

FROM VIOLENT WORDS TO VIOLENT DEEDS?  
ASSESSING RISK FROM THREATENING COMMUNICATIONS

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By

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## ABSTRACT

The goal of this research was to identify factors that improve the accuracy of violence risk assessments made in cases involving threatening communications. Specifically, this research examined psychopathological, social, demographic, and dispositional characteristics of threateners, target/victim types and their relationship with threateners, psycholinguistic features of threatening communications, and methods of contact. The goal was to assess whether or not these variables are significantly associated with a greater likelihood that threateners would approach or harm targets. The outcome of each threat case was retrospectively determined through interviews of local, state, and federal law enforcement officers who investigated these cases. The study's database consisted of 96 cases investigated and assessed by the Federal Bureau of Investigation's National Center for the Analysis of Violent Crime. Variables were scored manually and by two computer software programs which identified threateners' cognitive and emotional states.

This study examined three broad hypotheses: (1) There are social, demographic, and psychological characteristics of threateners associated with threat case outcome; (2) There are social and demographic characteristics of targets/victims associated with threat case outcome; and (3) There are language features, document features, and methods used to communicate threats associated with threat case outcome.

The first hypothesis was not supported, since characteristics of the threatener were not found to be associated with case outcome. The second and third hypotheses were supported by the following trends: two risk-enhancing factors related to the target/victim and eight risk-enhancing and four risk-reducing factors related to the threatening communication and methods of communicating were associated with case outcome. Two variables appear to signal the presence of cognition and emotion associated with predatory violence. An equation was created that accurately predicted 70.8% of all case outcomes in this study and 93.2% of the outcomes in the low (.00-.19) and 92.9% in the high (.5-1.0) ranges of prediction scores. Some limitations of this study and future research directions are discussed, along with potential application to involuntary hospitalization (commitment) decisions and release (i.e., from psychiatric hospitals) and parole decisions.

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This Dissertation is Dedicated to My Husband and Daughter  
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### **Chapter 1 - An Introduction to Assessing Threats**

An attractive news anchorwoman receives numerous letters professing love for her. The writer includes detailed descriptions of her attire and her travel on different days, a clear indication that he has been following her. After mailing these letters to the news station where she works, he begins leaving notes at her residence. Although initially positive and loving, the tone of his letters turns to angry rants about her “infidelity” after he observes her at a restaurant with her husband.

A company which manufactures baby food receives a letter warning that poison has been added to several jars of its product. To support this claim, the writer includes the address of a grocery store where the poisoned baby food is now on the shelf. The writer demands millions of dollars, threatening that he will not give notice the next time if the extortion money is not paid. The baby food company immediately dispatches local authorities to the store and removes all their products from the shelves. Toxicology tests reveal several jars contain rat poison.

A security guard at a petroleum plant receives a bomb threat. The caller claims that multiple bombs have been planted at the facility, and these bombs are programmed to blow up within 24 hours. The caller leaves no information about his identity or motive. A thorough search of the facility uncovers only one crudely made fake bomb.

A hospital receives a series of letters spanning several months. The letters contain threats to bomb the hospital and to kill an unnamed “doctor, nurse, and child.” One night

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an intruder breaks into the home of one of the hospitals' nurses. He ties her up, rapes her, and then strangles her seven-year-old son.

### **The Problem**

Individuals, corporations, and buildings are among the targets of written, telephone, email, and personal threats every day. Threats can be a factor in many categories of crimes, such as product tampering, extortion, bombing, domestic violence, stalking, and murder. Law enforcement agencies and private security firms that investigate these cases face three major challenges: (1) assessing threatener characteristics that relate to dangerousness; (2) predicting whether or not targeted violence is likely to occur; and (3) using those reliable and valid predictors as an aid in identifying and apprehending the threatener. Once investigators make these predictions and assessments, they must decide how best to protect potential targets. The consequences of their decisions may involve injury or even death and may require extensive personnel resources and large expenditures of money; therefore it is critical that assessments and predictions be as accurate as possible.

Cases involving threats have led a handful of agencies (e.g., the Federal Bureau of Investigation, the Capital Police in Washington D. C., the Naval Investigative Service, the Secret Service, and the Los Angeles, California Police Department (LAPD)) to establish units devoted to threat analysis. LAPD was also instrumental in establishing the Association of Threat Assessment Professionals (ATAP) in 1992. This association facilitates liaison among law enforcement, academia, and the business community, and

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provides a forum for sharing research and information on effective investigative strategies. In 2001, the first issue of the *Journal of Threat Assessment* was published. Still, psycholinguistic analysis of threatening communications is in its infancy.

### *Psychopathological Indicators of Those Who Threaten and/or Pose a Threat*

As law enforcement, security consultants, and behavioral science professionals have become increasingly aware of and involved in threat cases, they have begun designing research for identifying salient factors for “risk of targeted violence” and “offender characteristics” (Baumgartner, Scalora, & Plank, 2001). Several studies have examined social, demographic, and psychopathological characteristics of threateners by grouping them according to the types of crimes the threatener commits or vows to commit, such as stalking (Zona, Palarea & Lane, 1998; Meloy, Davis, & Lovette, 2001). Other studies have focused on the types of targets they chose, such as political figures (Fein & Vossekuil, 1999) or judicial officials (Calhoun, 1998).

Some research has sought to link mental and personality disorders with the likelihood of violent behavior. One pioneering example is the MacArthur Risk Assessment Study (Monahan, Steadman, Silver, Appelbaum, Robbins, Mulvey, Roth, Grisso, & Banks, 2001), which developed multi-branched decision trees of risk-enhancing factors, such as psychopathy, prior arrest history, alcohol or drug abuse, and a history of violence. Personality disorders are also predictors of an increased risk of violence, with antisocial personality disorder among the most noteworthy risk factors (Comer, 1998). Psychopathy (Hare, 1991, 1993), in particular, is a significant enough

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risk factor in predicting violence that some actuarial tools, such as the Violence Risk Assessment Guide (VRAG), use it as a predictive factor (Quinsey, Harris, Rice, & Cormier, 1998). But with only a threatening letter to work from, the ability to assess for mental or personality disorders is limited.

#### *Psycholinguistic Features Linked with Psychopathological and Dispositional Indicators*

The relevance of discussing links between psychopathological conditions and violence for this current research is found in the degree to which the analysis of language use can predict risk of violent behavior. In a threat case, the threatening communication is often one of the few sources of information, or the only source of information, from which investigators must expeditiously make decisions during the initial phase of an investigation. Consequently, researchers have begun to question whether or not characteristics of threatening communications can provide clues about threateners' psychopathology and intentions: specifically, whose threats are likely to be "sound and fury signifying nothing," as Shakespeare's Macbeth said, versus those likely to do the deed.

The first significant research to study this aspect of threats concentrated mainly on specific verbiage and stylistic features of the communication (Dietz, Matthews, Van Duyne, Martell, Parry, Stewart, Warren, & Crowder, 1991; Dietz, Matthews, Martell, Stewart, Hrouda, & Warren, 1991). However, a growing body of research, much of which emanates from political psychology, indicates that the ways in which an individual uses language can be associated with psychopathological disorders and dispositional



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characteristics, and linked with violent behavior. One example is Gottschalk's (1995) extensive research on measuring psychological states through content analysis of verbal behavior. This research led Gottschalk and Bechtel (2001) to construct a software program called PCAD 2000 (Psychiatric Content Analysis and Diagnosis), which uses content analysis to identify psychological states. Another example is Hermann's (2003) methodology for measuring personality characteristics from language use, which is the basis of a computer content analysis system called Profiler Plus or Profiler + (Young, 2001). The presence of certain characteristics, as measured by Profiler Plus, has enabled scientists to explain and predict some behavior of national leaders.

#### **Purpose of the Study**

Although law enforcement and security agencies have begun to focus their resources on understanding and predicting whether or not a threat is likely to be carried out, only a limited number of researchers have studied threatening communications and threateners. The present study was designed to further that knowledge. It sought to identify features of threat cases that will aid investigators in anticipating which threateners are more likely to physically approach or harm their targets. Specifically, this research examined psychopathological, social, demographic, and dispositional characteristics of the threatener, target/victim type and relationship with threatener, and the psycholinguistic features of written threatening communications to assess whether or not these variables are significantly associated with a greater likelihood that threateners would approach or harm a target (or someone or something associated with the target).

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This research is retrospective, because the outcome of each threat case was determined through interviews of local, state, and federal law enforcement officers who investigated these cases. The goal of this retrospective analysis was to identify factors that improve the accuracy of violence risk assessments that law enforcement must increasingly make.

The study's database consisted of cases the Federal Bureau of Investigation's (FBI) National Center for the Analysis of Violent Crime (NCAVC) analyzed and then *closed* during 1997 and 1998 (*closed cases* are defined as NCAVC completing its analysis). The fact that other agencies referred their cases to NCAVC often meant that these were among the most difficult cases to solve. NCAVC is a behavioral science and resource center which offers investigative support, research, and training to United States and international law enforcement agencies which are confronted with bizarre, serial, violent, and complex criminal behavior.

### *Research Hypotheses*

Given the need for more accurate assessments of the risk of violence in threat cases, and the growing use of psycholinguistic analysis of threatening communications to make these assessments, this research focused on three broad, but different sets of factors, and their predictive accuracy (and power) in regard to the outcome. *Outcome*, usually thought of as the dependent variable, was defined as one of four possible actions: (a) the threatener committed the threatened acts, (b) the threatener carried out harmful actions other than what was threatened, (c) the threatener approached or stalked the target/victim, or (d) the threatener committed *no action* (other than writing the threatening

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communication). It should be noted that the latter group (no action) serves as our baseline condition though it is not a true baseline group—individuals who think about such threats but who do not take the action step of even writing to the target—a group that is unobtainable. Still, as the initial threat letter triggers the assessment process, we want to differentiate those who take further action steps from those who do not.

There are three broad hypotheses:

- (1) *There are social, demographic, and psychological characteristics of the threatener associated with the outcome of a threat case.*
- (2) *There are social and demographic characteristics of the target/victim associated with the outcome of a threat case. Target is defined as the person, property, or entity being threatened. Victim is defined as the person, property, or entity actually harmed. The victim and target may or may not be the same, e.g., the threatener may have written a letter in which he threatened a target, yet he burned down the house of the target's sister.*
- (3) *There are language features, document features, and methods used to communicate threats associated with the outcome of a threat case. A threatening communication is defined as any written information which implies or explicitly states the potential of harm delivered to targets/victims or agents acting in their behalf. In most instances, threatening communications were letters, cards, or notes, but they included diaries or packages which contained multiple communications. Personal visits, telephone calls, and other means of contact were measured as separate variables.*

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### *Significance and Need*

Although a number of studies (e.g., Monahan et al., 2001; Quinsey et al, 1998; Pinizzotto & Davis, 1992; Dutton, 1998) have focused on factors which increase the potential for violence, relatively few have focused on risk factors for violence in threat cases. The present study is innovative in a number of ways:

- (1) This study included not only a greater breadth of criminal cases (e.g., stalking, murder, extortion, product tampering, sexual assault, harassment, and more) than in much of the previous research, but also a greater variety of target types (e.g., both people and institutions/objects).
- (2) Although the present study examined the relationship of isolated language features to threat outcome (as have previous studies), it also analyzed the relationship between outcome and intervening variables—psychological characteristics—as measured by the PCAD and Profiler Plus (version 4) computer software programs.
- (3) This study has resulted in a predictive equation composed of variables drawn from the threatening communication and methods used to communicate the threat. This predictive equation can aid investigators in increasing the accuracy of their predictions of threateners more likely to approach targets or to become violent.

“Violence is a complex behavior with multiple determinants, manifestations, and outcomes” (McNiel, Borum, Douglas, Hart, Lyon, Sullivan, & Hemphill, 2002, p.

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153). Be that as it may, law enforcement and security agencies must assess risk of targeted violence. Simply put, they must identify the doers from the non-doers. The problem is compounded, as the risk assessment literature reveals, because contrary to public opinion and television crime shows, violent behavior is neither frequent, nor pervasive: in fact, empirical studies show that actual violence is a low-probability event. Nonetheless, professionals who analyze threat cases need valid correlates to predict which threateners are most likely to move from violent words to violent deeds.

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### **Chapter 2 – Review of the Relevant Research**

Assessing intent from behavior and language is as old as humankind's quest for survival. But people do not always say what they mean, and they do not always mean what they say. Hence a host of factors contribute to judgments about the veracity of threats to harm. Known contributing factors and new factors that we suspect might relate to harming are the focus of this chapter.

Threatening communication cases can be particularly difficult to assess since they often start and end with little more than the threatening communication itself and the identity of the target. Given that investigators often do not know the identity of the threatener, they do not know what biopsychosocial factors may motivate the threatener to act. Despite these limitations, investigators are increasingly tasked with assessing the potential risk of violent action from those who threaten others, and if they had knowledge of factors associated with violent behavior, they could increase their effectiveness in assessing the potential of harm to the threat targets.

This chapter reviews research on complex associations among factors that are relevant to making these assessments. To the extent that research relating to threats, violence, and approach behavior can be segregated, Section 1 reviews research on psychopathological, social, demographic, and dispositional characteristics as risk factors for violence and approach behavior; Section 2 reviews risk assessment factors associated with those who threaten or pose a threat, and Section 3 discusses language use and its relationship with psychopathological and dispositional characteristics.

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### Section 1 – Psychopathological, Social, Demographic, and Dispositional Characteristics as Risk Factors Associated with Violence and Approach Behavior

Because “no action” threats are far more common than threats followed by some action, this low base rate for harmful acts creates an added difficulty for assessors trying to accurately predict which threateners are more likely to cause harm or approach to where the target fears harm. On the other hand, the ability to assess a person’s potential for violence is enhanced by the knowledge of factors associated with violence or approach behavior.

Psychology’s long tradition of attempting to assess intent from behavior and language has relied on a “central assumption underlying several areas of psychology, particularly social psychology and personality psychology, ... that the behavior of individuals is in important ways consistent across contexts. Such consistency is assumed to arise because of the powerful influence of dispositional characteristics, these being psychological features internal to individuals” (Moghaddam, 1998, pp. 103-104).

#### *Expressed Attitude*

Attitude is one such dispositional characteristic (Moghaddam, 1998). Attitudes have at least four functions. They help people (1) understand their world (knowledge function); (2) evaluate and place value on people, events, issues, and other areas in life (value function); (3) realize a more positive self-concept (ego-defensive function); and (4) obtain rewards from others, for example, winning approval for expressing an

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attitudinal position on an issue of importance to another person (social-adjustive function) (Moghaddam, 1998).

An early study which examined the assumption that attitudes cause behavior was conducted by LaPiere (1934). LaPiere traveled throughout the United States accompanied by a Chinese couple (Moghaddam, 1998). Although anti-Chinese prejudice in the U.S. was strong at the time, only one of 250 establishments they visited refused service to the couple. LaPiere subsequently sent questionnaires to these establishments, and approximately one-half responded, with 90 percent indicating that they would refuse service to Chinese people. LaPiere's findings suggested that attitudes do not necessarily predict subsequent behavior. These results were later challenged because LaPiere used a measure of general attitudes in his questionnaire, but compared those results to a specific behavior measure of obtaining service for one Chinese couple accompanied by a white male (Moghaddam, 1998). Other studies' results have suggested that "specific behavioral intentions are good predictors of specific behaviors" (Moghaddam, 1998, p. 104), for example, Kumar and Gairola's (1983) study of Indian women that found that specific and favorable attitudes about contraception accurately predicted contraceptive use.

Additionally, attitudes influenced by self-interest more reliably predict behavior (Moghaddam, 1998). Borgida and Campbell's (1982) study of students' attitudes about expanding parking facilities illustrated this connection. Students listened to taped conversations about the environmental consequences of building new parking facilities.



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Environmental issues favorably affected some students' attitudes about the expansion, but did not influence students who had experienced serious difficulties with campus parking (Moghaddam, 1998).

Attitude research suggests then that the expression of behavioral intentions under some conditions can predict subsequent behavior. Since threats are one specific type of expressed intention about subsequent behavior, the question then becomes, what can research determine about the relationship between the expressed intentions of threateners and their subsequent behavior, and what are the factors that affect this relationship.

