As we noted in earlier chapters, terms associated with profiling are often used interchangeably, and there is also considerable overlap between different categories. It should come as no surprise, then, that psychological profiling is often called criminal profiling, crime scene profiling, offender profiling, or suspect-based profiling. As we use the term here, however, psychological profiling refers to gathering data on a known individual or individuals, such as by background investigations, observations, psychological tests, personality inventories, risk assessment instruments, and interviews with that person or with those who know him or her. In that sense, psychological profiles should be prepared only by psychologists or other mental health professionals who have been trained to administer these measures and conduct these observations. By contrast, geographic profiling and crime scene profiling need not be conducted by mental health professionals; as we saw in earlier chapters, law enforcement personnel sometimes receive specialized training for certification as behavioral analysts or behavioral investigative analysts (BIAs) (e.g., from the International Criminal Investigative Analysis Fellowship).

It is important to note that psychological profiling can have a positive spin, and social and behavioral scientists often engage in these more positive enterprises. For example, police psychologists sometimes help administrators in the selection of candidates who might “fit the profile” of a successful officer or who might be a good candidate for promotion (Bartol & Bartol, 2012). Political psychologists conduct research on personalities of individuals who are good candidates for political office,
even for the presidency of the United States (Simonton, 1993). Discussing these aspects of profiling would take us far afield from our intended mission, however. This chapter focuses on psychological profiling that is done to prevent harm from occurring; it is profiling intended to help law enforcement or other authorities in identifying and understanding persons who might cause harm to themselves or others in some way.

As in crime scene profiling, when the psychologist “profiles” a specific individual, a report is prepared that focuses less on who the person is (because that is usually known) than on judgments and predictions of how dangerous the person may be and how his or her behavior might be managed. David Canter—whom we credited with coinining the term “investigative psychology”—and his colleague Laurence Alison (2000) point out that psychological profiling is basically an offshoot of traditional psychological testing and assessment procedures. As you will see throughout the chapter, psychological assessment of various types is an integral part of psychological profiling.

A Brief History of Psychological Profiling

Psychological profiling was used by the U.S. Office of Strategic Services (OSS) during World War II in an effort to identify the tendencies and thought processes of Adolf Hitler (Ault & Reese, 1980). The psychological profile resulted in a secret wartime 281-page report on Hitler, authored by Walter C. Langer (1943), a psychologist with a heavy psychoanalytical leaning. Langer, working with colleagues including Harvard psychologist Henry A. Murray, hoped that the profile would be helpful in gaining a deeper insight into Hitler, including the motivations underlying his actions.

In keeping with Langer’s psychoanalytic orientation, the report was filled with allusions to Hitler’s Oedipal conflict, his mother’s excessive tidiness and its effect on her son’s toilet training, witnessing his parents’ sexual activities, his food-related pleasures and revulsions, and—as suggested by the quote opening this chapter—his failure to find a meaningful love relationship.

Murray (1943) also prepared a 240-page psychological profile for the OSS on Hitler’s personality and its development. The analysis was used to predict what Hitler would do after an Allied victory and how he should be dealt with if he was captured. The profile was also intended to provide the OSS with suggestions for how to influence Hitler’s mental condition and behavior. Interestingly, Murray predicted that Hitler would commit suicide when he realized the end of the war was near, and history indicates that he did. It is very likely, though, that the technique of psychological profiling leaders and politicians predated the OSS by several hundred years in earlier efforts to understand the thinking of kings and military leaders.

Psychological profiling like the above has often been used by military and intelligence organizations, sometimes with embarrassing results when the information is leaked. In 1993, for example, CIA representatives mistakenly told Congress that Haiti’s exiled president, Jean-Bertrand Aristide, was prone to manic depression; the report—which was uncorroborated and denounced—nevertheless prompted one U.S. senator to refer to Aristide as a “psychopath” on the Senate floor (Omestad, 1994). Almost
assuredly, psychological profiles of the now-deceased Osama Bin Laden, his influential followers, and both living and dead political figures are buried somewhere in government files. Again, it is not our mission to broach these uses; instead, we focus on the type of psychological profiling that is the most acknowledged and researched—psychological profiling that is used to identify and predict the behavior, not of individuals with a large number of followers, but rather of single individuals in non-leadership positions who are possibly dangerous to others. Two highly similar procedures for accomplishing this task are threat assessment and risk assessment.

Both threat and risk assessments involve predicting the likelihood that a specific individual will be dangerous or violent to others at some point in time. These assessments examine psychological risk factors that reveal a propensity for violence in threatening or potentially dangerous individuals. The assessment also tries to determine what specific situations or circumstances might have or will set the person off. Although there are many similarities between the two enterprises, they are also distinct and will be treated separately in this chapter whenever possible.

**Threat assessment** is a process to determine the credibility and seriousness of a threat—the probability of it being carried out. In other words, it is concerned with predicting future violence or other undesirable actions directed at specified individuals or institutions after an expressed threat has been communicated. **Risk assessment** is often used in evaluating “individuals who have violated social norms or displayed bizarre behavior, particularly when they appear menacing or unpredictable” (Hanson, 2009, p. 172). Violence risk assessment tries to evaluate an individual's likelihood of engaging in future violence directed at unspecified individuals, in unspecified situations, across an unspecified time frame, usually in the absence of an expressed threat. Threat and risk assessment predictions are probabilistic tasks that require clinicians and other professionals to make judgments about the likelihood of violence (Hatch-Maillette & Scalora, 2002). Both threat and risk assessments should have a firm empirical foundation, especially if legal consequences may be involved.

Regardless of whether it is a threat or a risk assessment, the agency or parties requesting the assessment will want more than a statistical statement about the chances of a damaging or violent act occurring. They usually desire an estimate of the potential consequences and what can be done to reduce or mitigate them (Hanson, 2009).

We will begin by providing an overview of threat assessment, and to illustrate the process we will use the examples of school violence and shootings and workplace violence, because they often involve direct threats, sometimes long before an actual act of violence occurs. We will return to violence risk assessment later in the chapter, using the troubling issue of stalking to illustrate.

---

**Threat Assessment**

Threat assessments concentrate on the probability of a threat being carried out. Consider Mitchell, a 14-year-old with a history of marginal performance in his academic work.
Mitchell is having particular difficulty with his ninth-grade English teacher, a 32-year veteran of classroom wars who is just biding his time until retirement. Mitchell has on several occasions mentioned to fellow students that he would like to “off” the teacher, and a disturbing drawing of the teacher with daggers throughout his body was discovered by a school janitor in Mitchell’s desk. Mitchell’s in-class comments to the teacher have resulted in visits to the principal’s office and the school guidance counselor, and on one occasion he was suspended for 3 days. A recent altercation, in which Mitchell shook his fist at the teacher and told him he knew where he lived, led to a referral to a community psychologist who consults with the school. The psychologist was asked by the principal, are we right to be worried about Mitchell?

The threat assessments that have been most heavily researched are those that occur relative to school settings, such as in the above scenario. Although schools have always been faced with similar situations, they became particularly worrisome in the aftermath of school shootings during the late 1990s, and, to a lesser extent, in the apparent recent rise in bullying behavior. School districts began to set up or consult with threat assessment teams for evaluating the seriousness of various student threats toward other students, school personnel, or the school as a whole. These teams may consist of psychologists, school counselors, police officers, the school principal, and other school personnel. On college campuses, these teams may consist of faculty, campus police, mental health professionals, and other representatives.

Outside of school settings, another form of threat assessment is the assessment by mental health professionals of an individual who threatens to commit a serious crime. Research has found that those persons who commit mass murder, for example, often had threatened violence sometime prior to their killings (L. J. Warren, Mullen, & Ogloff, 2011). However, not all persons who make such threats carry out their stated intentions. Therefore, mental health professionals may be called upon to “profile” persons to assess the credibility of their threats, or a threat assessment team may be called in to evaluate the seriousness of the threat.

Threat assessments are also conducted when threats are made toward political or well-known persons. For example, the U.S. Secret Service is continually involved in threat assessments. The agency is responsible for protecting the president and vice president, their families, and certain national and international leaders. In 1998, the Secret Service completed a 5-year study (called the Exceptional Case Study Project [ECSP]) on the behavior of individuals who assassinated, attacked, or approached to attack a prominent person of public status (Fein & Vossekul, 1998). The study employed an incident-focused, behaviorally based approach in examining investigative reports, criminal justice records, medical records, and other source documents. The project identified and analyzed 83 persons known to have engaged in 73 incidents of assassination, attack, and near-attack behaviors from 1949 to 1995. This information and the ongoing accumulation of relevant threat data provide training materials for conducting threat assessments for law enforcement agencies and other personnel involved in psychological profiling.

Threat assessment usually involves three major goals (Fein, Vossekul, & Holden, 1995). The first goal is the identification of the potential perpetrator, in the event that he or she is unknown. The second goal is to evaluate the risks the potential perpetrator
may pose to particular targets. This goal requires the gathering of multiple sources of information on the potential perpetrator, including his or her behavioral patterns, interests, and state of mind at various points in time. These sources include interviews with the person or persons; material created or collected by the suspect, including notes, journals, letters, books, magazines, and relevant electronic media; contacts with persons who know or have known the suspect; and record or archival information, including police, court, probation, mental health, and correctional records. This goal also requires gathering as much information as possible concerning the suspect’s knowledge of and skills with weapons, and the nature of the weapons the suspect has in his or her possession.

Note, though, that even when an individual is identified, he or she cannot necessarily be legally charged with a crime. The 15-year-old who writes a note threatening to kill the principal may be suspended or expelled from school, but—in most jurisdictions—he has not committed a crime, nor has the student who creates a Facebook page devoted to demanding that a teacher be fired. However, a threat assessment expert may be asked to predict whether these individuals are likely to escalate their behavior to more serious outcomes. Moreover, if the threatening activity continues, it may constitute a breach of stalking laws, thereby enabling police to charge the individual with a criminal violation.

