

Public Figure Attacks in the United States, 1995-2015

J. Reid Meloy, PhD
SSA Molly Amman, JD



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

- In press, Behavioral Sciences and the Law
- 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
- Slides at drreidmelo.com



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 has been charged with the murder of David Madson in Chisago County, Minnesota. Authorities believe that he fled Minnesota in Madson's Jeep Cherokee.

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.

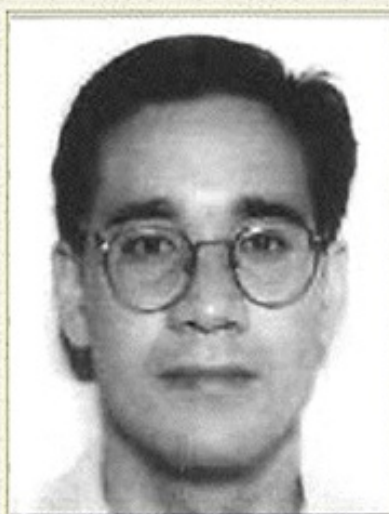
In Pennsville, New Jersey, authorities were called to a cemetery when the caretaker failed to return home from work on Friday, 5/9/97. The caretaker was discovered murdered. His vehicle was also reported to be missing. There are strong similarities between this murder and the other murders committed in Minnesota and Illinois.

The caretaker's vehicle is described as a red 1995 Chevy pick-up, with a dark interior, bearing New Jersey license plate KH993D.

REWARD: The FBI is offering \$10,000 for information leading to the apprehension of Cunanan.

REMARKS

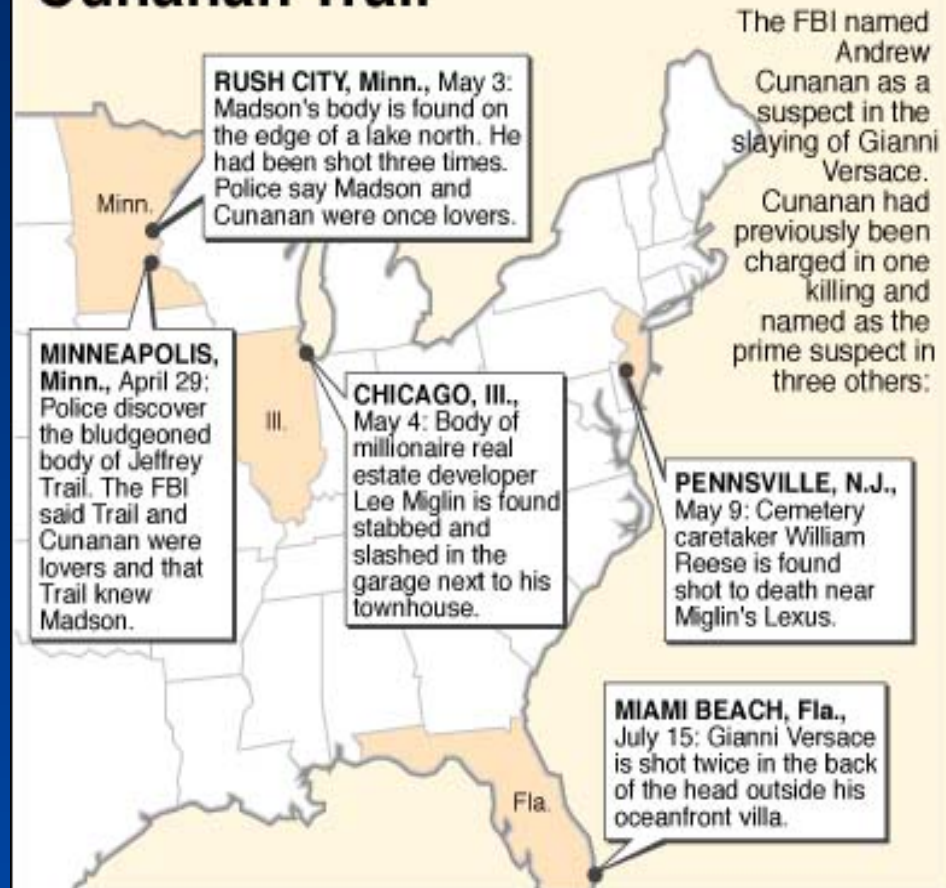
Cunanan may wear prescription eyeglasses. He allegedly has ties to the gay community. He portrays himself as