#### *Mental Disorders: Social, Demographic and Dispositional Characteristics*

Mental disorders have a long history of association with violence and approach behavior. Acts by individuals, such as Andrea Yates, who drowned her five small children while in the throes of what was later identified as schizophrenic psychosis, serve to illustrate the association. Although the general public still embraces the misconception that anyone who commits a brutal, senseless crime must be mentally ill or "crazy" (Perlin, 2000; Stefan, 2001), research indicates that rates of violence by the mentally disordered are not uniformly high, but rather, are related to many different factors.

Monahan, Steadman, Silver, Appelbaum, Robbins, Mulvey, Roth, Grisso, and Banks (2001) conducted the most extensive research to-date concerning the link between mental disorder and violence. After reviewing existing studies on this linkage, Monahan et al. concluded that psychiatrists and psychologists are accurate in no more than one in three predictions of future violence—even when individuals were institutionalized, had

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previously committed violence, and had a diagnosis of mental illness (Monahan, 1981). The stated purposes of this pioneering investigation (Monahan et al., 2001), called the MacArthur Violence Risk Assessment Study, were to improve the “validity of violence risk assessment” (Monahan et al., 2001, p. 9) and to create an actuarial tool. The MacArthur Study sampled white, African-American, and Hispanic ethnicity inpatients from Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, Kansas City, Missouri, and Worcester, Massachusetts. They examined 134 potential risk factors, which could be grouped into demographic, historical, contextual/social, and clinical factors. In order to learn details of violent incidents in the community in which patients were involved, researchers reviewed official records. They also interviewed patients and collateral individuals. The most frequent primary diagnosis of the study’s patients was depression (41.9%), with Alcohol/Drug Abuse/Dependence the second most frequent (21.8%); other diagnoses included Schizophrenia (17.0%), Bipolar Disorder (14.1%), Personality Disorder Only (2.1%), and Other Psychotic Disorder (3.1%).

The types of violence were placed into two broad categories: aggressive acts in which no injury occurred and violence of a serious nature, such as physical injury, sexual assault, and threats made with a weapon. About one-fourth of all violent incidents occurred while the patient was not taking physician-prescribed medication. Contrary to popular belief, very few of the violent incidents occurred during periods when the patient was experiencing active psychotic symptoms (only 7.4% were experiencing delusions

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and 5.2% were experiencing hallucinations). While the MacArthur Study is clearly relevant to this project, verbal threats were not included in that research.

The MacArthur study's greatest contribution to risk assessment for violence by mentally disordered individuals was the creation of an evidence-based multi-branched decision tree built from weighted factors. To explain, two factors whose presence significantly increased the risk of violence were psychopathy, as measured by the Psychopathy Checklist-Short Version (PCL-SV), and substance abuse. Other risk factors of interest included anger, prior criminal history, childhood abuse experiences, parental drug and alcohol use, and concentrated poverty in the patient's neighborhood. The MacArthur study demonstrated that mentally disordered individuals do commit violent acts, and it provided strong support for examining mental disorder combined with psychopathological, social, demographic, and dispositional factors which increase the risk of violence more than the presence of mental disorder alone.

#### *Personality Disorders: Social, Demographic, and Dispositional Characteristics*

As with mental disorders, research has empirically demonstrated that certain personality disorders and violence are associated. Of the ten personality disorders listed in DSM-IV-TR (American Psychiatric Association, 2000), the dramatic or cluster B disorders (antisocial, borderline, histrionic, and narcissistic) are associated with aggressive behavior (Berman, Fallon, & Coccaro, 1998). Antisocial personality disorder and psychopathy, which are closely related, are often considered to be the highest risk factors for violence.

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Numerous studies support the dangerousness of both the psychopath and the antisocial personality disordered individual. Forth and Kroner's (1994) study tested offenders in a federal prison for psychopathy using a diagnostic tool called the Psychopathy Checklist-Revised (PCL-R). They found 26.1% of 211 rapists, 18.3% of 163 mixed sex offenders (adult and child victims), and 5.4% of 82 incest offenders were psychopaths. Quinsey, Harris, Rice, and Cormier (1998) examined violent behavior of 600 men in a maximum-security hospital in Canada after their release. All of the men had been charged with a serious criminal offense. Quinsey et al. developed an actuarial tool, the Violence Risk Appraisal Guide (VRAG), to predict which men would be charged criminally with a new violent offense or be returned to the institution for crimes similar to the original offense during a period of approximately seven years after discharge. The PCL-R (Hare, 1991), which measures psychopathy, was one of the 12 best predictive variables.

Antisocial personality disorder also has a high correlation with violence. A study of 50 offenders who killed law enforcement officers (Pinizzotto & Davis, 1992) found 56% were diagnosed as having antisocial personality disorder. The juvenile killer (Heide, 1999), as well, is more likely to have a diagnosis of conduct disorder (i.e., which is often considered to be a precursor to a diagnosis of Antisocial Personality Disorder in adults). Other personality disorders are also associated with violent behavior. For example, Pinizzotto and Davis found that 23% of offenders were diagnosed as having

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dependent personality disorder, 8% as narcissistic, 8% as borderline, and 5% as passive-aggressive.

Studies of intimate aggressive behavior have found correlates with personality disorders, as well as with social and dispositional characteristics. Baumeister's (1990) study of intimate relationship murder-suicides found offender histories of depression and substance abuse. Dutton (1998) found a relationship between the borderline personality and male batterers who displayed features of intimate relationship abuse cycle. He also found a strong correlation between this behavior and dispositional characteristics of hostility toward women, anger, and a history of rejection by father or mother.

In a study of gender differences in serial murderers, Keeney and Heide (1994) reported that male serial murderers tended to have clinical diagnoses of antisocial personality more often than schizophrenia or psychosis. In contrast, clinical diagnoses, which were available for six of the female serial murderers, included "histrionic, manic-depressive, borderline, and dissociative disorders. Three were antisocial personalities, and one was diagnosed as schizophrenic" (Keeney & Heide, 1994, p. 391). The conclusion one can reach from all of this research is that mental and personality disorders, along with social, demographic, and dispositional characteristics, can be contributing factors to an increased risk of violence.

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### Section 2 – Risk Assessment Factors Associated

#### With Those Who Threaten or Pose a Threat

Threat assessors are tasked with accurately predicting which threateners are either more likely to act out violently or to approach to a distance where they create fear in the target. One obstacle to valid predictions involves some of the methods that have been historically employed. In *Nicomachean Ethics*, Aristotle stated the crux of the problem when he said “it is the mark of a trained mind never to expect more precision in the treatment of any subject than the nature of that subject permits” (Aristotle, 2004, p. 5). When methods rest heavily or solely on the experienced-guided hunches and speculations of grizzled investigators, these may be brilliant; but one investigator’s “truths” may differ from those of another investigator, and neither may be accurate. The value of unsubstantiated hunches, however, lies in creating reasonable hypotheses, some of which were tested in this dissertation. Although empirically based threat assessment research has found many results that support investigators’ hunches, it has also found results that are counter-intuitive, thus attesting to the value of doing empirically based research to identify salient threat assessment variables for predicting violence.

This section reviews a variety of risk assessment factors associated with threateners and their behavior. The first subsection discusses research grouped by the types of targets threateners choose and the second subsection discusses stalking, one type of crime threateners commit.

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### *Research by Types of Targets*

Individuals in the public spotlight, when they are political officials like the President of the United States or members of Congress, or public figures like well-known CEOs or celebrity movie actors, draw intense interest and are more likely to receive threatening communications. Many researchers have focused on these types of targets. The results of research discussed in section 1 suggest that someone with erotomania, for example, may send letters to movie stars, but probably not to judicial officials. Similarly, someone trying to extort money would be likely to target wealthy CEOs, not the President. Those disgruntled by judicial decisions would be likely to threaten judges, not movie stars. Those unhappy with political decisions would likely write the President or members of Congress, not a famous athlete.

Knowing the type of targets threateners select, and the kind of threats they make, helps assessors make predictions about threateners and the risk they pose. In an ideal world, assessors would want clean research on targets, such as research only on CEOs or only on movie celebrities. While some of the research that follows does focus narrowly on one type of target or one type of crime, other research lumps several types together. Still, reviewing available literature informs risk assessors. Most of the available research specifically devoted to threat assessment focused on high profile target types, not ordinary citizens. In this research, the sample includes not only threats directed at a few high profile individuals, but also threats to ordinary citizens.

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### *Celebrities.*

Studies of threateners of Hollywood celebrities (Dietz, Matthews, Van Duyne, Martell, Parry, Stewart, Warren, & Crowder, 1991) and members of Congress (Dietz, Matthews, Martell, Stewart, Hrouda, & Warren, 1991) were the first quantitative studies of significant scope “ever conducted of any kind of threatening or harassing communications” (Dietz & Martell, 1989, p. 2-1). Unlike studies discussed in the previous section, neither the Dietz, Matthews, Van Duyne, et al. (1991) nor the Dietz, Matthews, Martell, et al. (1991) studies dealt directly with the presence of mental or personality disorders in the subjects.

In their study of threatening and inappropriate letters to Hollywood celebrities, Dietz, Matthews, Van Duyne, et al. (1991) looked at characteristics of 1800 communications that 214 writers sent to 22 Hollywood celebrities. Researchers randomly selected 107 writers who had approached celebrities and compared them to 107 writers who had not approached. A communication was defined as any written information or any item that was delivered to an agent of the celebrity. Topics on which letter writers were pathologically focused included Hollywood (52%), a public figure (51%), love, marriage, or sex (15%), injustices (2%), and violent or aggressive themes (2%) with only 5% of the letter writers wanting assistance or rescue. Contrary to intuition, Dietz, Matthews, Van Duyne, et al. found that the presence or absence of threats in the letters was not associated with threateners approaching celebrities, even when writers gave some evidence of plans to carry out the threat (39%), means to carry it



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out (20%), or the opportunity (24%). This finding “challenged long held prior assumptions that threats increased risk of an approach behavior, and therefore potential violence” (Meloy, James, Farnham, Mullen, Pathé, Darnley, & Preston, 2004, p. 1087). Risk-enhancing factors included the threatener writing ten to fourteen letters; writing to the celebrity for a year or more; expressing a desire for a face-to-face meeting; announcing a specific time and location when something would happen to the celebrity target; making telephone calls in addition to writing; repeatedly mentioning entertainment products; and mailing correspondence from two or more geographic locations. Risk-reducing factors included the subject providing a complete return address; using tablet-like paper; including commercial pictures in the communications; attempting to create shame in the celebrity; mentioning other public figures; mentioning any sexual activity; indicating interest of a sexual nature in the celebrity; and expressing a desire to marry, have sexual relations with or have children with the celebrity.

#### *Political figures.*

In Dietz, Matthews, Martell, et al.’s (1991) study of threatening and inappropriate letters to members of Congress, researchers compared the same features in letters from 43 threateners who approached with 43 who did not. Across all threateners, 33% wanted assistance or rescue, in contrast to 5% in the Hollywood celebrity study (Dietz, Matthews, Van Duyne, et al., 1991) and approximately 80% of the letters had some pathological focus, which included injustices suffered (38%), a public figure (21%), love, marriage, or sex (8%), and violent or aggressive themes (17%). Few gave evidence in

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their letters of plans to carry out the threat (10%), having the means to carry it out (4%), or the opportunity (4%). Less than 1% of the letters were of the “cut-and-paste” variety commonly described in fiction.

Turning to the differences between doers and mere threateners, many of the fear enhancing features were associated with decreased risk of approach (Meloy et al., 2004) and therefore counter-intuitive. For example, threatening to harm or to kill, framing the threat in any format (direct, veiled or conditional language), and indicating that the threat would be accomplished—language from which common sense or stereotypes would predict an increased risk of harm or approach—were actually associated with a decreased risk. Dietz, Matthews, Martell, et al. (1991) did not speculate on reasons for these findings, perhaps because this was a descriptive, rather than analytic, study.

Ten risk-enhancing behaviors reported in Dietz, Matthews, Martell, et al.’s (1991) research were writing letters repeatedly; furnishing any identifying information; telephoning as well as writing; closing letters appropriately; being polite; the threatener assuming the role of special constituent; portraying the Congressional member in a benefactor/rescuer role; mentioning love, marriage, or romance repeatedly; expressing a desire for personal contact with the member; and expressing a desire for assistance, valuables, recognition, or rescue. One finding that differed from the Hollywood celebrity research (Dietz, Matthews, Van Duyne, et al., 1991) results was that letter writers who directly threatened Congressional members were less likely to approach, whereas the presence of threats in the Hollywood celebrity research was not associated with approach.

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Results from both studies (Dietz, Matthews, Van Duyne, et al., 1991; Dietz, Matthews, Martell, et al., 1991) contributed significantly to the new field of threat assessment. Both defined a number of salient variables in threatening communications and defined approach and attempted approach differently from earlier research which often focused on sufficiently bizarre behavior that it warranted arrest or commitment in a mental health institution (Baumgartner, Scalora, & Plank, 2001). By focusing on approach rather than bizarre behavior, the analyses from the Dietz studies more clearly informed the problem encountered by law enforcement—that approach could lead to heightened risk of violent behavior. Finally, their findings that those who threaten are either less likely to approach or their threats are not associated with approach began to shape risk management decisions for target protection and led to additional research.

In a subsequent study on threateners of members of U.S. Congress, Scalora, Baumgartner, Zimmerman, Callaway, Maillette, Covell, Palarea, Krebs, and Washington (2002a) examined investigative files of the United States Capital Police's (USCP) Threat Assessment Section (TAS) for the role of the threatener's pre-contact (e.g., prior threats to other federal agencies) and contact behavior with subsequent approaches to members of the U.S. Congress and their staffs. The USCP is tasked with the security of U.S. Congressional members, their staff, congressional offices throughout the U.S., and U.S. Capitol visitors. The sample consisted of 316 cases, 104 of which had a reported and documented approach toward a USCP protectee and 212 cases with no reported or documented approach. Threatening language was evaluated in terms of coherence,

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themes (policy-oriented, anti-government, target-oriented, and personal-oriented), the writer expressing a desire to harm the target or to have the target harmed, and the writer making specific or vague demands for the target to do something. Thirty-four percent of the cases involved written communications to the target or staff and 33% had phone contacts. Mental illness was suspected in 46% of the total subject sample, with approachers significantly more likely to have mental disorder characteristics (60%).

Scalora et al. (2002a) found approachers were significantly more likely to be males, to have articulated personal-oriented or help seeking themes, and to have more criminal offenses (although not for threatening or harassing). Two findings were particularly noteworthy—approachers were less likely to have target-oriented themes or to have used threatening language in their pre-approach contacts (e.g., letters, mails, phone calls) and, contrary to findings in other research (e.g., Calhoun, 1998; Baumgartner et al., 2001), a substantial portion (44.2%) of approachers engaged in pre-approach contacts of the target. Scalora et al. also used logical regression to create a predictive equation using four significant variables: approachers were more likely to have had prior encounters with federal law enforcement, to have used many methods for contacting targets, to have used less threatening language, and to have identified themselves.

In yet another study on risk factors associated with approach and pre-approach behavior toward members of U.S. Congress by the same researchers, Scalora et al.

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(2002b) examined 4387 cases of the United States Capital Police's Threat Assessment Section investigated between 1993 and mid-1999. Approach was defined as

either the investigator or the target contacted described any physical approach involving an articulated threat, threatening gesture, or attempt to unlawfully disrupt a congressional function. Such behavior could include an attempted (intercepted by law enforcement) or actual face-to-face contact with or without a weapon, or attempted or actual assault toward a member of the congressional community (e.g., member of Congress, staff, USCP personnel, or visitor). (p. 1361).

Subjects were described as having used threatening language if they articulated in either a direct or veiled manner a desire to either physically harm the target themselves or to have the target physically harmed.

Scalora et al. (2002b) found subjects physically approached in 22.5% of the 4387 cases and used direct or veiled threatening language in 31.7% of the cases. Although approachers were significantly less likely to articulate threatening language prior to contacting the member of the congressional community, 21% of the approaches and 42% of the violent approaches (2.2% of 4387 cases) were preceded by threatening statements.

#### *Political and public figures.*

As indicated at the beginning of section 2, some relevant research on threat assessment mixes targets. One such research which had public and political targets was Fein and Vossekul's (1999) study of United States Secret Service cases. This work

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focused on 83 assassins, attackers, and near-lethal approachers who targeted the President of the United States and other national political figures, movie, sports, and media celebrities, members of Congress, federal judges, business executives, and state and city officials from 1949 through 1996. The 83 subjects were involved in 74 total incidents. Thirty-four of the incidents involved attacks, whereas 40 were near-lethal approaches. In addition to subject interviews, researchers analyzed all available criminal justice, court, social services, mental records, and third party accounts of the subjects' behavior and history. However, no comparison was made to threateners who did not approach or who approached without weapons so there is no differential comparison, unlike in the current research.

