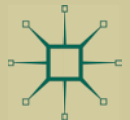


A close-up photograph of a bundle of multi-colored cables (red, yellow, green, blue, purple, grey) plugged into a grey multi-pin connector. The cables are bundled together and fan out from the connector.

DIGITAL DILEMMAS

TRANSFORMING GENDER IDENTITIES AND
POWER RELATIONS IN EVERYDAY LIFE

Edited by Diana C. Parry, Corey W. Johnson and Simone Fullagar



Digital Dilemmas

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Editors

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Transforming Gender Identities and
Power Relations in Everyday Life

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Digital Dilemmas: Transforming Gender Identities and Power Relations in Everyday Life

Diana C. Parry, Luc S. Cousineau, Corey W. Johnson,
and Simone Fullagar

Every day, we are urged to turn more of the management of our lives over to technology and the corporations which develop it. From the measurement of our fitness, to the music we listen to, we trust the algorithms and programming in these technologies to help us know when we are hip, happy, and healthy. Beginning with Apple's Siri, the "digital assistant" has been gradually incorporated into the normative parameters of everyday life, and these digital helpers have now become desirable features of homes with products like the Amazon Echo and Google Home. But what

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dilemmas are posed through the use of these technologies? Data are transmitted through (often poorly secured) internet connections, to major corporations to be processed, stored, acted upon, and sold through global networks that entangle gendered labour and leisure. In exchange for their convenience, personal information is extracted from the ebbs and flows of everyday activity. Perhaps this is why, as Kate O’Riordan (2006) demonstrated, these service technologies are imbued with historically feminine characteristics and voices, so that they feel less like HAL from *2001—A Space Odyssey* and more like Rosie from *The Jetsons*.

In this chapter, we will explore the nature of digital spaces and the connected and compounded effects that those spaces can have on shaping digital embodiments. Using various feminist theories, we discuss the discursive and ideological formation of gender imbricated in gender injustice, and outline how the intersection of gendered understandings with technological fluidity creates spaces where individuals can be simultaneously empowered and subjugated. In doing so, we will draw upon existing work that has explored elements of these dilemmas and bring those works together to examine the interrelationships of gendered leisure, advocacy, and civic engagement. We seek to advance new approaches to understanding, critiquing, and mobilizing action within the complex gendered relations that are entangled in leisure spaces and digital practices.

The proliferation of digital technologies, virtual spaces, and new forms of engagement raise key questions about the changing nature of relationships and identities within democratic societies. Scholars, policymakers, and activists have only begun to understand how everyday life is being transformed by technology in ways that inform and challenge social dynamics and norms, which govern our selves, our communities, and the spaces we inhabit. Nowhere are these issues more salient than when we explore the formation, regulation, and contestation of digital gender identities. The problems and paradoxes created through the intersection of gender ideology and the possibilities of digital environments create both spaces of positive explorations and embodiments, as well as sites of gender injustice. These opportunities and dilemmas, produced through leisure-related practices and digital public culture, are where attention is needed to produce cultural and critical inquiry. It is upon those dilemmas

at the intersections of gender, oppression, opportunity, and digitality where we focus this book.

Our aim in compiling this book is to contribute to current debates in digital humanities and social science (digital sociology, science and technology studies, cultural studies, leisure studies, and pedagogy) through a focus on key dilemmas occurring at the intersection of public culture, policy, practice, and everyday gender relations. Specifically, we aim to generate new conversations across two broadly defined bodies of scholarship—gender studies/social justice and digital sociology/leisure studies. To date, there has been limited attention paid to questions of gender and power as they manifest in our digital leisure lives in relation to changing notions of freedom, choice, and social well-being. Gender issues have yet to be comprehensively addressed within the emerging focus on digital technologies, despite special issues of key journals, like *Leisure Studies* (2016), which focused on promoting the digital in leisure studies and building a “lively leisure studies that can make sense of the constantly changing worlds of lively devices and lively data” (Lupton 2016, p. 711), the *Leisure Sciences* (2018) special issue on popular leisure in a digital age, and texts such as Spracklen’s (2015) *Digital Leisure, the Internet and Popular Culture*. We aim to begin the labour of ensuring that gender, and gender-related issues, are addressed in this literature. Exploring leisure-related digital practices that are virtual and visceral, the book is broadly oriented around three digital dilemmas:

- How do we theorize the influence of diverse virtual voices at the intersection of gender and (in)justice?
- How can innovative methodologies enable new insights into the social transformation of gender relations, digital cultures, and social justice?
- How is digital technology shaping relationships between diverse publics—citizens, communities, activists, policymakers—in terms of transforming gender injustice?

