

# Situated Knowledges

*Science, Feminism and  
Partial Perspective*

**Prof. Alecea Standlee**

# Donna Haraway

- ◆ Feminist philosopher of science and technology
- ◆ Has degrees in Zoology, Philosophy, English and Biology
- ◆ Work focuses on the intersections of feminism, science, technology, and the human experience
- ◆ “Situated Knowledges: The Science Question in Feminism and the Privilege of Partial Perspective”
  - *Feminist Studies*, Autumn 1988

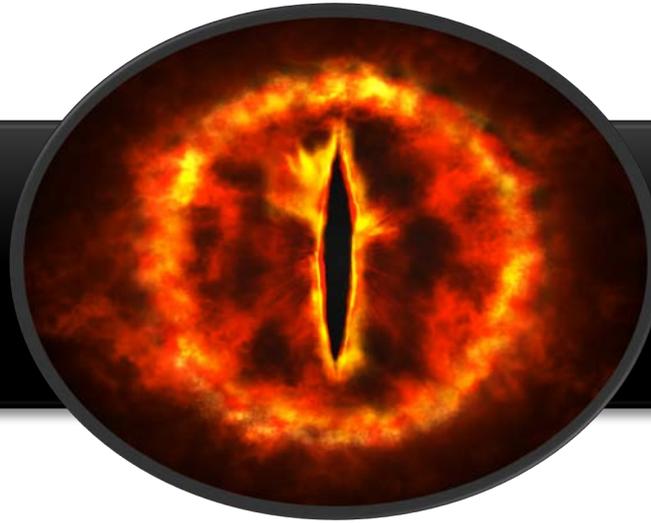


# Objectivity

- ◆ What is Objectivity?
  - An attempt to discover scientific truths by the elimination of personal biases
- ◆ Haraway's critiques of Objectivity
  - It is not possible
    - Ignores social location and identity of observers
  - Its not how modern scientific inquiry actually works
    - Funding sources
    - Scientific debate
    - Matthew Effect
  - Objectivity does not find truth
    - Creates a God Trick



# Objectivity God Trick



- ◆ The all seeing disembodied vision of science
  - Presumes an omniscient observer
  - Object under investigation is unchanging
  - Observer is separate and impartial

*“Vision has historically been used to distance the knowing subject from everybody and everything in the interests of unfettered power.” (Haraway 581)*

# Social Constructionism

- ◆ What is Social Constructionism?
  - All knowledge is the result of social construction, a shared understanding of the social world agreed upon within a society
- ◆ Haraway's critiques of Social Constructionism
  - Standpoint Theory
    - Knowledge is only available from specific social locations
  - Reduces all knowledge to ideology
    - Abandons science as a site for feminist knowledge
    - Science and opinion become equally valuable
  - Doesn't lead us to truth
    - Sets up another God Trick



