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What is This?

PROBLEMATIC APPROACH OF LEGISLATORS

Differentiating Stalking From Isolated Incidents

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The relative absence of political figure targets from stalking research is problematic for law enforcement personnel challenged with distinguishing cases representing a onetime contact from those that continue or escalate. Accordingly, this study compared solitary cases of problematic approach with stalking and intrusive harassment of legislators using 15 offender, contact, and motivation variables. Results revealed a significant model that correctly reclassified 85% of the single-approach cases and 50% of the stalking cases. Significant risk factors emerged that highlighted the persistent, focused, and multifaceted pursuit of political figure stalkers and intrusive harassers. More generally, results underscore the superior utility of contact and motivational variables for discriminating groups and the need for appropriate comparison groups when describing stalkers across contexts.

Keywords: stalking; intrusive harassment; political figures; threat assessment

Public awareness of stalking increased after highly publicized attacks on popular celebrities by fans in the late 1980s. Although evidence of stalking cases dates back centuries (see Mullen, Pathé, & Purcell, 2000), the study of this aggressive and intrusive behavior began only in the past two decades. Defined as the "malicious, intentional and repeated following or harassing of another person that threatens his or her safety" (Meloy & Gothard, 1995, p. 258), stalking is recognized as a pattern of behaviors that falls along a continuum of inappropriate pursuit. Included on this continuum is intrusive harassment, which consists of menacing and intimidating contacts across multiple settings (e.g., business, home) that also affect those close to the target (e.g., family, coworkers).

To date, the majority of research on stalking has focused on cases developing from known relationships. Although intimate partner stalking is the most prevalent (e.g., Tjaden & Thoennes, 1998), this narrow focus creates a large chasm in the available knowledge about other types of targets, such as political figures. Although violence toward political figures is considered rare, their relative absence from the stalking literature is problematic. For example, Scalora et al. (2002a, 2002b) noted that increases in media attention on congressional activities and their supervision of executive activities have made members of Congress more visible to the public, which, alongside their greater accessibility, heightens their risk for harassment. Accordingly, it is argued that "the need for behavioral research in these settings has become even more pressing in the face of increasing demands

on federal, state, and local law enforcement to assess risk and prevent targeted violence" (Coggins, Reddy-Pynchon, & Dvoskin, 1998). Thus, the purpose of this study was to investigate the intrusive harassment and stalking of legislators.

HARASSMENT OF POLITICAL FIGURES

In recent decades, a threat assessment model of targeted violence risk assessment has evolved to incorporate the "analysis of a subject's behavior and examination of patterns of conduct that may result in an attack on a particular target(s)" (Borum, Fein, Vossekuil, & Berglund, 1999, p. 327). Given the low base rate for violence, researchers are challenged to identify appropriate outcome variables with which to link risk factors. Scalora et al. (2002a, 2002b) have defined problematic approach as a viable threshold for heightened risk because of the physical proximity of the individual to the target. This method appears appropriate since contact proximity and approach are associated with violence in at least some contexts of stalking (Palarea, Zona, Lane, & Langhinrichsen-Rohlings, 1999; Zona & Palarea, 1997), and recent research has supported the use of problematic approach as a proxy variable in political figure stalking studies (James et al., 2011). Furthermore, when evaluating risk, it may be particularly useful for law enforcement personnel to be able to discern individuals engaging in isolated contacts from those who will continue to harass, threaten, and/or escalate their pursuit. Accordingly, the current study compared two levels of approach, limited or single approach (SA) and stalking or intrusive harassment (SIH), using individual, contact, and motivational factors identified in previous research.

To begin with, previous research suggests that individual-level variables (e.g., background characteristics) have some limited utility for distinguishing targeted harassment and violence in some contexts. For example, criminal history has been inconsistently linked to future stalking violence and recidivism (Mullen, Pathé, Purcell, & Stuart, 1999; Palarea et al., 1999; Rosenfeld, 2003; Rosenfeld & Harmon, 2002). Mohandie, Meloy, Green-McGowan, and Williams (2006) observed that stalkers of nonpolitical public figures were less likely to have a violent criminal record but more likely to evidence drug use than other types of stalkers. Conversely, problematic approach toward members of Congress overall has been significantly associated with drug, property, violent, and overall charges in addition to offenders' having contact with multiple law enforcement agencies for their behavior compared to nonapproaching problematic contactors (Scalora et al., 2002a, 2002b). Since few studies exist on this topic, these factors should be examined as potential indicators of risk.

