

# Offender Stigma: A Textual Analysis of Law Enforcement Social Media Presence

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## Introduction

- Offenders face stigma and labelling, especially in the digital era
- Online discourse is its own “digital prison” and interferes with reintegration (Lageson et al., 2017)
- Yet, 95% of offenders return to their original communities (Martin & Garcie, 2022)
- Police department use of social media has evolved over time (O’Connor & Zaidi, 2021)
- While predominantly used for image development, there may be side effects for communities

## Purpose

To explore themes of offender stigmatization as they appear on public Facebook posts in the context of a single, rural police department

## Methods

### Participants:

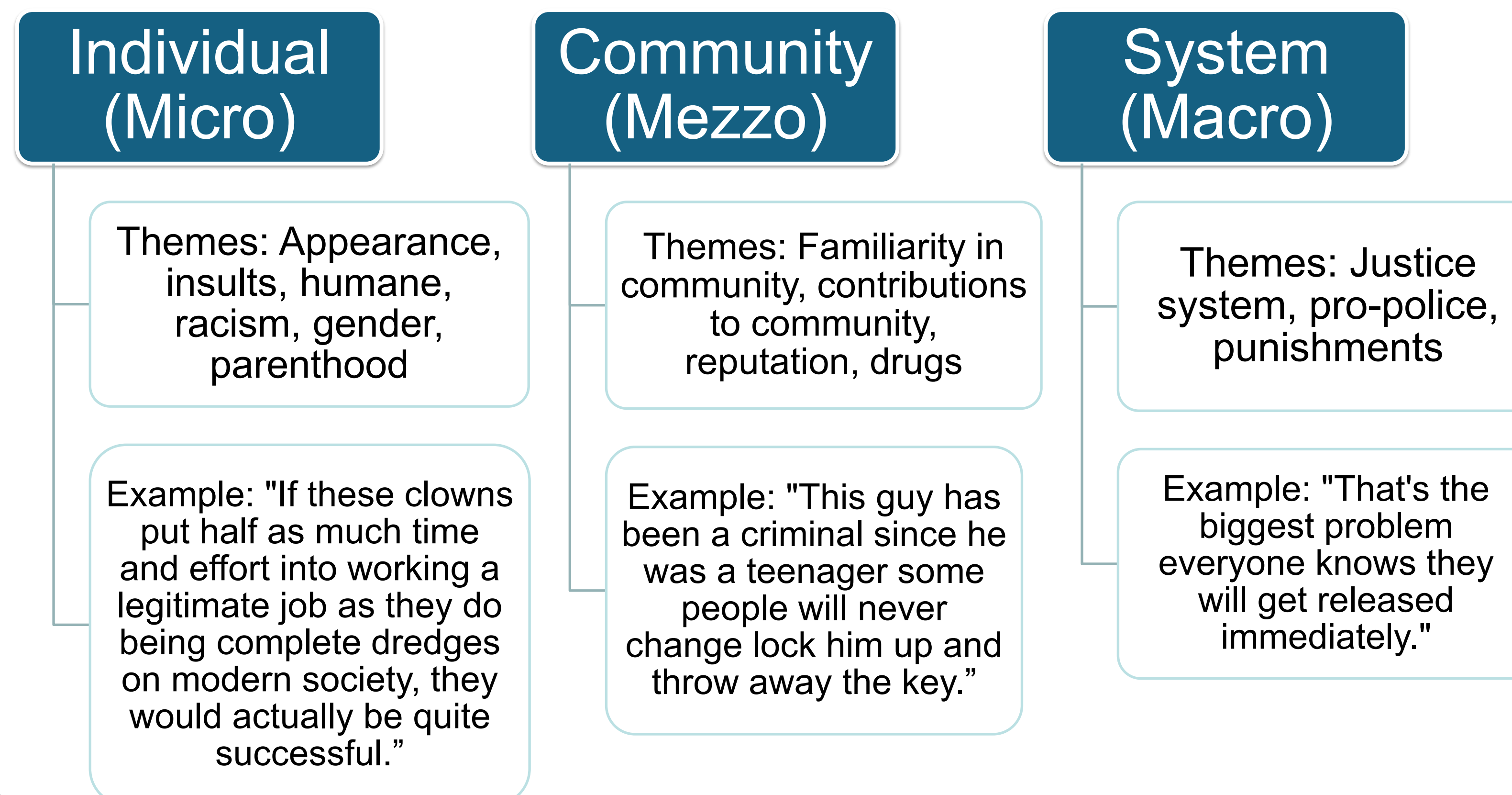
- Commenters on public arrest posts with mugshots from 2024-2025 of one specific agency with a Facebook media presence (most dominant platform, especially for community news; Li et al., 2015).

### Extraction Method:

- Public comments on 10 posts (identifiers removed) copied from Facebook

### Data analysis: Thematic textual analysis

- Text of the social media comments read for familiarization
- Open coding, with intersectional analysis (Christensen & Jensen, 2012)
- Identify patterns in data and group into larger themes, will be analyzed and coded for themes



## Discussion

- This analysis revealed significant stigmatizing comments on the Micro (Individual) level
  - Supports previous research suggesting social media encourages negative perspectives (Jalonen, 2014)
- Law enforcement social media presence offers a legitimate extension of physical community
  - Individuals engaged through consumption and participation in online communities (Shao, 2009)
  - Individuals actively engage with law enforcement social media to address community concerns and the individual offender, which is consistent with previous research (Jeanis, Muniz, & Molbert, 2021).
- Media can help an offender construct a new identity for successful reentry (Xiao et al., 2024)
- But emerging use of law enforcement social media (i.e., in dehumanizing ways) could negatively impact offenders.

## Limitations

- This study analyzed a single law enforcement agency. Additional research would be necessary to determine a trend.