Many Worlds of Ethics: Ethical Pluralism in CSCW

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ABSTRACT

Although CSCW has shown a strong interest in diversity and inclusion, the literature predominantly reflects ethics rooted in Western universalism, modernism, scientism, and Euro-centrism. Consequently, CSCW theories and practices tend to marginalize millions of people worldwide whose ethical perspectives do not align with the narrow focus of ethics and values within CSCW. In an effort to embrace ethical pluralism within CSCW, we propose a day-long hybrid workshop in CSCW and invite researchers and practitioners to initiate conversations centered around three themes: (a) foregrounding ethical diversities, (b) adapting diverse ethics, and (c) addressing challenges, barriers, and limitations associated with incorporating plural ethics into CSCW. Through this workshop, we aim to bring together CSCW scholars and practitioners, fostering a community that advocates for and advances the cause of pluralism in socio-technical systems.

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CCS CONCEPTS

• **Human-centered computing** → **Collaborative and social computing theory, concepts and paradigms**; **HCI theory, concepts and models**.

KEYWORDS

pluralism, ethics, values, co-existence, adaptation

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1 INTRODUCTION

Social computing combines people and their ways of being with technology, and in doing so, implicitly and/or explicitly alludes to various ethical positions [21, 22, 36, 47, 61]. On the one hand, such ethical positions guide the design, implementation, and analysis of these technologies [5, 42]. At the same time, the ethical orientations and affordances influence the intervention, use, adoption,

and adaptation of social computing technologies in any cultural context [1, 2, 40]. The cultural contexts are often shaped by people's ethics, values, and morality, which are largely influenced by the complex dynamics of their history [7, 11, 26, 51], politics [41], faith [35, 37, 40], spirituality [49], aesthetics [30], hope [25], identity [19, 44], and resource availability [59], among others. Moreover, due to increased mobility, geopolitical influences, and cultural confrontations through technology in the last few decades, among other global-scale interactions, people from different ethnic backgrounds are increasingly coming together, both in geographic regions and online spheres. However, the so-called "plural" societies and associated socio-technical systems often fall short in their practices to adapt to various paradigms of ethics, resolve ethical conflicts to mitigate possible harm, and create affordances through policies and technologies to address pluralism [42, 54]. Hence, many faiths, ethics, and associated people are left out, often silently.

CSCW has historically predominantly espoused universalist and modern ethical principles based on rationalism, empiricism, scientism, and timelessness, which are primarily practiced in Western and secular regions [42, 53, 58]. CSCW, however, recognizes that such universal and modern ethics are exclusionary to millions of people outside the West, whose histories and contexts are often shaped by colonialism, resource scarcity, and lack of access to technology [2, 3, 59]. A stronger influence of faith in public spheres and abundance of oral and Indigenous practices in many regions around the world are often not recognized in modern social computing systems (e.g., [10, 27, 42, 50]). As such, CSCW domains of privacy, sustainability, development, healthcare, feminisms, and content moderation have called for the adaptation of diverse systems of ethics towards a move to considering and adapting multiple systems of sociocultural values (see, for example, [39, 48]). The calls for decolonization, postcolonialism, postsecularism, feminism, posthumanism, and identity recognition have made it increasingly important to recognize, address, and adapt pluralistic forms of ethics in the research and practices of sociotechnical systems. Therefore, CSCW scholars and practitioners must embrace the opportunities and confront the challenges to recognize and honor diversity and difference, while simultaneously assessing values and principles that can guide design in complex and varied contexts. To borrow from the Zapatistas, "In the world we want many worlds to fit" [33].

In this backdrop, our proposed one-day-long hybrid workshop will advance the agenda of pluralism in CSCW and related research, focusing on the following questions:

- How can we recognize and adapt various systems of ethics in social computing systems in CSCW?
- How to suspend the belief that there must be a single ethical stance, and how to show multiple, diverse ethics in mind, in theory, and in practice?
- What might be the challenges of pluralism in CSCW research?

The goal of this workshop is to bring together CSCW scholars and practitioners to address questions and develop agendas that advance pluralism in order to make sociotechnical systems more inclusive, accessible, and just. The impetus for this workshop is the feedback received from the CHI 2022 workshop on faith, religion, and spirituality [40], as well as subsequent workshops that have explored similar issues [34]. The CHI 2022 workshop was attended by over 50 scholars who presented 22 short papers. A subset of these papers was published in a special issue of the ACM Interactions, calling for the integration of ethics in CSCW design and the consideration of pluralistic ethics in sociotechnical systems. This proposed workshop aims to build on these efforts by creating a space for discussion and collaboration that can further advance the field of CSCW towards a more pluralistic and socially responsible direction.

