I18   **Automating a Reliable System for Distinguishing Real From Simulated Threat Letters**

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After attending this presentation, attendees will have learned about a highly reliable, validated method for distinguishing between real versus simulated threat letters and threat letters versus angry letters.

This presentation will impact the forensic community and/or humanity by demonstrating how to handle threatening communications in terms of duty to warn and duty to protect.

The ability to distinguish between real threat letters and simulated threat letters is important in both law enforcement and psychiatric scenarios. When law enforcement is faced with a situation in which threatening letters have been received, the responding detective must first determine whether the threat is real or not. This determination enables the law enforcement agency to make most efficient use of its work force in determining how much protection the victim requires. When a psychiatrist, psychologist or social worker if faced with a situation in which a patient or client has written a threatening letter, the psychiatrist, psychologist or social worker must determine whether the ethical duty to warn applies, because the threat is real, or not. Chaski (1997) collected simulated threat letters from over 100 writers. Chaski, Howald, and Parker (2006) reported the results of an experiment in which Howald blindly evaluated 100 documents for the presence or absence of twenty-two linguistic features related to threatening communication. The 100 documents contained real threats, which were obtained from Chaski's and others' case files, simulated threats and angry letters from Chaski's Writer Sample Database. The 100 documents were randomized and divided into four sets. Based on Howald's evaluation, SPSS 13's CRT procedure (Classification and Regression Tree) obtained as high as 97% accuracy at distinguishing real from simulated threats. The reliability of the system is demonstrated by the fact that these high results were obtained even under cross-validation. Since human evaluation may vary depending on the coder, this linguistic-feature system would be most useful if it were automatized or semi-automatized in a computer software system. This talk presents the results of automating the threat assessment system, so that law enforcement or psychiatrists can simply use a computer program to provide a threat assessment.

Threat Assessment, Duty-to-Warn, Computational System