, or one’s

capacity to make decisions over one's primary subject area" (p. 178). The power of the practitioner lies in their decision-making capabilities. However, their argument goes one step further by identifying the potential to gain power. Smith and Place (2013) argue, "public relations stands to gain power through the expertise of the individual practitioner and the use of social media, which yields tangible evidence for the organization to assess the value of the public relations function" (p. 179). Essentially, public relations gains power as organizations continue to see its value as tangible results.

Yet, the idea of public relations having power remains a contested issue. Ethically charged concerns regarding public relations are not just limited to discussions of power, however. Botan (1997), for instance, discusses his concerns in terms of how information is communicated. Botan believes public relations as a practice requires exchange of information in order to remain ethical. Essentially, Botan argues that public relations practitioners should avoid a monologic approach to public relations. Botan says, "Although not seeking to be deceitful, to short circuit rational decision making, or to manipulate publics; the technician model has no specific interest in avoiding these behaviors" (Botan, 1997, p. 197). Botan instead favors the dialogical approach in which:

practitioners would begin from the assumption that target publics have interpretations of the world that are as varied and valid as the client's interpretations. They would assume that the real goal is not reducing publics to the service of the client through instrumental mastery but joining with the publics in the process of negotiating new mutual understanding. (Botan, 1997, p. 197)



Through creating a dialogue, the practitioners indicate their concern for the effects of their work and wish to solely provide the publics with facilitation and information leading to an informed decision.

Dialogical communication is possible through public relations efforts; however, it is not always practical, as it requires more resources than public relations practitioners typically have at their disposal (Grunig, 1992; Valentini, 2015). Dialogue, as defined by Kent and Taylor (2002) has five basic characteristics: mutuality, empathy, propinquity, risk, and commitment. Mutuality refers to the idea that the organization and its publics are linked. Empathy refers to the support and trust necessary for the dialogue to be achieved. Propinquity or dialogic exchange is characterized by three features including “immediacy of presence,” “temporal flow,” and “engagement” (Kent & Taylor, 2002, p. 26). Risk refers to the unpredictability and vulnerability that are associated with dialogue. Finally, commitment refers to authenticity, commitment to the conversation, and commitment to interpretation. All of these aspects of dialogue are important, and yet, costly and difficult to achieve.

Although many of these concepts have not yet been studied in terms of police organizations and their communication, the use of storytelling to create reality and reinforce structures of power is relevant and integral to understanding the police-community relationship. The very structure of the messages created and disseminated by the RPD could realistically affect the development of the relationship between the RPD and the community, which, in turn, would influence the effectiveness of the RPD in enforcing laws, preventing crime, and seeking justice for victims. Narrative theory offers key insight into how the simple act of storytelling affects the complex nature of civil society in the Rockford region.

## **Civic and Political Communication**

As in narrative theory, scholars recognize that the form and design of the messages and communication spaces may ultimately affect the norms or models of political communication that takes place (Freelon, 2015). The style of communication and the type of citizenship engaged in will be determined by the spaces created online. Political communication refers to any messaging that concerns public policy and any political topic (Freelon, 2015), while civic engagement refers to how individuals interact with political information and structures (Bennett, Wells, & Freelon, 2011). In the case of the RPD, the organization's communication can be considered political communication and inviting of civic engagement because the RPD takes a leadership role in the administration of local government and can be seen as both a policy maker and influencing other policy makers. What I mean by this is that the RPD plays a role in the governing of the city and assists in creating and enforcing rules that apply to all community members. When the RPD communicates, it asks the community to take part in the communication that shapes the political structure of the community.

The impact of the Internet and online communication on citizens' civic engagement in the United States has been an important topic in the study of communication. Being the police organizations engage in political communication and utilize the internet, the ways in which these types of organizations communicate with the communities they serve has been affected too. In terms of the engagement of youth in the changing landscape of democratic deliberation, there are two differing paradigms examining political engagement (Bennett, 2018). These paradigms include the engaged youth and disengaged youth. Essentially, scholars either acknowledge that Internet technologies and new forms of civic life facilitated by online technologies offer a form of

civic and political engagement in which individuals can express their ideas and beliefs in a non-traditional format, or they fear that the individualistic tendencies of Internet use are creating media engagement without connecting individuals to actual civic or political affairs.

In the realm of civic education, there seems to be a large body of research explicating two main citizenship paradigms present in the United States as a result of this debate about civic engagement in the era of the Internet. This manner of understanding citizen engagement allows for analysis of police organizations' communication in terms of the authority they have in their communities. These include dutiful citizenship (DC) and actualizing citizenship (AC) (Bennett, Wells, & Freelon, 2011; The Education Commission of the United States, 2012; Bennett, Wells, & Rank, 2009). DC is exemplified by participation in civic life through group settings. This paradigm is typified by the activity of political parties and other groups active throughout the United States in which many individuals come together to express their civic engagement as a group. In the case of these individuals, they become and remain engaged through a sense of personal duty. This particular model is an older model of engagement that has seen a certain amount of decline in younger generations.

AC sees a marked turn from the DC tradition (Bennett, Wells, & Freelon, 2011; The Education Commission of the United States, 2012; Bennett, Wells, & Rank, 2009). AC engagement shows a lesser regard for typical authority figures and groups. This type of engagement typically sees looser peer groups organizing around shared resources and social technologies and is particularly prevalent in the generations of digital natives. In this case, individual expression is highlighted and there is a lesser focus on staunchly

established groups. Four key civic competencies that scholarship points to as being accessible via web technologies include:

1. The *Knowledge* necessary to be an effective citizen.
2. The *Expression* skills needed to communicate effectively.
3. The skills needed for *Joining Publics* (groups or networks) that can emerge, coordinate, and organize around an issue or candidate.
4. The skills needed to *Take Action* to address a specific issue or policy. (Bennett, Wells, & Freelon, 2011, p. 840-841)

These competencies have leaned heavily toward the DC style (Bennett, Wells, & Freelon, 2011; The Education Commission of the United States, 2012). However, scholars have expanded the understanding of the AC competencies at work in civic engagement. Scholars have found several key differences in the way each style is expressed. DC style relies on information provided by the authorities, training for traditional forms of public address, membership in traditional organizations, and activities that are managed by traditional organizations. On the other hand, the AC style relies on peer-generated information, self-created media, membership in peer-defined networks, and peer supported activities. This also ties directly to Bohan & Yorke (1987) and the idea that the conceptualization of law enforcement is shifting. There has been a turn toward encouraging the public to be involved in shaping the communication patterns of the police organization. This conceptualization of the relationship between the police and the public focuses more clearly on the needs of the community rather than just focusing on producing police work in the community and points toward a shift from the DC to AC paradigm of citizenship.

Scholars also point to three distinct types of norms found in political communication (Freelon, 2015). Depending on the structure of the posts made by the RPD, the organization's posts will fall into one of the following categories. First, there is

a deliberative norm that focuses on asking questions and giving answers. Second, there is the communitarian norm that encourages homogenous thought and actions. Finally, there is a liberal individualist norm, which advocates for individualist behavior and thought. Dahlberg (2001) further explains the liberal individualist seeks to use online platforms for personal expression. The communication style is decidedly one-way, with the individual only examining other peoples' points of view for the purpose of refuting them. The communitarian model, on the other hand, is meant to reinforce or create community ties. These groupings may be based on identity or social characteristics such as gender, race, or ideology. This style reinforces ingroup and outgroup boundaries, as well as interaction and collective identities. Basically, this style prefers to separate people into groups using specific characteristics to define members of groups and those that do not fit into a group (Freelon, 2015; Dahlberg, 2001). Finally, the deliberative style encourages open dialogue, free of restriction. This approach, theoretically, should lead to greater understanding and the potential for individuals to change their opinions based on argument and reason.

All three models are characterized by selected features (Freelon, 2015). The liberal individualist tends toward monologue, personal revelation, personal showcase, and flaming. Monologue refers to the general lack of “the listening, responsiveness, and dialogue that would promote communicative actions” (Wilhelm, 1999, p. 98). This approach is characterized by a distinct focus on the personal narrative without regard for other perspectives. Personal revelation is simply the decision to reveal personal information about oneself; whereas, personal showcase is the decision to engage is a sort of self-promotion (Freelon, 2015). Flaming is communication based in hostility for the sake of harming another. This behavior can be done for personal satisfaction,

releasing tension due to holding opinions that may be unpopular and, thus, inappropriate in everyday interaction or simply to antagonize others.

The communitarian model is radically different. It is characterized by ideological fragmentation, mobilization, community identification, ingroup reciprocity, and ingroup questioning (Freelon, 2015). Essentially ideological fragmentation points to the idea that the group is ideologically homogenous. All members believe the same thing. Mobilization refers to the idea that the members will act together to further their ideals. Also, the members identify as members of a group, meaning they share a community identity. Finally, the group members communicate primarily within the group and ask each other questions, rather than engaging with other groups and ideas.

Finally, the deliberative model is characterized by rational-critical argument, public issue focus, equality, discussion topic focus, outgroup reciprocity and outgroup questioning (Freelon, 2015). Many of these characteristics seem self-explanatory. Individuals utilizing the deliberative model will argue rationally, with public interests in mind. They do not focus on either their own individual desires or the desires of a homogenous group. They interact with those of differing viewpoints and ask honest questions to gain a better understanding of issues.

This literature review has presented information on national standards for police organizations and the RPD itself, police communication, communication models, social media, the narrative paradigm, and civic and political communication. It is my belief that ultimately an analysis of the RPD's communication through those lenses will produce results that allow the RPD to have a stronger relationship with the community, create a social media strategy that takes into account changing preferences in civic engagement, and ultimately develop a basis upon which national standards for police

organizations' social media use can be created. This analysis will lead to a safer Rockford community and could potentially lead to safer communities across the nation.

### **Research Questions**

The above review of literature has led me to the following questions regarding the RPD's use of social media to create and maintain the relationship between the RPD and the community:

RQ<sub>1</sub> What themes are prevalent in the social media communication of the RPD?

RQ<sub>2</sub> How does the RPD use Fisher's narrative elements and one-way or two-way communication models to operationalize its relationship with the Rockford community via social media posts?

RQ<sub>3</sub> How does the RPD's use of social media change over time, especially corresponding to the major milestones including the October 30, 2013 welfare check incident; September 16, 2015 DOJ report; November 13, 2015 retirement of Chet Epperson; April 18, 2016 swearing in of Chief Dan O'Shea; and July 18, 2016 encryption of the police scanners?

## CHAPTER III

### METHODOLOGY

This chapter outlines my methods for a narrative analysis of the RPD's social media communication. It includes a detailed description of my sample and an explanation of why this particular sample was chosen. The chapter also explains the procedures I used for the data collection and analysis.

#### **Sample**

The social media communication of the RPD is the specific focus of this analysis. This focus narrows the range of data to material (i.e., texts) that is readily available to the immediate community and those who may be interested in the community and the RPD, but who are not located in the Rockford community.

The messages studied were all published on Facebook and Twitter between June 17, 2013, and April 15, 2017. This timeframe encompasses all the social media posts created by official RPD accounts until the beginning of this analysis. The RPD first posted to Facebook on June 17, 2013, and continues to utilize that particular channel. The RPD first used Twitter on August 5, 2015. Printing the webpages to PDF files has preserved the social media history of both the Facebook and Twitter accounts associated with the RPD. The Facebook posts will encompass the time periods, including the publication of the DOJ report and the transition of leadership from former Chief Epperson to Chief O'Shea.

The focus on a purely social media-based sample was chosen for several reasons. First, the use of social media allows for the RPD to reach constituents regardless of their physical location. Students away at school, families on vacation, and those who are considering traveling to the region are all able to access the same information as



someone located in the heart of Rockford. However, it is important to note that, as discussed in the literature review, some community members will be implicitly excluded from any social media communication due to their lack of technology requisite for social media use (U.S. Census Bureau, 2014). Secondly, as explained in detail in the proceeding literature review, social media is affecting the ways in which citizens with social media access are participating in democratic society Kent (2013). In the past, media gatekeepers served as mediators between citizens and organizations. This means that journalists and other media professionals would gather, interpret, and disseminate information to citizens, whereas now citizens receive information directly from organizations, without media professionals, many of whom are experts in particular areas, interpreting information first. Citizens are able to quickly and easily access information that affects their perception of their community and their role in it. For police organizations, this shortened boundary between authority and civilians undoubtedly creates challenges and opportunities. Finally, as also explained in greater detail in the literature review, the RPD's unique role in the community as an organization that is responsible for enforcing the legislative decisions of the governing body of the City of Rockford, forces the RPD to walk a fine line between being the authority in the region and relying upon openness with the community to generate tips and leads (Denef, Bayerl, & Kaptein, 2013). The transparency of social media presents an interesting challenge, as the RPD must find a balance between information sharing, relationship building, and appropriate boundary maintenance.

Rockford is a particularly useful community to study because of its diverse and large population. Approximately 17.8% of the population identifies as Hispanic, and approximately 20.9% of the population identifies as Black or African-American.