2 WORKSHOP GOALS AND THEMES

2.1 Foregrounding Ethical Diversities

CSCW theories and practices have, to a significant extent, centered on modern, Western, and secular ethics [40, 53]. This emphasis can be attributed to the field's early reliance on values such as techno-solutionism, empiricism, scientific rationalism, and individualism [2, 18], which were inherited from the modern values of Enlightenment (see, for example [58]). Consequently, CSCW has largely overlooked alternative ethical frameworks that may not be fully represented in its theories, concepts, and design practices. Moreover, failure to acknowledge diverse cultural practices have further marginalized non-Western values and ethics from modern technologies, leaving many Indigenous individuals and Nations worldwide at a disadvantage.

Various recent movements within CSCW have highlighted the importance of recognizing diverse systems of ethics. Postcolonial, feminist, postsecular, value-sensitive, and decolonial approaches have challenged the singular and universal ethics within the field and advocated for exploring alternative practices, norms, values, habits, and behaviors that may foreground ethical diversities within and beyond the West [8, 16, 26, 42, 46]. While these efforts are laudable, there are still challenges in foregrounding diverse ethics. For example, value-sensitive design approaches have created significant potential to engage with diverse systems of ethics, but they still rely on value neutralism, which creates a power dynamic where historically dominant ethics often emerge as the "winners" [13, 57].

This workshop theme invites participants to (re)evaluate CSCW's orientation to ethics questions with the goal of exploring how some forms of ethical frameworks are prioritized over others and how CSCW can be inclusive by recognizing marginalized ethics.

2.2 Adaptation, Accommodation, and Co-existence of Diverse Ethics

Despite the arguments for integrating plural ethics in CSCW, limited thought has been given to how to adapt various forms of ethics to current technologies and policies. This focus on adaptation raises important questions at both the existential and cultural levels within CSCW research. On the existential level, followers of many religious and classical philosophical traditions may interpret their community ethics in a "perfectionist" manner, which has historically led to "fundamentalism" and negative consequences [32]. The fear of negative consequences often results in a stereotypical position where extreme interpretations overshadow moderate and pluralistic ethical interpretations within the same philosophical tradition. For instance, even the strictest traditions of ethics have

pluralistic traditions that allow for diverse ethical practices as long as they align with core values [31]. Disregarding the plural forms of practiced ethics within a philosophical tradition, such as faith, and the fear of negative consequences stemming from a monolithic view of a community often restrict the integration of various ethical systems with sociotechnical systems.

At the cultural level, while modern secular ethics promises ethical pluralism in practice, it does so by separating the private and public spheres and relegating religions to the private sphere. Post-secular scholars argue that this modern approach to pluralism has been unsuccessful, as the separation of private and public spheres does not effectively function in practice [6, 23, 38]. Additionally, "procedural" modern secular ethics prioritizes the market economy and gives preference to certain values that align with market idealism, while neglecting others [40, 58]. In line with the insights from postmodernism and postsecularism, in sociotechnical systems, various systems of ethics beyond Western modern ethics continue to play a significant role. This can be observed in the motivations of some researchers and their projects (see [5], for example), as well as in how people adopt and utilize these systems [41, 42]. Therefore, it is crucial to recognize that adhering solely to the values of modernism will not inherently steer CSCW towards pluralism. Instead, CSCW must broaden its scholarly pursuits to accommodate and adapt various systems of ethics through its theories, methodologies, and practices.

This theme invites participants to explore how to adapt different systems of ethics to each other. We argue that this goal of adaptation is more important than ever, as CSCW design must routinely deal with various systems of values and ethics due to global migration, communication, and trade relations. We invite CSCW communities to evaluate the methodological, conceptual, and design tools that might be thwarting or advancing dialogues, negotiation, and cooperation in finding common interests for ethical pluralism. Additionally, we are interested in exploring the scopes, contexts, and temporality of such a vision of adapting systems of ethics.

