PARADIGMATIC COMPULSIONS: A RESPONSE TO HILLS'S "ISSUES IN RESEARCH ON INSTRUCTIONAL SUPERVISION"

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Power, as unveiled by numerous contemporary writings, has always inscribed itself in language. Speaking, writing, and discoursing are not mere acts of communication, they are above all acts of compulsion.
—Trinh T. Minh-ha

We have little to contribute to what has apparently become a continuing discussion and critique of supervision as a discipline. Our response is well grounded in "paradigm talk," but we know little about supervision. Our compulsion is to reframe the "paradigm wars" by focusing on how this conversation about supervision has mapped out the epistemological territory. A bipolar epistemological deployment limiting the conversation to two paradigmatic positions—positivism and interpretivism—reproduces, whether intended or not, the marginalization by gender, class, and race that dominates the academy, the public schools, and the broader social world.

Positivism, broadly defined, is the epistemology of traditional science. While it has undergone substantial revision by scholars like Popper, Toulmin, Lakatos, Kuhn, and Hesse since the logical positivists' initial attempts to develop a foundational epistemology, it has retained the fundamental tenets of science—objectivity, researcher-object and researcher-subject separation, empirical verification, cause-and-effect order in the world, and the unity of all sciences. Interpretivism, broadly defined, is an epistemology based not on objectivism but on subjective perception and meaning-making. It says that we know through our subjective constructions and, thus, that objectivity, in the

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positivist sense, is not possible. Interpretivism commonly includes constructionism, phenomenology, hermeneutics, and various culturalist approaches.3

Blumberg, early in his commentary, emphatically states, "These professors absolutely [our italics] must discard the idea that they are involved in creating a science, or even an applied science, of supervision [a positivist approach] in favor of the idea that they are involved in creating a scholarship of practice [an interpretivist approach]."4 His strong commitment to what he sees as the correct approach, "a scholarship of practice," is unmistakable. His bipolar characterization of the possible directions for supervision is also obvious: The scholarly work on supervision is divided between those who incorrectly are trying to create a science, applied or not, and those who correctly are trying to create loosely defined theories of practice. Anyone who might be trying to take something other than these two positions or who wants to do something different presumably does not exist.

Grimmett strongly reacts to Blumberg's polarization of science versus a scholarship of practice. "Blumberg's article ... represents fighting epistemological rhetoric [in which] he is more comfortable waging his own private cold war against what he euphemistically labels science [Grimmett's italics]."5 Although Grimmett criticizes Blumberg's "bellicose rhetoric," Grimmett does not disagree either with Blumberg's bipolar characterization of the discipline or with Blumberg's judgment that a scholarship of practice is better than a science of supervision.6 Sergiovanni faults Blumberg for fighting a battle that the scholarship of practice is already in the process of winning. He says Blumberg's article is "a bit anticlimactic," but he accepts Blumberg's binary map of the epistemological territory.7 Holland seeks to position more explicitly the epistemology of the debate by arguing that Blumberg's scholarship of practice is actually an instance of "an already existing tradition of interpretive or hermeneutic inquiry and scholarship in supervision."8 Although she mainly explicates the "principles" of this "already existing" framework, we must infer, because of her lack of attention to any alternative, that Blumberg's map is also hers.9

While Hills is highly critical of the conversation, especially the antagonism toward traditional science (i.e., positivism), he also accepts the same mapping

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2For an excellent, comprehensive discussion of especially positivism but also interpretivism, see Donald Polkinghorne, Methodology for the Human Sciences: Systems of Inquiry (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1983).
3Arthur Blumberg, "Toward a Scholarship of Practice," Journal of Curriculum and Supervision 5 (Spring 1990): 236
5Ibid., p. 259.
8Ibid., pp. 252-254.
of the epistemological territory. Given his positivist position, it is not surprising that the basis of his critique is the messy talk of interpretivists. In other words, he critiques the interpretivists' "ambiguities," "contradictions," and "uncritically held assumptions" based on the a priori assumptions or orientations of his own positivist paradigm. Although these are familiar criticisms of interpretivists by positivists, Burrell and Morgan would argue, correctly we think, that such critiques are based on the unstated positing of a meta-paradigm that in Hills's case is but positivism moved to the meta level. Although the thought would probably send shudders through Hills's paradigmatic orientation, deconstructionists like Spivak argue that "no rigorous definition of anything is ultimately possible." Post-foundational circles such as Spivak's displace this yearning after positivist scientificity and possession of scientistic capital for "winning" academic arguments by positioning science as a site of struggle over meaning and power for competing forces.

