The Effectiveness of the F.B.I.'s Top Ten Most Wanted List

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Abstract

The purpose of the current research was to assess what circumstances occurred in fugitive cases, what circumstances lead to the location of fugitives, and the circumstances surrounding sightings and media in the F.B.I.'s Top Ten Most Wanted List. In regards to sightings of fugitives, researchers were interested in the rates of prospective person memory as compared to retrospective person memory. Researchers created a coding protocol and coded every entry in the database to describe the circumstances occurring and leading to location of fugitives. Frequency analysis was then done to track how likely each circumstance was in the database. Researchers found the list to be successful in locating fugitives, with the majority being apprehended. Citizen sightings were found to be the second most common occurrence that led to location of the wanted individual. In regards to citizen sightings, researchers found that prospective person memory was engaged more frequently than retrospective memory and that sighters more often than not did not know the wanted person personally. This study has implications as to how successful the Top Ten List is at locating wanted persons and how successful their campaign is at initiating and mobilizing public engagement.

Keywords: F.B.I. Most Wanted, missing persons, wanted persons, prospective person memory, retrospective person memory

Introduction

The Federal Bureau of Investigation debuted the "Top Ten Most Wanted List" in 1950 after a particularly successful news wire story that was published in 1949 searching for the toughest criminals known to the F.B.I. (Lewis, 2020). After the massive success of this campaign in terms of apprehension of fugitives, the F.B.I. decided to create a published program that depicts the "Top Ten" fugitives that the F.B.I. believes can be captured with public assistance (Lewis, 2020). There are two criteria for an individual to be considered for the Top Ten Most Wanted List. First, the fugitive must pose a dangerous threat to society whether that be through a past violent criminal history or through committing a particularly heinous crime like terrorism (Cornish, 2012). The second criteria is the belief that public assistance in the case will result in a swift capture, meaning the fugitive is more likely to be captured as a result of civilian identification. To illustrate what these fugitive cases may look like, we turn to the 2016 case of Shanika Minor. Shanika Minor was added to the Most Wanted List in 2016 due to her alleged involvement in several crimes. Law enforcement led a widespread search for Shanika S. Minor after her addition to the F.B.I. 's Top Ten Most Wanted List, which included requesting the public's help in searching for her. Minor was wanted for questioning in relation to her alleged involvement in several crimes. Just two days after her publication to the list, a citizen called in a sighting and informed law enforcement they had seen Minor, which resulted in her apprehension. This report was attributed as the direct reason for her prompt arrest (Peace, 2016). Despite the wide news reporting of the success of cases on the F.B.I. 's Top Ten Most Wanted List, there is currently no research on the specific details that led these fugitives to be apprehended. Namely, there is little verifiable data on how and if fugitives are located and the role public engagement

plays in the location process. As such, this research is aimed at understanding how fugitives on this list are located and how citizens are involved in their apprehension.

Estimating the efficiency of methods to apprehend wanted individuals is important to understanding the overall success of the list. There are multiple reasons identifying wanted persons can be beneficial to both police and society in general. For instance, if a wanted person is dangerous, their location and capture will prevent them from committing future crimes. Their capture would also ensure that they would be apprehended and rehabilitated for breaking the law. In some cases, their capture might bring justice to victims or the return of stolen goods or funds. Further, some wanted persons may have pertinent information that will aid police in solving additional cases.

The last time the F.B.I. published updated statistics relating to the efficacy of the campaign was on its 70 year anniversary in 2020 (Federal Bureau of Investigation, 2020). At that time, a total of 488 fugitives had been captured out of the 523 people placed on the list and 162 had been captured with the assistance of the public (Federal Bureau of Investigation, 2020). However, the F.B.I. had no definition of what exactly constituted citizen assistance and did not state whether that meant sightings, tips, or other forms of public engagement. To date, there has been no research published on the breakdown of how fugitives were officially located from the list, only statistics on how many have been located at a given time. Research has shown that programs like the television show "*Americas' Most Wanted* substantially raises the rate of apprehension for fugitives and shortens the amount of time they stay at large (Miles, 2005). Although we know media like this has a role in locating fugitives, the F.B.I. also does not define what part the media plays in generating this apprehension of fugitives. They do state, however,

that the television show America's Most Wanted has generated the apprehension of 17 fugitives in some way as of 2017 (FBI FAQ, 2017).

