Introducing the Just Tech Platform

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> *Welcome to the Just Tech Platform, a new research mapping initiative from the Social Science Research Council's <u>Just Tech program</u>.*

Just Tech is premised on a simple but—until quite recently, it would seem—radical idea: that technologies are neither neutral nor objective; that they are designed by humans and that they, thereby, inherit our biases, our prejudices, our assumptions and our blind spots, our flawed data sets and our limited concepts. Technologies—particularly information & communication technologies—are social tools, and social tools are never used outside of a social context. They necessarily interact with social structures, which include race, gender, and class, among many other markers of difference and hierarchy. And so technology may just as soon reinforce or augment inequity and injustice as they may mitigate against them.

Not that long ago, the discourse surrounding the relationship between technology and society was characterized by utopian theories about the <u>liberatory effects</u> of <u>emergent technology</u> and <u>upstart platforms</u>. Recent inquiries into platform oligopoly, sophisticated disinformation campaigns, the rising threat of extremism, and disparate and disproportionate technological harms have called this optimism into question. Nevertheless, many in the tech industry, in government, and the academy remain enamored with the emancipatory promise of digital technology—or advocate technological reforms to address the social harms created by new technologies, which may in turn <u>create new problems</u>.

Today, for example, tech companies tout the benefits of artificial intelligence (AI) that can <u>read the emotions of children</u> through a computer screen, or to<u> search social media databases to identify people using facial recognition</u>. Yet new research reveals that<u> such technologies often do not work quite as advertised</u>. Moreover, when emotions are misread or faces misidentified, the consequences can have <u>life</u>

and death implications that frequently work to the detriment of racialized or marginalized people. Indeed, given how much data we share, we often do not know how our data is used against us until it is too late.

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This is the point of departure for Just Tech: that the true promise of novel technology cannot be realized without a sober reckoning with its manifest and potential harms. We recognize that it is not by accident that many of the most prominent critics of techno-utopianism, techno-solutionism, and techno-chauvinism are themselves members of marginalized and minoritized groups, for whom technology's promise has not always been fulfilled. We aim to center these perspectives, which are so often underrepresented and undervalued in tech, in government, and in the academy.

The Just Tech platform will serve as a forum, a catalog, and a showcase for research and researchers advancing critical inquiry at the nexus of technological development, inequity, and social justice. Through agenda-setting reviews of research, critical analyses, interviews, and researcher profiles, Just Tech will engage a field of research and practice as it stands and as it moves; as scholars, journalists, artists, and activists delineate the contours of a field that does not—that cannot—reside within a single discipline, much less within the academy.

Below, we highlight the core features of the Just Tech platform and describe how they are intended to serve the broad aims of Just Tech, as described above. We invite you to explore the Just Tech platform, to share it with others, and to reach out to us to provide feedback.

Research Fields: *orienting themes*

Just Tech organizes all of its content into one or more Research Fields. Each research field is associated with original editorial content, such as field reviews, essays, and interviews, as well as curated content, such as citations, events, field notes, and Just Tech's extended network of researchers.

Field Reviews: *the state of the field*

Just Tech Field Reviews are brief, agenda-setting reports about the state of research on discrete subjects at the intersection of novel technology and social justice. Field Reviews chart out where research has been to argue where it must go next. Each report is written and peer-reviewed by experts in their respective fields and every citation is linked to a publicly available Zotero library of citations.

Articles: *moving the field forward*

From essays to interviews to research notes, Just Tech Articles offer critical insight into the relationship between technological development, inequity, and social justice. Articles are written by researchers moving this field forward, including Just Tech fellows, grantees, and members of the extended Just Tech network.

Just Tech Network*: showcasing researchers*

Just Tech is buoyed by a diverse network of scholars, journalists, technologists, artists, and activists. Each profile in the Just Tech Network includes biographical information, social media contacts, and a selection of researcher's publications featured in the Just Tech Zotero library (see below). Network membership is limited to researchers who have contributed to Just Tech, either by writing, reviewing, or interviewing for the platform, or by serving on an advisory or selection committee.

Zotero*: a living library of citations*

The Just Tech Platform's Zotero citation library aggregates emerging and foundational research on topics related to technological development, inequity, and social justice. In addition to peer-reviewed research, the library may contain conference papers, reports, and news articles. The citation library will be populated primarily by works cited in Just Tech Field Reviews, featured citations of Just Tech Network members.

Field Notes*: research and analysis from around the field*

Field Notes are a means for Just Tech to surface and amplify new and noteworthy research and analysis from across the web. Essays, editorials, scholarly articles, book reviews, photo journals, and videos are shared with brief excerpts and links to the original content.

Calendar*: noteworthy events on the horizon*

The Just Tech platform features a dynamic calendar that is updated with events of interest to the Just Tech community.