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## Threatening and Otherwise Inappropriate Letters to Hollywood Celebrities

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**REFERENCE:** Dietz, P. E., Matthews, D. B., Van Duyne, C., Martell, D. A., Parry, C. D. H., Stewart, T., Warren, J., and Crowder, J. D., "Threatening and Otherwise Inappropriate Letters to Hollywood Celebrities," *Journal of Forensic Sciences*, JFSCA, Vol. 36, No. 1, Jan. 1991, pp. 185-209.

**ABSTRACT:** In this paper, the authors examine the characteristics of threatening and otherwise inappropriate letters sent to Hollywood celebrities. Such communications, known colloquially as "nut mail," "hate mail," obscene letters, and threat letters, are received by the famous in enormous volume. We studied approximately 1800 such letters to entertainment celebrities from 214 subjects, who averaged 8 letters apiece. We quote excerpts from these letters, describe objects enclosed with them, and provide quantitative data on such variables as the form, appearance, volume, and duration of such letters; the subject's perceived relationship to the celebrity; the thematic content of the letters; and the messages and threats they communicate. Comparisons between 107 subjects who pursued encounters with the celebrities and 107 who did not revealed 15 factors associated with such pursuit. Contrary to expectation, the presence or absence of threats was not associated with pursuit behavior.

**KEYWORDS:** psychiatry, questioned documents, mental illness, threats, obscene letters, public figure protection, assassination, stalkers, harassment, mentally disordered offenders, forensic psychiatry

Public figures are besieged by a constant onslaught of unwanted attention from mentally disordered persons in search of identity, love, power, relief, and—most of all—contact. Among the mentally disordered persons who pursue public figures are those who attack

Received for publication 20 Nov. 1989; revised manuscript received 28 Feb. 1990; accepted for publication 5 March 1990.

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the object of their attention. Yet, except for presidential assassinations, the pursuit of public figures has received little attention from the research community. Although there have been empirical studies of mentally disordered visitors to the White House [1-3] and other government offices [4], the authors of this paper have identified no systematic research on threatening and inappropriate letters to public figures.

We studied two populations: those who pursue celebrities in the entertainment industry and those who pursue members of the Congress of the United States. Our purpose in studying threatening and inappropriate letters and visits from the letter writers is to enhance the ability of behavioral scientists to predict assassination and other forms of attack on public figures and thereby prevent such behavior. We sought to identify features of such letters that would indicate greater or lesser risk of the subject attempting to gain physical proximity to the public figure, where the possibility of an attack is greatest.

In this paper, the first report from a six-year study, we describe threatening and inappropriate communications sent to Hollywood celebrities and examine whether certain features of these letters are associated with physical pursuit of the celebrity. As the excerpts from letters given in this paper suggest, their writers were mentally disordered persons suffering from a variety of conditions. Subsequent reports will consider threatening and otherwise inappropriate communications to members of Congress and will compare such communications with the present sample [5], describe the writers' psychopathology, and present analyses of additional variables associated with attempts to physically approach public figures.

## **Methods**

We studied threatening and inappropriate letters sent to entertainment celebrities which had been archived by Gavin de Becker, Inc., a Los Angeles based security consultation agency. The firm provides guidance to its clients on which mail to refer for assessment. The referral criteria ask those who open the mail to refer anything sinister, disjointed, bizarre, or unreasonable, and specify particular themes of letters which should be referred (for example, special destiny, obsessive love, death, suicide, weapons, and assassins). The complete criteria are available elsewhere [6]. The referred letters are collected, cataloged by writer, and filed in the de Becker archives, along with other investigative information. This firm has amassed an extraordinary collection of these materials (estimated at 143 000 items of correspondence as of this writing).

All of the celebrities with whom the subjects in this study had communicated are persons of national or international stature, including some of the most famous individuals in the entertainment world. The sampling universe we studied consisted chiefly of letters written to 22 celebrities, each of whom had many cases on file. Smaller numbers of letters written to each of a larger number of celebrities were also on file and were included in the pool of cases from which the sample was drawn.

### *Sampling*

Our sampling strategy reflected the goal of identifying features of such letters that would indicate which subjects would physically approach the public figure. The sampling universe comprised of those cases in which a letter writer had been on file for at least six months (allowing the subject an opportunity to attempt an approach and to write additional letters). Having found that subjects who approach write significantly more letters, we studied a simple random sample of letter writers who had attempted to approach the celebrity physically and a stratified random sample of an equal number of letter writers who had not approached, stratified according to the number of letters. By ensuring that the subjects in each sample had written equal numbers of letters, we guarded against artifacts that would otherwise have arisen from the greater amount of information available on subjects who had approached (and who had written more often, thereby revealing more information about themselves).

In January 1985, an index was generated of all cases then present in the de Becker archives. At that time the archives contained files on 1559 subjects, 270 of whom had approached the celebrity. Of these 270 individuals, 61 had sent no known mailings and 39 were lost to the study, either because a reported approach could not be confirmed or because the case file could not be located. Thus, the universe of letter writers who had approached consisted of 170 subjects, 107 of whom were randomly selected for study. A total of 1330 subjects who had not approached was available for sampling, but 58 of these had come to attention because of telephone calls and had never written. Of 1272 letter writers who had not approached, 107 were selected for study using a stratification procedure.

We stratified all letter writers into strata based on the total number of letters on file from the subject. For the study, we randomly selected 107 "approach-positive" letter writers to study and determined their distribution by number of communications; then we randomly sampled from the pool of "approach-negative" letter writers until 107 had been selected, to achieve a similar distribution by number of communications.

Of the 214 subjects in the stratified random sample, half had approached the celebrity and half had not at the time of data collection. The success of the matching procedure is verified by the finding that, in the sample selected, the mean number of communications did not differ significantly between the positive (8.4 mailings) and negative cases (8.2 mailings).

A "communication" was defined as the delivery of any written information or item to an agent of the celebrity. While in most instances these were mailed letters, greeting cards, or postcards, they included telegrams, deliveries of flowers or other gifts, diaries, scripts or other writings, and packages containing multiple letters or postcards, whether delivered by a U.S. Postal Service worker, a common carrier, a delivery service, or a messenger. Each of these was counted as a single communication. Telephone calls and visits were treated as separate variables; for the sake of brevity and to make it clear that telephone calls were not counted as communications, we use the terms "letters" and "mailings," even though not all communications were letters or were mailed.

A subject was classified as "approach positive" if known to have (1) visited a location believed to be the home of the celebrity; (2) visited any agency believed to represent the celebrity; (3) visited a location believed to be the home or business address of any acquaintance, friend, relative, or intimate of the celebrity; (4) approached within five miles of any of the above locations with the expressed intent of seeing, visiting, or confronting any of the above parties; (5) traveled more than 300 miles to see the celebrity or any of the above parties, even in a public appearance; or (6) behaved in any manner out of the ordinary at any public appearance of the celebrity.

A subject was classified as "approach negative" if he or she had sent inappropriate materials to the celebrity but had not met any of the above criteria for an approach-positive case. A subject who had written and who also attended a public performance would still be classified as approach negative if the subject traveled less than 300 miles to see the celebrity and behaved appropriately there.

### *Instruments*

A series of original instruments for the coding and recording of data was developed; these are described in detail elsewhere [6]. Separate instruments were developed and used to code data from individual letters and from entire case files, and separate instruments were used to code data on each threat identified and each approach identified. Drafts of these instruments were critiqued by the advisory board for the project, which consisted of experienced mental health clinicians, criminal investigators, violence researchers, and public figure protection experts. The instruments were revised on the basis of these critiques and pretests.

### *Confidentiality*

Those project staff with access to information on the celebrities or subjects signed contracts with Gavin de Becker, Inc., ensuring the confidentiality of the materials made available for the research. To protect the identities of both subjects and celebrities further, all data were recorded in coded form, using numerical identifiers. In preparing case histories, pseudonyms were developed for both subjects and celebrities, and all references to persons, places, films, recordings, television shows, and other potential identifiers were replaced.

