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Threatening and Otherwise Inappropriate Letters to Members of the United States Congress

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ABSTRACT: The authors examine the characteristics of threatening and otherwise inappropriate communications sent to members of the U.S. Congress by a sample of 86 subjects, 20 of whom threatened assassination. We quote excerpts from these letters and provide quantitative data on such variables as the volume, duration, form, and appearance of such communications; the enclosures; the subjects' perceived relationships to the recipients; the thematic content of the communications; and the messages and threats communicated. Comparisons between 43 subjects who pursued encounters with members of Congress and 43 who did not revealed 17 factors associated with such pursuit. In this population, threateners were significantly less likely to pursue an encounter than inappropriate letter writers who did not threaten, regardless of the type of threat or the harm threatened. Inappropriate letters to members of Congress are compared with those directed to Hollywood celebrities. Mentally disordered persons writing to public figures often mention and sometimes threaten public figures other than those to whom the letters are addressed, which raises important issues regarding notification of endangered third parties and the sharing of information among protective agencies.

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

Each member of the United States Congress must take public positions on such emotionally charged issues as abortion, gun control, capital punishment, gay rights, aid to

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the Contras, and military spending. Each must vote against the interests of one or another of the constituencies that follow every bill affecting business, labor, farmers, veterans, minorities, the poor, the disabled, the mentally ill, and every other imaginable class of citizens of the United States. Under these circumstances, even the most politically adroit cannot fail to alienate large numbers of individuals. Not surprisingly, members of Congress receive a steady stream of hostile and inappropriate mail, telephone calls, and visitors.

Threatening and inappropriate communications to members of Congress do not necessarily stem from their positions on controversial issues, however. Like other public figures, they are subject to pursuit by mentally disordered persons in search of identity, power, relief, and personal contact, and some of these individuals attack the object of their attention.

As part of a large study of mentally disordered persons who pursue public figures, the authors of this paper studied threatening and inappropriate communications to members of Congress. In the first report from this project [1], we addressed certain features of threatening and otherwise inappropriate letters to celebrities in the entertainment industry. In this report, we present analogous data concerning such communications to members of Congress. There have been studies of related populations, including mentally disordered visitors to the White House [2–4] and to other government offices [5], but to our knowledge, this is the first study of letters to members of Congress.

Our purpose in studying threatening and otherwise inappropriate letters to members of Congress is to develop a new behavioral science technique to help prevent assassination and other attacks on political leaders. We sought to identify features of letters that would indicate a greater or lesser risk of the subject attempting to gain physical proximity to the public figure, where the possibility of an attack is greatest.

This research is based on information contained in the archives of the U.S. Capitol Police in Washington, DC. This police department has jurisdiction on the government property housing the Capitol, the senate and congressional office buildings, and related property. In addition to all of the other responsibilities of any urban police department, however, the Capitol Police have the challenge of providing or coordinating security for a constantly traveling, highly visible group of men and women serving as United States senators and congressmen. The task of investigating and managing cases in which subjects harass or threaten members of Congress falls to the Capitol Police.

Methods

The methods used to study cases from the files of the Capitol Police were more straightforward than those used in the original exploratory study of similar cases in the entertainment industry [1,6]. Drawing on experience from the earlier study, we were able to simplify the sampling procedure, instruments, and data collection.

Nature of the Capitol Police Archives

At the Intelligence Unit of the U.S. Capitol Police, files are divided into three categories: terrorists, groups (a mixture of protest groups and organized crime), and individuals. We studied only the files on individuals. Because of limited storage capacity and the voluminous correspondence from some subjects, these files had been “pruned” in some instances, usually by discarding the oldest materials and such bulky items as treatises on the subject’s inventions, metaphysical theories, or proposals for universal peace, war, economic growth, love, mind control, and other matters. This occurred only for voluminous cases, and in any event, we had observed in the earlier study that multiple-letter writers tend to be highly repetitive.

Those responsible for opening the mail of members of Congress seemed inconsistent in their saving and referral of materials to the Capitol Police. There were often notations in the file indicating that a subject had written many times previously, though earlier letters were not always saved.

Cases come to the attention of the Capitol Police chiefly through reports made by members of Congress and their staff members. Other cases are reported by workers of every description on the grounds of the Capitol complex, by other law enforcement agencies, and by a variety of third parties. A decision to report a case to the Capitol Police reflects a variety of factors, including the potential reporter's perceptions of the seriousness of the case, the personal danger, and his duty; the reporter's knowledge of the availability of this resource; and his willingness to become involved.

There are 535 members of the U.S. Congress (100 in the Senate and 435 in the House of Representatives), each of whom has staff members working both in his or her home district and at the Capitol. Any of these staff members may observe behavior that would, ideally, be reported to the Capitol Police. Without uniform procedures, standards, or training for reporting cases, there is considerable variation in the completeness of the reporting, and this variation influenced the material available for research. Thus, like other research limited to *reported* crimes, our findings are limited to *reported* cases of subjects sending threatening or otherwise inappropriate communications.

Definitions

The variables were defined as they had been in the earlier study [1,6]. In brief, a "communication" was defined as the delivery of any written information or item to an agent of the member of Congress (usually staff members, but sometimes spouses, domestic workers at the member's home, or security personnel on the Capitol grounds). While in most instances these were mailed letters, greeting cards, or postcards, they included telegrams, deliveries of gifts, and packages containing multiple letters or postcards. 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 have used the terms *letters* and *mailings*, even though not all the communications were letters or were mailed.

Subjects who had sent inappropriate communications were classified as approach positive if they had (1) visited a location believed to be the home of the member of Congress; (2) visited any agency or office believed to represent the member of Congress; (3) visited a location believed to be the home or business address of any acquaintance, friend, relative, or intimate of the member; (4) approached within 5 miles (8 km) 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 (480 km) to see the member 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 member. Subjects were classified as approach negative if none of these criteria was met. Subjects who had written inappropriate communications and who had also attended public performances or visited the public offices were classified as approach negative if they had traveled less than 300 miles (480 km) and had behaved appropriately.

Sampling

Our sampling strategy, which reflected a broader goal of the overall research project (to predict from the content of letters which subjects would physically approach the public figure), is described in greater detail elsewhere [6]. Cases were randomly sampled from the complete universe of case files until we had selected 50 approach-positive cases in

which at least one item of correspondence was on file and 50 approach-negative cases in which at least one item of correspondence was on file. These 100 cases constitute the sample for purposes of determining whether the number of communications was associated with approaching the member of Congress. When this was found to be true, as it had been in the Hollywood sample [1], a stratified random sample was selected from among those 100 cases, using strata that represented the distribution of approach-positive cases by the number of mailings. This resulted in a sample of 86 cases that included 43 approach-positive cases and 43 approach-negative cases, matched for number of communications. (The remaining 14 cases were used as "unknowns" to test the predictive instruments that were ultimately developed, as will be reported elsewhere.)

Instruments

For this study, the multiple coding forms and code books used in studying letters to celebrities [1] were reduced to a single coding form and code book [6]. This form contained all of the variables that the analysis of entertainment industry data had indicated were valuable for descriptive purposes or which distinguished the approach-positive cases from the approach-negative cases.

