

PAPER**PSYCHIATRY & BEHAVIORAL SCIENCES**

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Factors Associated with Escalation and Problematic Approaches Toward Public Figures*

ABSTRACT: Detailed comparison of factors associated with abnormal approach to the prominent and with escalation from communication to approach has not hitherto been undertaken. This partially reflects the failure of individual studies to adopt compatible terminologies. This study involves a careful dissection of six public figure studies, three involving U.S. politicians, two Hollywood celebrities, and one the British Royal Family. Common findings were unearthed across six headings. Approachers were significantly more likely to exhibit serious mental illness, engage in multiple means of communication, involve multiple contacts/targets, and to incorporate into their communication requests for help. They were significantly less likely to use threatening or antagonistic language in their communications, except in those cases involving security breaches. These results emphasize the importance of integrating mental health findings and preventive measures into risk management. Approach should not be regarded as a single behavioral category and has multiple motivations. Future studies should adopt standard terminology, preferably taken from the general stalking research.

KEYWORDS: forensic science, stalking, escalation, violence, public figures, celebrity figures

Studies of abnormal communications and approaches to prominent people over the past 20 years have concerned celebrities (1,2), politicians (3–5), the judiciary (6), and the British Royal Family (7,8). The various studies, while examining similar phenomena in different populations, have failed to adopt any consistent approach to the issues, in particular, the variables that they examined and the classification of behavior and motivation. Problems of use of different typologies and concepts between the studies have discouraged detailed comparison of the various endeavors. Therefore, although research in the field has been summarized (9), there have been no attempts to establish the common ground between findings, or to draw out findings or conclusions that are consistent across the studies.

The waters have arguably been muddied by the highly influential Exceptional Case Study Project (ECSP) (10,11), which analyzed attacks, assassinations, and near lethal approaches (apprehended

with a weapon near the target with intent to attack) from a behavioral policing perspective on the known universe of politicians, businessmen, and media personalities attacked in the United States over a 47-year period. The ECSP conclusions that mental illness and threats were of little operational importance, despite the high prevalence of a history of mental illness, psychosis at the time of the attacks, and indirect warnings in their sample (11), may have discouraged attention to these elements. The dominance of the risk domain of violence to the virtual exclusion of all others (such as escalation, persistence, recidivism, and psychological damage) in such research may also have biased further research questions in the field. In addition, the two first and ground-breaking peer-reviewed scientific papers in the field (1,3) did not include important findings, particularly with regard to mental illness, that were contained in their original U.S. government report from which these papers were drawn (12), which has not been easily available to researchers in this field. A further consideration is that the studies of stalkers in the general population have, until recently, given little attention to the issue of approach (13), which might otherwise have stimulated comparative interest in those concerned with abnormal approaches and communications to the prominent. Whatever the reasons, the current review is the first to undertake a painstaking comparison of the variables considered in approach studies with a view to drawing out consistent themes.

Method

The published literature was scoured to identify the studies of abnormal communications and approaches to prominent people, which provided data on variables that distinguished between

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communicators who did not approach and those who did approach. Six studies were identified: three of these studies focused upon members of the U.S. Congress (3–5), two focused upon Hollywood celebrities (1,2), and one concerned the British Royal Family (8). A seventh study (6) was excluded from this analysis because of the uniqueness of the target, the U.S. federal judiciary, the lack of fixation among most of the subjects, and the personal nature of the threats owing to a previous negative encounter in the court between the subject and the victim. The findings from the six studies were compared in detail to attempt to disprove the null hypothesis that there would be no common themes concerning escalation from communication to approach.

