

Risk Factors for Approach Behavior Toward the U.S. Congress

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ABSTRACT. Recent attention within the risk assessment literature has focused upon the nature of targeted violence (i.e., threat assessment). The present study analyzes 316 cases of threatening and inappropriate contacts toward members of the U.S. Congress and their staffs, with an in-depth analysis concerning the role pre-contact (e.g., prior threat, non-approach contact) and contact behaviors may have in influencing subsequent problematic approach. Contrary to previous research, nearly half of the approachers engaged in pre-approach contacts toward the tar-

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get. Those subjects engaging in approach behavior were more likely to have had a history of prior contact with other federal law enforcement agencies, to utilize multiple methods of contact, and were less likely to have articulated threats prior to approach. Among those subjects engaging in physical approach toward a protectee, risk factors for pre-approach contacts also mirrored many of the approach risk factors, suggesting a subgroup of approachers who engage in more intensive contact behaviors. [Article copies available for a fee from The Haworth Document Delivery Service: 1-800-HAWORTH. E-mail address: <getinfo@haworthpress.com> Website: <<http://www.HaworthPress.com>> © 2002 by The Haworth Press, Inc. All rights reserved.]

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The scientific literature pertaining to the assessment of risk for violence has grown substantially in recent years. Empirical work has attempted to identify factors that can be readily ascertained and combined to provide incrementally better prediction of violence over chance. Research has examined the predictive utility of a variety of demographic, psychological, and behavioral characteristics and found some factors that appear to consistently relate to future violence with varying degrees of consistency (e.g., Lyon, Hart, & Webster, 2001; Monahan & Steadman, 1994; Quinsey, Harris, Rice, & Cormier, 1998). For the most part, however, this research has concentrated on assessing risk of violence toward a wide range of potential victims—ultimately identifying a general risk of violence. The assessment of this general risk of violence incorporates factors that are most commonly and reliably associated with either any violent behavior or specific forms of violent behavior, such as physically assaultive or sexually assaultive behavior. Meanwhile, a more recent body of literature has begun to examine risk of violence toward an identifiable target—or targeted violence. Some of this research has focused on the study of stalking behavior among those obsessed with a real or imagined relationship with the victim (e.g., Meloy, 1998, 2001; Palarea, Zona, Lane, & Langhinrichsen-Rohling, 1998), while efforts have examined, classified, or identified risk factors among threats and violence targeting public figures (e.g., Borum, Fein, Vossekuil, & Berglund, 1999; Calhoun, 1998; Dietz, Matthews, Martell

et al., 1991; Dietz, Matthews, Van Duyne et al., 1991; Fein & Vossekuil, 1999).

The study and assessment of targeted violence is unique because the concept of risk narrows to represent risk toward a particular target. A sound threat assessment methodology relies on a range of contextual, subject-level, and behavioral factors, many of which are commonly associated with current structured assessment approaches, to engineer the best estimate of the subject's risk of violence toward the specific target (Borum et al., 1999). Judgments of violence potential in threat assessments, as in general risk assessments, have been described as similar to meteorological predictions or forecasts, relying on frequent practice, base-rate information, actuarial support, availability of informational feedback, and dissemination of knowledge (Monahan & Steadman, 1996). Yet, these forecasts are even more challenging when they entail the prediction of violence toward a particular individual. Furthermore, as Coggins, Pynchon, and Dvoskin (1998) highlight, the threat assessment literature generally lacks the support of converging empirical efforts that identify risk factors for targeted violence. These authors also point out that not only has the literature lacked a systematic appraisal of risk factors among an array of violent and nonviolent cases, but the definition and threshold of violence or other problematic behavior has also been fairly inconsistent.

Since the bulk of the threat assessment research has been conducted by those responsible for protecting high-profile individuals (e.g., the U.S. Secret Service), or drawn from related databases (e.g., clinical samples of threatening persons), research results have primarily come from the threats or violence toward public figures. Studies drawn from these cases have generally been derived from samples representing discrete types of contactors and contact behavior. Some of these analyses have concentrated on the most extreme forms of violence, such as assassination (e.g., Heyman, 1984; Rothstein, 1964; Weinstein & Lyerly, 1969) and attack behavior (Fein & Vossekuil, 1999). In the most recent of these studies, Fein and Vossekuil (1999) presented the most complete examination of cases involving actual attack or assassination of a public figure. Their analysis offered compelling evidence that certain elements are more common than others among those engaging in the most violent behavior. Namely, most attackers were described as social isolates with histories of harassing behavior. Such attackers were also known to have histories of explosive/angry behavior; yet only half had histories of violent behavior and few had histories of violent crime or incarceration. Most of the attackers also had a history of weapon use

and an interest in militant/radical ideation or groups. Fein and Vossekil also noted a variety of features of mental illness that were present among attackers. In particular, many had a history of depression and suicidal ideation/behavior, as well as a history of contact with mental health professionals. The relationship between delusional ideation and attack-related behavior appeared insignificant, though delusions were not uncommon among these violent cases, suggesting some relevance.

