



Trauma-Informed Design: A Collaborative Approach to Building Safer Online Spaces

Casey Randazzo
Rutgers University School of
Communication and Information
New Brunswick, NJ, USA
cer124@rutgers.edu

Carol F. Scott
University of Michigan School of
Information
Ann Arbor, MI, USA
cfscott@umich.edu

Rosanna Bellini
Cornell Tech
New York, New York, USA
rbellini@cornell.edu

Tawfiq Ammari
Rutgers University School of
Communication and Information
New Brunswick, NJ, USA
tawfiq.ammari@rutgers.edu

Michael Ann DeVito
University of Colorado Boulder
Department of Information Science
Boulder, CO, USA
michaelann@colorado.edu

Bryan Semaan
University of Colorado Boulder
Department of Information Science
Boulder, CO, USA
bryan.semaan@colorado.edu

Nazanin Andalibi
University of Michigan School of
Information
Ann Arbor, MI, USA
andalibi@umich.edu

ABSTRACT

Trauma-informed design, which is gaining greater attention in the Computer-Supported Cooperative Work (CSCW) and Human-Computer Interaction (CHI) communities, focuses on designing and managing online platforms with consideration for the prevalence and impact of trauma on individuals, communities, and wider societies. This approach aims to build safer and more supportive digital spaces for users who have a history or trauma. This workshop enables participants to critically examine the application and measurement of trauma-informed approaches to social media. We bring together researchers and practitioners to explore the challenges and opportunities of trauma-informed design, with the goal of creating more compassionate and ethical online spaces that prioritizes user safety, well-being, and healing. Participants will engage in activities that encourage collaboration, discussion, and reflection on the principles of trauma-informed design and their application in different online contexts. By the end of the workshop, participants will have a better understanding of the principles of trauma-informed design and be equipped with tools and strategies to apply these principles in their work.

CCS CONCEPTS

• **Human-centered computing** → **Human computer interaction (HCI)**.

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KEYWORDS

Trauma-informed design; trauma; well-being; Social media; Human-Computer Interaction; Mental health; Privacy; Social support; Content moderation

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1 INTRODUCTION

Trauma, an emotional response to distressing events, affects approximately 70% of people globally [13]. The consequences of traumatic experiences can be significant and enduring, adversely impacting the mental health and well-being of those who experience it [30]. A growing number of Human-Computer Interaction (HCI) scholars have called attention to the importance of understanding trauma-informed practices for platform design [16, 35]. Social media platforms, for example, have drawn criticism for their role in perpetuating trauma for individuals experiencing intimate partner violence [12, 31], racial and cultural discrimination [1, 17, 28], gender and sexual minorities [20, 33, 37], people living with disabilities [2, 4, 21], at the intersection of identities [11, 29], managing social or internalized stigma [5, 6], and facing difficulties articulating their experiences [32]. To support these communities, this workshop employs the trauma-informed design framework [16, 35], which adapts the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration's (SAMHSA; [30]) trauma-informed principles (e.g., safety, trustworthiness and transparency, peer support, collaboration and mutuality, empowerment, voice, and choice, cultural, historical, and gender issues) to the novel context of platform design.

1.1 Trauma-Informed Framework

In this section, we review several of SAMHSA's [30] trauma-informed principles as outlined in HCI frameworks [16, 35].

1.1.1 Trustworthiness and Transparency. In the context of platform design, the principle of trustworthiness and transparency focuses on how platforms collect, use, and store data, attempting to ensure that user privacy and safety are protected [12, 18]. While transparency is crucial in building trust between users and platforms [16], individuals report feeling uncertainty in response to ambiguous moderation decisions and algorithmic systems [26, 27, 32].

1.1.2 Empowerment, voice, and choice. This principle is concerned with instilling a sense of agency in users by allowing them to control their platform experience [23]. This entails offering customization options and providing tools that allow users to manage their exposure to sensitive content (e.g., trigger warnings, word filters) [7, 32, 35]. Haimson et al. [20], for example, found that trigger warnings (i.e., brief warning messages that precede potentially triggering or sensitive content) contribute to the strengthening of online communities, help foster peer support, and establish secure environments for transgender users. Implementing filtering systems tailored to individual users [25] can provide users with the agency to control which potentially harmful content (e.g., misogyny, homophobia) is filtered from their comment sections or feeds. Providing users with a sense of agency over their experiences is especially important for individuals, groups, and communities who experience trauma, as it promotes self-efficacy, supporting the healing process [16, 35].