Additionally, 24.8% of the population lives below the poverty level (US Census Bureau, 2015b). While no research specific to the Rockford community links poverty and a lack of Internet access in the home, 45.3% of those who do not have Internet access in their homes live below poverty level as defined as less than \$25,000 for a family of four (U.S. Census Bureau, 2014). Additionally, this does not account for those who are able to access the Internet via smartphones and other technologies outside of the home. However, it does point to a potential flaw in potentially relying upon social media to disseminate information about emergencies and crime. If citizens would have to leave their homes to gain access to that information, it could easily exasperate the existing emergency due to a lack of information.

### **Procedures**

I used Fisher's (1984) narrative paradigm to examine the ways in which aspects of social-media discourse creation have shaped and characterized the narrative presented by the RPD. This narrative is of the utmost importance, as the narrative truth presented by the RPD will ultimately be reflected in the relationship between the RPD and the community it serves. Ultimately, this theory focuses on what is said more than on how it is said (Riesmann, 2008). This paradigm will be important to this particular analysis, as it explains the components that are necessary to develop a narrative about any particular aspect of human experience and several of the components that influence how a story is crafted. Additionally, this paradigm will allow for the critical analysis of the rationality of any narrative put forward by and about the RPD and the Rockford community.

The analysis of the data in this study follows the methodology explicated by Braun and Clarke (2006) and Taylor and Ussher (2001). Braun and Clarke (2006)

maintain that thematic analysis is particularly useful for scholars, as it reveals the rhetorical facets that are salient in human communication and can be utilized with a variety of methodologies. The pair focused on the creation of guidelines for the completion of a thematic analysis. They explain that this particular type of analysis places an, “emphasis upon the multiplicity of interrelated, subjective and often oppositional understandings, each with their own inherent validity. Realities are viewed as constructions, truth as multiple and subjective” (Braun and Clarke, 2006, p. 9). They detailed particularly useful examples of successfully completed thematic analyses, including Taylor and Ussher (2001). Taylor and Ussher (2001) approach research with the philosophy that they could better understand a phenomenon by understanding how those who experience the phenomenon make sense of it through their personal narratives. Based on their thematic analysis of the psychology of sado-masochism and integrating concepts from Fisher’s narrative paradigm and communications models, I followed the following procedures:

1. Identify initial narrative themes from all social media posts within the determined time frame. For the purpose of this analysis, a theme will be considered a recurring pattern in terms of the plot of the post (Ezzy, 1998).
2. Group themes together to identify emerging patterns, variability, and consistency.
3. Interpret themes by reading and rereading the social media posts within the historical context. Utilize relevant literature to assist in this interpretation.
4. Review any changes in the themes over time and what appears to be the impetus for change.

5. Review all social media posts within the determined timeframe for their narrative structure and use of narrative elements, specifically tracking narrative fidelity, probability, credibility, and defamiliarization.
6. Review all social media posts to determine whether they exemplify one-way or two-way models of communication as explicated by the coding methods of Waters and Williams (2011). The key differentiation between one- and two-way communication methods is that two-way communication will specifically ask the audience to interact with the RPD via the specific social media channel, while one-way will not contain a specific invitation to communication via the specific communication channel.

Ultimately, this analysis is guided by the use of narrative theory. Key characteristics I specifically analyzed repeated themes in terms of the ways the relationship between the RPD and the community is expressed through examining the media channel, intended audience, context, and perceived voice of the organization in each post. Additionally, I tracked the overall narrative fidelity, probability, credibility, and defamiliarization to ascertain if and how the RPD has told a consistently realistic story about its relationship with the community over time. All of these concepts will be analyzed to gain a complete picture of the narrative expressed by the RPD.

## CHAPTER IV

### FINDINGS

I examined all social media posts created by the RPD. The posts were all published between June 17, 2013, and April 15, 2017. The department first joined Facebook on June 17, 2013 and Twitter on August 5, 2015. The following sections will describe my results in terms of each of my research questions.

#### **Message Themes**

Research question one explores the specific themes prevalent in the messages created by the RPD and distributed via social media. Through the data analysis, several key themes were identified in Facebook and Twitter posts. These include Outing Criminals (OC), Community events (CE), Crime reports (CR), and Public interest pieces (PI). Evidence of these themes is outlined below. Posts that were considered to be outing criminals featured a suspects name and/or photograph for the purposes of identifying them to the community. Community events posts were those that invited the community to join the RPD in participating in an event. Typically these featured details about the event itself including the time, date, and location. Crime reports were posts that discussed the details of a specific crime, but did not divulge the name or photo of an accused person. Finally, public interest pieces are any posts that existed to inform the community about a particular topic and did not fit into the above-mentioned categories.

#### **Outing Criminals (OC)**

A vast majority of the Facebook posts made by the RPD go beyond simply reporting criminal activity. The RPD publicizes the names and mug shots of suspected criminals and their arrest reports. This is technically a legal practice. For example, on March 21, 2017, the RPD posted a photo of Valeisa Jones along with a detailed account

of how RPD officers made contact with her on their patrol, learned she had active warrants, and arrested her. The post concludes, “The charges against Jones are merely accusations. She is considered innocent until proven guilty in a court of law.” However, regardless of her guilt or innocence, she has had her photo posted on the RPD’s Facebook page and shared twice. Jones is not the only community member to be treated in this manner. Eighteen-year-old Shannalee Rivera was found as a passenger in a stolen minivan on March 6, 2017. The RPD posted:

On Monday, March 6, 2017, shortly before 7:30 p.m., officers from the Rockford Police Department S.C.O.P.E. team conducted a traffic stop on a vehicle in the 900 block of 9th Street. At that time the van was driven by a 17-year-old juvenile male and occupied by another 17-year-old male and an 18-year-old female, later identified as Shannalee Rivera. Officers were able to determine that the minivan had been reported stolen and the license plates had also been stolen.

All three of the occupants of the vehicle were taken into custody. Rivera and one of the juvenile males were wanted on arrest warrants for unrelated incidents.

**ARRESTED:** Shannalee Rivera, 18-years-old, Rockford, Ill.

**CHARGES:** Criminal Trespass to a Vehicle

Warrant

**ARRESTED:** 17-year-old Juvenile Male, Rockford, Ill.

**CHARGES:** Possession of a Stolen Auto

Possession of Stolen Property

No Valid Driver's License

Warrant

ARRESTED: 17-year-old Juvenile Male, Rockford, Ill.

CHARGE: Criminal Trespass to a Vehicle

Rivera was lodged in the Winnebago County Jail. Her photo is attached. The juvenile driver was lodged in the Winnebago County Juvenile Detention Center. The second juvenile was released to a parent.

The charges against all of the suspects are merely accusations and not evidence of their guilt. As with defendants in all criminal cases the suspects are considered innocent unless proven guilty in court.

Rivera's photo was attached to the post. This particular type of post details personal information and the officers' account of what occurred and does have a disclaimer that all suspects are considered innocent until proven guilty in a court of law.

### **Community Events (CE)**

In addition to public information about crime in the area, the RPD does utilize Facebook to promote events. Examples include the recap of the annual "Guns and Hoses" ice hockey game between the RPD and the Rockford Fire Department. The RPD posted, "Rockford Police enjoyed participating in the Annual Guns & Hoses Charity Game last weekend, a game made even better by a Police win! Proceeds from this year's event benefit Heartland Home Health, Hospice and IV Care Memorial Fund" along with several photos from the event. However, the RPD does not make much use of the actual "Events" feature in Facebook. Rather, the RPD makes text posts and attaches photos to

them. For example, on March 29, 2017, the RPD posted about their swearing-in and promotion ceremony. The RPD invited the public by saying:

The Rockford Police Department invite the public to attend a swearing-in and promotion ceremony on Friday, March 31 at 2:00 p.m. The ceremony will be held in the District 2 Community Room, 1410 Broadway. Please join us as we celebrate, support and congratulate these individuals.

The RPD also attached a flier with further details about the event. This particular post contains a direct call to action for the community members. In other cases, the RPD simply offers a recap of the event and photos of the gathering. For example, on March 22, 2017, the RPD posted photos of community members gathering together and the information:

District 3 Police enjoyed sitting down with the 5 Pointers/Log Cabin Arbor/Bella Meade Neighborhood Assoc last week for its first Senior Coffee, a forum where residents can meet each other, discuss ideas, share concerns and learn about ways in which they can get involved.

This post does not contain a direct invitation for future involvement. However, it does explain the event and its purpose.

The RPD has specifically utilized Twitter to create messages concerning the community events and events that have taken place. In fact, the very first action the RPD took on Twitter was to retweet a post inviting the community to attend an event that was cosponsored by the RPD and the United Way of the Rock River Valley. The RPD tweeted, “Join us tomorrow for #StrongNeighborhoods Days w/ @CityofRockford



police dept. & meet your neighbors: <http://ow.ly/QwFGf> #LIVEUNITED.” However, some messaging provides event information without a direct call to action. For example, on February 8, 2016, the RPD tweeted, “Monthly public CompStat meeting 2/10, 3p, Regional Design Center - 315 N. Main. #accountability #publicsafety.” In this instance, the event details are explicated without any direct call for attendance or participation on behalf of the audience. It seems that the events that are focused on building relationships and increasing public visibility of police officers in the community, especially when children are involved in the event, are covered in several successive tweets. For example, on March 28, 2016, the RPD tweeted, “Join us 3/29, 1-3p for Kites for Kids @ Ellis Arts Academy Field, Browns Park, Churchill Park, St. Edwards School Playground, & Gambino Park” and then, on March 30, 2016, the RPD tweeted an event recap saying, “We were thrilled to hand out more than 400 kites yesterday during Kites for Kids! #community #springbreak” with a video of their event. Additionally, the connotations of the words chosen to describe certain events via Twitter are particularly interesting. The RPD uses terms like “breaking bread and embracing the community” and “Strong Neighborhoods Block Party” evoking a community atmosphere. In relation to these events, the RPD has also tweeted encouraging messages such as, “Team work makes the dream work!!!” in concert with the collaborative, neighborhood focus of the event. Photos and videos accompanied many of the more recent event centered posts.

### **Crime Reports (CR)**

This particular theme is considered altogether different from the theme of outing criminals because this type of post does not include the name or photo of the accused. On occasion, the posts of the RPD indicate crimes that have occurred without

publicizing any particular suspect or individual involved. On August 9, 2014, the RPD posted:

On Thursday, August 7th, 2014 at 0202 hours Rockford Police and Rockford Fire Department responded to the 3300 block of N. Main St. to investigate a male lying in the roadway bleeding. Three citizens located the male and called 911.

The investigation revealed the male was a victim of a Hit and Run traffic crash involving a pedestrian. The victim, 55 year old Rockford resident Robert Hill was transported to a local hospital for serious/life threatening injuries.

On August 9, 2014 at 1:31 pm Robert Hill died from his injuries.

The investigation is still ongoing. Anyone with information is urged to contact the Rockford Police Department at (815) 987-5824 or Crime Stoppers at (815) 963-7867

This post details a report to the police, the results of the report, and the outcome of the incident. In addition, this particular post contains a call to action for community members to engage in the investigation by offering tips to the RPD. Another similar example would be the RPD's post on June 30, 2014. The RPD posted:

On Monday June 30, 2014 at approximately 06:00 a.m. members of the Rockford Police Department responded to the 300 block of North Alpine Road regarding a suspicious death.

The Rockford Fire Department had responded to this location at about 05:30 a.m. in reference to an alarm. Upon checking the interior of the building fire department personnel found a deceased white male. The deceased male had been partially burned.

Evidence at the scene indicated that the suspicious death was a homicide.

The victim has been identified; however, the victim's identity will be withheld until the notification of the next of kin has been completed.

Anyone with any information regarding this investigation is encouraged to contact the Rockford Police Department at 815-987-5824 or Crime Stoppers at 815-963-7867.

Again, the RPD included a specific call to action, seeking the assistance of local community members. In this case, however, the RPD refrained from including personally identifying information until the next of kin of the victim could be notified. Unsurprisingly, the RPD focuses many of its tweets on local crime. For instance, on April 29, 2016, the RPD tweeted, "Terrell Ellis is in custody on an IDOC warrant. Ellis is a person of interest in the homicide of his girlfriend Monica Box." On May 2, 2016, the RPD tweeted another update in the case saying, "Terrell Ellis now charged w/ 2 counts of murder in the slaying of Monica Box and held on \$2M bond." On June 29, 2016, the RPD tweeted, "Rockford PD on the scene of a murder of a 51 year old woman in the 3300 block of Lapey. No further details at this time." In both instances, the RPD

utilized Twitter to update the community about the actions of the RPD. This utilization of Twitter as a manner of updating the community about crime has also been used in ongoing incidents to provide multiple updates about the situation. On November 11, 2016, the RPD tweeted several times to update the community about a specific, on-going situation. The tweets unfolded as follows:

- 8:32 pm      “The Rockford Police Department is on the scene of a shooting incident in the area of Bruce St. and Woodlawn Ave.”
- 10:43 pm      “Update to shooting investigation in the area of Bruce St. and Rockton Ave. (900 N. Rockton Ave.”
- 10:47 pm      “Police located two juvenile gunshot victims. Paramedics pronounced one dead at the scene and transported the other to a local hospital.”
- 10:49 pm      “The victim at the hospital has non-life-threatening injuries. A press release will be posted later.”