Research also demonstrates equivocal results regarding the role of mental illness in both cases of stalking and political figure harassment overall. Although never reliably linked to any single disorder, several studies have noted stalking behaviors within a number of Axis I, Axis II, and neurological dysfunctions (e.g., Meloy & Gothard, 1995; Mohandie et al., 2006; Mullen et al., 1999; Olojugba, de Silva, Kartsounis, Royan, & Carter, 2007). Mohandie et al. (2006) actually found that public figure stalkers demonstrated the highest rates of mental illness (52%) compared to other types of stalkers. Among problematic approachers of members of Congress, Scalora et al. (2002a) found that approximately one third of problematic approach cases involved suspected mental illness. Notwithstanding,

Chang, Scalora, Schoeneman, Zimmerman, and McGaffin (2006) observed that offenders who stalked and intrusively harassed politicians were less likely to display symptoms suggestive of mental illness than those who targeted politicians using milder forms of harassment.

A special focus has been given to the relationship of threat and control override (TCO) symptoms to violence in recent years. TCO symptoms are distinguished by the belief that others are either trying to harm the individual (threat) or controlling his or her mind (control override). Although some studies have found TCO symptoms to be related to various measures of violence, this trend has been inconsistent (e.g., Appelbaum, Robbins, & Monahan, 2000; Link, Stueve, & Phelan, 1998; Swanson, Borum, Swartz, & Monahan, 1996). Still, there have been no empirical investigations concerning how such delusions may influence stalking. One could argue that having a belief that someone is looking to harm or control oneself may motivate a person to persistently pursue and retaliate against the perceived wrongdoer. Thus, this study will examine the roles TCO symptoms and mental illness overall may play in the stalking of political figures.

Contact variables describe the behavioral characteristics of communications within a case. In this regard, stalking statutes generally refer to a course of conduct to highlight the fact that no single behavior or event characterizes the intrusive behavior. Unlike other stalking contexts, however, public figure pursuers are presented with significant barriers in their quest to communicate with their targets. In fact, Mohandie et al. (2006) found that only 15% of public figure targets were contacted daily. Still, problematic approach toward members of Congress was significantly associated with making multiple contacts (Scalora et al., 2002a). In addition to frequency, stalking behaviors are known for their diversity of efforts. Mullen et al. (1999) found that approximately 74% of those stalked in the community were harassed via more than one method of communication. Most commonly, stalkers used telephones, letters, following, and approach to harass their target (e.g., Mullen et al., 1999; Tjaden & Thoennes, 1998). Analogous behavior has been demonstrated by those who approach members of Congress in general (Scalora et al., 2002b). Finally, although stalkers sometimes harass others connected to their victim, stalking is generally understood to involve a focused pursuit of a target. In this vein, although target dispersion is a risk factor for problematic approach (Scalora et al., 2002b), political figure stalkers may be distinguished by a concentrated effort toward an individual target. Therefore, the potential for number of targets, contacts, and methods of communication to differentiate SIH cases from others were examined in the present study.

In addition to the behavioral style, the tone of communications may be informative. Several empirical works have demonstrated that those who pose threats and those who make threats are not necessarily equivalent (e.g., Dietz et al., 1991; Fein & Vossekuil, 1999; Scalora et al., 2002a). Research has noted that public figure stalkers may actually make fewer threats and acts of violence in their pursuits than other types of stalkers (Mohandie et al., 2006). Some suggest that stalkers and attackers are deterred from making threats by the lower accessibility and higher security surrounding public figures (Fein & Vossekuil, 1999; Meloy, 2001). However, in a study of harassment toward congressional members, Chang et al. (2006) found that SIH cases were more likely to issue threats than milder, nonintrusive cases. A related line of inquisition pertains to the use of demands in the stalker's pursuit. Scalora et al. (2002a) found that among those who harass and/or inappropriately

contact members of Congress, there was no significant difference in the amount of demands issued between those who did and did not approach their targets. No study to date has specifically examined the use of demands as part of a stalker's campaign, and thus, these linguistic components were explored.