The exchange and flow of ideas between these different areas has yet to be fully explored (Johnson & Parry, 2016). There is a need to take stock of recent feminist research insights in both policy, activist, and academic arenas, and to identify the areas that still require greater research attention

and policy debate. This edited collection seeks to share these insights among academics, policymakers, activists, and practitioners. This knowledge integration and synthesis is crucial to reshape the literature on gender and to inform future national and international debates. These debates include important ideas like technological access as a human right, public versus private data, how the data we generate is managed, disseminated, bought and sold, and net neutrality (the concept that all traffic on the internet should have equal value and that corporations should not limit, police, or enhance one type of traffic over another). Each of these, along with being technical issues, have deep social roots in who is valued and what is valuable about them. Issues of difference and inequality, user-generated content, and neoliberal economic policies do not create the same level of opportunity for everyone. They do not foster equitable distributions of power. The ubiquity of our technological connections subjugate us in ways that most individuals do not fully understand, while they also fuel forms of resistance, inventiveness, and feminist subversion.

Feminist Theories and Digital Contexts of Gender Injustice

Research on the digital contexts of gender injustice is rapidly evolving, and cutting edge conceptual work is taking place in both academic and non-academic arenas (government, think tanks, industry, etc.). Much of the critical work in this area has been undertaken by feminists and there is a growing global community of feminist scholars who are exploring questions of power, social justice, and change in leisure-related practices (Fullagar, Pavlidis, & Francombe-Webb, 2018; Harvey & Shepherd, 2017; Johnson & Parry, 2016; Lupton & Thomas, 2015; Morrison, 2014; Pavlidis & Fullagar, 2014; Rich, 2018). This scholarship has brought to the fore a strong focus on women and changing digital contexts through which girls are engaging with feminist practices. For example, Keller's (2016) book on American girls' feminist blogging, Dobson's (2015) Australian work on post-feminist digital cultures, Smith-Prei and Stehle's (2016) Canadian book on technologies of transnational pop-

feminist activism, as well as the UK work produced by Retallack, Ringrose, and Lawrence (2016) on girls' digital and creative engagement with feminism through school-based theatre. Building upon this work we add to this important body of research by foregrounding the question of intersectional power relations and bring into view ableism, racism, classism, and heterosexism as they play out through the mediated contexts of everyday life (Durham, Cooper, & Morris, 2013; Jones & Hughes-Decatur, 2012; Williams, 2015).

Cyberfeminism and Networked Leisure

Since the early writing about networked computer systems, virtual worlds, cyberspaces, and digital environments have been heralded as new landscapes, filled with possibility and promise about the role they might play in emancipation and empowerment. Early users and theorists saw the virtual worlds of networked computing as potential utopias (Turkle, 1996; Warf & Grimes, 1997), and this perspective was taken up by feminist authors and gender theorists in a significant way. They saw blank slates in the multi-user dungeons¹ (MUDs) and bulletin boards, which housed the text-based communications of these early digital-world systems and developed utopic theories about how they might bring about change.

The emancipatory potential of the new worlds of the net and web were expounded by cyberfeminist researchers and other authors (cf. Rheingold, 1993) who saw the internet as a technology that could facilitate gender and racial equality, through work on political economy and internetworked global feminism (Daniels, 2009). Authors like Norris (2001), Sassen (2002), and Eisenstein (1998) explored how, as the internet began to develop as a driving economic and social force in Western culture, individuals in developing societies, and particularly women, were less likely to have access to technologies and therefore

¹ Multi-user dungeons (MUDs) were text-based, online spaces where multiple users could create personal identities and interact with one another through a multi-user interface, normally moderated by the users themselves. Some MUDs had very long lifespans with users developing and interacting with the space for years.