Fein and Vossekuil's (1999) study dispelled the myth that one set of descriptors fits all assassins who choose these types of targets. The attackers and near-lethal approachers in their study ranged in age from 16 to 73. Almost half had attended college (46%). Women were more likely to attack than approach, a finding that contradicts general trends of research results on gender and aggression. Subjects often had histories of mobility and transience. About two-thirds were described as socially isolated. Although most had histories of weapons use (71%), few had formal weapons training (19%). Few of the subjects had histories of arrests for violent crimes (20%) or for crimes that involved weapons (22%). Most had never been incarcerated before their attack on or near-lethal approach to the public figure (66%). Most had histories of explosive, angry behavior. Although only half of the individuals had histories of physically violent

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behavior, many had harassed other people (54%) or had a history of interest in militant or radical ideas and groups (40%), though fewer had been members of such groups (30%).

The subjects' mental health histories indicated that many had experienced serious depression or despair (44%), with 60% having experienced some contact with mental health professionals before the incident. Twenty-five percent of the attackers and 60% of the near-lethal approachers were considered to be delusional at the time of the incident. Many were known to have attempted suicide (24%) or to have made suicidal threats at some point before their attack or near-lethal approach (41%). Perhaps most chilling in terms of potential for prevention, 63% of the subjects had indicated their interest in attacking a public figure to someone, principally family members and friends, and 9% had recorded their thoughts in journals or diaries, though only 7% communicated a direct threat to the target or to law enforcement.

Nearly all the attackers spent weeks, months or years in planning. "Subjects ruminate about assassination, they read about it, ...they choose a target, they carefully plan, they engage in approach behavior and surveillance, they consider whether to escape, and they choose the moment and the weapon for the attack" (Meloy et al, 2004, p. 1088). These attack and approach characteristics are clearly indicative of predatory behavior. "Attacks and assassinations of public figures are not impulsive, emotionally-laden, sudden, or spontaneous acts, as the public often believes. They are acts of predatory violence: planned, purposeful, and emotionless" (Meloy et al., 2004, p. 1088).

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Gavin DeBecker's (1997) research also bears mentioning because it offers risk indicators for political and public figures. As the president of a California company that assesses threats and provides security advice to public figures, including CEOs, rock stars, and Hollywood celebrities, DeBecker has also consulted with and offered training to governmental agencies on his list of warning indicators which he developed from over 350,000 obsessive and threatening communications. Although some of the letters in his database were used in the Dietz, Matthews, Van Duyne, et al., (1991) celebrity research, DeBecker has not published statistics from his research. Despite this, his risk indicators are used by some assessors to predict who might be more likely to approach a public figure.

DeBecker's most valuable pre-approach indicators (which he calls pre-incident indicators) were subjects trying to learn the target's schedule; developing a plan; purchasing a weapon; keeping a diary; and telling people that "something big is coming" (DeBecker, 1997, p. 116). According to DeBecker, the most reliable workplace violence factors were the offenders' inflexibility; weapons purchase; feelings of sadness or hopelessness; identification with others who have committed workplace violence; co-worker fear of the subject; escalation of threats; intimidations toward management; paranoia; adverse reactions to criticism; blaming others; crusading behavior; unreasonable expectations; grievances; police encounters; and recent media coverage of other workplace violence. Threat language that helped in predicting violence included the language of rejection, entitlement, grandiosity, attention-seeking, revenge,



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attachment, and identity-seeking. DeBecker's assassin profile included narcissism; display of some mental disorder including delusions; a lack of healthy intimacy; researching the target; keeping a diary, journal, or record; obtaining a weapon; communicating inappropriately with some public figure (although it did not have to be the target); random travel; identification with a stalker or assassin; grandiosity; the ability to circumvent ordinary security; and making repeated approaches to a public figure. His risk-reducing behaviors included making death threats, which were the least likely threat to be carried out, and modifying the initial threat or issuing several different threats in a row.

#### *Judicial officials.*

Calhoun's (1998) study, appropriately titled *Hunters and Howlers*, described those who actually hunt and those who only threaten. Calhoun examined 2,996 verbal and written inappropriate communications and assaults targeting federal judicial officials in the United States from 1980 to 1993. In 91.9% of the cases, there was no evidence that subjects attempted to implement their threat to harm the targets (*specious threat*). In 124 cases, (4.1%), threateners made some effort to implement their threats, although no violence occurred (*enhanced threat*). In 118 (3.9%) of the cases, threateners assaulted court officials or people associated with them or they damaged property (*violent threat*). Calhoun did not specify how many acted before, during, or after their court cases.

Three distinctive attributes of threats against judicial officials emerged from the data. First, they often involved two or more targets. Whereas the public figure threatener

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often targeted a specific individual, the judicial threatener lashed out at the court system from a perceived sense of injustice that spawned anger. The threats may have been directed at a judge, but in almost half the cases they included others, such as the prosecutor who tried the case or the policeman who arrested the subject. Second, these threats were associated with anger or fear and these feelings related to specific reasons. Almost two thirds were related to court cases involving the subjects and their threats were designed to protect their freedom, their belongings, or even their criminal activity. Third, targets and threateners often knew each other and knew the nature of the dispute between them. The threats were “intended to unsettle or unnerve, to direct justice from its path, to frighten, or to pretend some special relationship exists with the judicial official” (Calhoun, 1998, p. xix). Calhoun’s results stand in stark contrast to patterns found in Dietz, Matthews, Van Duyne, et al. (1991), Dietz, Matthews, Martell, et al. (1991), and Fein and Vossekuil (1999), because Calhoun’s threateners often knew their targets.

Threatening communications could arrive in the form of letters and notes, but they could also be delivered as mail bombs, graffiti, or poisoned candy sent through the mail. Of these, Calhoun (1998) found written communications accounted for 43.1% of the cases, and 96.6% of these were rated as specious. The high rate of speciousness was due in part to the proportion of prisoners who threatened, but were severely limited in their ability to carry out their threats because of incarceration. Of the remaining 609 written threats from non-prisoners, 571 were categorized as specious (93.8%), whereas 32 were categorized as enhanced threats (5.3%), and 6 as violent threats (1%). Enhanced

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threats were defined as containing some evidence that the subject attempted to implement the threats, although Calhoun admitted that some of the evidence may have been coincidental and unrelated to the communication. Violent threats were defined as involving some type of implementation, such as physical injury or property damage. Ten of the cases rated as violent involved bombs or other incendiary devices, one involved poisoned candy, and two involved visits to the victim's residence.

Calhoun's (1998) risk-enhancing threatener characteristics included some evidence of group membership, accomplices, and anonymity, but target characteristics were not a discriminating factor. The method of delivery, however, was the single best indicator of the subjects' intent: Calhoun found that those who told someone, telephoned, or wrote seldom acted violently (1%), whereas *suspicious activity* (e.g., some event which the victim viewed as ominous or about which the victim became concerned or felt uneasy, such as a prosecutor finding a bullet on her bedroom pillow) was most predictive of violence, with 40.5% of these cases having a violent outcome and 17.6% having an enhanced outcome.

In summary, Calhoun (1998) found that howlers rarely hunted. They were content to howl and rant verbally or in writing. Hunters, however, rarely howled; instead, they approached, and the majority of these cases resulted in enhanced or violent outcomes. In many cases their suspicious activity took on symbolic significance (e.g., the bullet on the prosecutor's pillow), making it clear that the hunters could easily violate boundaries and place the targets in danger.

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### *State officials.*

Baumgartner et al.'s study (2001) reviewed threats toward a different type of public official: those in state government. In comparing approach to non-approach cases, their research examined characteristics of these cases, but did not set a goal of discovering a set of risk factors for approach behavior. Contact was defined as a single attempt to communicate by written form (e.g., letters or emails), oral (e.g., phone calls or phone messages), or approach. Baumgartner et al. found that 30% (n = 14) of their subjects either approached or attempted to physically approach the target, whereas 70% (n = 32) initiated contact, but did not approach. Few approachers and non-approachers had a history of unwanted pursuit (7.1% and 9.4%, respectively) or a record of mental health difficulties (14.3% and 9.4%, respectively). Both groups indicated they had experienced a stressful event prior to contacting the target (50.0% in approachers and 36.5% in non-approachers).

Baumgartner et al. (2001) found written communications were present in significantly more of the non-approach cases (68.2%) than in the approach cases (28.6%). Approximately the same percentage of approachers (78.6%) and non-approachers (81.3%) made threatening statements in their contacts. Threats to the targets in approach, compared to non-approach cases, ranged from physical harm (35.7% and 40.6%), property damage (7.1 and 3.1% respectively), harm to reputation (7.1% and 12.5%), harm to others (21.4% and 18.8% respectively), and unspecified threats (21.4% and 25.0% respectively). Both approach and non-approach cases contained some demand by the

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subject (71.4% and 56.3% respectively), and demands were specific, understandable, and related to some specified action in 80% of the cases, and vague in 60%, whereas 40% of the cases contained both specific and vague threats. Concerning themes in the communications, requests for assistance were present more often in approach cases, a result analogous to findings in Dietz, Matthews, Martell, et al. (1991). Child custody was the primary theme in approachers (21.4%), compared to non-approachers (3.1%). In contrast, topics related to political ideology, such as gun rights, were primary topics in non-approach cases (25.0%) and were not present at all in approach cases. Finally, Baumgartner et al.'s results were consistent with other research cited in Section 2, i.e., those who threaten were less likely to approach.

Whereas the focus of Baumgartner et al.'s (2001) study was threats to state government officials, Scalora, Baumgartner, and Plank (2003) examined the differences between individuals who displayed signs of mental illness and those who did not in targeted contact behavior toward state government officials and agencies. Data was gathered from 127 cases reported from 1987-2000. Fifty-six cases were designated as involving mental illness and 71 were designated non-mental illness. Mental illness was defined as meeting one of two threshold conditions: (a) the individual self-reported hallucination or delusional thought symptoms, or (b) there was some external corroboration. Contacts were defined as phone calls, letters, and physical approaches, either actual or attempted. Discriminant analysis determined that mentally ill subjects were more likely than non-mentally ill subjects to make contacts and the content of their

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communications was more likely to contain help seeking themes or religious content, e.g., “references to religious, theological, or spiritual terminology, figures, or icons” (Scalora, Baumgartner, & Plank, 2003, p. 243), but less likely to include insulting or degrading content and verbal threats.

An important management implication of Scalora, Baumgartner and Plank’s (2003) findings for law enforcement is to expand the list of triggers that prompt law enforcement attention. One typical trigger is the expression of aggression in the form of verbal threats. Although mentally ill individuals are less likely to express verbal aggression, they are just as likely to approach their targets as non-mentally ill individuals; therefore, certain content and themes associated with mentally ill individuals’ communications would seem to be risk factors worth evaluating.

#### *Stalking*

“If there is a heart of darkness in the desire to bond with another, it is stalking” (Meloy, 1999, p. 85). According to a national survey, 8% of women and 2% of men will be stalked at some point in their lives (Tjaden, 2003). In the United States, the 1990s might even be described as the decade of stalking due to the increased awareness created by high profile cases, such as the murder of Rebecca Schaeffer, a young actress on a comedy series. In that decade, stalking laws were passed in all 50 states (Rosenfeld & Harmon, 2002), as well as in Australia, New Zealand, Great Britain, and Canada (Meloy, 2000). Stalking behavior can be particularly dangerous because close proximity between

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stalker and target can increase the possibility of violence, although this may be mitigated by the stalker's motivation (Meloy, 2000).

Although no one classification of stalkers is universally accepted, several studies group stalkers according to their relationship with the target (Zona, Palarea, & Lane, 1998; Mohandie, 2000; Tjaden, 2003). The most common pattern is based on a relationship history gone awry. In this pattern, stalkers continue to pursue the target in the hope that their persistent contacts will foil the target's establishing a new relationship with someone else or will rekindle their romance, though sometimes the pursuit is motivated by revenge. Examples of offender behaviors in one study (Walker & Meloy, 1998) of relationship stalking included following the target, hiring others to do surveillance of the target, and harassing the target through telephone calls and letters. Another study (Palarea, Zona, Lane, & Langhinrichsen-Rohling, 1999) found prior sexually intimate stalkers had a violence frequency of 76%. Meloy, Davis and Lovette (2001) also found that this type of stalker was more likely to have made an explicit threat.

In the second pattern, the stalkers and targets have no previous relationship, as the stalkers' distorted thinking becomes the basis for their obsession and pursuit. Some of these stalkers are aware that no previous relationship exists, but they hope that their persistence will convince their targets to establish one. Other stalkers, called *erotomanics*, truly believe the targets love them, and they pursue their love interest on the basis of that delusion.

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Stalkers in the case files of the Threat Management Unit (TMU) of the Los Angeles Police Department (LAPD) often had mental and personality disorders (Zona et al., 1998). Many Axis I stalkers were diagnosed with schizophrenia, often paranoid type, or with a delusional disorder. Thought disorder was one of their most common characteristics. Those who developed delusions that they were married to a celebrity often wrote letters, and some followed and approached their targets. Mood disorder was another common Axis I stalker diagnosis (Zona et al., 1998). Stalkers who suffered from depression sometimes sought to reestablish or improve a relationship to maintain their self-esteem, though in some cases they committed suicide or homicide as a means of accomplishing that.

Zona et al.'s (1998) stalkers had diagnoses from all three personality disorder clusters, but cluster B was the most common. Antisocial personality disorder was typically the diagnosis in abusive domestic relationships. Borderline personality disordered stalkers often made frantic efforts to avoid real or imagined abandonment and had unstable and intense relationships. Stalkers in many such cases decided, "If I can't have her, nobody can!" (Zona et al., 1998, p. 74), an attitude which sometimes led to a death sentence for the target.

Mullen and Pathé (1994) studied 14 patients with erotomania, all of whom had engaged in stalking behavior. Their behaviors included approaching, telephoning, or sending letters to targets and following or loitering in the vicinity of their target. Targets



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were threatened in five cases, assaulted in five cases (with one homicide), and sexually assaulted in seven.

In a larger study, Rosenfeld and Harmon (2002) reviewed 204 stalking and harassment cases with offenders who had been referred for mental health evaluations by the court. They found 34 % of the cases involved weapon threats or unwanted physical contact; 6% involved severe violence; and about 40% of the offenders had a diagnosis of psychotic disorder. Thirty-four percent had a diagnosis of personality disorder, the most frequent being borderline, antisocial, and paranoid. Substance abuse, below average intelligence, minority race, age less than 30 years, and less than a high school education were associated with higher risk of violence.

Meloy (2000) has argued that a biopsychosocial model of stalking offers the best explanation for this behavior. The social component of this model is explained in part by typical characteristics of stalkers, e.g., social incompetence, isolation, and loneliness. Additionally, many stalkers have lost a parent in their early childhood years and have suffered a major loss in work or in a relationship in the six months prior to the onset of their stalking (Kienlen, 1998). The biological-based component appears to be related to attachment pathology, although what Meloy describes could also be related to environmental nurturance: people typically withdraw from those who reject or withdraw from them, but “stalkers keep seeking closeness to someone who doesn’t want them around” (Meloy, 2000, p. 180). Dutton (1998) and Kienlen found this attachment pattern is associated with poor self-image and needing the approval of others. One

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distinguishing characteristic of this pattern is *intimacy-anger*, “a pattern of social and emotional engagement in which the individual gets angrier the closer he gets to his object of pursuit” (Meloy, 2000, p. 180). The psychological component of stalking is associated with pathological narcissism, a pattern of thinking in which the stalker links fantasies of being special, loved, admired by and destined to be with the target. The target’s rejection creates feelings of shame and humiliation, which, in turn, fuel the stalker’s rage. This rage sparks the pursuit behavior through which the stalker attempts to hurt, control, damage or destroy the target. Oddly, once this goal is accomplished, the stalker’s narcissistic fantasies of being linked with the target are restored.