Finally, motivational content of communication should also be investigated because it can provide pertinent information about the direction of the pursuit and pattern of risk (James et al., 2010). Research on political figure harassers has cited an array of possible motives for their aberrant behavior (Fein & Vossekuil, 1999; James et al., 2007; Phillips, 2006). Notably, of those who violently approached public figures, two thirds had grievances that usually involved their targets (Fein & Vossekuil, 1999). Specified grievances appear to be a hallmark of public figure harassment, as many studies have shown that offenders frequently make help-seeking requests and references to other personal issues (Mohandie et al., 2006; Scalora et al., 2002a, 2002b). Still, Chang et al. (2006) found that unlike other political harassers, SIH cases were less likely to express personally related issues and, instead, focused on the target and policy-related issues. When compared with other pursuers of political figures, stalkers and intrusive harassers may be distinguished by more target than personally focused motivations.

Fittingly, the purpose of this study is to assess the ability of 15 offender, contact, and motivational characteristics to describe and accurately discriminate between SIH and SA behaviors toward members of Congress. As mentioned before, this type of analysis may be useful to law enforcement judgments about cases that will likely be chronic versus solitary. On the basis of the literature, SIH cases are expected to demonstrate higher numbers of contacts, use multiple methods of contact, and express more target and policy-related themes. Additionally, SA cases are hypothesized to exhibit more personally related issues and to be less likely to contact multiple targets.

METHOD

PARTICIPANTS

Two hundred fifty-four cases were randomly drawn from the "threatening and inappropriate contact" files of the U.S. Capitol Police's (USCP) Threat Assessment Section (TAS). Congress established the USCP in 1828 with the purpose of protecting "life and property" in addition to "preventing, detecting, and investigating criminal acts" (USCP, n.d.). More importantly, the USCP is the law enforcement agency with the national jurisdiction to protect members of Congress, their families, and staff, servicing them throughout the nation, its territories, and the District of Columbia (USCP, n.d.). The TAS is the unit responsible for investigating and managing incidents of threatening, suspicious, and inappropriate behavior toward the USCP's protected individuals. Individuals and/or their problematic contacts (e.g., letters, e-mails, telephone calls, etc.) reported to the USCP TAS are subjected to threat assessment screening to evaluate their intensity and risk for escalation. For this analysis, relevant investigative reports, criminal histories, contact information, victims' statements, and documentable mental health histories for cases occurring between 2002 and 2007 were drawn.

In this study, *stalking* was defined as the repeated following or harassment of another person. *Intrusive harassment* was further defined as menacing communications across

multiple settings and that affected those around the target. Cases were identified as SIH if the investigator verified that the perpetrator participated in (a) physical monitoring behaviors (e.g., surveillance, following) or (b) multiple approaches or harassing contacts of a congressional member, staff, or families in public and/or private settings ($n = 101$). SA cases consisted of a solitary incident of an attempted (e.g., intercepted by law enforcement) or successful face-to-face approach (coded yes or no) of a legislator or his or her staff ($n = 153$).

Taken as a whole, 72.8% of suspects were male, 18.9% were female, and in 8.3% of cases, gender was unknown. Although the mean age of offenders was 42.9 ($SD = 13.94$), closer inspection revealed that they ranged from 18 to 83 years old. Their racial distribution was as follows: White (74.9%), African American (17.9%), Hispanic (3.4%), and Other (3.8%). These characteristics appear to be generally consistent with other studies on aggression toward political figures in that offenders tend to be older, male, and White (Fein & Vossekuil, 1999; Scalora et al., 2002a, 2002b).

PROCEDURE

Data from the 101 SIH and 153 SA case files were analyzed for behaviors that denoted the particular offender, contact, and thematic characteristics of interest. Fifteen variables were analyzed in total. The senior investigator trained graduate students for 10 to 20 hr during the course of 2 weeks to evaluate these files using a coding manual. Meetings were held to discuss discrepancies, questions regarding items, and procedures, with decisions being documented to ensure future coding accuracy. Overall, the interrater reliability for all categories analyzed had a Pearson's product-moment correlation of no less than .88.