Many variables measured in the earlier study were eliminated because they had shown no variation or could not be coded reliably. Some variables, such as the mention of weapons, were retained despite the low frequency of their occurrence because of their obvious importance to those assessing the threat posed by the letter writer. In some instances, variables were reformulated to correspond to variable transformations that had proved desirable in working with the entertainment industry data. For example, instead of coding the form of a threat (direct, veiled, or conditional) for each of up to ten threats, as had been done earlier, the coder determined on the basis of all known threats whether any were direct, any veiled, and any conditional. A few new variables were added that are specific to public figures in the political arena. The elimination and recoding of variables greatly reduced the total number of variables on which data were collected.

The subjects wrote to the members of Congress about a variety of personal concerns and public issues. To capture the diversity of these themes, we developed lists of themes observed in our earlier research on letters to celebrities [1,6] and among the letters to members of Congress initially examined. The coders noted which among the listed themes were mentioned by the subjects. We also ascertained which themes were mentioned repetitively as an indication of the intensity of subjects' concerns with particular themes. Another 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.

Confidentiality

All information on the identity of the subjects and the members of Congress and other public figures with whom they were concerned was removed from the case files before coding began, to ensure confidentiality. A project staff member serving as case manager photocopied the file, deleted identifying information from the photocopy, and presented the "sanitized" copy to Intelligence Unit officers for inspection before removing the now anonymous materials from the premises. To avoid losing important information, the case manager coded each deleted passage, for example, by indicating that a deleted name was that of another member of Congress, the president of the United States, a Supreme Court justice, a Hollywood celebrity, or a television news anchor, or that a deleted passage referred to a bill before Congress, a magazine, a television show, a group to which the subject belonged, and so on. Geographic information was always encoded

because of the possibility that it would be taken as an indication of a congressional district.

Coder Training

The coders were trained using group discussions of coded test cases as the basis for acquiring a shared understanding of the instruments. The clinical variables were coded by five psychiatrists, a doctoral-level social worker, and two graduate students in psychology.

Reliability

No new calculations of interrater reliability were made, because each variable either had been previously subjected to such analysis or was identical in form to those used in the earlier study [6]. Two case files that had been used in training and coded by all but two of the coders were sent to a missing coder for blind recoding. His coding was identical to that of the modal scores of the other six coders for these two cases.

Statistics

In comparing the 43 approach-positive and 43 approach-negative subjects, we used the chi-square test for discrete variables (or those which were grouped into discrete values) and the *t*-test for continuous variables. Our threshold for reporting a statistically significant association or difference is a probability of 0.05, but in light of the sample size and the number of comparisons made, we recommend caution in interpreting associations or differences with probabilities between 0.01 and 0.05.

The frequency and percentage data reported here are based only on subjects for whom data were available. Some of the frequencies in Table 1 total less than the sample size because of missing data. Variables were dropped from the analysis if identified among less than 5% of subjects or if the interrater agreement was lower than 80%.

Results

Examples of Letters

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

Example 1—A man who had repeatedly requested an appointment with the president of the United States wrote to another political figure:

LET US BE BOLD AND MAKE THAT APPOINTMENT AGAINST THE EXPECTATION OF THE CIA! IF WE ALWAYS DO WHAT THE CIA TELLS US, BOTH THE SIGNIFICANCE OF THE LEADERSHIP AND DEMOCRACY WILL BE ABOLISHED. BEING SUPERPOWER IN MILITARY WILL NOT BE REAL. LET US INCREASE THE TRUST AND HOPES OF THE PEOPLE OF THE WORLD TO THE WHITE HOUSE! I could never imagine that the Yankees be so much coward. PLEASE BE BOLD!

Two weeks later, a Capitol Police officer responding to a suspicious person call found the subject sitting in one of the offices of a member of Congress. A secretary informed

the officer that the subject was acting suspiciously, appeared to be mentally ill, and was wanted by the Secret Service for questioning in connection with threats to the President. The subject admitted writing letters to the White House and various Cabinet members. He had with him a typed letter accusing the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) of conspiring against him to keep him from getting a job, turn his co-workers against him, cause him to be expelled from graduate school, end his relationships with women, and isolate him from society. According to the postscript, every member of Congress had already received the letter. The subject had also been investigated for threats to the director of the CIA, which agency the subject believed was committing various crimes and forcing his wife to have sexual relations with animals.

A week later, the subject wrote to the Capitol Police:

I was tired and hungry therefore, I was waiting in the office of [the member of Congress] for someone to promise any type of help. Luckily two nice polices of the Congress came according to my expectation. I did appreciate their attitude as well as your very friendly behavior.

Example 2—A subject sent the following letter to the wife of a member of Congress, asking that she bring it to the attention of her husband and a second member of Congress. The communication was typed on an oversized piece of paper. On the same page, he had pasted reduced photocopies of letters from the member of Congress to him (the subject) and from him (the subject) to postal authorities, along with copies of certified and registered letter receipts.

I WAS FRAMED! I WAS FRAMED! I WAS FRAMED—YES FRAMED BY ***** MONEY ***** AND ***** POWER ***** OF ***** THE *** U.S.P.S. ***** MONOPOLY ***!!!!!! JUST FOR AND ONLY FOR APPEARING IN THE PUBLIC USPS LOBBY, JULY 23, 1987 and just FOR BEING INTERESTED—10:45 A.M.—IN ACCEPTING MY CERTIFIED AND REGISTERED MAIL . . .

Example 3

In fact, if you would push for the inevitable just a little harder and pass legislation changing the name of the democratic party to the liberal-communist alliance, we just might get to our communistic equality more quickly than the third worldists have planned for us. . . . The white finally asks for his right to be put to death by the government before he does something he and others will be appalled at—an act almost as heroic as those of Oswald, and Ray!

Example 4—A woman repeatedly wrote, called, and visited the offices of a member of Congress. These are excerpts from two of her many letters:

Now if you can tell me that my ex-husband didn't get mauled by a bear, I'll tell you that things are not true but you can't. And I'll tell you this if you think things are bad now just wait. Because this is suppose to be a nation under God and I know what happened and so does he.

* * *

It will be one year since I have seen my Daughter Lilian. Now Generally I don't Lose my tempor But when I do I start to slam things. Last summer went Fishing . . . slamming Fish on Lilian's Birthday (February 19th). I Know a lot of People . . . Now Rumors have it they are doing quite well Financially (money wise) Because of what they did to ME. All I could Do was think I'll wait one year and if I don't get Lilian Back—slam—I'll destroy them. slam. Because what happened to me was true—slam—They called me a Liar—slam—and if I have to slam—I'll destroy them All—slam—Because the system cannot it any more—slam—man has no Feelings For nature they destroy it For the Almighty Dollar—slam—If they take away my Food source I take away theirs, etc.—slam Now I can say what will happen this month But I can surely tell you what will happen next month if I don't got my Daughters Back.

