

Allison McDonald

Contact

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Research Interests

My research interests lie in the intersection of technology and society, particularly in the areas of privacy and security. I am interested in how technology and tech policy exacerbate marginalization and impact digital safety.

Keywords: Security; Privacy; Human-Computer Interaction; Digital Inequity

Affiliations

Assistant Professor

Faculty of Computing and Data Sciences
Boston University, Boston, MA

September 2022 – present

Distinguished Fellow

Center on Privacy and Technology
Georgetown Law, Washington, DC

September 2022 – August 2023

Education

University of Michigan, Ann Arbor, MI

PhD, Computer Science

Advisors: J. Alex Halderman & Florian Schaub

Dissertation Title: Advancing Digital Safety for High-Risk Communities

2016 – 2022

Europa-Universität Viadrina, Frankfurt (Oder), Germany

As part of the Roger M. Jones Fellowship, I spent one year taking courses in an International Human Rights and Humanitarian Law LLM program.

2015 – 2016

University of Michigan, Ann Arbor, MI

Bachelor of Science in Engineering, Computer Science

Bachelor of Science, German

2010 – 2015

Awards & Honors

Honorable Mention, 2023

ACM CHI Conference on Human Factors in Computing Systems

Awarded for: “Nudes? Shouldn’t I charge for these”: Motivations of New Sexual Content Creators on OnlyFans

Distinguished Paper Award, 2021

USENIX Security Symposium

Awarded for: “It’s stressful having all these phones”: Investigating Sex Workers’ Safety Goals, Risks, and Practices Online

Service Award for Excellence in Climate, Diversity, Equity and Inclusion, 2020

This award recognizes the recipients’ commitment and action in working to improve the climate of the Computer Science & Engineering division.

Allison McDonald

Best Student Paper Award, 2020

IEEE Symposium on Security and Privacy

Awarded for: Can Voters Detect Malicious Manipulation of Ballot Marking Devices?

Best Paper Award, 2018

ACM CHI Conference on Human Factors in Computing Systems

Awarded for: Keeping a Low Profile?: Technology, Risk and Privacy among Undocumented Immigrants

Funding

Google Academic Research Award (\$97k), 2024

“Building Pathways to Ethical Use of AI in Research on Image-Based Sexual Abuse”

Facebook Fellowship, 2019 – 2021

Provides two years of funding to computer science doctoral students conducting innovative and relevant research.

Rackham Merit Fellowship, 2016

Provides funding for two years to selected incoming PhD students at U-M.

Roger M. Jones Fellowship, 2015

Provides one year of tuition and living expenses to one graduating engineer at the University of Michigan in order to deepen an engineering education through studying the humanities at a European university.

Publications

Conferences are the top-tier academic publishing venues in computer science, and involve a rigorous peer-review process. This is where the majority of my research is published.

Peer-Reviewed Conference Publications

The Sociotechnical Stack: Opportunities for Social Computing Research in Non-consensual Intimate Media

Li Qiwei, [Allison McDonald](#), Oliver L. Haimson, Sarita Schoenebeck, Eric Gilbert

Proceedings of the ACM on Human-Computer Interaction (CSCWI), November 2024

“I feel physically safe but not politically safe”: Understanding the Digital Threats and Safety Practices of OnlyFans Creators

Ananta Soneji, Vaughn Hamilton, Adam Doupé, [Allison McDonald](#), Elissa M. Redmiles

33rd USENIX Security Symposium (USENIX Security), August 2024

“Delete it and Move On”: Digital Management of Shared Sexual Content after a Breakup

Kathryn D. Coduto, [Allison McDonald](#)

ACM CHI Conference on Human Factors in Computing Systems (CHI), May 2024

A Canary in the AI Coal Mine: American Jews May Be Disproportionately Harmed by Intellectual Property Dispossession in Large Language Model Training

Heila Precel, [Allison McDonald](#), Brent Hecht, Nicholas Vincent

ACM CHI Conference on Human Factors in Computing Systems (CHI), May 2024

“Nudes? Shouldn’t I charge for these?”: Motivations of New Sexual Content Creators on OnlyFans

Vaughn Hamilton, Ananta Soneji, [Allison McDonald](#), Elissa M. Redmiles

ACM CHI Conference on Human Factors in Computing Systems (CHI), May 2023

★ [Honorable Mention](#)