The F.B.I. list can prompt citizens to be on the lookout for these fugitives or help them realize if they have already encountered them. One hope would be that a citizen may recognize a fugitive from the alert and subsequently report their location to local law enforcement, similar to what happened with Minor. Another hope is that citizens will be primed to look out for the fugitive in their daily life. In addition, this list expects that citizens who may have information about the fugitive or the fugitive's location will be prompted to contact law enforcement with information. This phenomenon of person searches has been of interest to researchers in understanding the effectiveness of missing and wanted search campaigns. The role of person searches was of primary interest in the current research.

These alerts can be effective at soliciting sightings in person searches both before and after an individual sees a wanted person. If a person sees the wanted person before they view the alert, they may report the sighting upon viewing the alert after they remember seeing said person. This is called *retrospective person memory* (Lampinen, Arnal, & Hicks, 2009). If a person sees the alert and stays "on the lookout" for the wanted person, they may encounter the wanted person after the alert. They can then report the sighting to local law enforcement upon encountering the wanted person. This is called *prospective person memory* (Lampinen, Arnal, & Hicks, 2009). Prospective person memory is a type of prospective memory, wherein a person must remember to do something in the future, as opposed to (retrospective) memory, wherein a person must remember something from the past.

Current lab based studies have contradictory results in determining the efficacy of prospective person memory and retrospective person memory. Lab based research studies that

hold that prospective person memory is poor in generating sightings on individuals (Lampinen, Curry, & Erickson, 2016). This study showed participants a video of a mock wanted person and were offered a cash prize if they could locate the individual, but no participants in the first experiment reported a correct sighting, with only 4 (.03%) generating a correct sighting in the second experiment (Lampinen, Curry, & Erickson, 2016). Other studies have found higher sighting rates when the target person is placed in the participants' vicinity soon after they study the alert, but sighting rates are still typically low 5-10% (Lampinen et al., 2009). Some studies such as Sweeney and Lampinen (2012) suggest that presenting multiple images can improve prospective person memory, but this has not been replicated in all further studies (Lampinen, Curry, & Erickson, 2016). However, one of the only studies on memory and wanted posters specifically showed through a diagnosticity ratio that prospective person memory was 3.35 times more likely to be accurate than inaccurate, whereas retrospective person memory was only 1.2 times more likely to be accurate (Mcallister et al., 2010). This study showed participants footage of a computer lab, in half of the videos a computer hacker was featured in the lab. Half of the participants were exposed to a wanted poster of the hacker prior to the video playing and the other half were shown a wanted poster after they had watched the video. Results showed that participants were more likely to recall the computer hacker in the video if they had viewed a wanted poster beforehand, exercising their prospective person memory (Mcallisteret al., 2010). However, no research has been done to understand why apprehensions occur for folks on the Top Ten Most Wanted list. In the current research we were particularly interested in what led to the location of fugitives and the circumstances surrounding *citizen sightings* as a direct result of exposure to the campaign.

Prospective person memory's efficacy has been debated in current research. Some lab based studies suggest that prospective person memory is poor in generating sightings of individuals (Lampinen, Curry, & Erickson, 2016). This study showed participants a video of a mock wanted person and were offered a cash prize if they could locate the individual, but no participants in the first experiment reported a correct sighting, with only 4 (.03%) generating a correct sighting in the second experiment (Lampinen, Curry, & Erickson, 2016). One other study on prospective memory used a psychology class as participants where researchers showed two pictures of people they would encounter and were offered a cash prize if they saw this person and reported it (Lampinen et al., 2009). One of the people later arrived at the class and greeted the room. Despite all of the participants seeing this person, only about 5% of the participants reported the sighting to their professor (Lampinen et al, 2009a). Another study on prospective person memory supported low rates of sightings using prospective person memory by showing participants mock news stories featuring a wanted person (Lampinen, Arnal, & Hicks, 2009b). The participants were informed that though the wanted person was not actually wanted by police, they would receive a cash prize for correctly reporting a sighting of them. Despite the wanted person showing up outside a class, only about 4% of participants correctly reported the sighting (Lampinen, Arnal, & Hicks, 2009a). These studies all show low rates of sightings despite confirming all participants would be exposed to a person they were to be looking for. However, some studies suggest that it may be more efficient in generating sightings than retrospective person memory (Mcallister et al., 2010). This study showed that prospective person memory was 3.35 times more likely to be accurate than inaccurate, compared to retrospective memory which was only 1.2 times more likely to be accurate than inaccurate (Mcallister et al., 2010).

