

# 3<sup>rd</sup> International Conference on Forensic Research and Technology

October 06-08, 2014 Hilton San Antonio Airport, USA

## Synopsis of psychological research studies investigating face recognition of missing children

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Over the past decade attention has begun to focus on the importance of understanding, and improving, the public's ability to correctly identify children's faces from AMBER alerts. Methods of recognizing missing children have advanced significantly over the past 30 decades. Beginning with Etan Patz's face appearing on milk cartons in 1979, to more technically elaborate mechanisms, such as face aging software, as well as psychological studies aimed at the best and most efficient ways to help the public, as well as law enforcement, increase the chances of recovering missing children. My current research addresses the question of how well adults are able to recognize children from AMBER Alert photographs. How well are adults able to recognize a child who does not look exactly like the typical photographs posted on AMBER Alerts (i.e., school photographs). The results of the studies I have conducted are both alarming, and hopeful. The results showed that if the child is seen looking differently than seen in AMBER alerts, recognition is as low as 8%, where if the child looks similar (clean looking in the AMBER alert and clean again in the recognition phase), recognition is fair, over 40%. Current research is showing that the public can increase their recognition of these children with some basic training. The purpose of my presentation will be to discuss the history of AMBER Alerts, recognition of missing children, and suggestions for educating the public through free seminars at schools, churches, and other organizations in throughout the country.

### Biography

Vicki S Gier completed her PhD in Experimental Psychology at the University of Nevada/Reno in 2003. She is currently an Associate Professor of Psychology at the University of Mississippi State University. She was one of the first psychologists to empirically test facial recognition based on AMBER Alert type studies. Her research includes testing how well adults recognize children's faces from AMBER Alerts from television, posters, and now from cell phones. She is one of the nation's leading AMBER Alert experts and has several articles published in the area of face recognition and AMBER Alerts.

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