Space, Time, and Human Activities in Virtual and Physical Spaces

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In the arena of threat assessment, the challenge of understanding the worldview of potential perpetrators of violent and/or harassing behavior has grown with the signification changes in psychological space created by new worlds and opportunities through online, social media and internet-based communities. Understanding the cognitive space and the cognitive maps of permissible ranges of actions and both the vectors and intensity creates new opportunities in Field Theory to establish overlap between cognitive maps and potential actions in both the physical and the virtual world. The barriers to actions and the permissions given by interactions between variables in the two worlds allows for new patterns of behavior not previously seen. Personality traits and patterns may be altered in the interactions which occur online, in social media settings or through other internet interactions such as virtual communities and the use of avatars. Do these interactions permanently change the person who experiences and frequents the virtual world or do the state-driven characteristics which are exhibited when the proper signal(s) associated with the virtual world come into play? Are their rules which cover the transition and the freedom of action between lives in the two worlds

Geographical profiling is a developing approach to defining the physical dimensions of perceptual space for personal engagement in threatening physical behavior in the physical world as well as assigning probabilities. It is now necessary that we endeavor to understand where the same considerations apply when people move within and through virtual space . The same thought needs to be dedicated to understanding how people develop their range of permissible activities and latitude of behavior in virtual spaces. What is the transition which occurs from their physical world of social interaction to their virtual world social interactions? What factors change their risk taking behavior and do the general rules of risk taking remain the same or does the cognitive map and the vectors which impact it change in virtual space.

If we consider both the actions of the perpetrator as well as the threat mitigation actions as a series of decision-making tasks, one can then seek to investigate the type of pressures and permissions which impact the trajectory of the actions. In cyberstalking it then becomes possible to develop hypotheses and test them as to what actions will increase undesired contact and which actions will serve to decrease the likelihood of increased threat behavior. Understanding the cognitive load created for all three groups – the perpetrator, the target and the threat assessor- can lead to increased understanding

of the interactions of behavior in virtual space and the selection of courses of action. The greater ability to predict likely outcomes of virtual behavior and movement in virtual space of all three of these groups increases the understanding of potential intersections which lead to increased conflict or reduce threat. This understanding also allows the development of a series of risk mitigation actions to reduce threat and/or to divert the perpetrator path from conception of the idea to actual action either in the physical or virtual world or the space which merges elements of both into a new cognitive map of a reality which intertwines them.