

Public Figure Attacks in the United States, 1995- 2015

J. Reid Meloy, PhD
SSA Molly Amman, JD
AETAP
Dublin, Ireland



Public Figure Attacks in the United States, 1995-2015

- First wide-angle review of public figure attacks since the landmark Exceptional Case Study Project (Fein & Vossekuil, 1998, 1999)
- We picked up where the ECSP left off



Public Figure Attacks in the United States, 1995-2015

- Behavioral Sciences and the Law, 2016, at DrReidMeloy.com
- Open source archival descriptive study
- Systematic and exhaustive internet searches
- No direct interviews; indirect assessments in some cases
- Codebook available
- Interrater reliability check for bivariate variables (ICC), 0.835



Acknowledgment

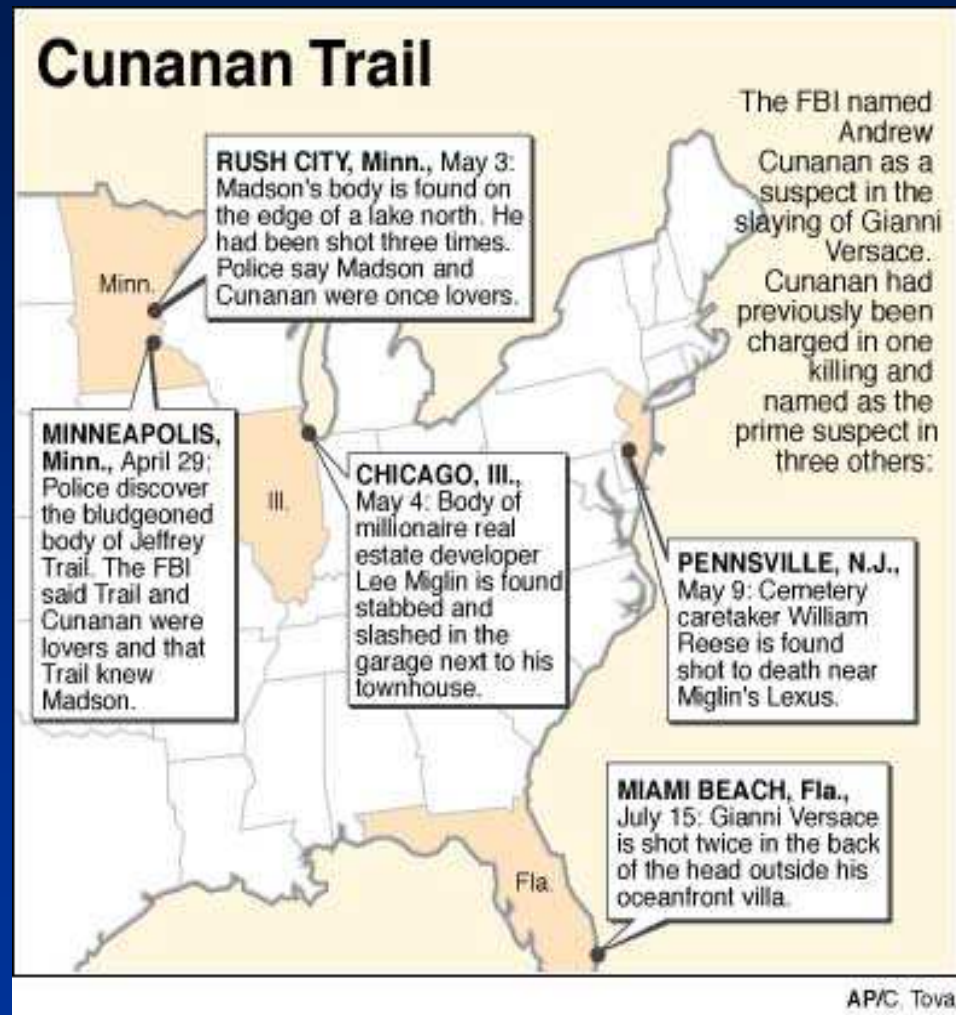
- Ms. Kristen Lybert, MA



Andrew Cunanan

FBI FUGITIVE PUBLICITY		TEN MOST WANTED FUGITIVE
Crime Alert: Andrew Phillip Cunanan		
WANTED BY THE FBI		
ARMED AND EXTREMELY DANGEROUS		Andrew Phillip Cunanan
		THE CRIME
Andrew Phillip Cunanan		<p>Andrew Phillip Cunanan has been charged with the murder of David Madson in Chisago County, Minnesota. Authorities believe that he fled Minnesota in Madson's Jeep Cherokee.</p> <p>Several days later, authorities discovered the Jeep abandoned, on a street where Chicago, Illinois authorities were investigating a murder. Discovered missing from this crime scene was the victim's 1994 Lexus, which later turned up in a cemetery parking lot in Pennsville, New Jersey.</p> <p>In Pennsville, New Jersey, authorities were called to a cemetery when the caretaker failed to return home from work on Friday, 5/9/97. The caretaker was discovered murdered. His vehicle was also reported to be missing. There are strong similarities between this murder and the other murders committed in Minnesota and Illinois.</p> <p>The caretaker's vehicle is described as a red 1995 Chevy pick-up, with a dark interior, bearing New Jersey license plate KH993D.</p>
		<p>REWARD: The FBI is offering \$10,000 for information leading to the apprehension of Cunanan.</p>
		REMARKS
		<p>Cunanan may wear prescription eyeglasses. He allegedly has ties to the gay community. He portrays himself as</p>

May-July, 1997





**Se cumplen 18
años del asesinato
del fundador de un
imperio de la moda.**

**Gianni Versace
1946-1997**

