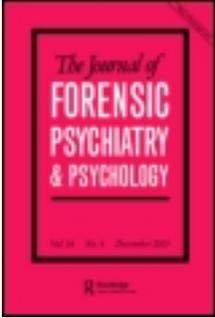


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### Disturbing communications and problematic approaches to the Dutch Royal Family

Bram Bart van der Meer<sup>b</sup>, Lieke Bootsma<sup>c</sup> & Reid Meloy<sup>a</sup>

<sup>a</sup> Black Swan Forensics Inc, Amsterdam, The Netherlands

<sup>b</sup> Regional Police Force, Utrecht, The Netherlands

<sup>c</sup> Forensis, Inc, San Diego, CA, USA

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## Disturbing communications and problematic approaches to the Dutch Royal Family

Bram Bart van der Meer<sup>a</sup>, Lieke Bootsma<sup>b</sup> and Reid Meloy<sup>c\*</sup>

<sup>a</sup>*Black Swan Forensics Inc., Amsterdam, The Netherlands;* <sup>b</sup>*Regional Police Force, Utrecht, The Netherlands;* <sup>c</sup>*Forensis, Inc., San Diego, CA, USA*

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Since the mass murder committed by Karst T. on Queensday 2009 in the Netherlands, special attention has been drawn to threat assessment of people who are a concern because of their disturbing communications and/or problematic approaches to the Dutch Royal Family. This descriptive study examined all subjects ( $N = 107$ ) referred to the Threat Assessment Unit of the Netherlands National Police Agency who engaged in disturbing communications ( $N = 414$ ) or problematic approaches ( $N = 122$ ) toward the Dutch Royal Family during the period 1995–2010. Statistical analysis explored differences among three subgroups: those who only communicated, those who only approached, and those who did both. The vast majority of all subjects were mentally ill. Consistent with the public figure research in other countries, we found that the last subgroup used multiple means of communication more frequently ( $p = .01$ ) and made communications which were less threatening ( $p = .02$ ) than people who only communicated. Other differences which distinguished those who both communicated and approached from at least one of the other two groups were a history of property crime (theft, robbery, or burglary), property damage, not engaging in recommended psychiatric treatment, seeking attention to solve a perceived problem, and pathological fixation. The results are compared with the published findings concerning communications, approaches, attacks, and assassinations of public figures, and recommendations are made to help threat assessment professionals identify more quickly and easily those disturbing communicators who are likely to approach.

**Keywords:** violent offence; violence; stalking; risk factors; risk assessments; mentally ill offenders

Scientifically understanding the disturbing communications and problematic approaches to public figures has concerned those charged with protecting them since the nineteenth century (Laschi & Lombroso, 1886; Régis, 1890).

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\*Corresponding author. Email: reidmeloy@gmail.com

Contemporary research in this area began with the work of Dietz and Martell (1989) and their focus upon approaches to the members of the US Congress and Hollywood celebrities. Taking the position that problematic approaches are a proxy for targeted violence risk (Borum, Fein, Vossekuil, & Berglund, 1999) toward public figures, such work has substantially increased understanding of those who may pose a threat of assault – as well as their demographic, behavioral, and motivational variations (James, Meloy, et al., 2010; James et al., 2007, 2008, 2009, 2011; Meloy, Sheridan, & Hoffman, 2008; Scalora et al., 2002a, 2002b). Two other complementary lines of research have also been fruitful: the direct study of attacks and assassinations of public figures (Clarke, 2007; Fein & Vossekuil, 1998, 1999; Hoffmann, Meloy, Guldemann, & Ermer, 2011; James et al., 2007, 2008; Meloy, 2011; Meloy et al., 2004, 2008; Unsgaard & Meloy, 2011), and refinement of the understanding of the nature of targeted violence (Borum et al., 1999; Calhoun & Weston, 2003; Fein & Vossekuil, 1995; Meloy, 2001; Meloy, Hoffmann, Guldemann, & James, 2012). Other interesting work has shown the close similarity between public figure stalkers and nonintimate stalkers in the general population (James, McEwan, et al., 2010; McEwan, MacKenzie, Mullen, & James, 2012).