Meloy’s biopsychosocial model has implications for analyzing communicated threats, whether related to stalking or to other types of crimes. Meloy asserts that violent behavior “varies in frequency according to the social, psychological, and biological determinants that are in play at the time of the violent act” (in press, p. 3). The nature of that violence can be classified into two biologically based modes of aggression which have been measured and validated in animal research, as well as in forensic, psychopharmacological, and neuroimaging studies (Meloy, 2001). The affective mode of violence is “highly autonomically arousing, accompanied by anger or fear, unplanned, and an immediate reaction to a perceived threat, usually rejection by the person who is the target of the pursuit, usually a prior acquaintance or intimate” (Meloy, 2001, p. 1212). The predatory mode of violence “is planned for days, weeks, or months, is purposeful (instrumental), has variable goals, and is primarily cognitively motivated” (Meloy, 2001,

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p. 1212). Predatory violence is “commonly used to gratify desires for money, power, dominance, territorial control, sex, and revenge. The multiple goals of this mode of violence sharply contrast with the simple goal of affective violence, to reduce a threat” (Meloy, in press, p. 16). Predatory violence is not associated with autonomic arousal. Instead, it is associated with both absence of emotion and with cognitive planning.

Meloy’s description of feline behavior effectively characterizes both types of aggression:

The prototype of affective violence in the cat is the behavior in the midst of a threat, usually another animal: arched back, piloerection, vocalization, display of teeth and claws, pupil dilation, and ears tilted backward....The prototype of predatory violence in the cat is the stalking of a wounded bird: behavioral alerting and focusing upon the target, the absence of any sound, and the absence of any sympathetic arousal other than pupil dilation. The cat will move quietly and directly toward the target with ears tilted forward, and there is no display of teeth or claws until the attack is executed. (Meloy, in press, pp. 5-6)

Consistent findings across studies indicate that threats typically do not presage an approach or attack; however, when attacks do occur, they are predatory in nature (Meloy et al., 2004). Measurements of conceptual complexity and ambivalent hostility taken from the threatening communication could inform assessors of the presence of cognitive processes and emotions more consistent with predatory violence. Conceptual complexity and ambivalent hostility are discussed in more detail in section 3 of this chapter.

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### Section 3 – Verbal Behavior’s Relationship with Psychopathology, Disposition, and Violence

If we are to control the increasing expressions of violence which threaten our society, it is imperative that we seek every technology at our disposal to understand the nature and character of those who would use violence as their weapon. What better source could we hope for in our understanding of such individuals than their own words and the content of their communications?

(Miron & Pasquale, 1978, p. 97)

#### *Historical Background*

According to Jerrold Post (2003a), the United States’ efforts to use personality assessments of national leaders in support of government policy began with Adolf Hitler. In the 1930’s Hitler set Europe aflame with his goals of conquest and the annihilation of Jews. In 1943, psychoanalyst Walter Langer was commissioned by the director of the Office of Strategic Services (OSS), the Central Intelligence Agency’s (CIA) predecessor, to do an “at-a-distance leader personality assessment” (Post, 2003a, p. 39) of Hitler. Langer’s profile, titled *The Mind of Adolf Hitler*, addressed issues such as Hitler’s childhood with a sadistic father, his education, personal appearance, religion, sexuality, and various life events that shaped his personality. Proud of his hardness and brutality, Hitler had a remarkable, narcissistic sense of his own destiny as a statesman and battle field commander. Conceiving of himself as a second Christ, he was a man who believed unconditionally in his ability to succeed. Langer’s “clinically informed assessment of a

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foreign leader at a distance” (Post, 2003a, p. 50) became the model for subsequent assessment of leaders.

By 1960, U.S. Government interest in U.S.S.R. First Party Secretary Nikita Khrushchev prompted the CIA to invite approximately twenty psychologists, psychiatrists, and specialists in internal medicine to a conference for the purpose of analyzing open source material on Khrushchev (Post, 2003a). The implications of Khrushchev’s personality assessment were used to provide President John F. Kennedy with recommendations on dealing with Khrushchev during the Vienna summit in 1961.

In 1965, Dr. Jerrold Post (2003a) assisted in establishing a pilot program within the CIA for the purpose of doing at-a-distance assessments. Eventually housed in the Center for the Analysis of Personality and Political Behavior (CAPPB), which later became the Political Psychology Division, a team lead by doctoral level analysts soon began providing assessments to intelligence agencies throughout the U.S. government. Members of a senior advisory panel of nationally known political psychologists were also recruited to develop sophisticated methodologies to study leaders. After President Jimmy Carter successfully used the team’s profiles of Menachem Begin and Anwar Sadat to negotiate the Camp David Summit in 1978, these studies of national leaders became a required resource for summit meetings and for managing crises.

Post’s (1991) assessment of Saddam Hussein’s personality and behavior prior to his invasion of Kuwait is an example of how these studies were used to manage a crisis and to predict the possibility of leaders using violent means to gain their objectives.

### **From Violent Words to Violent Deeds?**

Narcissism is a personality disorder that has dramatic implications for political psychologists' assessments (American Psychological Association, 2000). Narcissists tend to perceive others as not having their own individual wants and needs. This perception enables narcissists to see others as extensions of themselves. Narcissists also tend to be hostile (American Psychological Association, 2000; Baumeister, Smart, & Boden, 1996). One political implication of the mix of the narcissist's hostility and view of others is that narcissistic leaders sometimes eliminate those who disagree with them. The confluence of these psychological characteristics can result in the murder of adversaries and declarations of war on enemy nations. Post testified, in a December, 1990 congressional hearing concerning the Gulf crisis, that Hussein was not the madman many thought, but instead was a "judicious political calculator" (Post, 1991, p. 279). Psychologically a malignant narcissist, Hussein's "messianic ambition for unlimited power, absence of conscience, unconstrained aggression, and a paranoid outlook" (Post, 1991, p. 285), was the personality profile of a leader who used unrestrained violent aggression against his personal enemies, as well as other nations and ethnic groups.

#### *Using Verbal Behavior to Assess Personalities of Leaders*

Although definitive biographies and a wealth of public information were available for studying many national leaders, sometimes the only data available were speeches or press conferences, particularly for leaders who rose quickly to positions of power without a lengthy history in the public eye (Post, 2003a). A few of the sophisticated methodologies developed by CIA team's researchers, as well as others who studied

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language use and its relationship with personality characteristics, are the focus this section.

One of the pioneers in researching language use and its relationship to normal, psychopathological, and dispositional characteristics was psychiatrist Walter Weintraub (1981, 1989, 2003). Weintraub postulated that maladaptive responses to stress and psychological conflict are revealed in people's verbal behavior. People with the same psychological traits also share syntactic and paralinguistic language habits (Weintraub, 1981, 2003). These habits of language use are unconscious defense mechanisms less subject to conscious manipulation, making them suited to investigating personality traits and styles of thought and behavior (Weintraub, 1981).

Weintraub (1981, 1989, 2003) identified 14 categories of speech mannerisms: quantity of speech, rate of speech, long pauses, nonpersonal references, negatives, qualifiers, retractors, direct references, explainers, expressions of feeling, evaluators, and number of usages of *I*, *we*, and *me*. These mannerisms, which are reflected in reactions to psychological stress, allowed Weintraub (2003) to differentiate patterns of speech among deviant patient groups (e.g., impulsives and depressives). His system of analysis also identified characteristic adaptive styles or coping mechanisms. "Identifying a characteristic pattern of ego defenses is especially helpful in predicting behavior under stress, for it is under stress that these coping mechanisms not only come into play but can become exaggerated" (Post, 2003b, p. 79). In his study of national leaders, Weintraub (2003) found that Gerald Ford, for example, frequently used qualifiers, which gave his

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speech an indecisive quality. Bill Clinton tended to use the pronoun *me* quite frequently when he was attacked and responded by adopting the victim role. High use of the pronoun *me* can indicate passivity because, as the object of the verb, it receives rather than initiates actions. High frequency of negatives, a characteristic of H.R. Haldeman on the Watergate tapes, suggested stubbornness.

Ten of Weintraub's (1981) 14 verbal behavior mannerisms were applicable to written, as well as spoken language. Of the 10 that could be used for written language (quantity of speech, qualifiers, retractors, feelings, evaluators, negative, explainers, *I*, *we*, *me*), only qualifiers differed from the norms Weintraub's research established for spoken language. Weintraub speculated this difference may have been an artifact of the condition that writers had no time limits compared to speakers who did have a time limit.

Weintraub's (1989) analysis of the decision-making process could be relevant to threat analysis. Weintraub explained that any or all of the components of decision-making (preparation, decision, and reconsideration) can be pathologically affected in some individuals. If an individual used qualifiers more frequently than normals, the person could be experiencing difficulty in the preparation phase. If he or she used the passive construction, rather than the personal pronoun *I* followed by an action verb, Weintraub suggested this could indicate trouble in executing plans. Both of these language use characteristics, if present in threatening communications, could suggest the threatener is less likely to carry out a plan of attack successfully.



### **From Violent Words to Violent Deeds?**

Hermann (1987, 2003) used grammatical choices to study traits of national leaders. Hermann theorized that leaders' use of language, measured from their speeches, media interviews, and other available sources, offered access to personality through examining leadership style, defined as the way in which leaders relate to constituents, other leaders, and their advisers. Hermann's operational code analysis of leadership traits was built on grammatical choices that measured seven traits:

(1) the belief that one can influence or control what happens, (2) the need for power and influence, (3) conceptual complexity (the ability to differentiate things and people in one's environment), (4) self-confidence, (5) the tendency to focus on problem solving and accomplishing something versus maintenance of the group and dealing with others' ideas and sensitivities, (6) general distrust or suspiciousness of others, and (7) the intensity with which a person holds an in-group bias (Hermann, 2003, p. 184).

Hermann hypothesized that "these seven traits provide information that is relevant to assessing how political leaders respond to the constraints in their environment, how they process information, and what motivates them to action (Hermann, 2003, p. 186).

Coding for Hermann's categories can be done manually or by the automated text coding program Profiler Plus, created by Michael Young (2001), a research scientist. Profiler Plus searches sentences in the text "from left to right for ordered sets of tokens (words and/or punctuation) that have been identified as indicators of a concept or relationship or perhaps of a particular type of communication" (Young, 2001, p. 22) and it has the

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advantages of speed and reliability of the scoring, as it eliminates inter-rater variability. Profiler Plus, version 4, was used in this dissertation to measure Hermann's seven traits.

Hermann's (2003) operational code analysis of leadership traits may be relevant to threat analysis.

Operational code analysis defines politics as the exercise of power between actors, in which the beliefs of each actor about the nature of the political universe and the most effective strategies and tactics in this universe influence the choices of means, tactics, and strategies and the ensuing outcomes of the interaction episodes between them (Walker, Schafer, & Young, 2003, p. 231).

The conflict between threateners and targets and/or the needs threateners believe targets can satisfy could be conceptually similar to leader's exercise of power and beliefs about the nature of the universe. If so, then it follows that threateners' beliefs about power, the nature of their universe, and what constitutes effective strategies will influence threateners' choices of "means, tactics, and strategies and the ensuing outcomes" (Walker et al., 2003) of the threateners' interactions with targets. This research tests the hypothesis that Hermann's traits, measured through the threateners' communications, could be associated with outcome. Hermann's seven traits are described in the paragraphs that follow.

(1) Belief in one's own ability to control events—Individuals who scored high on this trait tend to plan or initiate action (Hermann, 2003), and are less likely to compromise. Those with low scores prefer to let others take responsibility, but they are

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quick to blame others when something goes wrong. This trait is scored by calculating the percentage of verbs that indicate speakers/writers or the groups with whom speakers/writers identify take responsibility for initiating or for planning action.

(2) Need for power and influence—This trait involves the wish to influence or control other people or groups (Hermann, 2003). Those high in this trait are often daring, but they care little for the people around them. People are viewed as instruments to implement the speakers/writers' goals. Those low in need for power and influence don't mind when others receive credit for achievements. These individuals typically create a sense of team spirit and high morale among their followers. Coding is done by scoring verb usage when speakers/writers either propose or are involved in forceful action, such as an attack, a threat, or an accusation.

(3) Conceptual complexity—This characteristic involves the ability to see that other people or places might have different positions, values, ideas or policies (Hermann, 2003). "In personality theory and research, cognitive [conceptual] complexity is generally associated with more sophisticated and better adaptive behavior, especially in ambiguous or confusing situations" (Winter, 2003, p. 27). Individuals who are high in conceptual complexity can entertain differences and are more flexible in their responses to others' ideas or to the objects in the environment. Conversely, those who are low in this trait tend to categorize things in dimensions of black or white, good or bad, and are less flexible in responding to stimuli. High conceptual complexity is coded with words, such as *possibility* and *approximately*, which indicate or suggest the ability to see

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different dimensions. Low complexity is coded with *allness* terms (Osgood, 1960), such as *without a doubt, absolutely, or irreversible*.

(4) Self-confidence—This is a measure of how people view their ability to cope with their environment adequately (Hermann, 2003). People tend to view themselves both in relation to others and as a result of their life experiences. Coding for self-confidence focuses on use of pronouns *my, myself, I, me, and mine* in the context of those pronouns indicating speakers/writers have instigated an action, been perceived as an authority on an issue, or have received the praise or a positive response from someone or some group.

(5) Task focus—This tendency to focus on problem solving versus building and maintaining relationships are two ends of a continuum (Hermann, 2003). Those who focus on task solving tend to perceive high morale as expendable if necessary to accomplish their goals. Those who emphasize relationships tend to view loyalty to the group and its members as more critical than achieving their goals. Coding for task focus counts words that indicate task activity and words that focus on concern for the desires and feelings of others. Examples of task-oriented words include *accomplishment, plan, and recommendation*. Illustrations of words indicating an orientation toward relationship with and loyalty to the group and its members include *collaboration, disappointment and appreciation*.

(6) In-group bias—Individuals who have higher in-group bias scores are alert to protecting their group (Hermann, 2003). These individuals are also more likely to

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perceive threats in the environment and to confront the offending party. Those lower in these traits are more accommodating and are more likely to work to build relationships. In-group bias scores are derived from modifying words or phrases that indicate favorable perceptions about the speaker/writer's own group (e.g., *great, progressive, successful*), strength (e.g., *capable, powerful*), or maintaining the group's identity or honor (e.g., *decide our own policies*).

(7) General distrust or suspiciousness of others—Distrust of others involves a tendency to suspect, doubt, and be wary of others (Hermann, 2003). Typically, the distrust leads to believing that the others have ulterior motives. Individuals with this trait are often hypersensitive to what they perceive as criticism. In extreme cases, the speaker/writer becomes paranoid. In coding for this trait, nouns and noun phrases that refer to someone other than the speaker/writer and to groups other than the ones to which the speaker/writer belongs are used. The last two traits, the intensity of in-group bias belief and general distrust or suspiciousness of others, are correlated (0.62) in Hermann's (2003) sample of 87 heads of state.

Interscorer reliability for the seven traits across multiple studies ranged from .78 to 1.00 between the author and a set of coders (Hermann, 2003). Construct validity of these traits is more problematic. As Hermann reasonably argued,

It is hard to conceive of giving people like Tony Blair, Saddam Hussein, or Boris Yeltsin a battery of psychological tests or having them submit to a series of clinical interviews. Not only would they not have time for, or tolerate, such

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procedures, they would be wary that the results, if made public, might prove politically damaging to them (Hermann, 2003, p. 178).

Hermann, did, however, compare her ratings on 21 leaders with ratings by “journalists and former government personnel who had had the opportunity to observe or interact with the particular leaders. The correlations between the two sets of ratings averaged .84 across the set of leaders” (Hermann, 2003, p. 211).

#### *Using Verbal Behavior to Measure Psychobiological Dimensions*

Psychiatrist Louis Gottschalk is another pioneer in content analysis of verbal behavior. When he joined the Department of Psychiatry at the University of Cincinnati in 1953, Gottschalk, with colleague Goldine Gleser, began to explore ways to quantify analyses of psychological states using content features in language (Gottschalk, 1995). The methodology they devised, called Gottschalk-Gleser content analysis, measures the magnitude of various psychobiological dimensions. Unlike many of the political psychology content analysis researchers, Gottschalk and Gleser used the grammatical clause as the unit of analysis, rather than single words. Gottschalk eventually developed measures to express the degree or intensity of six psychobiological constructs—*anxiety*, *hostility*, *social alienation-personal disorganization*, *cognitive impairment*, *depression*, and *hope*. The theoretical framework for Gottschalk-Gleser measurement approach includes “behavioral and conditioning theory, psychoanalytic clinic theory, and linguistic theory. In addition, the formulation of these psychological states has been deeply

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influenced by the position that they all have biologic roots” (Gottschalk & Bechtel, 2001, pp. 38-39). The Gottschalk-Gleser dimensions are described in the paragraphs below.