Additional studies have examined characteristics of cases involving less violent, yet still appreciably risky behavior. Several early studies examined characteristics of psychotic individuals who visited federal government targets (Hoffman, 1943; Sebastiani & Foy, 1965) and described general attributes of contactors and their reasons for visiting sites. However, these studies were descriptive in nature and attempted to enhance our understanding of those who engage in such behavior rather than to establish an empirically defined set of risk-enhancing factors for potential violence. The subjects in these studies were individuals who were ultimately institutionalized and who had gone so far as to actually place themselves in close physical proximity to their target, which could be inherently deemed to be a high-risk behavioral outcome. In contrast, Logan, Reuterfors, Bohn, and Clark (1984) did not require approach toward the target for a subject to be included in their study, permitting the identification of a number of features related to threateners who verbally threatened a president and who were considered by the researchers to be more dangerous. These features related to the subject's functional ability to inflict harm, preoccupation with the target, reason for contact, and history of violent crimes. Interestingly, many of these factors correspond to those in the current general risk assessment literature. While Logan et al. (1984) distinguished these risk-enhancing characteristics, a concrete type of actual or attempted violence was not a criterion used for differentiating threatener and comparison groups, highlighting that the purpose of their analysis was to describe common features of these threateners, not to define an empirically-derived set of risk factors for violence.

As implied earlier, defining the threshold for high-risk behavior is crucial to threat assessment research. Professionals within the law enforcement community, as well as researchers studying targeted violence, need to enforce a threshold that allows for the best assurance of safety without hindering a person's right to free speech. To address this need, high-risk behavior could be thought to include any problematic attempt to approach the target, consistent with Dietz and colleagues'

(1991) suggestion that closer "physical proximity to the [target is] where the possibility of an attack is the greatest" (p. 186). The risk of such attack would also extend to those intercepting and impeding the subject's physical contact with the target. Utilizing this level of behavior as the threshold broadens the scope of risk to include behavior that could lead most directly to violence, and it provides the law enforcement and threat assessment professional with the ability to construct the most effective protective strategies and intervene at the earliest phase of a potentially violent encounter. By establishing the threshold at physical approach or attempted physical approach, a larger number of problematic incidents potentially culminating in physical violence could be encompassed. Indeed, law enforcement professionals responsible for assessing threats already use approach as a proxy for high-risk behavior (e.g., the U.S. Capitol Police; Scalora & Callaway, 2000).

Several attempts have been made to analyze the threatening contact behavior of those who have approached their chosen target. Recently, Calhoun (1998) examined threats and violence against federal judicial officials and discovered relationships between several contact characteristics and increased levels of violence or potential violence that were reminiscent of previous findings from threat assessment research. Not surprisingly, he discovered that those who sought physical contact with the target, or placed themselves within close proximity to the target, were more likely to have had prior violent histories than those who did not. Furthermore, the subject's expressed motive for contacting the target also bore some relationship to violence. In particular, ideological motives unrelated to a specific case and motives tied directly to the victim were more often associated with greater levels of violence than motives described as personal to the subject, related to crime, or blatantly irrational. Additional variables, such as hiding one's identity, having a known affiliation to a group or organization, and having known accomplices, were also related to greater levels of violence or potential violence. Unfortunately, however, such subject-level information was frequently unavailable, a common pitfall inherent in many threat assessment.

In another study, Dietz, Matthews, Martell et al. (1991) examined written communications directed at members of the United States Congress in one of the more systematic attempts to empirically identify risk factors for approach behavior among a stratified sample of approach and non-approach cases. Dietz and his colleagues identified 10 risk-enhancing factors of problematic approach behavior, such as repetitive letter writing, multiple contact methods (i.e., telephoning and writing),

and providing identifying information. In addition, certain elements pertaining to a subject's perceived relationship to the target and associated goals for the contact were related, such as: (1) perceiving the target as benefactor or rescuer; (2) repeatedly mentioning romantic themes; (3) expressing desire for face-to-face contact; and (4) seeking help, valuables, or recognition. Furthermore, the data showed that use of threat, expressions of anger or hostility, a perception of persecution, and attempts to instill fear or worry in the target were significantly unrelated to approach behavior. These findings suggested that pre-approach contacts exhibiting a great deal of anger and threat may initially invoke fear of physical harm, arouse concern, and attract attention, yet are not nearly as predictive of approach as are contacts that exhibit seemingly less malevolent themes as well as innocuous signs of threat posed, some of which are potentially related to mental illness.