Identifying the Cases

- Open source research to identify all potential attacks on public figures during time frame
- Development of inclusion criteria
 - Attack
 - Public figure
- Sample narrowed, then coded



Attack

- Achieved physical proximity to target or proxy, either in person or remotely through deployment of a weapon or hazardous device, or
- Achieved entry into protected/private location such as a residence or private office under circumstances indicating a belief that target was present, with or without a weapon; and



Attack

- in such a way as to demonstrate both **intent and imminent capacity to inflict potentially lethal injury**, regardless of whether injury was actually inflicted.



Public Figure

- A personage of great public interest or familiarity, like a government official, politician, celebrity, business leader, movie star or sports hero.
- Local, regional, or national public figures counted.



The Sample

56 incidents

58 attackers

58 targeted victims

Not a one-to-one correspondence



Tucson, AZ, Jan. 8, 2011

Attempted murder of
Congresswoman
Gabrielle Giffords
Murder of U.S.
District Court Chief
Judge John Roll



Attackers

- Virtually all males
- 18-37 years (54%)
- Psychiatric and violent and nonviolent criminal histories prevalent
- 36% delusional at time (previous studies: 42-65%, Van der Meer et al., 2012)
- 73% grandiose



Selena killed in 1995 by Yolanda Saldivar



Grandiosity



Not self confidence



Diagnoses (45% cases when known)

- Schizophrenia
- Bipolar disorder
- Depression
- Delusional Disorder
- Schizoaffective Disorder
- Various personality disorders: narcissistic, avoidant, antisocial, borderline, histrionic, and paranoid traits



Criminality by history

- 77% violent criminal histories
- 81% nonviolent criminal histories



Targets

- Politicians (22%)
- Athletes (19%)
- Judges (16%)
- Musical celebrities (10%)
- Journalists (10%)
- Film-TV industry (5%)
- Pop culture (5%)
- Businessmen (3.4%)



Demographics of Targets

- Average age 43.4 years (23-80)
- 69% Male



Motivations

- Angry and personal
 - Dissatisfaction with governmental or judicial process
 - retaliation for specific actions
 - generalized distress (including psychosis)
- 37.5% of public figures knew their attacker