2.3 Challenges, Barriers, and Limits of Adapting Plural Ethics in CSCW

As CSCW strives to embrace a moral and political agenda of pluralism, it must also be proactive in addressing some of the pressing challenges that come with it. One of the major challenges of ethical pluralism is the need to address conflicting positions among different schools of thought to enable the co-existence of diverse systems of ethics. While some modern and pragmatic scholars suggest finding a common core of values upon which various traditions can agree (see, for example [12]), this approach has been successful in some social situations but has failed in others (such as abortion [55]). Another approach has been to find social conditions for co-existence based on common grounds [60], but both approaches assume culturally-localized ideas of moral autonomy and human reasoning. Recent work within CSCW underscores the importance of addressing the tension between universalism and pluralism to navigate potential challenges and opportunities [15, 56].

However, postmodern and postsecular sensitivities pose additional challenges for pluralism with regard to contextuality. In an age of planetary-scale communication and mixing of culture, it is difficult to envision the modes and complexity of ethical diversities and their co-existence. Boundaries and categories also pose complexities, as clearly defined boundaries in modern concepts, such as race, class, nations, and genders, have historically regulated identity, agency, and actions, but these boundaries are often ambiguous, oppressive, limiting, and tools for marginalization [9, 14, 43]. The growing interest in intersectionality further undermines simple ideas of boundaries "between" distinct and assumed-homogeneous groups (e.g., [17, 45]). Boundaries tend to binarize persons into being on one "side" or the other of the boundary. In a pluralistic vision for CSCW, negotiating boundaries is a challenge, and the negotiations themselves may limit CSCW's ambitions in adapting plural forms of ethics. However, Data Feminism argues to question binaries [20], and there is an HCI tradition to rethink boundaries as rich zones of hybridity where diverse knowledge and beliefs may combine to show us paths toward the new [24, 28]. Related feminist and participatory projects have opened the question of who or what has ethical stakeholder status in designing interactions with more-than-human entities as considered by diverse cultures and ways-of-knowing [4, 29, 52]. These insights make it important to initiate CSCW discourses around some important questions. For example, what are the possibilities to treat pluralistic ethics as diverse contributions to a hybrid space where new ethics can be co-constructed? How can we create hybrid spaces of pluralism in CSCW to coexist with different modes of our ethical diversities?

In light of these challenges, we invite participants to recognize these complexities in their theoretical, conceptual, interventionist, design, and evaluation pursuits of CSCW systems that embrace ethical pluralism.

3 ORGANIZERS

The organizers in this proposal come from different geographical, contextual, and career backgrounds. All of the organizing members have conducted research related to values, ethics, and pluralism. We have collective experiences of organizing several workshops at CHI and CSCW.

Mohammad Rashidujjaman Rifat (primary contact) is a Ph.D. candidate in the Department of Computer Science, a Schwartz Reisman Institute Graduate Fellow, and a doctoral collaborative specialization student in the Munk School of Global Affairs and Public Policy at the University of Toronto. His research is at the intersection of computation and faith. Rifat conducts qualitative, computational, and design research to explore faith-based ethics, rationality, and politics; and designs technologies to mitigate faith-based intolerance and make technologies inclusive of plural ethics.

Ayesha Bhimdiwala is a Ph.D. student in the School of Information at the University of Texas at Austin. Her research interests are primarily focused on Human-Computer Interaction (HCI) and Design. She is currently studying how we might approach, understand, and respond to faith- and gender-based oppression in digital spaces and reimagine the design of digital spaces.

Ananya Bhattacharjee is a Ph.D. student in the Department of Computer Science at the University of Toronto. His research focuses on building technology to help people manage mental health. He conducts research in different social and cultural backgrounds: he has collaborated with Mental Health America to understand

users' needs and design interventions accordingly; he conducted field studies in Bangladesh to understand the alignment between existing mental health technologies and local people's customs and values. His research works have been published in top venues like CHI, CSCW, TOCHI, and JMIR.

Amna Batool is a Ph.D. candidate at the University of Michigan School of Information specializing in Human-Computer Interaction (HCI) and Information and Communication Technologies for Development (ICTD) with a focus on improving women's privacy, health, and adaptation needs in low-resource settings. Her work incorporates feminist, cultural, and intersectionality theories, utilizing contextual inquiries and system design. Currently, she's collaborating with law enforcement agencies to mitigate the impact of non-consensual disclosures of women's information on social media platforms in South Asian communities.

Dipto Das is a Ph.D. candidate in the Department of Information Science at the University of Colorado Boulder. His research interest lies at the intersection of human-computer interaction and social computing. Drawing on decolonial and postcolonial perspectives, he studies the identity expression and technology practices of the multi-dimensionally marginalized communities in the Global South.

