

Time and Space Compression in Criminology

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This report discusses the effect of globalization on the perception of time and space and the subsequent compression of those entities. It explores facts surrounding crime rate increases and international issues and discusses evolving crime patterns and new types of offenses. In addition, the article examines social compression theory and the compression of time and space and the subsequent effect it has had on twenty-first century crime, including computer crimes (cybercrimes) and traditional crimes that have now been affected by the Internet's ability to link victims with offenders. It also discusses criminological theories as they relate to contemporary cybercrime and computer-related crime issues.

This paper defines the phenomenon of time and space compression and attempts to explain changes in crimes and crime causation in terms of this phenomenon.

It is not a common term, at least not yet; however, time and space compression can be easily explained and understood. Like other academic terms or phrases, time and space compression sounds much more scientific and academic than it really is. The term time and space compression, refers to the fact that both time—the amount of time it takes to accomplish a task—and space—the distance that one can cover or travel to accomplish a task—has been compressed or shortened but not necessarily actually reduced. In other words, one may consider the amount of time it now takes to accomplish a specific task compared with the amount of time it took to accomplish that task years ago.

In just an average person's lifetime, any number of activities now take less time than they did before. For example, before email (electronic mail), a person had to physically deliver a hard copy letter or use the United States Postal Service to deliver the hard copy letter to another person. Before the twentieth century, a person had to wait for mail to be delivered by means of horseback, carriage, or train. The advent of trucks and airplanes then compressed the time it took to receive or send mail.

In addition to the United States Postal Service, other forms of delivery became available such as United Parcel Service, Federal Express, and other services offered by companies hoping to cash in on the fact that they could deliver items more quickly than the United States government could.

Later on came the facsimile machine, or fax machine as it is known today, and then the Internet with email. As one can see from these examples, the time it takes to get a

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hard, or printed, copy of a document has been reduced to seconds. The time it takes to receive a hard copy of a document has been compressed, or reduced, from what it was formerly to what it is now.

One cannot discuss time compression without discussing space compression as its companion. As Einstein discussed in his theories, time and space are related and depend on the viewpoint of the observer. In the time compression example of the delivery of a document, we must also explain what happened to the space involved between the point of origin of the document and the point of destination. While the actual physical distance from one end of the country, or for that matter the world, to the other end has not become reduced, the perception of that same distance has become reduced. Compression has therefore occurred between distances as they relates to time and space.

As one can clearly see, the mileage has not been reduced between two points of longitude and latitude on the planet Earth, but the distance has become compressed and can be traveled more quickly than before. Moreover, the compression of the space is relative to the perspective of the observer, and it appears to the observer that the distance traveled is smaller due to the speed at which the distance is covered.

With email, an attachment can pass from a person's hands as that person sits at a computer in Asia to a person's hands in North America in a matter of seconds. How is that possible? It is possible because the time has been reduced to a point where a person's perception of the distance traveled by that document seems to be inches instead of several thousand miles.

Time and space compression is actually not simply due to the Internet; it occurred with the invention and common use of the telephone, telegraph, trains, cars, and airplanes. A study of United States history would show that crime has been increasing steadily at a rate consistent with modernization. A larger population could explain some of the increase (more people to commit crimes and more people to become victims); however, the fact that people can travel more quickly and easily now compared with when they traveled by foot or by horse is a strong factor in explaining the increase in crime in the United States. Criminals also take advantage of this time and space compression. Someone can commit a murder in Los Angeles and then fly by means of a jet aircraft to Chicago, thus leaving the scene of the crime and having ample opportunity to remove and destroy evidence along the way. In the early 1800s if someone was to commit a crime in Los Angeles, California, he would have to leave the crime scene on foot or horseback and would not be able to travel very far by the time the crime was discovered. Also, with that type of travel, physical evidence of the departure path would be visible and detected by authorities, resulting in a more difficult escape route for the criminal and more likelihood of being tracked.

Traditional Theories of Crime Causation

If one was to follow the classical theory of criminology, then one would believe that every person has the intrinsic choice either to commit a crime or not to commit a crime. It is entirely up to the individual to decide whether the consequences of the action are worse than the pleasure derived from the same action (Vold, Bernard, & Snipes, 2002).