Terrorist Motivation? Rare

- | | | |
|--------------------------------|---|----|
| • Single issue (anti-abortion) | 3 | 7% |
| • Extreme right | 1 | 2% |
| • Jihadist | 0 | 0% |



Nature of relationship when personal

- Known constituent
- Biological son
- Known stalker
- Co-worker
- Social acquaintance
- Political rival
- Known litigant in courtroom
- President of fan club



Motivations

- Only one case (<2%) where primary motivation was notoriety or infamy (unlike ECSP study where 38% did): Cunanan
- Desire for notoriety has been surmounted by unreasonable entitlement to attack those who have offended: evolving pathological narcissism



Motivations

- “Retaliation and survival” rather than “revenge and obliteration” (Knoll, 2010)
- Successful escape in most cases; suicide later, but only in a few cases (10%) and when arrest imminent



Retaliation and Survival

- Retaliate:
 - Strike back against a perceived wrong
 - End an injustice
 - Revenge for a rejection
 - Express profound dissatisfaction

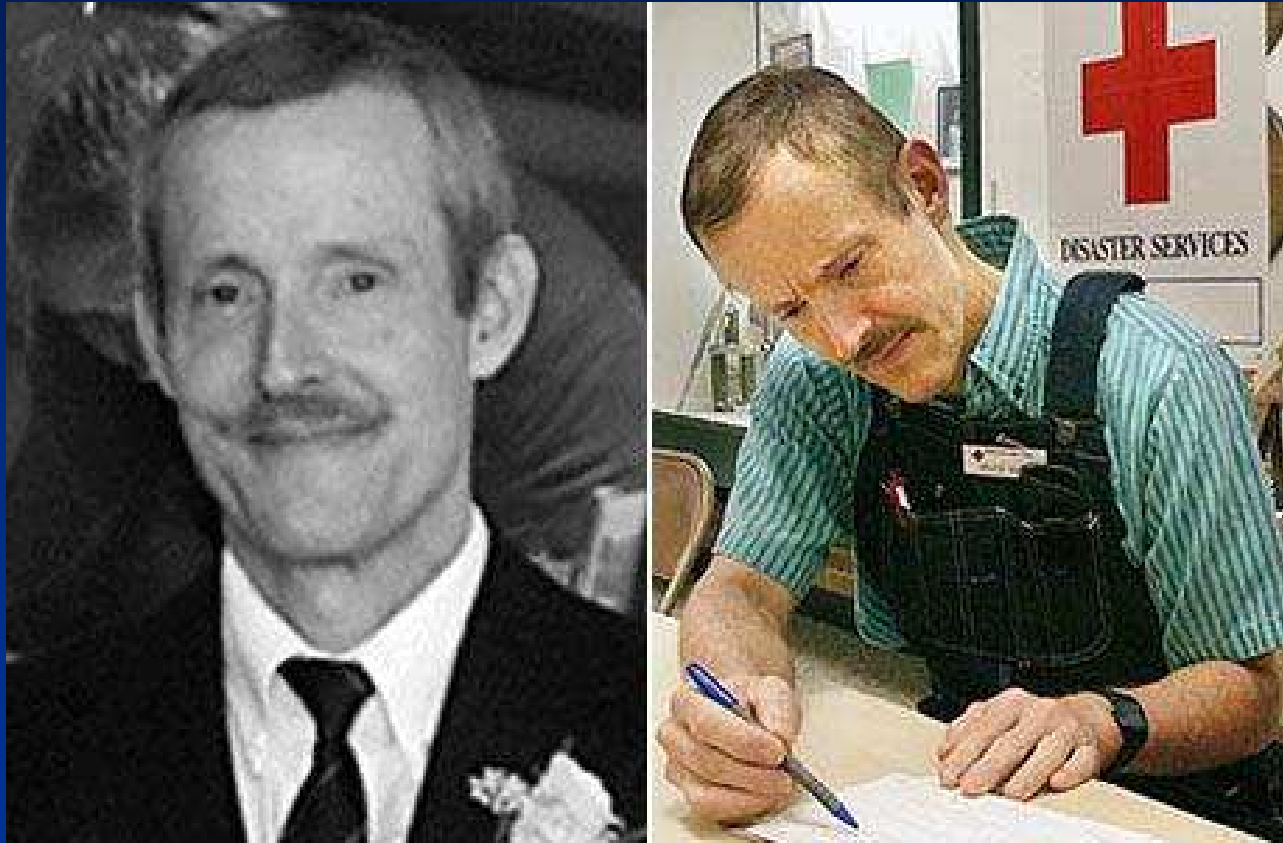


Retaliation and Survival

- Survive:
 - No desire to obliterate the self at the same time
 - Escape if at all possible