1.1.3 Social and Cultural Lens. Being aware of cultural, historical, and gender issues can help moderators and administrators to be sensitive to diverse backgrounds, perspectives, and experiences of users [1]. This principle includes addressing racial bias and discrimination issues [28] and ensuring that platforms cater to various cultural needs [17, 29]. Adopting a diverse lens is essential for creating online spaces that are supportive and understanding of all users [24], particularly for those who have experienced trauma [35].

1.1.4 Peer support. Peer support fosters connections and interactions between users, enabling them to benefit from the mutual and reciprocal support [16, 30, 35]. It is critical to trauma recovery because it allows users to receive validation and empathy from others who have gone through similar experiences [9, 10, 15]. Peer support can be effectively integrated into social media platform designs by, for example, creating alternative safe spaces (e.g., [3, 32] for individuals to discuss sensitive topics. However, other work shows that online spaces deemed supportive do not serve this function equitably [11] and can present a challenge in online communities, especially given that interlocking identities and power structures could amplify threats to marginalized communities (e.g., women in patriarchal societies) [1]. Andalibi and colleagues found that online support groups and pregnancy tracking apps can be invalidating, unsupportive, or even harmful for people experiencing pregnancy losses [8], including for LGBTQ people [11].

1.1.5 Safety. Perceptions of safety can vary depending on community moderation [1] or the platform's ability to prevent abuse [36]. In trauma-informed design, safety can entail developing and

applying moderation guidelines, policies, and procedures that prioritize user safety [26] and reduce the likelihood of re-traumatization, wherein people relive their trauma [35]. Effective governance requires consistent monitoring and responsiveness to issues that arise [1], and engages users in co-designing policies that protect community well-being [36].

1.2 Objective

A trauma-informed approach, based on SAMHSA's principles [30], is relatively novel in HCI [16, 35] and thus presents application challenges. To help address these challenges, this workshop brings together a diverse group of researchers and practitioners who can build upon current trauma-informed HCI frameworks [16, 35] and develop specific guidelines and indicators to inform the application and measurement of trauma-informed design. By doing so, we answer Scott et al.'s [35] call to develop more applicable mappings for the HCI community when designing online spaces. During the workshop, participants will engage in collaborative activities, discussions, and self-reflective exercises to effectively integrate trauma-informed principles into their work.

As designers, engineers, researchers, and practitioners, we are committed to crafting platforms that consider the full range of user experiences — including potential trauma — ensuring user safety and well-being, and designing mechanisms that address and mitigate harm. By assembling participants from diverse professional backgrounds, this workshop aims to examine the challenges and opportunities of trauma-informed design in order to facilitate the creation of more empathetic and responsive online spaces. We emphasize both prevention and intervention, focusing on how we can best respond when trauma occurs and strive to prevent it from happening in the first place.

2 THEMES FOR CONSIDERATION

This workshop will explore the following themes, which aim to provide a more profound understanding of trauma-informed design principles and their potential applications in HCI:

2.1 Challenges and Opportunities for Trauma-Informed Design

This workshop will consider the role and limitations of empathy mapping, user personas, narrative techniques [22], and the integration of compassion ([14] and DEIA principles (Diversity, Equity, Inclusion, and Accessibility) in the design process. Scott et al. [35] emphasize that incorporating DEIA involves critical self-reflection [19, 34], allowing designers and researchers to understand their own perspectives and biases, and the impact these have on the design of digital platforms. This theme will also consider how to partner with users, which highlights the collaboration and mutuality of the trauma-informed principles [30], when developing or implementing trauma-informed solutions.

Additionally, we will consider the challenges and opportunities of integrating support components into social media platforms (e.g., peer support networks, mental health resources, self-care tools) and the importance of co-designing these tools with trauma-informed clinicians. We will also examine potential modifications, such as customizable privacy settings, content filters, and trigger warnings,

empowering trauma-affected users to personalize their platform experience. Lastly, we will explore the misuse of community-based trauma-care tools, and how we can improve their implementation and perceived value to users who have experienced trauma.

2.2 Developing Indicators for Trauma-Informed Design

Gathering feedback from users, particularly from those who have experienced trauma, is crucial for assessing the effectiveness of trauma-informed design. We will discuss methodologies for collecting such feedback (e.g., surveys, interviews, focus groups, usability testing), and how we can use these approaches responsibly and sensitively to minimize further harm. We will attempt to identify ways to work towards best practices for trauma-informed usability testing. We will also explore the development of quantitative and qualitative metrics for assessing trauma-informed design.