The author believes that classical criminologists did not take into consideration overt factors influencing criminals to act the way they do. All things being even within a family unit, why does one child act in a socially unacceptable way, while others in the family behave properly and comply with society's norms? It could be explained biologically perhaps: one child could have a chemical imbalance that others within the family do not have. Or some type of outside social influence or other extrinsic elements could act on or pressure the deviant child to behave in the "abnormal" way.

Given the social perspective's theory, a person's environment appears to influence the individual's attitudes, beliefs, and cognitions; however, this theory does not explain a criminal raised in a family of law-abiding individuals, all with the same material objects, the same amount of love and attention, and all the same opportunities available. This topic will probably be discussed forever in criminology circles, and it will possibly never be explained; however, the author hopes that with further research—biological, societal, and other types—the reason for an anomaly within a family unit can be better explained.

Theorists Guerry and Quetelet believed that the solution to crime was far more complicated than simply trying to induce the fear that the consequences of the action are worse than the possible pleasure derived from committing the act (Vold et al., 2002). Intelligence levels below average have often been discussed as a factor in criminal behavior (Vold et al., 2002); however, this line of reasoning does not explain the fact that some of the most notorious criminals of all time have been highly intelligent, such as the Unabomber. The Internet compresses the ability to view what others have and what society suggests one must have to be successful and happy. Unlike television, newspapers, and other forms of mass media, the Internet allows interaction between perpetrators and victims, thereby helping to facilitate the commission of crimes. Other forms of mass media could certainly provide a motive—greed—for committing a crime, but those static, 1-dimensional forms do not allow the meeting of perpetrators with victims as the Internet does.

Traveling from coast to coast would present an individual with thousands of examples of high crime neighborhoods and poor, crime-ridden communities that contain a frustrated and underprivileged segment of our society. The Internet allows those neighborhoods to come to the victim, instead of the victim coming to those neighborhoods. Now, potential

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victims must do more than simply stay out of the high crime areas of their communities; they must guard themselves from predators entering their homes via the Internet.

Classical theorists state that an individual's decision to commit crime comes from free will and rational decisions; contemporary theorists state that many different social factors lead to an individual committing a crime such as learning criminal behavior and inability to obtain what society says one must have. Time and space criminologists would look at these existing theories and apply them to twenty-first century society with its inherent time and space compression issues.

Types of Crimes Made Possible by Time and Space Compression

Many new or contemporary crimes now exist that did not in years past due the fact that the instrumentalities of the crimes were not yet invented. Crime commission, or the ways that crimes are committed, may change as society evolves; however, the actual crime, or definition of the crime, remains the same. So while the crime (stalking) remains the same, new terms (cyberstalking) have been created to describe crimes that now occur and are possible because of technology and the Internet. Along with new terms such as the virtual world, virtual reality, cyberspace, the Internet, and the World Wide Web have come new crimes such as cybercrimes, cyberstalking, identity theft, computer crimes, computer fraud, computer viruses, and hacking. We are constantly told that technology enriches our lives: the Internet provides learning opportunities for our children, cell phones allow us to keep in touch while we are on the move, and laptop computers allow us to work almost anywhere at any time. But we are also warned about the dangers of technology, especially the Internet: hackers can steal our credit card numbers, pedophiles can target our children, and racists spread messages of hate. We take these dangers seriously because technology permeates almost every aspect of our lives.

For instance, it is not an exaggeration to suggest that virtually every child in the United States, Europe, and any number of other technologically advanced nations comes into regular contact with the Internet. It is for this reason that parents, teachers, law enforcement agencies, and others constantly monitor the safety of the young people in their care.

This section discusses some of these new technology-related crimes. Familiarity with the crimes made possible by time and space compression is necessary and relevant so the researcher can identify the criminological results of this phenomenon.

Stalking Versus Cyberstalking

Stalking is nothing new; it has been around for ages. A person follows another person to annoy or threaten him. Stalking can be motivated by hatred or obsession. Oftentimes stalkers state that they actually love their victims, and their victims love them.

Cases are reported daily to local police in reference to one person stalking another. Jilted boyfriends and ex-husbands may be the primary offenders; however, female stalkers exist as well. Celebrities and other people in the spotlight may become the fantasy object that the stalker must have. Stalkers can intend to cause stress by making threats, or they may actually intend to harm the victim physically. Some stalkers want only to be with the victim because they are obsessed or in love with the person. Regardless of the stalkers' motivation, their victims suffer tremendously from the stalking activity. Most states have made stalking a criminal offense; however, certain elements must be established for it to be a prosecutable case.