Retrospective person memory's efficacy in recalling information has little research, but some studies suggest that it too has low recall rates. In a study analyzing the effect of multiple images on memory, retrospective person memory had weaker results than prospective person memory on generating sightings of missing children (Sweeney & Lampinen, 2012). There is also research stating that retrospective person memory generated less accurate sightings than prospective person memory when viewing wanted posters (Mcallister et al., 2010). Many studies regarding retrospective person memory are only done in tandem with prospective person memory, despite circumstances of retrieval being different (Sweeney & Lampinen, 2012). Despite these lab based studies, little research has been conducted on the efficacy of missing person efforts in the field such as the F.B.I. 's Top Ten Most Wanted List.

The F.B.I. reports that approximately 136 (33%) of the 491 fugitives that have been on the list have been located as a result of "citizen cooperation" but does not explicitly define the circumstances this term encompasses (F.B.I. 's Ten Most Wanted Fugitives FAQ, 2017). One can assume this includes instances of using prospective and retrospective person memory in citizen sightings, but the distinction of citizen cooperation precludes apprehensions by police officers who find the wanted person using prospective or retrospective person memory. Without these distinctions, we cannot conclusively determine the role that prospective and retrospective person memory contributes to the efficacy of this campaign. It is crucial to understand the successfulness of these campaigns to know if and how successful a campaign of this caliber is. Furthermore, it helps determine what exactly about a search campaign is successful and why, which can be used to assist in the creation of future campaigns with higher success rates.

The goal of the current project is to determine how the fugitives on this list have been located and what all circumstances occurred in their cases. This study coded for circumstances

such as surrendered, found dead, killed during apprehension, sightings, tips, if charges were dismissed, and what types of media were involved in their searches. This study had a particular focus on how many have been apprehended as a result of prospective or retrospective person memory by use of general public engagement. This study will reveal how many of the reported instances of capture through citizen cooperation are attributed to the search campaign itself. In more general terms, this project will reveal how effective this missing person search was at identifying and capturing fugitives. This study will help in understanding the base rates of apprehensions for one the biggest person search campaigns in the U.S., strategizing about ways to make the campaigns more effective, as well as generating a comprehensive look at the efficacy of this campaign in relation to locating wanted persons.This study can additionally identify whether rates of efficacy of these campaigns are comparable to the general population's capacity for retrospective and prospective person memory. Overall, this study will reveal what exactly leads to the location of these fugitives and how effective the campaign is at generating citizen engagement that leads to apprehension. We developed several hypotheses regarding the success of the list and its use of citizen engagement (See table 1)

Table 1

Hypotheses

Hypothesis	Number
Police tips, citizen tips, and informant tips will be more likely than citizen sightings.	1
Most fugitives will have been located.	2
Single citizen sightings would be more common than multiple citizen sightings.e	3

It will be more likely that the sighter knows the fugitive than not.	4
It will be likely that reported sightings played a role in the locating and/or apprehension of the fugitive.	5
Retrospective person memory will be more likely than prospective person memory.	6

Methods

Data collection

This study used data originating from an online database of the United States Federal Bureau of Investigation's Most Wanted List. The two criteria for addition to the list are based on how dangerous the fugitive is considered to be in society and how likely it is that public engagement can quicken their capture.For addition to the list, a fugitive must first be sent in by one of the F.B.I. 's 56 Field Offices. From there, the candidates are reviewed by the Criminal Investigation Department's special agents and then sent for review by special agents in the Office of Public Affairs (Federal Bureau of Investigation FAQ, 2017). After being selected by special agents, the proposed fugitives are sent to the F.B.I. Director for approval and publication on the list (Federal Bureau of Investigation FAQ, 2017). The Top Ten Most Wanted list is distributed through various means and is updated alongside technological capabilities, as publicity is said to be key to the success of the list (Federal Bureau of Investigation FAQ, 2017). The list historically featured stories published in newspapers and radio shows in addition to distribution for physical posting in high traffic areas like post offices. With the advancement of

various forms of media, the F.B.I. began to use sources like television programs, the internet, and

podcasts to gain attention of the public in cyberspace.