Consistent across several studies, and a central tenet of threat assessment literature, is that making a threat of violence is not predictive of posing a threat of, or engaging in, a violent or potentially violent act (Fein & Vossekuil, 1998, 1999). While some attackers or potential attackers may alert third parties, or even the target, of their violent intentions, verbalization of a threat is not overly associated with physical approach or attack and, therefore, is not necessarily a predictive risk factor for violence within this context. In addition, authorities have traditionally intervened more quickly when threats have been articulated, potentially averting situations that may have escalated to a more problematic level. In any event, the limited predictive value of threatening statements has emerged across studies involving the security of governmental targets (e.g., Baumgartner, Scalora, & Plank, 2001; Calhoun, 1998; Dietz, Matthews, Martell et al., 1991; Dietz, Matthews, Van Duyne et al., 1991; Fein & Vossekuil, 1999).

In a similar vein, several of us had previously engaged in a large-scale study of 4,387 cases involving threatening and other problematic contact toward members of Congress over several years (Scalora et al., 2001). The cases were analyzed regarding documented subject characteristics, articulated motives, as well as several aspects of contact behavior, in relation to approach behavior. Approachers were significantly less likely to have articulated threat language prior to or during their contacts and were also less likely to have stated a policy grievance (foreign or domestic) as the source of their concern. Furthermore, approachers were substantially more likely to have expressed help-seeking requests as part of their prior and approach-related contacts and were less likely to have engaged in racist or sexualized behavior within their contacts.

Approachers were also significantly more likely to have had a criminal record as well as to have displayed symptoms suggestive of major mental illness.

As the body of literature on targeted violence continues to grow, the need to identify risk factors for problematic approach remains. Although the base-rate of violence is low, the need for predictive factors is no clearer than in the protection of government figures (Coggins, Pynchon, & Dvoskin, 1998). While other research has identified potentially valuable risk factors, a better understanding of factors that can be ascertained quickly and easily by law enforcement professionals when threat management cases initially arise (e.g., motives stated, nature of contact behavior, threatening language) may enhance the effectiveness of threat assessment and management strategies. Law enforcement professionals charged with the protection of political figures require strategies utilizing risk factors that are easy to understand and identify from available case information. At times, initial risk assessment determinations must be made under time-pressured conditions and with limited amounts of subject and contact information. In other situations, a longer pattern of behavior can be documented along with more thorough and detailed subject information. Continued empirical study of the configuration of a range of risk factors for problematic and targeted approach behavior can enhance the reliability and validity of risk determinations.

The present study is a follow-up to our large scale study (Scalora et al., 2001) and seeks to assess the predictive value of a set of subject and contact behavior-related factors displayed by a mixed sample of those who either have or have not attempted to approach a congressional target. Utilizing risk factors derived from studies that have focused on characteristics of communication behavior (e.g., Baumgartner, Scalora, & Plank, 2001; Calhoun, 1998; Dietz, Matthews, Martell et al., 1991) or on behaviors leading up to attack (e.g., Fein & Vossekuil, 1999) involving political targets, we attempted to systematically assess a range of factors pertinent to problematic approach behavior. More focused attention, however, will be given to several aspects of pre-approach contact behaviors among cases involving approach. Regarding pre-approach behavior, multiple studies have implied that approachers tend not to engage in threatening pre-approach contact (Dietz, Matthews, Martell et al., 1991; Fein & Vossekuil, 1999), though the nature of pre-approach contact is not yet thoroughly understood. The present study attempts to assess the nature of pre-approach contact in more detail.

METHODS

Data were drawn from investigative files of the U.S. Capitol Police's (USCP) Threat Assessment Section (TAS). Established in 1828, the USCP is the law enforcement agency with national jurisdiction that is primarily responsible for the security of members of the United States Congress, congressional staff, visitors to the U.S. Capitol, as well as congressional offices throughout the nation. All incidents of either a threatening or suspicious nature are reported to and managed by the TAS, which is responsible for performing the relevant investigative and risk assessment activity. All cases are initially screened to determine the intensity/timeliness of TAS intervention. Utilizing contemporary knowledge of violence risk factors, members of the TAS engage in threat assessment and management activity to prevent and address an escalation of risk toward their protectees (Scalora & Callaway, 2000).

The present sample of 316 cases was randomly drawn from the case files of the TAS among those cases that were investigated between October 1998 and July 1999 (a total sample of approximately 1,500 cases). Approach cases ($n = 104$) were identified based on any reported and documented actual approach toward a target under the USCP's protection. A subject was considered to have approached (coded yes/no) if either the case information indicated an attempted (intercepted by law enforcement) or actual face-to-face contact with a member of the congressional community (e.g., member of Congress, staff, USCP personnel, or visitor). The comparison group of non-approach cases ($n = 212$) was also identified based on a lack of reported and documented approach behavior. Cases that included the use of threatening language were over-sampled among the TAS files in an effort to guarantee a high representation of threat language between both groups and ensuring us the ability to examine the relationship between pre approach and approach behavior.