The anxiety scale measures “free anxiety... which manifests itself in psychological mechanisms of conversion and hypochondriacal symptoms, in compulsions, in doing and undoing, in avoiding human relationships” (Gottschalk, 1995, pp. 21-22). Anxiety is categorized into “six subtypes—*death, mutilation, separation, guilt, shame, and diffuse or nonspecific anxiety*” (Gottschalk, 1995, p. 22).

Hostility scores are computed in three categories of transient affect—*hostility directed outward, hostility directed inward, and ambivalent hostility* (Gottschalk, 1995). Hostility directed outward is related to the intensity of angry, assaultive, aggressive impulses and drives toward persons or objects other than oneself. Hostility directed inward scores indicate the intensity of self-hate, criticisms of self, and feelings of anxiety related depression and masochism. Ambivalent hostility scales reflect paranoia, which Gottschalk defined as critical, destructive actions or thoughts of others directed toward self. Single scores on these measures, as well as on anxiety, are more indicative of a state, rather than a trait.

Social alienation-personal disorganization scales measure the “relative degree of personal disorganization, social withdrawal, or feelings of isolation of schizophrenic patients. The common denominators of the schizophrenic syndrome are considered to be disturbances in the coherence and logicity of thinking processes and deficiencies in human relationships” (Gottschalk, 1995, pp. 22-23).

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Cognitive and intellectual impairment scales measure cognitive and intellectual functioning of two types (Gottschalk, 1995). The first type of functioning consists of transient and reversible changes. The second type consists of permanent and irreversible changes primarily due to brain dysfunction and, to a lesser degree, emotional changes.

Depression is measured both as a total depression score and as several subcategories. These subscales include “*Hopelessness, Self-Accusation, Psychomotor Retardation, Somatic Concerns, Death and Mutilation Depression, Separation Depression, and Hostility Outward* [italics added]” (Gottschalk, 1995, p. 23).

Hope scales measure the degree of optimism that something favorable is likely to occur in one’s personal life activities, in spiritual, and even imaginary events (Gottschalk, 1995). High scores in this category can be predictive regarding human survival, preserving or enhancing health, or the welfare or achievement of others and of self.

The Gottschalk-Gleser content analysis methodology can be applied to multiple circumstances of language production (Gottschalk, 1995). It can also be applied to written as well as spoken language and can be quantified to measure phenomena that may be either short-lived or have longer duration. Gottschalk-Gleser scales have been applied to suicide notes, affective states in different races, and within the fields of biological psychiatry and general medicine. They have also been validated in multiple cultures and languages, e.g., Chile, Germany, and Australia. Interscorer reliability coefficients in United States studies for Gottschalk-Gleser scales were .80 or above, as were English language studies done in Australia and Canada. Validity of hostility scores was



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investigated by examining their relationships with dimensions on the standardized aggression questionnaire SAF (Schofer, Kock, & Balck, 1979). Hostility directed outward-overt was associated with irritability and instrumental aggressiveness on SAF. Hostility directed outward-covert was associated with instrumental aggressiveness. Hostility directed inward was associated with irritability; and both hostility directed inward and ambivalent hostility were associated with aggressiveness directed inward.

Gottschalk (1995) collaborated with Robert Bechtel on computerizing the Gottschalk-Gleser content analysis scales, using independent and dependent clauses as coding units. The computer software, Psychiatric Content Analysis and Diagnosis (PCAD) (Gottschalk & Bechtel, 2001), was used in this current research to measure eight scales—anxiety, hostility outward, hostility inward, ambivalent hostility, social alienation/personal disorganization, cognitive impairment, hope, and depression. Although validity scores of constructs measured by PCAD, other than hostility, were not available, Bechtel worked closely with Gottschalk in developing PCAD to ensure the computer software measured Gottschalk’s psychobiological dimensions (Bechtel, personal communication, January 16, 2006).

The move from human to machine coding available through Profiler Plus and PCAD has advantages. “The greatest effort for a researcher wishing to use machine-coded events data is expended constructing a suitable dictionary for their subject matter” (King & Lowe, 2003, p. 621). Assuming that is accomplished, machine generated computational scoring of language use has the advantage of bypassing tedious and

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painstaking hand coding with its accompanying increased possibility of human error. Additionally, machines don't get "tired, bored, and distracted," (King & Lowe, 2003, p. 619), so computer programs may outperform human coders when dealing with large amounts of text.

### Summary

Violence is linked with a host of factors. Mental and personality disorders certainly play an important role in increasing the risk of targeted violence and/or approach, but social factors, such as childhood abuse, demographic factors, such as gender, and dispositional characteristics, such as anger, are also significant contributors.

The research specifically focused on threat assessment has approached the topic from different perspectives. Some studies have looked at stalkers because their approach behavior can pose a danger. A number of these studies found that stalkers who have had intimate relationships with targets are more likely to act violently than non-relationship stalkers. Many studies also have found that mental or personality disorders diagnoses in stalkers are associated with an increased level of dangerousness.

Additional studies have focused on grouping threateners according to the types of targets they choose. Several studies have examined those who approach and attack political and public officials. Dietz, Matthews, Van Duyne, et al. (1991) and Dietz, Matthews, Martell, et al.'s (1991) studies looked at variables in the communications that are associated with violence or approach behavior. Other studies (e.g., Calhoun, 1998; Baumgartner et al., 2001; and Scalora et al., 2002a) examined both threat communication

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and threatener/attacker variables. Although significant differences in outcome-related variables are present among and between threatener groups, two findings are consistent throughout many of these studies: (a) those who threaten are less likely to approach or harm, and (b) those who harm are less likely to threaten.

However informative this may be, the reality for investigators is that (a) some threateners do approach or act violently, and (b) the threateners' identities often remain unknown—which means, unfortunately, that offender-related information is unavailable to investigators. This frequently leaves the threat itself as the main source of information from which investigators must make decisions in these cases. Even though the base-rate for violence is low in threat cases, a threatener's actions can destroy or permanently alter the target's quality of life and peace of mind. Although the current state of threat research offers varying and sometimes conflicting advice, the need to identify reliable and valid predictors for targeted approach and violence remains.

The language that threateners use appears to offer some assistance. Research has clearly affirmed relationships between language use and psychopathological and dispositional characteristics of writers/speakers. Analysis of verbal behavior may, therefore, illuminate certain salient factors in the threatening communication related to case outcome.

This research explored these relationships by linking threateners' psychopathology and intentions expressed through their language use with case outcome. Specifically, it focused on what threateners asserted they would do, how specifically they

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indicated their intentions, and the ways in which they expressed attitudes toward their targets. Additionally, the threatening communication was examined for predictive features related to format and identifying information provided by the threatener. Information was also gathered about methods the threatener used to communicate with the target. Finally, content analysis of the threats done by computer programs isolated psychological characteristics which appear to be associated with predatory intent.

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### **Chapter 3 - Methods**

#### Materials

This research used a correlational design that compared variables gathered through an interview questionnaire and two automated instruments. The purpose of the design was to measure the interrelationships between the action taken by a threatener and characteristics of the (a) threatener, (b) target/victim, and (c) threatening communication and methods used to communicate the threat. Logistical regression analysis was used to develop an equation to assist investigators in predicting when threateners are more likely to harm versus simply threaten.

The research database consisted of threatening communication cases analyzed by agents from the Federal Bureau of Investigation's National Center for the Analysis of Violent Crime (NCAVC). A threatening communication was defined as any written information which implied the potential of harm delivered to targets/victims or agents acting in their behalf. The threatener's use of telephone calls and any electronic or other means of communication were coded as other methods of contacting the target/victim.

Actions considered to be threats consisted of burning, bombing, defacing or damaging property, disrupting events, extorting, kidnapping, murdering, physically assaulting or harming, product-tampering, revealing detrimental information whether that information was true or false, sabotaging, sexually assaulting, stalking, taunting (including harassing or intimidating), using weapons of mass destruction, and "other." Threatening language was coded as direct (no conditions, blunt, straight forward, and

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explicit), conditional (terms set by threatener, provisionally based on response of target/victim), or non-specific/implied (theme or threat is buried in oblique words which may not contain a specific overt threat, but is capable of creating stress or anxiety in target/victim). Although much of the database consisted of mailed letters, threateners employed other means of communicating, such as greeting cards, postcards, and writings on the outside of envelopes.

At the onset of data gathering in 1998, FBI cases did not have a specific identifier that marked them as containing a threatening communication. This lack of a specific marker necessitated a computerized search to identify a sufficiently large sample of threat cases. A computer search of potential threat cases in NCAVC case files closed in 1998 and 1997 revealed 911 possibilities (398 cases in 1998; 513 cases in 1997). The deciding factor for the case being included in this computer search was the type of crime (e.g., extortion, civil rights violations) and police cooperation (in which threat cases were referred to the FBI for profiling and investigative assistance). The computer search was done by an FBI computer case specialist after consultation on selection criteria with the writer and under her close supervision.

All 911 NCAVC files were then located and manually inspected for the presence of threatening communications. Graduate students and college seniors interning at the FBI conducted these manual examinations after they received training from the writer and while they were under her supervision. Some NCAVC case files included a wealth of detailed information, such as investigative steps, target interview results, and a profile

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of the threatener; however, other files contained only an electronic communication (EC), describing the rudimentary investigative facts of the case at the point of referral to NCAVC; sometimes copies of the original threats were included, sometimes not.

Whenever available facts pointed to the possibility of a written threat as an element of the case, the rule at this initial stage was to err on the side of inclusion in the database. As a result of this examination, 172 potential cases were identified (81 closed in 1998; 91 closed in 1997).

Because NCAVC was established to act as a consultant in assisting local, state, and federal law enforcement agencies, NCAVC typically offered advice on investigative steps, including constructing a profile of the threatener. NCAVC then closed its case, referring it back to the original agency for continued investigation. This meant that very few of the NCAVC case files contained some resolution or outcome of the case (i.e., whether or not the threatener ever carried out some harmful action or was ever identified and arrested). This led the writer to establish another level of scrutiny for a case to be included in the database: an in-depth telephone interview of the primary investigative officer or agent. There were two reasons to conduct a phone interview rather than mail a questionnaire to the primary investigator. First, police officers would be much more likely to take time to talk to a fellow law enforcement officer than they would be to fill out a lengthy questionnaire, and second, having the writer conduct the interviews greatly reduced the possibility of error.

### **From Violent Words to Violent Deeds?**

An interview protocol (see Appendixes A through D) was developed for accessing case-related information concerning three categories of independent variables and one dependent variable. The independent variable categories were (1) social, demographic, and psychological characteristics of the threatener, (2) target/victim type and relationship with threatener (e.g., strangers or co-workers), and (3) language and document features of the threat and methods used to communicate the threat. The dependent variable was case outcome—“action taken” by the threatener. Action taken was stratified into four levels: (1) no action (i.e., the threatener committed no harmful action other than writing the threatening communication), (2) the threatener approached/stalked the target/victim, but did not commit a violent act, (3) some harmful action, other than what was threatened, was carried out (e.g., the threatener said he would murder the target, but instead burned her vehicle), and (4) stated action was carried out (i.e., threatener did what he/she threatened to do). If the threatener made multiple threats within the communication, actions were examined in descending order from “stated action was carried out,” then “some harmful action, other than what was threatened, was carried out,” etc. Coding was done by the first appropriate category identified.

A threatener’s actions were classified as category #1 (no action) if (1) a minimum period of at least two years had elapsed between the receipt of the original threat and the interview of the investigating officer and (2) the threatener had not committed any harmful action during that time against the target/victim or any person or property associated with the target/victim. A threatener’s actions were classified as category #2



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(approaching or stalking the target/victim) if the case facts or information in the threat itself indicated that the threatener (1) visited the residence or business address of the target/victim, (2) visited the residence or business address of any relative, friend, acquaintance, or intimate of the target/victim, (3) physically observed the movements of the target or the targets' relatives, friends, acquaintances, or intimates, (4) came within sufficient physical proximity or attempted (but was intercepted by law enforcement) to come within sufficient physical proximity that the threatener had the ability to harm the target/victim or harm something associated with the target/victim (e.g., vehicle), and/or (5) the threatener traveled to or was apprehended on the way to a drop site to obtain money or other goods in an extortion case. A threatener's actions were classified as category #3 (some harmful action, other than what was threatened, was carried out) or category #4 (stated action was carried out) if the threatener committed any of the following acts: burning, bombing, defacing or damaging property, disrupting events, extorting, kidnapping, murdering, physically assaulting or harming, product-tampering, revealing detrimental information whether that information was true or false, sabotaging, sexually assaulting, stalking, taunting (including harassing or intimidating), using weapons of mass destruction, and "other." The possibility was considered that small numbers in some of the action categories might not statistically support running all four categories. If this occurred, it would necessitate combining categories into no action versus action taken.

### **From Violent Words to Violent Deeds?**

Variables were included in the interview protocol based on several criteria: (1) numerous discussions with research committee advisors, particularly Dr. Roger Shuy, a forensic linguist with extensive experience in analyzing threats, (2) multiple interviews of FBI and Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms, and Explosives (ATF) agents who assess threats, (3) training in threat analysis from the FBI and from the Association of Threat Assessment Professionals, (4) an extensive review of psychology and threat literature, and (5) the writer's professional experience as a threat assessor. Drafts of this interview protocol were critiqued by the advisors from Georgetown University and by law enforcement threat assessment practitioners. The protocol was revised on the basis of these critiques.

Although several of the cases contained multiple communications and numerous targets, the current research examined only the first written threat (determined by chronological date) sent to the first target (defined by chronological order). Had the researcher used all of the threatening communications, this would have unduly weighted some cases more than others, so the decision to use one communication weights all cases equally. From an investigative standpoint, using the initial communication to the first target was useful because information from the first communication is often the basis for opening an investigation and handling its initial phase. Finally, since one letter is often all that assessors have for a given case, the question is: Can we, from a single communication, find predictive factors that are valid indicators of whether the threatener will act or not?

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The threatening communications were also analyzed by two computerized text coding programs (Profilers Plus and PCAD). Both programs evaluate personality characteristics from language use. The list and definitions of characteristics measured by each computer program were discussed in Chapter 2 of this research.

### **Procedure**

Once the interview protocol was developed and each of the 172 potential threat cases was assigned a code number, the writer conducted a detailed review of all available information in the NCAVC case files. If the case facts fell outside the predetermined parameters of this study or the communication was not a threat as defined by this research, the case was excluded. If the case review warranted continued inclusion in the database, the primary investigating officer or FBI agent was identified. The writer then contacted the investigator and, using the protocol, conducted an interview by telephone. These interviews typically took one and a half to two and a half hours each. In order to participate in the interview, investigating officers were required to sign a consent form (see Appendix E) which was faxed to them. The signed copy was then faxed back to the writer.

All responses for threatener, target/victim, and case outcome were marked during the course of the interview. The language protocol was coded by the writer immediately after the conclusion of the interview. All harmful acts relating to each case were coded. One case which illustrates the coding process involved a threatener who sent several notes to a hospital saying that he would kill a doctor, a nurse, and a child. A few months

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after sending the first note, he broke into the house of one of the hospital's nurses, raped her with the barrel of a gun, and then strangled her son. Both harmful acts (the murder of the child and the sexual assault of the nurse) were coded for this case. To protect the identities of all parties in this and other examples that follow, some pseudonyms have been used and all potentially identifying information has been deleted or changed, while the important facts of the cases have been faithfully portrayed.

Once the protocol sheets were scored, they were scanned by a machine that electronically placed all scores into an SPSS spreadsheet created by an FBI management analyst. The threatening communications were typed by interns and proofread by the writer. Interns scored each threat using Profiler Plus and PCAD. Floppy disks containing Profiler Plus and PCAD scoring were then provided to the same FBI management analyst who electronically added these scores to SPSS. Electronic, not manual, transfer of data into SPSS was used in order to reduce the possibility of human error in the coding process.