For removal from the list, a fugitive must be captured, found dead, have their charges

dismissed, or in some cases be found to no longer fit the criteria. At any given time, the list

includes 10 wanted fugitives wanted for crimes of any type. For each fugitive on the list, the

F.B.I. publishes a photo, descriptive information about the person's appearance (i.e., culprit's

height, weight, eye and hair color, race, ethnicity, and sex), and any other pertinent details (e.g.,

age, aliases, suspected or possible whereabouts, crimes suspected of committing). The F.B.I.

provides a tip phone number and the contact information for local law enforcement for contact if

someone has information that could be useful in the location of the fugitive The list is updated as

fugitives are located in addition to instances where a more wanted person replaces a fugitive that

is no longer considered particularly dangerous to society. In the online database, the F.B.I.

details each person who has been placed on the list since its inception in 1949 as well as who has

been apprehended and gives descriptive information about how they were apprehended.

We coded all fugitives added to the list and details about their case from the list's

inception up until March of 2022 (N = 526). At the time of completion of coding, 491 fugitive

cases were considered closed or apprehended.

Coding Protocol

Protocol Development. I developed a coding protocol (see Appendix A) to code the

index of the F.B.I.'s Most Wanted List. An initial draft of the protocol was developed in

collaboration with Dr. Kara Moore based on research questions we developed regarding

prospective and retrospective person memory. Then I reviewed several cases and added

additional coding criteria based on information that was often disclosed in the F.B.I.'s

description of each case. After developing the original protocol, coding was performed on a

sample of 20 fugitives from each chronological section across the list to ensure efficacy of the

protocol. Upon completion of this first round of coding, adjustments were made for clarity and

efficiency resulting in the second version of the protocol. The coding protocol addressed what

circumstances occurred in fugitive cases, what led to the location of the fugitive if apprehended,

and circumstances surrounding sightings if any occurred. We coded for the number of sightings

made, the relationship between sighter and fugitive, the sightings accuracy, whether the sighting

led to location of the wanted individual, and whether the sighting relied on retrospective or

prospective person memory. In addition, we coded for what type of media was involved in the

search and whether that media led to location of the wanted individual. Once the first version of

the protocol was finalized, researchers recruited two research assistants from Kara Moore's

Cognition, Attention, Law, and Memory Lab who had no prior involvement in the project. These

researchers were taught how to code the data via Zoom. The full index was coded using the first

version of the protocol. Then we tested agreement rates amongst the coders. Three of 35 coding

variables had disagreement rates above 15% so we decided to revise those coding variables to

increase the agreement rate. The variables were Occurred, Located Type, and Description of

Location. We created a second and final version of the coding protocol that included changes to

the options to input for each variable in order to clarify and simplify the circumstances of each

case. Then, the three coders re-coded the full index for the revised variables and added a variable

to assess sighter awareness of fugitive status at time of sighting. Agreement rates were checked

for the revised variables and we found every variable to have below 11% disagreement between

each coder.

Protocol Variables of Occurred and Located. The coding protocol included questions

about the fugitive and circumstances surrounding what occurred while they were on the list.

Researchers coded the fugitive's number on list, name, and then the factors that occurred in their

case. Specifically, we coded for occurrences as to whether the individual surrendered

themselves, was found dead, was killed by law enforcement during apprehension, and whether a

citizen sighting occurred. A citizen sighting occurred when an individual saw and recognized

the wanted person and reported it. The coding protocol featured a section on whether the person

was located and whether that location was due to a sighting.Fugitives were coded as being

officially located when the description of the case included details that indicated that fugitives

were arrested by law enforcement, found dead, apprehended during commission of another

crime, or surrendered themselves to law enforcement. Fugitives were coded as not located if they

had not been located, if they were removed from the list before being located, or if charges were

dismissed or the search was canceled. Further, we coded for whether a sighting occurred by

police, the fugitive was arrested during the commission of another crime, and whether a tip was

given by a citizen, police officer, or informant. Tips occurred when an individual gave

information, other than a sighting of the individual, that led to the location of a fugitive. For

example, an F.B.I. informant may have information about the fugitive or crime gathered from

their underground sources or connections to individuals still involved in crime that was reported

to law enforcement. Lastly, we coded for whether charges were dismissed, whether a search was

canceled, and whether it was reported that the F.B.I. located the fugitive. F.B.I. located is defined

as the F.B.I. locating the wanted individual through official investigation into possible locations

of the wanted person, known associates, etc. We interpreted this as a broad description that may

have taken the place of more descriptive information about the case, but it also sometimes co-occurred with more descriptive information about the case.

