A NO LONGER IMAGINED COMMUNITY: THE VISIBILITY OF THE ONLINE MUG SHOT

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In Phoenix, AZ, Maricopa County's Sheriff Joe has a reputation for being "America's Toughest Sheriff" (About, 2015). One of his programs his website admittedly describes as controversial is the "Mugshot of the Day" where the Maricopa County Sheriff's Office (MCSO) posts all mug shots of those being booked for arrest at MCSO for the public to vote on. MCSO describes this webpage as having a million hits a day and as "one of the most visible law enforcement sites on the internet." This site helps illuminate a growing phenomenon of online mug shots, a phenomenon which constitutes offenders in new ways through assemblages of information. Gone are the isolated mug shots of ten most wanted; on sites like MCSO, all offenders are linked in a database, searchable by crime and viewable by the public. In this way, online mug shots create a visible community of offenders that did not previously exist before the internet. In the case of MCSO's site, the rationale is that more eyes on more criminals will ultimately lead to a closer, safer community. This conclusion of safety can be contested however, and I argue that although the MCSO's online mug shot program may have redefined our collective imaginary of the criminal through increased visibility, while it aims to unite the community, it can also be seen as fragmenting it and making it less sustainable.

Mug shots have historically been used to define the criminal. The mug shot calls a criminal into being and solidifies the offender as an offender once a photo is taken. Together with a database, those documented become known as criminals and are henceforth recognized as such. According to Finn (2009), mug shots were designed with the same essential objective of the Bentham's Panopticon: visibility. For Bentham, the Panopticon was a tower designed to monitor criminals. For mug shots, the photos were part of system where criminal monitoring could also take place. Once these photos and accompanying biographies were obtained, they could be shared between law enforcement agencies to ensure that the mobile criminal could always be under the watch of the law wherever he/she went.

The field of surveillance studies (which examines visibility) goes beyond just the use of Bentham, though. A different paradigm is that we are in a control society (Deleuze, 1992), and this theory is built on the idea that contemporary power (i.e., corporations and capital) circulates in ways that are no longer tethered to place. This creates splintered and dispersed networks of people (Nadesan, 2013, p. 5). Lyon (2007) adds, "Whereas Foucault had theorized surveillance in the context of confined fixed spaces like the Panopticon, Deleuze proposed that such old sites of confinement were no longer the only or the primary sites of surveillance" (p. 60). Surveillance then is something that can occur in almost any place.

The internet has brought surveillance to a wider audience and contributed to a splinted and diverse group of people. Before the internet, mug shot photos may have been confined to police stations. As media technologies such as mass printing or broadcast grew, some select mug shots may have moved to a broader audience such as those looking at post office bulletin boards or television viewers of shows such as *America's Most Wanted*. These mug shots were for the most part limited to the top ten worst criminals or specific offenders deemed especially heinous or a threat to the community; however, the functionality of internet allows all mug shots to be distributed to a wider audience. Especially in the case of MCSO, now everyone arrested at MCSO is documented on the site, and anyone interested in viewing arrestees from transportation violations to homicide can access the site and filter to their desired offense. Ultimately then, this platform creates a new, visible model of a criminal community that didn't exist so freely for the public. Rather than the traditional media model which downplays white collar crime and overplays violent crime (Barak, 1994), the online mug shot distribution theoretically highlights all offenders involved in criminal activities to a wider audience.

The larger visibility of this discernible criminal is supposedly a value for mug shots. According to Arpaio, "More eyes on arrestees may result in more leads to criminal investigators" (Hermann, 2011). Community members begin to know who committed what crime, and this supposedly will make a person more engaged with law enforcement which ultimately leads to a safer community. According to Busted!, a commercial aggregator of law enforcement information, being able to locate criminal information supposedly makes citizens "become aware about crime in their neighborhoods" which creates more trust and builds stronger ties (B!, n.d.). As the community becomes more aware of their surroundings, they find the need to be informed community members which supposedly results in lower crime rates.