All of these studies involved a universe of cases from which random samples were drawn in five of the six studies. Approach was defined slightly differently in each research group. The figures used for comparison in the British Royal Family (BRF) study are for those who engaged in approaches that did not involve breach activity. The BRF study defined approach as inappropriate attempts to achieve proximity to members of the Royal Family, a royal residence, or royal event (14). The Dietz studies defined approach in six different ways: (i) visited a location believed to be the home of the target, (ii) visited any agency or office believed to represent the target, (iii) visited a location believed to be the home or business address of any acquaintance, friend, relative, or intimate of the target, (iv) approached within 5 miles of any of the above locations with the expressed intent of seeing, visiting, or confronting any of the above parties, (v) traveled more than 300 miles to see the target or any of the above parties, even in a public appearance, and (vi) behaved in any manner out of the ordinary at any public appearance of the target (1,3,12). The Scalora studies defined approach as an attempted or actual face-to-face contact with a member of the U.S. Congressional community (4,5). The Meloy study defined approach as any physical or attempted physical approach to the celebrity that came to the attention of security personnel (2). Although these definitions vary somewhat, they all share one characteristic: attempting to achieve closer physical proximity to the target than had previously been experienced by the subject. Communication was defined in all the studies somewhat differently, but generally the term indicated inappropriate attempts at communication by letters, telephone, e-mail, fax, enclosures, or other methods that did not include a physical approach to the target. These communications went beyond normal interest and stood out because of elements of their content, such as bizarre, incomprehensible, unrealistic, threatening, sexual, obscene, persistent, or demanding language; or their form was quite abnormal, such as writing in blood or including odd enclosures. For example, in the Dietz celebrity study (1), enclosures ranged from dogs' teeth, sleeping pills, a bed pan, and a syringe of blood, to a half-eaten candy bar, 57 Ohio state lottery tickets, and medical photographs of

corpses with the celebrity's face pasted on the torsos of the bodies (see Table 1).

All variables in each study were scrutinized for similarities and differences to determine which could be descriptively compared across studies. Six headings were developed—serious mental illness, any threatening communication, multiple means of communication, antagonistic communication, requests for help, and multiple contacts and targets—which met two criteria: (i) data were available across the six studies for each heading and (ii) variables existed within the six studies, which were sufficiently similar to be categorized together under one heading.

Results

Results for the six identified headings are set out in turn in the following text. In most cases, there were significant differences within each heading between those who approached the target and those who did not, disproving the null hypothesis and yielding important sources of threat assessment information.

Serious Mental Illness

Table 2 compares the percentage of serious mental illness between the communicators and the communicator/approachers, nonparametric results, and significance. "Overt evidence of mental illness" was defined in the BRF study as whether there is evidence in the police files, or in written or recorded input, that the person exhibited one or more of the following: presence of obviously testable delusions, marked thought disorder, clear evidence of abnormal perceptions (hearing voices, etc.), or evidence of passivity phenomena. Passivity phenomena or "made actions" is a standard psychiatric term which denotes the experience that one's thoughts and/or actions are those of, or created by, external or alien entities. Also included were cases where there was clear documentary evidence of a diagnosis of severe mental illness taken from hospital records. The Dietz studies defined "any psychotic features" as the presence of one of the key psychotic features—delusions, thought disorder, or hallucinations—necessary for a diagnosis of a psychotic condition ([12], pp. 4–6). In the Dietz celebrity sample, the 72% is the overall proportion of the sample that were considered to be psychotic, but there was no breakdown of nonapproachers versus approachers for this variable, other than they noted the difference was not significant; therefore, the breakdown here is an estimate. For schizophrenia, 49% of their celebrity sample was reported to meet DSM-III criteria and 69% of their entire sample of U.S. Congress subjects met DSM-III criteria (12). The Scalora studies defined "suspected of serious mental illness" as certain behaviors noted by either victim reports or investigator observations detailed within the written case abstract, including self-reported hallucinations,

TABLE 1—Data on six comparative studies of abnormal communicator subjects who approached and did not approach public figures.

Study	Targets	Sampled Universe	Sampling Method	Number of Approachers	Number of Nonapproachers
James et al. (8)	British Royal Family	8001 police files	Random stratified	53	53
Dietz et al. (1)	Hollywood celebrities	1559 approach 1272 nonapproach	Random stratified	107	107
Dietz et al. (3)	U.S. Congress	U.S. Capitol police files Number not given	Random stratified	43	43
Scalora et al. (4)	U.S. Congress	4387 Capitol police files	Chronological 1993–1999	986	3401
Scalora et al. (5)	U.S. Congress	1500 U.S. Capitol police files 1998–1999	Random	104	212
Meloy et al. (2)	Hollywood celebrities	271 files from Enter. Corp.	Nonrandom and random	61 (nonrandom)	61 (random)

TABLE 2—Comparison of headings associated with escalation (approach vs. nonapproach) across six public figure studies.