 - Suicide only if capture is imminent
- May offer advantage for security planners-survival is more challenging



Bruce Ivins, Ph.D.



Bruce Ivins

- Anthrax attacks, two waves, in September and October, 2001: killed 5 people, injured 17
- Most prominent anthrax researcher in USG
- Motivated by:
 - Revenge
 - Need for personal validation
 - Career preservation and professional redemption
 - Loss
 - Also obsessed with and stalked a sorority house
 - Expert Behavioral Analysis Panel (2011)



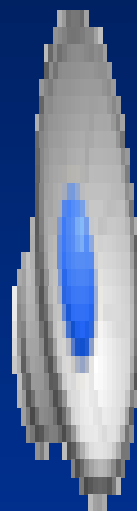
July 29, 2008

- Ivins committed suicide with overdose of Tylenol following release from a psychiatric hold and knowledge that he would likely be criminally indicted for crimes in 2001.



Roanoke, Aug. 26, 2015





Survival—wig, shawl, umbrella,
ammunition, 3 license plates



Pre-attack

- Direct threats very uncommon (5%): consistent with all previous research
- Insufficient data to code other warning behaviors
- Difficult to determine contact with or plans to attack other public figures



Madonna Case, April, 1995

- “I will slit her throat from ear to ear”
- Statement by Robert Hoskins outside home to Basil Stephens while Madonna present