Protocol Variables of Sightings and Their Circumstances The coding protocol included multiple variables to describe the circumstances surrounding any sightings that occurred in cases. If a sighting occurred, then the coder completed a section on how many individuals were involved in the sighting, whether that be single or multiple. Another section specified the relationship of the sighter to the fugitive, including options for common associations like law enforcement, family, friends, coworkers, neighbors, or having no relationship at all to the fugitive.The coding protocol featured a section to dictate whether prospective person memory or retrospective person memory occurred in the sighting. This variable specified whether the sighter became aware of the wanted status of the fugitive prior to the sighting or afterwards. Researchers coded for whether a sighting occurred before or after an individual viewed an alert about the wanted status of a fugitive. This section assesses whether a sighting occurred due to a) face recognition (if so, researchers code for any details about how long it was between when the person saw the alert and encountered the person, b) recognition of some other important detail (like license plate, associated person, etc.), c) whether one or multiple people saw the person.

Protocol Variables of Media Usage Further, coders recorded what media medium the sighter viewed the alert in and whether that alert played a role in locating the fugitive. This included options for both physical forms of media and digital such as newspapers, wanted posters, magazines, radio programs, television programs, internet, and other. Researchers coded for the name of the media outlet if applicable and recorded whether the media played a role in a sighting of a fugitive in addition to its role in the apprehension of the fugitive.

Results

Circumstances and Events that Occurred in Cases

We analyzed the circumstances and events that occurred during fugitives' time on the list (see Table 2). Detailing events such as surrendering, charges being dismissed, and other events that transpired in fugitive cases. In addition, specifications were made as to what events led to their apprehension or official location. The most commonly reported circumstance was F.B.I. Location, which occurred in 164 cases (31.2%) with citizen sightings (19.4%) being the second most common. F.B.I. Location was defined as the F.B.I. locating the wanted individual through official investigation into possible locations of the wanted person, known associates, etc. Single citizen sightings occurred in 96 cases (18.3%) with multiple citizen sightings occurring in 6 cases (1.1%) of the total 526 cases featured on the list. Table 2 shows the frequencies of every circumstance that was reported to have occurred in the index.

Table 2

Frequency Statistics of Occurred and Located Circumstances

Circumstance	Frequency of Circumstance	
	Occurred	Located
Surrendered	4.9%	5.3%
Found dead	2.3%	2.3%
Killed During Apprehension	1.5%	1.5%
Citizen Sighting	18.3%	18.3%
Multiple Citizen Sighting	1.1%	1.1%
Citizen Tip	6.8%	7%

Police Sighting	3.6%	3.6%
Police Tips	0%	0%
Informant Tip	0.6%	0.8%
Arrested During Commission of Another Crime	6.1%	6.5%
Charges Dismissed/ Search Canceled	4.6%	0%
F.B.I. Located	31.2%	31.0%
Other or Not Specified	0%	.6%
Arrested but entry does not specify circumstances	12.9%	12.7%
Arrested During Commission of Another Crime and F.B.I. Located	0.2%	0%
Killed During Apprehension and Arrested During Commission of Another Crime	0.8%	0.6%
Citizen Sighting and F.B.I. Located	0.2%	0.2%
Police Sighting and Arrested During Commission of Another Crime	0.4%	0.2%
Found Dead and Citizen Sighting	0.2%	0%
Surrendered and Charges Dismissed	0.2%	0%
Informant Tip and Arrested During Commission of Another Crime	0.4%	0.2%
Found dead and Charges Dismissed	0.2%	0%
Killed During Apprehension and F.B.I. Located	0.2%	0%

Citizen Sighting and Citizen Tip	0.4%	0.2%
Surrendered, Citizen Sighting, and Citizen Tip	0.2%	0%
Surrendered and Arrested During Commission of Another Crime	0.2%	0.2%
Fugitive Still on List as of March 2022	1.5%	0%
Arrest Attributed to Unspecified Widespread Media Coverage	0.2%	0.2%
Arrested During Routine Law Enforcement Check	0.4%	0.4%
Citizen Recognized Accomplice	0.2%	0.2%
Fugitive Arrested due to Citizen Cooperation	0.2%	0.2%

Note: N= 526

Location of Wanted Persons and Events Leading to Location

Descriptive statistical analysis performed on SPSS software revealed that 492 participants (93.5%) out of the total 526 were reported to have been officially located in the database. Only 33 cases (6.3%) were classified as not located, including the 10 individuals actively featured on the list as of March 2022. 1 case (.2%) was coded as unspecified as to whether the individual was officially located or not. These findings support hypothesis 2, that most fugitives on the list have been officially located.