Coders evaluated six offender variables describing pertinent background information. Mental illness (coded yes or no) existed if a constellation of offender behavior and self-reported symptoms indicative of psychological dysfunction (e.g., hallucinations, persecutory delusions, etc.) occurred or corroborating documentation was discovered. TCO symptoms (e.g., belief in government conspiracies or biotech chip implants) were coded on the basis of information disclosed by the individual in the course of the contact(s) or investigation (coded yes or no). Criminal history data were obtained from the National Crime Information Center and local law enforcement. The total number of number of violent (e.g., assault), property (e.g., burglary), drug or alcohol (e.g., possession or distribution), and threat or harassment (e.g., violation of protection order, terroristic threat, stalking) charges were calculated for this analysis.

Contact characteristics refer to elements of how the individuals communicated or approached and whom they targeted. Case files were first scored on total number of contacts, including previously reported and unreported face-to-face or media methods. Target dispersion (coded singular or multiple) refers to the exclusivity of targets contacted by the offender. The selection of targets was considered dispersed if the offender made contact with multiple targets or addressed Congress as a whole. Furthermore, offenders were coded as using multiple methods of contact (coded yes or no) if more than one modality of communication was employed (e.g., letters, e-mails, phone calls, approach, fax, etc.). USCP policy requires investigators to correspond with other relevant law enforcement agencies regarding threatening incidents. Cases were coded as having contact with multiple law enforcement agencies (coded yes or no) if the offender had been involved in prior or parallel events with other federal agencies. If the offender expressed a desire to harm or have harm happen to a target, the case was noted as involving the use of threatening

TABLE 1: Descriptive Statistics for Offender, Contact, and Thematic Content Variables by Group

Characteristic	Stalking or Intrusive Harassment	Single Approach	Total
	M *(SD)*	M *(SD)*	M *(SD)*
Total contact*	10.28 (23.59)	4.65 (17.29)	6.87 (20.16)
Drug/alcohol	0.45 (1.70)	0.54 (1.53)	0.48 (1.63)
Property	0.90 (2.74)	0.11 (4.05)	0.98 (3.31)
Violent	0.67 (1.85)	0.80 (1.99)	0.74 (1.89)
Threat/harassment	0.42 (1.48)	0.41 (1.01)	0.11 (0.59)
	n *(%)*	n *(%)*	n *(%)*
Mental illness symptoms	59 (58.4%)	100 (65.4%)	159 (62.5%)
Threat control override	2 (1.9%)	1 (0.7%)	3 (1.1%)
Target dispersion	31 (30.7%)	42 (27.5%)	73 (28.7%)
Multiple methods of contact*	44 (43.6%)	37 (24.2%)	81 (31.8%)
Contact with multiple agencies*	55 (59.5%)	47 (30.7%)	102 (40.1%)
Threatening language	35 (34.7%)	43 (28.1%)	78 (30.1%)
Demand language*	49 (48.5%)	52 (33.9%)	101 (39.7%)
Personal theme	29 (28.7%)	48 (31.4%)	77 (30.3%)
Policy theme*	38 (37.6%)	27 (17.6%)	65 (25.5%)
Target theme*	36 (35.6%)	18 (11.8%)	54 (21.2%)

*$p < .05$.

language (coded yes or no). Such threats could include direct references to physical harm or vague allusions to damage done to a protectee's reputation and career. Finally, if the offender made a demand of the target, it was recorded regardless of its rationality (coded yes or no).

Thematic variables examined the general focus of issues expressed by the offender and are taken from investigative reports and contacts. Target-focused themes (coded yes or no) describe comments made about the protectee, such as racial or sexual comments or otherwise degrading insults. Generalized complaints regarding government activity, political topics, and/or criticism about specific platforms, whether foreign or domestic related, are included within policy-focused themes (e.g., references to military interests or activities, abortion, welfare, etc.). Last, personally focused themes contain issues that are exclusively related to the offender (e.g., help-seeking requests or specific entitlement claims).

