

## The epistemic Privilege

With the epistemic privilege which is a fundamental part of feminist standpoint theory people who "belong" to certain, marginalized groups are attributed a special, situation-specific knowledge. This knowledge or consciousness arises from the unequal treatment of these groups and helps them to survive, to cope and to resist (Hill Collins 2000, p. 31). The epistemic privilege is based on a premise of Marxism.

I agree with the assumption that the epistemic privilege can be granted to marginalized groups. Because of the various vulnerabilities generated by society, the respective marginalized groups have a high sensitivity for their own disadvantage or the privileges of others. It is their own life reality, their own everyday life and their own survival that the individual or the collective within science deals with. It is a first and very fundamental version of knowledge (Hill Collins 2000, p. 34)

At this point, however, I would like to criticize my own assessment. It could be considered in terms of the "more" of epistemic privilege for this group, both quantitatively and qualitatively. Quantitatively, lesbian African-American women would definitely have more than the other groups because of the levels. Qualitatively, however, a differentiation must be made at this point: Just because the group is quantitatively more often endowed with the epistemological privilege, it may not mean that within each level it is qualitatively superior through the other existing levels (however, this is probably where my need not to produce new hierarchies is resisting). It is also questionable whether, when combining different levels, one level can be viewed completely without the others.

By sharing the epistemic privilege view, I would therefore grant the highest epistemic privilege to lesbian African-American women (example three):

"We [African-American lesbian women] are in the position to challenge the feminist movement as it stands to date and not out of any theoretical commitment. Our analysis of race and class oppression and our commitment to really dealing with those issues, including homophobia, is something we know we have to struggle with to insure our survival. It is organic to our very existence" (Smith 1981, cited in On Bar 1993, 90).

They are suppressed intersectionally on (at least) three different levels: on the basis of their sex, their sexuality and their skin colour/ethnicity. The knowledge becomes more and more specific through these three factors (without wanting to introduce a hierarchy). If I follow Hill Collins' argumentation, African-American women should necessarily be included in the scientific discourse. Following Hill Collins' argumentation, I would like to expand or further limit this example: lesbian black women must be included in the (scientific) discourse

- because they have an outsider role in feminist discourse, too, although they are outsider-within (Hill Collins 2000, p. 23).

If marginalized groups have the epistemic privilege, they determine the discourse. For one thing, they are the first instance to conduct research at all (if this has not already happened). On the other hand, self-definition and self-description can be shaped according to one's own wishes and identity can be built up both as a group and as an individual.

At the same time, it also ensures the decision-making authority over the use of already existing terms or their reinterpretation, renaming or even abolition. This would probably contribute to reducing linguistic discrimination - whether in science or in everyday life (Hill Collins 2000, p. 21f.).

In conclusion, as Hill Collins also mentions, epistemic privilege does not help to oust all other, in this case nonfemale, non-African-American and nonlesbian people from the respective fields of research.

„The importance of Black women's leadership in producing Black feminist thought does not mean that others cannot participate. It does mean that the primary responsibility for defining one's own reality lies with the people who live that reality, who actually have those experiences.“ (Hill Collins 2000, p. 35).

Rather, it is about different perspectives and points of view that are to be pointed out and listened to. In this way, critical dialogues can develop, understanding can be created and change can be stimulated.

And perhaps - polemically speaking - privileged, white, middle-aged cis sharp men from the middle class, who still dominate research, will take the knowledge they have gained as an opportunity to reorient their research; for example, with less othering and instead more sensitivity, more listening, more discussion, more restraint and above all: more knowledge about their own privileges.

## References

Hill Collins, P. (2000). Black Feminist Thought. London: Routledge.