### *Coder Training*

The data were collected by a team of seven researchers who traveled to Los Angeles for training and coding. They included three psychiatrists, one doctor of social work, and three doctoral candidates in clinical and community psychology. One of the doctoral candidates served as a case manager, organizing materials, selecting the sample, controlling the flow of case files, and coding much of the quantitative data on objective variables. The other six members of the team coded the more qualitative data.

All coders were trained simultaneously in the use of the coding instruments. As part of the training, three case files were coded independently by all coders, who then discussed as a group the coding of each variable.

### *Data Collection*

To keep the coders blind to the approach status of cases during coding, the case manager located all case materials in the de Becker archives, drew the sample, and prepared the case files for coding. As described in detail elsewhere [6], the coders were kept blind to the subjects' approach status during the coding of data from the first letter and from certain other individual letters. Cases were assigned randomly to coders.

### *Other Sources of Information*

Other sources of information often available included information from public records, such as Department of Motor Vehicle records, official criminal histories (from states in which this information is public), and newspaper stories. Other information had been developed through interviews (usually by telephone) conducted by de Becker personnel with subjects or their family members or associates or with mental health or law enforcement personnel familiar with a subject. Additional information came from direct observation of subjects in the course of an approach or at the time of various interventions. In a few instances, legal proceedings had made available such documents as psychiatric reports, hospital records, or police reports.

### *Reliability*

To measure interrater reliability, 20 cases were randomly selected to be coded by the six project staff members who coded qualitative data. These were the first 10 cases and the last 10 cases coded by each individual. Each item which failed to generate at least 80% agreement among the six coders on the first 10 cases was discussed and either rejected, revised, or clarified before final data collection began. For the final data collected, interrater reliability was calculated for 904 variables and ranged from 64 to 100% agreement. For 66 variables, the level of interrater agreement was between 64 and 80%, and for 838 variables, the level of agreement was between 80 and 100%. (Only a subset of these variables is included in this report.)

### *Statistics*

In comparing approach-positive and approach-negative subjects, we used the chi-square test of association for discrete variables (or those variables which were grouped into discrete values) and the *t*-test for continuous variables. Wherever appropriate, we report values of chi-square adjusted for continuity and probability, or the group means and standard deviations, the value of *t*, and the probability. As neither of these tests measures more than association or differences between mean values of two groups, we report the differences found as significant associations or differences, using a probability of 0.05 as the threshold for reportability. Considering the sample size and the number of comparisons made, however, we recommend caution in interpreting associations or differences with probabilities between 0.01 and 0.05.

The percentages reported are based only on subjects for whom data were available. Variables were dropped from the analysis if identified among less than 5% of the subjects or if the interrater agreement was lower than 80%.

### *Challenges to Representativeness*

Despite the guidance given to mail screeners for identification of inappropriate letters, several factors may have contributed to irregularities in the referral of letters. Letters that are written are not necessarily received by those who know the referral criteria, and even mail that does reach secretaries or others familiar with the criteria may go unopened or may not be referred when it should because of insensitivity in recognizing inappropriateness.

We have no reason to doubt that the letters studied are representative of inappropriate letters to similar public figures that might be gathered through similar methods. The only systematic biases we have reason to suspect are that (1) the most severely disorganized letter writers may be underrepresented because they more often fail to mail, address, or stamp their letters; (2) the most subtle degrees of inappropriateness are probably underrepresented because they do not meet the screener's threshold for referral; and (3) the most overtly threatening, ominous, and fear-arousing letters are probably overrepresented. However, one would expect that these biases would occur anywhere that data were collected from prescreened inappropriate mail referred to a central location.

## **Results**

### *Examples of Letters*

Examples of letters are given here to illustrate the types of materials studied. To protect the identity of all parties, in these and other examples, we have changed all dates and other potentially identifying information, while remaining faithful to the important facts. Pseudonyms are used where necessary. The names of businesses, streets, cities, states, and other potential identifiers have been deleted or replaced. The subjects' quotations are not corrected for grammar, spelling, or other errors.

#### *Example 1: A middle-aged man wrote to a young singer:*

I am afraid I made a mistake when I told you I was your father. Some guy showed me a picture of you and your father standing together when you got your award.

I was so proud when I thought I was your pop. I guess that means that my daughter aint your sister either.

. . . I asked your manager to borrow \$10,000 I hope she lets me have it.

Before I go I just want to say that the only reason I thought I was your pop was because I used to go with a person that looked like you.

Love forever

*Example 2: A man wrote to a female celebrity:*

hello darling this is youre New friend . . . we will be soon together for our love honey, I will write and mail lovely photo of myself okay. I will write to you Soon, have a lovely Easter time hoping to correspond. . . here is a postcard for you . . . honey how are you doing . . . wishing to correspond with you Soon . . . hoping we do some camping and Barbecueing Soon okay.

*Example 3: A man wrote to a television personality:*

. . . I would like to Have lots of pictures of you sex symBol woman like you are all the times if you don't mine at all if you take off your clotHes for me and I can see wHat you Got to the world then ever that love any How I would like to know How LonG is your Breast anyHow I would like to know How mucH milk Do you carry in your Breast anyHow I would like to know How far Does your Breast stick out on you anyHow I By playBoy Books all the times . . . I would like you to put up your legs and take pictures of you in the nude . . . I would like Have larGe pictures of you in tHe nude lots of them then ever were so I will take with me and have lots of womens in tHe nude I like sex symBol womens to look at all the times.

*Example 4: A mental patient who had escaped from hospitals reputedly stole a gun and ammunition. He believed a particular actress was being starved by police. In an incident separate from the gunfight mentioned in this excerpt, he committed a murder for which he was convicted.*

please disregard the other letter (I sent in January) I sent to you. Disregard this letter if you are married or have a boyfriend, as I don't want to break up an existing relationship. I would like to be one of the following to me; (a) a lover, (b) a girlfriend, or (c) a wife. I want it to be a forever thing, if we have faith in each other, and don't cheat. You must fulfill the following; (1) you must be a vegetarian (2) you must not have another boyfriend. (3) You must not hold hands or do anything beyond that point, with another, unless I give you permission (4) I believe in birth control devices and (fetus removal) abortion, to take the fear away from women, so they can have a complete orgasm. Men never have to worry, because they, don't have the baby. (5) You must not wear pants, unless the temperature drops below 50 degrees F. or you engage in hazardous work (like coal mining). (6) You can view pornographic movies.

. . . I was in a gunfight with the police, because I thought you didn't have to eat food. I was real sick (crazy) at the time. I was arrested, but should be getting out soon. I'm in a hospital; for observation. I was wounded as was one policeman. We are both okay now. A bystander was wounded by another policeman.

. . . I'm a vegetarian. I believe the slaughter of innocent animals is a crime against humanity. . . .

. . . last chance. Let's sit in a little room together. Let's drive to the end of the world. Let's look in each others eyes. Let's magnetically attract each other from close up. Let's talk till we want each other more than anyone else. . . . I believe we can have a good life together. Please call, write or come here by February 6th or else I'll have to look for someone else. . . .

*Example 5: A young man wrote to an actress:*

. . . I hate to trouble you with my problems, but I have a few. You see, I'm being harassed by this wall that . . . controls [most of the state]. Myself, I am a *cat*, yes really. Believe it or not, this wall is trying to frame me and put me in jail. You see I'm just a helpless image, and I control more than one wall. Nine I think. Please get in touch with me, because I know who L-7 is.

Sincerely

Tommy

Alias—The LINE

[Address]

P.S. I am Round

But I don't know how long

I can last.—H.E.L.P.

A month later, Tommy wrote that he was actually a dragon born from a cat, ending his letter with an invitation:

P.S. . . . I'll spet you don't know what would happen if You skinned a person and ate him.

If you come bring some big people with you, I've had this urge to eat my best friend for the past nine years.

*Example 6:* A woman sent a Christmas card to actor "Frank Serbio" stating: "Thanks for giving me Jason a beautiful bundle of joy. Merry Christmas Frank." Enclosed with the card was a photograph of her son. Six weeks later, she sent a second letter to Serbio's wife asking forgiveness for the Christmas card and suggesting that Frank had been "hurt" because she had told "people all over the world" about their son. She wrote:

I know that Jason is my beautiful baby and that Frank is the daddy. I never been in love and I always been a queen . . . I don't know much of anything other than the fact that I love my son and Frank very much. I don't know very much about life I was never told about life or how to love or be loved. . . . I know that I don't deserve a man like Frank. I know that I hurt him so much by writing to people all over the world about his son. . . . Tell Frank to come get Jason and take him Home with you and the boys.