Located Circumstances

Coders coded for what circumstances led to the location of a wanted fugitive (see Table 1). These options were the same as occurred but excluded charges dismissed or search canceled as those options did not lead to location of the wanted individual. Analysis on the frequency of what led to a fugitive's official location revealed that F.B.I. location due to investigation was the most commonly reported reason for location, occurring in 163 cases (31%). The second most commonly reported reason for official location was single citizen sighting which led to the fugitive's location in 96 cases (18.3%) with multiple citizen sightings only occurring in 6 cases (1.1%). More citizen sightings, both false and accurate, could have occurred but were not reported in the F.B.I.'s database for fugitive entries. These findings support hypothesis 3 that single citizen sightings would be more common than multiple citizen sightings.

Sightings and their Circumstances

Sightings were defined as an instance in which an individual sees or encounters someone (known or unknown) and then proceeds to report said individual to police as a result of the sighting or encounter. Sightings could be made by citizens, police, family members, coworkers, neighbors, friends or acquaintances, F.B.I. informants, or non-acquainted civilians. Analysis on the frequency of sightings revealed that a sighting was reported to have occurred in 136 (26.4%) of the 526 cases. In 135 (99.3%) of these cases, the sighting was reported as the reason for the official location of the fugitive. This analysis supported hypothesis 6 that it would be likely that reported sightings played a role in the locating of the fugitive. Out of the 136 cases where sightings occurred, the sighter was reported to know the fugitive in only 17 cases (12.5%). The majority of the reported sightings (n = 118, 86.8%) were made by people who did not know the fugitive. Next, we analyzed the relationship between the sighter and the fugitive. The most common relationship was a non-acquainted civilian, accounting for 88 cases (64.7%). Table 3

reveals frequencies of the relationships between sighter and fugitive. In addition, we analyzed the number of sightings that were reported per case. Out of the 136 cases where a sighting was reported, a single sighting occurred the most frequently in 120 cases (88.2%) followed by multiple sightings which occurred in 6 cases (1.1%). The sightings were reported to have been accurate in 135 of the cases (99.3%) where a sighting was reported to have occurred. Finally, in addition to person sightings, we coded for sightings of associated objects. These cases included instances where something such as a vehicle was said to have been identified rather than the person themselves. Only 8 cases (1.5%) out of the total 526 cases were identified as having a sighting of an associated object.

Table 2

Frequency of Sighter Relationship to Fugitive

Sighter Relationship	Percent
Law Enforcement Officer	15.4%
Family Member Extended	0.7%
Friend or Acquaintance	3.7%
Coworker	1.5%
Neighbor or Roommate	2.2%
Non-Acquainted Civilian	64.7%
Other	11.8%

Note: N= 136

Retrospective and Prospective Person Memory

In 123 (90.4%) out of the 136 cases where a sighting occurred, that sighting was reported to have relied on memory. Prospective person memory was defined as instances where an individual made a sighting of a fugitive after exposure to their status as a wanted person. Retrospective person memory occurred in cases where an individual made a sighting of an individual before knowing their status as wanted. Frequency analysis revealed that in 78 cases (57.5%) involving a sighting, the sighter relied on prospective person memory. Only 36 cases (26.5%) involved a sighter relying on retrospective memory. A chi-square test of independence was performed to examine the relationship between prospective and retrospective person memory. The relationship between these variables was significant, x^2 (1, N = 114) = 15.47, p = <.001, indicating there was a significant difference in rates of retrospective person memory and prospective person memory. One analysis did not provide support for hypothesis 7 that retrospective memory would be more likely than prospective person memory.