Published findings indicate that the vast majority of non-terrorist disturbing communicators and problematic approachers of public figures are mentally ill (Meloy et al., 2010); fixation on a person or cause is an important variable (Mullen et al., 2009); grandiosity in its various permutations may be an important predictor of an approach (Dietz & Martell, 1989; James, Meloy, et al., 2010); and threat management programs that enhance the mental health care of those who problematically communicate and approach public figures are effective (James, Kerrigan, Forfar, Farnham, & Preston, 2010). Meloy et al. (2010) found in a review of six public figure studies in the US and UK of celebrities, politicians, and Royalty that a number of communication variables positively correlated with an approach to a public figure: presence of mental illness; the absence of a threat; multiple communications and/or targets; multiple means of communications; the absence of antagonistic communications; and requests for help. Such findings, however, are in need of further validation, particularly in other European countries. This study was designed to test such findings in the Netherlands, and then search for other unique variables in four domains (psychiatric history, criminal history, communication variables, and behaviors during approach) that may predict or inform the risk of problematic approaches to the Dutch Royal Family. The practical purpose of this study is to help threat assessment professionals effectively identify those communicators who are more likely to approach a member of the Dutch Royal Family and those who are likely to breach security barriers, and to behaviorally describe those who approach and do not communicate beforehand.

## **Method**

### ***Hypotheses***

This study hypothesized that a Dutch sample of those who only communicated, and those who both communicated and approached, would be significantly different. Those who communicated and approached would be significantly more likely to have a mental disorder, use multiple means of communications, be less antagonistic toward their target, communicate more often, be more likely to request help, and threaten their target less frequently. Additionally, a sample of subjects who only approached and did not communicate would be described, and any observable differences between this group and the other two groups would be tested for statistical significance. Further observation of the data might suggest other variables worthy of statistical testing which heretofore were unaddressed or undiscovered in other studies of public figure problematic communications and approaches (Meloy et al., 2010). The findings of this study might contribute to a more comprehensive understanding of the behaviors of those who send disturbing communications to a public figure and decide to physically approach. Such work may eventually help threat assessors predict who will and will not engage in such behavior and thus improve the timeliness, cost efficiency, and effectiveness of protective intelligence efforts (James, Kerrigan, et al., 2010).

### ***Sample selection***

The sample consisted of all subjects ( $N = 107$ ) referred to the Threat Assessment Unit of the Netherlands National Police Agency because of their disturbing communication(s) and/or problematic approach(es) toward the Dutch Royal Family.

The 107 subjects were responsible for a total of 414 communications and 122 approaches. Only three approaches were at a public appearance of the Dutch Royal Family (all the others were at the palace gates). These three subjects were judged by the security guards to want to be in closer physical proximity to a Royal Family member and the distance was unacceptable. The subjects were divided into three different subgroups:

- (1) Communicators only ( $n = 58$ )
- (2) Approachers only ( $n = 22$ )
- (3) People who both communicated and approached ( $n = 27$ )

Both direct communications to the Dutch Royal Family and indirect communications to third parties concerning a member of the Dutch Royal Family were included. A communication was placed in this study if it was strange, bizarre, threatening, demanding, or considered abnormal, and

consequently reported by the Royalty protection police to the Threat Assessment Unit of the Netherlands National Police Agency. Communications were verbal, electronic, or written on paper and mailed. An approach was defined as problematic if it specifically came to the attention of the security guards due to the subject's behavior and warranted an incident report. Approaches were either attempted at the palace gates or during a public event.

All these communications and approaches were during the period 1995–2010. Data collection intensified after the tragedy at Queensday, 30 April 2009, when Karst T. drove his automobile toward the Queen's bus, killing eight people, including himself, and injuring 18 others. Due to the inability to code approach variables (there was never a threat assessment requested before the attack), the absence of most psychiatric data, security interests on the part of the Netherlands National Police Agency, and the absence of motivational data – the subject died at the scene – the authors decided this case was an outlier and should not be included in the sample. A summary of investigation of this case is available from the National Coordinator for Counterterrorism (2009).

### ***Data extraction***

The codebook of 107 variables was completed from the records of the sample and included personal background, criminal history, psychiatric background, the nature of their communications and/or approaches themselves, and their motivations. Coding was done by the first two authors. The codebook is available upon request. The files comprised mainly police information. Data forms were manually scored for each record and imported into the computerized SPSS database.

Much personal background information was missing. The variables 'education,' 'religion,' and 'social isolation' had such a high proportion of missing values that it was decided to exclude these variables from the analysis. The variables 'cluster-B personality disorder,' 'drug and/or alcohol abuse,' and 'actually using psychiatric medication' were often not discernable from police information. These variables were also removed from the analysis.