The third goal is to manage both the suspect and the risks that he or she presents to a given target. This step requires the clear identification of potential targets gathered from the nature of the threats. It also necessitates the development of a strategy that discourages the suspect from violence or moves him or her away from the intended target. For example, the evaluators may request the help of a prosecutor to use enforceable anti-stalking laws against the suspect.

Threat Assessment and School Violence

School shootings took a significant turn for the worse with the Columbine High School (Littleton, Colorado) massacre on April 20, 1999, which resulted in 15 dead and 23 wounded. (See Photo 6.1, depicting a scene from the library after the incident.) Although there had been a number of school shootings prior to Columbine (at least 10 between 1996 and 1999), the Columbine shooting prompted a great deal of alarm and concern nationwide. The Columbine rampage was the second-most covered news story in the decade of the 1990s and represented the deadliest school shooting in history at that time (Larkin, 2009; Muschert, 2002).

Photo 6.1: Evidence tags mark papers, books, and a calculator strewn across a library table at Columbine High School. Ten of the 12 students who died in the shooting were killed in the library.
Accumulating evidence indicates that the Columbine shooters, two teenage boys, sought fame through the shootings, and, perhaps more alarming, they provided a vivid and powerful model that later school killers have emulated (Kiilakoski & Oksanen, 2011; Larkin, 2009). The Columbine killers “left behind videos, photos, diaries, proto-blog Internet pages and created a brand for school shootings to come” (Kiilakoski & Oksanen, 2011, p. 247). Prior to Columbine, there was no documented evidence of student conspiracies to bomb or shoot up one’s school for some perceived “greater good” or political agenda. Pre-Columbine rampage shootings focused on perceived personal injustices such as intimate friend rejections, misogyny, and revenge for bullying and public humiliation (Moore, Petrie, Braga, & McLaughlin, 2003). Columbine and many subsequent school rampages have been driven by attempts at recognition and some ill-conceived endeavor to change life for other student social outcasts.

Columbine also produced a record of carnage that some shooters sought to exceed. As Larkin observes, the shooters attained a mythical status in the eyes of outcast student subcultures. In his research of subsequent school shootings, he found that, “In all cases, perpetrators either admitted links with Columbine or police found evidence of Columbine influences” (p. 1314).

In essence, then, Columbine has become a “cultural script” for aspiring school shooters to follow. For example, of the 12 documented school shootings in the United States between Columbine and 2007, two thirds emulated the Columbine script to a significant degree. Kiilakoksi and Oksanen (2011) assert that school shootings have become an international phenomenon since 1999, with most following the Columbine script. For instance, in 2007, Pekka-Eric Auvinen killed 8 students and staff and wounded 12 at Jokela High School in Tuusula, Finland, before committing suicide. Auvinen closely mimicked the Columbine script, right down to the music. The Columbine shooters were avid fans of the German/American rock band KMFDM, and planned their attack for the day the band released their Adios album. As Kiilakoski and Oksanen note, many other school shooters cite KMFDM in their diaries and videos, including Auvinen. “Auvinen used almost the same songs by KMFDM . . . that were cited by the Columbine killers” (p. 257). Larkin (2009) reports in his research that of the 11 school shootings outside the United States, 6 made direct references to Columbine before and during the incident. The latest publicized incident occurred in Salt Lake City, Utah, in January 2012. An 18-year-old and a 16-year-old were arrested after officials learned of their plot to bomb their school during an assembly. The younger of the two bragged to police that he was smarter than the Columbine killers. It was later learned that he had traveled to Colorado in the fall of 2011 to interview Columbine’s principal about the massacre. These observations suggest some modeling of the script in school shootings since Columbine. In the next subsection, we discuss whether these script similarities allow the development of an accurate profile of the school shooter.
Modzeleski, & Jimerson, 2010; McGee & DeBernardo, 1999). However, considering our present knowledge about the dynamics and precursors of student school shooters, we are still a long way from developing such a profile. As stated by Sewell and Mendelsohn (2000), “We do not know how to identify which youngsters will indeed perpetrate extreme violence—at least not beyond meager probability statements regarding previously violent adolescents” (p. 166). To begin with, school shootings are very rare events, despite media accounts that may suggest otherwise. Rare events do not allow a sufficient database for developing meaningful profiles—at least in the traditional sense of “profiling,” where a predictive description of the typical shooter is formulated.

In addition, there is a risk—even with relatively accurate predictors—that many students identified as likely to commit serious violence in the school will not, and consequently will be labeled unjustly. As asserted by Heilbrun, Dvoskin, and Heilbrun (2009), “‘Profiling’ potential school or college shooters is a futile exercise that will inevitably identify far more individuals than would ever go on to commit such violence” (p. 95). Some professionals have developed checklists that represent early warning signs of individuals likely to commit violent acts in the school. Even the developers of these early-warning checklists admonish against using the indicators as decision tools, but they are often misused, especially in the hands of untrained evaluators (Sewell & Mendelsohn, 2000). Another difficulty with early-warning signs of violence listed on checklists is that they have extremely high base rates—meaning many students display them (see Table 6.1)—whereas the violent acts themselves have very low base rates. In addition, many of these checklist instruments do not provide specific cut-off scores that indicate a risk significant enough to warrant particular action. More importantly, there often has been no empirical research on the checklist to establish either reliability or validity with regard to predicting violence.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table 6.1 Early Warning Signs of Violence</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Loss of temper on a daily basis</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Feelings of rejection and loneliness</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Victim of bullying</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Threatens others frequently</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Frequent name calling, cursing, or abusive language</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Prefers music expressing violent themes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lack of impulse control, especially dealing with anger</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>History of discipline problems</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Poor school performance</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Has threatened or attempted suicide</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Carries a weapon</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>History of violent or aggressive behavior</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fascination with guns and explosives</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Does not respect authority</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Uses drugs and alcohol</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The above discussion leads us to an important question: What is a school district expected to do when threats from students to other students, teachers, or school administrators are made? One good beginning is to establish a threat assessment team in the school or in the community, comprising individuals who are trained to provide careful consideration to the nature of the threat, the level of risk posed by the individual, and the necessary actions to prevent the threat from being carried out. We will discuss these threat assessment teams shortly.

THE SAFE SCHOOL INITIATIVE (SSI)

The U.S. Department of Education (ED) (Dwyer, Osher, & Warger, 1998), the FBI (O'Toole, 2000), and the Secret Service and ED (Vossekuil, Fein, Reddy, Borum, & Modzeleski, 2002) have all examined and published reports on the dynamics and causes of school shootings. The most influential of these studies was the one produced by the U.S. Secret Service in conjunction with the Department of Education. The two agencies initiated a comprehensive study exploring the thinking, planning, and other pre-attack behaviors displayed by school shooters. The study, called the Safe School Initiative (SSI), drew from the Secret Service's experience in studying and preventing targeted attacks. “The objective of the Safe School Initiative was to attempt to identify information that could be obtainable, or ‘knowable,’ prior to an attack” (Vossekuil et al., 2002, p. 3). The SSI examined incidents in the United States from 1974 through May 2000, analyzing a total of 37 incidents involving 41 student attackers.

The SSI concluded that the following 10 findings were thought to be the most important background knowledge when evaluating the level of threats:

1. Incidents of targeted violence at school rarely were sudden, impulsive acts.

   Some attackers planned the attack as few as 1 or 2 days prior to the incident; other attackers planned the attack for as long as a year prior to carrying it out.

2. Prior to most incidents, other people knew about the attack's idea or the plan to attack.

   In over three quarters of the attacks, at least one person had information about the planned attack, and in many cases (two thirds) at least two persons knew about the plan or intentions. In nearly all these cases (93%), the person(s) who knew beforehand was a peer, a friend, a schoolmate, or a sibling. Rarely did an adult know of the planned attack.

   In virtually all school shootings, other investigators discovered that the violent intentions of the assailants were repeatedly made clear to others, particularly peers, often including the time and place. They often verbalized their impending attack in the form of threats, boasts, and assertions of intent. It is estimated that at least 50% of school shooters make their intentions known to others, a phenomenon known by investigators as leakage. Documents show that the Columbine school shooters repeatedly dropped hints at school about their murderous intentions (Meadows, 2006).
However, peers rarely reported these threats to the authorities. The reasons for this behavior are not well understood, but fear seems to play a major role. A survey by the Safe School Coalition of Washington State (1999, cited in Verlinden, Hersen, & Thomas, 2000) revealed that fear of not being believed, fear of retribution, and fear of what might happen to the youth threatening the school violence were the most frequently reported concerns of peers. Verlinden et al. (2000) concluded that the risk for school violence is high when there are multiple warning signs and risk factors. “The more signs there are and the greater the opportunity, motivation, and access to weapons, the greater the possibility that the child may commit a violent act” (p. 47).

3. Most attackers did not threaten their targets directly prior to the attack.

In most cases (83%), attackers did not tell the targets they intended to harm them, whether in direct, indirect, or conditional language, prior to the attack.

4. Most attackers engaged in some behavior prior to the incident that caused others concern or indicated a need for help.

Almost all of the attackers (93%) exhibited some behavior prior to the attack that caused school officials, parents, teachers, police, or peers to be concerned. The behaviors included efforts to get a gun, or the writing of notes, poems, or essays for class assignments that indicated such intentions.

5. Most attackers had difficulty coping with significant losses or personal failures. Furthermore, many had considered or attempted suicide. Most attackers had a history of extreme depression or desperation.

6. Many attackers felt bullied, persecuted, or injured by others prior to the attack.

The SSI study found that about three quarters of the attackers felt persecuted, threatened, attacked, or injured by others prior to the incident. Some had experienced severe bullying and harassment over a long period of time.