Andrew Phillip Cunanan

May-July, 1997

Cunanan Trail





**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

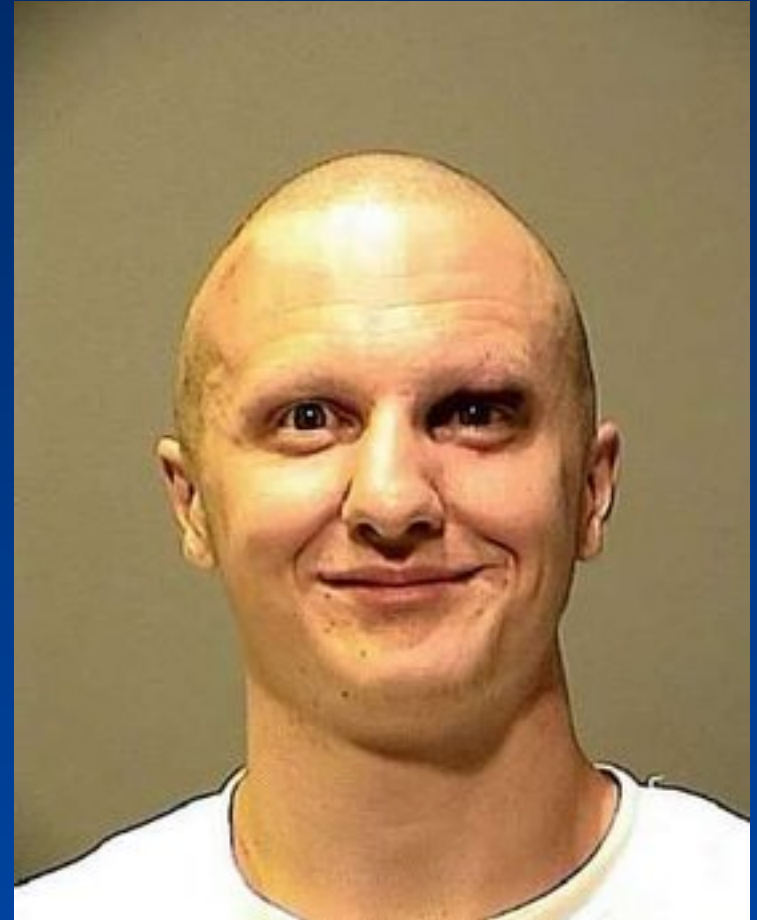
58 targeted victims

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
- 37.5% of public figures knew their attacker



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)
- 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