Study	James et al. (7)		Dietz et al. (1)		Dietz et al. (3)		Scalora et al. (4)		Scalora et al. (5)		Meloy et al. (2)	
	British Royal Family		Hollywood Celebrities		U.S. Congress		U.S. Congress		U.S. Congress		Hollywood Celebrities	
Target	Nonapproach (%)	Approach (%)	χ^2, p	Nonapproach (%)	Approach (%)	χ^2, p	Nonapproach (%)	Approach (%)	χ^2, p	Nonapproach (%)	Approach (%)	χ^2, p
Serious mental illness	69.8	92.5	11.135, 0.004	72	72	NS	27.7	35.1	20.24, <0.0001	39.6	59.6	11.22, <0.0001
Any threatening communication	15.1	1.9	9.00, 0.009	22	23	NS	35.1	21.4	69.50, <0.0001	76.4	41.3	70.941, <0.0001
Requests for help	24.5	37.7	NS	10	10	NS	16.5	27.4	59.57, <0.0001	17	35.6	7.846, 0.006
Multiple means of communication	3.8	25	10.405, 0.001	5	14	4.47, <0.04	*	*	*	6.6	39.4	51.966, <0.0001
Antagonistic communication	17–32	3.8–9.4	<0.026	15	6	4.10, 0.04	12.1	6.7	22.92, <0.001	70.8	43.3	22.3, <0.001
Multiple contacts and targets	49.1	77.4	14.525, 0.002	18	37	8.20, 0.004	17.7–33.2	22.5–39.7	<0.001	6–43	22–58	<0.015

*No data available.

observed incoherence or disorganization of thought, or obvious delusional presentation (e.g., paranoia, complaints of thought insertion or withdrawal); or if corroborating documentation existed affirming that the subject had suffered from some mental illness or had some law enforcement contact related to protective custody (4). “Psychotic during stalking” was defined in the Meloy et al. study (2) as any evidence of psychosis recorded during the stalking, including hallucinations, delusions, or formal thought disorder. Although all these terms and definitions vary somewhat, they all share the presence of psychosis during the activity of concern, a much more rigorous definition than just a historical record of mental illness.

Regarding the characteristics of psychosis, the importance of grandiosity is indicated in three studies. It was the most powerful discriminating factor in the BRF study (8), correctly classifying 74% of the cases as either approach or nonapproach with an AUC of 0.74 (95% CI, 0.65–0.82). Dietz and Martell (12) similarly found that any grandiose delusion appeared in 60% of all their subjects who inappropriately communicated to celebrities, and 44% demonstrated an excessive sense of self-importance or uniqueness. Of particular note is their finding that those who approached celebrities were significantly more likely ($\chi^2 = 4.85, p < 0.03$) to evidence an excessive sense of self-importance or uniqueness (52%) than those who did not approach (36%). This finding did not emerge in the Dietz et al. (3) U.S. Congress study. However, the taking of a “special constituent role” by the subject was significantly associated with approach (46% vs. 16%, $\chi^2 = 7.77, p = 0.0053$), and this variable suggests grandiosity.

It is likely that some of the differences within this heading among studies are determined by actual differences in composition between samples and the limitations and the biases of original data collection, primarily by nonmental health professionals, across all the studies. However, data analysis was performed by psychiatrists and psychologists across all the studies. The trend, once again, is quite clear: there is a very large proportion of subjects with serious mental illness across all the studies, and there is a significantly greater proportion of the psychotic who approach than those who do not, in the majority of the studies. The British Royal Family is unique among the studies in that the targets hold a semblance of political power with the monarch being the head of state, often possess a lifelong celebrity status, and are imbued with the romantic aura of a thousand years of history. Politicians, on the other hand, are limited to their legislative power, diminished by an absence of longevity, with an occasional celebrity figure emerging among the lawmakers. Celebrities are limited to their emotional or sexual attraction, also diminished by an absence of longevity for most, and typically have no formal political power. The deluded and grandiose appear to be somewhat equally drawn toward those born to their position for life, democratically elected for a period of time, or popularly desired, both affectionately and sexually.