Thanks, love, . . .

### *Volume of Communications*

The number of communications sent or delivered by each subject to the celebrity was determined not only for the cases included in the stratified random sample, but also for all 170 approach-positive cases and for a random sample of 170 approach-negative cases. This number ranged from zero to 150. (Cases with thousands of mailings also occur, but none fell within either sample.) The mean number of communications sent or delivered for the total population was 7.1. The complete distribution by number of mailings is given elsewhere [6].

Among the 170 approach-positive cases who had written at least once to the celebrity, the mean number of communications was 9.9 [standard deviation (SD) = 22.0]. Among the random sample of 170 approach-negative subjects who had written to the celebrity at least once, the mean number of communications was 4.3 (SD = 14.1). The difference between these means was statistically significant ( $t = 2.80$ ,  $df = 338$ ,  $P < 0.005$ ). Thus, subjects who approached sent a significantly greater number of communications to the celebrity. Note, however, that the communications did not always precede the first approach. Despite the association between the number of communications and approach to the celebrity, there was no association between the total number of pieces of paper in the communications and the approach status, even when those sending the most extreme amounts of material were removed from the analysis.

To examine further the association between the number of written communications and whether the subject approached the celebrity, we estimated the proportions of subjects who approached for classes of subjects who had written particular numbers of letters. These estimates were extrapolated from a random sample of 100 approach-positive cases and 100 approach-negative cases. These data are given in Table 1, which shows that the lowest rate of approach was for those who had written only once. The rate is somewhat higher for those who wrote 2 times, 3 or 4 times, or 5 to 9 times. The peak rate of approach, however, was among those who had written 10 to 14 times: 65% of such subjects had approached. Note, however, that this rate is based on a relatively small sample of 23 cases. These data cannot be interpreted as indicating the risk of future approach, because they are based on the total number of communications received before, during, and after approach by subjects in the sampling universe.

TABLE 1—Percentage of subjects who approached by number of communications ever received.

Number of Communications	Number of Persons	Number Who Approached	% Approaching	95% Confidence Interval, % <sup>a</sup>
1	997	75	7.5	5.9 to 9.1
2	152	19	12.5	7.2 to 17.6
3 to 4	114	20	17.5	10.5 to 24.5
5 to 9	120	19	15.8	9.3 to 22.3
10 to 14	23	15	65.2	42.7 to 83.6
15 to 24	20	4	20.0	5.7 to 43.7
25 or more	73	18	24.7	15.3 to 36.1

<sup>a</sup> Based on the normal approximation to the binomial distribution where  $N > 100$ ; based on scientific tables where  $N < 100$ .

To explore the potential value of the number of communications as a predictor of future approach behavior, we estimated the probability of a future approach by subjects who had written a particular number of communications without approaching. Table 2 gives the probabilities that subjects who have written a particular number of communications will *eventually* approach. Here, the proportions of those approaching vary from 3.5 to 12.2%, and the highest probability attaches to subjects from whom 10 or more communications have been received at a given time.

The total number of mailings ranged from 1 to 146 for the subjects selected for the sample on which the remainder of this report is based. There was a mean of 8 letters per subject. Ninety (42%) sent a single mailing, 27 sent 2 mailings, 14 sent 3, 11 sent 4, and 9 sent 5. One hundred fifty-one subjects (71%) sent 5 or fewer mailings. Twenty-four subjects (11%) sent 20 or more mailings; 8 (4%) sent 50 or more; and 1 sent over 100.

The individual mailings varied in length from a single postcard or preprinted greeting card to lengthy tomes, which affected the total quantity of information on particular subjects. One measure of the amount of information provided by subjects is the number of pieces of paper they sent. This ranged from 1 piece of paper to 2014, with a mean of 35.0 (25.7 without the most extreme case) and a median of 6.5 pages. Fifty percent of the subjects sent 6 or fewer pages; 10% sent more than 80 pages. The number of words in the subject's first letter ranged from 0 to 6475, with a median of 198 words. The median length of second letters was 228 words, and that of third letters was 240 words. The average sentence length ranged from 0 to 137 words, with a median of 14 words per sentence. The mean number of words in the first communication, the mean number of words per sentence, and the mean number of pages in the first communication did not differ significantly between the positives and negatives.

TABLE 2—Probability of a future approach by persons who have written particular numbers of communications without having approached.

Number of Communications	Number of Persons	Number Who Approached	% Approaching	95% Confidence Interval, %
1 or more	1405	67	4.8	3.7 to 5.9
2 or more	451	35	7.8	5.3 to 10.3
3 or more	311	28	9.0	5.8 to 12.2
5 or more	204	23	11.3	7.0 to 15.6
10 or more	90	11	12.2	6.3 to 20.8
15 or more	78	7	9.0	3.7 to 17.6
25 or more	57	2	3.5	0.4 to 12.1



*Duration of Communications*

For subjects who sent more than one mailing, the time span between the earliest and most recent mailings ranged from less than 1 month to 91 months, with a mean of 17.3 months ( $SD = 18.1$ ). The distribution of the duration of correspondence in months was skewed by some extremely persistent letter writers, so the more appropriate measure of the central tendency is the median, which was 11 months. Subjects who corresponded for longer than 1 year were significantly more likely to have approached than those who corresponded for less than a year (see Table 3).

*Identifying Information*

Only 10 (5%) of the letter writers maintained complete anonymity. Fully 180 (84%) gave their full names, 171 (80%) gave their addresses, and 204 (95%) gave some identifying information in their first known mailings.

Subjects who gave no addresses in their first known communications were significantly more likely to have approached the celebrity (see Table 3). This finding does not result from an association between traveling, on the one hand, and the lack of an address, on the other, because there is no association between these variables.

There was no significant difference between positive and negative cases in the proportion who gave their full names or who provided some identifying information. Thus, completely anonymous letter writers were neither more nor less likely to approach than non-anonymous letter writers.

*Addresses*

One hundred eighty-three (86%) of the subjects addressed their first mailings to the celebrity; 9 (4%) first mailings were not addressed to any individual; 9 (4%) were addressed to a spouse, friend, or relative of the celebrity; 4 (2%) were addressed to a secretary or other administrative staff member of the celebrity; 3 (1%) were addressed to the producer, television show, television station, or record company with which the celebrity was affiliated; 3 (1%) to some other person; 2 (1%) to the celebrity's manager; and 1 (less than 1%) to the celebrity's agent. There was no significant difference between the first letters of positives and negatives in the party to whom the envelope was addressed.

TABLE 3—Features of communications significantly associated with approaches toward Hollywood celebrities.

Variable	Approach Negative, N (%)	Approach Positive, N (%)	Chi-Square (Probability)
Duration of correspondence			
0 to 12 months	84 (82)	56 (63)	8.20 (0.004)
13 to 91 months	18 (18)	33 (37)	
Complete return address			
Yes	95 (89)	76 (71)	9.43 (<0.002)
No	12 (11)	31 (29)	
Number of postmarks			
One	95 (90)	73 (79)	3.99 (0.046)
Two or more	10 (10)	19 (21)	
Wrote and telephoned			
Yes	5 (5)	15 (14)	4.47 (<0.04)
No	102 (95)	92 (86)	

TABLE 3—Continued.