Media Usage

We coded for whether media was used in a case and whether media led to a sighting. Further, we coded for what type of media was used including newspaper, magazine, flyer, wanted poster, radio program, television program, and internet. Analysis revealed that in 150 cases (28.5%), media was reported to have been used. In 143 cases (27.2%), the media played a role in the location of a fugitive. In the 136 cases where a sighting occurred, media was reportedly involved in 113 (83.1%) of cases. The most common types of media were newspapers (n = 34, 6.5%) as well as F.B.I. Most Wanted posters (n = 34, 6.5%). Newspaper usage occurred in 34 cases (6.5%) out of the total 526. F.B.I. Most Wanted Posters occurred in 34 cases (6.5%) out of the total 526 as well. The second most common media reported was television programs,

which occurred in 23 (4.4%) of cases. Media may have been used in more cases but was not

reported in the F.B.I. 's database.

Discussion

This research sought to analyze how successful the Top Ten List is at generating

apprehension of fugitives and public engagement based on their criteria for addition revolving

around citizen assistance. Researchers attempted to assess the details of fugitive cases on the Top

Ten Most Wanted list to analyze what events occurred in cases and which of those events

transpired in an official location. This research had an eye towards the role citizen intervention

played in capturing fugitives and the extent that media led to the success of this campaign. To

analyze the success, coders developed a coding protocol that codified possible occurrences and

events that transpired in fugitive cases and then combed through all 526 fugitives to codify them

based on these variables. Researchers had six main hypotheses shown in Table 2. The findings

that were especially surprising were found when analyzing Hypothesis 4 that it would be more

likely that the sighter knows the fugitive than not and Hypothesis 6 that retrospective person

memory will be more likely than prospective person memory.

To assess how successful the list was at locating fugitives, researchers developed

Hypothesis 2 that most wanted persons would have been located. There was support for this

hypothesis as 492 participants (93.5%) out of the total 526 were reported to have been officially

located. Although many wanted person searches lack verifiable data to support their success, our

findings suggest that the Top Ten Most Wanted List is extremely successful at finding fugitives

through various means. Although there are multiple circumstances that led to the apprehension of

fugitives, more often than not the fugitives featured were officially located as a result of their

placement on the list in some way. The Top Ten Most Wanted List can further be researched to

understand why this success rate is so high and what about the list can be replicated in other wanted person studies to increase success rates.

Researchers also sought to understand what role public assistance played in the success of the list, leading to the development of Hypothesis 5 that it would be likely that reported sightings played a role in the locating and/or apprehension of the fugitive. This hypothesis was supported in our research findings as a sighting was reported to have occurred in 136 (26.4%) of the 526 cases. In 135 (99.3%) of these cases, the sighting was reported as the reason for the official location of the fugitive. In terms of what events led to the location of fugitives, fugitives were primarily located by general F.B.I. investigation into the wanted person, codified by F.B.I. Locate. The second most commonly occurring reason for location was found to be citizen sightings, which was unexpected based on the vastness of the list and the lack of research into wanted person searches that support high citizen engagement. To date, there has been no qualitative analysis on what occurs to locate individuals on Top Ten Most Wanted list or in other wanted person searches.

In addition to assessing what role public assistance played in locating fugitives, researchers sought to uncover what part non-acquainted civilians played in apprehension. When analyzing fugitive cases, researchers found that in 135 (99.3%) of the cases where a citizen sighting was reported, the sighting was reported as the reason for the official location of the fugitive. Many individuals may not expect to encounter a fugitive or wanted person, but this list generated a large amount of public engagement.

Researchers also examined the role that prospective person memory and retrospective person memory played in cases of citizen sightings, leading to Hypothesis 6 that retrospective

person memory would be more common than prospective person memory. This hypothesis was found to be unsupported, as our findings indicated that the sighter relied on prospective person memory in 78 cases (57.5%) involving a sighting, whereas only 36 cases (26.5%) involved a sighter relying on retrospective memory. Current lab based studies find that PPM/RPM has about a 5-10% recall rate (Lampinen, Arnal, & Hicks, 2009a). There is no way to determine how many people interacted with the fugitive prior to getting a reported sighting, so it is possible the rates of occurrence for these types of memory are in line with current research. Although we are unable to conclusively determine how many citizens were in contact with the wanted person or made a sighting and failed to recognize the fugitive, the rates of citizen sightings are likely higher than the general public would expect based on these studies. The F.B.I. Top Ten list does boast a high apprehension rate and uses public engagement expectation as one of the two criteria on the list, so it is also possible the public might be primed to expect to see these fugitives based on the belief that the list only publishes fugitives one might readily encounter.

