

# Positech@CSCW2024: Statement of Research Interest

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I am a scholar of online safety and abuse working across HCI and computer security and privacy (S&P). My work has tended to focus on the harmful uses of technologies, such as the ways technology can be used for sexual abuse or interpersonal abuse. As a researcher, my focus has been on these harms because they are powerful examples for demonstrating the ways that technology does not serve the most marginalized among us and calling for action. However, as a person who uses technology all day long, I am driven by the belief that we critique the things we love. I have made and maintained close friendships and relationships because of social technologies; I am regularly delighted by creators sharing their hobbies and talents on TikTok; I learn from grassroots resources shared freely and widely on Instagram.

Efforts to address the negative impacts of technology can be deeply informative about the potential for enhancing human connections and well-being. In the way that anger can be an informative emotion for illuminating how and why we may feel wronged, evaluating harms closely can reveal underlying motivations for and imaginations of a better world. In this statement of research interest, I reflect on my own work in three areas—data privacy, social media, and intimate digital relationships—to identify opportunities for Positech.

## 1 Data Privacy

In the age of surveillance capitalism, data privacy is a persistent individual issue. My own work has shown how transparency mechanisms targeted at individuals, such as longitudinal browsing extensions [6] and GDPR data access requests [3], are partial solutions in this regard but there are still more opportunities for shared and community engagement. Though data privacy is often thought of as a tedious individual chore, Spotify Wrapped and similar reports from social technology demonstrate that data can be a site for positive engagement. Current individual approaches to data privacy are valuable but limited, suggesting Positech that incorporates community-oriented perspectives to protect the values that privacy aims to protect.

Opportunities:

- How could aggregated online data be leveraged to create new sites of positive engagement?
- Which information do we regard as valuable because we want to keep it private, and how can technologies facilitate enhancing that value while respecting privacy?

## 2 Social Media

Discourses about security and privacy are common on social media, though participants do not use the language that academics would use. Rarely would content creators frame their intentions or motivations as security- or privacy-related, though their actions may unintentionally or intentionally have that impact. TikTok creators seeking to provide helpful tips for parents uncritically recommend family surveillance apps or introduce children to online and offline risks; others seeking to support partners in intimate relationships propose technology-facilitated tactics for coercive control [1, 5]. Relatedly, victim-survivors of image-based sexual abuse often turn to Reddit to ask for help navigating active crises and begin to heal [2]. While these projects focused on harmful consequences, they also demonstrate the potential for social media to create informal spaces for conversation about sensitive and stigmatized topics.

Opportunities:

- How can Positech leverage existing affordances of social media (e.g., scale, anonymity) to support enriching experiences online?
- What new affordances of social technology could be fruitful for creating online discourses that don't currently exist?

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### 3 Intimate Digital Relationships

While my prior and ongoing work has explored image-based sexual abuse [2] and noconsensual synthetic explicit imagery (also referred to as “deepfake nudes”) [4], these projects illuminate that technologies could also support intimate relationships in healthy ways. For example, other work has described consensual technology that draws on a FRIES model of consent to build empowering technology.<sup>1</sup> Technology creates new and unique forms of intimacy that are not possible (or less feasible) in offline relationships, such as consensual sexting, long-distance relationships, and more.

Opportunities:

- Where might offline relationships be supported by new social technologies?
- How can Positech create or support new forms of intimate digital relationships?

### Conclusion

My research is driven by the belief that critique can be productive. In this statement of research interest, I have explored open questions that I have about how to expand my research towards moving beyond protection and prevention. I would be excited to attend the Positech workshop at CSCW 2024 to join a community with a shared hope for the future of technology.

### References

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<sup>1</sup><https://www.consentfultech.io/>