

Cybercrime:

Using Psychological Theories to Understand & Prevent It

Carl Lochstampfor Jr.

Department of Cybersecurity, Old Dominion University,

CYSE 201S: Cybersecurity & Social Science, Professor Trinity Woodbury

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Assignment Question:

Identify which theories (of psychology and sociology) you think best explain cybercrime and discuss what you like about that theory.

What is cybercrime?

Cybercrime is an illegal activity that involves using computers, networks, or the internet (CISCO, 2025; ICE, 2025). It is a broad term covering a range of offenses, from hacking into systems to steal data, spreading malware, or scamming people online to more complex stuff like identity theft, cyberstalking, or even disrupting entire networks for political or financial gain. To help prevent cybercrime, governments and organizations seek to understand the origins or causes of cybercrime and the motivations and behaviors of cybercriminals using different cybersecurity measures and schools of thought.

Understanding cybercrime: Schools of thought and theory.

There are four primary schools of thought in psychology and the social sciences when seeking to understand and explain cybercrime (Murthy, 2022). First, psychodynamic theories suggest that unconscious desires and childhood experiences influence criminal behavior, especially unresolved conflicts. Second, cognitive theories focus on the thought processes and how individuals rationalize or justify their actions. Third, behavioral theories suggest learning through reinforcement, imitation, and social interactions. Fourth, personality theories suggest that certain personality traits predispose individuals to cybercrime. Lastly, when a person seeks to understand the reason or purpose of why and how cybercrime occurs, that person is not respecting or condoning those destructive behaviors and crimes. We are not absolving or erasing blame and responsibility from the equation that leads a person to commit cybercrimes. Seek understanding for more wisdom, empathy, and making the world a better place than it was yesterday.

Which theory or theories do you like the most when understanding and explaining cybercrime?

I do not favor any school of thought or theory over others because each helps explain the 'mosaic' or 'bigger picture' of reality and truth. With my understanding and prior academic experience in hermeneutics—the philosophy of understanding human dialogue, both verbal and written forms—the truth is objective but understood by humans from a subjective lens using one's own historical and cultural context or foreknowledge (i.e., prejudices used on the 'neutral' sense). Truth shines like a light through a crystal to display the source's many colors. The truth is not purely or originally subjective—humans do not create and control their version of truth (i.e., "my" truth)—because humans live within time and space using their horizons (Barthold, 2025).

However, humans can understand and glean different yet unifying information about truth by observing the different 'shades' or 'colors' that truth displays to us from the outside and into our world. Therefore, I prefer to rely on each theory to help understand the inner workings and connections between a person's thoughts and actions (Zurkus, 2018).

Examples of applying schools of thought for understanding cybercrime.

For example, the pursuit of hacktivism cybercrime by youth may fuel the desire for a place to belong (psychodynamic) and find purpose (cognitive and behavioral) in the hope of removing from the world what the youth perceives to society as 'dangerous, unethical, and a fascist monopoly over free thinking and actions' (The Economic Times, 2021). Alternatively, instead of a hacktivist, the young hacker may commit fraud and other financial cybercrimes to earn more money and fame: the hacker may want to escape his or her broken life of poverty and chaos because there is a lack of infrastructure with legal, legitimate, accessible and affordable means to do otherwise in his or her current geographical location.

Lastly, cyberbullying and online grooming and exploitation of children invoke many different theories for understanding and preventing Said atrocities (Sonjica, 2021). It is dangerous for children to have easy and unrestricted access to the internet and online strangers: this may stem from poor parental supervision and few to no technological restrictions on home devices (i.e., tablets, smartphones, and audio group conversations through video game PCs/consoles). Children are naturally curious and may find an exciting escape from their boredom to explore unknown and dangerous areas of the internet, even chatting with other children or online adult strangers. Innocently looking for alternative ways to entertain themselves without realizing the potential dangers of their thinking, decision-making, and the messages/information/data they distribute to

one another can be a sign or natural response of looking for validation or love from another person where the child's parents are physically and/or emotionally absent in the child's life.

For adults, boredom, unresolved childhood experiences and trauma, cognitive justification, and individual personality traits can also lead them to dangerous parts of the internet, including horrific acts to exploit other adults and even children online. These types of predators do not necessarily have to enter or surf the Dark Web; instead, they can join public local lobbies and group chats within everyday/favorite kid's games like *Roblox*, *Minecraft*, *Call of Duty*, and *Fortnite* (Clips, 2023; Valuetainment, 2024). Lack of gratitude and appreciation for one's life may also lead to boredom and pursuing unethical and illegal acts brings a 'thrill' to "break up that monotony." Instead of healing one's trauma through conventional and useful means like a licensed therapist, these predators may also relive their childhood trauma by wrongfully replaying it and involving children as a form of revenge and/or coping mechanism, thinking it will bring healing to their trauma. Unfortunately, as the saying goes: "Idle hands are the devil's workshop" (Proverbs 16:27).

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