A variety of subject and contact-level variables were considered for examination, as suggested by existing research. Concerning subject characteristics, the authors coded whether subjects identified themselves within the contact, or attempted to disguise their true identity in any manner (coded: not identify self/identify self). Subjects were suspected of suffering from a serious mental illness (coded: no/yes) if certain behaviors, or a combination thereof, were noted, including self reported hallucinations, incoherence or disorganization of thoughts or obvious delusional presentation (e.g., paranoia, complaints of thought insertion or withdrawal). Criminal history was drawn both from the Na-

tional Crime Information Center (NCIC) records as well as from contact information provided by local law enforcement that may not always be accounted for within national or state law enforcement databases. Criminal history was classified into the following categories of charges: drug/alcohol (e.g., possession, manufacture distribution, DWI), property (e.g., theft, burglary), violent (e.g., assault, weapons offenses), and threat/harassment (e.g., trespassing, terroristic threat, violation of protection order, stalking). Finally, the age of the subject was also recorded.

Regarding the subject's contact behavior, prior contact with the target (coded: no/yes) was indicated if either USCP records indicated a prior contact with the protectee or the protectee indicated a history of unreported contact with the subject during investigation (regardless of the harassment or level of threat the contact was considered to pose). Subjects were determined to have engaged in multiple forms of contact (coded: no/yes) if they engaged in more than one contact modality (e.g., letter, phone, e-mail). Since it is standard procedure for the USCP to contact other relevant federal agencies (particularly if other agencies or federal protectees are mentioned), prior or parallel threat activity and investigation was also documented (coded: no/yes). Target dispersion was determined by identifying how exclusive the subject was in selecting a target. If either multiple individuals were contacted or the subject addressed contacts to the Congress (or government) in general, target selection was considered dispersed (coded: no dispersion/dispersion). Subjects were considered to have utilized threatening language (coded: no/yes) if they described a desire to harm or have harm occur to the target in either a direct or veiled (e.g., a statement that harm may occur without directly threatening it) fashion. The type of harm could range from direct threat of death or physical harm to vague, unspecified harm (e.g., potentially to physical, reputation, or political well-being) that may arise.

Several content/language characteristics were also identified. These features were taken directly from the contacts as well as from investigative documentation. The presence of demand language (coded: no/yes) was noted if the subject made either vague or specific demands of the target to do something, regardless of the request's level of rationality. Coherence of the verbal or written statements by the subject (coded: coherent/any incoherence) was also noted. Incoherence was indicated if the subject's statements were poorly organized, tangential, or loosely associated, at least in part, during the contacts in question. Thematic content or language within the contact was sorted into three non-exclu-

sive categories (coded: no/yes): policy-oriented (generalized complaint regarding government activity, anti government statements), target-oriented (insulting/degrading language, sexist or sexualized references), and personal-oriented (exclusively related to the subject, personal help-seeking request, specific entitlement issue). It should be noted that some of the personal themes coded included requests that appeared to be fueled by delusional beliefs (e.g., requesting that harmful transmissions or thought-reading from government satellites be ceased).

To evaluate inter-rater reliability, 30 cases were randomly chosen and independently coded by at least two raters. Inter-rater reliabilities were determined by calculating Pearson product-moment correlations for continuous variables and the kappa statistic for categorical variables. Reliability estimates ranged from 0.86 (for thematic and language content, coherence of communication) to 0.92 (demographic factors, presence of threatening language, indications of mental illness, criminal history).

RESULTS

A total of 316 cases were coded. Subjects who physically approached their target ($n = 104$) accounted for 32.9% of the total sample. Approximately one-third (33.9%) of the cases involved letters or e-mails written to the target or the target's staff, and nearly as many of the cases (32.6%) involved phone contacts. Objects were delivered or mailed in 4.4% of the cases studied. The number of contacts made by the subjects was wide-ranging within the total sample ($M = 2.72$, $SD = 3.60$, Range 1-22).

Table 1 displays a comparison of the approach and non-approach groups related to the subject and contact-level variables. There was no difference in age between the approach and non-approach groups. Approachers were substantially more likely to have identified themselves prior to or during the contacts in question [$\chi^2(1) = 64.755$, $p < .0001$]. Gender was unknown for nearly 30% of the total sample, and all cases involving unknown gender occurred in the non-approach group. Among the known subjects, males were significantly more likely to have approached [$\chi^2(1) = 35.267$, $p < .0001$]. Concerning mental illness, 46.2% of the total sample was suspected of suffering from a serious mental illness. Approachers were significantly more likely to have