Any Threatening Communication

Table 2 also compares the percentage of any threatening communication within each study between the communicators and the communicators/approachers, nonparametric results, and significance. “Threatening language” in the Scalora and BRF studies was defined as a desire to physically harm or have physical harm occur to the target in either a direct or veiled fashion. The Dietz studies defined “threat” as any offer to do harm, however implausible. The Meloy study defined “threat” as a written or oral communication that

implicitly or explicitly states a wish or intent to damage, injure, or kill the target.

The studies demonstrate, with one exception (2), that the group with the smallest proportion of any threatening communication are the approachers when compared to the communicators who did not approach. Although this trend is clear, we also want to reiterate the large proportion of approachers that also threatened, ranging from 1.9% to 41.3%. In the Dietz U.S. Congress study, 58% of all the subjects threatened, which was significantly different between the groups. Nineteen percent of the approachers threatened to kill the target or those around him/her, and 46% of the communicators threatened similar action (3).

The consensus a decade ago was that threats were either irrelevant or actually protective against future assault (1,3,6,15). The BRF study could be used to argue the same position, with those who went on to approach without engaging in breach activity being significantly less likely to have threatened. However, this finding did not hold for those who engaged in breach activity (successfully or unsuccessfully attempting to penetrate an established security perimeter), where nearly a quarter had threatened compared with 15% of those who had only communicated (8). Despite the significant decrease in frequency of threats between the communicators and those who approached but did not breach ($p = 0.031$, $\phi = 0.237$), there was no significant difference between the communicators who threatened and those who approached and breached. It may be simplistic to regard approach as a single behavior type; different risks may apply to intrusive rather than nonintrusive approaches. Indeed, breaching behaviors might logically be seen as a higher order of escalation than simple approaches. Evidence for a differentiation between types of approach in relation to threat was also found in the study of Scalora et al. (4), in which the proportion of violent approaches preceded by threatening statements (i.e., approaches involving threat or use of a weapon, attempted or actual assault) was twice that for nonviolent approaches (42% vs. 21%). Meloy et al. (2) also found in their study of U.S. celebrity stalking cases ($N = 271$) that despite the low frequency of threats (18%) and violence (<2%), the majority of those who attacked a celebrity ($n = 5$) directly communicated a threat beforehand (80%). Both research groups argued that all threats should be taken seriously, despite their high false positive rate. Overall, these results suggest that the issue for future research should no longer be whether threats are important, but which threats and threateners are associated (or not associated) with which form of adverse event, behavior, or motivational type. We would also strongly urge the addition as a variable of breaching behavior, both successful and unsuccessful, whenever approaches are studied.

Requests for Help

Table 2 next compares requests for help across the six studies, nonparametric statistics, and significance. The BRF study defined "requests for help" as asking for help. The Dietz studies defined "requests for help" as casting the celebrity in the role of a rescuer or benefactor. In the celebrity study, there was no significant difference between the groups, although only the total percentage of those who requested help is mentioned in that study. Therefore, the 10% figure is an estimate when divided between the two celebrity samples. In their U.S. Congress study, the percentage in Table 2 refers to their variable "expresses desire for rescue, assistance, valuables, or recognition." There is also a second variable in the Dietz U.S. Congress study not cited in Table 2: "member cast in benefactor (rescuer, benefactor, potential benefactor) role."

The difference between the communicators and approachers for this variable was also significant (9% vs. 37%, $\chi^2 = 7.88$, $p = 0.005$). Subject overlap between these two variables was not addressed in the original study. The Scalora studies utilized two definitions. In the larger study, "help seeking" was defined as when subjects articulated requests for assistance from the target or indicated a desire that action be taken to remedy a perceived problem. In their random study only, "personal-oriented content" was defined as exclusively related to the subject, personal help-seeking requests, or a specific entitlement issue. "Help seeking" was not defined and directly measured in the random study as it was in their larger study. In the Meloy study, "help seeking" was defined as communication to the target asking for some kind of help.