Investigations of school shooters have consistently found that the three characteristics that emerge are peer rejection, social rejection, and victimization of persistent bullying. One key conclusion made by Leary, Kowalski, Smith, and Phillips (2003) is that “The typical shooter is a male student who has been ostracized by the majority group at his school for some time, and has been chronically taunted, teased, harassed, and often publicly humiliated” (p. 213). Being the victim of vicious and public bullying by peers consistently emerges in the school experiences of shooters. One of the Columbine High School shooters, Dylan Klebold, wrote in his diary how lonely he was without friends and that he was especially tortured by his failures with girls (Meadows, 2006). The other shooter, Eric Harris, wrote in his diary that everyone continually made fun of him. A vast majority of shooters had poor social and coping skills and felt picked on or persecuted (Verlinden et al., 2000). They expressed anger about being teased or ridiculed and vowed revenge against particular individuals or groups. Moreover, as a group, “they lacked social support and prosocial relationships that might have served as protective factors” (Verlinden et al., 2000, p. 44).
7. Most attackers had access to and had used weapons prior to the attack.

About two thirds had a known history of using weapons, including knives, guns, and bombs or explosives.

8. In many cases, other students were involved in some capacity.

Although a majority of attackers carried out their attacks on their own, many attackers (44%) were influenced or encouraged by others to engage in the attacks.

9. Despite prompt law enforcement responses, most shooting incidents were stopped by means other than law enforcement intervention.

Most of the attacks (75%) were stopped by school administrators, teachers, and/or students; alternatively, the shooter stopped attacking on his own. About half of the incidents lasted about 15 minutes or less prior to intervention.

10. Currently, there is no accurate or useful profile of students who engaged in targeted school violence.

Although all the attackers have been boys, there are no sets of traits that describe all or even most of the attackers. In addition, they varied considerably in demographic background and other characteristics, and came from a variety of family situations. The students who carried out the attacks were different from one another in many significant ways. Their targets also varied. It may have been a specific individual, such as a classmate, an administrator, or teacher; it may have been the school in general; or the attack may have been directed at a group or category of students, such as “jocks” or “geeks.” This is essentially the same conclusion the Secret Service advanced on adult assassins, published a few years earlier in the ECSP (Fein & Vossekul, 1998).

Both the school shooter study and the ECSP concluded that the use of profiles is not an effective approach to identifying students who may pose a risk for targeted school violence, or for assessing the risk that a particular student may pose for a school shooting once a particular student is identified.

In addition, the authors of the SSI study asserted that reliance on profiles carries two potential risks: (1) the great majority of students who fit the profile of a “school shooter” will not actually pose a risk of targeted violence, and (2) using profiles based on current research knowledge of shooters will fail to identify some students who actually do pose a risk of violence but share few if any characteristics with prior school shooters. And, as pointed out by Nader and Mello (2002) and as mentioned above, falsely identifying an adolescent as potentially violent may negatively affect his adjustment and social-emotional development. For example, a label of potentially dangerous or violent placed on an adolescent leaves him (or her) vulnerable to emotional and social debilitation when the label impugns the person’s social position among peers.

Vossekul et al. (2002) propose that, rather than creating a traditional profile for a potential school shooter, the inquiry should focus on a student’s behavior and communications to determine if that student appears to be planning or preparing for an attack. However, it is unclear what specific type of profiling Vossekul et al. are referring to in the above statement. It appears that they are referring to the traditional FBI or
clinical approach to profiling, rather than the more scientific, multidimensional predictions of psychological profiling. In the next section of the report, they emphasize the need to rely on the “fact-based threat assessment approach” that can facilitate efforts to gather and analyze information regarding student behavior and communications (p. 41). They further write,

Threat assessment, as developed by the Secret Service and applied in the context of targeted school violence, is a fact-based investigative and analytical approach that focuses on what a particular student is doing and saying, and not on whether the student “looks like” those who have attacked schools in the past. (p. 41)

**SCHOOL THREAT ASSESSMENT TEAMS**

After the Columbine shooting, the media and some experts were quick to make gross generalizations about the school violence problem. In addition, these horrific incidents have placed greater demands on clinical and school psychologists and other educational practitioners to be competent in conducting various assessments for determining violence risk. However, some practitioners in recent years have questioned the use of violence risk assessments, stressing their potential for stigmatizing effects on students as well as the danger of making far too many false positive predictions of future behavior (McGowan, Horn, & Mellott, 2011). A *false positive* prediction is predicting that someone will be violent when they turn out to not be; a *false negative* is predicting that someone will not be violent, and they turn out to be (see Table 6.2).

Following the Safe School Initiative, school districts in the United States have been encouraged to put together threat assessment teams designed to distinguish serious student threats from low-risk threats (Daniels et al., 2010). Put another way, some threats are more credible than others. This has prompted researchers to conduct studies in an effort to understand these distinctions. In one such study, Cornell and his associates (Cornell et al., 2004) examined 188 student threats that occurred in 25 schools over a 1-year period in Virginia. The researchers make a distinction between two types of threats: transient and substantive. **Transient threats** are statements that do not communicate a lasting intent to harm someone and that can be resolved with an apology or explanation. These were threats school authorities said they encounter frequently and that can be addressed as a routine disciplinary matter. Transient threats reflect emotional states that dissipate rapidly once the student realizes what he or she has said. “The most important feature of a transient threat is that the student does not have a sustained intention to harm someone” (Cornell et al., 2004, p. 533).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table 6.2  Prediction Table</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Prediction</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Will</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Will Not</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Substantive threats are serious in that they represent a sustained intent to harm someone beyond the immediate occasion when the threat was made. Substantive threats can be identified by five indicators, as suggested by O'Toole (2000):

1. **Specific, plausible details have been described in the plan.**
   This indicator may include the identity of the intended victims; the reason(s) for making the threat; the means, weapon, and method by which it will be carried out; and the date, time, and place where the incident will occur. In the 2012 alleged plan to bomb a high school in Salt Lake City, one of the youths had asked a girl he liked whether she would agree to stay home from school on a certain day if he were to ask her. Interestingly, the emotional content of messages may not signal anything significant beyond the emotional state of the student at the time. Emotional content may be conveyed by melodramatic words and unusual punctuation, such as, “You have ruined my life!!!!!!!” Although these types of messages frighten the recipient, the association between emotional content in the threat and the risk that it will be carried out has not been validated.

2. **The threat has been repeated over time or passed on to a number of peers.**

3. **There is evidence that planning to carry out the threat has taken place.**

4. **The student has recruited accomplices or has invited an audience to observe the incident.**

5. **There is evidence that the student actually has acquired firearms, bomb materials, and considerable ammunition.**

Some combination of the above indicators would strengthen the level of the threat. However, threat assessments must take into consideration the context of the threat and try to make reasoned judgments based on as much information as possible.

Students at all grade levels, including kindergarten students, make threats. According to the Cornell et al. (2004) research, most of the intended victims of the threats are other students, usually at the same grade level. There were 146 threats made by boys and 42 by girls in that study. The most common threat (41%) was to hit or beat up a targeted victim. In addition, there were 27 threats to kill, 24 threats to shoot, and 18 threats to cut or stab. There were 32 cases in which the threat was vague or nonspecific (“I’m going to get you”), and 10 other miscellaneous threats, such as threats to set fires or set off bombs. Of the 188 threats studied by Cornell et al., only 3 were considered serious enough to expel the student from school. In one case, a sixth-grade boy picked up a pair of scissors and threatened to stab a classmate. A second case involved an eighth-grade girl who threatened a male classmate, telling him she intended to shoot him. In the third incident, a ninth-grade girl was expelled for threatening to stab another student, and school authorities discovered a knife in her locker following the threat. About 50% of the students who threatened someone were suspended from school, with durations ranging from 1 to 10 days.

As mentioned in the Safe School Initiative, school threat assessment teams are cautioned that an adolescent who is struggling with social and peer rejection and feelings
of social incompetence who is then labeled a potential threat may complicate the situation even more. Moreover, as mentioned above, promoters of using early-warning signs to identify potential school shooters often caution against using the indicators as a simple checklist, but unfortunately these cautions are often ignored (Sewell & Mendelsohn, 2000).

In an effort to help school threat assessment teams, Dewey Cornell (Cornell & Allen, 2011; Cornell, Gregory, & Fan, 2011; Cornell & Sheras, 2006) has spearheaded a project designed to develop student threat assessment guidelines, called the Virginia Student Threat Assessment Guidelines. These were developed for K–12 schools in response to the FBI and Secret Service recommendations that schools utilize a threat assessment approach to reduce school violence. The guidelines are described in a 145-page manual that leads team members step-by-step through the threat assessment process (see Figure 6.1).

In summary, school shootings are understandably frightening and are of deep concern, but statistically they are rare. At this writing, since 2000, there have been 46 school shootings (in high, middle, and elementary schools) in the United States, resulting in 48 deaths. Some of these deaths were teachers or other school personnel. At the college level, there were 21 shootings, resulting in 64 deaths. As in the school shootings, some of the deaths of the college shootings were professors or other college personnel. The worst of the college incidents occurred in April 2007, when 32 persons were shot and killed at Virginia Tech. The Safe School Initiative report emphasized that, although school shootings are rare, the psychological impact on the students, school personnel, and the community is immense and long-lasting.

However, even prior to these violent incidents, anecdotal and media accounts of children being victimized at school by other children prompted researchers to study the issue to document the magnitude of the problem. Violence in schools is more than school shootings. It includes rape, aggravated and simple assaults, and robbery. Although in this section we are largely concerned with profiling and prediction of school shootings, it should be noted that hostage takings, bombings, arson, sexual assault, and bullying are all forms of school violence. Therefore, school violence in general remains a serious problem, and the Safe School Initiative and the Department of Education advocate for the development of threat assessment teams in a number of school districts to evaluate the possibility of various kinds of violence.