However, no press release was ever linked on Twitter. No additional details about the incident were ever released via Twitter. This type of rapid-response tweeting has been used in several situations in which an ongoing threat to the community existed. Another instance of this was seen on January 20, 2017, when a local bank was robbed. Tweets explained:

- 5:18 pm      “Rockford Police are on scene of attempted bank robbery at Alpine Bank on Spring Creek and Mulford.”
- 5:19 pm      “Media staging at First Free Rockford Church, southeast corner of

- Mulford and Spring Creek.”
- 5:21 pm “Suspect shot, more information to follow.”
- 5:55 pm “Live media briefing video at [https://www.facebook.com/RockfordIllinoisPoliceDepartment/videos/1217883441598990/ ...](https://www.facebook.com/RockfordIllinoisPoliceDepartment/videos/1217883441598990/)”
- 5:55 pm “Suspect is deceased, this is now a homicide investigation.”
- 5:56 pm “Southbound traffic on Mulford and Spring Creek remains closed.”
- 6:06 pm “Southbound traffic at Spring Creek and Mulford is now open.”

That was the last update on the incident at the time. In fact, the incident was not mentioned in tweets until the investigation was closed and the bank guard who shot the bank robber was cleared of any wrongdoing. On March 14, 2017 the investigation came to a close and the following series of tweets were posted:

- 12:36 pm “Metro officer shot Laurence Turner in self-defense and in defense of other employees. Had Turner survived injuries, charges as indicated.” (image)
- 12:37 pm “No charges against Metro officer.”
- 12:48 pm “Metro officer was a retired Sheriff’s deputy and not working in a law enforcement capacity”
- 12:52 pm “Turner linked to other armed robbery incidents including Mincemoyer Jewelry, Member’s Alliance Credit Union, and Harvard State Bank.”
- 12:55 pm ““...There’s no doubt that Metro officer’s actions saved the life of

those in the bank and himself" @WCSAJoe”

12:56 pm “Images from armed robberies linked to Turner” (image)

12:57 pm “Turner's family was helpful and cooperative throughout the investigation. They were not complicit in his crimes.” (image)

12:58 pm “THC and opiates found in Turner's system during autopsy.”

Those were the last updates on the case. At that point in time the case was considered closed. Additional details were explained via other media including national news.

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- 12:48 pm “Metro officer was a retired Sheriff's deputy and not working in a law enforcement capacity”
- 12:52 pm “Turner linked to other armed robbery incidents including Mincemoyer Jewelry, Member's Alliance Credit Union, and Harvard State Bank.”
- 12:55 pm ““...There's no doubt that Metro officer's actions saved the life of those in the bank and himself" @WCSAJoe”
- 12:56 pm “Images from armed robberies linked to Turner” (image)
- 12:57 pm “Turner's family was helpful and cooperative throughout the investigation. They were not complicit in his crimes.” (image)
- 12:58 pm “THC and opiates found in Turner's system during autopsy.”

Those were the last updates on the case. At that point in time the case was considered closed. Additional details were explained via other media including national news.



## **Public Interest Pieces (PI)**

The RPD posts pieces from the local news media that may be of interest to the local community on its Facebook page. In some cases, including the July 21, 2014, posting of the *Rock River Times* article, “Seven arrested on prostitution-related charges” (Online Staff). The RPD added its own text to the post saying:

On July 20, 2014, officers from the Rockford Police Department Neighborhood Response Unit (NRU) conducted a Street Crimes Detail within District 2, the Pilot Police District. During the course of the operation officers worked in an undercover capacity focusing on street level nuisance crimes. As a result of the detail, 7 arrests were made. The charges were for Prostitution, Soliciting Rides in the Roadway, and Improper Walking in the Roadway. Names and charges listed below.

Cynthia K. Saack, 42 years old, PROSTITUTION

Rebecca J. DuFoe, 41 years old, SOLICITING RIDES ON ROADWAY

Corinne J. Medders , 51 years old, SOLICITING RIDES ON ROADWAY

Brittany N. Singletary, 27 years old, PROSTITUTION/POSSESSION OF DRUG EQUIPMENT

Deborah J. Sawtelle, 48 years old, PROSTITUTION

Shonda N. Baker, 42 years old, SOLICITING RIDES ON ROADWAY

Melody L. Phillips, 41 years old, IMPROPER WALKING ON ROADWAY

Although this article also contains the names of those arrested and a crime, the article itself is informative for members of the public. Similarly, on May 1, 2014, the RPD

posted a link to a news article about the department's officers being trained for worst case-scenarios, specifically for active shooter situations. While there was no additional editorial offered with the post, the article itself offers the community unique information about a specific training the RPD officers underwent.

In addition to the typical crime reports that are pushed out via RPD's Twitter account, there are also safety warnings. The RPD tweets about significant traffic disruptions due to traffic accidents. For example, on April 6, 2017, the RPD tweeted, "AVOID north bound N. Alpine Rd at Moray Drive due to a traffic crash with lane blockage. <http://nixle.us/9AAMR>." This intersection is particularly busy, and an accident there would cause large-scale backups and, potentially, other accidents. Additionally, the RPD tweets about severe weather warnings, such as one on March 7, 2017, when the RPD tweeted, "Severe Thunderstorm Warning until 12:00AM Tuesday <http://nixle.us/99BZJ>." The RPD also retweets important messages from other official city accounts such as the City of Rockford's December 14, 2016, tweet, "City Issues Update of Winnebago and Boone Counties Warming Centers <http://bit.ly/2g20wwJ>." These messages are meant as warnings for the community about potential dangers and how to diminish risk for community members.

### **Narrative Elements, Communication Models, and Masspersonal Communication**

Research question 2 explores the use of narration in the RPD's social media posts. As detailed in the literature review, there are several key elements of the narration that create a sense of rationality, which include materiality, voice, perspective, ordering, setting, plots, and readership. As the following data will explain, the RPD creates a narrative that possesses both narrative fidelity, meaning it is told reliably, and narrative

probability, meaning it is told effectively by using narrative elements. Additionally, while the RPD has not created messages that specifically encourage two-way communication, the community does interact with the RPD's messages.

The first element to be analyzed is the materiality of the messages. The physical space occupied by the social media posts is actually virtual in nature. The social media posts are short in length and exist only on the Internet. Unlike other organizational communication, the messages created in these media are not published in any tangible form, unless someone specifically prints the post. The second element to be analyzed is the voice. The voice of the RPD on Facebook and Twitter takes the form of an unnamed organizational representative, embodying the organization. This omniscient voice is clearly in a leadership position. Evidence of the true author is clear; Kimberly Bruce, strategic communications manager for the City of Rockford, is the contact on the RPD's social media accounts. No historical data about this point of contact is available. However, it is possible that there are other individuals who regularly create and publish content to the account. Next for analysis is the audience's perspective. Because these posts are available for public access on social media, the perspective is particularly broad. Essentially anyone and everyone can see these posts.

A far as a coherent story, the posts as a whole collection maintain a sense of chronological order. In the cases for which the RPD offers chronological updates in a tightly grouped time span for a specific incident, the posts offer updates in an order that is sensible for the action as it takes place. For example, on January 20, 2017, when a local bank was robbed, tweets explained:

- 5:18 pm      “Rockford Police are on scene of attempted bank robbery at Alpine Bank on Spring Creek and Mulford.”
- 5:19 pm      “Media staging at First Free Rockford Church, southeast corner of Mulford and Spring Creek.”
- 5:21 pm      “Suspect shot, more information to follow.”
- 5:55 pm      “Live media briefing video at [https://www.facebook.com/RockfordIllinoisPoliceDepartment/videos/1217883441598990/ ...](https://www.facebook.com/RockfordIllinoisPoliceDepartment/videos/1217883441598990/)”
- 5:55 pm      “Suspect is deceased, this is now a homicide investigation.”
- 5:56 pm      “Southbound traffic on Mulford and Spring Creek remains closed.”
- 6:06 pm      “Southbound traffic at Spring Creek and Mulford is now open.”

The information was released in chronological order. Additionally, the setting of the story is also central to the story at play. Again, with this example, the setting of the action and the narration is sensible for the story. The media were staged directly across the street from the action and the additional updates regarding traffic flow are relevant to the location where the action was taking place. Finally, the readership of the social media posts was taken into consideration when crafting these particular and other messages on social media. Keeping with the above example, the RPD did not need to explicate further which bank was robbed and was able to use local landmarks and major intersections to explain the time and place of the action. Based on criteria established by Waters and Williams (2011), the RPD never has utilized two-way communication on Facebook, meaning the RPD never invited the community to interact with the organization via the social media channel. However, the RPD does utilize two-way

communication in the form of an indirect conversation. The RPD used the “@” feature to tag another Twitter user in their tweet. Approximately 6.71% of the RPD’s tweets utilized this form of communication. Approximately 93.29% of the tweets utilized one-way communication. Despite the nature of the posts the RPD has created, 99.806% of the RPD’s Facebook posts and 80.519% of the RPD’s Twitter posts have some sort of measureable community response to them. Additionally, the community’s responses tend to fall into one of four themes. The first theme is characterized by the community responding with a direct question to the RPD, which is almost always left unanswered. These types of questions include Karla L Hardman’s February 27, 2014 comment, “How can I share this with family that are not in Facebook. It will not let me copy it.” that was made in response to the RPD’s February, 2017 post:

On Monday, February 24th, shortly after 8:00 a.m. the Rockford Police Dept. was made aware of a suspicious incident near the intersection of Elm St. and Howard Ave. Witnesses reported that a White Male in his 40’s approached a group of female juveniles and attempted to lure them into his vehicle.

Detectives from the Rockford Police Dept., assisted by members of the Winnebago County Sheriff’s Dept., conducted a follow-up investigation into the incident.

On Wednesday, February 26th, a suspect and the suspect vehicle were located near the intersection of Chestnut St. and Stewart Ave. The results of the investigation were reviewed by the Winnebago County State’s Attorney’s Office. At this time no charges related to the suspicious incident have been authorized, however the investigation is on-going.

Investigators are no longer searching for the Green Chevrolet Pickup believed to be involved in the original incident.

Her question was never answered. The next theme of community responses is praise of the RPD. Many commenters have posted messages congratulating the RPD on an arrest or promotion. Additionally, posts fall into the theme of criticism of criminals. In response to RPD posts outing criminals, such as the RPD's January 8, 2014 post:

On Tuesday, January 7th Rockford Police Officers responded to the Wal-Mart at 3902 W. Riverside in reference to two children left in a vehicle that was not running. Upon officers arrival a six year old female and a 6 month old male were found in the vehicle. Rockford Fire responded and determined both children were cold but not frostbitten or otherwise harmed.

Surveillance video shows the children's mother, Sharnice Longwood, parked her vehicle in the lot at 5:46 pm and entered the store without the children.

Longwood returns to the vehicle at 6:18 pm and loads groceries into the vehicle and then returned to the store where she was seen plugging her cell phone into a charger and making a call. At 6:27 pm Longwood left the store and is seen walking through the parking lot. At 6:34 pm Officers arrived and removed the children from the vehicle. At 6:37 pm Longwood returned to her vehicle and spoke with the officers. At the time the children were located inside the vehicle the outside temperature was -4 degrees. Longwood was arrested and charged with two counts of Child Endangerment. Both Children were released to the care of the Illinois Department of Children and Family Services.

Arrested: Longwood, Sharnice B/F 24 years old, Rockford resident.

The RPD's post included a photo of the accused. Community members responded with direct criticism of the suspect. For example, Cheri Webster-Carlson's January 8, 2014 comment said, "Thank God for video surveillance cameras that have a good cause against her now. Hope she loses her kids for good and tie her tubes so she can't have anymore." The final theme is tagging another individual in a comment so that they are made aware of the RPD's post. In this instance there is rarely any other information included other than the individual's handle. In addition to comments, other features both on Facebook and Twitter allow users to like, share, favorite, or retweets content. However, these actions could not garner a measurable response from the RPD.

Defamiliarization or the use of novelty in messages, on the other hand, is seen in the novelty of posts. This can be seen in the variety of media the accompany posts. The interesting photos and videos that the RPD published with their posts create eye catching, visually interesting elements to the stories. The content itself focuses on new stories that are relevant to the current time. For example, on November 20, 2015, the RPD's Facebook post concerned a narcotics-related arrest. Leading up to that post, the RPD focused on a snow emergency, and immediately following that post the RPD focused on a new piece of equipment that can destroy illicit narcotics, and then the RPD reported that the Jefferson Street Bridge was closed. While some topics remain on the same subtopic, such as the two narcotics-related posts, the RPD does not typically dwell on the same story for more than one post or, in the case of Twitter, one day.