less likely to reap the benefits of those technologies. Some 20 years after Eisenstein's work, as connectivity becomes more and more essential to life in a global community, the idea of internet access as a human right continues to proliferate; take, for example, the non-binding resolution at the United Nations in 2016 (United Nations, 2016) while individuals in developing countries, or even the poor and marginalized in Western countries, continue to struggle for simple connectivity, let alone equitable access. In 2003, Radhika Gajjala cautioned that

[i]f cyberfeminist agendas are to produce subversive countercultures or to succeed in changing existing technological environments so that they are empowering to women and men of lesser material and socio-cultural privilege the world over, it is important to examine how individuals and communities are situated within the complex global and local contexts mediated by unequal relations of power. (p. 54)

Gajjala's concern is about both the colonialist notions of Westernized technological adoption in other parts of the world, particularly South Asia, as well as the liberal feminist trappings of celebrating technology as liberating to *all* women. However, these critiques should not undercut the important effects that global or quasi-global interconnection have had on bypassing local, state, and mass media resistance to feminist causes globally (Everett, 2004; Sassen, 2002).

The intersections of gender and technologies have also been taken up by authors outside of feminism. Wajcman (2000, 2010) has written extensively on how gender interfaces with the technologies that we use every day, from our taken-for-granted assumptions about the technological acumen of men, to the co-mingling of technological development and gendered lives through domestication technologies like washing machines, and media like daytime television. There is current work exploring how our use of social media and its pervasive nature in our lives are affected by gender, not just in the ways that we interact with the technologies, but in the ways that those technologies code us knowingly and unknowingly (Bivens & Haimson, 2016; Bivens, 2017; Carstensen, 2014; Shepherd, 2013).

We are, through our engagement with social media and other interactive technologies, categorized, grouped, and reduced to discrete variables stored in databases. Some of these data points we provide willingly, like our name, or the high school we attended, but others are generated through complex algorithms which group us in ways we don't know about; they can even predict our behaviour. As we continually give up our (personal information) data in exchange for the use of these technologies, we must engage with the dilemmas of simultaneously being the user and the product, or face the repercussions of opting out. Work exploring both the surveillance and gendered implications of big data and technologies watching us as we use them is already underway, and their findings provide us with reason to question our technological choices (D'Ignazio, 2016; Noble, 2016; Whitson, 2014).

For early users and theorists of virtual communities and networked lives, the opportunities presented by the digital landscape were large in number and constantly evolving in nature, and the web has remained a space of perceived opportunity as it has developed. Although the utopic visions of a new digital social order may have faded, the web still represents opportunities for individual and social gain for users and consumers. Linking our offline and online lives, and allowing us to more easily coordinate social events or gain notoriety, we are consistently presented with the allure of being "internet famous" and becoming "real-life" rich, like Bethany Mota, a California teen whose shopping YouTube channel has over ten million subscribers and almost one billion views since 2009 (YouTube, 2018).

Particularly in our leisure, digitality has become an irrevocable part of how we communicate (Facetime, SMS messaging, Skype), coordinate (Eventbrite, Doodle, Facebook events), and mobilize meaning (phones, tablets, wearable tech). It provides the opportunity for large and small-scale real-time organization around social issues; movements like the Arab Spring, Black Lives Matter (BLM), or #idlenomore are good examples. These movements, along with being powerful calls for social justice, and individual and collective rights of citizens, are propagated by the intersections of technology and leisure for participants and supporters. Links between leisure, technology, and social movements have always been prescient, and the ability of digital technologies to link these

elements together is rivalled in history only by the printing press (Goldin & Kutarna, 2016). Although the core and founding protestors in each of these movements spur initial interest, it is the proliferation of their messages through social networking sites like Twitter and Facebook (sites of dedicated leisure involvement for many people (Rose & Spencer, 2016)), which generate attention and public support. In the case of the Arab Spring, Twitter served as both a rallying cry and a means of coordination. Because of the decentralized nature of spreading messages on the platform, as well as the ability to use non-personal accounts managed by several people, protests' coordination on Twitter proved far more difficult to limit and manage than individual, identifiable, charismatic leaders would have been (Howard et al., 2011; Khondker, 2011). The Idle No More movement in Canada, which began as “teach-ins throughout Saskatchewan to protest impending parliamentary bills that will erode Indigenous sovereignty and environmental protections” (IdleNoMore, 2018), spread through both media coverage and social media across the country, linking Indigenous and non-Indigenous people together to support their cause. Likewise, the global network of social media and advancing technological capabilities allowed pictures and videos of incidents like those of the death of Michael Brown to circulate and provide unequivocal support to the assertions of #BlackLivesMatter. Black Feminists have also intervened in digital spaces to make visible the lesser known lives and violent deaths of Black women through the hashtag #sayhername (Mohrman & Fischer, 2016). Now a “member-led global network of more than 40 chapters”, BLM is a “Black-centered political will and movement building project” started by three Black women and propelled by technology and sharing (Black Lives Matter, 2018).