Variable	Approach Negative, N (%)	Approach Positive, N (%)	Chi-Square (Probability)
Type of paper			
Plain or lined	68 (64)	41 (39)	12.21
All others	39 (36)	65 (61)	(0.0005)
Commercial pictures sent			
Yes	11 (10)	2 (2)	5.24
No	96 (90)	105 (98)	(0.022)
Repeatedly mentions other public figures			
Yes	38 (35)	24 (22)	3.84
No	69 (65)	83 (78)	(0.05)
Repeatedly mentions entertainment products			
Yes	28 (26)	45 (42)	5.32
No	79 (74)	62 (58)	(0.02)
Expresses desire to marry, have sex with, or have children with the celebrity			
Yes	21 (20)	7 (6)	6.9
No	86 (80)	100 (94)	(0.008)
Expresses desire for face- to-face contact with the celebrity			
Yes	28 (26)	58 (54)	16.3
No	79 (74)	49 (46)	(0.0001)
Attempts to instill shame in the celebrity			
Yes	16 (15)	6 (6)	4.10
No	91 (85)	101 (94)	(0.04)
Expresses sexual interest in the celebrity			
Yes	35 (33)	21 (20)	4.09
No	72 (67)	86 (80)	(0.04)
Mentions any sexual activity			
Yes	20 (19)	9 (8)	3.99
No	87 (81)	98 (92)	(<0.05)
Announces specific location where something will happen to the celebrity			
Yes	5 (5)	19 (18)	7.93
No	102 (95)	88 (82)	(<0.005)
Announces specific time when something will happen to the celebrity			
Yes	4 (4)	18 (17)	8.56
No	103 (96)	89 (83)	(0.003)

### *Multiple Public Figure Harassment*

The 214 subjects in the statistical sample of those who wrote letters to figures in the entertainment industry were primarily concerned with the same 22 celebrities at the time of at least one of the writings studied, but many wrote to multiple public figures, both serially and simultaneously. Thirty-eight subjects (18%) were simultaneously harassing a second public figure. Twelve subjects were harassing a third public figure, 4 subjects a fourth public figure, 2 a fifth, and 2 a sixth. In addition to the 22 celebrities with whom they were primarily concerned, the subjects in our sample volunteered the names of 14 other public figures whom they had also harassed. These subjects had harassed at least 8 political figures, one of whom had been written to by at least 13 of our subjects and another by 10. (The subjects mentioned other public figures in addition to those whom they were known to have been harassing, as indicated below.)

### *Geographic Distribution*

The subjects were based in 37 states, the District of Columbia, Canada, West Germany, England, France, and the Philippines. Forty-four percent lived in California, New York, and Texas. One hundred sixty-eight (85%) mailed their communications from a single state, province, or foreign country; 24 had postmarks from at least 2 different states, provinces, or countries; and 5 from 3 or more. Those whose mailings came from multiple states, provinces, or countries were significantly more likely to have approached than those whose mailings came from a single location (see Table 3).

### *Means of Communication*

At least 12% of the subjects had used some means other than mailed letters in their efforts to contact the celebrity from a distance, including telephone calls and telegrams. Because it is not always possible to determine that a caller is the same person as a letter writer, and because information on telephone calls does not always make its way into case files, we suspect that the true proportion of subjects who communicate through multiple media is much higher than the 12% measured. (Cases that did not fall in the sample had also placed classified advertisements, sent delegates to visit the celebrity, published books through vanity presses, and, in one instance, hired a billboard.) At least 43 subjects (20%) hand delivered at least one letter to the celebrity's home, studio, manager, agent, or someone else representing the celebrity. Subjects known to have telephoned in addition to writing were significantly more likely to have approached the celebrity (see Table 3).

### *Paper and Ink*

In their first known mailings, 59 (28%) used lined paper; 50 (24%) used plain paper; 31 (15%) used stationery; 21 (10%) used preprinted greeting cards; 18 (8%) used unprinted, quality stationery; 9 (4%) sent a photocopy; 8 (4%) sent some combination of the above types of paper; 5 (2%) used postcards; 5 (2%) used inappropriate stationery or paper (for example, with obscene printed language); and 7 (3%) used other forms of paper. The type of paper used by a subject for the first written communication was significantly associated with his or her approach status. As shown in Table 3, subjects who wrote on tablet-like paper (either plain or lined) were significantly less likely to have approached than those who wrote on any other type of paper.

Ninety-eight (46%) of the subjects used black ink or typewriting; 84 (39%) used blue ink or typewriting; 10 (5%) used colors which were indiscernible because only a photocopy was available, 7 (3%) used pencil; 7 (3%) used red ink or typewriting; 4 (2%) used more than one color; 5 (1%) used green; and 1 (less than 1%) used some other combination.

The first letters of positives and negatives did not differ significantly in the color of the ink, pencil, or typewriting used.

### *Handwriting*

The largest number of subjects (105 or 49%) wrote their first known letters in cursive script; 57 (27%) hand printed their letters; 36 (17%) sent typed letters; 11 (5%) used a combination of these methods; 3 (1%) used only commercial greeting cards without adding text; and, contrary to popular stereotypes, only 1 (less than 1%) sent a letter which had been cut and pasted from printed matter. Of 179 subjects whose first letters contained any handwriting or printing (even if merely a signature or a few words), 20 (11%) showed changes in their handwriting within the first letter. Of 118 subjects who sent more than one letter containing any handwriting or printing, 41 (35%) showed discernible changes in handwriting over time. The first letters of positives and negatives did not differ significantly in whether they used handwriting, printing, typing, or other forms of text, nor did they differ with respect to changes in handwriting within the letter. Positives and negatives did not differ significantly in whether they showed changes in handwriting over time.

### *Propriety*

While 129 subjects (60%) used appropriate greetings in their first known communications, 29 (14%) used the celebrity's name by itself, 26 (12%) used no greeting, 19 (9%) used an overly familiar term, 8 (4%) used a greeting which was inappropriate for other reasons, and 3 (1%) used some attention-getting phrase (for example, "Hi"). One hundred fifty-three (72%) of the subjects greeted the celebrity informally (for example, by first name), 28 (13%) addressed the celebrity formally (for example, "Dear Mr. Jones"), 26 (12%) did not address the celebrity at all, and 6 (3%) used an idiosyncratic or bizarre epithet. While 148 (69%) of the subjects used a reasonably appropriate form of closing on their first known communications, 50 (23%) used inappropriate forms of closing, 11 (5%) used no closing, and 5 (2%) ended the letter idiosyncratically.

Overall politeness was rated for each subject. Five percent of the subjects were rated as "very polite," 80% as showing "ordinary politeness" or as being "somewhat polite," 10% as "inconsiderate, rude," and 5% as "vulgar, lewd, obscene."

There were no significant differences between the first letters of positives and negatives in the use of inappropriate as opposed to appropriate greetings, in the use of inappropriate versus appropriate means of addressing the celebrity, in the use of inappropriate versus appropriate closings, or in politeness.

### *Appearance and Format*

Twelve subjects (6%) used idiosyncratic spelling, and 37 (18%) used idiosyncratic punctuation. Individual characters were bizarrely formed in the writings of 25 subjects (12% of the total sample and 14% of the 178 subjects who did not type their letters). Twenty-one subjects (10%) made excessive revisions to their letters. The writings of 24 subjects (11%) contained text that was noticeably off-center on the page. Postscripts were used by 111 (52%) of subjects in their first communications.

We used a variety of measures of disorganization in the form of the subjects' writings. The direction of the lines of text on the paper was rated as representing one of four classes: horizontal (88% of subjects), slanted upward from left to right (5%), slanted downward from left to right (3%), or undulating or wavy (4%). Evidence of poor planning of space on the paper was rated as representing one of four classes: none (74%), minimal (17%), moderate (8%), or "utter chaos" (1%). Finally, a rating of overall disorganization

was used that required the coders to record how many of the following three elements were evident: disorganized use of space, disorganized use of paragraphs, and use of multiple colors. Seventy-one percent of the subjects showed none of these features, 22% showed one, 7% showed two, and 1% showed all three.

We compared positive and negative cases on a series of variables designed to measure the occurrence of particular types of idiosyncratic writing or disorganization in the appearance of their letters. We found no significant differences on any of these variables. There was a nonsignificant trend toward more idiosyncrasies among the negatives than among the positives on spelling, punctuation, and bizarre formation of individual characters, but the positives tended to make excessive revisions somewhat more often. No differences were observed in evidence of efforts to disguise handwriting, the slope of lines of text, the position of text on the page, evidence of poor planning of space on the paper, the use of postscripts, or ratings of overall disorganization.