Despite differences in terms and definitions, all studies attempted to measure the request for help from the target through a communication to the target that initially did not include an approach. The trend, once again, is quite clear. There is a larger proportion of help seeking among the approachers than the nonapproachers, and it is statistically significant in a majority of studies. Help seeking is clearly a counterpoint to any threatening communication, and appears to motivate, rather than inhibit, an approach. However, help seeking, even among the approachers, is confined to one half or less of each sample, similar in proportionality to the approachers who threaten. The frequency at which the same subjects both help seek and threaten is unknown for all studies except for the BRF research. Among all those who communicated, 25% of those who used threatening language were asking for help, whereas only 9.3% of those asking for help used threatening language. Among those communicators who did not approach, there was no overlap. Among all those subjects who both communicated and approached, 50% of those who used threatening language were asking for help, but only 13.3% of those asking for help used threatening language. The frequency at which some subjects dynamically shift from help seeking to threatening behavior once their request is rejected is unknown in all the studies. This would require a longitudinal study of communicators' letters and their content, but is highly relevant to threat assessment, because rejection can be a source of intense humiliation for the pursuer, and rapidly shift his idealization to devaluation of the target (16,17).

Multiple Means of Communication

Table 2 next addresses the multiple means of communication across the six studies. The BRF study variable selected for this heading is "more than one method of communication" and was defined as subjects doing at least two of the following: writing letters, containing enclosures, sending e-mail, sending facsimiles, or telephoning. The Dietz studies' variable is "multiple means of communication" and meant that the subject both mailed letters and telephoned. Twenty percent of the celebrity subjects and 35% of the U.S. Congress subjects hand-delivered a letter. E-mail did not exist at the time of these studies. The Scalora studies' variable is "multiple methods of contact" and was scored if the subject engaged in more than one contact modality (e.g., letter, phone, and e-mail). The Meloy study variable was "multiple means of communication" and was scored if the subjects did at least two of the following when communicating: wrote letters, telephoned, or e-mailed.

The significant trends for this variable, which was defined quite similarly across studies, are striking. In all studies, the communicators who approached were more likely to use multiple means of communication, which along with the last variable we analyzed, multiple contacts and targets, may be measuring the time and

energy devoted by the subject to his pursuit. These variables, in turn, may be dictated by the intensity of the fixation of the subject upon the target, and in some cases other targets, and his willingness to translate his commitment into action. From a risk assessment standpoint, 79–98% of those who utilized only one means of communication did not approach.

Antagonistic Communication

Table 2 next addresses antagonistic communication across the six studies. Two BRF study variables were selected for this heading and define the range noted in the table: “anger/hostility in content” and “abusive language.” Neither variable was further defined in the codebook. Both of these variables were significantly different between the two groups. Significance (p) values ranged from 0.026 for abusive language to 0.004 for anger/hostility. When approachers with any breach activity were compared to the communicators, there was no significant difference (8). When approachers who breached were compared to those who did not breach for anger/hostility, the difference was significant ($p = 0.016$) and had a mild effect size ($\phi = 0.282$) in the direction of more frequent anger/hostility for the breacher group. For the Dietz celebrity study, “attempts to instill shame in the celebrity” was the selected variable for this heading. There was no significant difference between the groups for attempts to evoke worry, anxiety, fear, upset, or anger. As noted earlier, threats were not significantly different and were made by 23% of their entire celebrity sample. Five percent of this sample cast themselves as enemies of the celebrity, but the relationship of this variable to threats and the other emotional variables is unknown. For the Dietz U.S. Congress study, a number of variables were combined to give the range noted for this heading: “subject takes an enemy role, member cast in enemy role, attempts to instill fear, attempts to provoke upset, and attempts to instill worry.” All significance (p) values were at least 0.01 in the direction of less antagonistic communications for approachers and increased to 0.00001 for any threat. In the Scalora studies, the only defined variable in their first study related to this heading was “obscene/sexual” and was scored when the subject communicated degrading language or imagery involving gender groups or sexual references. In the random study, “target-oriented content” was selected for this heading and scored by the researchers when insulting/degrading language, fear inducing content, or sexist or sexualized references were utilized. In the Meloy study, “verbal insult” is the variable selected for this heading and was defined as the subject being abusive toward or insulting of the target in his communications.