### **The RPD's Use of Social Media over Time**

Research question 3 explores if and how the RPD's social media use changed over time as several key events took place. There were several changes that occurred over the specific time periods studied. As explicated in the problem statement and literature

review, the RPD has had several critical events affect the public perception of the RPD in recent history. These include the October 30, 2013, welfare check incident; September 16, 2015, DOJ report; November 13, 2015, retirement of Chet Epperson; April 18, 2016, swearing in of Chief Dan O'Shea; and July 18, 2016 encryption of the police scanners. Each of these events represents a significant event in the history of the RPD and a public event that had the potential to affect the relationship of the community with the RPD.

**June 17, 2013, to October 30, 2013**

During this time period 147 posts were made on Facebook at a rate of 1.081 posts per day. The first post directly outing a criminal and including a photo of the accused was not posted until July 18, 2013. That post explained:

Several months ago members of the Rockford Police Department's Narcotics Unit and agents with the U.S. Drug Enforcement Administration (D.E.A.) began investigating numerous individuals who were suspected of selling heroin throughout the city of Rockford. During the course of the investigation, the list of individuals involved grew and it was learned some of the suspects were delivering heroin to customers and other suspects were selling heroin from residences at different locations throughout Rockford.

Six individuals have been arrested and charged with various criminal charges stemming from this investigation. One subject, who has been identified as Johnny M. Jackson, remains at large and has an active warrant for his arrest. If anyone has information on the whereabouts of Johnny M. Jackson, please contact the Rockford Police Department at 815-987-5824 or CRIMESTOPPERS at 815-963-7867. Photo of Jackson is attached.



During the course of this investigation heroin, U.S.C. a handgun, ammunition, and other items associated with drug trafficking were recovered. The involved individuals are listed below

Arrested: Butler, William E. 58, Belvidere – Arrested 7-16-13

Charges: Criminal Drug Conspiracy, Bond: \$500,000

Arrested: Butler, Julius M. 60, Rockford - Arrested on 6/3/13

Charge: Possession with intent to deliver 1-15 grams of heroin within 1,000 feet of school

Bond: Remains in custody with at \$250,000 bond and a Illinois Department of Corrections Parole violation hold.

Arrested: Leonard, Willie R. Jr 59, Rockford – Arrested on 3/21/13

Charge: Possession with intent to deliver 15-100 grams of heroin.

Bond: Remains in custody with a \$75,000 bond.

Arrested: Williams, Albert 59, Rockford – Arrested on 7-16-13

Charges: Two counts of unlawful delivery of heroin, Possession with intent to deliver 1-15 grams of heroin, resisting arrest, obstructing justice, battery to a police officer, unlawful use of weapon by a felon.

Bond: \$500,000

Arrested:Kuykindall-Thomas, Charmyne L. 52 Rockford – Arrested 7-16-13

Charge: Unlawful delivery of 1-15 grams of heroin, No F.O.I.D card

Bond: Released on bond.

Arrested: Williams, Tyrone 47, Rockford – Arrested 7-17-13

Charge: Two counts of delivery of heroin

Bond: Released on bond.

All subjects are innocent until proven guilty in a court of law.

Despite six individuals being charged in connection with the incident, only one photo was shared. Many of the other posts made during this time period included tips about how to remain safe, information about specific crimes committed in the community, and special events that were taking place. Many posts included community information related to the proper installation of an air conditioner, heat advisories, and roadside safety check rules implemented by the Illinois State Police.

During this time period, the RPD posted on Facebook almost every day, usually more than once per day. Toward the end of this time period, more and more photos and graphics were being included in posts. This habit became especially evident in August 2013, when officers were promoted and several new recruits joined the force. On the date of the welfare check that caused great scrutiny of the RPD, no posts were made on Facebook. In fact, it appears that to never have been mentioned on Twitter was not utilized until August 2015.

After analyzing the total number of posts made during this time period, it became clear that public interest pieces dominated the posts, representing 38% of the messages

posted by the RPD. Community events were included in 19% of posts, crime reports were represented by 14% of posts, and criminals were “outed” in 29% of posts.

Table 1.

*Facebook Posts by Category June 17, 2013, to October 31, 2013*

CE %	CR %	OC %	PI%
19%	14%	29%	38%

**October 31, 2013, to September 16, 2015**

During the time immediately following the welfare check incident and preceding the publication of the DOJ report, 499 posts were made on Facebook at a rate of 0.727 posts per day. Many of the posts during this time period included graphics and photos highlighting event information and officers interacting with their community. Additionally, quantified crime data was often included in posts, including information explaining the data. For example, on September 12, 2014, the RPD posted, “At this month’s RockStat, the Rockford PD shared some positive data for the city’s crime trends. Group A incidents, Violent Crime and Property Crime were down in all three Districts.” As with the previous time period, there were few posts specifically outing criminals. After analyzing the total number of Facebook posts made during this time period, it became clear that public interest pieces dominated the posts, representing 48% of the messages posted by the RPD. Community events were included in 17% of posts, crime reports were represented by 10% of posts, and criminals were “outed” in 25% of posts.

Table 2

*Facebook Posts by Category October 31, 2013, to September 16, 2015*

CE %	CR %	OC %	PI%
17%	10%	25%	48%

Twitter was not utilized until August 2015. Only then was Twitter used primarily to inform the public about community events. On occasion fliers detailing the events and which officers would be present was also included. During this time period, 10 posts were made on Twitter at a rate of 0.0146 posts per day. After analyzing the total number of Twitter posts made during this time period, it became clear that public interest pieces dominated the posts, representing 50% of the messages posted by the RPD. Community events were included in 40% of posts, crime reports were represented by 0% of posts, and criminals were “outed” in 10% of posts.

Table 3

*Twitter Posts by Category October 31, 2013, to September 16, 2015*

CE %	CR %	OC %	PI%
40%	0%	10%	50%

**September 17, 2015, to November 13, 2015**

In the short time between the release of the DOJ report and Chief Epperson’s retirement, 47 posts were made on Facebook at a rate of 0.810 posts per day. Many posts discussed the officers’ presence in the community, community events, and personal achievements. During this time, many posts also contained information about

improvement in crime statistics. For example, on September 24, 2015, the RPD posted a number of data charts and the text:

Rockford Police CompStat presentations was held this afternoon. The attached District Scorecards show the Group A offenses and select crimes that the Rockford Police track on a daily basis.

District 1 (City's west side) saw an almost 10% decrease in Group A offenses, 47% decrease in Aggravated Battery and Shots Fired, and 63% decrease in Robberies in August.

District 2 (City's near east side) saw an 11% decrease in Aggravated Battery and Shots Fired and a 41% decrease in Robberies in August.

District 3 (Far east side) has a 0.76% increase in Group A offenses as compared to the same time in 2014.

The Rockford Police Department recognizes that there is a lot more work to do but these numbers show that progress is being made and that is mainly because of the support we get from our great citizens.

Posts like these focused on the positive effects of the police officers in the community in contrast with the destructive nature of criminals.

After analyzing the total number of Facebook posts made during this time period, it became clear that public interest pieces dominated the posts, representing 55% of the

messages posted by the RPD. Community events were included in 15% of posts, crime reports were represented by 13% of posts, and criminals were “outed” in 17% of posts.

Table 4.

*Facebook Posts by Category September 17, 2015, to November 13, 2015*

CE %	CR %	OC %	PI%
15%	13%	17%	55%

This pattern seemed to be mimicked on Twitter. However, one key difference was the manner in which an incident at Rockford’s Crusader Clinic on September 28, 2015, was described on Twitter versus Facebook. On Facebook the event was described in the following posts:

- Approximately 4 PM “Rockford Police are on the scene at Crusader Clinic, 1100 Broadway, in reference to a white, male subject in his 30's who had allegedly fired several shots inside the building. Negotiators are on the scene and communication with the subject has been established. There are no reports of any injuries at this time.”
- Approximately 7 PM “The suspect is in custody. Media briefing to be held shortly.”
- Approximately 9 PM “On Monday September 28, 2015 at about 2:15 p.m., Rockford Police Officers responded to Crusader Community Health at 1100 Broadway for a report of a man with a gun inside the building and there were shots fired. Upon arrival, Officers encountered numerous patients and staff members fleeing

from the building and learned the gunman was on the second floor. Officers immediately entered the building and located the armed suspect, 36-year-old Steven Dummer of Rochelle, in a second floor waiting room threatening suicide. The officers secured the immediate area and began negotiation with Dummer. As other officers arrived to assist, including officers from the Rockford Police Department, Winnebago County Sheriff's Office, and Rockford Park District, they secured the exterior of the building and conducted an evacuation. Rockford Police negotiators responded and they negotiated with Dummer for about four hours before Dummer surrendered to officers without further incident. Rosecrance Health Network crisis counsellors responded and stood-by at the scene as expert resources for negotiators.

Rockford Fire Department transported Dummer to a local hospital where he was medically cleared before being transported to the Winnebago County Jail and lodged in lieu of a \$100,000 bond. Dummer faces charges of Aggravated Discharge of a Firearm and Aggravated Unlawful Use of Weapons, and Dummer should be considered innocent until proven guilty in a court of law.

The rapid response and preparation of Crusader Community Health employees followed by an effective response by the

Police Department and partnering agencies led to a peaceful resolution to this very critical incident with no injuries to anyone.”

These three posts are generally longer form and seem to be posted with some delay from actual events. On Twitter, the RPD posted:

- 5:14 PM “Rockford Police are on the scene at Crusader Clinic, 1100 Broadway.”
- 5:14 PM “In reference to a white, male subject in his 30's who had fired several shots inside the building.”
- 5:14 PM “Negotiators are on the scene and communication with the subject has been established. There are no reports of any injuries at this time.”
- 5:46 PM “Media staging at 7th and 12th Avenue.
- 7:25 PM “The suspect is in custody and is being transported to local hospital for mental health evaluation.”
- 7:28 PM “Press release with additional details to be distributed later this evening.”

Additional information was never distributed via Twitter, and the individual in question was never specifically identified. Additional tweets during this time period focused on community warnings about severe weather and information about community events and honors, such as “Boy Scouts honor three community members - <http://WREX.com> – Rockford’s News Leader.” Twitter and Facebook seem to serve radically different purposes at this point in time.

During this time period, 12 posts were made on Twitter at a rate of 0.207 posts per day. After analyzing the total number of Twitter posts made during this time period, it



became clear that public interest pieces dominated the posts, representing 75% of the messages posted by the RPD. Community events were included in 0% of posts, crime reports were represented by 25% of posts, and criminals were “outed” in 0% of posts.

Table 5.

*Twitter Posts by Category September 17, 2015, to November 13, 2015*

CE %	CR %	OC %	PI%
0%	25%	0%	75%

**November 14, 2015, to April 18, 2016**

Between the retirement of Chief Epperson and the swearing in of Chief O’Shea, the use of Facebook continued to focus on community events and recognizing the successes of officers, which falls into the theme of public interest pieces. During this time period 118 posts were made on Facebook at a rate of 0.752 posts per day. While there continued to be alerts about local crime, there continued to be a focus on the incidents themselves rather than outing the criminals who committed the crimes. While this type of post continued to exist, posting of photos of criminals remained sporadic. In addition, posts continued to praise the RPD for supposedly reducing crime in the region. On March 10, 2016, the RPD posted the link to a news article entitled, “Crime Analysts Credited for Drastic Improvements.” However, data charts with any sort of proof of lower crime statistics no longer were posted.

After analyzing the total number of Facebook posts made during this time period, it became clear that public interest pieces dominated the posts, representing 66% of the messages posted by the RPD. Community events were included in 8% of posts, crime reports were represented by 6% of posts, and criminals were “outed” in 20% of posts.

Table 6.

*Facebook Posts by Category November 14, 2015, to April 18, 2016*

CE %	CR %	OC %	PI%
8%	6%	20%	66%

On Twitter, posts during this time also focused on community events and public interest pieces. However, during this time period, there was an increase in retweeting the posts of community members. For example, when discussing a partnership between the US Drug Enforcement Agency (DEA) and RPD, the RPD chose to retweets as many as four community members' accounts in addition to creating their own posts.

During this time period, 103 posts were made on Twitter at a rate of 0.656 posts per day. After analyzing the total number of Twitter posts made during this time period, it became clear that public interest pieces dominated the posts, representing 91% of the messages posted by the RPD. Community events were included in 4% of posts, crime reports were represented by 2% of posts, and criminals were "outed" in 3% of posts.

Table 7.

*Twitter Posts by Category November 14, 2015, to April 18, 2016*

CE %	CR %	OC %	PI%
4%	2%	3%	91%

**April 19, 2016, to July 18, 2016**

This time period signaled a marked change in the RPD's use of Facebook. During this time period 175 posts were made on Facebook at a rate of 1.923 posts per day. Posts

during this time shifted to a focus on crime reports and outing criminals versus public interest pieces. Posts also included community events and public interest pieces; however, there was a much heavier focus on including photos of suspected criminals.

After analyzing the total number of Facebook posts made during this time period, it became clear that public interest pieces dominated the posts, representing 53% of the messages posted by the RPD. Community events were included in 21% of posts, crime reports were represented by 9% of posts, and criminals were “outed” in 18% of posts.

Table 8.