TABLE 1. Univariate Analyses of Approach and Non-Approach Samples

Characteristic	Group		
	Approach ($n = 104$)	Non-Approach ($n = 212$)	Total ($n = 316$)
<i>Subject Characteristics</i>			
<i>Gender</i>			
Male	81 (77.9%)	118 (51.9%)	191 (60.4%)
Female	22 (21.2%)	18 (8.5%)	40 (12.7%)
Unknown	0 (0.0%)	84 (39.6%)	84 (26.6%)
Mean Age (SD)	43.12 (10.85)	44.49 (15.96)	43.78 (13.50)
Subject Identified Self***	94 (90.4%)	91 (42.9%)	185 (58.5%)
Mental Illness Suspected***	62 (59.6%)	84 (39.6%)	146 (46.2%)
<i>Mean Prior Criminal Charges (SD)</i>			
Drug/Alcohol*	.42 (1.38)	.16 (.68)	.24 (.98)
Property*	.81 (2.01)	.34 (1.65)	.50 (1.79)
Violent**	.74 (1.81)	.30 (1.06)	.44 (1.37)
Threat/Harassment	.22 (.68)	.09 (.63)	.14 (.65)
Total Prior**	3.23 (5.90)	1.48 (4.74)	2.05 (5.21)
<i>Contact Behavior</i>			
Prior Contact with Target***	37 (35.6%)	30 (14.2%)	67 (21.3%)
Other Federal Agencies***	23 (22.1%)	13 (6.1%)	36 (11.4%)
Multiple Methods of Contact***	41 (39.4%)	14 (6.6%)	55 (17.5%)
Target Dispersion**	60 (57.7%)	91 (42.9%)	151 (47.8%)
<i>Content/Language</i>			
Threatening Language***	43 (41.3%)	162 (76.4%)	205 (64.9%)
Demanding Language	48 (46.2%)	76 (35.8%)	124 (39.2%)
Incoherent Language***	55 (52.9%)	62 (29.2%)	117 (37.0%)
Policy-Oriented Content	32 (30.8%)	80 (37.7%)	112 (35.4%)
Target-Oriented Content***	45 (43.3%)	150 (70.8%)	195 (61.7%)
Personal-Oriented Content***	37 (35.6%)	36 (17.0%)	73 (23.1%)

* $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$, *** $p < .001$

displayed characteristics suggestive of mental illness [$\chi^2(1) = 11.220$, $p < .001$].

While a majority of the sample did not have a known prior criminal offense, criminal history differentiated the approach and non-approach groups. Approachers had significantly more prior criminal offenses

across most of the categories studied, including drug/alcohol charges [$F(1) = 5.306, p = .022$], property charges [$F(1) = 4.722, p = .03$], violent charges [$F(1) = 7.442, p = .007$], and total charges [$F(1) = 8.090, p < .005$]. Particularly noteworthy, however, was that prior levels of threat/harassment charges did not differentiate between the groups.

With regard to other contact behaviors, univariate analysis indicated that a significantly larger proportion of approachers than non-approachers (nearly three times as many) had prior contacts with other federal law enforcement agencies—often related to threat assessment activity [$\chi^2(1) = 17.657, p < .0001$]. In terms of the most recent target(s), approachers were significantly more likely to have made contacts toward the target prior to the approach [$\chi^2(1) = 18.978, p < .0001$]. Approachers were also more likely to have evidenced target dispersion [$\chi^2(1) = 6.099, p = .014$]. While not statistically significant, univariate analysis noted a trend indicating that a greater proportion of approachers articulated demand language. Approachers, however, were substantially more likely to have relayed their information in an incoherent and disorganized manner [$\chi^2(1) = 16.722, p < .0001$]. Approximately 17.5% of the total sample engaged in multiple methods of contact (e.g., letters and phone calls), and approachers were substantially more likely to have utilized multiple methods of contact [$\chi^2(1) = 51.966, p < .0001$]. In light of past research, it was not surprising that approachers were substantially less likely to have articulated threatening language either prior to or during the incidents in question [$\chi^2(1) = 70.941, p = .0001$]. In fact, less than half of the approachers articulated threats.

Analysis of themes articulated within the contacts indicated some noteworthy differences. Themes or content of a personal nature related to the subject was significantly more related to approach activity [$\chi^2(1) = 13.582, p < .0001$]. Approachers were significantly less likely to have used themes that were focused primarily on the target (such as mere insult/degradation of the target or exclusively employing fear-inducing language) [$\chi^2(1) = 22.307, p < .0001$]. Policy-related themes were employed at equal levels among approachers and non-approachers.