Example 5—A subject with a history of civil commitment to mental hospitals, who claimed to be a weapons expert, wrote a letter to a member of Congress in which he refers to television network anchor “Mickey Flanahan”:

I am demanding the unconditional arrest and impeachment of the President of the United States. . . . I have been the victim of a very serious radio communications breach of security. In the spring of 1976, the Department of Justice bugged my home and transmitted (audio only) to XYZ television studios, where the evening news show was being broadcast. One day I mischievously directed the anchor, Mickey Flanahan, to blink his eyes. Mickey Flanahan had so much trouble with his eyes blinking that it was uncontrollable. I am sure millions of people witnessed this occurrence. Before long, news reporters everywhere were blinking their eyes intentionally. The XYZ evening news show was not the only show I frequented. I have found that I am on the air during most local and national, live television broadcasts. I have been on the air in other countries. I have definitively been on the air with the President of the United States through these illegal means. This is why I am demanding the unconditional arrest and impeachment of the President of the United States.

Three years earlier, he had sent a letter to the House of Representatives Office of the Sergeant at Arms on the same theme:

I was also on the air at many other local, national, and non-commercial stations. According to one source, I was patched into the VHF emergency broadcast system. This illegal transmitting would have been apparent to XYZ’s Pacific standard time viewing audiences. I have been on the air almost five years via police monitoring or wiretapping. . . . Communists, in comparison, are never subject to such restraints and harassment.

Example 6—The following excerpts from a letter to a member of Congress from a woman who also telephoned frequent warnings mentioned so many public figures that we use numbers instead of pseudonyms to avoid adding to the confusion. Public figure #1 is an actor, #2 a television newsman, #3 a second member of Congress, #4 a financier, #5 a second actor, and #6 the chief executive officer of a major corporation.

Over the weekend I was being told alot that you want to marry me and was being told this yesterday (3/19) also during the Telethon. So I said I think I’ll marry Public Figure #1, I think I’ll marry Public Figure #1. Then I saw a knife turn into a gun. A little later I saw Public Figure #1’s penis jump out. A little later I said I’m going to marry Public Figure #1. then (I just heard gun) I saw (I m seeing Lesbian) a point of an iron stab me in the corner of my eye (just saw Lesbian again). 7:50 PM I saw a razor blade and [the member of Congress] and am still wondering about how Public Figure #2 killed (I just heard Public Figure #3) Public Figure #4. I’m hearing that Public Figure #5 made \$60,000,000 last year. It makes me wonder why he makes so much while I’m not allowed to make anything and am being killed all the time. . . . (While writing this I looked in the mirror and saw (I heard here saw my face smashed) my hand with the pen in it stab myself in the eye. After this they said they’re going to kill Public Figure #3. . . . (while typing this letter Public Figure #2 just called me bitch) . . . 9:30 PM—I’m hearing . . . that Public Figure #2 is hurting many people in California. While hearing this I was smashed in the teeth by a baseball bat. I think Public Figure #2 is also trying to kill Public Figure #6 because I was thinking of why he didn’t answer my letter in which I asked him for help being that I’m supposed to be Joan of Arc reincarnated and he is French (I thought he might help me) when I saw a gun in my sex organs.

Volume of Communications

The number of communications sent or delivered by each subject to a particular member of Congress was determined not only for the cases in the statistical sample, but also for a random sample of all of the cases in the Capitol Police files at the time the sample was selected. This number ranged from zero to a number well in excess of 500. The complete distribution by number of mailings for a random sample of cases in the

sampling universe is provided elsewhere [6]. In a random sample of 50 approach-positive letter writers, the mean number of written communications was 7.1 (SD = 11.9). In a random sample of 50 approach-negative letter writers, the mean number of communications was 2.2 (SD = 2.2). The difference between these means was statistically significant ($t = -2.76$, $df = 49$; $P < 0.008$). Thus, subjects who approached sent a significantly greater number of communications to the member of Congress. Note, however, that these numbers are based on the communications found in sometimes incomplete files. Moreover, the communications on file did not always precede the first approach. There were instances in which the subject delivered his first letter during an approach and instances in which letters continued after one or more approaches.

For the same unstratified sample of 100 subjects, a similar association was observed between the total number of pieces of paper in the communications and the approach status. After truncating the most extreme cases to a value of 30 pieces of paper (the next highest value being 26), the mean number of pieces of paper for approach-positive subjects was 8.36 (SD = 8.8); for approach-negative subjects the mean was 4.9 (SD = 5.1) ($t = -2.24$, $df = 65.1$; $P = 0.028$).

As described above, only a portion of the original random sample was subjected to further study to eliminate the potential confounding effects of the association between the number of letters and approach behavior. The total number of written communications from the subjects selected for the sample ranged from 1 to over 100, but the "pruning" of files that had become too large to store made it impossible to count the total number of written communications. Eliminating three outliers with a very large but uncountable number of mailings, the mean number of communications was 2.5 per subject. The distribution of these cases by number of communications is provided elsewhere [6].

The total quantity of information available about a subject was a function of the volume of the subject's communications, which varied from a single postcard or greeting card to many lengthy tomes. At one extreme was a subject who wrote so little on a preprinted greeting card that little was known about him. At the other extreme was a subject who provided 18 volumes of documentation for unfathomable claims that were never stated clearly enough to be certain what it was she wanted. She did, however, provide a great deal of personal information about herself.

In the stratified sample, the number of pieces of paper that contained subjects' writings ranged from 1 piece of paper to more than 1000, with a mean of 17.8 (5.5 without the most extreme case) and a median of 4.0 pages. Fifty percent of the subjects sent 3 or fewer pages; 10% sent more than 15 pages. The mean number of pieces of paper on file for subjects did not differ significantly between approach-positive and approach-negative subjects in the stratified statistical sample, which confirms the success of the effort to ensure that the two groups did not differ on the amount of information available.

Duration of Communications

For subjects who sent more than one mailing, the time span between mailings ranged from less than 1 month to 76 months, with a mean of 12.5 months (SD = 17.7). The distribution of the duration of correspondence in months was skewed by some extremely persistent letter writers, so the more appropriate measure of central tendency was the median, which was 4 months. No significant association was observed between duration of correspondence and approach status.

Identifying Information

Subjects tended to give ample identifying information about themselves. Sixty-eight (81%) gave their full names, 61 (74%) gave an address, and 72 (86%) gave some identifying information in their written communications. Only 12 (14%) of the letter writers

maintained complete anonymity. Giving any identifying information was significantly associated with approaching the member of Congress (see Table 1), but this finding could be partly an artifact of the difficulty of linking inappropriate visitors with anonymous letters they had written. There was no significant difference between positive and negative cases in whether they gave their full name or full address.

Geographic Distribution

Subjects in this sample were based in 16 states and the District of Columbia. Thirty-six subjects (90% of 40 cases in which the number of postmarks was known) mailed their communications from a single state; 4 (10%) had postmarks from at least two different states. There was too little variation to detect any association there might be between approach status and the number of different states from which communications had been mailed.

Means of Communication

At least 12% of the subjects had used some means other than mailed letters in their efforts to contact the member of Congress from a distance, including telephone calls (9 cases) and telegrams (1 case). Subjects who telephoned in addition to writing were significantly more likely to approach the public figure (see Table 1). 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, the true proportion of subjects who communicate through multiple media is certainly higher than the 12% measured. Thirty subjects (35%) hand delivered at least one communication, mostly to staff members at the Capitol.