*Facebook Posts by Category April 19, 2016, to July 18, 2016*

CE %	CR %	OC %	PI%
21%	9%	18%	53%

The Twitter posts during the time between O’Shea being sworn in and the decision to encrypt the police scanner system were focused primarily on celebrations. Specifically, the swearing in of Chief O’Shea was followed with several community events including a promotion, swearing-in, retirement and award ceremony marked the beginning of Chief O’Shea’s tenure with excitement. The RPD’s tweets during this time often included graphics including the design of the new police station, fliers for a safety fair, and promotional material for the “Cop on the Rooftop” fundraiser. Few posts focused on crime reports or incidents in the community.

During this time period, 119 posts were made on Twitter at a rate of 1.308 posts per day. After analyzing the total number of Twitter posts made during this time period, it became clear that public interest pieces dominated the posts, representing 85% of the

messages posted by the RPD. Community events were included in 9% of posts, crime reports were represented by 3% of posts, and criminals were “outed” in 3% of posts.

Table 9.

*Twitter Posts by Category April 19, 2016, to July 18, 2016*

CE %	CR %	OC %	PI%
9%	3%	3%	85%

**July 19, 2016, to April 15, 2017**

In July 2016, the RPD’s police scanner became encrypted, which spurred much debate in the community. Following this decision, the trend of outing criminals publicly on Facebook by posting their photos and documenting their arrests continued to increase. The RPD continued to post about community events, crime reports, and public interest pieces, including information about police station open houses and a winter warning not to leave cars running unattended. During this time period 566 posts were made on Facebook at a rate of 2.089 posts per day. However, it seems that almost every week and sometimes multiple times a week during this time period the RPD chose to publish a photo of a suspected criminal. For example, on January 16, 2017, the RPD posted:

On 01/14/2017 at about 10:30pm, members of the Rockford Police SCOPE team attempted to conduct a traffic stop on a 2001 Saturn for a traffic violation. As the driver came to a stop in the 700 block of North Horsman Street, both he and the front seat passenger quickly exited the vehicle and fled on foot. They ran to a residence in the 700 block of North Horsman Street. Officers chased both subjects and observed the passenger, later identified as 21 year old Rockford

resident Cameron Frazier, discard two handguns. Frazier then attempted to gain entry into the residence but officers were able to apprehend him. The driver of the vehicle escaped. Officers recovered both handguns.

Officers searched the vehicle and located a quantity of marijuana. Officers also located a quantity of cash on Frazier's person.

Frazier was charged with the following offenses:

Armed Violence

Aggravated Unlawful Use of a Weapon (2 counts)

Possession with Intent to Deliver Cannabis (30-100 grams)

Violation of the Firearm Owner's Identification Act (No FOID)

Resisting

Frazier was transported to the Winnebago County Jail where he was lodged. A photo is attached. The charges against Frazier are merely accusations. He is considered innocent until proven guilty in a court of law.

This is an on-going investigation. No further information is available at this time.

Anyone with any information regarding this incident is encouraged to call the

Rockford Police Department at 815-966-2900 or Crimestoppers at 815-963-7867.

Then, not a full week later, the RPD posted another outing-type post. On January 20, they explained:

On Wednesday, January 18, 2017 at approximately 8:00 a.m., the Rockford Police Department assisted the U.S. Department of Agriculture, Food and Nutrition Service (USDA) and the Internal Revenue Service (IRS) in a federal investigation related to fraudulent use of the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP), also known as food stamps.

During the operation, USDA and IRS agents along with the Rockford Police conducted a series of coordinated search warrants at the following locations:

- Mr. Clark's Grocery, 1019 South Main Street
- S and B Discount, 1207 Broadway Street
- Platinum Electronics, 1114 Broadway Street
- Thaim Hin Grocery Store, 1103 Broadway Street

As a result of the operation, each of these businesses were condemned for numerous code violations by the City of Rockford. The following four individuals were arrested on federal food stamp and wire fraud charges:

- Vansy Xayvandy, 41, Rockford
- Aung Gyaw, 22, Rockford
- Som Xayvandy, 45, Rockford
- Feuy Khaikham, 55, Rockford

Rockford Police arrested and the charged the following individuals with State of Illinois offenses:

**ARRESTED:** Feuy Khaikham, 55, Rockford

CHARGE: No FOID

ARRESTED: Soulivanh Bounleutay, 46, Rockford

CHARGE: Armed Violence

In part of the operation, federal agents and the Rockford Police conducted a search warrant at 2525 Cerro Vista Drive. Federal agents interviewed the residents; however, no arrests were made.

No further information is available at this time. Additional information may be released as it becomes available.

For more information on the federal investigation, please visit

<http://bit.ly/2jgd9mR>.

All charges are merely allegations and parties are presumed innocent until and unless proven guilty in a court of law.

For reasons that remain unclear, despite the fact that six individuals were charged with crimes in this instance, only two individuals had their photos posted.

After analyzing the total number of Facebook posts made during this time period, it became clear that public interest pieces dominated the posts, representing 48% of the messages posted by the RPD. Community events were included in 11% of posts, crime reports were represented by 13% of posts, and criminals were “outed” in 28% of posts.

Table 10.

*Facebook Posts by Category July 19, 2016, to April 15, 2017*

CE %	CR %	OC %	PI%
11%	13%	28%	48%

On Twitter during this time, the RPD posted about a variety of community events, crime reports, and public interest matters. For example, the RPD tweeted on November 4, 2016, about a car accident, saying, “Avoid E. State St between Fairview Ave and Alpine Rd due to a serious traffic crash. <http://nixle.us/95PEH>.” It seems that during this time period Twitter became used more and more for the distribution of information to community members.

During this time period, 218 posts were made on Twitter at a rate of 0.804 posts per day. After analyzing the total number of Twitter posts made during this time period, it became clear that public interest pieces dominated the posts, representing 82% of the messages posted by the RPD. Community events were included in 4% of posts, crime reports were represented by 14% of posts, and criminals were “outed” in 1% of posts.

Table 11.

*Twitter Posts by Category July 19, 2016, to April 15, 2017*

CE %	CR %	OC %	PI%
4%	14%	1%	82%



## Summary

The data described above demonstrates how the RPD has utilized social media to communicate with the community it serves. The next section will analyze this data to explain the impact of these findings on that relationship and community.

Four themes emerged from the analysis of the posts. These include community events, crime reports, outing criminals, and public interest pieces. Community events posts included specific details about events that made it possible for a community member to join the RPD in the event. Crime reports posts included information about a specific crime, but did not name a suspect. Outing criminals posts were posts that reported a specific crime, but included the name, other identifying information, and the mug shot specific to a suspect, often one who has been charged, but not convicted, of the crime in question. Finally, public interest pieces were any posts that included information about a particular topic that might be of interest to community members. Often these included links to news stories or pictures of RPD officers receiving awards.

The narrative form and elements in the RPD's posts indicates that despite the unique materiality of the messages, traditional narrative elements have been retained. The organization's collective voice has remained evident across posts. No one officer's perspective is obviously dominant. Additionally, the RPD maintains the sense of accurate chronology throughout the posts, even utilizing social media to update the community in a timely manner when dangerous situations occur.

Overall, the sample of Facebook posts included 1,552 posts over 1,399 days. This means that the RPD posted on Facebook approximately 1.109 times per day. During this entire time period, public interest pieces was the dominant post theme.

For the below charts, the time periods are labeled on the x-axis as explained in Table 12.

Table 12.

*Time Periods Relevant to the Study*

Number	Time Period	Significance
1	June 17, 2013 - October 30, 2013	Beginning of RPD's social media use – Welfare Check
2	October 31, 2013, to September 16, 2015	Welfare Check – Publication of DOJ Report
3	September 17, 2015, to November 13, 2015	Publication of the DOJ report - Retirement of Chet Epperson
4	November 14, 2015, to April 18, 2016	Retirement of Chet Epperson - Swearing in of Chief Dan O'Shea
5	April 19, 2016, to July 18, 2016	Swearing in of Chief Dan O'Shea - Encryption of the police scanners
6	July 19, 2016, to April 15, 2017	Encryption of the police scanners – Beginning of Analysis

*Figure 1. Facebook Category Use Comparison by Time Period*

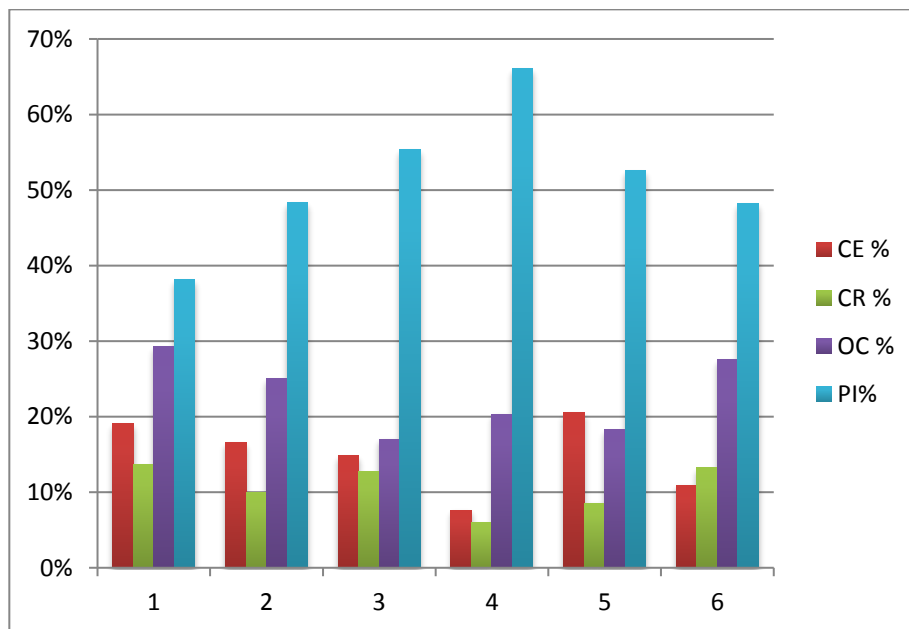
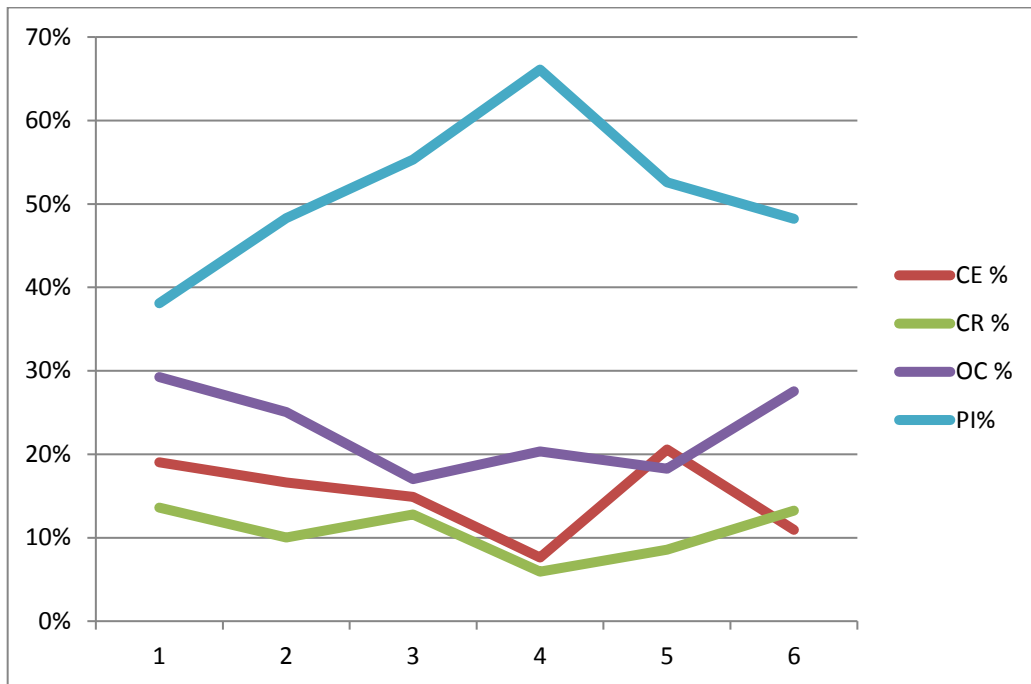


Figure 2. Facebook Category Trends by Time Period



However, there were additional trends of particular interest. First, the crime reports theme was the least popular post theme across all time periods. Second, the outing criminals theme saw peak popularity during time period one and six. These times represent the time between the RPD joining Facebook and the welfare check situation and the time after the police scanners were encrypted. In contrast, the theme was least popular during time periods three and five. The periods represent the times between the DOJ report and Chief Epperson's retirement and between the swearing in of Chief O'Shea and the encryption of the radios. Finally, the outing criminals theme popularity rose 10% between periods five and six. Period five represents the time between the swearing in of Chief O'Shea and the encryption of the radios and period six represents the time after the police scanners were encrypted.

The sample of Twitter posts included 462 posts over the entire 1,399-day period the sample was drawn from. However, the Twitter account only existed for 610 days of that period. Over the entire sample period, the RPD tweeted approximately 0.330 times per day. However, over just the period of time the Twitter account existed for, the RPD tweeted approximately 0.757 times per day. As with Facebook, public interest pieces was the dominant post theme. In some time periods, nearly all the posts were in regards to public interest pieces.