Dec. 2, 1964

Lev 20:14-2; Luke 16:17-1; Le. 18:1-5; 4. Lev 18:6

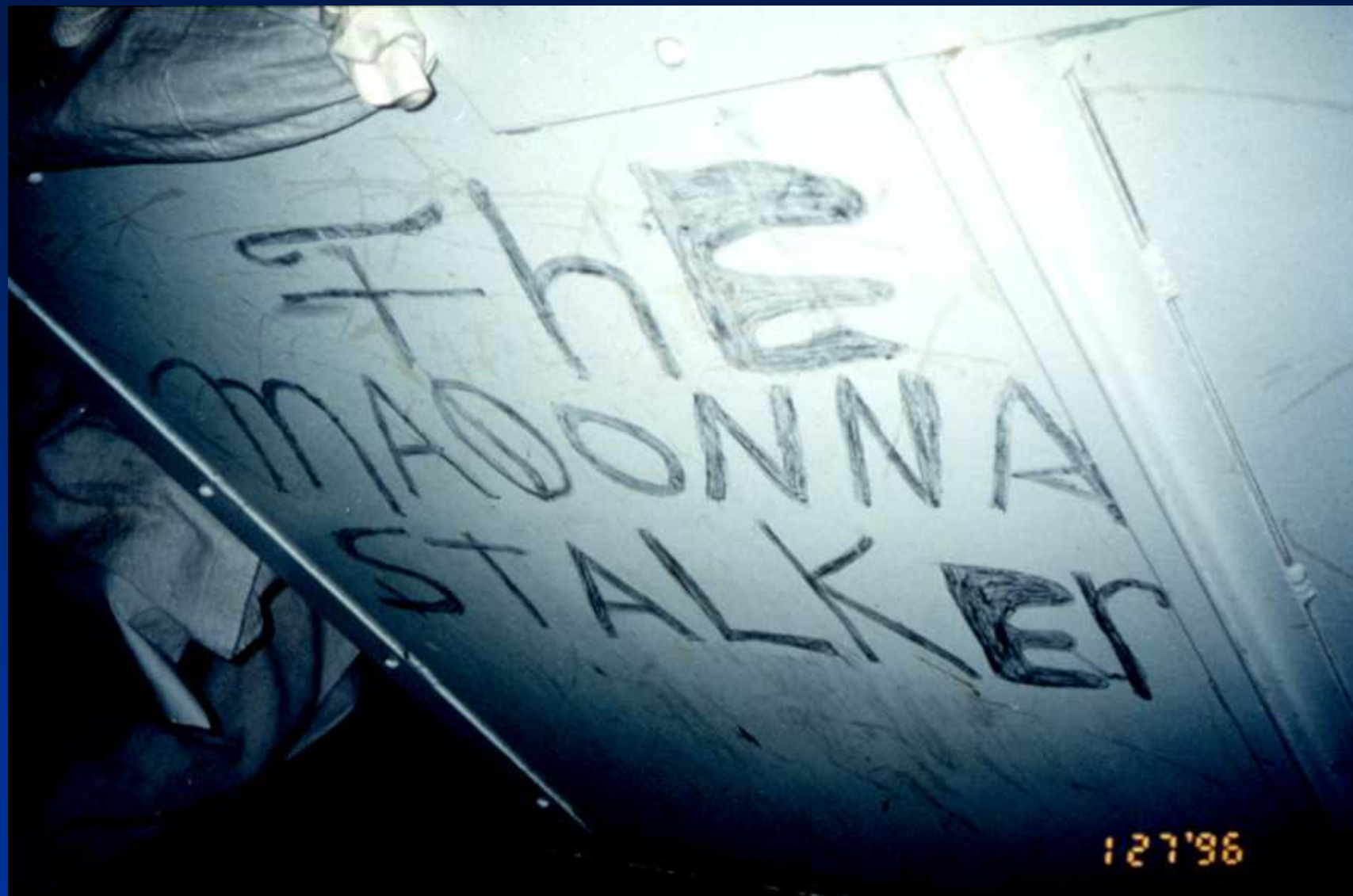
over



*"...I feel it made his fantasies come true.
I'm sitting in front of him, and that's
what he wants. "*

**Madonna Ciccone
Testimony Jan. 3, 1996
People v. Robert Hoskins**





Attack Characteristics

- Anytime
- Shooting (57%), physical assault (18%), or stabbing (11%)
- Residence or work setting—although entry and exit from automobile significant (16%)