Thirty-nine of the 172 cases were excluded from the database after the writer conducted a detailed pre-interview review of the file and the communication or after she uncovered facts in the course of the interview of the investigating officer which indicated that the case did not fit the parameters for inclusion. This reduced the total number of threat cases that fell within the parameters set by this research to 139. An additional six cases were excluded for other reasons: no threatening communications could be located for two cases; two agencies refused to cooperate with this research resulting in the

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exclusion of two cases; and investigators for two cases were cooperative, but could not provide sufficient information to fill out the interview protocol. An additional thirty-one cases that fell within the parameters of the research had to be excluded because the communications themselves contained too few words to be scored by Profiler Plus or PCAD. Both programs require a minimum number of words in the text to achieve reliability of the computer generated scores on each trait (Profiler Plus requires a text with 100 or more words; PCAD, a minimum of 90). This left 96 cases in the database used in this research.

#### **Statistics**

Pearson product-moment correlations were calculated for relationships between independent and dependent variables. Multiple regression was used to rank order predictors from each category of independent variables; then logistical regression was used to construct a predictive equation from salient independent variables.

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### **Chapter 4 – Results**

A total of 96 FBI threat cases were coded for the purpose of examining three broad hypotheses: (a) there are social, demographic, and psychological characteristics of the threatener associated with the outcome of a threat case, (b) there are social and demographic characteristics of the target/victim associated with the outcome of a threat case, and (c) there are language features, document features, and methods used to communicate threats associated with the outcome of a threat case.

#### Case Outcome

##### *Breakdown of the Action Category*

Threateners committed harmful action against the target/victim (person or institution/object) in 26 (27%) of the 96 cases (see Table 1). “Harmful action” was broken down into three subcategories: (1) stated action carried out (3.8%), (2) some action, other than what was threatened, carried out (34.6%), and (3) threatener approached/stalked target/victim, but did not commit violent act (61.5%). The remaining 70 of the 96 cases (73%) were coded “no action” because these threateners did not harm persons or property; however, it must be noted that the number of action cases could have been higher, had not law enforcement intervened in 12 of these 70 no action cases (17.1%) before harm could occur. The low numbers in the action subcategories necessitated collapsing these action subcategories so that the final analysis compared “action” to “no action” cases.

## From Violent Words to Violent Deeds?

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Insert Table 1 about here

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### *Types of Actions Threateners Committed or Attempted*

Some of the 26 action cases had multiple scorings, with the number of actions per case ranging from 1 to 4. Table 2 displays all actions (total 48) threateners committed and/or attempted. Attempted actions were defined as threateners demonstrated behavior indicating they planned to follow through on the threat (e.g., a medical doctor ordered multiple poisons which he planned to use on his patients, but law enforcement seized the poisons en route).

The most common action was stalking (17), followed by extorting (9), and taunting, harassing, or intimidating the victim (6). Defacing or damaging property (3), revealing detrimental information (3), murder or attempted murder (3) and physical assault were noted.

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Insert Table 2 about here

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### Threateners

Threateners were identified in only 43 of the 96 cases (44.8%). Analysis of characteristics of the 43 identified threateners was complicated by information being

### **From Violent Words to Violent Deeds?**

unavailable to answer some of the protocol questions. Table 3 shows the number of threateners for whom information was available in each category.

On the first data run, 15 threatener characteristics significantly correlated with action taken (see Table 3). Threateners in the current research, like subjects in Fein and Vossekuij's (1999) assassins, attackers, and near-lethal approachers study, were more likely to have: a history of depression, mobility and transience, and interest in militant or radical ideas and groups; harassed others in the past; experienced a significant event prior to their threatening behavior; and discussed suicide. Like Fein and Vossekuij's offenders and unlike Calhoun's (1998), threateners in the current research were more likely to have indicated to others an interest in harming the target. And similar to offenders in Rosenfeld and Harmon's research (2002), threateners here were more likely to act if they had a history of substance abuse.

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Insert Table 3 about here

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Because Missing/Unknown and Not Applicable responses appeared to be confounding the results set out in Table 3, a second statistical run was done with interview protocol responses (see Appendix A) broken down and reworded. For example, the threatener culture question was divided into its parts: (1) "Threatener's parents immigrated with the threatener moving to the U.S. as a child or adult and the threatener remaining largely enculturated in previous culture," or (2) Threatener was



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reared and enculturated in the U.S. society.” Each individual question was then run to determine if it significantly correlated with action.

On the second run, none of the social, demographic, or psychological characteristics measured by the threatener interview protocol (see Appendix A) was associated with action taken, and only marital status approached significance. Specifically, threateners who acted were somewhat more likely to be married at the time they made the threat ( $r = .32203$ ,  $p = .0676$ ).

#### Targets

Targets of threatening communications were divided into two categories: people (73%) and institutions/objects (27%) and their characteristics were then correlated with the outcome measure (see Table 4). People were significantly more likely to be harmed ( $r = .21072$ ,  $p = .0415$ ), compared to institutions/objects. Of the institutions or objects that were harmed, government or public buildings were somewhat less likely to be chosen, a finding that approached significance ( $r = -.18359$ ,  $p = .0765$ ).

In cases in which the threatener identity was known and information was available, the relationship between the threatener and target was examined. Targets and threateners were somewhat more likely to know each other ( $r = .25926$ ,  $p = .0855$ ) and significantly more likely to be acquaintances ( $r = .32733$ ,  $p = .0282$ ), results also found in Calhoun’s (1998) research. They were also somewhat more likely to be co-workers ( $r = .26414$ ,  $p = .0796$ ), a finding that approached significance. Of the targets not personally known to the threatener, public/government officials were somewhat less

### **From Violent Words to Violent Deeds?**

likely to be harmed, a finding that approached significance ( $r = -.25332$ ,  $p = .0931$ ), when compared to business officials, public figure/celebrities, and strangers with no known affiliation to the threatener. When the target variables were analyzed using logistical regression, none had sufficient strength to be used in the predictive equation.

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Insert Table 4 about here

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#### Language Use

Threatening communications were examined in this research because they are one of the few sources of information initially available to investigators. Excerpts from the threatening communications in three cases are given below to illustrate the range of threats studied.

#### *Examples of Letters*

Example 1-- This is a portion of threat letter #1 sent to Mr. Jones, a wealthy businessman.

*Dear Mr. Jones:*

*Let me first introduce myself to you. My name is not important, but the business transaction that I propose is of the utmost importance. What I am offering you is simple: Your life for five million even. At this point, you are probably wondering who the hell this is and where I may get off making you this offer. Let me tell you a little bit about myself.*

## **From Violent Words to Violent Deeds?**

*I am a thirty-four year old ex-Army Ranger. My chosen profession now can only be accurately described as what it really is, and that is an assassin. I have been contracted for various hits by many private and professional sources, including our very own government as well as the Chicago Mafia. If it makes any difference, I have not enjoyed my work. But hey, ninety five percent of the working people in America are not satisfied with their current employment. I can also tell you that I have a hundred percent record on contract kills. This is good news for my employers but not of course, for my marks.*

*Now that I have your attention I will explain what all of this has to do with you. I want out of business. As I stated before, I do not enjoy my work. However, like a prostitute, the money is there, so it is very difficult to just walk away. This is where you come in. You see, I believe that the dozens of people who met an untimely death at my hands would have likely come up with the same (or greater) amount of money contracted, just to live.*

*It is with that belief that I decided to hire myself to contract someone who would be willing to pay that contracted amount, NOT to be killed. I am sorry to say that you were my obvious choice as the person to take this contract on. With that said, here is what needs to take place, to have you avoid being contract number thirty-nine completed, in my resume....*

After researching Mr. Jones and his family on the internet, the offender in this case obtained a gun, a passport, and opened bank accounts which gave him the ability to

### **From Violent Words to Violent Deeds?**

transfer money. The offender then sent the threatening communication to Mr. Jones and requested return communication by way of two message postings on a personals bulletin board on a computer service. The offender was arrested as he was traveling to intercept Mr. Jones, and his gun was located in the search of his car. Subsequent investigation determined that his claims of having military training and being an assassin were false. Additionally, he was in his mid-20s, not 34 as he claimed. The offender was convicted of extortion.

Example 2--Subsequent to the merger of two churches, one of the elders, who had been a member of one church, accused members of the other church of misusing funds. Soon afterward, he began receiving threatening letters, the first of which follows.

Errors in the letter have not been corrected.

*Mr. Church Elder:*

*Who do you think you are? For the past several years because of you we have not been able to keep a pastor, most of our good people who left is because of you. Your time for playing God is over, we know now what you are.*

*We have heard whispers for years that you are a sexual pervert. The private investigator we hired got pictures of you.... We also have videos of you feeling up and fondling our young teenage girls and boys. I am sure the District Attorney's Office will be very interested in the videos.*

*It is a shame and a disgrace to this church that we have not taken the proper action to rid this church of a pervert, devil like you.*

### **From Violent Words to Violent Deeds?**

*We plan to have the District Attorney's Office to audit all the church financial accounts, we want to know where our money has gone and to **WHO???***

*All we want is for you to just leave, and leave us alone so we can get on with God's work. We warn you if you show your ugly fat face in this church next Sunday or ever again, we will have a copy of this letter ready for every member of this church with pictures enclosed. When the District Attorney's Office views the videos you will be arrested on child molestation charges.*

*DO YOU GET THE PICTURE FAT BOY??????*

The threatener in this case was never identified and the threats eventually stopped.

Example 3--A young woman living in an apartment complex began receiving letters stating that her boyfriend was not being faithful. The errors in the communications have not been corrected. Letter #1 follows:

*Hello Jane,*

*You are a wonderful lover. You deserve someone better than the scumbag that you are seeing. I know he is NO good. I have seen with other women.*

*I know that you are wondering who this is. All I can say is, it's someone who knows you very well. I know that you think that "red-neck-punk" you are seeing is good to you. But I am telling you right now, I have seen him with other women on more than one occasion. I can't believe that you would want someone like that. He looks like a bomb half of the time. I would really be embarrassed to be seen with someone like that in public. Anytime a man cuts his hair that way he did, and expect for you to be seen in*

### **From Violent Words to Violent Deeds?**

*public with him, has no respect for himself or you. Believe me, he likes attention. I know one of the women he has been with and she said she dumped him because she said that she caught him with someone else. By the way, this is going on while he is seeing you right now. I am not doing this to hurt you or to be mean, I just hate to see a person being treated that way. Especially, when I know and see with my own eyes that he is cheating on you.*

The target in this case continued to see her boyfriend and the letters began to escalate in anger, as illustrated by the portion of letter #6 reproduced below:

*You are one stupid bitch!*

*I hope you are on guard at all times because I know what you look like now...I will kill you....I will be following you and your will not know it. Have you ever thought about driving down the road and all of a sudden you discovered that you had no Breaks.*

After the target received letter #6, she found her car paint had been “keyed” or scratched.

The offender then sent letter #7, a portion of which follows:

*I hope you like the new design on your car. Actually, it could have been worse. If you didn't notice it, check it out on the left side of your car. It's not as deep as I would have liked it, but I will make sure that everyone can see it the next time. By the way, I followed the both of you to your apartment on Monday night. Is he trying to protect you? It won't work.... After he left, that's when I fixed up your car a little. But this is just a **WARNING. This is only the BEGINNING BITCH!!!***

### **From Violent Words to Violent Deeds?**

The offender in this case was a male neighbor of the target. Shortly after the target moved into the apartment complex, the offender left a note on her vehicle stating that he would like to get to know her better. Sometime later, he knocked on her door and asked if she was married. When she told him she was currently seeing someone, he walked away from her door without making any further comment. He later told a co-worker that she “blew him off.” A co-worker of the offender described him as a reserved individual who found it hard to meet new people. He also said that the offender had admitted to sexual problems in childhood and was seeing a psychiatrist at the time of the threats. When the offender was interviewed by law enforcement, he did not confess, but did make self-incriminating statements. A few hours after his interview, the offender attempted suicide by cutting his throat, although the cut was minor enough that he did not require any stitches. After he was released from the hospital, he moved away and was never prosecuted.

#### *Scoring of Language Use and Document Features*

Research findings have lead to the analysis of language use to predict risk of violent behavior. With associations now established between psychopathological conditions and language use, this current research sought to link characteristics of threatening communications with threateners’ psychopathology and intention. Language use was scored using three tools: the language section of the protocol (see Appendix C) and the two computer software programs (Profiler Plus and PCAD).

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### *Language section of protocol.*

This current research found several language use features, document features, and methods used to communicate threats were associated with threateners acting (see Table 5). Threateners were significantly more likely to approach/stalk or harm when they used the language strategy of persuasion in their threat communications ( $r = .20634$ ,  $p = .0437$ ) (see example 1 letter addressed to Mr. Jones for an illustration of persuasion), while the strategy of extorting only approached significance ( $r = .17823$ ,  $p = .0823$ ). Threateners were also significantly more likely to act when they asserted they would commit two types of actions: stalking ( $r = .23901$ ,  $p = .0190$ ) and revealing detrimental information, whether true/or false ( $r = .25048$ ,  $p = .0138$ ) (see example 2 letter for an illustration of revealing detrimental information). Although Dietz, Matthews, Van Duyne, et al.'s research (1991) on celebrity threats found that threateners' specific mention of time and location was a risk-enhancing feature, those variables had no relationship with outcome in this research. On the other hand, threateners indicating what or who was to be targeted, either explicitly or implicitly, was associated with increased risk, but that association only approached significance ( $r = .18241$ ,  $p = .0768$ ). Furthermore, threateners specifying the weapons they would use only approached significance and was negative ( $r = -.16458$ ,  $p = .1110$ ).

This research also found that threateners were significantly more likely to act when they repeatedly mentioned love, marriage, or romance ( $r = .35139$ ,  $p = .0004$ ) and used a polite tone in the threatening communication ( $r = .26225$ ,  $p = .0098$ ), and these



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findings supported what Dietz, Matthews, Martell, et al. (1991) found in their threats to members of Congress study. One correlation with action in this current research (that approached significance) was threateners indicating they were thinking about being with the target “forever” or “in eternity” ( $r = .17290$ ,  $p = .0921$ ). Conversely, threateners were significantly less likely to act if they used words indicating prejudices concerning religion ( $r = -.20234$ ,  $p = .0480$ ), whereas use of words indicating prejudices concerning race, gender, sexual preference, and ethnicity had no relationship to action.

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Insert Table 5 about here

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This research found some document features associated with harming and approaching/stalking (see Table 6). Threateners were significantly more likely to act if they handwrote the threat ( $r = .21286$ ,  $p = .0373$ ), but significantly less likely to act if they used inappropriate capitalization ( $r = -.20447$ ,  $p = .0469$ ), typed their threats on a typewriter rather than a computer ( $r = -.23513$ ,  $p = .0233$ ), or gave their real return address, either partial or complete ( $r = -.229$ ,  $p = .0329$ ), and the latter finding supported the Dietz, Matthews, Van Duyne, et al.’s (1991) findings on celebrity threats.

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Insert Table 6 about here

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### **From Violent Words to Violent Deeds?**

Finally, threateners in the current study were significantly more likely to act when they communicated with targets through multiple mediums, such as telephoning or emailing the target, in addition to sending their threatening communication ( $r = .31898$ ,  $p = .0017$ ). This association was also found in studies of threats to members of Congress (Dietz, Matthews, Martell, et al., 1991; Scalora et al., 2002a) and threats to celebrities (Dietz, Matthews, Van Duyne, et al., 1991).

It is noteworthy that several language tools typically used by experienced investigators to predict risk of dangerousness had no predictive validity in this current research (see Table 7). Experienced investigators typically give more credence to direct threats, yet this research found no association between type of threat (direct, conditional, or non-specific/implied) and taking action ( $r = -.02978$ ,  $p = .7745$ ). This assumed credence of direct threats leading to action was more strongly contradicted in Dietz, Matthews, Martell, et al.'s study (1991) of threatening letters to members of Congress, where the presence of direct, conditional, or veiled threats actually decreased risk of approach.

This current research also did not support assessing risk from the wording in the threat which indicated who will carry out the threat, with choices being threatener alone (use of *I*), the threatener and others (use of *we*), or someone other than the threatener (use of *he, she, or they*) ( $r = -.04604$ ,  $p = .6775$ ). Contrary to what Dietz, Matthews, Van Duyne, et al., (1991) found in their celebrity threat study, this research found that

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mention of when (date/time) ( $r = -.11888$ ,  $p = .2512$ ) and where (place) ( $r = -.07620$ ,  $p = .4630$ ) the threat was going to be carried out were not associated with threateners taking action. Furthermore, threateners specifying the violent action they intended to inflict had no association with taking action ( $r = -.03242$ ,  $p = .7557$ ), nor did their couching the threat in hypothetically structured phrases (*could, should, would, ought to*) ( $r = .14558$ ,  $p = .1811$ ). Moreover, indications in the threatening communication of criminal sophistication, e.g., establishing ability to carry out the threat, planning for future communication with the target, or specifying the method for delivery of money or other valuables, were not associated with action ( $r = -.09014$ ,  $p = .3876$ ). Finally, the use of passive voice in describing activities necessary for carrying out the threat, e.g. “You will be killed” versus “I will kill you”, was not associated with harm or approaching/stalking ( $r = -.03157$ ,  $p = .7838$ ), a finding contrary to what Weintraub’s (1989) language research would suggest.

