

Virus writers have girlfriends - official

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The stereotype of virus writers as spotty nerds who can't pull is well wide of the mark, according to an expert on the psychology of virus writers.

Sarah Gordon, senior principal research engineer at Symantec Security Response, said that the more recent idea that virus writing activity is focused mainly around money-making scams is inaccurate. Gordon - sometimes described as the Clarice Starling of anti-virus security - has interviewed over a hundred virus writers in the course of years of research.

She found the type of person who causes the disruption that accompanies the release of malicious code varied considerably by age, education, income, interests and social skills. "Most of the adult males I've interviewed have had girlfriends. Female virus writers have had boyfriends. The stereotypes are wrong," Gordon told El Reg.

Gordon drew a distinction between viruses created out of technical curiosity - which still account for the majority of "in-the-wild" viruses - and malicious code created by criminal elements in the hacking community as a way of stealing personal information on computer resources.

Agobot, Bagle and the like get all the publicity but the vast majority of viruses are written by people as a technical challenge. These nuisance virus writers have no conception of the damage and inconvenience their creations can cause. "Virus writing is irresponsible but not difficult," she said.

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