Sociotechnical Imaginaries of Responsible Design: A Case for Mitigating Gender-based Online Harm

Min Zhang
The Open University
Milton Keynes, Buckinghamshire
United Kingdom
The Centre for Protecting Women Online
Milton Keynes, Buckinghamshire
United Kingdom
min.zhang@open.ac.uk

Arosha K Bandara
Centre for Protecting Women Online / School of Computing & Communications
The Open University
Milton Keynes, United Kingdom
arosha.bandara@open.ac.uk

Gordon Rugg
Hyde & Rugg Associates
Stoke-On-Trent, United Kingdom
Keele University
Newcastle, United Kingdom
gordon@hydeandrugg.com

Irum Rauf
School of Computing and Communications
The Open Univesrity
Milton Keynes, Buckinghamshire
United Kingdom
Lero
Limerick, Ireland
irum.rauf@open.ac.uk

Dilrukshi Gamage
Department of Computation and Intelligent Systems
University of Colombo School of Computing
Colombo, Sri Lanka
dgs@ucsc.cmb.ac.lk

Bashar Nuseibeh
The Open University
Milton Keynes, United Kingdom
bashar.nuseibeh@open.ac.uk

Silvia Podesta
IBM
Copenhagen, Denmark
silvia.podesta@ibm.com

Wanling Cai
School of Computer Science and Statistics
Trinity College Dublin
Dublin, Ireland
Lero
Limerick, Ireland
School of Computer Science
University College Dublin
Dublin, Ireland
wanling.cai@tcd.ie

Sarah Robinson
School of Applied Social Studies
University College Cork
Cork, Ireland
Lero
Limerick, Ireland
sarah.robinson@ucc.ie

Abstract

Gender-based online harm has become a global problem due to technological advances and affordances. Despite an increasing interest in designing technical and legal interventions in tackling online harm, the level of online violence against women and girls remains high. Responsible design plays a pivotal role in mitigating technological harms, and it has particularly captured attention in the era of Artificial Intelligence (AI). This workshop aims to use the sociotechnical imaginary framework to bring together HCI researchers, developers, and practitioners across domains and sectors to collectively reflect and envision how responsible design can address gender-based online harm. Through facilitated hands-on activities, participants will explore how new approaches, paradigms, technologies, and mechanisms can be designed and implemented to better understand the responsibility in responsible design. This will also help the HCI community understand how to put responsible design into practice and shape the future of responsible technology that prevents gender-based online harms.

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CCS Concepts

• **Human-centered computing**; • **Collaborative and social computing; Human computer interaction (HCI).**;

Keywords

Online harm against women and girls, online safety, gender-based online violence, technology-facilitated gender-based violence, digital abuse, responsible design, responsibility, responsible technology, sociotechnical imaginary

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1 Background and Motivation

Digital technologies increasingly shape our social, cultural, and political lives, yet they can reinforce or facilitate gender-based harm in online spaces. From harassment [26], abuse [4, 11], to algorithmic bias [28], and exclusion [25], these online harms can be deeply embedded in the design and governance of digital systems. Emerging technologies, such as generative AI and immersive digital spaces, have introduced new forms of harmful practices [10], and new organizational contexts of technological development, such as open-source spaces, can perpetuate deep-fakes [22]. Technological products and processes enable and/or mediate the relationship between users and other people. As Leader [17] argued, technologies can create new possibilities, practices, associations, and distribute '*technology of power*' to make people more controllable and manageable. Similarly, Wood et al. [31] identified that technology's affordance and design properties can '*invite*' individuals to perpetrate or '*co-produce*' online harm [5]. Some companies deliberately use 'dark patterns' [5] and deceptive designs for commercial benefits, while others might design technology with unintended consequences. For example, recent HCI research highlighted increased social divisions and distrust due to sensationalism and misrepresentations on community safety platforms such as *Citizen* [7]. Moreover, a lack of consensus on the definition and terms of online harm (and safety) contributes to victims/survivors and perpetrators perceiving abusive behavior as a normal part of life [17].

There is an increasing number of technological 'solutions' [12] attempting to tackle technology-facilitated gender-based violence or online harm, e.g., content moderation, especially after the UK's 2023 Online Safety Act and the UK communication regulator Ofcom's recent call[1] on technology companies to take responsibility to tackle gender-based online harms such as misogyny and online harassment. Many design paradigms and principles have re-gained attention, including safety-by-design, responsible design [3], human-rights-by-design [30], responsible AI [13], responsible software engineering [32], and value-centric design [24]. Some big-tech companies have also developed their own responsible design principles, which are dedicated to integrating ethical, social, and environmental considerations into their software development practices, especially for AI products, such as Google AI Principles[2], Deloitte's Trustworthy AI[3]. However, these principles, ethics, and codes of conduct are high-level, and there is a lack of tools, methods, and practical guidance to help put principles into the design and development of software systems [32].