Paper

For each subject, the predominant type of paper used for all mailings was recorded. Forty-seven subjects (56%) most often used plain paper; 21 (25%) used lined paper; 4 (5%) used stationery; 3 (4%) sent a photocopy; 1 (1%) used a greeting card; 1 (1%) used unprinted, quality stationery; 4 (5%) sent some combination of these types of paper; 0 used postcards; and 3 (4%) used other forms of paper. The type of paper was not associated with approach status.

Handwriting

Thirty-one subjects (37%) wrote their communications in cursive script, 22 (26%) hand printed their letters, 28 (34%) sent typed letters, and 1 (1%) used a combination of these. Subjects with cursive letters were significantly less likely to approach (see Table 1). Contrary to the popular stereotype, only 1 subject (1%) sent a letter which had been cut and pasted from printed matter.

Propriety

Thirty-seven subjects (45%) predominantly used appropriate greetings in their communications, 14 (17%) used the name of the member of Congress by itself, 18 (22%) used no greeting, 1 (1%) used an overly familiar term, 11 (13%) used a greeting which was inappropriate for other reasons, and 1 (1%) used some attention-getting phrase (such as, "Hi"). Positives and negatives did not differ in the use of inappropriate or appropriate greetings.

TABLE 1—Features of communications significantly associated with approaches toward members of the U.S. Congress.

Variable	Approach Negative, N (%)	Approach Positive, N (%)	Chi-Square (Probability)
Provided identifying information			
Yes	32 (76)	40 (95)	4.76 (<0.03)
No	10 (24)	2 (5)	
Wrote and telephoned			
Yes	1 (2)	10 (23)	6.67 (<0.01)
No	42 (98)	33 (77)	
Type of writing			
Cursive	22 (51)	9 (21)	7.26 (0.007)
Other	21 (49)	34 (79)	
Closing of letter			
Appropriate	7 (17)	21 (54)	10.32 (<0.002)
Other	34 (83)	18 (46)	
Polite			
Yes	16 (41)	29 (81)	10.60 (0.001)
No	23 (59)	7 (19)	
Subject takes enemy role			
Yes	25 (58)	9 (21)	10.94 (0.0009)
No	18 (42)	34 (79)	
Subject takes special constituent role			
Yes	7 (16)	20 (46)	7.77 (0.0053)
No	36 (84)	23 (54)	
Member cast in enemy role			
Yes	26 (60)	10 (23)	10.75 (0.001)
No	17 (40)	33 (77)	
Member cast in benefactor role			
Yes	4 (9)	16 (37)	7.88 (0.005)
No	39 (91)	27 (63)	
Repeatedly mentions love, marriage, or romance			
Yes	0	6 (14)	4.48 (0.034)
No	43 (100)	37 (86)	
Expresses a desire for face-to-face contact			
Yes	3 (7)	13 (30)	6.23 (0.02)
No	40 (93)	30 (70)	
Expresses desire for rescue, assistance, valuables, or recognition			
Yes	13 (30)	24 (56)	4.75 (0.03)
No	30 (70)	19 (44)	

TABLE 1—*Continued*

Variable	Approach Negative, N (%)	Approach Positive, N (%)	Chi-Square (Probability)
Attempts to instill fear in the member of Con- gress			
Yes	26 (60)	9 (21)	12.33
No	17 (40)	34 (79)	(0.0004)
Attempts to provoke up- set in the member of Congress			
Yes	15 (35)	5 (12)	5.28
No	28 (65)	38 (88)	(0.022)
Attempts to instill worry in the member of Con- gress			
Yes	28 (65)	15 (35)	6.70
No	15 (35)	28 (65)	(0.01)

Twenty-eight subjects (35%) predominantly used an appropriate form of closing in their communications, 37 (46%) used inappropriate forms of closing, and 15 (19%) used no closing. Those subjects who used an appropriate closing were significantly more likely to approach than those who used an inappropriate closing or none at all (see Table 1).

Some subjects demonstrated inappropriateness by writing impolite letters. Eighteen subjects (24%) were inconsiderate or rude, and 12 (16%) were vulgar, obscene, or lewd. As shown in Table 1, subjects who were polite were significantly more likely to approach than those who were impolite (including those who were inconsiderate, rude, vulgar, obscene, or lewd).

Appearance and Format

Idiosyncratic punctuation was used by 14 subjects (16%). Evidence of poor planning of space on the paper was rated as falling into one of four classes: none (81%), minimal (13%), moderate (2%), or "utter chaos" (4%). Neither the use of idiosyncratic punctuation nor poor planning of space was associated with approach status.

Enclosures

Twenty-seven subjects (31%) provided enclosures with their communications. The distribution of enclosures is shown in Table 2. Media clippings and photographs were most common, but even these were sent by only 8% of subjects. Examples of specific enclosures include the following:

- a photocopy of a statute
- two greeting cards
- a photograph of the subject
- documents purportedly supporting the subject's position
- a photocopy of information purportedly from a "Voice of Americanism" [sic] broadcast
- the subject's resume
- photocopies of various receipts
- a report from a climatologist and the resume of a proposed business partner
- a cartoon drawing with a violent theme depicting the subject and the President

TABLE 2—Enclosures sent to members of Congress.

Enclosure	N (%)
Media clippings and photographs ^a	7 (8)
Subject's creative efforts ^b	4 (5)
Photograph of subject	4 (5)
Religious or mystical materials	3 (4)
Other photographs (apparently homemade) ^c	2 (2)
Commercial pictures ^d	1 (1)
Bizarre materials ^e	1 (1)
Business cards	0
Other businesslike enclosures ^f	1 (1)
Valuables and commercial materials ^g	0
Other	9 (10)

^aIncludes photographs of the member of Congress from the media.

^bIncludes drawings, poems, tape recordings, and literary works (including poetry or lyrics within a letter).

^cIncludes only those which could have been taken by the subject; excludes photographs of the subject or of the member of Congress.

^dIncludes commercial drawings, stickers, and seals.

^eIncludes biological materials, personal documents (social security card, driver's license, birth certificate), drugs, pebbles, dirt, seeds, and similar objects.

^fIncludes literature explaining businesses and self-addressed replies.

^gIncludes items of value and books.

Neither sending an enclosure nor any specific type of enclosure was associated with approach status.

Perceived Relationships with Members of Congress

These subjects had no personal relationship with the members of Congress to whom they wrote, but many believed that there was a personal relationship, often an important one. To evaluate the nature of the perceived relationships with strangers, we developed the concept of roles adopted by the subjects and the parallel concept of roles in which subjects cast the members of Congress. The use of the role concept stems from the use of the term in social psychology, but most of the role relationships perceived by subjects were obviously the product of mental disorder, often delusions.

The coders were trained to identify "roles" assumed by the subjects in their correspondence with members of Congress. For each subject, the coder identified up to three roles in which the subject had cast himself or herself. The most frequently adopted role was that of an enemy (40%), which includes the roles of assassin, persecutor, and condemning judge. The next most frequently adopted were those of a special constituent or fan (31%) and the appropriate role of one of many constituents or a stranger (17%). In addition to those who depicted themselves as an enemy of the member of Congress, there were smaller proportions who cast themselves in equally inappropriate, if less overtly ominous, roles: religious adviser, prophet, or savior (14%); friend, adviser, or acquaintance (13%); business associate or collaborator (9%); someone with special powers (9%); rescuer (7%); and lover or would-be lover (6%).