One of the only studies on memory and wanted posters specifically showed through a diagnosticity ratio that prospective person memory was 3.35 times more likely to be accurate than inaccurate, whereas retrospective person memory was only 1.2 times more likely to be accurate (Mcallister, Baiamonte, Ory, & Scherer, 2010). This is consistent with our findings indicating that in 78 cases (57.5%) involving a sighting, the sighter relied on prospective person memory versus retrospective person memory which was only reported in 36 cases (26.5%). Although the F.B.I. does not seem to report erroneous sightings, our findings suggest that prospective person memory heads more results in location of fugitives. These findings are inconsistent, however, with other research studies that hold that prospective person memory is poor in generating sightings on individuals (Lampinen, Curry, & Erickson, 2016). This study

showed only four (0.3%) of 138 participants reported a correctly identified sighting (Lampinen, Curry, & Erickson, 2016). Some studies such as Sweeney and Lampinen (2012) suggest that presenting multiple images can double prospective person memory, but this has not been replicated in all further studies (Lampinen, Curry, & Erickson, 2016). Despite these lab based studies, few studies have been conducted on the efficacy of missing person efforts in the field such as the F.B.I. 's Top Ten Most Wanted List. This study suggests there might be a research gap in the effectiveness of prospective person memory in the field that limits the implications of the results from lab based studies.

Historically, missing person searches such as the Missing-Children Milk Carton Program have not had verifiable data to analyze success (Salazar, 2012). The focus of the current research was on the F.B.I. 's most wanted list, but many other lists and campaigns for the public's help in locating people exist (Pashley, Enhus, & Leys, 2010). There was even a T.V. show based on the F.B.I.'s Most Wanted list designed to increase the public's engagement with locating these wanted fugitives entitled "America's Most Wanted." This study might suggest that prospective person memory is a practical tool to generate findings of fugitives, which is debated in efficacy in current lab based studies. It is possible there is a higher level of intent to look for fugitives as sighters might deem a wanted person on the list as dangerous, but further studies need to be done to determine the role of 'intent to find' on the Top Ten Most Wanted List. With these findings, further research should be done before a complete understanding of the full effects of this program's success is reached. It would be useful to further explore what about this campaign promotes such a high level of success in terms of citizen sightings, especially with regards to citizens who have no relationship to the missing person. The success of this campaign suggests that lab based studies are not accurate in terms of memory being used to generate citizen

sightings in real world settings. Further research in this area can generate more successful

missing person searches and subsequently bring more missing persons to justice, both within the

carceral system and outside of it. Although future studies need to be conducted to establish what

makes the F.B.I. 's Top Ten Most Wanted List successful in generating prospective person

memory, this study has provided clear support in its efficacy in locating fugitives based on what

is reported by the F.B.I.

The analysis of the Top Ten Most Wanted list led to vast success in both locating

fugitives and engaging citizen sightings. However, the results of the research are restricted by the

limitations of the database. One limitation of this study is that the descriptions for each fugitive

were written by special agents in one of the F.B.I.'s 56 field offices. Therefore, there may be

variability in what was reported. In addition, the index served details of circumstances that

occurred in fugitive cases, but there might be more events that occurred and were either not

reported or not reported in entirety. Subsequently, the F.B.I. reports may be incomplete and may

not mention circumstances of occurrences like false identification or erogenous sightings. As the

list may not report all circumstances of each fugitive, these results may be skewed by incomplete

information on cases. Future research could be done to investigate information on the fugitives'

cases from other sources to gain a more complete picture of what occurred in their case.

Despite these limitations, this study has implications that the F.B.I. Top Ten Most

Wanted List is extremely successful at its goal of apprehending fugitives with public assistance.

In addition, the list seems to be particularly effective in generating public engagement through

citizen sightings. As reported by the F.B.I. in 2020, 488 fugitives had been captured out of the

523 people placed on the list and 162 had been captured with the assistance of the public

(Federal Bureau of Investigation, 2020). Although we cannot define what all this term

encompasses, the research did find that citizen sightings were common in these cases. These

sightings more often than not occurred by individuals with no relation to the fugitive, meaning

there was high success in generating engagement of non-acquainted citizens rather than simply

just encouraging relatives or associates of the wanted person to confess their whereabouts due to

widespread media coverage. Further research needs to be done to confirm these results, but

preliminary findings support the success of the campaign in both finding fugitives and

harnessing public engagement.

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