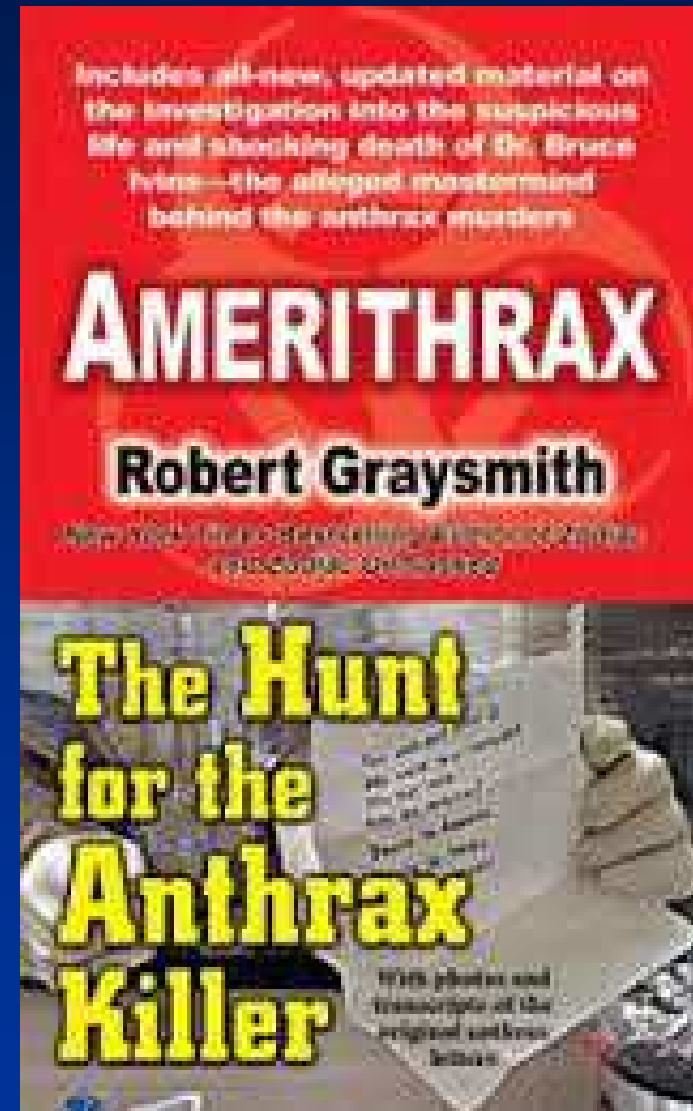


Attacks

- 54% lethal toward target
- 29% collateral damage (injury or death)



Collateral Victims



Collateral Victims

- Killed or harmed in 29% of cases
- Highest number: Tucson case, 17



Attacks

- 89% direct, interpersonal attacks
- 7% indirect, distance attacks
- 11% attacks displaced onto proxies
 - Happenstance and convenience rather than intentional displacement



Proxies attacked instead (11% of cases)

- Bodyguard
- Family members
- Significant other
- Professional successor
- Postal and office workers
- Friend
 - proxy was also a public figure



Attack Methods

- Shooting 57%
- Physical Assault 18%
- Stabbing 11%
- Toxin laced mail 3.5%
- IEDs 5.4%
- 20% made their weapons



Lethality Risk

- Journalists 100%
- Film-television industry figures 100%
- Business leaders 100%
- Health care/religious leaders 100%
- Music Industry Celebrities 57%
- Politicians/Political Party Figures 55%
- Judges 38%



Observations

- Public figure types more diverse than ECSP
- Attacks occurred at locations where one could reasonably expect to find the public figures
 - Detailed research/knowledge may be unnecessary much of the time
 - Lengthy period of surveillance and planning may be unnecessary much of the time



Observations

- Politicians at greatest risk
 - Fatality rate when attacked 55%
 - Threat is largely personal, rather than ideological
 - Easy to find
 - Largely attacked at work (54%) and during business hours (85%)



Observations

- Emergence of athletes as an at-risk group
 - 19% of sample (higher than ECSP*)
 - Almost always (82%) attacked late at night (midnight to 6:00 a.m.)
 - Pro athlete lifestyle / situational vulnerability
 - Over half link to attendance at nightclubs (45%) or parties (9%)



Observations

- Judicial security becoming increasingly important
 - 16% of sample (higher than ECSP)
 - Easy to find
 - Largely attacked at work (67%)
 - Usually attacked by litigants (67%)