Those subjects taking the role of enemy were significantly less likely to approach (see Table 1). In contrast, those subjects taking the role of a special constituent were significantly more likely to approach (see Table 1). None of the other particular roles was significantly associated with approach behavior.

Subjects often cast the member of Congress to whom they were writing in a role other than that reflecting a correct perception of their true social relationship, which was that of a political representative to whom the subject was a stranger. In many instances, these roles were reciprocal to those assumed by the subjects (for example, subjects assuming the role of a business associate or collaborator often cast the Congress member in the role of a business associate or collaborator), but this was not necessarily the case.

The coders identified up to three roles in which the member of Congress had been cast by the subject. Although 88% of subjects showed a recognition in at least one of their writings that the Congress member was actually a stranger to them, 42% cast the member in an enemy role, including the roles of persecutor and conspirator. Other inappropriate perceptions of role occurred among subjects who considered the member to be a rescuer, benefactor, or potential benefactor (23%); business associate or collaborator (12%); friend or acquaintance (9%); lover, potential lover, or would-be lover (6%); beneficiary of the subject (5%); or spouse, potential spouse, or suitor (2%).

Two of the roles in which subjects cast the member of Congress were significantly associated with approach status. As shown in Table 1, subjects who cast the Congress member in an enemy role were significantly less likely to approach. In contrast, subjects who cast the member in the role of a benefactor, which includes the roles of rescuer, benefactor, and potential benefactor, were significantly more likely to approach (see Table 1).

The coders rated whether the nature of the role in which the subject cast himself changed over time. Of 36 cases in which there were either multiple mailings or variously dated materials within a single mailing, the coders rated 3 (8%) as showing a change in roles and 33 (92%) as showing no change in roles. A change in roles over time was not associated with approach status.

Patronage

Subjects were assigned to one of three levels of patronage, as has been described elsewhere [1]. Rated according to this scale, 46 of the subjects (62%) evidenced minimal patronage, 24 (32%) moderate patronage, and 4 (5%) maximal patronage. The measurement of the level of patronage was confounded with the measurement of approach status, since traveling to see the member of Congress was among the criteria for assessing moderate or maximal patronage.

Idolatry

The coders judged only 4 subjects as having "ever idolized or worshipped someone." Two of these idolized the member of Congress to whom they had written, 1 idolized another public figure, and 2 idolized someone else. The frequency of idolatry in this sample was too low to permit comparisons between positives and negatives.

Thematic Content

As expected, commonly mentioned themes in these letters included political issues (40%), the president of the United States (35%), other government figures (40%), and political parties or groups (26%). Communists and Democrats were mentioned with equal frequency (13%), just ahead of Republicans (12%), and much more often than Nazis (2%) or Socialists (1%).

The particular political issues mentioned by the subjects seemed to reflect newsworthy issues of the day. Forty percent mentioned any political issue, 12% mentioned racial politics, 10% mentioned the Middle East, 7% mentioned the economy, 6% mentioned

Central America, and 1% mentioned the hostages in Iran. Forty-one subjects (48%) mentioned any political issue or political party. Of these, 26 expressed political sentiments, the intensity of which was rated as minimal (11 cases), moderate (14 cases), or extreme (8 cases). Although it is often appropriate to write to members of Congress with concerns about these issues, the writings by these subjects were anything but appropriate, even if on a relevant subject. No significant difference was observed between negatives and positives in whether any political theme or party was mentioned.

These subjects also mentioned other persons and institutions that are the recipients of similar unwanted attention, including entertainment celebrities (13%), corporations, corporate executives or corporate products (6%), and sports figures (1%). Five percent made explicit reference to political assassins.

To code 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.)

Of the 86 subjects, 76 (88%) repeatedly mentioned a particular theme. Table 3 shows the distribution of these themes. The theme repeatedly mentioned by the largest proportion of subjects (49%) was that of injustices they perceived themselves as having endured. Twenty-eight (33%) of the subjects repeatedly mentioned the member of Congress or another public figure, and an equal number repeatedly mentioned political or governmental themes. Other themes repeatedly mentioned by sizable proportions of subjects were law enforcement, security, intelligence, or the military (27%), religious or mystical themes (23%), violence or aggression (24%), and racial issues (15%). Nine subjects (10%) repeatedly mentioned love, marriage, or sexual activity. Only 1 or 2 subjects repeatedly mentioned union with the member of Congress, legislation, becoming a public figure, rescue of the member, or occult, science fiction, or fantasy themes. Only one of the repeatedly mentioned themes was associated with approach status. As shown in Table 1, subjects who repeatedly mentioned love, marriage, or romance were significantly more likely to approach the member.

Sixty-nine (80%) of the subjects evidenced preoccupation, overvalued ideas, or obsession regarding someone or something. (Here, the term "preoccupied" is used to indicate this entire class of ideation.) The distribution of the subjects' preoccupations is given in Table 3. The most prevalent theme for these preoccupations was the subjects' perceptions of injustice they had endured (38%). Second in frequency was a preoccupation, experienced by 18 subjects (21%), with the member of Congress or another public figure. Other themes with which subjects were preoccupied included violence or aggression (17%); politics or government (16%); religious or mystical themes (14%); law enforcement, security, intelligence, or the military (13%); and racial issues (6%). Seven subjects (8%) were preoccupied with love, marriage, or sexual activity, and two with union with the member. None of the preoccupations, overvalued ideas, or obsessions was significantly associated with approach.

Degree of Insistence

The subjects varied in the degree of insistence communicated in their writings, which we consider conceptually related to their degree of obsession and emotional investment in particular ideas. We assessed several different aspects of insistence by coding whether each was present in a subject's communications. The most prevalent type of insistence occurred among the 58% of subjects who communicated that their concerns were of extreme importance, of great consequence, or grave. Other indicators of insistence were demanding or ordering the member of Congress to take particular actions (36%), com-

TABLE 3—Themes repeatedly mentioned by subjects.

Theme	Repeatedly mentioned, N (%)	Preoccupied with, N (%)
Injustice to self	42 (49)	33 (38)
Politics or government	28 (33)	14 (16)
Law enforcement, security, intelligence, or military	23 (27)	11 (13)
The member of Congress	18 (21)	11 (13)
Other public figures	22 (26)	15 (17)
Violence or aggression to self or others	21 (24)	15 (17)
Religion or mysticism	20 (23)	12 (14)
Racial issues	13 (15)	5 (6)
Love, marriage, romance	6 (7)	3 (4)
Sexual activity	4 (5)	4 (5)
Union with the member of Congress	2 (2)	2 (2)
Legislation or entertainment products	2 (2)	0 (0)
Rescue of the member of Congress	1 (1)	0 (0)
Becoming a public figure	1 (1)	0 (0)
Occultism, science fiction, or fantasy	1 (1)	0 (0)
Other	32 (37)	27 (31)

municating a sense of urgency or emergency (35%), demonstrating fanaticism or zealotry (29%), or begging or imploring (16%). None of the measures of insistence was associated with approach behavior, either alone or when combined in an additive index.