Given the substantial number of subjects suspected of evidencing mental illness within the total sample, the presentation of additional information about these subjects seems noteworthy. These subjects were more likely to have made specific demands during their contacts as opposed to their non-mentally ill counterparts (45.7% versus 34.1%) [$\chi^2(1) = 4.050, p = .044$], and they were substantially more likely to express their concerns in an incoherent or disorganized manner [$\chi^2(1) =$

100.695, $p < .0001$]. One-third of the mentally ill subjects engaged in prior contacts with the target as opposed to 11% of the non-mentally ill sample [$\chi^2(1) = 25.163, p < .0001$]. Mentally ill subjects were also significantly more likely to have engaged in multiple methods of contact [$\chi^2(1) = 21.808, p < .0001$]. While the mentally ill subjects often presented information in a disorganized manner through a wider range of contacts, they were substantially more likely to have mentioned personal issues [$\chi^2(1) = 18.977, p < .0001$], often seeking help, and less likely to focus on characteristics of the target [$\chi^2(1) = 4.457, p = .035$].

In an attempt to construct a model for differentiating between approach and non-approach cases, a logistic regression analysis was performed that utilized 314 cases and all of the contact behavior variables included in the above-mentioned univariate analyses. The resulting equation successfully differentiated between the approach and non-approach groups [$\chi^2(17) = 145.932, p < .0001$] while accounting for 37% percent of the variance (Cox and Schnell $R^2 = 0.372$). The resulting model correctly reclassified 82.5% of the overall sample (71.2% of approachers and 88.1% of non-approachers). Table 2 displays the relevant significance testing and beta weights for the variables within the model. Not surprisingly, some of the variables that individually differentiated between the approach and non-approach groups most strongly in the univariate comparisons also significantly contributed to the regression model. Approachers were significantly more likely than their non-approach counterparts to have had prior contact with other federal agencies. Concerning the present contact behavior, approachers were more likely to have identified themselves during contacts and to have engaged in multiple modalities of contact. Furthermore, approachers were significantly less likely to express threatening language during their contacts. Interestingly, while univariate analyses yielded significant differences, other contact language characteristics did not distinguish between approachers and non-approachers in the model.

In order to assess factors related to pre-approach behavior, an in-depth analysis was performed of the approach cases, comparing those cases with pre-approach behavior with an approach-only sample. As stated earlier, prior research has implied that approachers may be less inclined to engage in threatening contact behavior prior to approach (Dietz, Matthews, Martell et al., 1991; Dietz, Matthews, Van Duyne et al., 1991; Fein & Vossekuil, 1999). However, the nature of pre-approach contact is not well understood. Surprisingly, almost half of the approachers (44.2%) in the present sample engaged in some contact be-

TABLE 2. Summary of Binary Logistic Regression Analysis Predicting Approach and Non Approach Behavior

Predictor	β	SE	Odds ratio	Wald statistic
<i>Subject Characteristics</i>				
Subject Identified Self***	2.355	.459	.095	26.306
Mental Illness Suspected	-.595	.470	.552	1.602
<i>Prior Criminal Charges</i>				
Drug/Alcohol	.341	.211	1.406	2.599
Property	.254	.159	1.290	2.544
Violent	.372	.199	1.451	3.484
Threat/Harassment	.209	.208	1.232	1.003
Total Prior	-.200	.107	.819	3.508
<i>Contact Behavior</i>				
Prior Contact with Target	-.218	.466	.805	.218
Other Federal Agencies*	1.136	.540	3.115	4.418
Multiple Methods of Contact***	1.879	.490	6.548	14.688
Target Dispersion	-.118	.377	.888	.098
<i>Content/Language</i>				
Threatening Language***	-1.972	.389	.139	25.757
Demanding Language	.157	.382	1.170	.170
Coherence of Language	-.045	.431	.947	.016
Policy-Oriented Content	-.150	.350	.860	.185
Target-Oriented Content	-.182	.363	.834	.250
Personal-Oriented Content	.232	.423	1.261	.301

* $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$, *** $p < .001$

havior toward the target prior to approach. As indicated in Table 3, univariate analyses indicate that several of the variables predictive of approach behavior in general also related to pre-approach behavior. Substantially more of the pre-approach sample displayed symptoms indicative of mental illness [$\chi^2(1) = 25.611, p < .0001$]. Subjects within the pre-approach sample were also significantly more likely to have been involved with other law enforcement agencies related to threat assessment activity [$\chi^2(1) = 7.684, p = .006$]. Contrary to earlier men-

tioned analyses relating different aspects of criminal history to approach behavior, those engaging in pre-approach contacts had substantially more prior arrests for threat/harassment-related crimes [$F(1) = 6.486, p = .012$]. Of those approachers engaging in pre-approach contacts with the target, significantly more articulated threatening statements in their prior contacts—contrary to the inverse relationship in the literature between stated threats and problematic approach behavior [$\chi^2(1) = 3.988, p = .046$]. Those engaging in pre-approach contact were also more likely to evince target dispersion [$\chi^2(1) = 6.099, p = .014$]. Regarding other contact behaviors, those engaging in pre-approach behavior also articulated more demand language [$\chi^2(1) = 7.187, p = .007$] and were more likely to display incoherence or disorganization within their prior contacts [$\chi^2(1) = 17.821, p < .0001$]. Regarding thematic content, those engaging in pre-approach contact were significantly more likely to note personal or help-seeking concerns in such contacts [$\chi^2(1) = 7.846, p = .006$].