Nusrat Jahan Mim is a Doctor of Design Candidate at the Graduate School of Design, Harvard University. Her work draws upon cutting-edge critical literature in Urban Design Politics around Faith and Informalities and addresses the contemporary struggles of marginalized communities within the globalized projects of modernization, urbanization, and digitization.

Abdullah Hasan Safir is a Research Assistant at LCFI, University of Cambridge whose current research interest lies in reimagining AI particularly from the Global South perspectives. He has recently finished his Master's in Digital Media and Culture from the University of Warwick with Commonwealth Scholarship, achieved distinctions and was awarded for his academic excellence. His previous publications engage with design and development issues at the intersection of digital technologies and their implications on Rohingya refugees and Internally Displaced Populations in Bangladesh.

Sharifa Sultana is a Ph.D. Candidate at Cornell University, USA and a Facebook Fellow. Her research focuses on the rural Bangladeshi population. She is interested in understanding how religious, spiritual and faith-based practices connect to the wellbeing of people in rural Bangladesh and other similar communities, and how technology plays a role in this.

Taslima Akter is a Postdoctoral researcher in the department of Informatics at University of California Irvine. Her research is centered on gaining an understanding of the accessibility and privacy hurdles that individuals with disabilities face. In her work, she has delved into the privacy requirements of a variety of marginalized groups such as those with visual impairments, racial minorities, and ROTC students. Furthermore, she is currently engaged in designing systems that take privacy into account for these groups.

C. Estelle Smith is an Assistant Professor in the Department of Computer Science at the Colorado School of Mines. Dr. Smith's research focuses on building a new area of Human-Computer Interaction in Computational Spiritual Support (see bit.ly/sacredtech). This requires a pluralist perspective honoring both the diversity of users' religious, spiritual, or faith-based beliefs, and the central importance of these beliefs in relation to their health, wellness, and use of sociotechnical systems.

Bryan Semaan is an Associate Professor in the Department of Information Science at the University of Colorado Boulder. His research examines the role of Information and Communication Technologies in enabling resilience amongst people immersed in challenging contexts (e.g. people's experiences with racism). His work draws on critical perspectives (e.g. decolonial and feminist) to create just and equitable sociotechnical systems.

Robert Soden is an Assistant Professor at the University of Toronto working on climate informatics, human-centered computing (HCC), and science and technology studies (STS). His research uses a range of ethnographic, participatory, and design research methods to evaluate and improve the technologies we use to understand and respond to environmental challenges like disasters and climate change.

Michael Muller works in the role of Senior Research Scientist in IBM Research on the historical and contemporary lands of the Wampanoag and Massachusetts peoples (known to settler-colonists as Cambridge MA USA). He works in a hybrid area of HCI, AI, collaboration, and social justice, with a current focus on generative AI. Michael co-proposed the CHI subcommittee on Critical and Sustainable Computing and Social Justice. He co-chairs SIGCHI CARES, and is a member of Fempower.tech.

Shaimaa Lazem is an Associate Research Professor at the City of Scientific Research and Technology Applications, Egypt. Her research interests include participatory design, decolonising HCI, and cross-cultural collaborations. She co-founded ArabHCI in 2016, and is currently working on designing and deploying an innovative curriculum on Responsible Human-Centered AI for African AI start-ups as part of a Google Research for Inclusion and Google AI awards.

Syed Ishtiaque Ahmed is an Assistant Professor of Computer Science at University of Toronto. He conducts research in the intersection between Human-Computer Interaction (HCI) and Information and Communication Technology and Development (ICTD). He received his Ph.D. in Information Science from Cornell University in 2017. He established the first HCI research lab in Bangladesh in 2009, and still maintains it. His research work is built around the concept of 'voice' that connects various branches of political philosophy to technology intervention. His current research focuses on the politics of faith and justification in computing.