Although this heading captures a fairly disparate number of variables across the studies, once again virtually every study found significant differences between the communicators and the approachers in the direction of the approachers being less likely to engage in frequent antagonistic communication, regardless of the target (British royalty, Hollywood celebrity, or politician). Although the ranges are quite extreme (12–71% for the communicators and 4–43% for the approachers), the trend is consistent. It is also notable that in the two studies where ranges were constructed, there is no overlap between the groups. Findings from this heading should be treated with caution because of the wide disparity of definitions for variables across studies and the extreme overlap for ranges between the groups when the variables are aggregated. It is noteworthy, however, that approachers of celebrities are typically less antagonistic communicators than the approachers of politicians. Power likely aggravates more than fame, or perhaps the lack thereof in the subject.

In the BRF study, it is of note that the figures for both abusive language and anger/hostility in content were different in approachers who engaged in breach activity than for approachers who did not (8). The proportions were of a similar order for those that engaged in breach activity as for those that communicated only. This again indicates, as with the threatening communications, that approachers are not a homogenous group and that those who breach have some different characteristics from those that do not.

Multiple Contacts and Targets

Table 2 includes the last of the six headings, multiple contacts and targets. This is by far the most disparate heading, containing a number of variables that are quite different from each other, but share two characteristics: repetitiveness and dispersion. In other words, communications are repeated and/or simultaneously made to other targets besides the identified one. The variable selected for this heading from the BRF study is “multiple preapproaches,” which was scored when any communications were repeated, either to the target or to other individuals or groups, either public figures or law enforcement, and documented. It also included communications to more than one royal household and to nonroyal persons. It was simply defined in the codebook as more than one preapproach or communication. A second relevant BRF variable, “communications to other prominent people as well as Royal Family members,” is not given in the table. Such communications were significantly more prevalent in approachers than communicators (32.5% vs. 17.0%, $\chi^2 = 3.960$, $p = 0.047$). However, there was no significant difference between communicators and approachers who did not breach. The significant difference was with approachers who did engage in breach activities (42.3% vs. 17.0%, $\chi^2 = 5.918$, $p = 0.015$).

In the Dietz study concerning celebrities (1), the selected variable was “duration of correspondence greater than 1 year.” The mean number of communications sent to the celebrity was also significantly greater for the approachers than the communicators only (9.9 vs. 4.3, $t = 2.80$, $p < 0.005$). The peak rate of approach was in the group that sent between 10–14 letters. Eighteen percent of all the subjects were simultaneously harassing another public figure. For the U.S. Congress study, the variable selected was “mean number of written communications.” This significant relationship also appeared with a simple count of number of pieces of paper sent (8.36 vs. 4.9, $t = 2.24$, $p = 0.028$). In both studies, however, sometimes the first communication was at the same time or after the first approach (3).

In the Scalora U.S. Congress study (5), the two variables selected for this heading were “multiple law enforcement agency contact” and “multiple targets contacted.” The former was scored if one local, state, or federal law enforcement agency noted a contact with the subject besides the U.S. Capitol Police, the site of the study. The latter was scored if the subject contacted multiple congressional offices or addressed contacts to the congress or government in general. The range given in Table 2 concerns the two variables, which were both significantly different between communicators and approachers at $p < 0.001$ (multiple law enforcement $\chi^2 = 11.46$; multiple targets $\chi^2 = 14.23$). In the U.S. Congress random study, the two variables were “other federal agencies” and “target dispersion.” The former was scored when there was prior or parallel threat activity, and an investigation was documented by another agency ($\chi^2 = 17.657$, $p = 0.0001$); the latter was scored the same as multiple targets contacted in their first study ($\chi^2 = 6.099$, $p = 0.014$).

In the Meloy study of celebrity stalkers (2), the variable selected was “other targets,” which included other celebrities, friends,

family members, or professionals involved with the subject. However, this variable was unknown for 39% of the communicators only and 35% of the approachers.

Again, the trend for this last heading is quite clear. In all the studies, multiple contacts and targets were more frequent among the approachers than the communicators only. In five of six studies, this difference was statistically significant at $p < 0.015$. Approachers were more likely to repeat their communications, communicate for a longer period of time, send more communications, contact other public targets, have encounters with other law enforcement agencies, and harass friends, family members, or professionals. These behaviors occurred regardless of the target’s domain: political, entertainment, or royalty. This heading, along with multiple means of communications, appears to be a measure of both energy—perhaps affective or motivational or both—and degree of pathological fixation.