Responsible design remains an emerging and evolving field without consensus on definitions and theories [18]. Responsible design requires designers to take responsibility to *avoid harm*, *do good*, and *govern the design process* [3]. However, the fundamental concepts of responsible design, such as what responsibility is, what harm/good is, still need a clearer definition and further exploration. Furthermore, the domain knowledge of designers and the way designers conceive of a problem directly affect the design considerations and design process. For example, research demonstrated the flawed theoretical assumptions and ideologies underpinning many safety technologies, such as the responsibilization of safety to individuals [19], a stranger perpetrator [15] (but in reality, acquaintances commit many more crimes than strangers [6]), and misrepresentation of safety [16] (e.g., knowing the loved one's locations means he/she is safe). Bivens and Handoff [2] reviewed over 200 anti-rape apps and found that rape myths and social norms were prevalent in the technological design and development. Similarly, the crime map on the *Citizen* app creates a perception that a neighborhood is dangerous, and crime is common [8], which affect the quality of life and mental health of users [7]. Therefore, technology is both influenced by and influences social, cultural, and political dynamics. Rather than prescribing gendered justice through a '*techno-fix*' [27], we call for a sociotechnical imaginary [14] of responsible design for gender-based violence-free online spaces. Imagination is also core to empathy, the ability to take the perspective of the other [20], and we suggest that both are core to responsible design.

The sociotechnical imaginary [14] refers to "*collectively held, institutionally stabilized, and publicly performed visions of desirable futures, animated by shared understandings of forms of social life and social order attainable through, and supportive of, advances in science and technology*". Co-constructed by social and technical actors, the sociotechnical imaginaries are shared visions of how future life should or should not be, which lay the foundations for design, development, deployment, marketing, and regulation of technology access and adoption. Technologies are materialized forms of a sociotechnical imaginary. The sociotechnical imaginary framework has been applied to various contexts, such as agriculture [9], AI [25], anti-violence [27], campus safety [29], and smart homes [21]. For example, Zhong et al. [33] proposed '*AI imaginaries*' as the "*collective ideas, beliefs, values, symbols, expectations, and narratives that individuals and communities hold about AI and its potential impact on our shared digital futures. AI imaginaries are not limited to the technology itself but also encompass the societal transformation.*"

This workshop aims to create a space for critical reflection, collaboration, and imagination around the responsible design of technology, bringing together diverse voices and visions to explore how we can leverage new approaches, technologies, and mechanisms to better understand the problem, challenge harmful norms, support affected communities, and build safer and more inclusive digital futures. Sociotechnical imaginary offers an anchoring framework that enables us to envision and create coherent narratives

[1] https://www.ofcom.org.uk/online-safety/illegal-and-harmful-content/ofcom-calls-on-tech-firms-to-make-online-world-safer-for-women-and-girls

[2] https://ai.google/responsibility/principles/

[3] https://www.deloitte.com/uk/en/issues/generative-ai/trustworthy-ai.html

about 'harm-free' online futures, asking how responsible design practices might be changed to implement such visions. By foregrounding gendered experiences and interdisciplinary perspectives, we aim to generate new points of view, representations, and imaginations by rethinking what responsibility means in the context of gender-based online harms, decoding the complexities and tensions between different understandings of online harm and responses, to better understand implications for responsible design and practice. We also aim for the workshop to build a community and inspire future events, such as panels and workshops at other SIGCHI venues, research collaborations, and grant applications. This workshop will explore the following questions:

1. What are the sociotechnical imaginaries of safe online spaces free of gender-based violence?
2. What do we mean by responsibility? Who is responsible for what, and to whom?
3. What taken-for-granted norms contribute to online harms? How can we change design norms to create responsibility?
4. How to deal with tensions between distributing individual and shared responsibilities in managing online harms [1]?
5. What does being responsible look like in design and its processes, and organizational arrangements? What are symbols, narratives, and representations of 'being responsible'?
6. How to put responsibility in design? Which methodology works (and in what contexts)?
7. What does responsible design for tackling gender-based online harm require in practice?

2 Organizers

Our team of organizers represents experts in online harms, personal safety, psychology, design, methodology, misinformation, responsible software engineering, pro-social computing, social engineering, and enterprise design thinking, from both academic and industry backgrounds. Each organizer brings unique expertise, experience, and vision to the workshop. Our team has extensive workshop organizational experience in user experience, responsible software engineering, design, applied psychology, ethics, and knowledge modeling.

Min Zhang (main contact) is a Lecturer of HCI at the Open University and the Centre for Protecting Women Online. Her work focuses on the future of responsible technology in preventing gendered online harm, personal safety, and the collective power of community, and how to design safe, positive, and inclusive online spaces to not only combat online harm, but also promote online positivity, such as positive masculinity. She serves as the program committee for several ACM conferences, workshops, and IFIP WG 13.11/12.14.