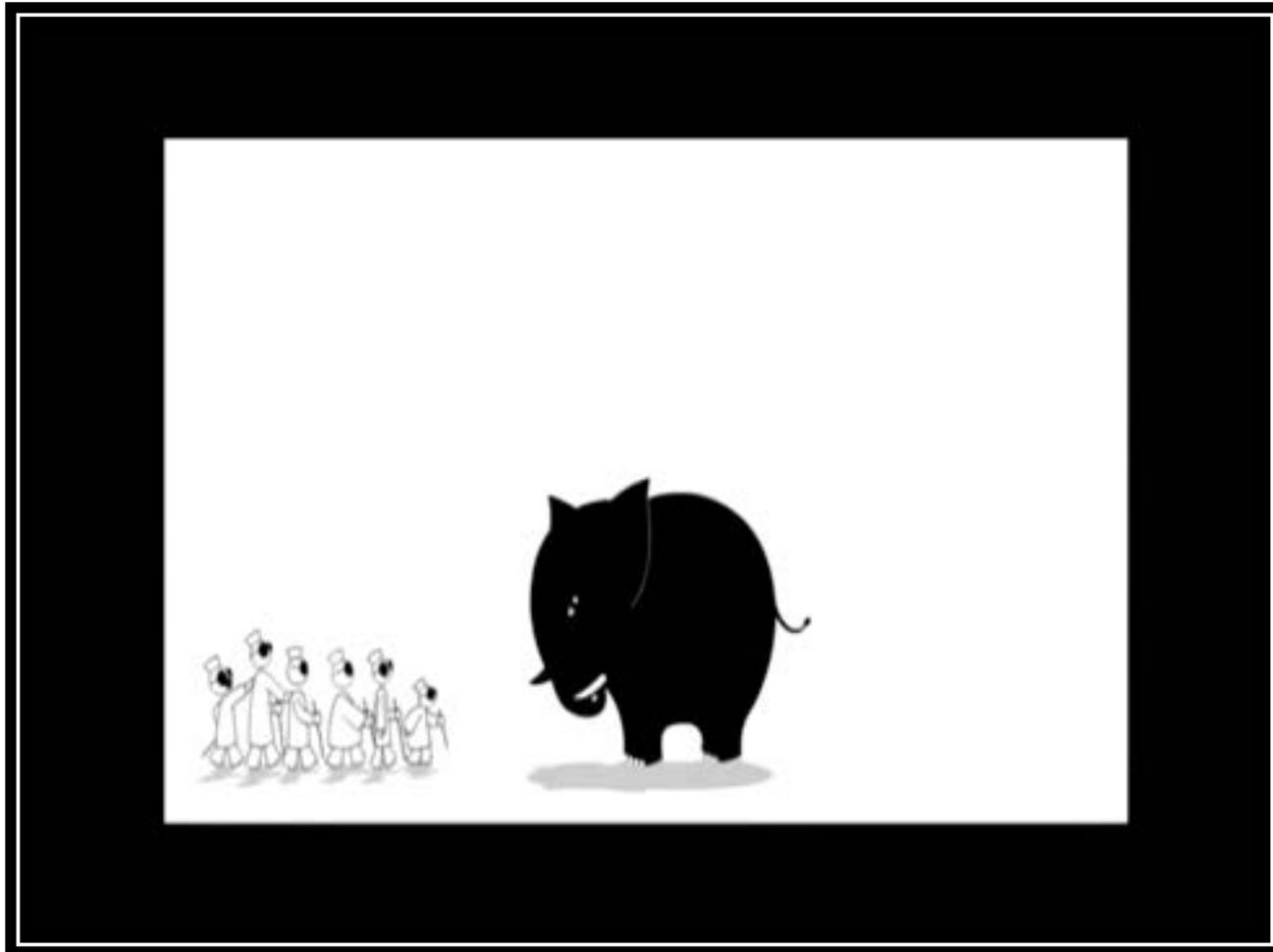
# Constructionism God Trick



*“...we end up with a kind of epistemological electroshock therapy, which far from ushering us into the high stakes tables of the game of contesting public truths, lays us out on the table with self-induced multiple personality disorder.” (Haraway 578)*

- ◆ With all knowledge socially constructed, there are no universal truths
  - Truth is meaningless and inaccessible
  - Limits the ability to search for answers

# Six Blind Men and an Elephant



[Video Courtesy of Phat Phish  
Mumbai Documentary House](#)

# Situated Knowledges

- ◆ What does Situated mean?
  - The social location of a person in reference to place, time and power
- ◆ Situated Knowledges
  - Observer understands their own location
  - Awareness of the limits of their vision
  - Understands that all knowledge is partial

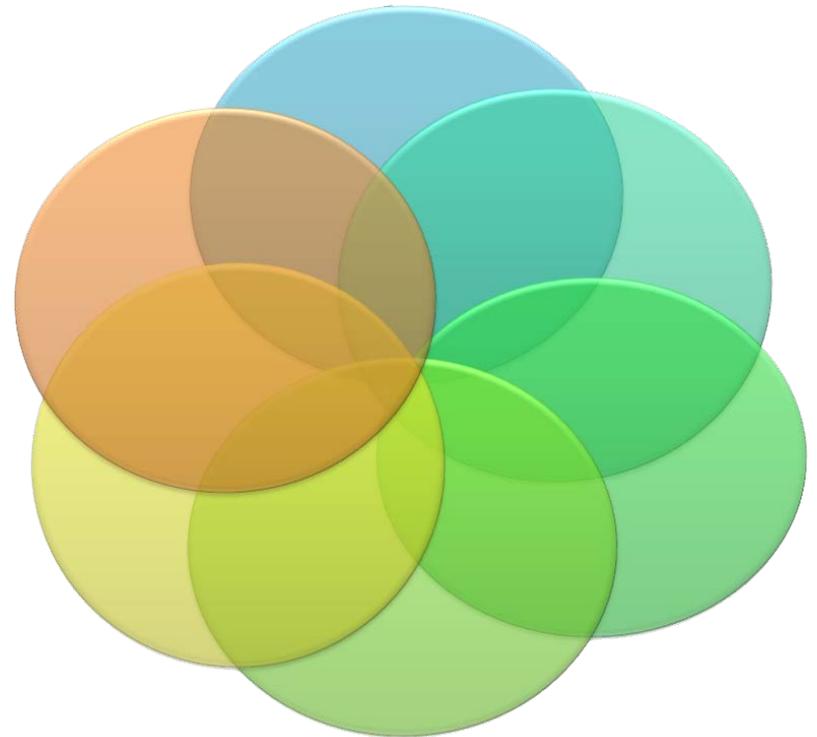


*“Only partial perspectives promise objective vision... Feminist objectivity is about limited location and situated knowledge, not about transcendence and splitting of the subject and object.”*

(Haraway 581)

# Situated Knowledges

- ◆ The “real world” can only be understood by seeing every perspective as part of a much larger whole
  - All observation is shaped by the position in society that the observer holds
  - Allows for knowledge expressed by both the observer and the observed
  - Acknowledges the partiality of all understanding, and seeks multiple perspectives



# Activity: A Card Trick

- ◆ Describe the object based only on what you can see.
- ◆ What is the shape, color, size?
- ◆ What can't you see?
- ◆ What happens when we incorporate what your classmates see?



# Discussion Questions

- ◆ What does Haraway's Situated Knowledges contribute to sociology?
- ◆ Can you think of any critiques of Situated Knowledges?
- ◆ Can you think of any ways Situated Knowledges can help us create equality?