Predicting an Approach in Four Studies

Four of the six studies also employed logistic regression to see how accurately an approach and nonapproach could be predicted. Table 3 lists the results. The overall correct classification rate varied from 76.4% to 83%, which is roughly 25–30% better than chance depending on the base rates for approach within each study. In two of the studies, the selected sample size for approachers equaled nonapproachers, establishing a base rate of 50% for approach. In other studies, sample size was not equated between approachers and nonapproachers and varied between 1:3 and 1:4 ratios. Although the predictor variables differ across studies, multiple communications and/or contacts emerges as a predictor variable in each study. It appears that a common thread among those who approach public figures in these four studies is a level of energy, motivation, or fixation that manifests as behavior to contact the primary target multiple times, use multiple methods of contact, and/or

contact secondary targets. This does not mean that multiple communications and/or contacts is the most powerful predictor variable, but it does suggest that it may be the variable most likely to generalize as a predictor of approach across subsequent studies.

Discussion

The limitations of this comparative study reflect those of the original articles and are those found in all archival research: retrospective analysis of data, missing data, possible observational bias, the risk that confirmatory bias may have diminished our interpretation of nonsignificant variables across studies, and the ubiquitous presence of unknown unknowns: variables that were never considered in any of the original studies and therefore remain completely unstudied. We are also conscious of the human propensity to see patterns where none exist, and the desire to construct explanatory narratives, as we have done for subjects who escalate their abnormal behavior toward the prominent, which may turn out to be insufficient given the complexity of such behaviors and their causes (18).

This detailed examination of the literature on abnormal communication and approach to the prominent, however, has established a pattern of consistent findings across the studies in question, whether concerned with politicians, celebrities, or royalty. The most striking finding is the high prevalence of mental illness across all studies and the significantly greater prevalence in approachers than nonapproachers in five of the six studies; the possible exception to the latter finding was the Dietz celebrity study (1) in which the prevalence of mental illness was estimated to be 72% in both groups, but approach and nonapproach groups were not inferentially compared, and mental illness was not separately reported for each group. The findings concerning grandiosity in three of the studies indicate that it is one of the most important aspects of mental disorder in this population, especially when considered a predictor of escalation and approach (8). We consider grandiosity an aspect of pathological narcissism, endemic in stalkers of both public and private individuals (16,19,20), and a complement to another aspect of pathological narcissism, entitlement. Self-importance begets the demand for recognition and gratification, perhaps even more so if it is of psychotic proportions. In one Rorschach study (21), schizophrenic patients hospitalized subsequent to their posing a threat to the U.S. President as judged by the U.S. Secret Service were found to be more pathologically narcissistic and self-absorbed than other schizophrenics in the same hospital setting—but also prone to more depression, suicide gestures, and attempts, perhaps an indication of failed grandiosity.

The findings concerning mental illness reinforce the importance of mental health interventions as part of risk assessment and management (7,20). Improvement in public mental health care in general reduces psychosis as an epidemiological risk factor for a variety of problems, including pursuit of the prominent. Intervention by mental health care professionals in specific threat cases reduces risk toward the identified target, and simultaneously benefits the individual by improving his health and social function. Risk assessment and management units currently incorporate psychological or psychiatric elements to different degrees. The U.S. Secret Service uses a system of liaison with contracted psychiatrists (22,23) and has identified most of their threat cases as mentally ill (24). The U.S. Capitol Police have a threat assessment unit in which a forensic psychologist is closely involved (25). In Sweden, the Security Police have incorporated a forensic psychiatrist and a forensic psychologist from the Karolinska Institute into their threat assessment unit—the Swedish Security Service also estimate that

TABLE 3—Logistic regression comparisons for prediction of approach versus nonapproach in public figure cases.

