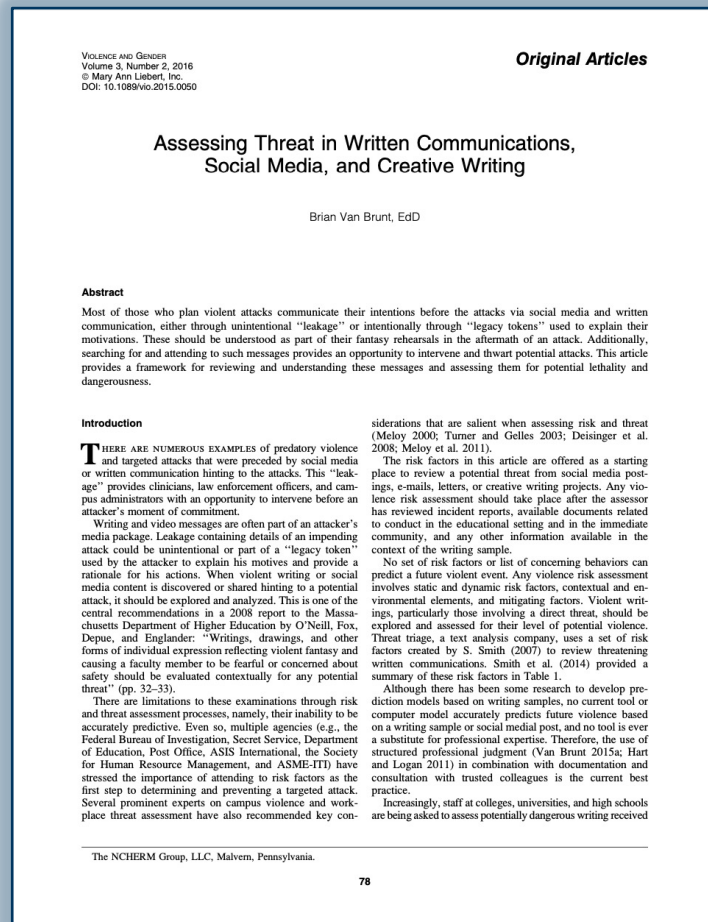


# Assessing Threat in Written Communications, Social Media, and Creative Writing

By Brian Van Brunt



Most of those who plan violent attacks communicate their intentions before the attacks via social media and written communication, either through unintentional “leakage” or intentionally through “legacy tokens” used to explain their motivations. Most attackers share this information prior to the attack as a fantasy rehearsal to gauge the reaction of the attention that will come to them after the actual attack.

# KEY POINTS



**Written communication and social media posts provide insight into an attacker's motive for the attack.**

**Attending to these materials can aid in prevention and getting out in front of a potential attack.**



**The most effective way to assess threatening, concerning or dangerous writing is the use a structured process to determine the risk of violence based on models grounded in research and risk factors informed by case studies.**



**A good threat assessment should review the writing and social media posts to determine the presence of risk factors. These include fixation and focus, hierarchical thematic content, preattack planning, injustice collecting**



# ASSESS FOR THE FOLLOWING

## FIXIATION AND FOCUS

Look for narrowing from a broad group (i.e., all women) to a specific group (i.e., sorority members.) Attend to naming of the target that is repeated, objectified, emphasized (as with all CAPS) and described in graphic language.

## HIERACHICAL THEMATIC CONTENT

Look for disempowering, militaristic, language to make themselves a glorified avenger – a corrector of real or perceived wrongs. They often use paranoid language and reference past attacks.

## ACTON AND TIME IMPERATIVE

Look for details such as time and place of the attack, what weapons will be used, what obstacles need to be overcome (e.g., metal detectors, security) and a “do this or else” conditional ultimatum

## PREATTACK PLANNING

Look for discussion of how to acquire weapons, research into the details about the target, or descriptions of what they will wear (or costume) during the attack is of increased risk.

## INJUSTICE COLLECTING

Look for perseveration on past wrongs and a desire to create justice. Attend to discussion of how to acquire weapons, research into the details about the target, or descriptions of what they will wear (or costume) during the attack is of increased risk.