**ADULT SCHOOL SHOOTERS**

So far, we have talked about school-aged shooters killing or otherwise harming classmates and teachers. Adults unaffiliated with the school have also been involved in school violence incidents. Attempts to predict these attacks are often considered futile, similar to attacks by mass killers. Schools can, however, take protective measures such as installing video cameras on school premises and ensuring that points of entry to the school are clearly visible. Many schools today also have “intruder drills,” during which students and teachers practice barricading their classroom doors and hiding behind barriers, such as desks and tables.
**Figure 6.1** Decision Tree for Student Threat Assessment

**Step 1. Evaluate threat.**
- Obtain a specific account of the threat by interviewing the student who made the threat, the recipient of the threat, and other witnesses.
- Write down the exact content of the threat and statements by each party.
- Consider the circumstances in which the threat was made and the student’s intentions.

**Step 2. Decide whether threat is clearly transient or substantive.**
- Consider criteria for transient versus substantive threats.
- Consider student’s age, credibility, and previous discipline history.

**Step 3. Respond to transient threat.**
Typical responses may include reprimand, parental notification, or other disciplinary action. Student may be required to make amends and attend mediation or counseling.

**Step 4. Decide whether the substantive threat is serious or very serious.**
A serious threat might involve a threat to assault someone (“I’m gonna beat that kid up”). A very serious threat involves use of a weapon or is a threat to kill, rape, or inflict severe injury.

**Step 5. Respond to serious substantive threat.**
- Take immediate precautions to protect potential victims, including notifying intended victim and victim’s parents.
- Notify student’s parents.
- Consider contacting law enforcement.
- Refer student for counseling, dispute mediation, or other appropriate intervention.
- Discipline student as appropriate to severity and chronicity of situation.

**Step 6. Conduct safety evaluation.**
- Take immediate precautions to protect potential victims, including notifying the victim and victim’s parents.
- Consult with law enforcement.
- Notify student’s parents.
- Begin a mental health evaluation of the student.

**Step 7. Implement a safety plan.**
- Complete a written plan.
- Maintain contact with the student.
- Revise plan as needed.


In recent years, a number of adult males have barged into school buildings, killing students and staff. Though horrific, instances such as this are rare, but unlike student shooters,
the adults do not typically make threats. In West Nickel, Pennsylvania, on October 2, 2006, 32-year-old Charles Carl Roberts carried three guns into West Nickel Mines School, an Amish one-room schoolhouse. The gunman took hostages, all girls, and sent the boys and adults outside. He barricaded the doors and then opened fire on a dozen girls, killing five and seriously wounding five others before committing suicide. His motivation was unclear, but he indicated that his actions were not directly related to school or the Amish community, but were driven by events in his childhood. More likely, “he may have viewed himself as powerless or his own life circumstances as hopeless and acted out in a school environment that was simple, peaceful—and completely at his mercy” (Gerler, 2007, p. 2).

A week earlier, 53-year-old Duane Roger Morrison, armed with an assault rifle and carrying a backpack full of explosives, walked into Platte Canyon High School in Bailey, Colorado. He took six female students hostage and sexually assaulted five of them. He then released four of them. When a SWAT team broke into the classroom, Morrison shot and killed one 16-year-old student before turning the gun on himself. The other remaining hostage managed to escape. The motive of this adult attacker remains unclear. These two incidents occurred so close together in time that a copycat effect is suspected.

Two infamous adult shooters who massacred college students were Marc Lépine and Kimveer Gill. Lépine was responsible for the “Montreal Massacre” in which he killed 14 women attending class at the École Polytechnique in December 1989. His attack appears to have been primarily motivated by hatred toward feminists, whom he blamed for ruining his life. Gill shot 20 persons, killing 1, at Dawson College, Westmont, Quebec, in September 2006. Police investigators learned that Gill planned on committing similar attacks at other institutions throughout Montreal. Both Lépine and Gill were about 25 years old at the time, and both committed their attacks at colleges they never attended (Langman, 2009). According to Langman, Gill modeled his attacks after Columbine and apparently admired Eric Harris. From all indications, Gill completely withdrew from life and most social contact about a year before his rampage. Lépine’s shooting appears to follow the characteristics of a mass murder prompted by hatred of a subgroup. The Gill attack, on the other hand, shows some of the characteristics of a school shooting and seems to follow the cultural script of Columbine to some extent.

PSYCHOLOGICAL CHARACTERISTICS OF STUDENT SCHOOL SHOOTERS

Subsequent to the Safe School Initiative report, other researchers have examined more closely the psychological characteristics of school shooters. We must caution, though, that discovery of a few common characteristics does not mean that a profile of a school shooter is warranted, as we repeatedly have stated throughout this section. Leary et al. (2003) scrutinized the psychological patterns and backgrounds of offenders involved in 15 school shootings between 1995 and 2001. They discovered that peer rejection was involved in most cases of school shootings. Most of the rejected shooters experienced an ongoing pattern of teasing, bullying, or ostracism, and a few had experienced a recent romantic rejection. In many cases, some of the victims of the violence were those who had rejected or humiliated the shooter.
Peer rejection alone did not seem to be enough to inspire them to kill classmates and school personnel, however. In addition to the social rejection, perpetrators showed at least one of the following three risk factors: psychological problems, an interest in guns or explosives, or a morbid fascination with death.

The psychological problems centered around low impulse control, lack of empathy for other people, serious depression, aggressiveness, and antisocial behavior. Many of the shooters had been in trouble for aggressive behavior toward peers, and some had abused animals. Depression appears to be especially important in identifying potential school shooters. In one comprehensive study, three fourths of school shooters had expressed thoughts of suicide or had attempted suicide before the attack (Vossekuiil et al., 2002).

Fascination with firearms, bombs, and explosives is also a common theme. School shooters seemed to be comfortable with instruments of destruction. Wike and Fraser (2009) note that police in Plymouth Meeting outside of Philadelphia arrested a 14-year-old school dropout who, with his parents’ assistance, had collected swords, guns, grenades, bomb instruction manuals, black powder used in bomb making, and videos of the Columbine massacre. According to police—who acted on a tip from students—this alienated student had plans to attack his former school.

The third observation is that shooters tend to be highly fascinated with death and dark lifestyles and themes. They are not as horrified by sadistic and brutal carnage as most of their peers. In March of 2005, Jeffrey Weise, a 16-year-old at Red Lake High School in Minnesota, killed his grandfather and his grandfather’s girlfriend, and then drove to the high school and fatally shot a security guard, a teacher, and five students. He wounded six others before shooting himself. Weise left many messages with dark themes on websites, posted photos of himself dressed all in black, and wrote stories about school shootings and zombies (Weisbrot, 2008). However, these dark themes also may be characteristic of depression or thoughts of suicide. Weise had been hospitalized for suicidal behavior. Eric Harris and Dylan Klebold, the Columbine High School shooters, are often referred to as devout believers in the macabre, but the evidence does not hold up that this was clearly the case. Rather, it appears that they were both simply angry and possibly severely depressed young men.

In a vast majority of school shootings, the perpetrators apparently had very little attachment or bonding to their schools, teachers, or peers (Wike & Fraser, 2009). School attachment and bonding appear to be crucial in any strategy designed to reduce school violence. Some investigators have found that school attachment plays an important role in producing high levels of academic achievement and in reducing substance use, violence, and high-risk sexual behavior (Catalano, Haggerty, Oesterle, Fleming, & Hawkins, 2004; Wike & Fraser, 2009).

Workplace Violence

Very broadly, workplace violence is any act of physical violence, harassment, intimidation, or other threatening behavior that occurs in the workplace (U.S. Department of Labor, 2011). In the public mind, workplace violence often refers to a worker or ex-worker killing
his or her coworkers, as in the expression “going postal,” minted in the late 20th century after a rash of violent incidents involving postal workers. “Mass murders in the workplace by unstable employees have become media-intensive events” (Critical Incident Response Group, 2001, p. 11). However, multiple homicides represent a very small portion of workplace violence incidents. For example, it is estimated that only 4 to 7% of workplace homicides occur between coworkers (LeBlanc & Kelloway, 2002). Workplace violence also applies to violence directed at employees by customers, visitors, robbers, spouses, unhappy clients, patients, or any person who comes into contact with employees.

**STATISTICS ON SERIOUS WORKPLACE VIOLENCE**

Data collected by the Bureau of Labor Statistics (2010) indicate that, on average, 564 people are murdered at work each year, making it the second leading cause of occupational death in the United States. In 2008, there were 30 multiple-fatality workplace homicide incidents, accounting for 67 homicides and 7 suicides. On average, about two persons died in each of these incidents. Shootings accounted for 80% of all homicides in the workplace. Robbers were the assailants in about 40% of the cases. Coworkers and former coworkers were the assailants in 12% of all workplace shootings, and women are most often the recipients of the violence (Hayes, Outten, & Steer, 2000). There are three apparent reasons for this. First, women tend to be the front people, such as the receptionists, and if someone is going to harm somebody in the workplace, they often begin with the front person. According to Hayes et al., the second reason is that women are often in the personnel and human resources fields. The perpetrator is often angry because of a poor review or for being fired, reprimanded, or laid off, which he or she attributes to the personnel department, at least in part. The third reason is that domestic violence frequently spills over into the workplace. Ex- or current husbands or angry boyfriends may come into the work environment and try to harm the woman, as well as any employees who try to stop the violence.

Although the impression derived from media reports over the past two decades is that workplace violence is expanding, it must be emphasized that a large majority of workplace homicides do not involve murder between coworkers or between workers and supervisors within an organization, but occur in robberies and related crimes by people outside the organization (Neuman & Baron, 1998). Convenience store clerks or fast-food restaurant workers are often the victims of robbery and other forms of violence while working, especially those employees who work at night and alone.