Wants and Desires

In their letters to members of Congress, most of the subjects sought something. The most common requests were for rescue or assistance (28 cases). Although it may, in principle, be appropriate to seek assistance from one's political representative, the assistance sought was always inappropriate. Among the expressed desires that were most obviously inappropriate were requests for valuable gifts (9 cases), face-to-face contact in the member's home or private office (4 cases), sexual contact (2 cases), and a visit from the member at the subject's home (1 case). Some subjects wanted compensation for harms they had delusions of undergoing, wanted their inventions to be used against enemies of the nation, or urgently wanted their thoughts communicated to the President or foreign leaders.

Two of the desires expressed by subjects in their writings were associated with approach status. As shown in Table 1, subjects who expressed a desire for face-to-face contact or for rescue, assistance, valuables, or recognition were significantly more likely to approach the member of Congress. No significant difference was observed between negatives and positives in their requests for a response by mail or telephone, for getting information to someone, or for marriage, sex, or having children.

Emotional Provocation

The coders rated whether each subject had attempted to instill, evoke, or provoke any of seven types of emotional response. By far the most prevalent was the effort to instill

feelings of worry or anxiety, observed in the writings of 43 subjects (50%). The second most common was an effort to evoke fear (35). In decreasing order of frequency, the other emotions subjects sought to evoke were upset (20), shame (19), anger (11), love (1), and sexual excitement (1). Three of these 7 types of emotional provocation were associated with approach status. Subjects who attempted to cause fear, provoke upset, or instill worry in the member of Congress were significantly less likely to approach (See Table 1).

Sexual Content

A single subject wrote about sexual arousal or responsiveness, and this concerned the wife of the member of Congress. No subject specifically wrote about sexual arousal or responsiveness involving the member or specifically expressed his or her own sexual interest in the member. Six subjects (7%) mentioned some sexual activity, including deviant forms, but this was not associated with approach behavior.

Threatening Content

Defining a "threat" as any offer to do harm, however implausible, the coders identified threats in 50 (58%) of the cases and no threats in 36 cases. Sixteen subjects (19% of the sample and 32% of the threateners) made only one threat, and 34 subjects (40% of the subjects and 68% of the threateners) made two or more threats. The largest number of threats made by any one subject in the sample was 31. The mean number of threats per threatener was 4.3 (SD = 5.5). Without the most extreme case, the mean was 3.7 threats per threatener (SD = 3.9).

Of the 43 approach-negative cases, 36 (84%) made one or more threats. Of the 43 approach-positive cases, 14 (33%) made one or more threats. The mean number of threats was significantly larger among the approach-negative cases (mean = 3.2, SD = 4.2) than among the approach-positive cases (mean = 1.4, SD = 3.2) ($t = 2.30$, $df = 84$; $P = 0.024$). The presence or absence of a threat was strikingly associated with whether subjects approached or not.

Table 4 gives the statistically significant comparisons between subjects who approached the member of Congress and those who did not with respect to various features of threats. As shown there, subjects who threatened were significantly less likely to approach. Nearly every feature of threats studied bore a significant relationship to approach behavior, always in the direction of threateners approaching less often.

Threats were classified according to whether they were direct, veiled, or conditional, using criteria described elsewhere [1,6]. Among the 50 threateners, 24 (48%) made direct threats; 30 made indirect or veiled threats (60%); and 25 made conditional threats (50%). Many threateners made more than one type of threat. Taking threats as the unit of analysis (rather than subjects), we coded a total of 211 threats, of which 89 were direct (42%), 76 veiled (36%), and 46 conditional (22%).

We examined the conditions subjects set forth to avert their 46 conditional threats. Subjects more commonly sought influence or power (40%) than financial gain (20%) or personal attention (8%). None of the conditions specified in conditional threats was itself associated with approach; for each condition, those subjects who made conditional threats were less likely to approach.

Seventeen threateners (34% of all threateners) made 69 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. For example, one subject wrote:

Follow-up!
WARNINGS FROM GOD ALMIGHTY!
BE DAMNED!

* * *

GOD ALMIGHTY WILL DESTROY YOUR OIL WELLS! BANKS! CITIES! TOWNS!
STATES! COUNTRIES! BUILDINGS! (GOD WILL DO IT FOR YOU—OKAY?!)

Four subjects expressed desires or intentions that, while involving exerting influence through lawful means, were, from their contexts, threats nonetheless. For example, one

TABLE 4—Features of threats significantly associated with approaches toward members of the U.S. Congress.

Variable	Approach Negative, N (%)	Approach Positive, N (%)	Chi-Square (Probability)
Any threat			
Yes	36 (84)	14 (33)	21.07 (0.00001)
No	7 (16)	29 (67)	
Threatened any kind of harm toward any public figure			
Yes	28 (65)	13 (30)	9.14 (0.003)
No	15 (35)	37 (70)	
Threatened to kill any public figure or those around a public figure			
Yes	20 (46)	8 (19)	6.41 (0.011)
No	23 (54)	35 (81)	
Threat to be executed by subject or his agent			
Yes	23 (54)	10 (23)	7.08 (0.008)
No	20 (46)	33 (77)	
Threat to be executed by someone other than the subject or his agent			
Yes	17 (40)	7 (16)	4.68 (0.03)
No	26 (61)	36 (84)	
Any direct threat			
Yes	17 (40)	7 (16)	4.68 (0.03)
No	26 (60)	36 (84)	
Any veiled threat			
Yes	21 (49)	9 (21)	6.19 (0.013)
No	22 (51)	34 (79)	
Any conditional threat			
Yes	17 (40)	8 (19)	3.65 (0.05)
No	26 (60)	35 (81)	
Any implausible threat			
Yes	14 (33)	3 (7)	7.33 (0.007)
No	29 (67)	40 (93)	

subject, who often wrote hexes promising the destruction of the world also threatened to file a civil suit:

I am suing you for damages for: . . . fraudulently lying pretending you are torturing someone else so you wont get caught and pay for your crime.

* * *

If I do not hear from you in two (2) weeks I will be reporting you to the U.N. & to the Civil Liberties Union . . .

Threats were rated for evidence of plans, means, or opportunity to carry out the threat. Five subjects' threats were accompanied by evidence of a plan to carry it out. Two subjects' threats were accompanied by evidence of means to carry out the threat. Two subjects' threats were accompanied by evidence of opportunity to carry out the threat. Subjects who gave evidence of having a plan, the means, or the opportunity to carry out their threats generally approached, but their numbers were too small to achieve statistical significance.

The threat credibility scale (described elsewhere [1,6]) assigns each subject a score based on whether any threat is accompanied by evidence of a plan (worth 1 point), means (1 point), or opportunity (1 point). In this sample, 6 subjects (12% of threateners) scored greater than 0 on this scale: 4 scored 1, 1 scored 2, and 1 scored 3.