In addition to the incredibly predominant use of the public interest pieces theme, trends involving the themes crime reports and community events are particularly interesting. First, the use of the crime reports theme peaked in period three, between the DOJ report and Chief Epperson’s retirement. However, its use has increased 11% between periods five and six, representing the time between Chief O’Shea’s swearing in and the encryption of the radios. Finally, use of the community events theme peaked in period two, representing the time between the welfare check situation and the DOJ report. However, its use has decreased 5% between periods five and six.

Figure 3. Twitter Category Use Comparison by Time Period

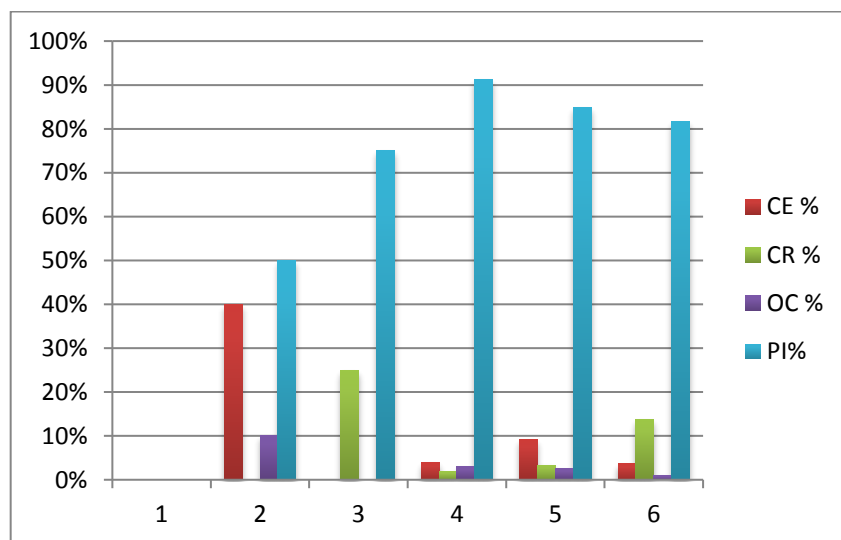
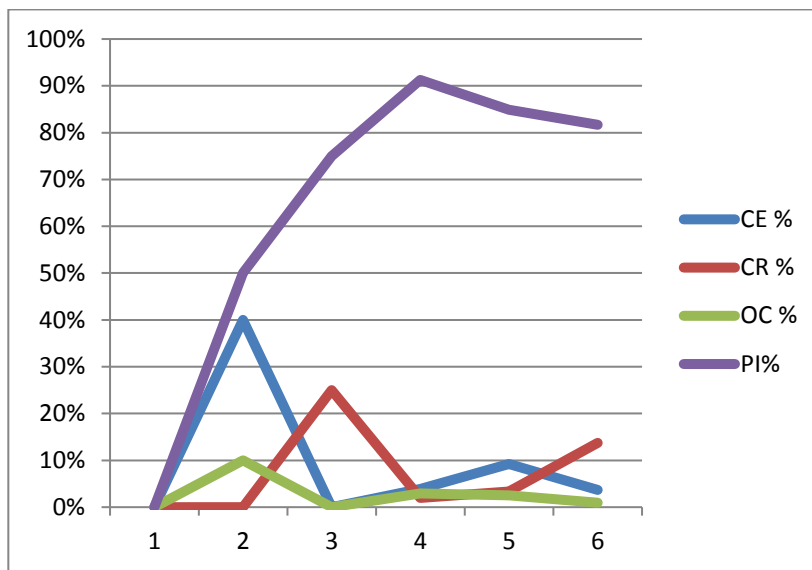


Figure 4. Twitter Category Trends by Time Period



The data generated through this analysis has led to interesting revelations regarding the RPD's use of social media. In the next chapter, these findings will be analyzed so that the data can generate actionable recommendations.

## CHAPTER V

### ANALYSIS

Social media use is gaining steam among police organizations. *The International Association of Chiefs of Police 2015 Social Media Survey Results*, 96.4% of the organizations surveyed utilize social media, 73.8% of the surveyed organizations that do not currently use social media are considering adoption of social media, and 83.5% of the organizations using social media believe its use has improved community-organization relations. While Valentini (2015) argues that there is little to say that social media efforts influence the attitudes or behaviors of publics, chiefs of police seem to have faith in the channel's ability to improve police-community relations. This coupled with the organization's ability to exercise control over the specific message that the community is presented (Bučar-Ručman & Gorazd Meško, 2006), and social media's effect on civic and political communication make it incredibly important to understand social media communication by police organizations. (Bennett, Wells, & Freelon, 2011; The Education Commission of the United States, 2012; Bennett, Wells, & Rank, 2009).

I conducted an analysis of the social media posts the RPD made during the time frame June 17, 2013, through April 15, 2017. After reviewing literature regarding the RPD's role in the community, police communication in general, the narrative paradigm, and political communication, I narrowed the scope of my analysis to determine key themes in the RPD's messaging, the RPD's use of narrative elements, and the change, if any exists, in the messages of the RPD across time. In this chapter, I will discuss my findings and interpret the data in terms of the theories I explored in my literature review.

## **Message Themes**

Research question one asked, “What themes are prevalent in the social media communication of the RPD?” The RPD uses Facebook and Twitter to distribute messages to the community. The goal of research question one, was to gain an understanding of the key themes at play in the messages the RPD creates via social media. The messages created on Facebook typically explore themes of outing criminals, community events, crime reports, and public interest pieces.

The RPD’s use of social media relies heavily on the traditional DC citizenship paradigm. This paradigm relies heavily on the traditional form of political engagement in which individuals rely upon the traditional authority and power structure to provide information and shape their attitudes and beliefs (Bennett, Wells, & Freelon, 2011; The Education Commission of the United States, 2012; Bennett, Wells, & Rank, 2009). In the case of the RPD’s use of Facebook, the RPD retains the typical authoritative control over the content shared. While the RPD does share public interest pieces in the form of news articles and updates about their officers, the RPD retains control of how the information is presented and the content is shaped in the perspective of the public.

Furthermore, the themes represented in the social media posts attempt to directly tie the RPD to the community and, essentially, create a gap between law-abiding citizens and those accused of crimes. The repeated focus on the RPD’s officers’ involvement in the community and publicizing of events in local neighborhoods demonstrates the officers’ willingness to meet the community in local neighborhoods and actively communicate create opportunities for communication between the RPD and the community. In addition, the RPD focuses on crime alerts and public interest pieces that serve to inform the community about current events and potentially

dangerous situations for the community to avoid. These posts also seem to invite community involvement, explaining, “The investigation is still ongoing. Anyone with information is urged to contact the Rockford Police Department at (815) 987-5824 or Crime Stoppers at (815) 963-7867.” While this approach seems to invite two-way communication, as explained by Grunig & Hunt (1984), it is neither symmetrical nor guarantees a public response. Additionally, this communication is not indicative of the masspersonal communication as the messages are not personalized (O’Sullivan & Carr, 2017); the RPD does not seem to invite interaction, but more realistically is simply pushing a one-way message to a broad audience over a potentially two-way channel. Finally, the theme of outing criminals is particularly interesting. Many of the accused who have been targeted in the RPD’s posting of photos have not actually been convicted of a crime at the time that their photo is posted. They have been charged, and the RPD does include a disclaimer that all of the accused are innocent until proven guilty in a court of law.

However, the posting of these photos betrays a key weakness in the RPD’s use of social media. Ultimately, this particular theme is troubling as it creates an increased distance between those accused of crime versus the RPD and the rest of the community. Especially if the accused is later found innocent, this action of outing or “othering” the accused could very likely drive a wedge between the accused and the community. The stigma of being accused of a crime in a very public way could be damaging to a person’s self-esteem and reputation in the community, not to mention alienate potential witnesses to crimes. Any community member who is aware of the preponderance of crime in this community will recognize that every accused criminal is not featured on



the RPD's social media. Whoever retains editorial control of the RPD's Facebook posts is making strategic decisions about which photos to publicize.

While the RPD has not violated any existing laws about the dissemination of such information, many have begun to question the ethical legitimacy of posting such things on social media (Bidgood, 2015; MacLeod, 2015). Several leaders of law enforcement organizations have come forward to speak about their concerns that posting mug shots or booking photos on social media does little good for communities, and, ultimately, only serves to disrupt the lives of those who may, other than a brief and relatively inconsequential run-in with the law, be law-abiding citizens. For example, Sheena Foley of Burlington, Vermont was arrested after rolling through a stop sign and not having a current license (MacLeod, 2015). While this is considered a lawful arrest, she did not hurt anyone and committed a minor traffic violation. However, her mug shot was posted to the local police department's Facebook page and she was publicly humiliated for her transgression. The chief of police there has now ended the practice of posting mug shots, referring to posts on social media as, "a bell you can't unring" (MacLeod, 2015). Essentially, while the First Amendment protects this practice, it almost subverts the right to due process, as the posts seem to lead to a form of public punishment similar to that of wearing a scarlet letter (Bidgood, 2015; MacLeod, 2015).

Twitter seems to be used more to provide real time updates about situations in progress until they are resolved. This is indicative of the opinion expressed in the *International Association of Chiefs of Police 2015 Social Media Survey Results (2015)* that the second most-common use of social media by law enforcement agencies is to notify the public of crime. In addition, the RPD rarely uses Twitter to directly call attention to the identity of those accused of crimes in the community. Rather, Twitter

seems to remain a sort of neutral party, truly protecting the privacy of those who are accused, but not legally guilty.

### **Narrative Elements, Communication Models, and Masspersonal Communication**

Research question two asked, “How does the RPD use narrative elements to conceptualize its relationship with the Rockford community via social media posts?” The RPD’s use of narrative in the creation of its Facebook and Twitter posts has created a unique identity expressed through social media and influenced the relationship between the community and the RPD. First, consider the materiality of the posts. The use of graphics and photos and, indeed, the choice of photos utilized has certainly influenced the perception of the RPD. Photos included in the RPD’s posts are of several varieties. First, the RPD posts photos of its officers being honored. Photos like this typically include swearing in ceremonies and community recognition of officers. These photos typically display the officers well dressed and smiling with well-respected and well-known community members. Second, the photos display officers at community events. These typically include officers with smiling children and community members who seek to be involved in the betterment of the community. They are typically portrayed as productive and most often smiling. These photos are in direct contrast with the often-unflattering photos of accused criminals that are often posted. This practice degrades those charged with a crime, creating the perception that they are simply criminals, rather than community members who may have made a bad decision or a mistake and elevates the RPD officers to a high, morally superior status by creating the perception that there are only two options or extremes. This creates the perception that

community members can either be criminal or respected community member, rather than acknowledging that there are, in some cases, shades of gray in between.

Whether the RPD realizes it or not, its use of narrative elements is particularly damaging in this instance. In this case, materiality, or the actual physical text and images of this narrative is affecting the community's perception of the truth of the narrative it presents (Barry & Elmes, 1997). To the average community member, the choice of images presents a dichotomy that is simple to understand and seemingly undeniable: the choice between right and wrong. In this case, presenting the image of a community member who may not seem to be of an affluent background and may seem defiant or uncaring in their photo reinforces the idea that there is a fundamental difference between those charged with a crime and those who have not been. It reinforces stereotypes about what "good" people and "bad" people look like.

When community members are presented with these pictures, their responses are rarely positive. For example, Hornswoggle Blister commented on June 6, 2014:

to bad that they won't allow you to shoot this loser when you see him and receive a reward. instead they want you to report it. they didn't say they had him cornered in a house once but weren't allowed to go in after him did they , hmmm! hope one of his victims friends or family finds him first!

While the crime in question, area shootings, is undoubtedly serious, it seems inappropriate that the RPD did not moderate this threatening comment.

The authoritative distance is furthered by the RPD's use of voice. Barry and Elmes (1997) explain that voice is the perception of who is telling the story. Although the voice espoused through the communication channel is never explicitly named, it is clear that the voice represents the collective authority and opinion of the RPD.

Additionally, the RPD's different treatment of voice on Facebook and Twitter seems to create contradictory paradigms of citizenship — both dutiful citizenship (DC) and actualizing citizenship (AC) (Bennett, Wells, & Freelon, 2011; The Education Commission of the United States, 2012; Bennett, Wells, & Rank, 2009). First, on Facebook, the RPD, as discussed above, relies solely on its own voice to shape and produce content. While the RPD does share public interest stories created by news outlets, the RPD does not share posts or allow outside voices to take ownership of the content. This demonstrates a DC style of citizenship in that it relies on traditional authority figures and political groups to disseminate political opinion and information about current events (Bennett, Wells, & Freelon, 2011; The Education Commission of the United States, 2012; Bennett, Wells, & Rank, 2009). In contrast, on Twitter, the RPD often utilizes the retweets function, which demonstrates an AC style. This style allows for individuals rather than authorities to create the content and, thus, the meaning.