The remaining dependent variables ( $N = 43$ ) were divided into objective factual questions and subjective questions which involved interpretation. The interrater reliability of the subjective questions (29 variables) was calculated for 20% of the sample ( $n = 22$ ). These were all subjects who belonged to subgroup number three (communicators and approachers). Cohen's  $\kappa$  could not be calculated for nine subjective variables, because they lacked a symmetric two-way table. Percentage of agreement for these variables ranged from 70% to 100%: three between 70% and 80%, three between 80% and 90%, and three between 90% and

100%. The other 20 items showed Cohen's  $\kappa$  above 0.50. The amount of reliability was equally divided: two variables gave a  $\kappa$  around 0.50; three around 0.60; four around 0.70; five around 0.80; one around 0.90; and five with a  $\kappa$  of 1.0. These  $\kappa$  values range from moderate to excellent (Landis & Koch, 1977).

### **Definition of terms**

A disturbing communication was defined as *threatening* toward the Dutch Royal Family if it met the Dutch legal definition of the offence 'threatening': 'Statements of public violence against individuals or goods, or of violence against an internationally protected person or his/her protected goods, through which danger is created for the general safety of persons or goods, with rape, sexual assault, a crime against life, with kidnapping, serious bodily harm, or with arson' (Cleiren & Nijboer, 2008, p. 339).

Breaching behavior was defined as successfully passing through the security perimeter: for example, if somebody climbed over the palace gates or penetrated a behavioral perimeter established by the police. Damage toward Royal property was not a specific item in our inquiry. This behavior was quite rare and therefore not suitable for statistical analysis. However, a history of *property damage* and any other *property crime* history were coded. The latter included theft, burglary, or robbery. These two variables did not overlap.

*Multiple means of communication* was coded if there was a direct communication to, or indirect communication, about the Dutch Royal Family utilizing more than one method, such as sending a letter and sending an email.

There were no diagnostic interviews with any of the subjects. Because of this limitation, coding for *psychiatric variables*, such as 'having a mood disorder,' was quite strict. This was only coded when (1) a formal diagnosis from a mental health professional was explicitly mentioned in the police contact reports, or (2) psychotic symptoms such as delusions were recorded in the case file and obvious to the researchers. Reports by family, friends, or the subject concerning a diagnosis were not coded as a psychiatric disorder. Due to the limitations of the database, however, observational bias (e.g., selective recording by the police officer of articulated delusions by the subject) could still conflate, exaggerate, or minimize both diagnoses and symptoms.

*Not engaging in recommended psychiatric treatment* was measured by looking at their motivation to seek help voluntarily and willingness to take psychotropic medication. However, the authors are aware of the fact that this is not a static, but a dynamic item. This variable was independently coded by two researchers for 20% of the sample. The concordance rate was 76%; Cohen's  $\kappa$  could not be calculated. Psychiatric coding was done by

two psychologists (van der Meer and Bootsma) with the advice of a forensic psychiatrist as needed.

Two specific psychological concepts were coded in the communications because of their perceived relevance for this study: *fixation* and *grandiosity*. A pathological fixation was defined as an obsessive preoccupation with a person, subject, or cause/problem that results in significant deterioration of that subject's family or occupational life (Meloy et al., 2012; Mullen, James et al., 2009). The fixation did not have to be directed toward the Dutch Royal Family; the subject could also be fixated on a personal problem. Grandiosity was defined as a feeling/opinion of self-importance that was discordant with the facts of the subject's life.

Eleven possible *motivations* were coded: some that clearly arose from delusional beliefs, while the role of psychopathology in others was less clear. Five motivations showed such low frequencies per cell that they were removed: seeking friendship, seeking intimacy, ending a perceived persecution, saving the world/country, and striving for fame. Six motivations were included in the final analysis: claiming Royal identity, seeking to bring attention to a perceived problem, financial gain, seeking help, offering counsel or advice, and holding the Royal Family responsible for their personal situation. Motivations were not exclusive categories in the sense that a subject could have several. When several motivations were present in a given case, the researchers then made a judgment as to which motivation was the primary one. The concordance rate for this subjective variable was 76%; Cohen's  $\kappa$  could not be calculated.

### ***Statistical analysis***

The dataset incorporated a series of variables suggested by international literature and preliminary studies. Descriptive statistics were first used to examine and characterize the dataset. Categorical data were reported as numbers and percentages; some continuous data were considered in relation to the mean, median, and standard deviation. In order to explore the differences among subgroups, univariate analyses were carried out. A  $2 \times 3$  design was utilized for variables that were applicable to all subjects ( $N = 107$ ). For variables which directly corresponded with the nature of the communications or the approach,  $2 \times 2$  contingency tables were used. Simple cross tabulations reported the numbers, percentages,  $\chi^2$ , and  $\phi$ -coefficient as a measure of association and effect size. The original hypotheses were tested for significance along with an exploratory scattergun analysis of the data; the latter focused upon additional psychiatric variables, specific criminal history variables, other communication variables, and specific behaviors during approach. This resulted in the testing of 43 variables. Based purely upon chance, one would expect two to three variables to be significant at the 0.05 level; therefore, significance was set at  $p \leq .01$ .