Trauma-Informed Computing: Towards Safer Technology Experiences for All

Janet X. Chen,* [Allison McDonald](#),* Yixin Zou,* Emily Tseng, Kevin A. Roundy, Acar Tamersoy, Florian Schaub, Thomas Ristenpart, Nicola Dell [* denotes equal authorship]

ACM CHI Conference on Human Factors in Computing Systems (CHI), May 2022

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“It’s stressful having all these phones”: Investigating Sex Workers’ Safety Goals, Risks, and Practices Online

Allison McDonald, Catherine Barwulor, Michelle L. Mazurek, Florian Schaub, Elissa M. Redmiles
30th USENIX Security Symposium (USENIX Security), August 2021

★ [Distinguished Paper Award](#)

The Role of Computer Security Customer Support in Helping Survivors of Intimate Partner Violence

Yixin Zou, Allison McDonald, Julia Narakornpichit, Nicola Dell, Thomas Ristenpart, Kevin Roundy, Florian Schaub, Acar Tamersoy

30th USENIX Security Symposium (USENIX Security), August 2021

The Annoying, the Disturbing, and the Weird: Challenges with Phone Numbers as Identifiers and Phone Number Recycling

Allison McDonald, Carlo Sugatan, Tamy Guberek, Florian Schaub

ACM CHI Conference on Human Factors in Computing Systems (CHI), May 2021

“Disadvantaged in the American-dominated internet”: Sex, Work, and Technology

Catherine Barwulor, Allison McDonald, Eszter Hargittai, Elissa M. Redmiles

ACM CHI Conference on Human Factors in Computing Systems (CHI), May 2021

Can Voters Detect Malicious Manipulation of Ballot Marking Devices?

Matthew Bernhard, Allison McDonald, Henry Meng, Jensen Hwa, Nakul Bajaj, Kevin Chang, J. Alex Halderman
41st IEEE Symposium on Security and Privacy (Oakland), May 2020

★ [Best Student Paper Award](#)

403 Forbidden: A Global View of CDN Geoblocking

Allison McDonald, Matt Bernhard, Luke Valenta, Benjamin VanderSloot, Will Scott, Nick Sullivan, J. Alex Halderman, Roya Ensafi

ACM Internet Measurement Conference (IMC), October 2018

Quack: Scalable Remote Measurement of Application-Layer Censorship

Benjamin VanderSloot, Allison McDonald, Will Scott, J. Alex Halderman, Roya Ensafi

27th USENIX Security Symposium (USENIX Security), August 2018

Keeping a Low Profile? Technology, Risk and Privacy among Undocumented Immigrants

Tamy Guberek, Allison McDonald, Sylvia Simioni, Abraham H. Mhaidli, Kentaro Toyama, Florian Schaub

ACM CHI Conference on Human Factors in Computing Systems (CHI), April 2018

★ [Best Paper Award](#)

Refereed Workshop Publications

Ethical Practices for Security Research with At-Risk Populations

Rasika Bhalerao, Vaughn Hamilton, Allison McDonald, Elissa M. Redmiles, Angelika Strohmayer

Workshop on Ethics in Computer Security (EthiCS), June 2022.

Designing Digital Literacy and Security Trainings for Latinx Immigrants in the United States

Sylvia Simioni, Allan Martell, Allison McDonald, Abraham H. Mhaidli, Tamy Guberek, Kentaro Toyama, Florian Schaub

3rd SOUPS Workshop on Inclusive Privacy and Security (WIPS), August 2018.

An ISP-Scale Deployment of TapDance

Sergey Frolov, Fred Douglas, Will Scott, Allison McDonald, Benjamin VanderSloot, Rod Hynes, Adam Kruger, Michalis Kallitsis, David G. Robinson, Nikita Borisov, J. A. Halderman, Eric Wustrow

Proc. 7th USENIX Workshop on Free and Open Communications on the Internet (FOCI), August 2017

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Magazine Articles

Safer Digital Intimacy for Sex Workers and Beyond: A Technical Research Agenda

Vaughn Hamilton, Gabriel Kapchuk, [Allison McDonald](#), Elissa M. Redmiles

IEEE Security & Privacy Magazine, 2024

Reports

American Dragnet: Data-Driven Deportation in the 21st Century

Nina Wang, Allison McDonald, Daniel Bateyko, Emily Tucker

Center on Privacy & Technology at Georgetown Law ([link](#))

APIs and Your Privacy

N. Cameron Russell, Florian Schaub, [Allison McDonald](#), William Sierra-Rocafort

February 14, 2019, Available on SSRN ([link](#))

Other Writing

There is no prohibition on face surveillance in Detroit

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July 29, 2019, *The Center on Privacy & Technology* on Medium ([link](#))

The web really isn't worldwide—every country has different access

Allison McDonald

December 8, 2018, *The Conversation* ([link](#))

Talks

Investigating Sex Workers' Safety Goals, Risks, and Practices Online

Guest lecture in the Cornell Security Seminar. November 23, 2021.