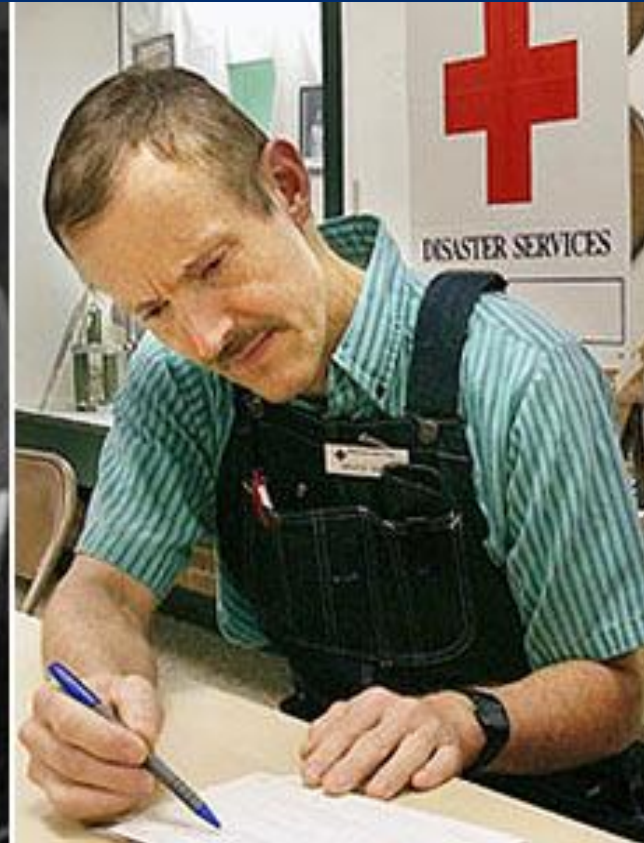


Retaliation and Survival

- 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



Attack Characteristics

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

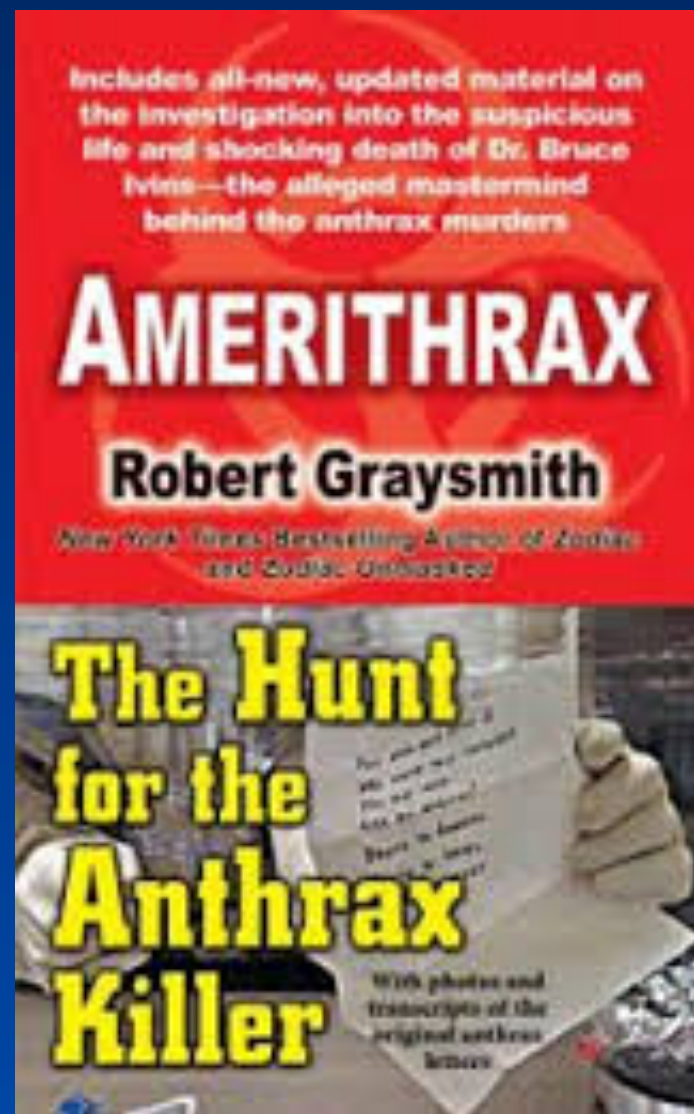


Attacks

- 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%



The Ballad of Carl Drega

Essays on the Freedom Movement, 1994 to 2001

By Vin Suprynowicz

Carl Drega

- 1970s: Carl Drega became known as a local menace
- 1995: Began stalking Judge Vickie Bunnell
- 1997: Attack
- Judge plus three assassinated, three others wounded
- Booby traps left for LE



One neighbor's thoughts

- “Somebody that you should be goddamned afraid of. He had bad blood for everybody. He was a psycho, a terror...he was extremely clever, but as nutty a man and you'd ever meet. He was one you were afraid to be around because you never knew what he was going to do next.”





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

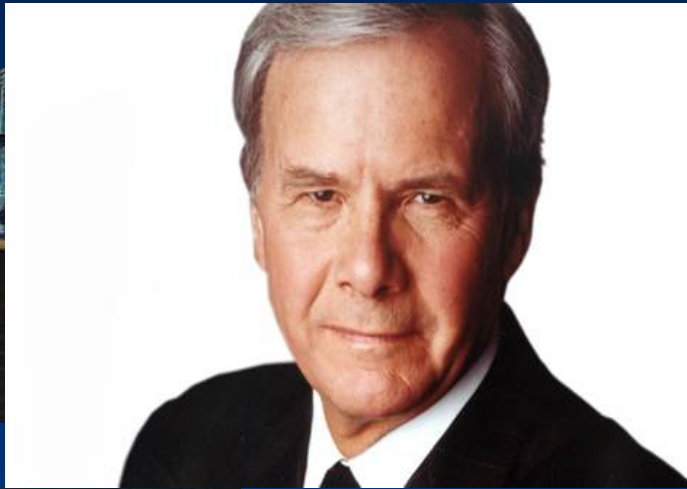
- Music celebrity attacks 10% of cases
- All involved a firearm (6 were shot and in 7th case offender attempted to access a firearm on-site)
- East coast-west coast hip hop music “war”
 - 4 of 7 cases