Ultimately, however, the RPD retains control over which voices are considered worthy of notice. This type of style seems to be better attuned to the needs and desires of younger generations. Never the less, both channels seem to support a more homogenous, communitarian communication style rather than a more nonconformist, liberal individualist communication style. Essentially, the RPD creates a homogenous opinion group on Facebook by differentiating between those accused of a crime and other community members and asking for community members to contribute to the prevention and solution of crimes. They use the platform to clearly define an ingroup or “us” and an outgroup or “them,” which is particularly unsettling being that those

relegated to the outgroup may be the very witnesses to crimes that the RPD could benefit from a strong relationship with. On Twitter, the RPD espouses its opinion and sometimes that of those with similar opinions. While on Twitter the RPD does not often request community input, the RPD does occasionally retweet messages that align with its own collective opinions. This dominant voice is ultimately a weakness in the RPD's social media use. The voice of the RPD is distant from the public it serves. Furthermore, as younger generations turn toward an AC style of communication, the RPD risks alienating younger community members who will eventually become either law-abiding assets to the RPD or criminals who wreak havoc in the community. Either way, the RPD must be prepared to meet these generations where they stand and develop a healthy relationship with them.

The posts and, thus, the opinions of the RPD are all publicly available to any who go looking for them. However, it is interesting to note that a Google search for the RPD's Twitter account did not yield results. One must search directly within Twitter to locate the account. Again, the narrative element of materiality is directly related to this behavior (Barry & Elmes, 1997). The posts of the RPD are only available in digital format, thus alienating any community members who are not able to access the Internet or social media as a result of personal choice or circumstances. Furthermore, the RPD decided to encrypt its police scanners as of July 18, 2016, supposedly to keep criminals from monitoring the scanner. However, the RPD continues to use Facebook and Twitter to post updates about key incidents that may disrupt the community. For example the RPD repeatedly tweeted about a bank robbery that occurred January 20, 2017. Had the robbery turned into a hostage situation, the robber could have monitored the situation via social media much more easily than they could have via the scanner. Finally, the

RPD does effectively create a coherent story through a chronological plot and realistic setting. The RPD frequently posts from locations that are well known to community members and closes the physical gap between the RPD and the community.

Grunig (1992) explains that two-way symmetrical messaging is the most-ethical form of communication, explaining that both the organization and the audience to have some control of the information flow; the balance of power between the speaker and audience make this the most ethical form of communication. Later PR research, including Valentini (2015) casts doubts on the effectiveness of social media for relationship building. Valentini (2015) explains that many public relations practitioners believe in the power of social media as a tool for dialogue. However, dialogue cannot exist without interactions among users and two-way exchange of communication. In fact, similar to the RPD's use of social media, most social media use embodies the one-way model of communication and, in fact, does not foster dialogue or audience interactivity necessary for relationship building (Saffer, Sommerfeldt, & Taylor, 2013). The RPD's lack of intentional two-way communication on social media is not necessarily out of the ordinary for organizational social media use. However, this focus on one-way communication makes it nearly impossible for the RPD to build a relationship with the community via social media. It is possible that the RPD believes it is utilizing two-way communication in part due to the communication channel it is using. Being that community members do choose to interact with the RPD's posts on social media, it is likely that the RPD would receive positive responses to their adoption of two-way communication. Furthermore, masspersonal communication, which can be achieved through one-way or two-way communication, could also be utilized to create highly personalized messages that seem to be directed to a single user, but are visible to the

entire community. These posts would engage a specific community member, but also engage the rest of the community. Additionally, being that Grunig (1992) explains that two-way symmetrical communication is the most ethical communication model, implementation of these strategies would make the RPD's social media accounts a more ethical resource for the community.

Ultimately, the RPD does effectively use narrative elements to create a coherent and realistic story of their involvement in the community. However, the RPD does create contradictory views of the manner in which it views civic engagement. The RPD's use of Facebook and Twitter, in some ways, creates contradictory perceptions of how the RPD wishes to interact with the community via social media.

### **The RPD's Use of Social Media over Time**

Research question three asked, "How does the RPD's use of social media change over time, especially corresponding to the major milestones including the October 30, 2013 welfare check incident; September 16, 2015 DOJ report; November 13, 2015 retirement of Chet Epperson; April 18, 2016 swearing in of Chief Dan O'Shea; and July 18, 2016 encryption of the police scanners?" The RPD's use of social media has evolved over time. Beginning in June 2013, the RPD dipped its toe into the complex channel of Facebook. Since the very beginning of the RPD's use of Facebook, the RPD posted almost every day, sometimes multiple times a day. However, one particularly interesting finding of this project is that between the last two time periods, the outing of criminals theme on Facebook has been used more and more frequently. In fact, it was not until Chief O'Shea was sworn in and the RPD encrypted its police scanners that this type of post has become more and more common. Additionally, 67% of these types of posts do include a photo of at least one suspect Also interesting to note along with the frequency

of this trend, is that throughout the RPD's history of making such types of posts, it has been common that not every individual mentioned in the post has had their photo included. In some cases the photos are withheld due to the age of the accused, but in others there does not seem to be a clear logic behind the choice. In these cases, all parties are of legal age and have been charged with a crime.

Additionally, over time, the RPD has not acknowledged the scandals and incidents that have cast scrutiny over the department. For example, the October 30, 2013, welfare check situation was never mentioned on the RPD's Facebook page. In addition, Chief Epperson did retire, still under the shadow of an investigation into the welfare check situation, the RPD posted overwhelmingly positive information about the embattled Chief, thanking him for his service and focusing on his achievements.

Furthermore, once Chief O'Shea took command of the RPD, the use of Twitter to disseminate information increased dramatically. In fact, Twitter has only been utilized by the RPD since July 2015. This was mere months before the DOJ's report was made public. There has not been a radical change in the way the RPD utilizes social media. Yes, several themes became more prevalent and Twitter is utilized more. However, there has not been a noticeable shift in the overall strategy behind the social media use despite the potential for change. The following chapter will outline practical suggestions for more effective use of social media and narrative elements.



## CHAPTER VI

### PRACTICAL SUGGESTIONS

Based on the analysis of the RPD's social media use and the best practices explored in the literature review, I have developed several practical suggestions that should have a positive influence on the RPD's maintenance of its relationship with community members through social media. These recommendations include integrating one-way, two-way, and masspersonal communication strategies into social media posts, communicating with both DC and AC paradigms in mind, avoiding outing criminals type posts and using the RPD general orders on social media use, and integrating narrative elements into social media strategies. Table 1 serves as a digest version of the theory the suggestions and based on and how the suggestions can be implemented.

Table 13.

Best Practices for Social Media Use by Law Enforcement Agencies

<b>Communication Objectives</b>	<b>Description/Theoretical Background</b>	<b>Examples of Application</b>
Integrate One-Way, Two-Way, and Masspersonal Communication Strategies into Social Media Posts	<p>One-Way</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Communication streams from an organization to a public (Grunig &amp; Hunt, 1984).</li> <li>• Specifically, utilize the public information model, which takes the audience into account (Grunig &amp; Hunt, 1984).</li> <li>• May utilize emoticons and words to express emotions; includes updates or announcements from the organization itself or information or reports from other agencies (Waters &amp; Williams, 2011).</li> </ul>	<p><i>Strategy:</i> Post information as a notification to community members.</p> <p><i>Example Post:</i></p> <p>A car accident has taken place at the intersection of Alpine and Harlem Rds. Please avoid that area.</p>
	<p>Two-Way</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Communication streams from an organization to a public and back from the public to the organization (Grunig &amp; Hunt, 1984).</li> <li>• Specifically, utilize two-way symmetrical communication, which takes the audience into account (Grunig &amp; Hunt, 1984).</li> <li>• Asks for feedback or participation in a survey or poll; asks the audience to somehow interact with the organization via the social media channel; may also use direct messaging features, direct replies, or mentions (Waters &amp; Williams, 2011).</li> </ul>	<p><i>Strategy:</i></p> <p>Ask community members for feedback or to participate somehow via social media</p> <p><i>Example Post:</i></p> <p>The RPD is planning a neighborhood meeting in the Rolling Green neighborhood. Please comment below to indicate what topics you would like to discuss at the meeting.</p>

(Table Continues)

<b>Communication Objectives</b>	<b>Description/Theoretical Background</b>	<b>Examples of Application</b>
Integrate One-Way, Two-Way, and Masspersonal Communication Strategies into Social Media Posts	<p>Masspersonal</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Communication that is both highly personalized and highly accessible to other individuals (O’Sullivan &amp; Carr, 2017).</li> <li>• This would include a genuine, personalized, public message directed to a specific constituent containing either information or a request. All responses should be addressed.</li> <li>• Ex. Posting on someone’s Facebook wall for his or her birthday or tweeting a link to more information at someone.</li> </ul>	<p><i>Strategy:</i></p> <p>Use directed posts on one or more selected channels to open a larger conversation.</p> <p><i>Post Example:</i></p> <p>Cathy, thank you for joining us at our neighborhoods meeting. You had great questions. Do you have any additional questions we can answer for you?</p>
Communicate with both DC and AC Paradigms in Mind	<p>Dutiful Citizenship Paradigm (DC)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Participation in civic life through group settings; become and remain engaged through a sense of personal duty; traditional authority figures lead groups (Bennett, Wells, &amp; Freelon, 2011; The Education Commission of the United States, 2012; Bennett, Wells, &amp; Rank, 2009).</li> </ul> <p>Actualizing Citizenship Paradigm (AC)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Shows a lesser regard for typical authority figures and groups; looser peer groups organizing around shared resources and social technologies; individual expression is highlighted (Bennett, Wells, &amp; Freelon, 2011; The Education Commission of the United States, 2012; Bennett, Wells, &amp; Rank, 2009).</li> </ul>	<p><i>Strategy:</i></p> <p>Allow guest posters or specific officers to post as themselves via the RPD page. Utilize natural partnerships between the RPD and other local organizations or leaders.</p> <p><i>Post Example:</i></p> <p>This is Officer Smith posting! I’d like to give some additional feedback about the RRStar’s recent article... If you have any other questions you can reach me at 815-xxx-xxxx.</p>

(Table Continues)

<b>Communication Objectives</b>	<b>Description/Theoretical Background</b>	<b>Examples of Application</b>
Engage in Inclusive Communication	<p>Prescribed Social Media Uses</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Social media as outlined by general order 60.13 include use as an investigative tool, manner of community outreach and engagement, and method for communicating time-sensitive notifications (Rockford Police Department, 2013).</li> <li>• Avoid outing criminals</li> <li>• While the First Amendment protects the practice of outing criminals, it subverts the right to due process, as the posts seem to lead to a form of public punishment similar to that of wearing a scarlet letter (Bidgood, 2015; MacLeod, 2015).</li> </ul>	<p><i>Strategy:</i></p> <p>Stop posting mug shots and names of those who are charged with crimes on social media.</p> <p><i>Post Example:</i></p> <p>These posts would not exist, therefore there is no example.</p>
Integrate Narrative Elements into Social Media Strategies	<p>Narrative Elements</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Several devices work together to create a credible narrative; materiality refers to the physical element of the narrative; voice and perspective utilized in presenting the message can influence the perception of the message. These features have been described as “who says” and “who sees” (Barry &amp; Elmes, 1997).</li> <li>• While the issue of materiality is solved by ensuring posted information is available offline, potentially through letters to the editor or leaflets for those who are known to be offline, voice should be addressed through specific social media strategies.</li> </ul>	<p><i>Strategy:</i></p> <p>Occasionally allow guest posters to integrate a community voice into social media posts and ensure that time-sensitive, public safety information is available in formats beyond the current digital materiality of the posts.</p> <p><i>Post Example:</i></p> <p>We RPD officers would like to wish you a Happy 4<sup>th</sup>!</p>

## **Integrate One-Way, Two-Way, and Masspersonal Communication Strategies into Social Media Posts**

First, consider the strategies adopted on both Facebook and Twitter. Facebook has been utilized for the dissemination of information in a longer narrative, while Twitter allows for the RPD to selectively integrate external voices into the official RPD messaging. It seems that perhaps the misunderstanding of the usefulness of social media has led the RPD to use social media in a less effective way. I recommend that the RPD reflect on the ways in which two-way or even masspersonal communication could serve as relationship building tools. Masspersonal refers to the idea that social media posts can bridge the gap between mass and interpersonal media by exposing interpersonal communication to a wide audience. Rather than assuming that social media use will create a strong dialogue between the RPD and community members, the RPD should focus on the ability of social media to broadly communicate seemingly personal messages with the wider audience. The Rockford community's diverse nature makes it impossible for the RPD to target every audience. However, current strategic choices could easily alienate certain community members.

The RPD already has integrated one-way communication into its social media use. Continuing to post information that keeps the public safe will continue to ensure that the RPD remains a relevant and trusted source of information. This also aligns with the RPD's general order 60.13, which explains the RPD should use social media as a method for real-time notifications. For example, posts that fall into the crime reports and public interest pieces categories would be considered one-way communication. These types of posts ultimately ensure public safety.