### *Enclosures*

One-hundred seventeen subjects (55%) provided enclosures with their communications. These ranged from the innocuous (for example, business cards) to the bizarre (for example, semen, blood, or a coyote head). The most prevalent enclosures were photographs of the subject (18%) and poetry written by the subject (15%). The distribution of types of enclosures is shown in Table 4. Some specific categories of enclosures merit mention, even though they are included within the broader categories in the table. These include poetry (32 subjects), biological materials (14), items of value (8), personal documents such as a Social Security card or birth certificate (7), tape recordings (6), self-addressed reply envelopes (6), books (6), receipts (5), bills (4), copies of letters (4), resumes (4), maps (3), stuffed toys (3), things such as pebbles or dirt (3), and drugs (1).

While these categories convey something of the diversity and inappropriateness of the enclosures sent by subjects, they do not begin to convey the challenge these enclosures pose to analysts seeking to understand the meaning of communications from a particular

TABLE 4—*Enclosures sent to Hollywood celebrities.*

Enclosure	N (%)
Subject's creative efforts <sup>a</sup>	50 (23)
Photograph of subject	38 (18)
Other apparently homemade photographs <sup>b</sup>	22 (10)
Bizarre materials <sup>c</sup>	16 (8)
Religious or mystical materials	14 (7)
Media clippings and photographs <sup>d</sup>	13 (6)
Commercial pictures <sup>e</sup>	13 (6)
Valuables and commercial materials <sup>f</sup>	12 (6)
Business cards	17 (8)
Other business-like enclosures <sup>g</sup>	24 (11)
Other	41 (20)

<sup>a</sup>Includes drawings, poems, tape recordings, and literary works (including poetry or lyrics within a letter).

<sup>b</sup>Includes only those which could have been taken by the subject; excludes photographs of the subject or the celebrity.

<sup>c</sup>Includes biological materials (blood, semen, hair, coyote head), personal documents (Social Security card, driver's license, birth certificate), drugs, pebbles, dirt, seeds, and similar objects.

<sup>d</sup>Includes photographs of the celebrity from the media.

<sup>e</sup>Includes commercial drawings, stickers, and seals.

<sup>f</sup>Includes items of value and books.

<sup>g</sup>Includes literature explaining businesses and self-addressed replies.

subject. To provide the reader a glimpse at this complexity, we list a sampling of enclosures from the universe of cases from which the sample was selected:

dog teeth  
 2 sleeping pills  
 a bed pan  
 a syringe of blood  
 animal feces  
 a tape of the subject speaking to the celebrity in a halting manner with music in the background  
 a toy submarine  
 a facsimile bomb  
 2150 A.D. by Thea Alexandre (a science fiction novel about "macro-philosophy . . . a mind expanding exodus from the imperfect today into a better tomorrow")  
 a disposable lighter from a television studio  
 a driver's license  
 U.S. currency  
 copies of *Texas Monthly* magazine  
 a half-eaten candy bar  
 a one-litre bottle containing a whistle and keys with labels indicating that they fit the garage, front and back building doors, locks on an apartment door, and a mailbox  
 5 one-cent stamps  
 57 Ohio State lottery tickets  
 8 tubes of red lipstick from various manufacturers  
 a sample tube of toothpaste  
 a disposable razor  
 a motorcycle  
 a pad of blank paper  
 a deposit slip and three personal checks: two blank, one made out to the celebrity for \$1.00  
 a pack of cigarettes  
 3 ballpoint pens  
 6 comic books: *Wonder Woman*, *Superboy*, *Supergirl*, *Superman Family*, *Krypton Chronicles*, and *Betty & Veronica*  
 a small stone  
 4 \$100 bills of play money  
 a Rubic's Cube key chain  
 a pencil  
 medical photographs of corpses with the celebrity's face pasted on the corpses' torsos  
 a photograph of the celebrity's home  
 a tape of the subject singing along with a record, interspersed with passages in which the subject speaks to the celebrity  
 a shampoo coupon  
 25 drawings and water color paintings, mostly of faces or eyes  
 3 playing cards  
 blood-smear paper  
 a map of the subject's home town  
*I Gave God Time* by Ann Kiemel Anderson, inscribed to the celebrity: "I'm still stuck on you . . . Still believe I'm your Husband!!!"

Subjects who enclosed commercial pictures (including drawings, stickers, and seals) were significantly less likely to have approached than those who did not enclose such materials (see Table 3). There was no significant difference between positives and negatives in the proportion who enclosed their own creative products, photographs of themselves, media clippings and photographs, valuables and commercial materials, other businesslike enclosures, religious or mystical materials, bizarre materials, or any enclosures. The findings concerning enclosures within the first mailing were similar to those for enclosures at any time.

### *Perceived Relationships with Celebrities*

Although the subjects had no personal relationship whatsoever with the celebrities to whom they wrote, many believed that there was a personal relationship, often an important one. To evaluate the nature of these perceived relationships, we developed the concept of roles adopted by the subjects and the parallel concept of roles in which the subjects cast the celebrities. The use of the role concept stems not from the theatrical nature of the celebrities' careers but rather from the use of the term in social psychology. The reader schooled in psychopathology will understand that most of the role relationships perceived by the subjects are the product of mental illness, but not all of the roles reflect delusions.

The coders were trained to identify "roles" assumed by the subjects in their correspondence with celebrities. The list of roles from which these were selected was generated by reading hundreds of letters to determine the general types of roles in which persons writing inappropriate letters to celebrities tended to cast themselves, and the coders were free to identify new roles and add them to the list as coding proceeded. For each subject, the coder identified up to three roles in which the subject had cast himself or herself.

The most prevalent of the inappropriate roles in which the subjects cast themselves were those of friend, adviser, or acquaintance (41%); spouse, would-be spouse, or suitor (30%); and lover or would-be lover (25%). Smaller numbers of subjects cast themselves as business associates and collaborators (15%); religious advisers, prophets, and saviors (15%); enemies (5%); persons with special powers (5%); family members (4%); and rescuers (1%). Twenty-two percent of the subjects cast themselves as special fans, and 17% chose appropriate roles (that is, as one of many fans or as a stranger).

The subjects often cast the celebrity to whom they were writing in a role other than their real one—that of a performer or celebrity who was a stranger to the subject. In many instances, these roles were reciprocal to those assumed by the subjects (for example, subjects assuming the role of a suitor or would-be spouse often cast the celebrity in the role of a potential spouse), but this was not necessarily the case.

As with the subjects' own roles, the coders were asked to identify the predominant or primary role in which the celebrity was cast and also any secondary or tertiary roles assigned by the subject. The most prevalent of the inappropriate roles in which the subjects cast celebrities were those of friend or acquaintance (36%); spouse, potential spouse, or suitor (27%); and lover, potential lover, or would-be lover (26%). Smaller numbers of subjects cast the celebrities as business associates or collaborators (14%); rescuers or benefactors (10%); beneficiaries (8%); family members (6%); or enemies (4%). Eighty-four percent chose at least one appropriate role, such as recognizing that the celebrity was a famous performer or a stranger to the subject.

Coders rated whether the nature of the role in which the subject cast himself changed over time. Of 156 cases in which there were either multiple mailings or variously dated materials within a single mailing, the coders rated 47 subjects (30%) as showing a change in roles and 109 (70%) as showing no change in roles. None of the particular roles studied was significantly associated with approach status, nor were changes in roles over time.

### *Patronage*

A concept developed for this project was that of the degree of "patronage" of the public figure exhibited by the subjects. This was rated according to a three-point scale, devised to be applicable to subjects writing to public figures in entertainment or politics:

1. *Minimal patronage*—This level of patronage appears normal: that is, the subject attends movies, local concerts, or speeches; buys books or records; votes in elections.
2. *Moderate patronage*—This level of patronage appears somewhat out of the ordinary: that is, the subject creates extensive collections; attends the public appearances of the public figure several times within a year; shows some evidence of extensive travel to see the public figure; campaigns, engages in fund raising, or circulates petitions.
3. *Maximal patronage*—This level of patronage is clearly extraordinary: that is, the subject has devoted a room or shrine to the public figure; takes multiple trips of extraordinary distances to attend public appearances of the public figure; devotes a significant amount of time on a daily basis to behavior directly related to obsession with the public figure.