Technology, and in particular social media, presents an open platform for the development and dissemination of ideas and the challenging of social norms (issues of gender, sexual identity, race, and privilege to be presented in this book notwithstanding for the moment), where movements, which begin as small ways of protest can catch larger public attention and help usher in public discourse to make gender inequity visible in new, collectivized ways.

The #everydaysexism and #metoo movements are perhaps the most quintessential example of this power in this contemporary moment.

#metoo was created in 2007 by civil rights and sexual abuse activist Tarana Burke as a way to help victims understand that they were not alone in their sexual victimization. The movement was popularized by actress Alyssa Milano in October 2017 when she encouraged women to tweet “me too” as a way of demonstrating the extensive and pervasive nature of the problem (Garcia, 2017). Since October 2017, countless women and men, celebrities and not, have used the hashtag, as well as the collective power of the movement to express, sometimes for the first time, their experiences with sexual violence (me too movement, 2018). The movement, and those who have broken their silence about sexual misconduct, were named TIME magazine’s 2017 person of the year (Zacharek, Dockterman, & Sweetland Edwards, 2017). It has facilitated victimized women and men to come forward and has brought to light persistent and egregious sexual violence committed by very powerful players in Hollywood and elsewhere, including most notably Harvey Weinstein and Kevin Spacey.

The #metoo movement, even as young as it is, has created some dilemmas of its own. After the initial flurry and subsequent steady flow of accusations and support, whispers of backlash appeared. Not long after the strong support shown at the 75th Golden Globe awards with a near-uniform adoption of Black fashion and the donning of “Time’s Up” pins (in support of the Time’s Up Legal Defence Fund, which pledges to provide support to women and men who have experienced sexual harassment, abuse, or assault in the workplace (Time’s Up, 2018)), conversations in some circles have turned to whether the #metoo movement has gone “too far”. This accusation teems with a type of aggrieved entitlement Kimmel (2013) attributes to the powerful facing change, where those who have had and maintained privilege in a space (like men in Hollywood, or the arts more broadly) begin to lose the absolute power they once enjoyed and respond by claiming that the work being done to limit that privilege is itself prejudiced (e.g. reverse racism). It does beg the question of how we manage the power and potential of digital movements with wide uptake, especially in the face of critiques like having “gone too far”.

At the same time that new digitally integrated reality provides so many opportunities, it presents challenging personal and cultural dilemmas. The gender and power relationships we live with offline have supplanted

the utopic visions of a new cyber social order, and in their move online, they have become even more complex. This complexity emerges from the anonymity and personal disconnection available on the web, and although it provides positive self-expression opportunities for some, it permits a new kind of destructive rhetoric and leveraging of gender and power dynamics by others. The same mechanisms that might allow for production and dissemination of educational materials about gender expression for trans-high schoolers (Singh & Johnson, 2018), also permits the transmission and dissemination of anti-feminist or alt-right messaging (Schmitz & Kazyak, 2016), as in the case of extreme men's rights activist (MRA) websites where "women and homosexuals are discouraged from commenting" (Return of Kings, 2017). Where the internet, and particularly social media, permits the dissemination of ideas and critical social commentary, it also permits comments in response, which might include sexual assault or death threats. Such is the case with the now-famous #GamerGate, where the thinly veiled accusations of a jilted ex-partner caused a surge of near-anonymous and vitriolic backlash against female journalists and developers in games (Braithwaite, 2016; Burgess & Matamoros-Fernández, 2016; Massanari, 2017). What complicates the issue of #GamerGate even further is that discussions of the incident in an academic context were quickly and easily roped into discourses and conspiracy theories about the changing landscape of game and game development culture, because of the academic use of technology as a tool for theorization and scholarship (Chess & Shaw, 2015).