DISCUSSION

The findings obtained in this study were consistent with those from other threat assessment studies on public figures, particularly government figures. While several variables independently differentiated between approach and non-approach cases, four variables related to the content and intensity of the contact behavior (namely, use of threatening language, identification of self during contact, multiple methods of contact, and involvement with other law enforcement agencies) explained a substantial amount of the statistical variance within the multivariate analysis predicting approach behavior.

Both univariate and multivariate analyses indicated that the intensity of interest and the extent of contact activity displayed toward the target were related to approach behavior. This relationship was demonstrated in the approachers' greater use of multiple methods of contact, which is consistent with findings obtained by Calhoun (1998), Dietz, Matthews, Martell et al. (1991), and Dietz, Matthews, Van Duyne et al. (1991), and the greater likelihood that approachers would have a history of prior contact with other federal agencies. It is unclear, however, to what degree such contacts with other federal agencies relate to common targets. Regarding intensity of focus toward the target, the present findings indicated that target dispersion was associated with approach behavior.

TABLE 3. Univariate Analyses of Pre-Approach Contact Among Approachers

Characteristic	Group	
	Prior Contact (n = 46)	Approach Only (n = 58)
<i>Subject Characteristics</i>		
Mental Illness Suspected***	40 (64.5%)	22 (35.5%)
<i>Mean Prior Criminal Charges (SD)</i>		
Drug/Alcohol	.41 (1.00)	.43 (1.63)
Property	1.11 (2.42)	.57 (1.59)
Violent	.87 (2.07)	.64 (1.59)
Threat/Harassment*	.91 (1.70)	.26 (.87)
Total Prior	4.26 (6.41)	2.41 (5.39)
<i>Contact Behavior</i>		
Other Federal Agencies**	16 (34.8%)	7 (12.1%)
Target Dispersion*	32 (69.6%)	28 (48.3%)
<i>Content/Language</i>		
Threatening Language*	24 (52.2%)	19 (32.8%)
Demanding Language**	28 (60.9%)	20 (34.5%)
Incoherent Language***	35 (76.1%)	20 (34.5%)
Policy-Oriented Content	17 (37.0%)	15 (25.9%)
Target-Oriented Content	24 (52.2%)	21 (36.2%)
Personal-Oriented Content**	23 (50.0%)	14 (24.1%)

*p < .05. **p < .01. ***p < .001

Contrary to literature suggesting that exclusive focus on a target is related to subsequent approach behavior, we have found the opposite to be true. Approachers were significantly more likely to have focused on more than a single target during their contacts, which might be explained by the fact that target selection may involve a complex relationship to the motives or themes expressed within the contact, as well as being tied to the symptomatology of those evincing mental illness. In any event, one practical consideration suggested by these findings is that there should be collaboration between agencies performing threat assessment activities to assess the intensity and diversity of contact behavior through multiple agency contacts and target selection patterns.

Consistent with previous findings (e.g., Dietz, Matthews, Martell et al., 1991), univariate analysis showed that subjects were significantly more likely to approach when articulating personal or help-seeking requests, but not when articulating target-related themes of an insulting or degrading nature. The greater likelihood of approach with more personally driven themes is also underscored by the finding that approachers are less likely to conceal their identity either prior to or during the approach contacts.

The presence of threatening statements was inversely related to approach behavior, a finding that is also consistent with prior research and underscores the notion that articulation of threats is not necessarily predictive of higher-risk behavior. However, this finding does not suggest that threat assessment professionals should minimize the risk posed by threats, since over 40% of threateners engaged in approach behavior. In general, the data are unclear concerning the degree to which interventions following threatening contacts decreased the possibility of approach behavior. Nevertheless, our findings provide support for the notion that threat assessment professionals should focus on those individuals who pose a threat, as a result of the nature of their contact behavior, rather than simply those who articulate threats (Borum et al., 1999; Fein & Vossekuil, 1998).

Another set of practical considerations is suggested by the relationship between apparent mental illness and approach behavior. The presence of mental illness was significantly related to approach behavior, as nearly 60% of approachers displayed behaviors that were highly indicative of mental illness. Symptoms were often related to the nature of the personally-driven content or help-seeking requests noted within the contacts studied. While some approach contacts may not have involved articulated threats that necessarily triggered interventions such as civil commitment, mentally ill subjects present some challenges for case managers. First, cases of individuals with suspected mental illness appeared to involve more intense contact behavior, given the tendency of these individuals to use multiple methods of contact and to engage in more contact with the target prior to the initiation of threat assessment activity. These subjects also were more likely to have contacted other law enforcement agencies, suggesting the need for interagency communication to determine the nature of such contacts. Mentally ill subjects were more likely to have contacted a wider range of targets while, not surprisingly, presenting information in a less coherent or organized manner. These findings firmly point to the need for interdisciplinary collaboration, when legally permissible, between law enforcement and

mental health professionals related to threat assessment as other authors have suggested (e.g., Coggins & Pynchon, 1998; Coggins, Steadman, & Veysey, 1996; Fein & Vossekuil, 1998).