3 WORKSHOP PLANS AND STRUCTURE

3.1 Pre-Workshop Plans

Recruitment: The organizing committee will disseminate a call for participation to relevant research communities on social media platforms (e.g., CHIMeta, Twitter, Mastodon). We will also disseminate the call in relevant professional mailing lists, and word-of-mouth. We will also focus on disseminating the workshop in communities for trauma-informed clinicians.

Website: We will create a dedicated workshop website to supplement recruitment materials and provide updated information to help participants prepare for a productive workshop (e.g., workshop plans, participant profiles and submissions with permission).

3.2 Day-of Logistics

Structure: The one-day workshop will bring together 15-20 participants (e.g., clinicians, social workers, HCI researchers, practitioners such as designers and engineers) interested in trauma-informed design and HCI. Participants will be invited to submit papers of 2-5 pages (plus references) in the ACM Extended Abstracts Format, describing original research and/or reflecting on their interest and experience in the topic.

Format: We will utilize a hybrid format to enable remote attendees to engage in real-time discussions and activities. Breakout sessions will be organized in a way that ensures equitable distribution of input from remote and in-person participants. We will also provide detailed instructions and guidelines to ensure a smooth and inclusive experience for all, regardless of their mode of attendance.

3.3 Suggested Workshop Schedule

Welcome and Icebreaker (1 hour): Workshop organizers will introduce themselves and the workshop, followed by a positionality exercise where participants will engage in self-reflection using a mural board.

Empowering Users (1 hour): This activity will challenge participants to reimagine digital platforms to prioritize the needs and preferences of trauma-affected users. Participants will brainstorm ideas for customizable privacy settings, content filters, and trigger

Time	Activity Title
9:00 AM	Welcome and Icebreaker Activity
10:00 AM	Empowering Users Activity
11:00 AM	<i>Coffee break</i>
11:30 AM	Co-Designing Support Components Activity
12:30 PM	<i>Lunch</i>
14:30 PM	Designing Safe Spaces Activity
15:30 PM	Measuring Impact Activity
16:15 PM	Reflections and Discussion
16:45 PM	Closing Remarks and Next Steps

Table 1: Workshop schedule

warnings, creating prototype designs that effectively incorporate these features. Each group will present their findings in an interactive gallery walk where they will receive constructive feedback and insights from their peers.

Co-designing Trauma-Informed Support Components (1 hour): In this hands-on activity, participants will collaborate with clinicians to co-design support components for social media platforms, such as peer support networks, mental health resources, and self-care tools. Each group will focus on a specific component and discuss the challenges and opportunities in integrating it into existing platforms. Participants will also explore strategies to minimize misuse and improve implementation, culminating in a collaborative showcase of their co-designed solutions.

Designing Safe Spaces (1 hour): Participants will engage in an exercise to create community guidelines that foster safe and supportive environments on social media platforms for trauma-affected users. Each group will focus on specific aspects of the guidelines, such as language, behavior, reporting mechanisms, and moderation practices. The groups will share their insights and recommendations, culminating in a collectively designed set of trauma-informed moderation guidelines.

Measuring Impact (45 min): This activity will challenge participants to identify metrics for assessing the effectiveness of trauma-informed design. Through a series of interactive brainstorming sessions, participants will work together to establish potential benchmarks, indicators, and methods for measurement. The activity will culminate in a group reflection and synthesis of the proposed metrics, equipping participants with a comprehensive understanding of how to evaluate the impact of trauma-informed designs.

3.4 Post-Workshop Plans

Following the workshop, organizers will write an article summarizing the outputs, including the insights, challenges, and potential solutions related to trauma-informed social media design. The article will be submitted to a HCI publication (e.g., Interactions) for wider dissemination of the workshop findings. Additionally, the organizers will facilitate ongoing knowledge sharing and collaboration within the community nurtured during the workshop. This may include creating an online forum or mailing list for participants to continue discussions, share resources, and collaborate on research

projects. The workshop organizers will also explore opportunities for future events, such as follow-up workshops or special interest groups (SIGs) at relevant conferences (e.g., CSCW, CHI), to maintain momentum and further advance the field of trauma-informed design in HCI.

4 ORGANIZING COMMITTEE

Casey Randazzo (she/her) is a Ph.D. candidate at the School of Communication and Information at Rutgers University. Casey focuses on the role of computer-mediated communication in recovery from personal traumatic experiences such as sexual assault, gun violence, intimate partner violence, and community-wide trauma such as environmental disasters or catastrophic events. Through this research, Casey aims to promote the implementation and adoption of trauma-informed design principles to create safer digital environments, mitigate retraumatization, and support recovery for individuals and communities affected by trauma.