**CATEGORIES OF WORKPLACE VIOLENCE**

In an effort to organize the research about and accounts of workplace violence, the California Division of Occupational Safety and Health (1955) divided the incidents into four major categories based on the perpetrator’s relationship to the workplace.
In Type I, the assailant has no legitimate relationship with the targeted workplace and enters the organization or business to commit a crime, such as a robbery. Convenience store, liquor store, or fast-food restaurant employees are often the victims. In Type II, the perpetrator is the recipient of some service provided by the workplace, such as health care, social services, counseling, education, or psychotherapy. Nurses, social workers, teachers, and therapists are often the recipients of this type of violence. In Type III, the offender is an employee or former employee of the workplace. The perpetrator in these cases is often a disgruntled employee who has been fired, laid off, demoted, embarrassed, or has lost benefits. In Type IV violence, the offender does not have a legitimate relationship with the workplace but has a personal or intimate relationship with an employee. Often, Type IV is a form of domestic violence spilling over into the workplace.

Our focus here will be on Type III violence, where a current or former coworker engages in violence at his or her workplace or former workplace (see Photo 6.2). We will especially concentrate on the extent to which this violence can be predicted in a psychological profile. To date, there is limited research that examines the predictors of workplace violence. Those studies that have investigated Type III violence have concentrated on either (a) describing the person who engages in coworker violence, or (b) identifying the job characteristics that increase the probability of violence from a current or former coworker (LeBlanc & Kelloway, 2002). There have been very few investigations to validate what factors best predict who will become violent in the workplace, but researchers have identified some warning signs.

**Photo 6.2:** Two men engage in a violent altercation in their workplace, while a fellow employee makes an effort to intercede. Although no weapons are in evidence, such eruptions contribute to a hostile work environment and may escalate into more serious violence.
THE WARNING SIGNS

When the violence comes from an employee, there is a much greater chance that some warning signs have been observed by other employees or supervisors. In many cases, there are several warnings of verbal threats to kill or do harm to oneself or others. In other cases, the perpetrator has demonstrated a pattern of escalating threats that appear well planned, or made frequent references to other incidents of workplace violence. Often, the threatening behavior or commentary builds over time, with the employee making progressively hostile comments or threats over a relatively short period of time. Usually, they are directed at a specific target or the organization in general.

Table 6.3 lists some problematic behavior or warning signs that may lead to more serious violence. Like the list of warning signs for school violence, these indicators should not automatically be assumed to be precursors of violence in the workplace. In addition, no one behavior necessarily denotes a red flag; there must be several behaviors that cause concern.

Table 6.3 Employee Warning Signs of Potential Workplace Violence

- Increasing belligerence
- Ominous, specific threats
- Hypersensitivity to criticism
- Recent acquisition/fascination with weapons
- Apparent obsession with a supervisor or coworker or employee grievance
- Preoccupation with violent themes
- Holds serious grudges, especially against supervisors
- Interest in recently publicized violent events
- Outbursts of anger
- Extreme disorganization
- Noticeable changes in behavior
- Homicidal/suicidal comments or threats
- Drug or alcohol use on the job


As emphasized by the Critical Incident Response Group (2001), workplace violence is often preceded by a threat. Sometimes, however, the threat is difficult to detect because it is subtle and subjective. “The threat may have been explicit or veiled, spoken or unspoken, specific or vague, but it occurred” (p. 23). Fortunately, many threats turn out to be harmless blowing off of steam, but all should be considered serious when first made. Perhaps even more serious is any pattern of aggressive behavior, including constant harassment, stalking, and unwanted physical contact; a pattern of these behaviors is a red flag that an employee may pose a danger to coworkers.
BEHAVIORS AND CHARACTERISTICS THAT MAY PREDICT WORKPLACE VIOLENCE

Barling (1996) makes the case, largely based on the research literature on family violence, that there are four personal factors that tend to be predictive of Type III violence: alcohol use, past history of aggression and violence, lack of self-esteem, and the use of psychological aggression in the workplace. As noted by Barling, “Profiles of potentially violent employees emphasize their excessive alcohol consumption” (p. 33). Alcohol consumption and a history of aggression and violence are related to aggression and violence toward coworkers and subordinates (Greenberg & Barling, 1999; LeBlanc & Barling, 2005). In fact, alcohol abuse appears to be very common among those employees who kill at the workplace (LeBlanc & Barling, 2005), as is substance abuse (Hayes et al., 2000). Excessive alcohol consumption or substance abuse increases workplace violence because it amplifies the probability of a situation being misread and decreases intellectual and verbal functioning (Cox & Leather, 1994).

In reference to the second factor, history of aggression and violence, an employee who has such a history is likely to resort to resolving conflict and disagreement via the same strategies in the future. One way to reduce the possibility of an employee being violent is to conduct background checks for aggression and a history of violence of prospective employees before hire. The best predictor of future behavior is past behavior in similar situations. If the employee has been aggressive, violent, and threatening to other employees or supervisors in previous workplaces, he or she is likely to show a similar pattern in future work environments.

The third factor, lack of self-esteem, is highly characteristic of aggressive and potentially violent individuals. Any event or series of events that diminishes self-esteem in certain employees has the potential of pushing them over the edge. Closely related to low self-esteem is the fourth factor, that of psychological aggression directed at the worker from coworkers or supervisors. This may be in the form of hostile teasing, harassment, and humiliation. For example, in 1999, Ottawa, Ontario, transit worker Pierre Lebrun shot and killed four of his coworkers and seriously wounded two others before shooting himself (LeBlanc & Barling, 2005). Reports indicated that Lebrun was continually taunted at work because of his stutter.

Another form of psychological aggression, at least from the victim’s perspective, is interpersonal injustice. Recent research indicates that perceptions of interpersonal injustice in the workplace may lead to workplace violence (Dupré, Barling, Turner, & Stride, 2010).

Interpersonal injustice is an individual’s perception of the extent to which he or she is treated with a lack of respect, courtesy, and dignity by someone who is in a position to execute practices and procedures that relate to him or her. (Dupré et al., 2010, p. 360)

Interpersonal fairness is of great concern to employees, particularly as it relates to job evaluations that can lead to promotions and salary increases. Evaluations that are
perceived as unfair or unjustified can generate strong emotional and hostile reactions. In addition, perceptions of interpersonal injustice may spill over to other situations and across relationships. When a person experiences or perceives something that generates anger, it is possible that that person may take it out on others, not only in the workplace but in the home as well. It is important that professionals conducting threat assessments in the workplace take this point into careful consideration in understanding the dynamics of a risky situation.

Type III workplace violence is very complex, and predicting whether a disgruntled or angry employee will attack is extremely challenging. Perpetrators can be either employees or supervisors, and the attack can be directed at one or several targets, including current or former supervisors, coworkers, subordinates, or any agent representative of a targeted organization or company. Perpetrators also often have a wide range of reasons for their attacks. A vast majority of Type III victims, however, are killed (often randomly) by disgruntled employees who were fired or who felt mistreated by the company or agency. It seems that a particularly autocratic work environment, such as that found in large, impersonal bureaucratic organizations, can be a problem. However, as the examples provided by the Critical Incident Response Group (2001) indicate, no workplace seems immune. As we discussed previously, when an employee feels frustrated and angry, he or she may be prone to engage in violent actions. Nevertheless, in benevolent work environments, violence has a low probability of occurring.

Hayes et al. (2000) in their research on workplace violence suggest that another serious dangerous characteristic is the possession of extremist opinions or attitudes. Anyone who frequently expresses strong attitudes of hatred toward people of color or toward people's sexual orientation or religious beliefs, or who has rigid and extreme attitudes about women in the workplace, is himself a warning sign for potential work environment violence, especially if the expression of these attitudes increases in intensity.

In sum, effective threat assessment in the workplace must include a thorough analysis of the following: (1) the nature and context of the threat; (2) the identified target; (3) the apparent motivation of the person who threatens; (4) the ability of the person to carry out the threat; and (5) the person's background, especially past violent behavior and previous work history and job behavior.

Organizations must develop clear policies and guidelines for what to do when an employee is evaluated as dangerous but has yet to commit any serious crime. Termination of the employee in the heat of the moment without time for preparation may be exactly the wrong thing to do if an employee is considered dangerous. The organization would also be wise to have designated personnel trained to oversee the organization's antiviolence policy, including when to seek threat assessment experts and crisis management professionals.

In light of the above-reported research findings, threat assessment teams might want to consider a number of factors in deciding whether or not a particular individual presents a credible threat of harm. In school settings, such aspects as peer acceptance/rejection; involvement in activities; access to and fascination with weapons; fascination and preoccupation with death or morbid topics; and communication to others of
intent to harm, particularly over a period of time, are all relevant. Psychological problems, such as highly aggressive behavior, depression, or even attempts at suicide represent other red flags. In addition, the overall climate of the school itself is crucial. In a national study of school violence, Gottfredson, Gottfredson, Payne, and Gottfredson (2005) reported that schools in which students find the rules fair and in which discipline is managed consistently experience less violence and disorder. High teacher morale and strong leadership were also important factors.

With regard to the workplace, we have less research information, but here, too, the culture of the organization appears to be an important factor, at least in protecting employees from Type III violence. However, some threats are issued in the context of stalking behaviors, which will be addressed further on. Therefore, we now turn our attention to violence risk assessment, which is similar to threat assessment but involves a much broader spectrum of potentially violent situations and targets.

Violence Risk Assessment

Violence risk assessments are used in the evaluation of a wide range of potentially violent situations, including domestic violence, juvenile violence, prison and jail violence, workplace violence, and violence to oneself. In risk assessments, forensic psychologists and other professionals are often asked to predict the likelihood that a known individual will be “dangerous” to himself or herself or to society in general.

The area of violence risk assessment has come a long way since John Monahan (1981) published a seminal monograph on the topic. In that paper, Monahan provided a comprehensive review and discussion of the relevant scientific and technical literature pertaining to the prediction of individual violent behavior at that time. Monahan has continued working in that area in the years since, publishing numerous scholarly works, many in association with the MacArthur Research Network (e.g., Monahan, 1996; Monahan et al., 2001; Skeem & Monahan, 2011).