Sample Classification	Predictor Variables	Overall Correct (%)
British Royal Family 53 approachers versus 53 nonapproachers (James et al. [8])	Grandiosity Multiple communications Multiple means of communication	74.4
U.S. Congress 986 approachers versus 3401 nonapproachers (Scalora et al. [4])	Major mental illness Contacts multiple targets Prior arrest Seeks more help Less likely to use aliases Less likely to threaten Less direct constituent Less foreign and domestic policy grievance Less obscene/sexual content Less racial content	76.4
U.S. Congress 104 approachers versus 212 nonapproachers (Scalora et al. [5])	Multiple contact methods Identifies self Prior federal law enforcement contact Less threatening language	82.5
Hollywood Celebrities 61 approachers versus 61 nonapproachers (Meloy et al. [2])	Increased frequency and methods of contact Police response	83

90% of those subjects that come to their attention as a concern regarding a protectee have had contact with the mental health system (personal communication, Knut Sturidsson, March 2009). The Netherlands National Police Agency reports a 59% rate of psychosis among those threatening public figures between Jan. 2007 and Jan. 2009 (personal communication, B.B. van der Meer, April 2009). In the U.K., matters have been taken a stage further, with the formation of a combined police/mental health unit, the Fixated Threat Assessment Centre (20,26). Each case is jointly worked by a police officer and a community forensic nurse, with access to both police and mental health databases. Their activities are coordinated and supervised by more senior police officers and by forensic psychiatrists and psychologists who are all members of the unit. The prevalence of mental illness in those paying abnormal attention to the prominent mandates that threat units for the prominent involve psychiatric staff, both in assessment and in management interventions. The manner in which such psychiatric input is incorporated will vary necessarily from country to country depending on the comprehensiveness of their health care systems, their mental health laws for involuntary commitment, and the complexities of their confidentiality arrangements.

The finding that both threatening language and antagonistic language are significantly less frequent in those that approach is one that conforms with the received wisdom on this issue. However, the finding in the BRF study that there is no significant difference on these items with those approachers who breach is of importance. It indicates that "approach" should not be considered as a single concept, and that it may be important in future studies to separate out those who engage in breach activities from those approachers who do not. Those that attempt, and sometimes succeed in breaching are likely to be as antagonistic and threatening in their language as those that only communicate. We also reiterate once again that the data underscore the need for all threats to be taken seriously by those responsible for the safety of the prominent because of the substantial proportion of approachers that do communicate threats, and in particular give warning signs, prior to an approach.

A consistent feature of the studies in question is that those who engage in communication with particular energy and enthusiasm, as indicated by multiple means of communication and multiple contacts/targets, are more likely to approach. This is a finding of practical use which can be incorporated into risk assessment matrices. It underscores the intensity of motivational drive, pathology of fixation, and tenacity of pursuit of the subject, and practically translates into the need for cross jurisdictional communication among law enforcement agencies and perhaps mental health care providers (5).

In four of the six studies, the variable "requests for help" was significantly associated with approach. Whereas such cases are a minority in all but one of the approach groups, the consistency of the finding makes it worthy of further study. It may be that asking for help is a marker for the forms of motivation that indicate a desire or expectation of a personal relationship, but less overtly grandiose than some other forms of motivation where entitlement is a prominent feature. Those asking for help are distinct from those offering help in those studies where the two issues are considered. At the very least, it can be said that asking for help is a very different phenomenon from the anger and hostility characteristic of those who fall into the general category of "resentful" (20); however, the rejection of help once asked for can result in a dynamic shift in the emotions of the subject toward resentment, and perhaps humiliation.

The current exercise in comparison concerns approach and escalation. It should be noted that different domains of risk are

associated with different patterns of risk factors (27). The risks for violence are likely to be different from those for approach and escalation in important respects. Whereas the high prevalence of mental illness is a finding shared with studies of attacks on public figures (10,11,28,29), those very few engaged in serious violence appear to differ from those considered in this paper in that the former's fixation is predominantly upon a cause or a quest for "justice" (28,29), rather than upon the pursuit of a relationship based upon Meloy et al.'s "entitled reciprocity" (26). The latter term describes the belief that commitment to a public or prominent figure, and investment of time and energy, creates a debt that is owed to the subject (14). It is a likely derivative of grandiosity, often but not always manifest to a psychotic degree in these subjects.

Finally, this exercise in comparison starkly illustrates the difficulties that arise when different investigators adopt mutually incompatible, or in some cases disparate ways of classifying and describing behavior and motivation. The importance of adopting a standard terminology in all behavioral science cannot be overemphasized. The observation that findings concerning approach and escalation toward public figures appear to be mirrored in general stalking populations from which ex-intimates have been excluded suggests that the use of terminology from the stalking research may be a sensible point from which to continue this line of work (8,20,30,31).

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