## **Results**

### ***Demographics***

The average age of the subjects was 48 years ( $SD = 13$ ), and ranged from 21 to 84. The median was 49 years old. Only 8% ( $n = 9$ ) were younger than 30; 18% ( $n = 19$ ) were older than 60. Eighty-six percent ( $n = 92$ ) were men, 79% lived alone ( $n = 84$ ), 71% ( $n = 76$ ) were unemployed, and 66% ( $n = 71$ ) were Dutch ethnicity (subject and his parents were born in the Netherlands). Their residences were often in the middle and the west of the country, which is also the most populated part of the Netherlands. Five people were homeless. Four subjects lived abroad.

### ***Criminal history***

Criminal history was taken from previous police records and judicial documentation. Seventy percent ( $n = 75$ ) had prior police records (police registration but not necessarily a criminal conviction), 55% ( $n = 59$ ) were convicted earlier of any crime, 40% ( $n = 43$ ) had a prior record for violence, 23% ( $n = 25$ ) were convicted for a violent crime, 48% ( $n = 51$ ) had a prior record for threatening, and 20% ( $n = 21$ ) had a conviction for threats. Twenty-one percent ( $n = 22$ ) were not prosecuted because of health reasons, mostly mental health problems. Finally, 15% ( $n = 16$ ) were convicted and ordered into mental health care.

### ***Psychiatric disorder***

Most prevalent psychiatric disorders were in the psychotic spectrum: 75% ( $n = 80$ ) had psychotic symptoms and/or were diagnosed with schizophrenia. Mood disorders and suicide attempts (both 11%,  $n = 12$ ) were less frequent; however, these data were difficult to discern from the police files and were probably underreported. Thirty-two percent ( $n = 34$ ) showed signs of pathological fixation and 36% ( $n = 38$ ) of the subjects showed 'grandiosity.' A majority (71%,  $n = 76$ ) had been in contact with mental health care; 51% ( $n = 55$ ) had been admitted to a psychiatric hospital in the past. Almost half of the entire group (43%,  $n = 46$ ) did not engage with recommended psychiatric treatment, inferred by their medication noncompliance (26%,  $n = 28$ ; 29% unknown) or their involuntary commitment to a mental hospital (36%,  $n = 38$ ; 28% unknown). Thirty-eight percent ( $n = 41$ ) were unknown.

### ***Motivations***

The most common primary motivations of all subjects for contacting the Dutch Royal Family were 'seeking to bring attention to a perceived

problem' (24%,  $n = 26$ ) and 'claiming Royal identity' (13%,  $n = 14$ ). Other motivations, such as desiring friendship ( $n = 2$  as primary motivation) or a loving relationship ( $n = 4$ ), financial gain ( $n = 1$ ), saving the country or world ( $n = 3$ ), notoriety ( $n = 0$ ), counseling (offering advice;  $n = 6$ ), seeking help ( $n = 9$ ), holding the Royal Family responsible for their personal situation ( $n = 6$ ), or ending a perceived persecution ( $n = 2$ ) were all less common. Four subjects' motivations were unknown. Twenty-eight percent ( $n = 30$ ) of the subjects could not be categorized according to our typology. After closer study, the majority of these were completely chaotic (grossly disorganized behavior and thoughts) because of their psychosis and no exact motivation could be determined, a category included in the motivational typology used in the British Royal Family study (James et al., 2009).

### ***Communications***

Different characteristics of the communications and approaches were also explored, divided into means and content. Subjects either directly communicated to the Royal Family (56%,  $n = 47$ ) and/or communicated to third parties *about* the Royal Family (44%,  $n = 37$ ). One-third of the people (31%,  $n = 26$ ) communicated only once. Ten percent ( $n = 11$ ) communicated more than 10 times. One-fifth (21%,  $n = 18$ ) used *multiple means* of communication. Subjects who mailed letters ( $n = 40$ ) were more frequent than those who used verbal or electronic communications. The content of the communications was more often confused (illogical, tangential, rambling, circumstantial; 72%,  $n = 61$ ) than specifically (legally) threatening (32%,  $n = 27$ ). Only four persons both threatened and requested help in their communications.