Where our new digital reality allows for grassroots social organization in the face of injustice or tyranny (see examples above from #BLM, #metoo, #idlenomore), it also provides the means to monitor, police, or influence the maintenance of the status quo by governments, corporations, and even individuals (Roberts, 2016). For instance, much of the discourse around the release of sexually explicit materials from celebrity cloud accounts (Marwick, 2017; Massanari, 2017), has been about how the female celebrities in question should have "known better", or that it "serves them right" for taking the photos at all. A discourse of ownership and "rights" emerges in the online conversations about these illegally obtained pornographic images, which place the women in question as both lacking agency and intelligence about who should possess the

photos, and their rights to privacy as celebrities who are also women. The context of the discussions are important because they centre on affected women celebrities and remind us of cultures of sexual and personal ownership over women's bodies—even women who command large sums of money for the use of those bodies as paid actresses, athletes, or models (Marwick, 2017). Celebrity aside, questions of ownership, leverage, blackmail, and extortion reach women of all ages and statuses in cases where former partners threaten to, or do, release intimate images of former partners or friends—so-called revenge porn. With several entire websites dedicated to this idea of intimate images of women made in private and exposed for public consumption, revenge porn has led to quickly enacted policy and law banning the practice and establishing penalties for perpetrators (Cyber Civil Rights Initiative, 2018).

The Contribution and Organization of this Book

Adopting an interdisciplinary approach, chapters in this book will draw upon different theories, methodologies, and applied (policy and practice-related) perspectives to examine the interrelationships of gendered leisure, advocacy, and civic engagement. In doing so, we seek to advance new approaches to understanding, critiquing, and mobilizing action within the complex gendered relations that are entangled in leisure spaces and digital practices.

Section One: Theory in Digital and Leisure Contexts

The book is divided into three major sections. The first focuses on the application of theory to the digital and leisure contexts as discussed in this introduction. Along with deep theoretical perspectives on how the inclusion of digital media and social spaces have changed feminist activism, this section explores some of the intersections of digital media, race, gender, and (counter)narratives present in our dynamic digital landscapes—beginning with the work of Aimée Morrison, who

explores the use of viral Twitter hashtags. These hashtags utilize humour, as well as the speed of information sharing and dissemination in the age of social media, to work at destabilizing the framing imposed on situations by dominant groups. In her exploration of #DistractinglySexy, #StayMadAbby, and #BeckyWithTheBadGrades, Morrison presents the micro-counter-narratives that can be created in the Web 2.0 culture of participant-created media.

Morrison's chapter is followed by a discussion and theorization of the roles that Black Feminism has played in the ongoing fight for social justice on behalf of Black women, girls, and their communities by Ashley Love. Love explores the ways that a Digital Black Feminism is changing and enhancing that work, delving into the ways that Black women have actualized foundational elements of feminism; even at times when their unique voices and perspectives were silenced in the larger feminist movement. Love then moves to demonstrate how Black women and girls are accessing and using social media and other digital communities to modernize and further the mission of Black Feminism in the digital age.

Section Two: Methodological Discussions and Guideposts

The second section of the book moves into methodological discussions and guideposts. Trussell, Apgar, and Kovac analyse and use critical reflection on a community-based research project that shifted from in-person, semi-structured interviews to an online asynchronous forum to help readers understand the opportunities and potential difficulties of employing traditional research methods with diverse and digitally curated social groups. They explore how the intersection of online spaces and feminist research opens up new opportunities for qualitative inquiry through asynchronous online discussion groups. The critical reflection on their research experience also allowed for an analysis of the research process, and how the introduction of digital spaces and research problematizes our traditional notions and approaches to research ethics, methods, and knowledge mobilization.

This chapter is followed by Cousineau, Oakes, and Johnson, who propose a queering of ethnography in online environments, particularly those of fast-moving mobile applications. Providing a methodological approach to exploring and using geo-social networking applications (GSNAs) in research, this chapter examines the fast-changing environment of mobile applications, and the fickle nature of the modern digital consumer, suggesting that research strategies that were once “state of the art”, even on digital platforms, no longer meet the needs of some contemporary research venues. Cousineau, Oakes, and Johnson provide a set of directional markers that can help researchers interested in user experiences with mobile apps, and particularly GSNAs, create robust and appropriate research strategies; strategies which remain flexible enough for application in the digital landscape, but theoretically grounded and methodologically sound.