RESULTS

All 254 cases were used to calculate the univariate and bivariate descriptive statistics. Table 1 displays the univariate and bivariate results of the study. Nine cases were excluded from the multivariate analysis after preliminary results indicated that there was a missing value on at least 1 of the 15 offender, contact, and thematic variables. A final sample consisting of 94 SIH and 151 SA cases was used for the multivariate analyses.

UNIVARIATE AND BIVARIATE ANALYSES

Univariate analyses reported the descriptive statistics of the experimental variables for the entire sample. On average, investigated individuals had few charges for prior criminal

TABLE 2:   Reclassification Results for the Linear Discriminant Model

	Predicted Group Membership	
Actual Group Membership	Stalking or Intrusive Harassment	Single Approach
Stalking or intrusive harassment	47 (50.0%)	47 (50.0%)
Single approach	23 (15.2%)	128 (84.8%)

acts (M_{Charges} = .11 to .98), but a small subset of individuals with numerous charges created notable variance. For example, an individual who stalked or intrusively harassed had 37 prior property charges, and another individual who approached on a solitary occasion had 13 charges for prior violence. In regard to contact behavior, the average case investigated involved 6.87 contacts, but there was a large range (0 to 189), and the modal number of contacts was 1. Close to one third (31.8%) of the sample engaged in multiple methods of contact, and two fifths had prior contact with other law enforcement agencies. More than one quarter of the investigated individuals generalized the pursuit to more than one target (28.7%). Despite the fact that nearly two thirds of the sample evidenced mental illness (62.5%), almost none of the cases displayed TCO symptoms (1.1%). Nearly one third of the sample expressed threatening language (30.1%), but a larger proportion made demanding statements during their encounters (39.7%). Finally, policy-related themes (25.5%), personally related themes (30.3%), and target-related themes (21.2%) were all expressed by fewer than a third of the sample.

Bivariate analyses compared the two approach groups on the 15 offender, contact, and thematic factors separately. Results indicated that SIH and SA cases primarily differed on contact and thematic characteristics. SIH cases made a larger number of total contacts with their target, $F(1, 251) = 4.78$, $p < .05$, and were more likely to involve multiple methods of communication, $F(1, 244) = 13.13$, $p = .001$. SIH cases were more likely to focus on target, $F(1, 252) = 22.38$, $p < .001$, and policy-related issues, $F(1, 252) = 13.32$, $p < .001$, as well as make specific demands, $F(1, 251) = 5.76$, $p < .05$. SA cases were less likely to have had prior contact with other law enforcement agencies as a result of their threatening and/or inappropriate behavior, $F(1, 252) = 14.99$, $p < .001$. No other variables displayed significant differences between groups.

MULTIVARIATE ANALYSES

We conducted a discriminant function analysis to determine whether the six offender characteristic, five contact-level, and three thematic content predictors could accurately discriminate between SA and stalking cases. Accounting for 18.6% of the variance, the model was significant and successfully differentiated among the two approach types, $\lambda = .81$, $\chi^2(15, N = 254) = 48.51$, $p < .001$, R-canonical = .43. The model correctly reclassified 71.4% of the overall sample, including 85% of the SA cases and 50% of the stalking cases (see Table 3). Table 3 displays the structure matrix and standardized canonical coefficients used to compare the different approach groups. Results further revealed that many of the significant bivariate variables also discriminated between approach types. Specifically, the standardized canonical correlations indicated that SIH cases were more likely to have been in contact with multiple agencies, used multiple methods of contact, and focused on policy- and target-related issues.

TABLE 3:   Summary of Linear Discriminant Model

Predictor	Standardized Canonical Coefficient	Structure Matrix
Mental illness signs/symptoms	−.389	−.157
Threat control override	.050	.010
Drug/alcohol charges	.136	.051
Property charges	.132	.067
Violent charges	−.027	.054
Threat/harassment	−.121	−.026
Target dispersion	−.040	.068
Multiple methods of contact	.351	.472
Contact with multiple agencies	.534	.502
Threatening language	−.124	.169
Demand language	.065	.267
Total contact	.108	.271
Personal theme	−.090	−.077
Government theme	.221	.488
Target theme	.557	.628

POST HOC CLUSTER ANALYSIS

Post hoc cluster analysis was conducted to explore for subgroups of stalkers and intrusive harassers. The presence of a subgroup with significant similarities characteristically with SA cases could help explain the reclassification accuracy of the multivariate model. A two-step, log-linear cluster analysis using all 254 cases and using the 15 offender, contact, and thematic content variables yielded no fruitful results. Both a two- and three-cluster solution was attempted, but this provided no significant findings beyond the original grouping of cases. Additional cluster solutions were attempted using the 94 subsets of SIH cases, but no revealing findings emerged.