### ***Approaches***

Sixteen subjects lived in the Hague, the city in which the Dutch Royal Family is resident. The majority of these subjects approached. There was no significant difference in frequency of psychotic illness between people who lived in the Hague and those who did not.

The majority of the 49 subjects who approached did it more than once (69%,  $n = 34$ ). Almost one-third of all the approachers (29%,  $n = 14$ ) put a significant amount of energy in the approach. This was defined as incurring a high financial cost relative to the subject's income, traveling an unusually lengthy distance, or spending much time in order to get physically closer to the family member. Twenty-nine percent ( $n = 14$ ) were arrested during the approach. None of the subjects was violent at approach. Only one person was known to have carried a weapon (a knife), but this could be an underrepresentation since not everyone was searched. The majority of approachers, like the communicators, seemed to be confused (65%,  $n = 31$ ).

A much smaller percentage was verbally aggressive (19%,  $n = 9$ ) or made threats (14%,  $n = 7$ ). Almost half of the approachers made a request (45%,  $n = 22$ ), e.g. to speak to the Queen, or handed in a letter at the palace gate (39%,  $n = 19$ ).

### ***Breaching security***

Eight subjects (16% of those who approached) successfully breached the security perimeter of the Dutch Royal Family. There were no data indicating that a subject attempted to breach and was unsuccessful. The breaching group (those who passed the security perimeter, either behaviorally established by the protective detail or geographically established by the residence) was too small for statistical analyses. However, because of their higher proximity risk, the most striking descriptive results are given below.

Only two out of these eight people communicated before their breaching approach. Three people had approached the Dutch Royal Family before. Two people made a threat during their approach. One subject communicated during the breach by handing a letter at the palace gates. Three subjects communicated after their breach.

All eight 'breachers' had psychotic symptoms and/or were suffering from schizophrenia. Seven had been in mental hospital, and seven subjects had not engaged in recommended psychiatric treatment. Six people seemed pathologically fixated on a person and/or problem. Six persons were also coded for 'grandiosity': they all claimed to have a Royal identity.

The vast majority of the breachers were therefore severely mentally ill, fixated, noncompliant with treatment, did not communicate beforehand, and harbored grandiose delusions of Royal identity. This is the group which was most likely to get into physical proximity of a Dutch Royal Family member, and in this study 3 out of 122 approaches (2.5%) were 'successful' if defined in this way. All breachers reported to the police that they wanted to either go to or talk to a Royal Family member.

Descriptive differences between breachers and approachers who did not breach were notable: all breachers showed psychotic symptoms, while only 76% of the nonbreachers did; 75% of the breachers were fixated, while only 29% of the nonbreachers were fixated; 88% of the breachers did not engage in recommended treatment, while only 46% of the nonbreachers did not engage; 75% of the breachers evidenced grandiosity, while only 29% of the nonbreachers did; and *all* the breachers claimed Royal identity, while only 11% of the nonbreachers did.

### ***Significant differences among subgroups***

Eight out of 43 tested dependent variables within the set of 414 communications, and 107 subjects were significantly different or approached

significance at  $p \leq .01$  between at least two out of three subgroups. These are listed in Table 1.

The variable ‘not engaging in recommended psychiatric treatment’ was coded in 43% of the cases ( $n = 46$ ). Effect sizes were small for all variables, except for arrest during the approach, which showed a moderate effect size. Another nonsignificant trend was suggested which is not listed in Table 1: people who both communicated and approached were more often incoherent in their communication (85%,  $N = 23$ ,  $p = .06$ ) than communicators only (66%,  $N = 38$ ).

Two communication variables from Meloy et al. (2010) were associated with an increased risk of an approach: multiple means ( $> 1$ ) of communication and *no* threatening communication. Evidence of pathological fixation was also associated with an increased risk of approach. Three historical criminal and psychiatric variables were associated with an increased risk of approach: criminal record for property crime, criminal record for property damage, and not engaging in recommended psychiatric treatment. The significance of the variable ‘arrest during an approach’ was probably explained by their disruptive or breaching behavior at the time, making this variable an outcome rather than a risk factor.

There were also some findings that distinguished the two groups of approachers: those who only approached and did not communicate beforehand were significantly more engaged in recommended psychiatric treatment, less fixated, and less likely to be seeking to bring attention to a perceived problem than the communicators who also approached. However, the fixation finding may be a data collection bias given the absence of communications beforehand to offer evidence of their thinking.

