

Research shows art imitates life -- the 'hard' life, that is

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New research from the University of Cincinnati brings into focus the connection between routine, police station mug shots and the marketing-savvy snapshots captured by the fashion police.

Stephanie Sadre-Orafai, a University of Cincinnati assistant professor and socio-cultural anthropologist, suggests so in the presentation of her research, "Beyond Types: Animating Evidence and Potential in Booking Photographs." The Nov. 17 presentation is part of the session, "Unsettling Accounts – [Photographs](#), Traces and Evidence" – at the 110th annual meeting of the American Anthropological Association in Montreal.

Sadre-Orafai conducted her research at a leading fashion casting agency in New York, comparing how police take mug shots with photos snapped by booking agents in the fashion industry. Neither images are taken by high-end photographers, she says, yet the bare-bones, head-and-profile mug shots are capturing an image that is similar to the Polaroids used to scout for appropriate fashion models for a particular gig.

"The data that I'm presenting is about the choices that are being made about how to frame these images," says Sadre-Orafai. "Casting in the fashion industry is a very recent form of expertise that is being developed, yet shares much in common with the history of criminal photography" she says.

Sadre-Orafai's presentation evolves from a chapter that she contributed

to the book, "Fashion Crimes: Dressing for Deviance," edited by Joanne Turney and currently in press with international publisher I.B. Tauris in London.

In examining the intersection of image between mug shots and snapshots of fashion portfolios, she says she looked through the police mug shots published in the book, "Least Wanted: A Century of American Mug Shots," a collection of thousands of ordinary mug shots in a book edited by contemporary photographer Steven Kasher and editorial [art](#) director Mark Michelson (Steidl & Partners, 2006).

"With similar lighting, poses, branding (the casting agency here replacing the police department name), and meticulous record of bodily measurements and photographic sitting dates, casting images share much in common with criminal mug shots," states Sadre-Orafai in the chapter she contributed to "Fashion Crimes: Dressing for Deviance."

"Iconic and instantly readable, both are documentary portraits used to fix identities motivated by the specter or promise of transformation: in the case of the casting image, the glamour of the fashion photograph; for the mug shot, the future recidivist in disguise. Both are images of potential, overwhelmingly charged by association," wrote Sadre-Orafai, in her chapter titled, "Mug Shot/Headshot – Danger, Beauty and the Temporal Politics of Booking Photography."

She says future research will examine the field of criminal profiling.

Provided by University of Cincinnati

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