DISCUSSION

To date, little research has been conducted on the stalking or intrusive harassment of political figures. The purpose of this study was to examine the ability of offender, contact, and thematic content characteristics to distinguish SIH from SA cases to help distinguish onetime threats from ongoing harassment and potentially violent behavior. Results yielded a significant discriminant model indicating that the use of multiple methods of contact, prior contact with multiple law enforcement agencies, and the expression of target- and policy-focused themes best distinguished SIH from SA cases. Bivariate results also found that SIH cases involved a greater average number of total contacts and were more likely to express demands. Finally, approximately 30% of the total sample displayed target dispersion, threatening language, and personally focused themes, and more than 60% evidenced mental illness.

This study confirms that SIH cases display a more intense pursuit than SA cases, not only in sheer number of communications but in their diversity of efforts as well. On average, SIH cases made approximately six more contacts with their target, and more than 40% involved multiple methods of communication. The latter finding is also consistent

with James et al. (2009), who reported that multiple methods of communication were associated with persistent approach. Although by definition, one would expect SIH cases to involve a more persistent course of conduct, the diverse nature of such direct and indirect contact behaviors is noteworthy. In addition to more SIH behaviors, the more problematic contactors used a range of different contact behaviors, suggesting a distinct pattern and intensity of effort preceding their more dramatic and persistent contact. Furthermore, unlike in the private sector, pursuit behaviors toward political figures are more carefully scrutinized by the security personnel charged with their protection. The intensity of effort displayed by SIH individuals went above and beyond what was already characteristic of approach cases in general (Scalora et al., 2002a, 2002b) in this context of lower accessibility. Even at low levels of repetition, contact frequency and number of communication methods should cue security personnel that a serious problematic pursuit is emerging and early intervention is warranted.

A closer look at the content of communications revealed that SIH pursuers were more externally focused and grievance driven. Consistent with Chang et al. (2006), this study found that SIH cases expressed target- and policy-focused content approximately 2 times more often than SA cases. The present results also run counter to those presented by Mohandie et al. (2006), finding instead that personally related themes, such as help seeking, were equally as likely to occur among SA and SIH cases. Furthermore, nearly half of SIH pursuers used demanding language in their communications. Scalora et al. (2002b) found a trend indicating that approachers (statistical trend) and mentally ill pursuers (statistically significant) were more likely to issue demands. The current study observed that this linguistic feature occurs more frequently in SIH cases even though it is not distinguishing. Considered together, these results suggest that the SIH pursuers' beliefs about their targets' personal and political actions (or character) have an important role in driving their rigid, self-entitled behavior. Associated speech could serve as a cue for early intervention by law enforcement and security personnel.

In the present study, no significant statistical differences were found between SIH cases and SA cases in their use of threatening language. These data contradict Chang et al. (2006) and demonstrate that SIH cases may not be set apart by their use of threats in a broader scope of problematic contact cases. In fact, about 30% of both SIH and SA cases displayed threatening language, suggesting this behavior occurs at a nontrivial frequency within approach cases in general. The current study supports commentators' assertions that threats are not a more prominent feature of approach cases because they can cue law enforcement agencies to intervene (Fein & Vossekuil, 1999; Meloy, 2001). At the same time, Smith (2007) more closely examined the communication styles of stalkers and found that the content within the threat (e.g., threats to stalk) may be more informative than the mere decision to express them. The simple categorical classification of issuing or not issuing threats appears to do little to distinguish political figures stalkers, but further investigation of the qualitative aspects of threats may help to characterize those 30% of SIH cases that use this aggressive language.