However, the RPD cannot rely on one-way communication alone. It is imperative that the RPD include two-way communication in its social media posts as a method of relationship building. These types of posts will require more monitoring and greater attention to the public responses that are generated by the original post. These types of posts may include a survey or poll, ask for feedback, or encourage any other interaction via the social media channel (Waters & Williams, 2011). For example, the RPD may create a poll that asks community members what type of programming they would be most likely to attend. Additionally, the RPD could ask for feedback about their neighborhood meetings to get a better sense of what citizens would like to hear about during those events or even create a poll to determine what time or day would be most advantageous for neighborhood members to attend such a meeting. Ultimately, this type of post will allow the RPD to learn more about the community they work with and show a commitment to improving the communication and relationship between the RPD and community.

Finally, the RPD can integrate masspersonal communication into its strategies by creating posts that are directed towards a specific individual or group that ultimately allow community members to become a part of a two-way interaction. For example, the RPD could thank a community leader for their service or ask a community member about their experience at an event. Masspersonal strategies, then, will allow the RPD to utilize seemingly interpersonal communication to craft a message that can be useful for the whole community (O'Sullivan & Carr, 2017). Much like overhearing and joining a conversation across a hallway, masspersonal communication will allow the RPD to further invite community members into conversations that may ultimately make the community safer.

### **Communicate with both DC and AC Paradigms in Mind**

While I do not recommend that the RPD wholly embody the AC paradigm of civic engagement, encouraging a middle ground between the wholly authority based DC paradigm and the individualistic AC paradigm could facilitate a stronger partnership between the community and the RPD. Perhaps encouraging guest posters and continuing to retweets community members would facilitate a greater confidence in the RPD's effort to create an actual partnership. Additionally, the RPD could capture and selectively publish the outcomes of deliberative moments that take place through their face-to-face efforts on their social media channels. Facebook specifically could be used as a platform for sharing information beyond the short 140 characters of Twitter This strategy could also utilize the illusion of interactivity or masspersonal communication to build connections and facilitate conversation between the RPD and community members. Ultimately this would help demonstrate an effort towards the AC paradigm on *both* Facebook and Twitter, a sharp contrast from the current situation.

### **Engage in Inclusive Communication**

The RPD should refine the themes utilized in its social media posts. While the RPD does not seem to have broken any laws in its use of social media, there are ethical dilemmas associated with posting the photos of accused community members on social media. Exercising editorial control over which photos are posted, beyond what is legally required in the case of juvenile offenders, and leaves the RPD open to accusations of bias. Although CALEA offers no guidance as to how law enforcement organizations utilize social media, the Global Justice Information Sharing Initiative demonstrated concern about the potential for social media to be used in the violation of civil rights. I recommend that the RPD shift their focus from whether or not they are currently

violating laws and toward respect for their fellow community member. I urge caution in this matter as the current practice of posting mug shots could ultimately embarrass and publicly shame an innocent person, leading them to distrust the RPD and feel alienated in their community. While some criminal justice research indicates that this sort of public shaming can be an effective punishment, due to the “unknown psychological consequences of public shaming sanctions,” Goldman (2015) indicates that the practice should be better regulated to ensure consistency and appropriate punishment. Furthermore, it is imperative to understand that Goldman (2015) only examines this type of public shaming in circumstances in which the individual in question has already been found guilty of the crime.

I would highly recommend that the RPD discontinue the practice of publicizing the photos of the accused unless there is a public need for identification of the individuals. Based on concerns for civil rights as espoused by the Global Justice Information Sharing Initiative (2013) it seems that any act by a police organization that could even be construed as having violated the rights of citizens should be avoided. For example, if an individual was armed and considered a threat to the community, the RPD would be well within its rights to make that individual’s photo readily available to community members. In fact, this type of crisis communication by police organizations has been normalized by social media use during the UK riots of 2011 and active shooter incidents at schools (Denef, Bayerl, & Kaptein, 2013; Mazer et al., 2015). However, it seems unconscionable that the photos of potentially innocent individuals are published in a highly public way without due process. While the RPD’s actions remain legal, they are not necessarily ethical. If the RPD chooses to continue to make these photos available, it seems that all photos of all community members accused of crimes should



be publicized via social media. It would seem that there is too great a potential for irreparable harm to the reputation of the RPD otherwise.

Overall, it appears that the RPD would be better off utilizing social media for communication during crisis events and to keep the community aware of ongoing criminal activity. Actually, the Global Justice Information Sharing Initiative focuses on balancing the duties of law enforcement officers with their responsibilities to protect the civil rights of those they serve (Global Justice Information Sharing Initiative, 2013). For example, it seems reasonable to continue to post about car accidents and bank robberies so that the community is aware of potential dangers. It would seem that, along with my last recommendation, aligning the strategies of both channels towards the strategies utilized on Twitter would be incredibly advantageous. For example, in the instance of the shooting at the Crusader Clinic, the RPD tweeted relevant information to keep the community aware and safe, without disclosing unnecessarily private information about the accused. Had the RPD utilized this strategy on Facebook as well, they may have protected the accused from unnecessary stigma and scrutiny. Police organizations must be able to translate their duties as officers to their social media use, but also realize that this new technology creates additional risks to the civil rights of community members.

In order to accomplish these suggested changes, the RPD could very simply refer to its own general order 60.13. The order specifically refers to suggested post themes including providing tips for crime prevention, offering citizens on-line reporting options, sharing crime maps and data, soliciting tips about unsolved crimes, and providing notifications about road closures, special events, and emergencies (Rockford Police Department, 2013). Discontinuing the practice of outing criminals via social

media alleviates the possibility that the RPD will alienate innocent individuals and would be represent a strategy more closely aligned with its official social media policy.

### **Integrate Narrative Elements into Social Media Strategies**

Finally, the RPD should reevaluate its use of narrative elements. While the RPD may not realize that they are even utilizing these elements, a conscious focus on strategic use of narrative elements could make a positive impact on the perceived narrative they create. For instance, I would highly suggest altering the espoused voice of the RPD's social media messages. Narrative is intrinsically linked to the creation of identity and power (Hartelius & Browning, 2008). By maintaining a position of authority through the active voice of the RPD on social media, the RPD is creating a power distance between the organization and the community that could eventually hurt the relationship between the RPD and the community. Additionally, this contributes to the RPD's alignment with the DC paradigm. This could eventually cause a rift between the RPD and younger generations who increasingly seek to establish their own voice in the civic sphere. Creating a voice that is more relatable for younger generations and diverse constituents will ultimately yield better relationships for the RPD with community members. Additionally, by only making their posts available via social media, the RPD is maintaining a sense of materiality that alienates any community members who does not utilize social media. The RPD should ensure that the information and specific messages it posts via social media are available via other channels.

In summary, the RPD has created strong social media presence. However, there are several things the RPD can do to increase the likelihood that the Rockford community will continue to pursue a relationship with the RPD via social media. These

suggestions ultimately can be utilized by other law enforcement agencies to improve relationships between the agencies and the communities they serve.

## CHAPTER VII

### STRENGTHS, LIMITATIONS AND FUTURE DIRECTIONS

Upon the completion of this project, there are several implications that are important to recognize. The strengths and limitations of this study, as well as directions for future research are outlined below.

#### **Strengths and Limitations**

This study has several key strengths and weaknesses that affect how useful this study is to the field of communication, the RPD, and the law enforcement community. First, until this point, the study of law enforcement communication was done primarily through the lens of law enforcement theory and not through communication study. Rather than approaching the topic of social media from a predominantly legal perspective, this study relies on proven insights into the manners in which organizations can and should communicate to achieve the best results, filling the research gap in the communication field that focuses on theory and practice of police-community communication. This study, then, not only serves as a strong foundation for understanding how communication concepts can be translated to practice in the field of law enforcement, but also demonstrates to the law enforcement community that communication scholars and professionals have the knowledge and skills to be useful partners to law enforcement leaders.

Additionally, the exploration of masspersonal communication strategies' usefulness in strategic communication is a relatively new concept. By examining the potential use of these strategies in concert with one- and two-way communication and narrative elements expands the potential for masspersonal communication to be utilized practically by communication professionals. Additionally, this study offers an important

avenue into further exploration of police-communication communication as a matter of civic engagement (see Bennett, Wells, & Freelon, 2011). Since civic engagement refers to how individuals interact with political information and structures, and the RPD is a part of the local government structure, it is crucial that the RPD remain an effective leader in communication related to civic engagement.

Beyond the field of communication, this study has implications for the RPD. As this study focused specifically on the social media use of the RPD, the practical suggestions offered as a result of this analysis are specifically relevant to the organization. However, my unique role as researcher serves as both a strength and a limitation of this study. On the one hand, my personal knowledge of the community and experiences with the RPD served as a starting point for undertaking the analysis. I am able to utilize my personal knowledge as a community member to access resources to interpret the data that I found.

However, my own perspective as a community member has undoubtedly influenced my interpretation of the data. The very nature of this qualitative analysis makes it dependent on the world-view of the individual conducting the analysis. In the future, it would be particularly useful to adopt a collaborative approach to the analysis. This would lessen the potential for a single perspective to inadvertently influence the results of the study. Furthermore, the perspective of a non-community member may also alleviate the potential for bias in the analysis. Although this is a potential weakness, this is also a potential strength. My perspective allowed me to perceive that the problem existed, but also allows for individual viewpoints to be considered. A true strength of this method is its ability to frame reality as subjective, rather than objective (Fisher, 1984). Additionally, my own reluctance to actively involve the opinions or perspectives

of members of the RPD's leadership in the analysis is a potential weakness. In order to ensure that the analysis was not shaped by the political ambitions and potential fears of community leaders, I did not discuss the analysis with community members or members of the RPD. A greater understanding of the internal motives of the organization and its members could have offered additional insight into the power structures that influence the use of social media and potentially have removed some of the red tape that stood between my analysis and the general policies of the RPD. A future analysis may develop a more complete perspective of the communication habits of the RPD through partnership with the RPD in the analysis. This may also create a more useful analysis from the organization's perspective as it could conceivably take into account the specific goals of the organization.

Additionally, the relationship between the RPD and the community does not exist solely as a product of social media use. The RPD does utilize other communication methods to reach the community, including many face-to-face programs. To gain a fuller understanding of how all of these programs coexist to create a relationship, all of the programs together could and should be studied. Additionally, it is unrealistic to believe that the analysis of communication and relationship building could ever be considered complete without examining the role of the audience in the communication process. The preceding analysis largely focused on the content created by the RPD and ignored the responses of the community members. It would be incredibly interesting to analyze the perceived relationship that each individual interacting with the RPD via social media has with the RPD and the community as a whole.

Ultimately, however, this study is particularly beneficial to the law enforcement community as a whole. This research offers clear guidance as to the best practices police

organizations should follow in order to best communicate with the communities they serve. When considering how best to communicate, it only makes sense to include scholarship developed through study of communication as a whole. Additionally, as national standards governing this type of communication do not exist, this analysis can serve as the foundation for understanding and implementing strategic communication strategies.

Ultimately, communications scholars, the RPD, and law enforcement leaders can utilize this analysis to better understand effective communication between law enforcement agencies and the communities they serve. However, although this foundation offers specific practical suggestions, future research can continue to strengthen communities through by investigation law enforcement organizations' communication.

### **Future Directions**

In the future, this analysis could be used as a starting point for additional qualitative and quantitative analyses. In particular, it would be useful to expand the analysis by examining the interactions between the RPD and the community via a variety of communication channels beyond the simple social media interactions analyzed in this study. This approach would offer a more complete explanation of the current state of the relationship between the RPD and the community and both parties' perceptions of their relationship.

Additionally, internal communication that takes place within the RPD about social media and its uses would offer greater insight into the cultural norms surrounding social media use as a department. This could later be expanded to develop an understanding of the relationship building efforts of police departments and other law

enforcement and peacekeeping organizations nationally. Ultimately, the goal would be to expand this particular analysis to allow for far-reaching analysis of the relationships between communities and the very organizations that are tasked with protecting them from the inside out. The ways in which individuals interact with political information and structures or civic engagement is impacted greatly by emerging communication technologies as citizens are confronted by new tools that allow them to discuss and analyze problems and then take action to solve them (Bennett, Wells, & Freelon, 2011). The tumultuous relationships between communication gatekeepers, law enforcement officers, and community members across the United States cannot continue to remain in such a precarious balance.

Finally, this study focuses almost entirely on the communication created by the RPD, rather than the responses of local community members. In the future, scholars should examine responses to the RPD's social media posts. Additionally, scholars could conduct interviews and focus groups to gain an understanding of how the community perceives the RPD and the relationship between the RPD and the community. Further analysis of these relationships through the lenses afforded communications scholars has enormous and undeniable potential for improving the current state of affairs.

### **Summary**

This particular case study has created a starting point that can be replicated and expanded to explore additional organizations and the RPD in new and valuable ways. This analysis, while not exhaustive, paves the way for additional studies and the strengthening of police-community relationships as a whole. My ultimate goal for this project was to have a positive effect on my community by applying best practices for social media use. This analysis has uncovered useful information and ideas for



improving communication and relationship building between the community and the RPD.

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