### *Nonsignificant differences among subgroups*

The psychiatric variables which showed no significance among the subgroups were psychotic symptoms, suicide attempt by history, psychiatric hospitalization by history, grandiosity, traumatic life event, and mood disorder. The criminal variables which showed no significance among the subgroups were any crime record, and any crime record for threatening, sexual offense, violence, or stalking. The communications variables which showed no significant difference between the communicators and the communicators who approached were multiple communications, communications to third parties, and communications which were insulting, demanding, angry, hopeless, or requesting help. The approach behaviors which showed no significant difference were threatening, insulting, giving a present, requesting something, being verbally aggressive, or being incoherent during the approach. The remaining nonsignificant variables were the five motivations (other than seeking to bring attention to a perceived problem) and the energy invested in an approach.

Table 1. Variables which differentiated among communicators, approachers, and those who did both toward the Dutch Royal Family, 1995–2010.

Variable	Communicators <i>N</i> = 58		Total <i>N</i> = 27		Approachers only <i>N</i> = 22		Effect size (Cramer's $\phi$ )	$\chi^2$	<i>p</i> -Value
	Numbers	%	Numbers	%	Numbers	%			
Criminal record for property damage	11	19	11	41	11	50	0.288	8.862	.01
Criminal record for property crime	9	16	11	41	7	32	0.253	6.849	.03
Not engaging in recommended psychiatric treatment	20	35	17	63	9	41	0.353	13.369	.04
(Pathological) fixation	16	28	14	52	4	18	0.262	7.365	.03
Attention seeking for a problem	30	52	14	52	4	18	0.273	7.968	.02
Multiple means of communication	8	14	10	39	Not applicable		0.278	6.489	.01
Threatening communication	23	40	4	15	Not applicable		0.248	5.245	.02
Arrest during approach	Not applicable		5	19	9	41	0.423	8.761	.01

## Discussion

### *Limitations*

This is a validation study of previously reported findings (Meloy et al., 2010) and a descriptive pilot study to explore other variables rationally derived from the extant research. All findings should be treated as preliminary pending further studies using more rigorous independent variable definitions and selection. Subject selection, for example, was likely confounded by observation bias. In other words, many different functionaries carry out a first judgment as to whether the subject posed any danger or not, and whether or not the disturbing incident should be reported to the National Police Agency in order to produce a threat assessment. There were also no objective criteria determined beforehand to select these subjects – and no consent for participation was necessary – due to the archival nature of this study. Mentally disturbed persons might be overrepresented, because their letters cause greater concern and they may act more bizarrely upon approach. The indirect communications are also likely to have been underreported. There is a Type I error risk in this study due to the large number of variables which were compared across groups and the number of subjects. However, this risk has been reduced by assigning a small significance value to the findings in Table 1. Finally, the rational selection of variables to study is always subject to an overconfidence bias: researchers believe they know all the variables to be studied and are aware of the variables that cannot be known. They strive for a coherent and realistic story rather than recognize that there may be many variables which remain unknown unknowns to them (Kahneman, 2011).

### *Severe mental disorder*

This study confirms the findings of others that the vast majority of those who communicate in an abnormal or disturbing fashion toward a public figure, and approach or do not approach, are severely mentally ill at the time (Dietz & Martell, 1989; James, Meloy, et al., 2010; James et al., 2009; Meloy et al., 2004, 2008, 2010; Scalora et al., 2002a, 2002b). Such individuals not only have a history of mental illness, but also are often viewed as psychotic at the time, either through their delusional communications or their utterances to law enforcement and security personnel when they approach. However, the presence of mental illness alone did not differentiate the communicators from those who both communicated and approached, as it did in other studies (Meloy et al., 2010). The characteristic in the subjects who both communicated and approached was that they were twice as likely not to engage in recommended psychiatric treatment (64% failed to do so) than those who only approached (38% failed to do so) or only communicated (35% failed to do so). Not engaging in recommended treatment appears quite close to noncompliance with treatment, which has been shown to be a specific

problematic behavior according to those attempting to intervene in such cases (James, Kerrigan, et al., 2010). From a targeted violence threat perspective, not engaging with psychiatric treatment is also a prominent characteristic among non-terrorist attackers and assassins of public figures where there is also a history of diagnosis of psychiatric disorder (Fein & Vossekuil, 1998, 1999; Hoffmann et al., 2011; James et al., 2007, 2008; Meloy, 2011; Meloy et al., 2004; Schlesinger & Mesa, 2008). High prevalence for current psychosis and/or severe mental disorder among public figure attackers is a validated finding, with figures ranging from 42% to 65% (see Table 2). These figures are significantly greater than the prevalence rate for psychosis and/or severe mental disorder in the general population (1–3%), although such a chronic or acute mental state alone is not a predictor of an attack (Meloy et al., 2008). We reiterate, however, that there was no violence among the subjects in this study, and no approach where there appeared to be violent intent toward a member of the Dutch Royal Family.