Rated on this scale, 146 of the subjects (69%) evidenced minimal patronage, 45 (21%) moderate patronage, and 21 (10%) maximal patronage. The measurement of the level of patronage was confounded by the measurement of approach status, since traveling to see the celebrity was among the criteria for assessing moderate or maximal patronage. Therefore, no attempt was made to assess the association between patronage and approach.

### *Idolatry*

One hundred nineteen subjects (56%) were rated as having "idolized or worshipped" the celebrity to whom they wrote. Sixteen had also idolized or worshipped a second person. Whether the subject idolized the celebrity or not was not associated with approach status.

### *Thematic Content*

Subjects wrote to celebrities about a variety of personal concerns and public issues. In an effort to capture the diversity of these themes, we developed lists of themes that we had observed among the writings initially examined. The coders noted which among the themes on these lists were mentioned by the subjects.

Seventy-eight subjects (36%) mentioned some public figure other than the one to whom they had written, including President Kennedy (5 subjects), President Reagan (13), President Carter (11), John Hinckley (4), other assassins and would-be assassins (3), and other public figures (73). One third of the 73 subjects who mentioned a public figure other than the one to whom they had written mentioned multiple public figures. The number of other public figures mentioned ranged from 0 to 49, with a mean of 2.4 ( $SD = 7.2$ ).

A total of 29 subjects (14%) mentioned a political issue, party, or group. Of these, 26 expressed political sentiments, the intensity of which was rated as minimal (2 cases), moderate (18), or extreme (6). Among the issues and groups mentioned were nuclear war and nuclear power, the economy, the Middle East, Central America, the Iranian hostages, racial issues, republicans, democrats, Nazis, and communists. No significant difference was observed between negatives and positives in whether any political theme or party was mentioned.

We examined which themes were mentioned repetitively as an indication of the intensity



of the subjects' concerns with particular themes. Of the 214 subjects, 204 (95%) repeatedly mentioned a particular theme. Table 5 shows the distribution of these themes. To evaluate a theme as "repeatedly mentioned," the coder needed only to note two or more mentions of the same theme within the total body of available communications from the subject. In contrast, a judgment that the subject had "ever been preoccupied or obsessed with someone or something" required evidence that the subject "can't stop thinking about someone or something." (Some of the attributions of preoccupation or obsession would be better classified as overvalued ideas, but this distinction was not coded.)

One hundred thirteen subjects (53%) repeatedly mentioned love, marriage, or sexual activity, and 194 (91%) repeatedly mentioned the celebrity or another public figure. One hundred ninety-six subjects (92%) repeatedly mentioned something about the world of Hollywood (celebrities, entertainment products, or becoming a celebrity).

One hundred eighteen subjects (55%) evidenced preoccupation, overvalued ideas, or obsession regarding someone or something. These concepts are treated in detail elsewhere [6]. Here, the term "preoccupied" is used to indicate this entire class of ideation. The distribution of the subjects' preoccupations is given in Table 5. Thirty-one subjects (15%) were preoccupied with love, marriage, or sexual activity; 108 (51%) were preoccupied with the celebrity or another public figure; and 111 subjects (52%) were preoccupied with the world of Hollywood (celebrities, entertainment products, or becoming a celebrity).

Only two of the repeatedly mentioned themes were associated with approach status. As shown in Table 3, subjects who repeatedly mentioned public figures other than the celebrity were significantly less likely to have approached the celebrity. In contrast, as shown in Table 3, subjects who repeatedly mentioned entertainment products were significantly more likely to have approached the celebrity. Even when repeatedly mentioned themes or obsessions were combined to examine preoccupation or obsession with anything related to celebrities or the entertainment industry, any celebrity or public figure, any preoccupation, or any obsession, no other significant difference was found. None of the preoccupations, overvalued ideas, or obsessions was significantly associated with approach status.

TABLE 5—Themes repeatedly mentioned by subjects.

Theme	Repeatedly Mentioned, N (%)	Preoccupied with, N (%)
The celebrity	189 (88)	105 (49)
Love, marriage, romance	98 (46)	24 (11)
Entertainment products	73 (34)	13 (6)
Religion	64 (30)	20 (9)
Other public figures	62 (29)	20 (9)
Union with the celebrity	50 (23)	22 (10)
Sexual activity	41 (19)	11 (5)
Violence or aggression to self or others	35 (16)	4 (2)
Injustice to self	28 (13)	5 (2)
Politics or government	27 (13)	5 (2)
Law enforcement, security, intelligence, or military	22 (10)	1 (<1)
Becoming a public figure	17 (8)	5 (2)
Mysticism	12 (6)	7 (3)
Occultism	10 (5)	6 (3)
Science fiction or fantasy	8 (4)	0
Racial issues	8 (4)	1 (<1)
Rescue of the celebrity	7 (3)	1 (<1)
Other	33 (15)	8 (4)

*Degree of Insistence*

A measure of intensity that would be independent of particular themes was desirable, and for this purpose we used ratings of the subjects' degree of insistence. We assessed several different aspects of insistence by coding whether each was present in a subject's communications. Eighteen percent of the subjects communicated that their concerns were of extreme importance, great consequence, or grave; 14% begged or implored; 13% demonstrated fanaticism or zealotry; 8% demanded some action or ordered the celebrity to take particular actions; and 8% communicated a sense of urgency or emergency. None of these measures of insistence was significantly associated with an approach, either alone or when combined in an additive index.

*Wants and Desires*

Most of the subjects requested or demanded something from the celebrity. Up to three desires were coded for each subject's first communication. The most common desires expressed were for nonsexual face-to-face contact (86 subjects, 40%), a response by mail or telephone (84 subjects, 39%), or to get information to someone (48 subjects, 22%). Among the most obviously inappropriate requests were those for marriage (15 subjects), sexual contact (11), rescue or assistance (10), a visit from the celebrity at the subject's home (10), valuable gifts (9), having children with the celebrity (6), and, in 1 case, a pornographic photograph of the celebrity illustrating the subject's fetishistic interests. Overall, 28 subjects (13%) sought to marry, have sexual contact with, or have children with the celebrity.

Among the desires expressed by subjects in their first letters, two were significantly associated with approach status. Table 3 shows that subjects who expressed a desire to marry, have sex with, or have children with the celebrity were significantly less likely to have approached. (Note, however, that this category was made up more of subjects who wrote obscene letters than of subjects who were deluded about having an intimate relationship with the celebrity.) Table 3 shows that subjects who expressed a desire for face-to-face contact with the celebrity were significantly more likely to have approached. No significant differences were observed between the negatives and positives in their requests for a response by mail or telephone or for rescue, assistance, valuables, or recognition. A nonsignificant trend was observed for those who asked to get information to someone; these individuals were somewhat less likely to have approached.

*Emotional Provocation*

The coders rated whether each subject had attempted to instill, evoke, or provoke any of seven types of emotional response from the celebrity. By far the most prevalent was the effort to instill feelings of love, observed in the writings of 86 subjects (40%). In order of decreasing frequency, the other emotions subjects sought to evoke were worry or anxiety (26), fear (26), shame (22), upset (21), sexual excitement (19), and anger (8). Of the seven types of emotional provocation studied, only one was associated with approach status. As shown in Table 3, subjects who attempted to instill shame in the celebrity were significantly less likely to have approached the celebrity.

*Cryptic Content*

Twenty-eight percent of the subjects used unclear, cryptic, encoded, esoteric, or veiled references in their writings which made them difficult to understand. These included references to religious history (8%), symbolism (2%), the occult (1%), mythology (1%), numerology (1%), and astrology (less than 1%). There was a nonsignificant trend for

the negatives to more often use symbolism or esoteric references, such as references to particular performances related to the celebrity, religion, the occult, mythology, numerology, or astrology. The use of cryptic symbolism was statistically independent of approach status.

### *Sexual Content*

The writings of 67 subjects (32%) gave evidence of sexual arousal or responsiveness, for example, in mentioning masturbation or describing sexual interests. Fifty-six (26%) specifically wrote about sexual arousal or responsiveness involving the celebrity. Fifty-one subjects (24%) specifically expressed their own sexual interest (as opposed to romantic interest) in the celebrities to whom they wrote. Three subjects identified themselves as homosexual and five as bisexual. One subject reported transsexualism, and seven were judged to be confused about gender identity.