Now with time and space compression, a new form of an old crime has developed. The Internet now allows stalkers to use the World Wide Web to locate victims and to stalk them in cyberspace. Now instead of only ex-wives, girlfriends, or celebrities being stalked, any of us can be the victim, as long as we use the Internet.

When the communications revolution of the 1990s brought the Internet and other technology into the home, it took little time for stalkers to discover that technology offers new ways to pursue victims and avoid detection. Cyberstalking can affect any Internet user, no matter where he or she is located. Adults and young children, males and females, expert computer users and novices are all equally vulnerable to this form of electronic harassment.

Although cyberstalking represents a new form of deviant, and oftentimes, illegal behavior, it bears many similarities to offline, or traditional stalking. In working toward a definition of cyberstalking, it is important to understand something of the nature of offline stalking.

One of the problems that arise when dealing with these new crimes involving computers and derived from or encouraged by time and space compression is to define and label these new offenses. For instance, cyberstalking is named after traditional stalking but with a prefix that indicates that the stalking involves cyberspace or the virtual world of the Internet. As with other new offenses, the challenge then is to create a definition of cyberstalking that can meet the needs of all of those involved, or a wide range of stakeholders.

Stakeholders are all those with an interest in cyberstalking, including law enforcement agencies, Internet Service Providers (ISPs), clinicians, researchers, and victims. Each

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stakeholder has a different set of needs. Law enforcement agencies want to catch cyberstalkers as well as other contemporary criminals, ISPs want customers to feel safe using their services, clinicians want to treat cyberstalkers, researchers want to explain the nature of cyberstalking, and, of course, the victims want to be protected.

As in all areas of research, a problem must be defined before it can be examined. Without a common understanding of a given concept, any research undertaken may not address the actual problem and is unlikely to be of any real value. In addition, it becomes difficult to draw together the work carried out by different individuals and organizations because each is working under a different set of preconceptions and expectations.

Traditional Crimes Now Executed by Different Means

When looking at cyberstalking compared with traditional stalking, several differences become evident. Electronic communications technologies also make it much easier for cyberstalkers to encourage third parties to harass or threaten a victim, for example, by impersonating the victim and posting inflammatory messages to bulletin boards and chat rooms, causing viewers of that message to send threatening messages back to the victim.

Criminal offenses that have always existed, and probably always will, but now are made easier or the victim made more accessible due to time and space compression include child molestation, serial killing, theft, sex crimes, and fraud. These offenses are not exclusive to criminals who choose to use the Internet but exist independently of the Internet. That being said, the Internet could be blamed for assisting these criminals in carrying out and executing their criminal behavior. Some criminals may have never located an appropriate victim even if they had the intent to do so ("mens rea" the guilty mind). The Internet now offers this criminal a wide variety of infinite possibilities to locate and secure a victim for his crimes. A person could be in a cabin in the woods with a wireless modem hooked to a battery operated laptop computer and communicate with a potential victim of child molestation who is in New York City.

Serial Killers Can Use the Internet to Acquire Victims

John Wayne Gacy was a notorious serial killer whom the author has researched. The author was a little boy living in the suburbs of Chicago, Illinois, when the Gacy case hit the headlines.

As a young white male, the same profile of Gacy's many victims, the author was especially frightened by this criminal's actions. After all, the author could have possibly been one of his victims. In addition, as a student of criminal justice at a local community college, the author was able to tour the actual prison where Gacy spent the last 14 years of his life. That experience provided the author another morbid connection to this case.

John Wayne Gacy was a middle-aged white male contractor, living in the Chicago area, who enjoyed, among other things, dressing up like a clown for children's birthday parties. Gacy had another, more insidious, passion, that being the torture, strangulation, and sodomization of young males. Over a three-year period, Gacy murdered at least 33 young males; moreover, Gacy disposed of his victims' bodies by covering them with lye and placing their remains—sometimes intact, sometimes not—into the crawlspace under his house. In other words, he made every attempt not to be discovered. Gacy literally created his own graveyard for his victims, right inside the confines of his home. Investigators stated that the smell inside of Gacy's home, when they served a search warrant, was overwhelming.