Arosha Bandara is a Professor of Software Engineering at The Open University whose research and teaching focus on software engineering for adaptive systems. He has a particular interest in techniques for building responsible, adaptive security and privacy mechanisms for software-intensive socio-technical systems. His work has been applied in diverse domains, including healthcare and policing. He is a member of the steering group for the OU's Centre for Policing Research and Learning.

Gordon Rugg is a specialist in methods for handling knowledge that people find difficult or impossible to put into words. He has a multidisciplinary background, including a PhD in Psychology, and postdoctoral work in knowledge acquisition for AI and for requirements engineering. His interests include cross-cultural research and User-Centered Design. He has experience in running knowledge elicitation and systematic idea generation workshops by using multiple approaches, such as card sorting, upward laddering, and think-aloud. He is a co-author of the books *The Knowledge Modelling Handbook* and *The Unwritten Rules of PhD Research.*

Irum Rauf is a Lecturer at The Open University, UK. She is also involved in research on Responsible Software Engineering at Lero, the Science Foundation Ireland Research Centre for Software. Her research focuses on the intersection of technology and society, particularly on creating technology that can empower people and communities. She investigates the unintended societal consequences of technology and explores approaches to mitigate its negative effects on users and society. She is interested in transdisciplinary research and has worked in multi-disciplinary, multi-generational, and multi-national teams.

Dilrukshi Gamage is a Senior Lecturer at the University of Colombo School of Computing (UCSC) in Sri Lanka. She is exploring AI-generated content harms from the Global South, particularly South Asia. She has extensive experience in organizing CHI workshops, especially relating to building tools for credibility indicators and Feminist voices of ecological issues. She serves on the Asian CHI steering committee and also SIGCHI Colombo in promoting HCI in the Asian Context.

Bashar Nuseibeh is Professor of Computing at the Open University, where he leads the Software Engineering and Design Group. His research interests include requirements engineering, adaptive security and privacy, and psychosocial factors in software design. Bashar has chaired and organised many international conferences, including co-chairing the first international workshop on responsible software engineering. He is currently UKRI's Research Pillar Chair for Responsible AI – the UK's flagship research programme in the area.

Wanling Cai is a postdoctoral researcher at Trinity College Dublin and a researcher at Lero, the Science Foundation Ireland Research Centre for Software, Ireland. She is also an incoming Assistant Professor at University College Dublin. Her research lies at the intersection of HCI and AI, investigating the issues surrounding the use of interactive technologies (e.g., recommender systems, conversational AI, generative AI, and wearables) in everyday life and healthcare contexts. She has served on the program and organization committees of several ACM conferences, such as IUI, RecSys, UMAP, and MUM.

Silvia Podesta is an advisory innovation designer and Business Technology Leader at IBM. With a strong grounding in user-centered design and a track record in digital strategy, product development, and customer experience, she helps clients to bridge design, technology, and governance to implement responsible and strategically impactful AI. She has authored a book on digital design strategy and co-authored a paper on trustworthy AI design for process transformation in a media and journalism use case.

Sarah Robinson is an Applied Psychologist, working at the School of Applied Social Studies, UCC, and at Lero, the Science

Foundation Ireland Research Centre for Software. She has an interest in responsible design and engineering, community-based research, creative methods, and children. She has co-organized workshops for DIS and other venues.

3 Pre-Workshop plans & Websites

We will put details about the workshop and submissions, introduce the organizers on the website, and advertise the CFP: https://oucpwo.github.io/chi-sird-2026/. Prior to the workshop, we will publish the successful workshop submissions, the background of delegates who will attend the workshop, a schedule of workshop activities, and accessibility information. In addition, we will set up a Discord channel to create an online space for facilitating discussions and communications before, during, and after the workshop.

Given the workshop's aims cover a broad field and a multidisciplinary community, we hope to attract participants not only from HCI researchers but also designers, technologists, and industry professionals from related fields such as psychology, policing, regulation, philosophy, and others. We will advertise the workshop via social media channels and mailing lists to raise awareness and encourage strong submissions, such as organizers' shared memberships, affiliations, and networks. We will also leverage our contacts within the well-established international network of the Centre for Protecting Women Online, including both research and industry partners, and newsletter subscribers. The organizing team will recruit more people with relevant expertise and experience for the program committee members.

The organizer team will prepare the pre-workshop questions and scenarios and put them on a Miro board. Two weeks before the start of the workshop, we will invite participants to introduce themselves on Discord and have access to a Miro board to answer pre-workshop questions and familiarize themselves with the workshop.