The only specific sexual behaviors mentioned by more than 5% of the subjects were vaginal intercourse (18 subjects) and fellatio (12 subjects). These and other sexual behaviors were mentioned in a variety of contexts. For example, in the case of vaginal intercourse, 4 subjects mentioned it as an activity they disapproved of, 2 mentioned it in a juvenile manner, 7 mentioned it as a pleasant fantasy, and 5 mentioned having engaged in it. Other sexual behaviors were mentioned by smaller numbers of subjects: masturbation (9 subjects), cunnilingus (7), anal intercourse (7), rape (5), sexual activity with children (4), making another person suffer (3), use of pornography (3), partialism (3), use of fetishes (2), exposing his or her own genitals (2), writing obscene letters (2), being humiliated, beaten, or otherwise made to suffer (2), being bound (1), use of sexual devices (1), peeping on strangers (1), rubbing or touching strangers (1), binding another or seeing someone bound (1), dressing in clothing of the opposite sex (1), and sexual activity with animals (1).

A significant association was observed between the subject indicating a sexual interest (as opposed to a romantic interest) in the celebrity and approach status. As shown in Table 3, subjects who indicated a sexual interest in the celebrity were less likely to have approached. Likewise, as shown in Table 3, subjects who mentioned any sexual activity, including deviant forms, were significantly less likely to have approached.

### *Threatening Content*

Defining a "threat" as any offer to do harm, however implausible, the coders identified threats in 49 (23%) of the cases and no threats in 165 cases. Twenty-two subjects (10% of the sample and 45% of the threateners) made only 1 threat, and 27 subjects (13% of the subjects and 55% of the threateners) made 2 or more threats. The largest number of threats made by any one subject in the sample was 14. The mean number of threats per threatener was 2.80 (SD = 2.99).

Threats were classified according to whether they were direct, veiled, or conditional, defined as follows:

*Direct threats*—straightforward and explicit statements of an intention to commit harm that do not state conditions that might avert the harm (for example, "I'm going to kill you").

*Veiled threats*—indirect, vague, or subtle statements suggesting potential harm that do not state conditions that might avert the harm (for example, "There's no saying what might happen").

*Conditional threats*—statements portending harm and specifying either conditions to be met in order to avert the harm or conditions under which the threat will be carried out; usually such threats use the words “if,” “if not,” “or,” “or else,” “unless,” or “otherwise.”

Among the 49 threateners, 13 subjects (26%) made direct threats; 19 made veiled threats (39%); and 35 made conditional threats (71%). The threateners averaged nearly 3 threats each, sometimes making more than one type of threat. Taking threats as the unit of analysis (rather than subjects), we coded a total of 135 threats, of which 28 were direct (21%), 34 veiled (25%), and 73 conditional (54%).

To explore the nature of the conditions that the subjects set forth for averting the threatened action, we looked at the conditions set forth to avert the 73 conditional threats made by these subjects in any of their writings. The most common demand—found among 69% of the conditional threateners—was for personal attention, including demands coded as “write to me,” “call me,” “meet me,” “marry me,” and “acknowledge me.” Next in frequency—found among 51% of the conditional threateners—was a demand for influence or power over the celebrity, including demands coded as “change your product or ways,” “deliver my message,” and “stop doing what you’re doing.” Only 6% demanded materials of financial value. Nine percent made other demands, some of which were never specified.

Eighteen threateners (37% of all threateners) made 47 threats (included in the totals above) which were implausible because they were curses or hexes, evidenced a psychotic notion of causation, or were technically impossible. Examples of such threats are the following:

I don't know what else to tell you. I've warned you. Repent and accept Christ before the hour of God's Wrath upon the world arrives. It will be a Holocaust like the world has never seen.

\* \* \*

You better not get your hair cut because if you do—Jupiter will collide with Mars.

\* \* \*

I feel that you are in danger with you [sic] new boyfriend . . . if he has brown eyes. I lost my only brother whom was married to a brown eyed girl.

\* \* \*

May the veins in your legs get darker, bluer, and uglier; and bigger; and hideous—like your repulsive body.

\* \* \*

Write that letter to me God Damn It or else I'll have you all fornicating with Ubangies before I'm through with you—and I mean it!!

\* \* \*

My People are out to kill all Gays & Lesbian Women all over the world all Gay men who Do Not Work In Show Bussiness [sic] & also Lesbian Women who Do Not Work In Show Bussiness [sic] will also Be Killed.

Five subjects made threats that were statements of a desire or intent to exert influence through lawful means but that from their context were nonetheless threats. For example, various subjects wrote:

I want you to know I will never have a wife & kids if you won't be my bride for I will be in mourning for you the rest of my life and there's a good chance I will end up a bum on the street . . .

\*       \*       \*

I realize that you aren't going to come looking for me. So, I'm going to have to go looking for you. Please don't be frightened. I am not a nut.

\*       \*       \*

I saw your movie you looked at me at the last of the picture, now I am going to do something else with my time. This was not in this letter last time! You will see.

Threats were rated for the presence of evidence of plans, means, or opportunity to carry out the threat. For 19 subjects, the threat was accompanied by evidence that the subject had a plan to carry it out. Ten subjects made threats that were accompanied by some evidence that the threatener had the means to carry out the threat. Twelve subjects made threats that were accompanied by some evidence that the threatener had an opportunity to carry out the threat.

Information volunteered by the subject on plans, means, or opportunity helps those assessing threats to evaluate the credibility of the threat. For example, a vague, implausible plan lowers the credibility of the threat, while a detailed, plausible plan enhances its credibility. Because of the potential importance of these variables, we created a scale to measure these aspects of credibility. This threat credibility scale assigns each subject a score based on whether any threat is accompanied by evidence of a plan (worth one point), evidence of means (one point), or evidence of opportunity (one point). Thus, the subjects' scores range from zero to three on this scale. In this sample, 22 subjects (45% of threateners) scored greater than zero on this scale: 11 scored one, 3 scored two, and 8 scored three.

The most common target of the threats was the celebrity (16% of all subjects). The next most common target was the subject himself or herself; threats of suicide or self-mutilation were made by 5% of subjects. Other threats include those against groups of people (4%); intimates or property of the celebrity (3%); other public figures or their intimates, protective personnel, or property (2%); and the subject's own intimates or property (less than 1%).

Thirty-four threateners indicated that they would carry out the threats themselves, 12 indicated that the threats would be executed by unspecified parties, and 7 indicated that the threat would be executed by God.

Among subjects who threatened to assassinate or kill someone, the most frequently named target of the death threat was the celebrity to whom the communication was addressed (9 subjects, or 4% of all subjects). Eight subjects (4%) threatened suicide. Less commonly, threats were directed to other public figures, someone around the celebrity, or others (1% each).

In addition to death threats, subjects threatened a variety of other types of harm, including nonlethal threats of personal injury, threats to harm loved ones or associates, or threats to destroy property. Twenty-six subjects (12%) directed such threats toward the celebrity, and 1 subject did so toward other public figures. Three subjects (1%) directed such threats toward themselves, and 9 subjects (4%) toward a person or group other than a public figure or themselves.

The specific actions threatened were the following: to kill someone (5%); harm someone sexually (3%); injure someone physically in other ways (4%); do something undesirable but unspecified (4%); harm someone's career (3%); stalk, haunt, or hunt someone (2%); harm a business (2%); kidnap someone (1%); commit arson (less than 1%); or otherwise damage or steal possessions (less than 1%).

Forty-nine of the subjects made at least one threat. Of the 107 approach-negative cases, 24 (22%) made a threat; of the 107 approach-positive cases, 25 (23%) made a threat. Thus, there was no association between threatening and approaching. Moreover, there

was no significant difference in the mean number of threats between the approach-negative threateners and the approach-positive threateners. Among the aspects of threats examined in relation to approach status were the means by which the threat was conveyed; whether the threat was anonymous or not; the person or property against which the threat was directed; the nature of the threatened harm; whether the subject made direct, veiled, or conditional threats; the logical structure of the threat; the nature of any demands made for conditional threats; the person or force that was to carry out the threat; whether the locus of control was internal or external; evidence of a plan, means, or opportunity to carry out the threat; and scores on the threat credibility scale. None of these variables had a significant zero-order (bivariate) association with making an approach when studied in the sample as a whole or when studied among those who had made a threat.