John Wayne Gacy was ultimately executed in an Illinois prison after serving time on death row. Gacy was interviewed before his execution but displayed no remorse when speaking of his many victims.

What if John Wayne Gacy had access to the Internet at the time of his killing spree? Could time and space compression have allowed that killer to multiply his victim count exponentially? Gacy used deception and deceit to hire potential victims to work for his contracting business, but what if he did not even know the victims in advance but had been able to set up meetings at his home with potential victims? Gacy could have used time and space compression capabilities to set up meetings with young males from all over the world. The Gacy killings are an excellent example of what a traditional serial killer could do given time and space compression capabilities by using the World Wide Web.

According to the classical school of thought, people are rational beings able to make decisions in a calculating and logical way by taking into consideration the consequences and benefits of their actions. Having free will allows them to make decisions. The theory of free will states that crime is a choice that a person makes after considering the benefits and costs of the behavior (Vold et al., 2002).

The case of Martha Stewart is another excellent example of how the criminal justice system of today can operate and relate to time and space compression. Stewart's case was a showcase illustrating that the federal criminal justice system can effectively prosecute anyone. Even an individual with an outstanding reputation, and someone who most of society would probably describe as "squeaky clean," could be prosecuted and convicted. The fact that Stewart was actually convicted of obstruction of justice and lying to investigators draws a striking contrast to her reputation as a loving and honest professional "Homemaker." Time and space compression could have enabled Stewart to commit the crimes she was convicted of. The Internet, telephones, fax machines, and email may have been instruments of the crime, enabling an "inexperienced" criminal to commit the crime.

Online Harassment/Cyberstalking Statistics

The following report is a result of continuous efforts to track information in the community. In the past, law enforcement personnel, journalists, and lawmakers asked for demographic information and found that it could not be provided by any organization. Although many victims of online harassment and stalking are unwilling to provide demographic information, Working to Halt Online Abuse (WHOA) has been around long enough to earn their constituency's trust. So in early 2000 they started asking victims for demographic information. The following statistics are based on cases handled by WHOA where the victims filled out the questionnaire as completely as possible, not the total number of cases handled by WHOA each year: 198 cases for calendar year 2003, 218 cases for calendar year 2002, 256 cases for calendar year 2001, 353 cases for calendar year 2000. The latter years have better demographic information, based on what law enforcement asked WHOA to attempt to collect.

The very nature of online crimes means little information exists regarding the harassers, as most victims either do not know their harasser or do not know enough information about them to record. However, beginning in 2001, WHOA was able to obtain at least the gender and location of the harassers. Please note: the demographic information WHOA has is reported by the victims and has not been verified. Members of the media and other professionally interested parties can receive PDF versions of each year's complete statistics by e-mailing WHOA (<http://www.haltabuse.org/>) with their name and organization.

Summary

The condition of time and space compression has endangered the lives and property of more people than ever. Potential crime victims and criminals now reside in an arena of potential criminal acts that could not have been dreamed of in days past. At the turn of the last century (nineteenth to twentieth century), all that was needed to keep yourself and your property secure was a good fence, a watchdog, and maybe a shotgun. The borders around you, your loved ones, and your property were clearly drawn. The chance of you being victimized by someone who lived halfway around the world was very minimal. A person knew when strangers were in their community. People watched out for each other and noticed unusual behavior. How do we recreate that same sense of security now? Where exactly are the fences around cyberspace and the virtual world? How do we know who the strangers are? Who are our virtual neighbors watching out for us? These questions and many others may never be answered; however, the purpose of this paper was to ask the questions and familiarize the criminal justice practitioner, as well as the scholar, with this contemporary concept of time and space compression and how it contributes to modern crime causation.

The work of traditional theorists may still be applied during this modern era of time and space compression due to the fact that theories describe why people commit crimes and not necessarily how they are able to commit those crimes. Computers are mere instruments of crimes, the same as a club, a knife, or a gun. Regardless of how a person manages to locate a victim and carry out an offense, the traditional theories of crime causation can still be applied and explored. The question of how time and space compression will ultimately affect society has yet to be seen; however, recognizing its existence and identifying potential problems are the first steps to formulating a solution.

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