However, I counter this claim; more visibility of criminals does not necessarily mean the community is safer, especially in a long-term sustainable context. According to Raco (2007), safety is one requirement for a sustainable community. Sustainably-safe places share a "sense of community identity and belonging" (p. 307), and they also support "tolerance, respect and engagement between people of diverse backgrounds." Unsustainable communities have lack a culture of association and ownership of public space, are intolerant, and divided in local politics. In the case of MCSO, the ability to vote on the mug shot helps position the community as an unsustainable place. The mug shot of the day vote essentially places the criminal into the role of the other by positioning the criminal as the object of undesirability and as something to laugh at. This can be seen by the frequent winners who are often the most extreme-looking offender (see figure 1). In this view then, by creating the outsider, the criminal is no longer part of the community, and instead of strengthening the community and bringing the community together, it is essentially fragmenting the community by breaking it apart. The criminal moves into a position of the other and a community outsider. Communities adopting an outsider position for the criminal tend to have "increase[d] punitive attitudes and support for punitive policies like increased sentence lengths" (Leverentz, 2012, p. 349) which may ultimately produce higher incarceration rates, rates which are found to

"have the unintended consequences of destabilizing neighborhoods" (Klofas & Porter, 2011, p. 123).

(Figure 1, MCSO, n.d.)

Survey results help refute this claim. While only a small sample, I surveyed eighteen people anonymously to answer questions about their feelings towards the site. They looked at 109 mug shots pages from 10/25/14 to 2/2/15. The following information represents some of the questions asked of the respondents.

Question	Results
These pictures make me feel [more empathetic/less empathetic/no change] towards those I consider criminals.	11.11% more empathetic 50% less empathetic 38.89 % no change
Do you think these individuals are involved in their communities or politics?	0% yes 61.11% no 38.89% don't know
Do you think they have college degrees?	0% yes 33.33% no 66.67 % don't know
Do you think those depicted are criminals?	38.89% yes 5.56% no 55.56% can't say
The people in the mug shots are_____.	22.22% guilty 0% innocent 77.78% unknown
Would you be friends with these individuals?	5.56% yes 33.33% no 22.22% maybe 38.89% can't say
If you saw someone you know on this page, would it change your opinion of that person?	22.22% yes 27.78% no 27.78% maybe 22.22% can't say

Overall, while this is a small study that would need to be expanded for more reliable results, many of the questions do start to point to the criminal being more of an outsider. For instance, fifty percent of the respondents felt less empathetic to those they consider criminals after looking at the photos, and approximately sixty-one percent believed that these individuals were not involved in their communities or politics. While

each question doesn't offer definitive results, it does raise the question of the consequences of the mug shot program.

So although the MCSO's online mug shot may have redefined our collective imaginary of the criminal by showcasing all types of crimes which are searchable and assembled in the same place, the site and the ability to vote on the criminal may continue to reinscribe "the other" on the alleged offender's body. While the idea is to have more eyes on criminals for safer communities, the othering of criminals can ultimately affect the way the community thinks about crime and punishment, and overall, this affects the community not just in the present, but in the longer, (un)sustainable future. Future research which incorporates a larger number of survey respondents would be beneficial before drawing more solid conclusions.

Post script:

In addition to the survey results, several other interesting bits of data came from the mug shots themselves. In an investigation of two hundred sixty mug shots from 5/5/15 to 6/10/15, several trends began to emerge. The below chart lists several categories for those nominated for the "mug shot of the day."

Reason	Result
Attractive female	134/260 ($\approx$52%)
The bad person from the news	26/260 (10%)
The people who like to smile	23/260 ($\approx$8.8%)
The person with the tattoos	20/260 ($\approx$7.7%)
The disheveled Individual	17/260 ($\approx$6.5%)
Amusing picture	10/260 ($\approx$3.8%)

Each category also offers an additional avenue to explore, especially the largest category of the attractive female. This brings up many questions for feminist studies of surveillance to explore regarding how the body of the female arrestee is viewed on online mug shot sites. Overall, this whole conversation raises a concern about online mug shot posting and asks for attention and consideration of this issue.

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