Today, risk assessments are one of the most common functions performed by psychologists, particularly those in forensic or correctional practice. Risk assessments are relevant when courts or the criminal justice system decides whether to grant bail, whether to confine people to secure institutions, and whether to grant parole—or conditional release—to prisoners. The development of a number of short-form, rapid risk assessment tools has made it possible for non-psychologists to screen such individuals for risk of violence. The risk assessment need not be accompanied by a full psychological profile, however. A mental health practitioner may be asked just one thing: Is this individual likely to commit violence in the future? On the other hand, a complete psychological profile on a given individual should include an assessment of risk, that is, of whether the individual is suspected to be a danger to self or society.

Many instruments are used to assess the risk of violence. Among the most empirically valid are the Violence Risk Appraisal Guide (VRAG), Historical Clinical Risk-20 (HCR-20), the Level of Service Inventory–Revised (LSI-R), the STATIC-99, and the Sex
Offender Risk Appraisal Guide (SORAG). Risk assessment methods for domestic violence have become increasingly valuable in recent years. Two of the more popular and well-researched instruments for this purpose are the Ontario Domestic Assault Risk Assessment (ODARA) and the Domestic Violence Risk Appraisal Guide (DVRAG) (see Hilton, Harris, & Rice, 2010).

As is true of all forms of profiling, risk (and threat) assessments involve judgments about uncertainty. While they provide some statistical probability of occurrence, they are never certain. In addition, research has consistently demonstrated that common sense is not a reliable guide to what matters in these assessments (Hanson, 2009). For over 50 years, statistical models that rely on measurable, valid risk factors have been, in a majority of cases, superior to clinical judgment or professional opinion (K. S. Douglas & Ogloff, 2003; Grove & Meehl, 1996; Hanson, 2005, 2009; Meehl, 1954). Nevertheless, many clinicians today argue very persuasively that these instruments must be balanced with sound, clinical judgment developed through years of experience and training.

The debate regarding statistical or actuarial prediction versus clinical prediction has led to a third approach for assessing violence risk or threat (McGowan et al., 2011). This third method—called the structured professional judgment (SPJ) model—views violence as a contextual, dynamic construct that exists on a continuum. The method relies on both structured clinical and actuarial judgments. More specifically, the SPJ model uses empirically validated risk factors (the actuarial part) as a “means for informing clinical judgments concerning an individual’s risk for violence” (McGowan et al., 2011, p. 479). These empirically validated risk factors are used as a starting point, and then clinical judgments are employed, allowing the assessment to be case specific. That is, the judgment considers the specific context and the specific individual factors that statistical data cannot account for. “Taken together, this decision-making model represents a hybrid that draws on empirical knowledge and clinical judgment to guide the assessment of an individual’s predisposition toward violence as well as the ecological influences that elicit it” (McCowan et al., 2011, p. 479). So far, the research has been supportive of this method (McEwan, Pathé, & Ogloff, 2011; Melton, Petrila, Poythress, & Slobogin, 2007; Webster & Hucker, 2007). We will integrate this new approach as it pertains to violence risk assessment, especially concerning stalking risk assessment, which will come later in the chapter.

At this point, it is important that we again turn our attention to some additional psychological concepts that are important to understanding violence risk assessment. The ultimate goal of profiling is prediction. Psychologists have long been involved in the enterprise of behavioral prediction, with the assumption that if we can predict with reasonable accuracy, we can prevent and treat those behaviors that are most dangerous to society and to the individual. If we can predict that an individual will be violent, for example, we can take steps to prevent the violence, including offering treatment addressing the violent tendencies. Psychological profiling, then, very often involves the assessment of one’s risk of violent behavior.

Unfortunately, as we saw in the earlier chapters, predicting behavior is not easy or simple—and many psychologists today prefer to forego that enterprise entirely. Crime scene profiles, psychological autopsies, suspect-based profiling, geographic
profiling, and psychological profiling all assume to a large extent that psychologists can predict (or *postdict* [after the fact]) human behavior. However, in past years, forensic evaluators were wrong twice as often as they were right in predicting crime and violence (Hanson, 2009). It may be that crime scene and geographic profilers are even less accurate, but there is no way to know for sure, since currently the field lacks testable theory and empirical support (Lilienfeld & Lanfield, 2008; Snook et al., 2008).

The two concepts that are among the most important in understanding predictions of potentially violent persons are dynamic and static risk factors, to which we now turn our attention.

**DYNAMIC AND STATIC RISK FACTORS IN PREDICTION**

An important issue in psychological profiling is the distinction between dynamic risk factors and static risk factors (Andrews & Bonta, 1998; Andrews, Bonta, & Hoge, 1990). They are referred to as “risk factors” because they are associated with or predictive of antisocial behavior. **Dynamic risk factors** are those that can change over time and situation. For example, one's employment status and substance abuse have potential for change, and are thus dynamic. In contrast, **static risk factors** like parental criminality or one's own early onset of antisocial behavior are historical and cannot be changed.

Dynamic factors can be subdivided into stable and acute (Hanson & Harris, 2000). **Stable dynamic factors**, although they are changeable, usually change slowly and may take months or even years to do so, if they change at all. Consider, for example, one's attitudes about violent pornography or one's long-time association with deviant peers. **Acute dynamic factors**, on the other hand, change rapidly (over days, hours, or even minutes), sometimes dependent upon mood swings, emotional arousal, and alcohol or other drug-induced effects. In some research (e.g., Hanson & Harris, 2000), acute dynamic factors were better predictors of reoffending—in this case, with regard to sex offenders—than were stable dynamic factors.

During the 1980s and 1990s, violence risk assessment was directed at improving prediction and largely concentrated on using static, unchangeable risk factors in predicting the behavior of individuals at high risk of violence (McEwan et al., 2011). The methods of violence risk prediction utilized past behavior and static personal factors in the assessment process. Since that time, violence risk assessment procedures have increasingly focused on dynamic, changeable factors as meaningful and powerful components in assessment equations. Perhaps more importantly, the utilization of dynamic, changeable factors in violence risk assessment is more closely aligned with most clinicians' existing practice and helps greatly in the management of dangerous individuals. “The most effective interventions to reduce violence risk will be those that target the dynamic risk factors causally related to violence for that individual” (McEwan et al., 2011, p. 182). In the next section, we cover the topic of stalking as a prime example of the value of violence risk assessment.
Stalking

Stalking, also called obsessional harassment, is “characterized by persistent unwanted contact and/or communication with a victim, resulting in the victim’s fear or distress” (Sheridan & Roberts, 2011, p. 255). The term refers to repeated and often escalating unwanted intrusions and communications, including loitering nearby; following or surveying a person’s home, making multiple telephone calls or other forms of unwanted direct and indirect communications, spreading gossip, destroying personal property, harassing acquaintances or family members, sending threatening or sexually suggestive “gifts” or letters, and aggressive and violent acts. (Abrams & Robinson, 2002, p. 468)

Stalking is an extremely frightening, emotionally distressful, and depressing crime of intimidation, and it is gender related. Eighty percent of the victims are women, and the vast majority of stalking is done by men (Meloy & Felthouse, 2011). In addition, persistent stalking behavior is associated with violent behavior (Sheridan & Roberts, 2011). Spitzberg (2007), for example, found that long-term stalking behavior has an overall violence rate of 32% and a sexual violence rate of 12%. Violent behaviors in the study included assault, injury, suicide, rape and attempted rape, murder and attempted murder, the use of a weapon, and vandalism. Serious violent episodes occur in less than 10% of those stalking incidents reported (Rosenfeld, 2004; Sheridan & Roberts, 2011).

Although stalking is associated with violence, it is distinctive from violence in several important ways (Kropp, Hart, Lyon, & Storey, 2011). First, the perpetrator usually knows or is familiar with the victim, whereas violence is often directed at strangers. Second, stalking may only be indirectly or implicitly threatening to the victim, although it often remains very frightening and stressful to the victim. Third, stalking can persist for many months or years, in contrast to many other forms of violence that occur one time. Not surprisingly, clinicians have discovered that the longer the duration of the stalking—regardless of whether the behaviors are intrusive, violent, or some combination of both—the greater the potential danger to the victim (McEwan, Mullen, & Purcell, 2007).

Stalking took on national concern in the United States when actress Rebecca Schaeffer was killed by an obsessed fan in 1989 (Rosenfeld, Fava, & Galietta, 2009). Probably due to a copycat effect, four other California women were murdered within 2 months after the Schaeffer killing by individuals who were stalking them. These stalking-based murders prompted the California legislature to enact the first anti-stalking law. Anti-stalking laws now exist in all 50 states, the District of Columbia, and Canada. During the years before stalking legislation was enacted, little was known about stalkers and the relationships with their victims (Schwartz-Watts, 2006). Although most states define stalking in their statutes as the willful, malicious, and repeated following and harassing of another person, some include such activities as lying-in-wait, surveillance, nonconsensual communication, telephone harassment,
and vandalism (Tjaden & Thoennes, 1998b). Some states require that at least two stalking incidents occur before the conduct is considered criminal.

**PREVALENCE**

It is estimated that stalking affects 5 to 16% of adults at some point during their lifetime (Eke, Hilton, Meloy, Mohandie, & Williams, 2011). Stalking behavior is often unreported, with only one third to one half of stalking victims reporting the crime (Schwartz-Watts, 2006). Consequently, self-report surveys of stalking victims provide the most comprehensive picture of the amount of stalking, because these reports include incidents in which the victims did not contact police. The now-classic study on stalking was conducted by the Center for Policy Research and published in a monograph titled *Stalking in America: Findings From the National Violence Against Women Survey* (Tjaden & Thoennes, 1998b). It was a nationally representative phone survey of 8,000 women and 8,000 men, 18 years or older, conducted between November 1995 and May 1996. The survey found that 8% of women and 2% of men reported that they had been stalked at some point in their lives (Tjaden, 1997). In most instances, the stalking lasted less than 1 year, but some individuals were stalked for more than 5 years. According to the research reported by Mullen, Pathé, and Purcell (2001), however, repeated unwanted communications and imposed contacts that go on for more than 2 weeks are highly likely to last for months or even years.

