The Looping Effects of Objectivity
(Abstract)

With websites like 'www.climatechangefraud.com' suggesting that the reason Al Gore argues for the truth of climate change is because he invests in clean-energy technologies, and the other side alleging that those crying fraud are driven by oil money, it seems no one is free from bias. In an epistemic environment like this, one wonders whether the rhetoric of objectivity is beneficial. Richard Rorty argues that it is not. Sharyn Clough, adopting a Davidsonian-Rortyian framework has suggested that feminist philosophers of science move beyond epistemic concepts, including objectivity. In this paper, I argue that if we take an historical view of objectivity, we can see that it is a tool used to create categories of person-hood. Using work by Lorraine Daston and Ian Hacking, I argue that objectivity creates a looping effect in epistemic subjects. Thus, each new account of objectivity developed will attempt to solve the problems with epistemic subjects in the past, but, through creating new categories of person-hood, will create new problems with the subject. Using this account, I examine Helen Longino's suggestion of objectivity as a social product, rather than an individual pursuit. I conclude by resisting Clough's and Rorty's suggestion that we do away with epistemic concepts like objectivity, and identify two new problems with the epistemic subject that will likely emerge should Longino's theory of objectivity be widely adopted.