Unlike contact and thematic variables, offender variables were less useful in discriminating between SA and SIH cases. Consistent with Chang et al. (2006), criminal history did not significantly distinguish either approach group. In fact, both groups had fewer than one charge on average for violent, property, threat or harassment, and drug or alcohol offenses. At the same time, SIH cases had been in contact with other law enforcement agencies for

their behavior approximately twice as often as SA cases. It appears that although their actions do not result in higher adjudication rates, SIH cases are more visible to a broad range of law enforcement agencies. The growing number of advocates for the use of mental health consultation in threat assessment cases (e.g., Coggins & Reddy-Pynchon, 1998) suggests that there is a trend toward developing more mental health–sensitive interventions. To this end, Mohandie et al. (2006) found that public figure stalkers were more likely to be hospitalized than be processed by the criminal justice system. Given the high rates of mental illness found in both approach groups, one wonders about the impact this trend may have on the documented histories of offenders, as it might help to explain the low rates of criminal convictions across groups. Future research should explore the ability of interventions (e.g., hospitalizations, protective orders) to discriminate SIH behaviors from others forms of problematic contact toward political figures.

Although not distinguishing factors, personally focused speech and symptoms of serious mental illness were displayed in a substantial number of cases. Previous research indicated that mental illness and personally focused speech were features occurring at higher frequencies among public figure stalkers than other subgroups (Mohandie et al., 2006). In fact, Meloy, Mohandie, and Green (2009) report similar rates of mental illness and help-seeking behavior in their sample of purely celebrity stalkers. The present research suggests that these factors may be more indicative of problematic approach of public figures in general rather than a hallmark feature of either political figure or celebrity stalkers. To this end, previous research has failed to accurately identify characteristics that were truly unique to political figure pursuers. Such findings are important when considering the characterization of political figure stalking and highlight the need to examine risk factors across a variety of relevant comparison groups. That is not meant to undermine the importance of these factors within threat assessment, since recent research indicates that mental illness significantly relates to the persistence and escalation of pursuit (James et al., 2009, 2010). Rather, to better understand the nature of political figure stalking itself, future research should identify qualities that distinguish these individuals from other subgroups of stalkers as well as political figure harassers.

TCO symptoms were examined within stalking cases in this study for the first time. Results revealed that TCO symptoms rarely occurred in either SA or SIH cases. These findings run contrary to previous research (Link et al., 1998; Swanson et al., 1996) that found that the symptoms were significantly related to aggressive behavior. Similar to threatening language, these symptoms may be overt and may signal the need for early intervention by security personnel before communications have an opportunity to escalate into SIH. It may also be possible that the severity of these symptoms may preclude the necessary mental organization to achieve a successful pursuit. In either case, future research should continue to examine the role of TCO symptoms in aggressive behavior as well as the factors that limit its influence.

The limitations of this study may help guide future research and, therefore, are worthy of mention. Of particular importance, information coded from the case files was reliant on the accuracy and reliability of the original investigator's documentation of observed behaviors. Thus, the coding of case files was limited to what the investigating officer deemed worthy of reporting and any supplemental primary source documentation (e.g., mental health records). For example, inferences about the offender's motives were often

necessarily based on the investigator's report of the offender's behavior and speech content or what could be directly gleaned from the content of the offender's communications. Compared to a traditional clinical interview, this approach may provide less reliable inferences about the more intrapsychic antecedents (e.g., mental illness symptoms, motivation) to public figure SIH. However, commentators note that law enforcement professionals may benefit more from research that presents findings consistent with their regular degree of accessibility instead of those requiring greater expertise and/or extensive investigation (e.g., Coggins et al., 1998; Scalora et al., 2002b). Finally, although our sample characteristics were similar to other studies in the area, its small size may limit generalization, and as such, research should continue examination of factors identified in this study.

Further study is necessary before conclusions can be made about political stalkers and intrusive harassers. As it stands, the literature on these groups mainly supports what is already known about problematical approach of political figures. This study highlights the need to expand the comparison of groups to identify factors that uniquely characterize political figure stalkers. The current model was able to contribute to this aim by developing a significant multivariate model that distinguished SIH of political figures from SA cases. Results indicated that communication and thematic variables were most effective in finding distinctions between groups of political figure harassers but that offender variables were less efficacious.

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