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Insert Table 7 about here

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#### *Profiler Plus.*

Of the seven psychological characteristics Profiler Plus identified from language use in the threatening communications, only conceptual complexity was significantly associated with outcome. Threateners with high conceptual complexity were more likely to act ( $r = .24764$ ,  $p = .0150$ ) (see Table 8).

## From Violent Words to Violent Deeds?

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Insert Table 8 about here

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### *PCAD.*

PCAD identified eight psychological characteristics from language used in the threatening communications. None were significantly associated with outcome; however, ambivalent hostility approached significance. Threateners with lower ambivalent hostility were somewhat more likely to act ( $r = -.17030$ ,  $p = .0971$ ) (see Table 9).

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Insert Table 9 about here

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### Predictive Equation

Once the independent variables were analyzed, an attempt was made to construct a predictive equation for differentiating between action and no action cases using a two step process. First, multiple regression was used to rank order variables within each category (threatener, target, language protocol, Profiler Plus, and PCAD) according to their association with outcome. Not surprisingly, some of the variables that individually differentiated between threateners who acted versus those who only wrote threats also contributed to the predictive model, however other independent variables which were not significantly associated with action also contributed.

### **From Violent Words to Violent Deeds?**

The most salient threatener variables were rank ordered as follows: the threatener (1) had a history of stalking others, (2) had discussed suicide, (3) was married at the time the threatening communication was received, (4) had stalked or physically approached the target/victim, and (5) was divorced.

The most salient target variables were rank ordered as follows: the target (1) was an acquaintance of the threatener, (2) was a co-worker of the threatener, (3) was not known to the threatener and was a public/government official, (4) was a person, not an institution or object, (5) was an individual known to the threatener.

The most salient language features were rank ordered as follows: (1) using words indicating prejudices concerning religion, (2) repeatedly mentioning love, marriage, or romance, (3) using a polite tone in the threatening communication, (4) indicating the target/victim, either explicitly or implicitly, in the threatening communication, (5) specifying weapons threateners planned to use, (6) mentioning a reason or motive for making the threat, and (7) indicating threateners were thinking about being with the target “forever” or “in eternity.”

The most salient document features were rank ordered as follows: threateners (1) giving their real return address, either partial or complete (2) using a typewriter, (3) using inappropriate capitalization, and (4) handwriting the threat.

The only salient method of communication was threateners using multiple mediums to contact the target/victim, such as email or phone calls, in addition to the threatening communications.

### **From Violent Words to Violent Deeds?**

The most salient psychological characteristic, as measured by Profiler Plus, was conceptual complexity. The most salient psychological characteristics, as measured by PCAD, were rank ordered as follows: (1) ambivalent hostility and (2) total anxiety.

After all salient variables were rank ordered within their various categories, logical regression analysis was used to select the best predictors from these variables for the purpose of constructing an equation that might differentiate between threateners who acted and those who did not (see Table 10). The variables and their designators used in the predictive equation (*patent pending*) were: (1) conceptual complexity (CC), (2) ambivalent hostility (PCAD 18), (3) using words indicating prejudices concerning religion (LQ26), (4) using polite tone in the threatening communication (LQ60), (5) mentioning love, marriage, or romance (LQ62), (6) indicating the target/victim, either explicitly or implicitly, in the threatening communication (LQ17), (7) threateners giving their real return address (partial or complete) (LQ43), (8) threateners communicating with the target/victim through multiple mediums (LQ24), and (9) threateners specifying weapons in the threatening communication (LQ14).

The first step in the predictive model is calculating y from the following equation composed of variable values and their beta weights:

$$y = 11.2607 + (3.5635 \times CC) - (10.5651 \times PCAD18) - (10.2594 \times LQ26) + (1.2062 \times LQ60) + (12.7267 \times LQ62) + (0.6726 \times LQ17) - (11.8110 \times LQ43) + (1.1225 \times LQ24) - (1.2740 \times LQ14).$$

## From Violent Words to Violent Deeds?

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Insert Table 10 about here

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The value calculated for  $y$  then becomes the exponent in the second step, which entails calculating the probability of threateners taking action from the equation:

$$p = \frac{e^y}{1 + e^y}$$

$p$  = the probability of the threatener taking action

$e$  = the base of natural logarithm. This value is a constant always equal to approximately 2.71828.

Scores for  $p$  will range from .00 to 1.00. This predictive model correctly classified 68 cases of the 96 cases (70.8%). The five incorrectly classified cases (1 false positive and 4 false negatives) constituted 5.3% and 23 cases couldn't be classified (24.2%) (see Table 11).

Another way to look at the results is to divide cases into three groups according to their probability scores, and this way dramatically improves the equation success rate predictions (see Table 11). If cases with probability scores of .00-.19 are predicted to be no action, the equation correctly predicted 55 of the 59 cases that fall in this range (93.2% correct prediction rate), with 4 false negatives. If cases with probability scores of .5-1.00 are predicted to be action cases, then the equation correctly predicted 13 of these 14 cases

### **From Violent Words to Violent Deeds?**

(92.8% correct prediction rate), with one false positive. The 23 cases that fell in the range of .20 to .49 could not be predicted (24.2%).

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Insert Table 11 about here

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## **From Violent Words to Violent Deeds?**

### **Chapter 5—Discussion**

Before discussing this research's significant findings in detail, a short summary is provided. Ten risk-enhancing and four risk-reducing variables were identified. Two risk-enhancing factors related to the target were: the target being (1) a person (as opposed to an institution/object) and (2) an acquaintance of the threatener. Eight risk-enhancing factors related to the threatening communication, and the methods of communicating that threat were: the threatener (1) threatens to reveal detrimental information (whether true or false); (2) threatens to stalk; (3) uses persuasion; (4) repeatedly mentions love, marriage, or romance; (5) uses a polite tone in the threat; (6) handwrites the threat; (7) has a higher score on conceptual complexity, as measured by Profiler Plus; and (8) communicates with the target through the threat and other methods. The four risk-reducing factors were: the threatener (1) uses words indicating prejudices concerning religion; (2) uses inappropriate capitalization; (3) provides a true return address (either partial or complete); and (4) types the threat on a typewriter.

An equation was constructed using logistic regression analysis for the purpose of predicting case outcome (i.e., whether or not the threatener would take action). That equation produced 70.8% accurate predictions in the overall sample and 93.2% in the low (.00-.19) and 92.9% in the high (.50-1.0) ranges of prediction scores.

#### **Threatener Variables**

While all threateners threatened violence, only 27% acted. Yet this percentage is not trivial; in fact, the percentage of "action taken" might well have been higher, since

### **From Violent Words to Violent Deeds?**

law enforcement intervention occurred in 12 cases, which likely reduced the number of action cases.

However, threateners who did act rarely did exactly what they threatened. When they did act, most approached and stalked. Although a minority of the actors did use physical violence, others created considerable fear and emotional anguish in their targets. Furthermore, variance was again evident in that some threateners committed multiple acts, whereas some committed only one act. In addition, some threateners took action against persons, while others acted against property, and a few acted against both.

Although the identities of only 43 (45%) threateners in this study were known to law enforcement, initial analysis found 15 social, demographic, and psychological variables associated with threateners acting. However, the high numbers of Missing/Unknown and Not Applicable responses to threatener protocol questions appeared to weaken and perhaps confound their predictive value. For example, when questions were rewritten to elicit yes or no answers, none of the threatener variables correlated with outcome.

Why did this study find that none of the threatener variables correlated significantly with outcome—when other studies have found significant relationships between threateners' characteristics and their actions (e.g., Scalora et al, 2002a; Fein & Vossekuil, 1999; Baumgartner et al., 2001)? One possible explanation is the heterogeneous nature of this study. Previous studies had greater homogeneity—their targets were similar (e.g., they were celebrities, members of Congress); the threateners

### **From Violent Words to Violent Deeds?**

had a common characteristic (e.g., mental disorder), or the crime was the same (e.g., stalking). In contrast, this study had greater heterogeneity; there were many types of targets (famous and not famous persons, as well as institutions/objects) and crimes (e.g., extortion, stalking, murder, sexual assault, bombing). It may be that this diversity blurred and washed out those previously identified threatener variables. Perhaps, then, in a much larger study where the sample could be broken down more finely by target and by crime, while still retaining a sufficient size to run statistical analyses, specific threatener variables might re-emerge as significant in a predictive equation.

#### Target Variables

While none of the social, demographic, or psychological characteristics of the threateners in this research were associated with case outcome, this study did identify salient social and demographic characteristics of the target. Although institutions and objects constituted a substantial portion of the targets in this study (26 of the 96 cases, or 27%), nearly all of the action cases (22 of the 26 cases, or 84.6%) involved people, illustrating that targets were significantly more likely to be persons rather than institutions/objects. This research also found that those person-targets were significantly more likely to be acquaintances, a result that differed from studies that showed that intimates were likely to be targets (Palarea, Zona, Lane, & Langhinrichsen-Rohling, 1999). One explanation for this could be related to the types of cases in this sample. Although the FBI was the investigating agency in some of these cases, many cases were referred from other agencies. As stated previously, this meant that these cases were often

### **From Violent Words to Violent Deeds?**

difficult to solve. Since intimates are typically the first individuals investigated as potential offenders, it may be that most of the intimate-threateners cases were resolved at the local and state level and, therefore, not included in this research sample. Finally, although two target variables independently differentiated between action and no action cases, neither reached the significance level necessary to be included in the predictive equation.

#### Communication Variables

Unlike other risk assessment areas (i.e., as in involuntary commitment, release, and parole decisions), threatening communication cases do not begin with a known person in custody. What we have is the threatening communication, and on this basis law enforcement must make risk assessments and decisions about deploying limited manpower and resources. Thus, by necessity, communication variables are primary. While 73% of threateners in this study did not act, a finding consistent with other research (e.g., Baumgartner, Scalora, & Plank, 2001; Scalora, Baumgartner, Zimmerman, Callaway, Maillette, Covell, Palarea, Krebs, & Washington, 2002b), 27% did act, and several features related to the threat helped predict those who did, and those who might in the future. Threateners were more likely to act if they threatened to stalk and threatened to reveal detrimental information (whether true or false), although they did not necessarily do either of these. Stalking has numerous complex motives, ranging from revenge to erotomaniac delusions of love relationships. In this study, stalking was most often associated with extortion cases. Similarly, threatening to reveal detrimental

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information was associated with extortion. One possibility for the association of these two variables with outcome relates to motive: that is, the threateners attempting to gain something for themselves. If so, then these results may be similar to those in the members of Congress studies (Dietz, Matthews, Martell, et al., 1991; Scalora et al., 2002a), which found “subjects were significantly more likely to approach when articulating personal or help-seeking requests” (Scalora et al., 2002a, p. 51).

Threateners providing a true return address was a risk-reducing factor, which was consistent with Dietz, Matthews, Van Duyne, et al.’s (1991) celebrities study, but not with Dietz, Matthews, Martell, et al. (1991) or Scalora et al.’s (2002a) studies of threats to members of Congress, both of which found that furnishing identifying information was risk-enhancing. The finding that threats typed on a typewriter was risk-reducing could be related to the age of the threatener, in that typewriter users are more likely to be older and, therefore, less likely to carry out their threats. It is difficult to speculate about why handwriting threats was risk-enhancing whereas using inappropriate capitalization was risk-reducing. It is also unclear why, in this research, threateners were significantly less likely to act if they used words indicating prejudices concerning religion, whereas their expressing prejudices concerning race, gender, sexual preference, and ethnicity had no relationship to acting. The latter findings were similar to those of Scalora et al.’s (2002a) threats to members of Congress study, in which “articulating target-related themes of an insulting or degrading nature” had no relationship to approach. Perhaps the prejudicial themes are what non-actors howl about but do not then generate hunting actions.

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### Conceptual Complexity, Ambivalent Hostility, and Predatory Violence

When one thinks about the distinction between “howlers” and “hunters,” the latter group is more likely to reflect predatory violence, whereas the former is more likely to reflect affective violence. If, as Meloy (in press) stated, determining the “mode of violence may be one of the most important criteria in assessing future violence risk” (p. 5), then scores on ambivalent hostility and conceptual complexity, when taken together, may assist threat assessors in making the distinction.

“Communicated threats are typically *expressive* [affective] or *instrumental* [predatory]” (Meloy, 2001, p. 1211). Affective violence is reactive, typically an immediate response to a perceived threat and its goal is threat reduction, which is defensive in nature (Meloy, in press). In contrast, predatory violence is “planned, purposeful, and emotionless” (Meloy, James, Farnham, Mullen, Pathé, Darnley, & Preston, 2004, p. 1088). It is a cognitively motivated attack, “primarily intended to control or influence the behavior of the target through an aversive consequence” (Meloy, 2001, p. 1211).

Scores on ambivalent hostility and conceptual complexity may assist the threat assessor in detecting the presence of predatory thinking. Higher scores on ambivalent hostility would be more consistent with the thinking of paranoid threateners who respond to perceived threats to self. The act of writing the threatening communications may assist these threateners in defusing their anger. By the time their targets have received the threats, the threateners’ heightened state of emotional arousal has lessened or passed.

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Such threateners have written, and through that process, “blown off steam,” making them less likely to proceed with violence. On the other hand, lower scores on ambivalent hostility—which were associated with acting in this research — indicate lack of paranoia. “Predation as a mode of violence would be more successful, and well thought out, given the absence of such affect” (Meloy, personal communication, February 21, 2005).

Similarly, conceptual complexity would logically diminish prior to affective violence as threateners react to perceived imminent threats. Conversely, higher conceptual complexity—which was associated with threateners being more likely to act in this research—indicates deliberative thinking. The “absence of autonomic arousal and affect in predatory violence ...would [allow] more room, so to speak, for cognitive deliberation ...[that] is certainly greater in predatory violence as the individual plans to carry out the act and weighs various tactical maneuvers” (Meloy, personal communication, February 21, 2005).

Thus, it appears that the presence of lower ambivalent hostility and higher conceptual complexity together are consistent with predatory thinking. And with “predation, we would expect the consummation of the act” (Meloy, personal communication, February 21, 2005).

#### **Predictive Equation**

In an attempt to construct a model for differentiating between threateners who took action and those who did not, variables from each category (threatener, target/victim, language, and the two computer programs) were rank ordered using

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multiple regression. Logistical regression analysis was then used to construct a predictive equation from these salient and significant variables. The resulting equation (*patent pending*) successfully differentiated between threateners who attempted or committed harmful actions and those who simply wrote, but did not act. The variables in the predictive model (see Table 10) were: the threatener (1) repeatedly mentions love, marriage, or romance; (2) uses a polite tone in the threat; (3) has a higher score on conceptual complexity, as measured by Profiler Plus; (4) communicates with the target through multiple mediums; (5) uses words indicating prejudices concerning religion; (6) provides a true return address (either partial or complete); (7) has a lower score on ambivalent hostility, as measured by PCAD, (8) indicates the target/victim, either explicitly or implicitly, in the communication, and (9) specifies weapons in the communication. The nine variables in the model accurately predicted 70.8% of case outcomes in the overall sample, and 93.2% of the outcomes in the low (.00-.19) and 92.9% in the high (.50-1.0) ranges of prediction scores (see Table 11).

#### **Limitations**

Some limitations in the present research should be noted. First, only cases referred to the FBI's National Center for the Analysis of Violent Crimes were included. These cases were referred by FBI field offices, as well as state and local law enforcement agencies; typically these cases were referred because they had not been solved, and the agencies wished to draw upon the expertise of experienced profilers. The level of



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difficulty of these cases could indicate that they contain some unique elements present to a lesser degree in non-referred cases.

Second, only written threats were analyzed, and only those constituting the first written threat to the target were included in the analysis. Analysis of characteristics of other targets and multiple communications would have provided additional information, but this was not done in order to equally weight all cases in this study. In a much larger study, one could test cases with multiple versus single communications.