Section Three: Dilemmas at the Intersection of Gender, Gender Identity, and Digitality

The third section of the book shifts focus to particular dilemmas faced at the intersection of gender, gender identity, and digitality. These dilemmas of digital presence, health, and embodiment extend from research exploring mental health, sport, and social conceptions of women’s embodiment. Fullagar and Small, in a project framed through an academic-arts collaboration and the *Mindshackles* website, explore the cultural representations of women recovering from depression. Using photographs, film, and audio, the website aims to document stories and the diversity of experiences of women struggling with mental health. Fullagar and Small use theoretically guided feminist questions to explore the ways in which we document, and subsequently experience, the hardship of others allows for the exposition and erasure of gender issues. The chapter touches on issues of medicalized assessment and treatment regimens and the culturally differential way in which mental health is addressed by gender, race, and other marginalized identities.

Swist and Collin continue this focus on mental health with their work on the mobilization of playful modalities in working with young people to develop digital campaigns that engage with the issue of emotional

well-being and gender (masculinity) in new ways. Swist and Collin draw on the participatory design of one youth mental health campaign to illustrate the creative possibilities of digital campaigns, as well as illuminate the gendered positions presented and perpetuated by these digital engagements. They also explore how these can change their focus from predetermined expectations of gender and behaviour in mental health to a more complex interplay of digitality, gender, and playfulness.

The next chapter also explores the intersections of the digital, play, and gendered spaces, but Lebel, Pegoraro, and Harman discuss the interaction of women in sport with their social media platforms, examining the complex issues which form at the intersection of digitality, gender, sport participation, and open public interaction online. Aggregating analysis from several studies, they discuss the impacts of social media interactions on women in sport and how these interactions change their negotiation of gender and personal identity as athletes.

The influence of gendered notions of acceptable body image and performance are further discussed by Depper, Fullagar, and Francombe-Webb in their chapter examining the *This Girl Can* campaign in the UK. Depper, Fullagar, and Francombe-Webb present a critical examination of the gendered assumptions presented by the Sport England campaign and explore the intense reactions on social media generated by the portion of the campaign aimed at celebrating natural bodies. They ask whether the ways in which women's bodies are digitally enacted might problematize or undermine the campaign, and how the campaign is, or is not, actualized online and offline.

In the last chapter of this section, Emma Rich moves the discussion to focus on the technologies that mediate the relationship between health and fitness, digitality, and gendered embodiment. Rich explores the co-contingent relationship between the influential and growing area of digital health technologies and the gendered discourses implicated in their production and consumption. She discusses the possibilities available for teaching healthy lifestyle behaviours through these digital health technologies, and how gender and gendered understandings of health and fitness are simultaneously taught and reinforced. She also contends that the pedagogical opportunities created by these digital health technologies have the potential to enact social and individual change.

The purpose of this text is to foster further discussion about the changing formation of leisure and technology in our lives as they continue to intermingle, reproduce, and often challenge gendered ways of being. The speed at which these changes are taking place means that as we are creating or theorizing new technological opportunities, we are simultaneously creating new dilemmas which require different ways of researching gender-power relations. Part of the call in this book is for readers and researchers to critically explore the gender relations that implicitly and explicitly shape technological artefacts, platforms, regulatory mechanisms, and civic spaces as they are experienced in the ubiquity of everyday life. Exploring their influence and implications for gender justice and public life requires intellectual inventiveness to move beyond the normative assumptions of techno-utopia or the moral panic of dystopic fears.

The movements and tools currently available to us are strong because of, and contested by, the technologies which have driven their development and proliferation. #metoo is able to spread and effect massive change because of the always-on nature of digital communication and our need to be in constant contact with the world. But this same need places the movement in the crosshairs of short news cycles and politicized rhetoric, and those same channels which propel a movement for social justice also carry its detractors and critiques. We hope that this book will provide its readers with practical knowledge about methodological and theoretical approaches to working with technologies and their inherent dilemmas, and can serve as a guidepost for continued theorization and practical work on these important issues.

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