For each threat, the coder recorded the target of the threat, who would execute the threat, and the type of harm threatened. The most common target was the member of Congress (33%), and the second most common class of targets consisted of other public figures or their significant others, protective details, or property (22%). Twelve percent of subjects threatened to harm a stereotyped group of people, a class of people, or "everyone"; 5% threatened to harm the member's significant others or property; 4% threatened to harm themselves; 2% threatened to harm another individual third party or his property; and 1% threatened to harm their own significant others or property.

Thirty-eight percent of the subjects indicated that they or their agents would execute the threats. Others indicated that the threats would be executed by unspecified or vaguely identified third parties (14%), by God (9%), or by a group (7%).

Twenty-nine subjects (34%) threatened to kill someone, making homicide the most commonly threatened harm. The most prevalent type of death threat was a threat to assassinate the member of Congress. Twenty-three percent of all subjects threatened to assassinate him or her, as did 69% of those who made any death threat. Others whom the subjects threatened to kill were other public figures (14%), people around the member of Congress (4%), themselves (2%), and others (2%).

Other threatened actions included harming someone's career (7%); doing something undesirable but unspecified (5%); injuring someone physically (2%); stalking, haunting, or hunting someone (2%); committing arson (2%) or suicide (2%); and harming a business (1%). Five subjects (6%) directed such threats toward the member of Congress, 7 (8%) toward other public figures, 0 toward themselves, and 1 toward others.

Weapons

A total of 26 subjects (30%) mentioned any weapon in their letters. Only one of these subjects specified that he possessed or had access to weapons. Mention of a weapon bore no significant relationship to approach status.

Announcements of Events Concerning the Member of Congress

Seven subjects (8%) announced a specific location where something would happen to the member of Congress, and 12 (14%) announced a specific time when something would happen to him or her. Such announcements were not associated with approach.

Discussion

We identified 17 factors that were significantly associated with whether subjects who wrote threatening or otherwise inappropriate letters to members of Congress approached those members. These variables can be divided into risk-enhancing and risk-reducing factors. The 10 risk-enhancing factors identified were repetitive letter writing; providing any identifying information; telephoning in addition to writing; closing letters appropriately; politeness in letters; taking the role of a special constituent; casting the member of Congress in a benefactor role, including the roles of rescuer, benefactor, or potential benefactor; repeatedly mentioning love, marriage, or romance; expressing a desire for face-to-face contact with the member; and expressing a desire for rescue, assistance, valuables, or recognition.

The 7 risk-reducing factors identified were cursive writing; taking an enemy role, including the roles of assassin, persecutor, and condemning judge; casting the Congress member in an enemy role, including the roles of persecutor and conspirator; attempting to instill fear in the member; attempting to provoke upset in the member; attempting to instill worry in the member; and making any threat.

The finding regarding threats was particularly robust. Each of the following aspects of threats, taken alone, was significantly associated with not approaching: threatening any kind of harm toward any public figure; threatening to kill any public figure or those around a public figure; indicating that a threat would be executed by the subject or his agent; indicating that a threat would be executed by someone other than the subject or his agent; making any direct threat; making any veiled threat; making any conditional threat; and making any implausible threat.

Our findings regarding threats to members of Congress contradict the usual assumptions relied on in judging whether threatening or harassing communications warrant concern, notification of the police, security precautions, or investigation. With respect to inappropriate communications to members of Congress, the presence of a threat in the communications appears to lower the risk that a subject is going to pursue an encounter.

Comparison of the Hollywood and Congressional Samples

We are now in a position to compare these results with those derived from a similar examination of communications directed to Hollywood celebrities [1]. Threatening and otherwise inappropriate letters to Hollywood celebrities and to members of Congress—two populations of public figures that have little in common aside from prominence—have both striking similarities and important differences. Both populations of public figures receive a high volume of threatening and inappropriate communications recognizable as the work of the mentally disordered from such obvious features as bizarre appearance, enclosures, and content. The sampling methods used for the two studies preclude the use of inferential statistics to compare results from the two samples, for which reason the comparison given here draws simply on large differences between the two samples in the percentage of cases with particular attributes.

Similarities Between the Hollywood and Congressional Samples

In most respects, the volume and form of the letters were quite similar in the two samples. Half or more of the subjects wrote multiple letters, and a small number of subjects in each sample wrote many hundreds of letters. (The record-setting subject to date sent over 10 000 letters in six years, and is still at it; her two runners-up are at the 6200 and 5400 letter marks.) Serial letter writers averaged about 12 months of correspondence.

Most of the subjects volunteered their own names, addresses, or both (95% among

subjects writing to celebrities and 86% among subjects writing to members of Congress). Only 5% of the subjects writing to celebrities and 14% of those writing to members of Congress remained completely anonymous. Less than 1% of the letters were the "cut-and-paste" variety common in fiction.

About 10% of the subjects mailed letters from multiple states or countries, indicating their mobility. At least 12% of the subjects telephoned, sent telegrams, or used some other method to communicate with the public figure from a distance, in addition to mailing letters. Among the more creative efforts observed were classified advertisements, sending delegates to visit the public figure, publishing a book through a vanity press, and hiring a billboard.

In each sample, 88% or more of the subjects repeatedly mentioned particular themes in their writings. Fifty-five percent or more of the subjects were pathologically focused on some topic or idea.

Both populations mentioned public figures other than those to whom they had written. Thirty-six percent of the subjects focused on celebrities mentioned some public figure other than the celebrity to whom they had written, including political leaders. For example, 2% mentioned President Kennedy, 5% President Carter, and 6% President Reagan. Subjects writing to members of Congress often mentioned other government figures (the president of the United States was mentioned by 35% and other government figures by 40%), but also mentioned other famous people or entities, including entertainment celebrities (13%); corporations, corporate executives, or products (6%); political assassins (5%); and sports figures (1%). The significant overlap in the focus of these two populations of letter writers is one of our most important findings.

Most death threats and threats to commit other kinds of harm specified that the victim would be the public figure to whom the subject wrote or those around the public figure, but threats were also directed toward other public figures, private citizens, and the subjects themselves. Subjects threatened a variety of harm, including homicide, other personal injury, and property destruction. Most of the threateners indicated they would carry out the threats themselves, but others indicated the threats would be executed by unspecified parties or by God. In each sample, approximately one third of the written threats were implausible because they were predicated on a psychotic notion of causation, were technically impossible, or were curses or hexes.

Differences Between the Hollywood and Congressional Samples

The letters written to celebrities were, on the average, more intimate and personal, while those written to members of Congress were, on the average, more distant and formal. For example, subjects writing to celebrities more often addressed the public figure too informally (72% for celebrity letters versus 17% for letters to members of Congress). Subjects writing to members of Congress more often typed their letters (34% for Congress members versus 17% for celebrities), while those writing to entertainment celebrities more often wrote in a cursive script (49% versus 37%). As far as could be determined, subjects writing to celebrities more often sent enclosures (55% versus 31%), and these were more often personal in nature than were those sent to members of Congress. Indeed, some enclosures were as personal as birth certificates, passports, photographs of the subject masturbating, and containers of blood or semen.

The most common roles adopted by those pursuing celebrities were seemingly benevolent, such as friends, spouses, suitors, or lovers; only 5% cast themselves as enemies, while 40% of subjects in the present sample did so. Subjects pursuing celebrities more often idolized the object of their attention than did those pursuing members of Congress. For example, while 58% of the former idolized or worshiped someone, almost always the celebrity, only 5% of the latter did so.

