UC SANTA BARBARA

THE Current

May 3, 2022
Shelly Leachman

The Dirt on Data

The realities and dangers of social networking, the consequences of algorithm design, and defending human dignity in the context of predatory capitalism. They're important topics of increasing concern — and receiving ever more attention.

They're also the key subjects explored by mathematician and data scientist Cathy O'Neil, whose work was featured in acclaimed documentary "The Social Dilemma."

She will discuss all of that, and undoubtedly more, in an appearance at UC Santa Barbara Tuesday, May 3, at 7:30 p.m. in Campbell Hall. O'Neil's visit to campus comes by way of the UCSB Arts & Lectures programming initiative Creating Hope, and is as part of the ongoing series Justice for All.

"Cathy O'Neil has made a significant contribution to unveiling the ways in which data affects our lives," said Sharon Tettegah, associative vice chancellor for diversity, equity and inclusion and director of the Center for Black Studies Research, who first proposed bringing O'Neil to campus. "Her book delivers information that brings to light how big data, and all data, can discriminate against various populations using mathematical models (algorithms).

"I am looking forward to learning more about her new book, *The Shame Machine: Who Profits in the New Age of Humiliation*," added Tettegah, also a professor of Black studies and part of the faculty advisory committee behind the Justice for All series.

O’Neil’s first book, the 2016 bestseller “Weapons of Math Destruction: How Big Data Increases Inequality and Threatens Democracy,” was a semifinalist for the National Book Award. In “The Shame Machine,” her just published follow-up, she offers unparalleled insight about shame, its relationship to power, and how to cultivate dignity in an age of social media and hyper-partisan politics.

After earning a Ph.D. in math from Harvard, O’Neil served as a math professor at Barnard College before switching over to the private sector, working as a quant for the hedge fund D.E. Shaw and as a data scientist in the New York start-up scene. She is the CEO of ORCAA, an algorithmic auditing company, a member of the Public Interest Tech Lab at the Harvard Kennedy School, and a regular contributor to Bloomberg Opinion.

The event is presented in presented in association with the UCSB Center for Black Studies Research, Center for Information Technology and Society, Center for Responsible Machine Learning, Data Science Initiative, Department of Computer Science, Department of Psychological & Brain Sciences, the Department of Statistics & Applied Probability, and Goleta Valley Library.

About UC Santa Barbara

The University of California, Santa Barbara is a leading research institution that also provides a comprehensive liberal arts learning experience. Our academic community of faculty, students, and staff is characterized by a culture of interdisciplinary collaboration that is responsive to the needs of our multicultural and global society. All of this takes place within a living and learning environment like no other, as we draw inspiration from the beauty and resources of our extraordinary location at the edge of the Pacific Ocean.