Subjects in the present sample typically had a more extensive history of criminal offenses, particularly related to violent offenses as noted in prior literature (Fein & Vossekuil, 1999; Logan et al., 1984). The present study confirms findings from the risk assessment literature that has shown prior criminal history to be predictive of future problematic behavior or violence (e.g., Harris & Rice, 1997; Quinsey et al., 1998; Scott & Resnick, 2000). Indeed, approachers were more likely to have a history of prior drug or alcohol, violent, and property offenses, as well as more extensive criminal histories overall. These findings suggest that prior misconduct is important to assess when evaluating the risk of targeted violence. Particularly noteworthy was that a prior history of threat/harassment charges (e.g., terroristic threat, violation of protection order, trespassing) was not related to approach behavior and was frankly limited within both samples, although the presence of prior threat/harassment charges was significantly associated with pre-approach behavior. It is difficult to speculate the reasons for such a finding. Given the inverse relationship between threatening activity and approach behavior, one might conclude that such individuals may be inclined to avoid utilizing direct threats in general across a variety of contact settings or situations. It is also possible that the processing of threat/harassment charges by the legal system, in general, may be less common. However, those individuals who tend to engage in extensive and problematic contacts with public officials may be predisposed to a pattern of threatening and harassing behavior that could also be a manifestation of their criminal propensities.

While prior literature has implied that approachers are less inclined to engage in threatening pre approach contacts, nearly half of the approachers studied engaged in prior contact involving the target. Particularly interesting were the findings that many of the risk factors predictive of approach behavior were also predictive of pre-approach contact behavior. Such findings suggest that those who engage in pre-approach contacts may represent a more intense pattern of approach behavior that is heavily influenced by symptoms of mental illness and related to personally relevant demands. The role of mental illness may not only be related to cognitive distortions and emotional instability, but also to behavioral impulsivity that leads individuals to contact targets more intensely, thereby bringing these individuals more frequently to

the attention of threat assessment professionals. However, the effect of mental illness symptoms is not yet fully understood.

This sample was drawn from a large scale study of problematic contacts toward members of Congress and their staffs (Scalora et al., 2001) with particular attention given to in-depth analysis of contact behavior. While the sample used was relatively small, it is somewhat larger than, but bears features similar to samples used in related threat assessment studies (Baumgartner, Scalora, & Plank, 2001; Dietz, Matthews, Martell et al., 1991; Dietz, Matthews, Van Duyne et al., 1991; Fein & Vossekuil, 1999). However, some limitations in the present study are worthy of mention. Much of the behavioral information, outside of criminal history and information drawn from available primary source contact documents from the subject, was drawn from information deemed worthy of documentation by the investigator. Determining the reliability of observations or assertions made in case reports and materials is difficult. Information regarding the subjects' mental illness was limited either to observations noted by the investigating officers, the reporting party, or extrapolations from the content of those written or verbal contacts that were recorded. In addition, mental health information could not be independently verified. However, these limitations mirror the nature of information typically available to law enforcement personnel in threat assessment cases. As noted in previous literature, there is an intrinsic value for law enforcement professionals to present information at a level consistent with what they regularly confront rather than providing observations that require more extensive or refined expertise (e.g., Scalora & Plank, 2001; Coggins, Pynchon, & Dvoskin, 1998).

To conclude, the findings from this study echo calls from other researchers for increased research on cue-criteria or risk factors related to problematic approach toward public officials, as well as a need to tailor research findings to the tasks and responsibilities of law enforcement officers (Coggins, Steadman, & Veysey, 1996; Coggins, Pynchon, & Dvoskin, 1998). Given the findings that approachers were more likely to have engaged in contacts requiring threat assessment activity from other law enforcement agencies, additional research concerning subjects engaging in multi-agency contacts, and their implications for risk assessment, is critical. However, performing such multi-agency research is hindered by administrative and legal restrictions on the sharing of law enforcement intelligence information (particularly to researchers) without a legitimate law enforcement purpose. There is also a continuing need for research that integrates a range of risk factors, and assesses the impact of interventions utilized in threat management contexts. Attention should also focus

those individuals who are resistant to initial intervention. The relevance of mental health information to problematic approach behavior so underscores the substantial need for additional research on the relationship between mental illness and problematic approach, as well as the enhancement of cross-disciplinary collaboration between the mental health and law enforcement communities (Coggins, Steadman, & Veysey, 1996; Coggins, Pynchon, & Dvoskin, 1998).

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