Chapter 3
Society in a Virtual World

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ABSTRACT
The new virtual world created by the Internet, with its attendant new technology environment, new actors and new models of societal behavior, has given rise to unexpected and as yet to be described social phenomena. This chapter guides the reader through virtual communities on the Internet, highlighting behavioral anomalies in the community or individual. The main objective of this chapter is to introduce the reader to basic patterns of behavior which may foster illegitimate use of the Internet, including illegal activity, and security incidents. This survey of virtual communities and the threats they create to Internet security, as well as the behavioral change of individuals when exposed to the virtual world, is intended to give the reader a basis for understanding the virtual world’s impact on mankind and social reality. Such an understanding could be helpful to discern new Internet threats or to assess expected risks.

INTRODUCTION
The evolution of the human society is characterized by persistent interaction of individuals and communities, which continuously moves the evolution of the mankind forward. Historically, these interactions existed in the physically sensed and observed world. The actors involved in interaction were real persons or groups of persons. Moreover, these interactions were observed and experienced in the physical environment, ie. in the real world. The playing of children on the street was part of growing up and education, improving their sense of the world and creating necessary perceptual apparatus. Individual communication was usually accompanied by some physical perception. The listener sensed not only the speech of a counterparty but also its movement, body position or facial expression. Interpersonal communication was thus comprised of two balanced components – verbal and non-verbal communication or so called “body language”.

With improvement of verbal communication skills and development of new means of
human expression, non-verbal communication was becoming increasingly concealed and the first instances of mankind’s existence in the virtual world emerged. For example, book printing gave access to written messages for ever-broader masses. Book stories shifted readers into an imagined world, letting them to share the lives of fictional or historical characters with their own imagination. This one-way communication allows transferal of information only from writer to reader and lack of interaction leaves a vacuum in normal communication involving speech. Nevertheless the individual, separated from society, could spent a pleasant moments in the circle of his imaginary heroes, not communicating with surrounding society.

**Birth of the Virtual World**

In this historical context, the most significant change in communication was brought by computers and communication media, chiefly the Internet. Interactivity, impossible with virtual book characters, became the cornerstone of computer communication. The main attributes of the new virtual world are a total absence of non-verbal perception, the possibility to create immortal virtual individuals, simplicity of going across communities and the suppressed need for compromises, all of which can seem more attractive and enjoyable than real world. The virtual world also fosters new dimensions of social life with all its attributes – political, social, emotional, religious, etc. Even major characteristics of existing society have been transferred into the virtual world - life in the virtual world formulates its own rules which often go out of natural order, where human society lives for centuries. Also, the new form of virtual existence brings new or modified risks and new or modified forms of human behavior, to which we either have to adapt or we have to find a means to oppose.

The decentralized nature of the virtual world, without any formally centralized “governing” authority, seems to impart a highly democratic quality to this world. However, while appearing democratic, the virtual world is more akin to widespread anarchy which, if not limited by technological rules, may in fact annihilate the virtual world or make it unusable. The functionality of the virtual world is ensured by mutual agreement among administrators, who adapt their manners to the majority. We can say that virtual world is “driven” by its users and their general sense of morality and ethics. Anyone who abides by the major rules of the virtual world can enter virtual world; the virtual world is open. The openness of the virtual world provides an environment for an incredibly vast amount of information resident within the virtual world. Anyone can present any information without further redaction or censoring. Anyone can contact other users of the virtual world or “virtual persons” or can create relationships with others due to the freedom to use or misuse the virtual world. Unfortunately this freedom leads to the existence of an “information scrap yard” where anything can be found, but assigning a meaning to information found becomes a crucial problem. The initial problem of the real world – to find appropriate information - has evolved to a more sophisticated and complex process of culling searched information from large amounts of data, weighing up the information found and evaluating the probability of accuracy and meaning of the information found.

Several features of the virtual world, arising from the characteristics mentioned above, facilitate illegal activities in the virtual world. The most important one is a non-transparent environment due to the technological complexity of the system. This technological “shadow” gives a sham sense of safety to the criminal, since the crime scene knows him only by his virtual identity.

The potential for existence of a virtual personality in the virtual world, anywhere and anytime, is a stimulus for creation of different virtual groups and virtual communities. By communication, presentation of personalities in the virtual space