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

Paris Hilton @ParisHilton

My new fragrance [#GoldRush](#) is available at [@HSN gohsn.co/lpyGs](#)

Joined March 2009

1,558 Photos and videos

Tweets Tweets & replies Media

Paris Hilton @ParisHilton · Jul 30

[#CurrentMood](#) ❤️❤️❤️❤️❤️

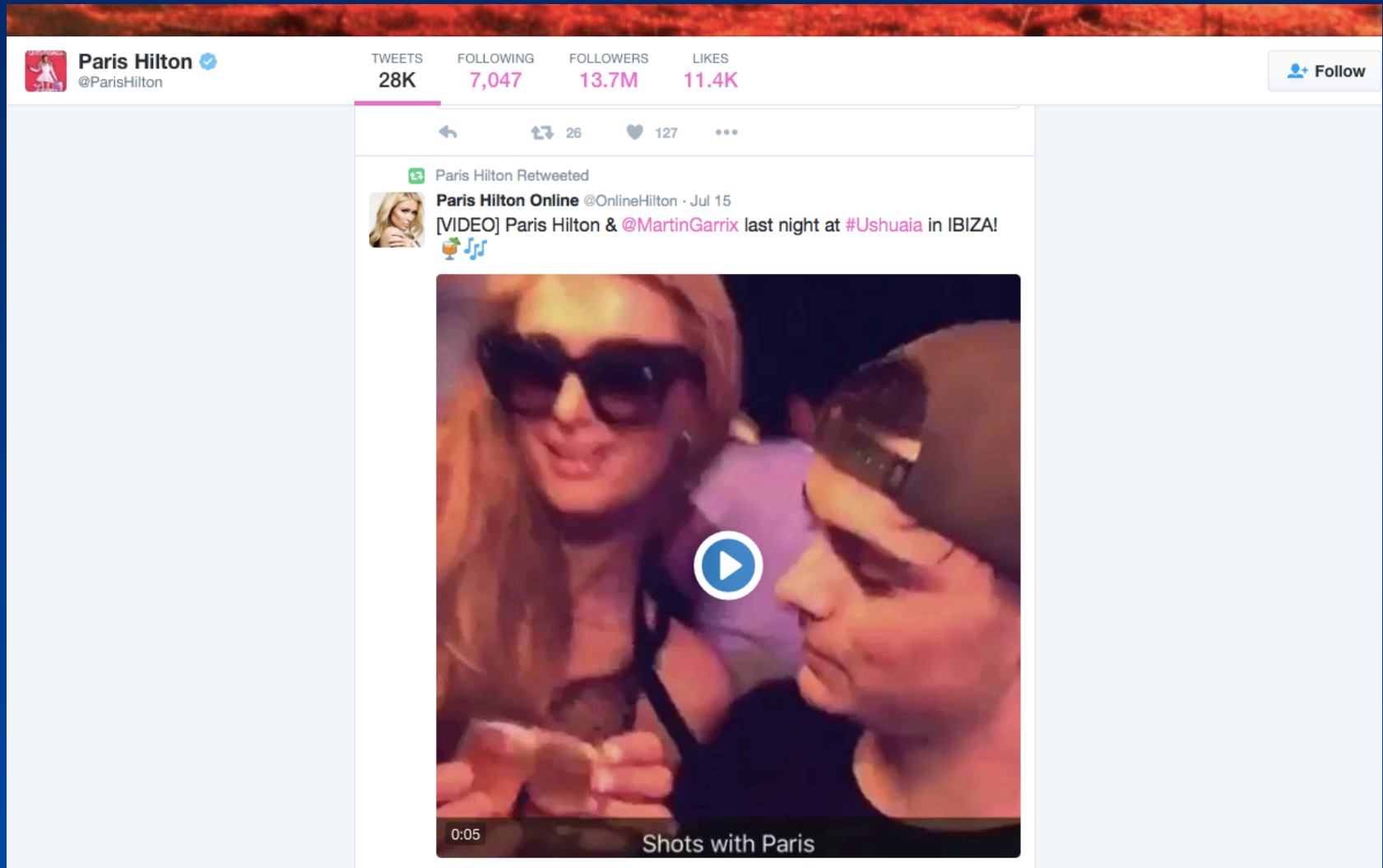
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Private life made public



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