4 Plan to Publish Proceedings

We plan to publish a collection of the submitted content as workshop proceedings after the workshop on our website and on arXiv. We will use the workshop website to create a permanent record that links to these archival versions of all position papers, as well as any portfolios, and recordings of all talks and sessions.

5 Workshop activities

This half-day workshop will contain two main sessions (**two sessions of 90 minutes**) involving group activities, separated by a coffee break. The group activity will split all participants into groups of max 5 people based on their indicated interests and submissions. Each group will be provided with physical cards and discussion prompts, moderated by at least one of the workshop organizers. At the end of each group activity, each group will be asked to share their discussions with quick 2-minute lighting talks. The tentative schedule for the workshop is as follows:

Introduction (30 minutes)

We will start the workshop with a welcome session introducing the main themes and workshop outlines. We invite participants to engage in an ice-breaker activity: imagining the future of a violence-free digital world and selecting a visual card that best represents their vision. The participants will present their experience and knowledge in relevant topics and the reason why they picked a certain visual card, through a 3-minute lightning talk. These talks will be followed by a short Q&A session to encourage discussions and networking.

Session 1: Sociotechnical Imaginaries of Online Harm & Responsibility (1 hour)

In this session, participants will be introduced to card sorting [23] and the upward laddering approach to uncover their semi-tacit knowledge and notions about gendered harm, safety, and responsibility in online environments. Participants will be grouped with a mixture of experience and expertise. This session is particularly designed to unpack participants' understanding (goals & values) of fundamental concepts 'safety', 'harms', and 'responsibility', to build collective imaginaries of violence-free online spaces. In the last 10 minutes, each group will present their discussions, revealing (competing) narratives and discourse around harm and safety, and the representations and tensions of responsibility in the digital world.

Coffee Break (30 minutes)

Session 2: Co-Design Sociotechnical Responsible Solutions (1 hour)

Participants could join new groups (e.g., based on their interests) and collaboratively work on potential sociotechnical solutions at individual, organizational, national, and international levels. Each group will take a design scenario and prompt questions, and brainstorm how to put their imaginaries and visions of responsibilities into the design decisions, features, process, and governance. Groups have the freedom to extend further discussions and share with other participants in the last 10 minutes of Session 2.

Closing and Consolidation (30 minutes)

In the closing part, we wrap up the workshop with a short presentation summarizing the work, highlighting areas of future work and opportunities, and proposing ways to keep engaged with the responsible design community through Discord and beyond.

6 Accessibility

Authors will be encouraged to submit position papers or other media in accessible versions. We will use a platform that enables captions for speech. We will also determine participants' accessibility needs in advance and will liaise with the CHI Accessibility Chair if further support is needed. We will encourage participants to engage with the Gary Marsden Travel Fellowship to increase the mobility of people without funding.

7 Post-workshop plans

As part of the workshop, we will facilitate discussions around future collaborations and continue discussions of the proposed topics through various online channels. This workshop website will serve as a location to publish a workshop summary and link to future events.

The workshop Miro board will serve as a live repository of sociotechnical imaginaries, providing curated case studies, reflections, mappings, and discussion notes, which can provide input for future events and workshops. We will focus on submitting the outcome

of collective efforts and discussions during the workshop for publication, and the reflections and imaginaries will guide decisions about extending collaborations beyond CHI 2026.

8 Call for Participation

Sociotechnical imaginaries help to frame potential benefits and risks associated with digital technology. This workshop aims to develop imaginaries for how responsible design can help address and mitigate gender-based harm online. We aim to bring together researchers, designers, technologists, and practitioners who are actively working on, or reflecting on, projects that intersect with gender, safety, and harm in digital spaces.

We invite interested researchers and practitioners to submit a short position statement (up to 2 pages excluding references, in CHI submission format) and bio (up to 200 words) that demonstrates their interest, experience, and knowledge in relevant topics. Submissions may present previously completed research, work-in-progress, emerging ideas, conceptual challenges, or opportunities for reflecting on responsible design and real-world experience. Relevant topics include, but are not limited to:

- Conceptual explorations of responsibility and online harm
- Representations of online safety, harm, and responsibility
- Experience of handling 'responsibility' in technology
- Online harassment and abuse prevention
- Responsible design
- Policy and governance implications in responsible design
- Methods and theories for conducting responsible design
- Responsible design with gendered or marginalized groups
- Critical reflection on responsible technology/responsible AI
- Novel perspectives in responsible design and its future
- Organizational contexts of responsible design and development
- Applications of infrastructural justice to responsible design

Acceptance will be based on workshop relevance and the potential to contribute to discussions, as reviewed by workshop organizers. All successful workshop position papers require at least one author to attend the workshop in person and be registered for the workshop. More information is available on https://oucpwo.github.io/chi-sird-2026/.

9 Expected size of attendance

We expect 30 in-person attendees.

Acknowledgments

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