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Knitting, Not Chess: Different Pasts and Futures for AI

## Artificial Intelligence and You: The Social and Human Dimensions of AI

**Missouri S&T Center for Science, Technology, and Society**

**Thursday April 25th, 2024 | Innovation Lab, Forum | 5:30-7:00**

**Seminar Abstract**

In the latter half of the 20th century, teaching a computer to play chess became a primary focus of those working in artificial intelligence (AI). This emphasis on chess had long repercussions for the development and direction of AI. Likewise, understanding the broader history of chess, especially in terms of gender, provides insight into the gendered history of computing. I open my keynote with this history of AI, chess, and gender before I shift gears to knitting. I show how the history of computing is a history of textiles. After a brief overview of the highly algorithmic and complex nature of knitting, I’ll elaborate on this computing-textiles connection via histories of the Jacquard loom, Herman Hollerith, U.S. Census Workers, IBM, Social Security, keypunch operators, and Apollo core memory weavers (among other examples). Weaving these threads into the history of AI means considering the work of women, especially Black, Latina, and Navajo women. I’ll conclude with reflections on what it means to center women in the pasts and futures of AI, and the dangers of failing to do so.

**Biography**

Dr. Rankin earned her PhD in History from Yale in 2015; prior to that she also studied at MIT, Duke, University College London (UCL), and Cambridge. As a first-generation four-year college student, she earned her BA at Dartmouth College with a double major in mathematics and history, graduating magna cum laude and Phi Beta Kappa. And relevant to the topic at hand, she also taught herself how to knit.