### *Demographics*

Although the age range of those who communicate and problematically approach varies considerably across studies (James et al., 2009; Meloy et al., 2004), the average age in this study was 48 ( $SD = 13$ ), significantly older than the mean age of general stalkers, which is 35 (Meloy, 1998; Mullen, Pathé, & Purcell, 2009). It is also significantly older than the British Royal Family random sample ( $M = 39$ ,  $SD = 13$ ; James et al., 2009). The reasons for this difference are unknown. As in the British Royal Family study, most of our study samples were citizens of their country and resided within their country at the time of communication or approach.

### *Motivations*

Although the 11-type motivational typology used in this study was largely derived from the British Royal Family studies (James et al., 2009), three types together accounted for 65% ( $n = 70$ ) of the primary reasons for a communication and/or approach: claiming a Royal identity (Delusions of

Table 2. Current psychosis or history of severe mental disorder among non-terrorist public figure attackers and assassins in Europe and the US.

Study	Subjects	<i>N</i>	%
Fein & Vossekuil, 1999	US Presidential and other attackers	73	43
Hoffmann et al., 2011	German public figure attackers	14	42
James et al., 2007	British Royal Family attackers	23	48
James et al., 2008	Western European politician attackers	24	42
Schlesinger & Mesa, 2008	US nonpolitical homicidal celebrity attackers	17	65

Royal Identity in the British study), seeking to bring attention to a perceived problem (Sanctuary and Help Seekers in the British study), and chaotic or otherwise unclassifiable motive (the Chaotics in the British study). These three categories also accounted for a majority of the motivations (51%) in the British study.

### ***Risk factors for an approach***

Although this study did not validate four of the variables in the study of Meloy et al. (2010) which significantly differentiated approachers from communicators (presence of psychosis, multiple communications, no antagonistic communications, and requests for help), it did validate two variables: no threatening communications ( $p = .02$ ) and multiple means of communications ( $p = .01$ ). Effect sizes were small, but given the relatively small size of the study sample, these findings are important preliminary results that fall in line with six other public figure communicator and approacher studies (Meloy et al., 2010) in the US and Europe which encompass political, celebrity, and Royalty targets. Both variables infer an initial absence of hostility toward the target and an intensity of pursuit.

Although one-third of all the subjects showed evidence of fixation and grandiosity, only fixation approached significance between the communicators and the approachers ( $p = .03$ ). Approachers who also communicated were twice as likely to be fixated (28% vs. 52%); however, the subjects who only approached were less fixated than the other two groups (18%), showing evidence of fixation in only one out of five cases. This may again be a data gathering limitation, however, since it is much easier to establish fixation when there are communications which precede an approach. Fixation as a risk factor for approach, whether on a person or a cause, did not differentiate between communicators and approachers in the British Royal Family study (James, Meloy, et al., 2010; Mullen, James et al., 2009). Fixation has also been proposed as one of the eight warning behaviors in targeted violence (Meloy et al., 2012).

Grandiosity alone in a logistic regression model was a powerful predictor of approach in the British Royal Family study (James, Meloy, et al., 2010) and produced an Area Under the Curve (AUC) of 0.74 (95% CI, 0.65–0.82). Grandiosity *per se* did not differentiate between the communicators and approachers in this study; and one of the other variables which did emerge, the motivation of seeking to bring attention to a perceived problem, only differentiated between the two approacher groups. The major motivation in this study, however, is associated with grandiosity: claiming a Royal identity, even though it did not distinguish between communicators and approachers (however, it was descriptively greater in the breachers when compared to the approachers who did not breach). In this study, no motivational category distinguished the communicators from the communicators who also approached.

Two other variables were associated with an approach in this study: a history of property damage and other property crime. These criminal behaviors were twice as common in the approachers as in the communicators, but again the effect size was small. We do not know the reason for these associations, and such specific criminal variables, to our knowledge, have not been measured in other public figure studies. Property crime is fairly common among stalkers in general, particularly female stalkers (Meloy, Mohandie, & Green, 2011).