Carol Scott (she/her), Ph.D., M.S.W., is a trauma expert. She has been studying trauma and applying trauma-informed approaches for over a decade. Dr. Scott's research intersects social work, psychology, HCI, and health informatics. Currently, Dr. Scott is a Postdoctoral Research Fellow at the University of Michigan, School of Information. Using mixed methods, she studies:

- (1) the lived experiences and well-being of various groups, including: (a) toddlers, children, teens, and emerging adults; (b) individuals involved in the criminal justice system; and (c) people who have lived experience of harm on- and offline.
- (2) how these groups use and interact with digital technology,
- (3) how their tech use and engagement impact their mental and behavioral health, and addressing pain points by designing mHealth and just-in-time adaptive interventions.

Dr. Scott has conducted similar workshops, including “Becoming Trauma-Informed: Applying Theory, Care, and Practical Skills for Research and Design” for Rosenfeld Media Advancing Research Conference 2023, “Trauma-Informed Technology” for Lifeline in Tasmania, and “Trauma-Informed Research” for the Ethical Design Network.

Rosanna Bellini (she/her) is a Postdoctoral Scholar at Cornell Tech, New York City. In her research, she focuses on the misuse of digital technologies in intimate partner contexts, with a specialization in working first-hand with adversarial users (‘abusers’) and financial harms. To mitigate the risk of re-traumatization and burnout for at-risk groups and researchers, she is determined to identify the tenets of safer HCI and security and privacy (S&P) research.

Tawfiq Ammari (he/him) is an Assistant Professor at the School of Communication and Information at Rutgers University. Dr. Ammari's work lies at the intersection of Social Computing and Science, Technology, and Society Studies (STS). His work focuses on the interplay between technological and social role change. Specifically, he studies how large societal shifts (changing masculinity norms) are associated with online interactions and social movements.

Michael Ann DeVito (she/her) is an Assistant Professor at Northeastern University in Computer Science and Communication Studies. Dr. DeVito specializes in Human-Artificial Intelligence Collaboration in the context of social systems, especially social platforms. Her research closes gaps in understanding between users and AI-driven social systems to enable sustainable, intentional, and mutually beneficial Human-AI collaboration. Dr. DeVito develops and employs in-depth, qualitative, participatory methods to examine and address friction and distrust-inducing disconnects, often in the context of marginalized identity and communities.

Bryan Semaan (he/him) is an Associate Professor and the Associate Chair for Graduate Studies in the Department of Information Science at the University of Colorado Boulder. He examines the role of Information and Communication Technologies in enabling resilience amongst people immersed in challenging contexts (e.g. people's experiences with racism and stereotyping, LGBTQ+ people “coming out”, and refugees integrating into new sociocultural contexts). Dr. Semaan's work draws on critical perspectives (e.g. decolonial, critical race, and feminist) to understand, critique, and create ethical, moral, just and equitable sociotechnical systems.

Nazanin Andalibi (she/her) is an Assistant Professor at the University of Michigan School of Information. Dr. Andalibi's research is in HCI, CSCW, and Social Computing. She studies the interplay between marginality and technology. Her research examines how marginality is experienced, enacted, facilitated, or disrupted in and as mediated through sociotechnical systems. Related to this workshop, she has conducted research at the intersection of technology and reproductive health, sexual abuse, and mental health.

5 CALL FOR PARTICIPATION

We invite researchers, designers, engineers, and practitioners to participate in a one-day workshop on Trauma-Informed Design at Computer-Supported Cooperative Work (CSCW). This workshop aims to explore the challenges and opportunities associated with integrating trauma-informed design frameworks for social media platforms, with the goal of creating more compassionate and ethical online spaces that prioritizes the safety and well-being of users. Workshop participants will engage in presentations, discussions, and activities, later breaking into groups to develop actionable guidelines and indicators for measuring the principles of trauma-informed social media design. In this workshop, participants will uncover the possibilities and social and psychological impacts that should be considered when designing trauma-informed platforms. We will explore themes such as: 1) Challenges and Opportunities for Trauma-Informed Design; and 2) Measuring Indicators of Trauma-Informed Design.

Participants are invited to submit a 2-5 page (plus references) position paper in the ACM Extended Abstracts Format, describing original research and/or reflecting a contributor's interest or experience with trauma-informed principles or social media/community design. The papers should be submitted via email to **TraumaInformedCSCW@gmail.com**.

At least one author of each accepted position paper is required to register for and attend the workshop. All participants are also required to register for both the workshop and for at least one day

of the conference. Find more information on our website: <https://sites.google.com/view/traumainformedcscw>.

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