### *Weapons*

Thirteen subjects mentioned a weapon. Seven (3%) mentioned handguns. Other weapons were mentioned by smaller numbers of subjects: rifle (2 subjects), bomb or incendiary device (2), and weapons other than firearms or explosives (7). None of these subjects specified that they possessed or had access to these weapons, but other subjects in the sampling universe had done so. The number of subjects mentioning a weapon was too small to permit detection of statistical significance. Nine of the 13 subjects who mentioned a weapon approached.

### *Announcements of Events Concerning the Celebrity*

Twenty-four subjects (11%) announced a specific location where something would happen to the celebrity. Twenty-two subjects (10%) announced a specific time when something would happen with respect to the celebrity. Subjects who announced a specific location where something would happen to the celebrity were significantly more likely to have approached (see Table 3). Likewise, subjects who announced a specific time when something would happen to the celebrity were significantly more likely to have approached (see Table 3).

## **Discussion**

Several potential research sites that we considered for this project were unsuitable because information was stored by potential victim, rather than by subject, or because letters were discarded or stored in unorganized heaps. Our findings highlight the importance for security and research purposes of developing files on individual subjects such as those employed by Gavin de Becker, Inc. Because individual celebrities receive communications from multiple subjects and because subjects writing more than a single letter corresponded for a median duration of 11 months, it is necessary that files be maintained on particular subjects rather than on the recipients of the communications. Most files can be kept by subject name; only 5% of the subjects remained fully anonymous.

At least 12% of the subjects telephoned, sent telegrams, or used some method other than mail to communicate with the celebrity from a distance. The development of methods to associate letters in case files with other means of communication would aid research in this area, and provisions for lawfully recording telephone conversations would be of great value both for public figure protection and for research.

The presence of multiple postmarks is generally an indication of the subject's mobility, since none of these subjects was known to make use of remailing services or similar techniques for concealing his or her location. In some cases, patterns of seemingly random

travel were evident from the postmarks alone. Based on the content of their letters, some of these subjects were engaged in a delusional search for the celebrity, traveling to locations where they believed incorrectly the celebrity might be found, while others traveled in a seemingly random pattern as they became increasingly frantic to find the celebrity, to escape their persecutors, or for unexplained reasons.

Contrary to the popular stereotype, less than 1% sent a letter that had been cut and pasted from printed matter. Over half the subjects, however, sent enclosures with their communications, ranging from the innocuous (for example, business cards) to the bizarre (for example, body fluids, a coyote head, and ammunition). The most common enclosures were photographs of the subject and poetry written by the subject.

A majority of the subjects cast themselves in roles that on the surface would seem benevolent to the celebrities: friend, adviser, or acquaintance; spouse, would-be spouse, or suitor; and lover or would-be lover. Only 5% of the subjects depicted themselves as enemies of the celebrities to whom they wrote.

A majority of the subjects (55%) were judged as being obsessed or preoccupied with a person or issue. Ten percent of the subjects demonstrated extraordinary levels of patronage through such behaviors as devoting a room or shrine to the celebrity, taking multiple trips of extraordinary distances to see public appearances of the celebrity, and devoting significant time on a daily basis to behavior directly related to their interest in the celebrity.

Thirty-six percent of the subjects mentioned some public figure other than the celebrity to whom they had written. This finding is one of several indications that subjects who harass or threaten one public figure present a risk of harassing or threatening another public figure.

The subjects expressed a broad range of desires, the greatest number hoping for personal contact, including having face-to-face contact with a celebrity (40%), getting a response by mail or telephone (39%), and marrying or having sex or children with a celebrity (13%). Thirty-two percent of the subjects wrote about sexual activities, spanning a variety of normal and deviant sexual interests. Twenty-four percent specifically expressed their own sexual interest in the celebrity.

Twenty-three percent of the subjects made at least 1 threat, broadly defined, and 55% of the threateners made 2 or more threats. The mean number of threats per threatener was 2.8. The subjects who made conditional threats generally sought to extort personal attention (69%) and influence or power (51%); only 9% demanded materials of financial value. Thus, these conditional threats vary strikingly in the nature of the demand—but not in form or impact on the victim—from traditional extortion threats.

Of 135 threats, 47 (35%) were implausible because they were curses or hexes, evidenced a psychotic notion of causation, or were technically impossible. This finding supports the idea, also evident from our discussion of enclosures, roles, and the appearance of the communications, that many of the subjects were mentally disordered. Nineteen subjects gave evidence that they had a plan to carry out their threats, 10 that they had the means to carry out their threats, and 12 that they had the opportunity to carry out their threats.

While threats were directed primarily toward the celebrities to whom the subject wrote or those around the celebrities, among death threats, suicide threats were second in frequency to threats to kill the celebrity. Threats also, however, were directed toward other public figures or private citizens, which points to the possibility that efforts directed toward public figure threat assessment may be useful in understanding and preventing other violent crime by mentally disordered offenders.

A major failing of much of the predictive literature concerning violence has been the ignoring of base rate information, in part because such information is rarely available. We consider the data in Table 2 important in helping to refine estimates of the base rate of approach behavior in this population. Armed with information about the base rate,

efforts can be directed toward predicting deviations from the base rate, whether higher than the expected rate or lower.

We identified 16 factors that are significantly associated with whether subjects writing inappropriate communications to celebrities approach those celebrities. The number of communications is associated with approach as an inverted-U-shaped function; the subjects who sent a total of 10 to 14 communications were those most likely to have approached.

The other 15 variables significantly associated with approach behavior can be divided into risk-enhancing and risk-reducing factors. The risk-enhancing factors identified were a duration of correspondence of one year or longer; the subject expressing a desire for face-to-face contact with the celebrity; a specific time announced when something would happen to the celebrity; a specific location announced where something would happen to the celebrity; repeated mention of entertainment products; the subject telephoning in addition to writing; and the presence of two or more geographically different postmarks. The risk-reducing factors identified were the subject's using tablet-like paper; providing his or her full address; expressing a desire to marry, have sex with, or have children with the celebrity; enclosing commercial pictures; attempting to instill shame in the celebrity; indicating sexual interest in the celebrity; repeatedly mentioning other public figures; and mentioning any sexual activity.

The most important of the negative findings is the lack of association between verbal threats and approach behavior. This finding held true through many attempts to disprove it by testing every aspect of threatening statements for which we could create a measure. This finding contradicts a vast body of assumptions that is relied on each day in judging whether harassing communications warrant concern, notification of the police, security precautions, or investigation. With respect to inappropriate communications to entertainment celebrities, the presence or absence of a threat in the communications is no indication whatsoever of whether a subject is going to pursue an encounter. Those who rely on the presence or absence of threats in making judgments about what to do are making a serious mistake. Unfortunately, this error is codified in the criminal law, which recognizes various types of verbal threats as unlawful but does not accord equal recognition to harassment without threats, even though the latter often poses an equal or greater danger of harm to persons or property.

## **Conclusion**

In this paper, the authors described many of the features of threatening and otherwise harassing communications directed to one group of public figures, namely, Hollywood celebrities. We also identified 16 variables associated with whether letter writers pursued encounters with the celebrities to whom they wrote. As this is the first research of its type, it remains to be seen whether the results can be generalized to communications received by other groups of public figures, such as political, religious, or business leaders.

## *Acknowledgments*

This project was originally funded by a grant from the National Institute of Justice to the University of Virginia (Grant No. 83-NI-AX-0005) under the project title "Violence and Mental Disorder: The Choice of Public Figures as Victims." Additional sources of financial support were the Center for Advanced Studies, University of Virginia, for Dr. Dietz's Sesquicentennial Associateship; Kirby Forensic Psychiatric Center, New York, NY, for a research leave for Dr. Martell; the Academic Computing Center at the University of Virginia and at New York University for computing resources; and the Threat Assessment Group, Inc., Newport Beach, CA, for the preparation of this report. This



study was made possible by the cooperation of Gavin de Becker, who was also instrumental in generating interest within the National Institute of Justice in the problem of public figure victimization.

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