Observations

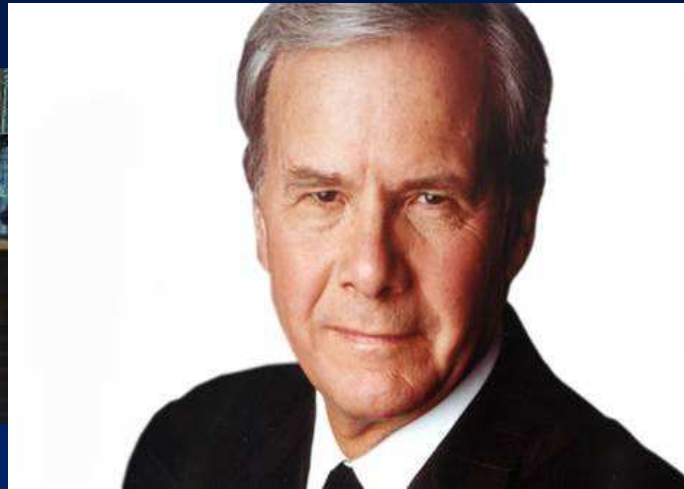
- Music celebrity attacks 10% of cases
- All involved a firearm (6 were shot and in 7th case offender attempted to access a firearm on-site)
- East coast-west coast hip hop music “war”
 - 4 of 7 cases



Observations

- Journalist attacks 10% of cases
- No previous studies of attacks in the US
- 100% fatality rate
- Each case unique
 - Live, on-air attack
 - Ambush to prevent completion of story
 - Anthrax letter
 - Home invasion
 - Unknown





Conclusions

- “Publicly intimate” figure
 - Unprecedented access
 - Willing or unwilling participants in access
- Blurring of personal and public information, primarily due to internet and social media: parasocial (one-sided relationship illusion via media) (Horton & Wohl, 1956, Psychiatry)



Inviting Social Media Posts

The image is a screenshot of a Twitter profile for Paris Hilton. The header features a large banner image with the text "I LOVE YOU WITH ALL MY HEART" in glowing yellow letters against a red, fiery background. Below the banner is a profile picture of Paris Hilton in a pink dress, holding a purple suitcase, with the word "Amnesia" written in a cursive font above her. To the right of the profile picture, statistics are listed: TWEETS 28K, FOLLOWING 7,047, FOLLOWERS 13.7M, and LIKES 11.4K. A "Follow" button is located to the right of these statistics. Below the profile picture, the name "Paris Hilton" is displayed with a verified account icon, followed by the handle "@ParisHilton". A bio states: "My new fragrance #GoldRush is available at @HSN gohnsn.co/lpyGs". Below the bio, it says "Joined March 2009" and "1,558 Photos and videos". A grid of six small images is shown below the bio. The main content area shows a tweet from Paris Hilton dated July 30, featuring a small profile picture, the text "#CurrentMood" followed by seven heart emojis, and a large image of Paris Hilton lying down in a white, cloud-like or smoke-like environment. On the right side of the profile, there is a "New to Twitter?" section with a "Sign up" button, and a "You may also like" section with a "Refresh" link and a list of suggested users: Kim Kardashian West, KATY PERRY, and Britney Spears.