In other international studies, 15% of women in Australia reported being stalked, and in England and Wales 16% of women and 7% of men reported being stalked (Sheridan & Roberts, 2011). In Canada, 9% of persons aged 15 or older reported that they had been stalked during the past 5 years in a way that caused them to fear for their safety (Canadian Centre for Justice Statistics, 2005; Kropp et al., 2011). These data indicate that stalking is a serious problem internationally. Researchers believe that the motive of most stalkers is to control, intimidate, or frighten their victims.

**RISK ASSESSMENT OF STALKING VIOLENCE**

As emphasized by Kropp et al. (2011), risk assessments of stalking must involve a full explanation of the risks involved, including the nature, imminence, severity, and frequency of the stalking the perpetrator might commit, and the conditions under which the victim is likely to live. Research shows that nearly all stalking cases will ultimately involve face-to-face contact between victim and stalker (Mullen, Pathé, & Purcell, 2000; Sheridan & Roberts, 2011). Consequently, in most cases, the victim is quite familiar with the stalker and probably is the best source of information on the nature of the stalking.

Many—perhaps most—stalking victims want to know the likelihood that they will become the victim of a violent act (Rosenfeld & Harmon, 2002).
Determining which stalkers represent a significant risk of violence, and differentiating those individuals from the remaining offenders who may pose less risk of physical harm, has clear and significant implications for victims, clinicians, and the legal system. (p. 685)

In an effort to identify features that may differentiate violent stalkers from nonviolent stalkers, Rosenfeld and Harmon analyzed 204 stalking and harassment cases referred for court-ordered mental health evaluations in New York City. Results supported the findings of previous researchers (e.g., Palerea, Zona, Lane, & Langhinrichsen-Rohling, 1999) who found that former spouses or intimates of stalkers were most at risk. Specifically, intimate stalkers threatened persons and property (including physical violence toward the victim), were more likely to “make good” on their threats by following them with some form of violent behavior, and used more physical approach behaviors in contacting their victims than non-intimate stalkers. This observation is known as the intimacy effect (Calhoun & Weston, 2003); research has established that the more intimate the relationship between a stalker and a victim, the more likely a threat will be carried out (Mullen, Pathé, & Purcell, 2009; Warren et al., 2011). These results underscore the importance of accounting for the presence of an intimate relationship when assessing for violence risk in stalking cases (Palerea et al., 1999).

Additional studies by Barry Rosenfeld and his colleagues (Rosenfeld, 2004; Rosenfeld et al., 2009) report that another strong predictor of violence is a history of prior threats of harm. As emphasized by Rosenfeld et al. (2009), “the overall association between threats and subsequent violence is substantial and should raise concerns whenever a credible threat of violence is expressed, and such verbalizations must be thoroughly evaluated” (p. 103). The Rosenfeld group also confirmed their findings from a previous study that the existence of a prior intimate relationship between the victim and the offender is also a strong predictor of violence. That is, persons who stalked prior intimates were more likely to be violent than those who stalked strangers, family members, or acquaintances. Moreover, availability of weapons or a history of using weapons increases significantly the risk of life-threatening violence. Finally, when the stalking behaviors increase in frequency or severity, this represents an important cue to a heightened risk of violence. Interestingly, in most cases severe mental disorders are not strong predictors of violent stalking.

However, it should be noted that some mental health professionals who deal regularly with persons having mental or emotional difficulties have become the victims of stalking by their clients (Gentile, Asamen, Harmell, & Weathers, 2002). The stalkers of mental health professionals may be either single or divorced at the time of the stalking (Gentile et al., 2002). The majority of these clients (62%) were diagnosed as having a mood disorder. In another survey, about 2 out of 3 university counselors had experienced some type of harassing or stalking behavior from a current or former client (Romans, Hays, & White, 1996).

Sheridan and Roberts (2011) discovered that an additional robust predictor of serious stalking violence is when the stalker visits the victim’s home, a finding also reported by James and Farnham (2003). More specifically, the Sheridan-Roberts
research revealed that those stalkers who visited the victim’s home, workplace, or other places frequented by the victim more than three times a week are those most likely to be violent. Those stalkers who camp out on the victim’s property may be especially dangerous.

As noted by McEwan et al. (2011), “In the absence of a unifying explanatory theory for stalking, researchers and clinicians have developed numerous taxonomies to group the heterogeneous stalking population into more manageable subtypes” (p. 187). They go on to say that such classification systems provide a broad guide for clinicians and law enforcement personnel for understanding the range of stalking behavior, but these systems are in desperate need of supportive empirical research and unifying theory. The following are some examples of classification systems, or typologies.

**STALKING TYPOLOGIES**

There have been at least 12 published attempts to categorize the different patterns of stalking behavior (Mohandie, Meloy, McGowan, & Williams, 2006). Many of these have used both mental health problems and motivations as the foundation for the typology. Others have relied almost exclusively on the motivations of the perpetrators. The vast majority of these typologies have been used only marginally for law enforcement investigations or risk/threat assessment. As emphasized by Mohandie et al.,

> A typology should be parsimonious, stable (interrater and temporal reliability), behaviorally based, and useful (concurrent and predictive validity) for a variety of applied settings and professionals, including law enforcement, prosecutors, defense attorneys, judges, juries, forensic mental health experts, and victims’ rights activists. (p. 147)

**The RECON Typology**

One of the most extensively studied and cited stalking typologies is known as RECON, initially developed by Mohandie (2004). The acronym stands for relationship (RE) and context (CON). As described in the prior sections, research has shown that the degree of prior relationship intimacy is a very important variable, especially as it pertains to risk for violence. Research has also demonstrated that there is a difference between those persons who stalk public versus private persons, a pattern that refers to the context. The RECON typology, which is based on more than 1,000 stalkers, divides the pursuit patterns of stalkers into two main categories and four subcategories. The two main categories are Type I, where the perpetrator has had a previous relationship with the victim, and Type II, where the perpetrator has had no or very limited contact with the victim (Mohandie et al., 2006). Type I is further subdivided into perpetrators whose prior relationship has been intimate, such as a married, cohabiting, or dating partner; and perpetrators who have more of an
acquaintance, coworker, or friendship relationship. Type II is subdivided into those persons who are pursuing a victim considered to be a public figure, and those persons who pursue a victim identified as a private figure. Thus, the four classifications are labeled (1) intimate, (2) acquaintance, (3) public figure, and (4) private stranger stalkers (see Table 6.4).

Table 6.4  RECON Typology

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type I: Previous Relationship</th>
<th>Type II: No Prior Relationship</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Intimate</td>
<td>Public Figure</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Acquaintance</td>
<td>Private Stranger</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Adapted from Mohandie et al. (2006).

Mohandie et al. (2006) discovered that nearly one third of their large sample had assaulted the victim, and nearly one half had exhibited some form of violence toward the person or property. Fortunately, homicide was very rare, occurring in only 0.5% of the cases. However, intervention by law enforcement did not deter the majority of the stalkers, and frequently they made contact with the victim within 1 day after law enforcement had intervened.

The researchers found the intimate stalkers to be the most violent, which is a consistent finding in the research literature. “They insult, interfere, threaten, and are violent” (Mohandie et al., 2006, p. 153). In addition, they found that virtually all of the intimate stalkers reoffended relatively quickly compared to other groups of stalkers. The acquaintance stalkers were less violent, but still one third of the sample assaulted the victim or caused damage to property. “If they threaten, they do so repeatedly, and their pursuit patterns are likely to be indirect, sporadic, but relentless, enduring on average for almost 2 years” (p. 153).

Public figure stalkers are distinguished by a greater proportion being female perpetrators (27%), and their pursued victims tend to be males. In addition, public figure stalkers tend to be older, are less likely to have criminal records, and are more likely to be mentally disordered than the three other stalker types. There are, of course, exceptions. Comedian and television personality David Letterman was stalked for nearly 10 years by a disturbed, possibly schizophrenic woman who pretended she was his wife, entered his home, sent him flowers, and ultimately committed suicide by placing herself in the path of a speeding train. Public figure stalkers are also less likely to threaten the targeted person, and a vast majority are considered nuisances rather than dangerous to the pursued victim. In Mohandie et al.’s (2006) research, only 2% were violent, compared to 74% of the intimate stalkers. However, when violence was committed, it was usually quite serious. Perhaps a partial explanation for the low violence frequency may be the extent of security measures that often surround celebrities, politicians, and other high-level authorities or leaders.

Private stranger stalkers, who represent the less common group, tend to be mentally disordered men who may be suicidal. About one half of this group threatened their
victims, and nearly one third were violent toward the person or property. Recidivism rates for this group are low (25%).

Eke and her associates (2011) write that “Professionals assessing a stalking case can use the RECON typology to categorize the relationship and context and then use the offender characteristics, offense factors, and recidivism rates typical of that category to inform their assessment” (p. 273). She followed up on the stalkers from the Mohandie sample 9 years later, and found that 3 out of 4 had committed another crime, and 56% had committed crimes related to stalking. The average time before reoffending was less than 1 year, but over half reoffended in less than 3 months. The stalking offenses included criminal harassment, uttering threats, and making harassing phone calls to the victim. Today, various types of cyber messaging would likely be the norm for harassing. As might be expected, most of the reported violence of prior intimate stalkers was directed at a current or previous intimate partner. In addition, intimate stalkers were most likely to recidivate in general, fail on conditional release, and commit new stalking offenses. They are clearly the most risky of the RECON typology categories.