### ***Those who only approach***

James, Meloy, et al. (2010b) found that those who only approached were more likely to engage in intimidating behavior and attempt a breach than those who communicated with the British Royal Family beforehand. They were also less deluded, persecuted, grandiose, and confused than those who both communicated and approached. We found that the Dutch subjects who only approached were also more likely to breach, yet were also severely mentally ill, less fixated, more engaged in recommended psychiatric treatment, and less likely to be seeking to bring attention to a problem than the communicators who also approached. This is a potentially difficult and aggressive group, since the protection detail will have no early warning through communications that these particular subjects may approach. Such cases confirm the notion that threat assessment in some cases can only be done at the point of first contact by the personal protection officers, not the threat assessors, since there are no data to be analyzed before an initial approach. An alternative reason for the absence of communications other than the approachers' failure to communicate is that communications did exist but the correspondence officers or addressees failed to recognize them as warranting attention and did not refer them to the Threat Assessment Unit. This is a remediable problem through education and training of the initial recipients of Royal Family communications.

### ***Practical implications for public figure threat assessment***

Those individuals who send disturbing communications to members of the Dutch Royal Family were typically mentally ill males in their fifth generation of life, living alone, unemployed, and with a history of police contact and criminality, often violent. The majority were seeking to bring attention to a perceived problem, claiming Royal identity, or confused in their communications. Of the 49 approachers in the study group during this period (1995–2010), none was violent, and none – other than perhaps the Karst T. case – was clearly motivated to attack or assassinate a member of the Dutch Royal Family.

Known risk factors need to be taken into account when conducting a threat assessment toward a public figure. There is growing evidence that individuals engaged in protective intelligence should focus on

communicators who display an intensity toward and fixation upon the public figure, evident by a deterioration in other aspects of their lives, and the utilization of multiple means of communication. Most abnormal communicators are mentally ill, but a lack of engagement with recommended psychiatric treatment is another suggestive red flag that the subject may approach. And contrary to traditional police lore, the *absence* of a threatening communication, now replicated in the Netherlands, increases the risk of an approach. In the Netherlands, two unique distal variables have also emerged which correlate with an approach: a history of property damage and property crime (theft, burglary, robbery). Such directed focus of attention by the threat assessor will allow for categorization of cases as either high risk or low risk for an approach, and will help prioritize further intelligence investigation of a particular subject (Fein & Vossekuil, 1995). As interest in a public figure increases, the ability to filter through the ‘noise’ of communicators who pose little risk of an approach becomes mandatory.

Our findings also emphasize the importance of attending to those who approach and did not communicate beforehand. In the Netherlands, it appears that such approaching subjects who are psychotic, grandiose, fixated, claiming a Royal identity, and not engaged in recommended psychiatric treatment are most likely to breach. Although none of the breachers in this study intended an attack upon a member of the Dutch Royal Family, a breach of security and physical proximity to the family member is a prerequisite for an attack.

### ***Future directions***

This study establishes associations between communicators who approach a member of the Dutch Royal Family, and those who do not, but further research is needed on the predictive validity of such variables. It cannot be said that those variables which were validated in this study from the review of Meloy et al. (2010), that is, the absence of threats and multiple means of communication, predict an approach; such work is dependent upon predictive studies, and more precisely, a classification tree method rather than the usual regression method (Gardner, Lidz, Mulvery, & Shaw, 1996). ‘Such an approach prioritizes an interactive and contingent model of violence risk – one that allows many different combinations of risk factors to classify an individual at a given level of risk’ (Monahan et al., 2005, p. 2). In the domain of public figure risk, the preferred variable being predicted would be a problematic approach, since it functions as an analogue for violence risk toward the target – and attempting to predict violence toward a public figure is impossible given such a low base rate. Problematic approaches also may cause distress among Royal Family members, disruption of public events and schedules, and policing costs: such broader prediction has a much more immediate practical value.

Application of such research to other public figures in the Netherlands, such as politicians and celebrities, would also be useful. A recent study suggests that subjects who abnormally communicate and may problematically approach politicians are typically younger than this study's sample, threaten through electronic means, often represent the beliefs of a political group, and do not have a mental disorder (De Groot, Drost, & Boutellier, 2009). Such comparative research could have important practical benefit for those entrusted with the protection of Dutch politicians.

From a clinical perspective, a more detailed study of the psychiatric symptoms that are associated with an approach appears warranted. This has only been done in one previous study in Germany involving non-terrorist attacks on political figures (Hoffmann et al., 2011). The unwillingness or inability of our subjects to engage in recommended psychiatric treatment also invites more practical research into establishing the efficacy of mental health treatment programs for such subjects in the Netherlands; such a program has been demonstrably effective in the UK (James, Kerrigan, et al., 2010). At present, Assertive Community Treatment teams are addressing this problem in the Netherlands by focusing upon individuals who pose a threat, have a diagnosable mental disorder, and have been resistant to traditional mental health care.

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