Third, another decision made for the purpose of equally weighting all cases was the selection of only one category of action for each case (e.g., stated action carried out, some action other than what was threatened, approached/stalked but did not commit violent act, and no action carried out). Only the most harmful act attempted or committed was coded in this study, but many cases had more than one action. Evaluating all actions attempted or committed in each case could have further informed the analysis.

Fourth, the behavioral characteristics and history of the threateners were obtained from the primary investigator. Given that some facts are likely to be in doubt, and given that the investigator's subjectivity may enter into his or her judgments involved in coding those facts, there is likely to be some question about the reliability of those judgments. Without a second independent coder, we cannot determine the inter-rater reliability and this is a limitation in this study.

Although these limitations may have had some impact on the results of this research, three pertinent issues are worth noting: (1) this sample comprised all threat

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cases (with first communications over 100 words), analyzed by the FBI's National Center for the Analysis of Violent Crimes over a two-year period (other than the six cases discussed in chapter 3 which were excluded because of missing threats, lack of cooperation, and insufficient information); (2) high levels of accuracy (93%) in the low and high ranges of predictive scores were achieved from the first and, in some cases, only threat to the target—information that is available at early stages in investigations; and (3) the size of the sample in this research is sufficiently large enough to allow the results to be generalized to all FBI NCAVC written threat cases (with first communications over 100 words), and possibly to other threat case samples.

#### **How This Study Contributes to the Literature**

Given the limitations of any research, this current study, when compared to previous studies, improved earlier works in six ways. First, it increased the range of targets/victims by including institutions/objects, as well as threats to individuals. Additionally, it did not focus specifically on one type of person, such as Congressmen, judges, or celebrities; instead, it included those in “the general public” category, as well as high-profile individuals.

Second, this study expanded upon the type of crimes examined in previous research. It included a wide range of both violent and non-violent crimes.

Third, this study refined threat research's traditional dichotomous outcome measure—taking action or not taking action—by breaking it into categories of threateners (a) doing what they said they would do, (b) doing something harmful other than what

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they threatened to do, and (c) approaching or stalking—all of which have some level of dangerousness or fear of harm associated with them. By refining the dependent measure (taking action), particularly by including the act of stalking/approaching, this study produced a highly predictive equation.

Fourth, much of threat-related risk assessment research has focused on retrospective analysis of characteristics of known threateners and on using these characteristics as predictive tools. For example, Monahan, Steadman, Silver, Appelbaum, Robbins, Mulvey, Roth, Grisso, and Banks (2001) used three sources of data (subject interview, review of official records, and interviews of collateral individuals). “It is these methods of data gathering that are most effective in retrospectively determining the mode of violence in a subject” (Meloy, in press, p. 13). Be that as it may, law enforcement officials often do not know the identity of the threatener/subject, making these methods useless in many on-going investigations. This current research, in contrast, was more realistic in that it focused on the limited information available at the initial investigative stage, where the threatener’s identity was not known. The question here was, “Can investigators accurately predict from the limited information of the threatening communication?” The results show that a predictive model does emerge from this work, and that model has substantial accuracy. This predictive model can aid investigators in making more informed decisions about what steps to take and what resources to commit.

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Fifth, some researchers have called for abandoning efforts to analyze the form and content of threatening communications for predictive purposes (Meloy et al., 2004). This current research demonstrates that threatening communications can provide salient variables for predicting threatener behavior. It is worth noting that six variables in the predictive model were coded from the threat itself and two more variables were added by computer software programs scoring psychological states from language content analysis of the threat; thus the threat alone accounted for eight of nine variables in the predictive model.

Sixth, although the focus of this study was improving risk assessment by law enforcement professionals, one should also consider its potential use for risk assessment in other more traditional areas, such as what contributes to the thought processes of clinicians who must decide whether or not to release or commit the mentally ill, or parole boards considering parole for a convicted felon. Monahan et al.'s (2001) decision tree, which includes factors such as a history of violence and substance abuse, certainly informs clinicians and forensic specialists, but what if, for example, the written ruminations of someone like John Hinckley about Jody Foster indicate conceptual complexity and ambivalent hostility consistent with predation? Might this knowledge gleaned from the writings (e.g., diaries, letters, e-mails) of such individuals further increase predictive ability, and therefore affect the release or commitment decision?

## **From Violent Words to Violent Deeds?**

### Suggestions for Future Research

This study found the presence of threatening communications was inversely related to threateners taking action, a finding consistent with previous research which “underscores the notion that articulation of threats is not necessarily predictive of higher-risk behavior” (Scalora et al., 2002a, p. 51). Despite this trend, 27% of the threateners in this study attempted or committed harmful acts, and others might have done so if law enforcement had not intervened. Threat assessment professionals should not discount the risk posed by threateners who express themselves through threatening communications and should certainly not discount those who take the additional action step of approaching or stalking (e.g., Rosenfeld & Harmon, 2002; Meloy, 2001; Fein & Vossekuil, 1999; Calhoun, 1998; Zona, Palarea, & Lane, 1998).

Thus, the first suggestion for future research is to examine the implications this research has for the stalking literature. Stalking can be seen in at least two ways: first, as the outcome or dependent variable, i.e., the threatener acts by stalking, and second, as an intermediate action variable, i.e., stalking is a prelude to violence. This current research views stalking in both ways, and it suggests that if researchers investigate any written or verbal material stalkers direct to their targets, assessors might be able to identify variables related to action, thereby enabling them to more accurately predict those who will stop at stalking and those who will commit greater harm.

A second suggestion is to do further research on the types of predictors examined in this and previous threat assessment research which tap into language use at the

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syntactic or structural level (e.g., looking for instances of *I*, *we*, or *they* to determine who threateners say will carry out their threats). The thinking behind such research is appropriately focused, in that some syntactic variables are significantly associated with action. Previous research has also tapped into semantic or content related language by looking at information, such as thematic content and roles assumed by threateners (Dietz, Matthew, Martell, et al., 1991). But further research which employs more systematic evaluation and coding of language use shown to be associated with psychological states/traits, such as cognition, emotion, and particularly predation, may provide additional information as to what the threateners' intentions truly are. Profiler Plus and PCAD are two content analysis programs that demonstrated their usefulness in assessing psychological states associated with threateners acting. Other methods of analysis, whether they are coded manually or by computer, need to be identified and tested in future threat assessment research to determine their effectiveness.

A third suggestion for future research involves looking at other variables from the threatening communication which appear to be consistent with higher conceptual complexity and lower ambivalent hostility. Two examples are the use of persuasion and politeness—both associated with a higher likelihood of acting in this research. Both variables suggest more deliberative and less emotional thinking. Whether or not they may be indicative of predatory thinking processes is a matter of speculation at this point; the question is an empirical one. This question ought to be explored in future research.

### **From Violent Words to Violent Deeds?**

A fourth suggestion is to replicate this study in the context of e-mail threats. The prevalence of emails as a form of communication could provide a fertile source of research material. Perhaps e-mail or text message threats will turn out to be more impulsive and affective forms of threatening rather than indicative of predators, but this needs to be empirically assessed. Since this research found that multiple ways of communicating threats was positively correlated with action, e-mailing and text-messaging, in addition to letter writing, might add to the predictive equation's accuracy.

A fifth suggestion is to consider viewing some of the variables which have been identified in studies of the mentally disordered through a predatory lens. As Monahan et al. (2001) have pointed out, mental disorder by itself has low rates of violence, but mental disorder may be coupled with psychopathy, which does relate to predation. An example of a risk-enhancing variable from this research which might be viewed through a predatory lens is the threatener repeatedly mentioning love, marriage, or romance. One might initially view this variable as being affectively oriented, but that view may be ill-advised and superficial. Hidden within the focus on love, marriage, or romance may be a design, purpose, and a vision of mystical union—something far more sinister and predatory than pure affect. The presence of this particular focus may reveal that the threatener has moved from surface emotion to thinking and planning—cognitive processes consistent with predation, which would increase the likelihood of violence significantly. That may explain why this variable showed such a strong beta weight in the predictive model (12.7267).

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A sixth suggestion involves more traditional risk assessment areas. The results from this research may transcend threat assessment and have application in other areas of clinical and forensic decision-making. Conceptual complexity and ambivalent hostility appear to reveal emotion and cognition important for clinicians to discern when considering release or commitment decisions, thus, analyzing writings of the person under review may add critical information to the clinicians' decision-making process.

#### **Conclusion**

This study identified two risk-enhancing characteristics of threat targets, along with eight risk-enhancing and four risk-reducing features associated with written threatening communications and methods of communicating threats. Two of these variables, specifically higher conceptual complexity and lower ambivalent hostility (paranoia), appear to signal the presence of cognition and emotion related to predatory violence. Identifying the presence of predatory thinking in threatening communications may provide investigators with an important clue for more accurately assessing when threateners are planning to move from violent words to violent deeds.



## From Violent Words to Violent Deeds?

Table 1

Number of cases with action compared to no action

Case categories	n	%	%
		of action cases	of total cases
Harmful action taken	26		27
Stated action carried out	1	3.8	1
Some action, other than what was threatened, carried out	9	34.6	9.4
Against persons	(3)	(11.5)	(3.1)
Against institutions/objects	(4)	(15.4)	(4.2)
Against persons and institutions/object	(2)	(7.7)	(2.1)
Threatener approached/stalked target/victim but did not commit violent act	16	61.5	16.7
No action carried out	70		73
Intercepted by law enforcement	(12)		(12.5)

## From Violent Words to Violent Deeds?

Table 2

Number of actions attempted or taken by threateners

Crimes	n	% of all actions attempted/taken
Burning	0	0%
Bombing	1	2.08%
Defacing or damaging property	3	6.25%
Disrupting events	0	0%
Extorting	9	18.75%
Kidnapping	0	0%
Murdering	3	6.25%
Physically assaulting or harming	2	4.17%
Product-tampering	0	0%
Revealing detrimental information whether or not that information was true or false	3	6.25%
Sabotaging	0	0%
Sexually assaulting	1	2.08%
Stalking	17	35.42%
Taunting (including harassing or intimidating)	6	12.5%
Using weapons of mass destruction	0	0%
Other	3	6.25%
	48	100%

## From Violent Words to Violent Deeds?

Table 3

Threatener variables associated with action taken

Threatener variable	Of identified threateners (n = 43), n for whom information was available	Pearson Correlation
Culture of threatener	37	.40555***
Gender of threatener	43	.40786***
Current marital status of threatener (when writing threat)	33	.28739**
Does threatener have history of mobility and transience?	34	.39500***
Has threatener indicated to others interest in harming target?	29	.39655***
Does threatener have history of harassing/stalking others?	30	.40226***
Does threatener have history of issuing threats?	28	.37226***
Did threatener indicate he/she experienced a significant event prior to threatening behavior?	25	.34860***
Does threatener have history of drug use/abuse?	27	.34089***
Was threatener on prescription medicine at time he/she was writing threatening communications?	21	.40640***

### From Violent Words to Violent Deeds?

Table 3 (continued)

Threatener variables associated with threateners acting after initial analysis

Threatener variable	Of identified threateners (n = 43), n for whom information was available	Pearson Correlation
Does the threatener have history of prescription drug abuse?	16	.37152***
Does threatener have history of alcohol abuse?	17	.47243***
Did threatener have interest in militant or radical ideas or groups?	30	.38225***
Does threatener have history of serious depression or despair?	18	.24888*
Did threatener ever discuss suicide?	20	.34767***

*Note* \* $p < .05$ ; \*\* $p < .01$ ; \*\*\*  $p < .001$ .

## From Violent Words to Violent Deeds?

Table 4

Target variables associated with action taken

Target variable	Pearson Correlation
Target of threat was a person	.21072*
Target and threatener knew each other	.25926
Target was acquaintance of threatener	.32733*
Target was co-worker of threatener	.26414
Target was public government official	-.25332
Target of threat was an institution/object	-.21072*
Target was government/public building	-.18359

*Note* \* $p < .05$ .

## From Violent Words to Violent Deeds?

Table 5

Language variables associated with action taken

Language variable	Pearson Correlation
Threatening to reveal detrimental information (whether true or false)	.25048*
Threatening to stalk	.23901*
Using persuasion in threatening communication	.20634*
Repeatedly mentioning love, marriage, or romance	.35139***
Tone of threatening communication is polite	.26225**
Use of words indicating prejudices concerning religion	-.20234*

Note \* $p < .05$ ; \*\* $p < .01$ ; \*\*\* $p < .001$ .

## From Violent Words to Violent Deeds?

Table 6

Document features associated with action taken

Document features	Pearson Correlation
Threat was handwritten	.21286*
Use of inappropriate capitalization	-.20447*
Threateners provided true return address (partial or complete)	-.22900*
Threat typed on typewriter, not computer	-.23513*

*Note* \* $p < .05$ .

## From Violent Words to Violent Deeds?

Table 7

Commonly used language variables **not** associated with action taken

Language features	Pearson Correlation	P Value
Type of threat (direct, conditional, non-specific/implied)	-.02978	.7745
Who will carry out threat ( <i>I, he, she, we, they</i> )	-.04604	.6775
Date/time when threat is to occur specified	-.11888	.2512
Place where threat is to occur specified	-.07620	.4630
Violent action specified	-.03242	.7551
Wording threat using hypothetically structured phrases ( <i>could, would, should, ought to</i> )	.14558	.1811
Criminal sophistication indicators in communication	-.09014	.3876
Use of passive voice in describing activities necessary to carry out threat ( <i>You will be killed versus I will kill you</i> )	-.03157	.7838



## From Violent Words to Violent Deeds?

Table 8

Psychological characteristics associated with action taken as measured by Profiler Plus

Psychological characteristics	Pearson Correlation	P Value
Belief in one's own ability to control events	-.05355	.6121
Need for power and influence	-.04722	.6549
Conceptual complexity	.24764*	.0150
Self-confidence	.06316	.5929
Task focus	.00522	.9600
In-group bias	-.02868	.8249
General distrust or suspiciousness of others	-.09583	.3689

*Note* \* $p < .05$ .

## From Violent Words to Violent Deeds?

Table 9

Psychological characteristics associated with action taken as measured by PCAD

Psychological characteristics	Pearson Correlation	P Value
Total anxiety	.09030	.3816
Hostility directed outward	-.02044	.8433
Hostility directed inward	-.01663	.8722
Ambivalent hostility (paranoia)	-.17030	.0971
Social alienation-personal disorganization	.07140	.4894
Cognitive impairment	-.01911	.8534
Hope	.03521	.7335
Depression	-.01153	.9112

## From Violent Words to Violent Deeds?

Table 10

Predictive equation variables and their beta weights

Variables	df	$\beta$	Wald Chi-Square
Intercept	1	11.2607	0.0006
Conceptual complexity (CC)	1	3.5635	2.0848
Ambivalent hostility (PCAD 18)	1	-10.5651	2.7527
Words indicating religious prejudices (LQ26)	1	-10.2594	0.0046
Polite tone (LQ60)	1	1.2062	1.6135
Mentioning love, marriage, or romance (LQ62)	1	12.7267	0.0009
Indicating target/victim, explicitly or implicitly (LQ17)	1	0.6726	0.4558
Giving their real return address (LQ43)	1	-11.8110	0.0077
Communicating through multiple mediums (LQ24)	1	1.1225	1.8577
Specifying weapons (LQ14)	1	-1.2740	2.5686

## From Violent Words to Violent Deeds?

Table 11

### Predictive equation success rate by probability score groups

Probability scores	Prediction	N of cases	N of cases correctly predicted	False positives	False negatives
.00-.19	No action	59	55**	0	4
.20-.49	Can't be predicted	23	NA*	NA*	NA*
.50-1.00	Action	14	13***	1	0

\*NA – Not applicable

\*\*93.2% correctly predicted in .00-.19 probability score range

\*\*\*92.8% correctly predicted in .50-1.00 probability score range

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**From Violent Words to Violent Deeds?**

Appendix A

**From Violent Words to Violent Deeds?**

Appendix A (continued)

**From Violent Words to Violent Deeds?**

Appendix A (continued)



**From Violent Words to Violent Deeds?**

Appendix A (continued)

**From Violent Words to Violent Deeds?**

Appendix B

**From Violent Words to Violent Deeds?**

Appendix B (continued)

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## **From Violent Words to Violent Deeds?**

### Appendix C

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**From Violent Words to Violent Deeds?**

Appendix E



**From Violent Words to Violent Deeds?**

Appendix E (continued)