Ninety-two percent of the subjects writing to celebrities repeatedly mentioned the world of Hollywood, 91% repeatedly mentioned public figures, and 53% repeatedly mentioned love, marriage, or sex; only 13% repeatedly mentioned perceived injustices. In contrast, among those writing to members of Congress, the most common theme repeatedly mentioned by subjects was that of injustices they perceived themselves as having endured (49%). Comparatively few repeatedly mentioned public figures (33%), the world of Capitol Hill (33%), or love, marriage, or sex (10%).

Fifty-five percent of those writing to celebrities were pathologically focused on some topic or idea, most often the world of Hollywood (52%), a public figure (51%), or love, marriage, or sex (15%). Only 2% were focused on injustices. Among those writing to members of Congress, however, 80% demonstrated such a pathological focus, most often their perceptions of injustices they had endured (38%) or a public figure (21%); 8% were focused on love, marriage, or sex. A smaller proportion of the entertainment industry subjects than the political subjects was pathologically focused on violent or aggressive themes (2% and 17%, respectively).

Thirty-two percent of subjects writing to celebrities mentioned sexual activities, in contrast with 7% of those writing to members of Congress. Twenty-four percent of the former and none of the latter specifically expressed their own sexual interest in the public figure.

Subjects writing to members of Congress more often communicated a sense that their concerns were of extreme importance (58% writing to Congress members versus 18% writing to celebrities) or urgent (35% versus 8%). Subjects writing to celebrities, however, more often expressed a desire for face-to-face contact than those writing to members of Congress (40% versus 19%). Those writing to members of Congress more often sought to get information to someone (41% versus 22%) or to be rescued or assisted (33% versus 5%). Approximately equal proportions of subjects in both samples sought to upset or shame the recipients of their letters, but those writing to celebrities more often sought to evoke love and sexual excitement, while those writing to members of Congress more often sought to evoke worry, fear, and anger.

Subjects writing to members of Congress more often made threats, broadly defined, than those writing to celebrities (58% versus 23%). Those sending threats to Congress members averaged 3.7 threats apiece, while those sending threats to celebrities averaged 2.8 threats. Threats to commit all types of harm—including death threats—were more prevalent among the communications to members of Congress. Those sending threats to members of Congress more often made direct threats (48% versus 26%) and veiled threats (60% versus 39%) and less often made conditional threats (50% versus 71%). In both samples, subjects making conditional threats often sought influence or power (40% among Congressional subjects, 51% among Hollywood subjects). Those subjects threatening celebrities, however, much more often sought personal attention (69% versus 8%). Those threatening celebrities more often gave evidence of having a plan to carry out the threat (39% versus 10%), the means to carry out the threat (20% versus 4%), or the opportunity to carry out the threat (24% versus 4%). Subjects writing to members of Congress more often mentioned a weapon (30% versus 6%).

Factors Associated with Pursuit Behavior in the Two Samples

In this paper, we compared 43 subjects who both wrote to and pursued a face-to-face encounter with a member of Congress with 43 subjects who wrote but did not pursue an encounter. We found a positive association between the number of mailings and the likelihood of approach, which confirms an analogous finding reported earlier for subjects writing to Hollywood celebrities [1,6]. We found significant differences also between those who approached and those who did not in many of the same areas of behavior in which significant differences were found in the celebrity study, including the volume of

communications, whether the subject provided identifying information, the means of communication used, repeatedly mentioned themes, expressed desires, and emotional provocation.

Significant differences were also found for features that were not significant in the other study, including handwriting, propriety, role perceptions, and threatening statements. In contrast to the entertainment industry study, we did not observe any association between approaches to members of Congress and the duration of communications, type of paper used, or enclosures to the communications. Nor did we find significant differences in the geography of postmarks on the letters, the sexual content of letters, or announcements concerning the member, perhaps because there was too little variation in these variables to study their relationship to approach behavior adequately.

The most striking and robust difference between the findings reported here and those of the other study, however, is the discovery in this study of a strong association between making threats and *not* approaching. Subjects who sent threats to a member of Congress were significantly *less* likely to pursue a face-to-face encounter with him or her. Subjects who sent inappropriate letters that contained no threats were significantly more likely to pursue a face-to-face encounter. In the Hollywood celebrity study, in contrast, there was no association between threats and approach [1].

Conclusions

Inappropriate communications to members of Congress differ in important ways from those directed to entertainment figures, emphasizing issues of power and violence more than romance. Nonetheless, there are substantial similarities, particularly in the fact that persons in both spheres of public life receive a large volume of inappropriate and threatening mail and a large number of inappropriate visits, chiefly from persons who are mentally disordered. This paper provides new information on the relationship between inappropriate letters and inappropriate visits.

The extent to which many subjects focus their attention on multiple public figures, including both entertainers and political leaders, calls for new approaches in the protection of public figures. The importance of the discovery that those who harass and pursue one public figure often harass and pursue other public figures is underscored by the fact that this is also true of many of those who attack public figures. To cite just two examples, John Hinckley sent and delivered multiple communications to actress Jodie Foster and called her on the telephone long before the shooting of President Reagan and his party. Likewise, Chet Young was known to the Secret Service for threatening the President before he murdered the father of the singing Lennon Sisters. In these and many other cases we have studied, there were important indicators of risk to a public figure long before an attack on a public figure, but those warnings were not received by those who needed the information or were not recognized as warnings.

To maximize the effectiveness of public figure protection agencies it would be necessary to create a central repository of information on persons who make threatening and inappropriate communications to public figures and who make inappropriate visits to public figures. A central repository of information poses significant legal and policy problems, however, including those governing the sharing of information and the keeping of intelligence files on persons who have not committed a crime. Appropriate legislation could, however, remove barriers—such as liability fears or administrative rules—that currently deter some protective agencies from notifying endangered third parties of a subject's focused interest.

Note that a central repository that was limited to information on threateners would fail to encompass many of the most dangerous subjects. To encompass those whose pursuit of public figures will bring them within striking distance, it is essential to include

all inappropriate communications, whether threatening or not, and all persons making inappropriate visits in search of the public figure, whether at the true location of the public figure or not.

Those who require the presence of a threat before calling the authorities, before opening an investigative file, or before taking measures to prevent dangerous encounters are seriously in error. Unfortunately, criminal law, which recognizes various types of verbal threats as unlawful, does not accord equal recognition to harassment without threats, even though the latter are more closely associated with pursuit by the mentally disordered, at least for members of Congress and Hollywood celebrities.

We recommend that persons and organizations that regularly receive threatening and otherwise inappropriate communications or reports develop standardized procedures for preserving evidence and reporting the information to concerned parties [7]. Those who first receive such communications, such as secretaries, need guidance on the criteria and methods for case reporting. Law enforcement agencies, security personnel, and others need policies governing the notification of third parties mentioned in such communications.

Forthcoming reports from this project will address the psychopathology observed among these letter writers, their pursuit of encounters with public figures, and the use of the content of these communications to predict approaches. Future studies should address communications to individuals in other spheres of public life and in forms other than writing, including telephone and face-to-face statements.

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