Despite Hills's biting criticism of these authors, he ends his article by disputing that he intends his "critique" to discredit hermeneutic or interpretive studies and by claiming that "we will gain little and lose much in attempting to enhance the credibility of one approach by attacking the credibility of another." His denial notwithstanding, his critique of the messy talk of interpretivists enhances the credibility of his position by attacking the credibility of theirs. After taking the field soundly to task for its lack of positivistic rigor, he concludes with a call for compatibility and complementarity, thus agreeing to the same bipolar map laid out by Blumberg.

Bolin, whose first article published in the Summer 1988 Journal of Curriculum and Supervision originally provoked Blumberg's commentary, is the only one who hints that the agreed upon map may not cover all the actual territory. She suggests a more politicized position when she notes that teachers who are predominantly female are largely supervised by male administrators. She also points out one underlying problem: "unfulfilled promises of democracy that beg a social and political agenda on behalf of children." She does not, however, address a more formal and substantive criticism of the limitations inherent in the dichotomous map that everyone else accepts, explicitly or implicitly.

11 Gibson Burrell and Gareth Morgan, Sociological Paradigms and Organizational Analysis Elements of the Sociology of Corporate Life (Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann, 1979)
As Foucault and Minh-ha, among many others, have repeatedly pointed out, discourses deploy, usually implicitly, regimes of knowledge and power. The epistemological maps portrayed in or used by a discourse define what is reality and what is not, what is acceptable and what is not. Debates with only two philosophical frameworks in effect marginalize or even silence all other positions. Other positions simply do not have the imprimatur of credibility.

This point has wider implications than the academic label paradigm debates would convey. Until the recent past, the mainstream academic discourse has largely excluded Marxism and critical theory, both of which take class inequity as a starting point. This exclusion was due to the hysterical but politically functional opprobrium that, while originating in national politics, was maintained in collusion with the academy. The exclusion has deprived most U.S. scholars of the possibility for a substantive encounter with a point of view globally important, philosophically, historically, and socially. The continuing academic response to feminism proves that this exclusionary policy, stated or not, has not applied to only the historical peculiarities of the U.S. response to communism. Most facets of the university, including educational studies, still exclude the body of feminist scholarship in virtually every arena of the social sciences. Further, those working from a race-specific context would argue that both positivism and interpretivism are white Eurocentric paradigms that marginalize people of color.15

All three of these critical positions—critical theory and Marxism, which typically focus on class; feminism, which focuses on gender; and race-specific orientations, which focus on race—would argue that direct, powerful connections between the academic exclusion of these paradigmatic positions, intended or not, and the social inequities of class, gender, and race strongly affect supervision specifically and schooling more generally. For instance, excluding feminism in the discourse on supervision elides the extreme gender stratification in public education and the effects that stratification has on supervisory relations. Therefore, dichotomous paradigmatic maps of positivism and interpretivism are not innocent. In fact, following Stanfield, who argues that whites can forget they are white while blacks cannot forget they are black, this exclusionary dichotomy is itself a function of the privilege of those drawing the maps.16 Because of their socially privileged position, they can forget or not know that their map of reality makes some groups of people and some positions invisible and that this constructed invisibility reproduces


the broader social maldistribution of power, resources, and pain by class, race, and gender.

Our act of compulsion in this response is to re-map, but always provisionally, the paradigmatic territory to include especially those groups and positions marginalized, exploited, and oppressed in our society. Challenging both the positivist and interpretivist paradigms that contest each other for domination in the academy, we call for a paradigmatic affirmative action that interrupts a delimited discourse and includes feminists; critical theorists; critical postmodernists; and advocates of Afrocentric, Hispanic, Native American, and Asian epistemological orientations. Otherwise, our "academic" conversations will reproduce and reinforce the gender, race, and class inequities that already distort and cripple all our lives.

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Based on the authors' concepts of culturally responsive teaching, this brief book outlines a view of culturally responsive supervision and gives 11 sets of guidelines for recognizing and responding to culturally stereotyped patterns of thought and values. One section explains how to use the handbook in the supervision cycle.