4 WORKSHOP PLANS

We plan to hold the workshop in a hybrid format, with some organizers and participants joining in person and others remotely. We are dedicated to ensuring that the workshop is accessible to participants from all around the world, including those from the Global South. We recognize that traveling to attend conferences can be difficult due to logistical and financial constraints, and we welcome all participants to join us virtually to ensure their full participation in the workshop. To ensure maximum inclusivity, we are prioritizing the remote option, while still providing an in-person component for those who are able to attend the conference in person. The organizers have significant experience in organizing hybrid workshops and conferences, and will leverage this expertise

The workshop structure	
Time	**Activity**
9:00 - 9:10	Welcome and Introduction
9:10 - 10:00	Opening keynote
10:00 - 10:30	Coffee break
10:30 - 12:00	Brainstorming Session
12:00 - 13:00	Lunch Break
13:00 - 13:30	Group Presentation 1
13:30 - 14:00	Group Presentation 2
14:00 - 14:30	Group Presentation 3
14:30 - 15:00	Break
15:00 - 15:40	Closing keynote
15:40 - 16:00	Closing remarks

Table 1: The workshop structure.

to make the workshop engaging and interactive for all participants. In doing so, we aim to align with the core value of inclusion that underpins CSCW and is also the spirit of this workshop, which seeks to recognize and incorporate plural values and ethics.

To facilitate pre-workshop interactions and foster meaningful discussions during the workshop, we will encourage all participants to familiarize themselves with each other's work. To achieve this goal, we will "publish" and share the accepted workshop papers on a Slack channel with all participants and encourage them to read the papers. This will offer an opportunity for participants to become acquainted with each other's research, establish connections, and initiate discussions, leading to productive interactions during the workshop.

The workshop will span one day and will be structured according to the plan outlined in Table 1. The event will commence with introductory remarks from the organizers, followed by a keynote presentation. Subsequently, the organizers and participants will divide into three groups based on three predetermined themes that emerged from the submissions. The remote participants will join through Zoom (or the platform prescribed by CSCW), and at least two organizers will assist remote participants with technical and logistic issues. The remote participants will be grouped together with in-person participants so that the remote participants do not miss out on any activities. The organizers successfully followed a similar approach in several workshops. The organizers will provide necessary supplies, including papers, pencils, markers, and others, and will also set up online collaboration tools such as Miro, Slido, and Doc, to facilitate participation and collaboration among virtual and in-person participants. The workshop will conclude with a closing keynote and a discussion about future steps.

5 WEBSITE

The link to the website is https://sites.google.com/view/pluralismcscw/. We have prepared the website with the call for participation, information about attendance, and the workshop agenda.

6 CALL FOR PARTICIPATION

Despite a strong interest in diversity and inclusion, the CSCW community has marginally engaged with pluralism. In our day-long hybrid workshop, we will explore the opportunities and challenges of recognizing and adapting diverse ethics in CSCW theories and practices. We invite interested researchers and practitioners to submit a position paper under the following themes:

- **Foregrounding ethical diversities:** Identifying the systems of ethics that are marginalized in CSCW research, theories, and practices and underlining the importance of elevating those in CSCW.
- **Adaptation of diverse ethics:** Reflect on and propose ways in which future work in the CSCW community can adapt and accommodate for coexistence of diverse ethical paradigms.
- **Challenges, barriers, and limits of adapting plural ethics in CSCW:** What might be some pressing challenges of adopting pluralism in CSCW. What might be some negative consequences of adopting pluralism in sociotechnical systems?

Submission Details:

- Calls for proposal out: July 07, 2023
- First round submission deadline: August 15, 2023
- First round notification of acceptance: August 20, 2023
- Second round submission deadline: October 06, 2023
- First round notification of acceptance: October 08, 2023
- Page limit: 2-6 pages (including references).
- Template: ACM Master Article Submission Templates, single column.
- Selection criteria: Contribution to workshop's themes, quality of presentation, and potential to stimulate discussions.
- Submission languages: In spirit of pluralism, we will accept participants in Arabic, Bengali, English, Hindi, and Urdu. The authors will participate in English.
- Submission: Email to pluralismatcscw@gmail.com with the subject line "CSCW 2023 Workshop".
- NB: Upon acceptance, at least one author must attend the workshop, prepare a three-minute long video presentation, and register for the workshop and at least one day of the conference. Accepted papers will be archived on the workshop's website.
- Website: https://sites.google.com/view/pluralismcscw

7 POST WORKSHOP PLANS: COMMUNICATING INSIGHTS WITH THE WIDER AUDIENCE AND SUSTAINING THE COMMUNITY

Our aim is to communicate our ideas to a wide and diverse audience. To achieve this, all papers and presentations from the workshop will be hosted on our workshop website, which will enable anyone interested to review the materials at a later time. Furthermore, we will invite participants to join our email list and Slack channel to enable ongoing conversations and engagement.

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