Investigating Sex Workers' Safety Goals, Risks, and Practices Online

Guest lecture in the Information Security Group at Royal Holloway University of London. October 21, 2021.

Investigating Sex Workers' Safety Goals, Risks, and Practices Online

Guest lecture in Privacy Engineering course, Northeastern University. August 18, 2021.

Spyware and Digital Intimate Partner Abuse

Invited speaker (w/ Yixin Zou) for the Sexual Assault Prevention and Awareness Center, University of Michigan. March 2021.

Uncertain Concern: How Undocumented Immigrants in the US Navigate Technology

Guest lecture in "Information Privacy, Surveillance and Exposure," University of Michigan. February 11, 2020.

Keeping a Low Profile?: Technology, Risk and Privacy among Undocumented Immigrants

Invited speaker at SUMIT 2018 Cyber Security Conference, Ann Arbor, USA. October 25, 2018.

Uncertain Concern: How Undocumented Immigrants in the US Navigate Technology

34th Chaos Communications Congress (34C3), Leipzig, Germany. December 30, 2017.

Teaching

DS 587: Data Science in Human Contexts

Computing & Data Sciences, Boston University

Fall 2023, Fall 2024

DS 121: Foundations of Data Science II

Computing & Data Sciences, Boston University

Spring 2023, Spring 2024

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EECS 388: Introduction to Computer Security

University of Michigan

Graduate Student Instructor

Fall 2018, Winter 2019

EECS 388: Introduction to Computer Security

University of Michigan

Guest Lecturer on Control Flow Hijacking

Winter 2019, Fall 2019

Online Self-Defense: How to protect your privacy, identity and security when using technology

Co-instructor for a digital security class through the Osher Lifelong Learning Institute at the University of Michigan, an organization providing education for adult learners ages 50+.

Community Computer Security Workshops

2016 – present

I design and lead computer security workshops, primarily for journalists, lawyers, activists, and community groups.

- Saline Area Senior Center, November 2021
- Knight-Wallace Fellows, February 2020
- Latinx community workshops, July 2018
- Latinx community workshops, November 2017
- Knight-Wallace Fellows, October & November 2017
- Clean Water Action, May 2017
- Knight-Wallace Fellows, April 2017
- Privacy and Technology Law Association, January 2017
- International Human Rights Law Master's Program, April 2016

Work Experience

Center on Privacy and Technology at Georgetown Law, Washington, DC

Research Fellow

August 2019 – August 2022

Center on Privacy and Technology at Georgetown Law, Washington, DC

Summer Fellow

May 2019 – August 2019

Expedia, Inc., Bellevue, WA

Software Intern

May 2014 – August 2014

University of Michigan, College of Engineering, Ann Arbor, MI

Computing Consultant

January 2011 – May 2015

Service

Program Committee Member

ACM Conference on Human Factors in Computing Systems (CHI)

2025

USENIX Security Symposium

2023, 2024

ACM Computer and Communications Security (CCS)

2024

IEEE Symposium on Security and Privacy (IEEE S&P)

2023, 2024

Workshop on Security for Harassment Online, Protections, and Empowerment (SecHOPE)

2023

Workshop on Technology and Consumer Protection (ConPro)

2022

External Reviewer

ACM Conference on Human Factors in Computing System (CHI)

2018, 2020, 2021, 2023, 2024

Proceedings of the ACM on Human-Computer Interaction (CSCW)

2020, 2021, 2022

Proceedings on Privacy Enhancing Technologies (PETS)

2020, 2021

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Dissonance Event Series

Organizing Member

2016 – 2022

Dissonance explores topics of security, privacy, law, and ethics by bringing together speakers from many disciplines and facilitating challenging discussions.

ECSEL+

Co-Chair

June 2019 – May 2021

Treasurer

June 2018 – May 2019

ECSEL+ is a group to support gender minorities in the Computer Science graduate program at the University of Michigan.

Computer Science Graduate Student Organization

Vice President and Treasurer

May 2017 – May 2018

CSEG is the graduate student organization representing graduate computer science students at the University of Michigan.