Paris Hilton ✓
@ParisHilton

My new fragrance #GoldRush is available at @HSN gohnsn.co/lpyGs

Joined March 2009

1,558 Photos and videos

Tweets Tweets & replies Media

Paris Hilton @ParisHilton · Jul 30

#CurrentMood ❤️❤️❤️❤️❤️❤️❤️

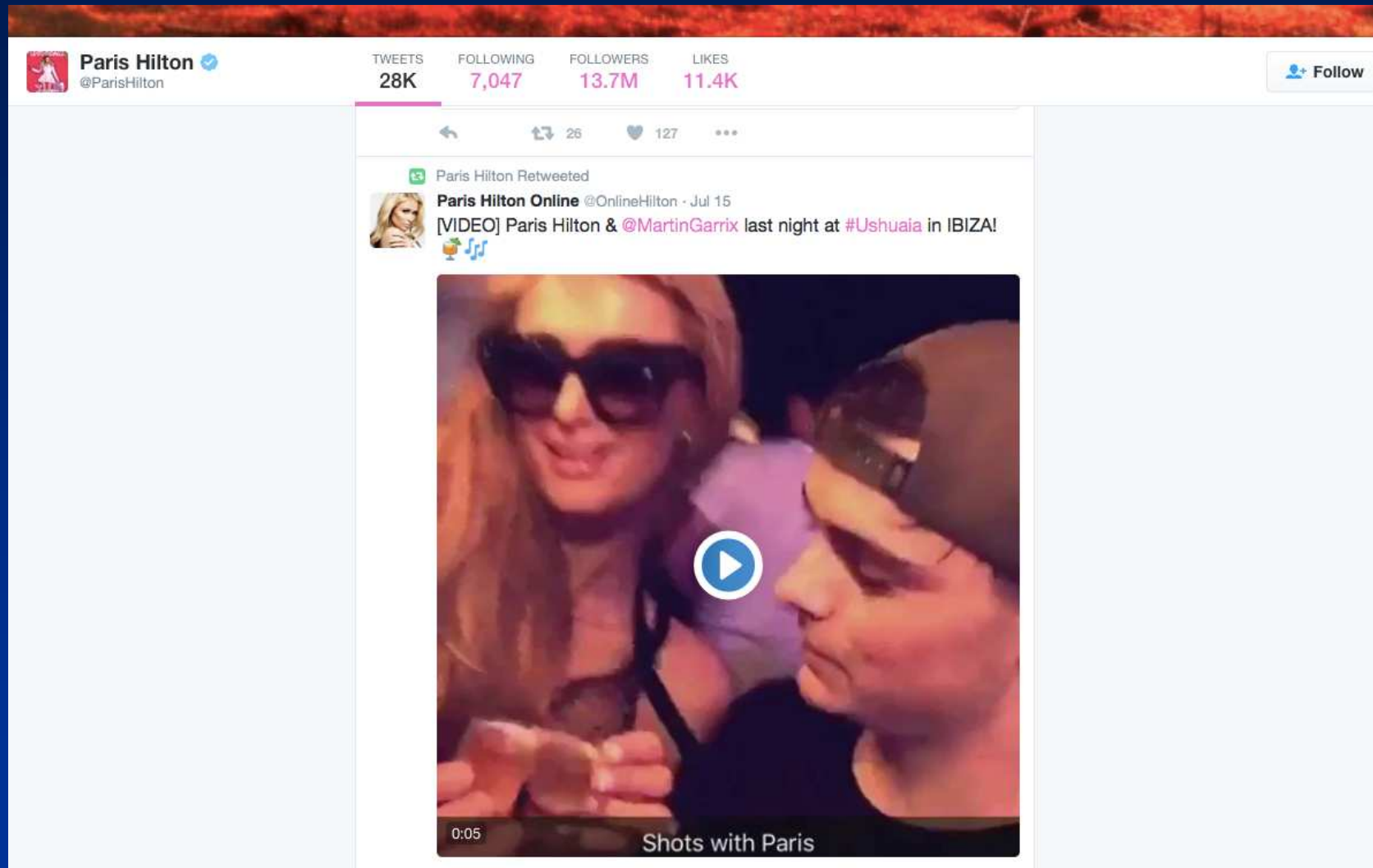
New to Twitter?
Sign up now to get your own personalized timeline!

Sign up

You may also like · Refresh

- Kim Kardashian West @KimKardashian
- KATY PERRY @katyperry
- Britney Spears @britneyspears

Private life made public



Conclusions

- ECSP redux: Perpetrators are males, often psychiatrically disordered, do not directly threaten, are not ideologically motivated, and attack a politician with a firearm



- **A surge** in histories of criminality, a shift toward judges and athletes, and emergence of the “publicly intimate figure.”



- Acts are often personal, and driven by the dynamic of **retaliation and survival**



- No longer a primary desire for infamy



Pride breakfasted with Plenty, dined with
Poverty, supped with Infamy.

(Benjamin Franklin)

izquotes.com



INTERNATIONAL HANDBOOK OF THREAT ASSESSMENT

EDITED BY **J. REID MELOY** AND **JENS HOFFMANN**

OXFORD