The Mullen et al. Typology

Another useful typology, one attracting research attention, was proposed by Mullen and his associates (Mullen et al., 2000; Mullen, Pathé, Purcell, & Stuart, 1999). They developed a five-category typology of stalkers. The Mullen types are not mutually exclusive groupings, and the placement of an individual is a matter of clinical judgment rather than strict empirical divisions. The five are (1) intimacy-seeking, (2) rejected, (3) incompetent, (4) resentful, and (5) predatory stalkers. Intimacy-seeking stalkers are socially isolated, lonely, socially inept, and filled with an inflated sense of entitlement. Although they recognize that the object of their attention does not reciprocate their affection, they nevertheless hope that their behavior will eventually lead to intimacy and everlasting “true” love. These stalkers tend to be intellectually limited, and their knowledge of courting behavior is rudimentary. Rejected stalkers make up the largest group and are largely ex-partners. They often acknowledge mixed and confusing feelings of desire for both reconciliation with their victim and revenge. Clinically, they are most often diagnosed with some type of personality disorder. These stalkers are most likely to assault their victims as a form of revenge.

Incompetent stalkers often stalked others previously, and they regard their victims as attractive potential partners but are not infatuated with them. The motives of resentful stalkers are to frighten and distress the victim. “Such a stalker persistently pursued a young woman because she appeared, when glimpsed in the street, to be attractive, wealthy, and happy when the stalker had just experienced a humiliating professional rejection” (Mullen et al., 1999, p. 1249). These stalkers tend to be very paranoid and delusional in their approach to victims and the social world in general. However, while they are threatening and prone to damage their victim’s property, they rarely physically assault their victim. Predatory stalkers
form a small group but are potentially sexually violent. These individuals take pleasure in the sense of power produced by stalking as well as the power inherent in sexual assault.

**WHEN DOES STALKING USUALLY STOP?**

Most victims, in addition to knowing the violence risk involved, want to know how to stop the stalking. So what does terminate stalking? Some stalkers stop pursuing their current victim when they find a new “love” interest. About 18% of the victims in the Violence Against Women Survey (Tjaden & Thoennes, 1998b) indicated that the stalking stopped when stalkers entered into a relationship with a new person. Law enforcement interventions short of arrest also seem to help. Fifteen percent said the stalking ceased when their stalkers received a warning from the police. Interestingly, more formal interventions such as arrest, conviction, or restraining orders do not appear to be very effective—perhaps serving to antagonize the stalker. When it comes to persistent, frightening stalking that creates risks to personal safety, such as carried out by the intimate stalker, the survey suggests that the most effective method may be for the victim to relocate as far away from the offender as possible, providing no information of one’s whereabouts to the stalker or to individuals who might communicate that information.

**CURRENT RESEARCH IN THE DEVELOPMENT OF RISK ASSESSMENT OF STALKERS**

Kropp et al. (2011) find that risk assessment of stalking is usually conducted by relying primarily on clinical judgments, due in large part to the lack of alternatives. Actuarial approaches are typically not used, because no instrument or statistical procedure has been developed specifically to assess the nature of stalking. In addition, there is no research that examines the usefulness and validity of existing psychological tests or actuarial risk assessment tools for determining the risks in stalking behavior. In Kropp et al.’s view, the best approach to assessing stalking risk is to develop structured professional judgment guidelines, as mentioned earlier in the chapter. They believe that actuarial approaches are not feasible at this time because the scientific literature does not provide enough solid data for developing such a method, but the literature does provide sufficient information for developing SPJ guidelines.

Currently, there are two sets of SPJ guidelines focusing on stalking risk assessment and management. One is the Guidelines for Stalking Assessment and Management (SAM; Kropp, Hart, & Lyon, 2008) developed in Canada. The second set of SPJ guidelines—developed in Australia—is called the Stalking Risk Profile (SRP; MacKenzie et al., 2009) and is rooted in the motivational typology developed by Mullen et al. (2006). Both approaches allow clinicians to make final risk ratings of
low, moderate, or high and take into consideration risk factors that have support within the scientific and professional literature (McEwan, Pathé, & Ogloff, 2011). According to McEwan et al., this approach has two important benefits for stalking risk assessment. “At a practical level it is flexible and allows for the complexity of many stalking situations, while at a conceptual level it allows the developing stalking risk literature to take advantage of advances in contemporary thinking on violence risk assessment” (p. 181).

The SRP incorporates the nature of the relationship between the stalker and the victim, the stalker’s motivations, the general psychological characteristics and social status of the stalker, and the victim’s psychological and social vulnerabilities. It is recommended that the risk assessment examine the stalker’s history of violence, prior antisocial conduct, substance abuse, psychiatric history, personality disorders, and social and relational instability (Mullen et al., 2006). The stalker’s history of the use and knowledge of weapons is also a concern. The SRP also encourages the use of professional risk assessment tools, such as the HCR-20 and the Spousal Assault Risk Assessment.

The SAM is designed to be used by criminal justice, security, mental health, and forensic professionals working in a variety of contexts where concerns of stalking arise. The SAM takes into consideration factors from three domains: the patterns of the stalking behavior, the psychological adjustment and background of the perpetrator, and victim vulnerability factors. Both the SAM and the SRP hold considerable promise for the violence assessment of stalking behavior and may lead the way for crime scene profiling in the future, in those cases where a specific individual is suspected or is in custody.

According to Kropp et al. (2011),

The SAM helps users to exercise their best judgment; it is not a replacement for professional discretion. Its purpose is to introduce a systematic, standardized, and practical framework for gathering and considering information when making decisions about stalking risk. (p. 305)

Summary and Conclusions

Psychological profiling differs from other forms of profiling thus far covered in this text in one important way: It focuses on one individual and attempts to assess his or her potential. Although the resulting psychological profile can address positive characteristics—such as one’s potential for leadership or for performance in a particular position—it is most relevant, for our purposes, as it assesses potential for violence. Thus, in this chapter we have illustrated psychological profiling by discussing threat and risk assessments.

Psychological profiling has a long history, having been employed by government agencies as well as private industry. Perhaps the most well-known profile in history was the lengthy report on Adolf Hitler, prepared by psychoanalytically oriented mental
health professionals at the time of the Second World War. Psychological profiling today is more apt to involve standardized psychological measures as well as structured clinical or professional judgment—in other words, it is a mixture of reviewing an individual’s risk factors as well as considering circumstances that relate to his or her own particular situations at the time of assessment. A major use of psychological profiling today is for purposes of threat and risk assessment.

Although these terms are often used interchangeably, we noted that threat assessment is conducted when an individual has made an explicit threat of violence or has displayed behaviors that imply that violence may be imminent. To illustrate this, we discussed the potential for school and workplace violence. Risk assessment is a broader term, used to assess risk—even though no threat may have been made—in a wide range of contexts. Risk assessments may be performed when inmates are released from prison, before someone is granted bail, before someone is released from a mental hospital, or when courts are deciding whether to sentence offenders to prison or community programs, among other examples. In the chapter, we discussed risk assessments conducted for the purpose of deciding whether a stalker presented a risk for potential violence. Note that there is some overlap between the terms threat and risk assessment; in many cases—as in the case of some stalkers—threats may have been made.

Perceived increases in school violence and bullying behaviors have produced requests for psychological profiling of potential school shooters. Many schools now have access to “threat assessment teams” made up of psychology, law enforcement, and education professionals whose role it is to assess the credibility of a threat or series of threats made by a student. The Columbine incident of 1998 spearheaded nationwide efforts to identify potentially dangerous students as well as behaviors that would lead to violence. We now know that there is no one “school shooter profile,” although educators should be aware of a number of warning signs and characteristics. Lists of these signs include such factors as being a loner, having an excessive interest in weaponry, communicating intent to be violent to others, and being specific in describing one’s planned method of attack. Nevertheless, these characteristics themselves do not necessarily predict a school shooter, so threat assessment teams must be cautious of making false-positive predictions. In addition, some past school shooters fell under the radar, meeting few if any of the identified characteristics.

Similar concerns are raised in the case of workplace violence, which remains a leading cause of death of employees in the workplace. Most workplace violence occurs from the outside, however. Threat assessment enters in when an employee or past employee is regarded as a potential threat to others in the workplace. Researchers have identified a range of problem behaviors that may be precursors of workplace violence, including hypersensitivity to criticism, angry outbursts, increasing belligerence, and noticeable changes in behavior.

Stalking—which we discussed under the topic of risk assessment—is a behavior that has received increasing research attention but defies efforts at profiling. Although at least a dozen different stalking typologies have been proposed, only a few have been extensively researched. We discussed the typologies proposed by Mohandie and
his colleagues—RECON—and Mullen and his colleagues. Both take into consideration the relationship between the stalker and his or her victim and the motivation of the stalker. As a group, stalkers are more likely to harm their victims psychologically than physically. Intimate stalkers, however, those who pursue a former intimate partner, are most likely to do physical harm. In recent years, researchers have offered guidelines, such as the SAM and the SRP, that are based on structured professional judgment to help psychological profilers assess the likelihood that stalking will develop into violence.

### KEY CONCEPTS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Acquaintance stalkers</th>
<th>Predatory stalkers</th>
<th>Safe School Initiative (SSI)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Acute dynamic factors</td>
<td>Private stranger stalkers</td>
<td>Stable dynamic factors</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dynamic risk factors</td>
<td>Public figure stalkers</td>
<td>Static risk factors</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Incompetent stalkers</td>
<td>Rejected stalkers</td>
<td>Substantive threats</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Intimacy-seeking stalkers</td>
<td>Resentful stalkers</td>
<td>Threat assessment</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Intimate stalkers</td>
<td>Risk assessment</td>
<td>Transient threats</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Transient threats</th>
<th>Safe School Initiative (SSI)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Substantive threats</td>
<td>Stable dynamic factors</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Threat assessment</td>
<td>Static risk factors</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Transient threats</td>
<td>Substantive threats</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
