Notice of the Final Oral Examination for the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy

of

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“The Matrices of (Un)Intelligibility: Postmodern and Post-Structural Influences in Nursing — Comparing American and Non-American Literature from the Late 1980s to 2015”

School of Nursing

Thursday, September 29, 2016
9:00am
David Turpin Building
Room A144

Supervisory Committee:
Dr. Mary Ellen Purkis, School of Nursing, University of Victoria (Supervisor)
Dr. Anne Bruce, School of Nursing, UVic (Member)
Dr. Stephen Ross, Department of English, UVic (Outside Member)

External Examiner:
Dr. Michael Traynor, School of Health & Education, Middlesex University, London, UK

Chair of Oral Examination:
Dr. Erin Kelly, Department of English, UVic

Dr. David Capson, Dean, Faculty of Graduate Studies
Abstract

In the late 1980s, references to postmodernism, post-structuralism, and Michel Foucault started to appear in nursing journals. Since that time, hundreds of journal articles and dozens of books in the discipline of nursing have cited these continental-philosophical ideas—in substantial or minor ways—in nurses' analyses of topics in nursing practice, education, and research. Key postmodern and post-structural notions including power/knowledge, discourse, the clinical gaze, disciplinary power, de-centering of the human subject as the originator of "meaning", and the challenge to grand narratives and binary thinking—all found their place on the pages of British journals such as the Journal of Advanced Nursing, Nursing Inquiry, and Nursing Philosophy and in an American journal Advances in Nursing Science among a few other periodicals. In my dissertation, I assemble this voluminous body of publications into a "field of study". Taking a comparative approach to this field, I argue that we can understand postmodern/post-structural scholarship in nursing as characterized by a marked difference between its non-American (in this case, Australian, British, and Canadian) and American domains.

While each domain is heterogeneous, peculiar features distinguish American postmodern/post-structural nursing literature from its non-American counterparts. I build on a recent systematic critique of so-called American “unique nursing science” and (meta)theory by Mark Risjord (2010), who surfaced the unacknowledged legacy of the logical positivist philosophy of science on contemporary American nursing conceptions of science and theory. These influences, according to Risjord, have had profound and lasting intellectual impact on nursing theoretical work manifesting in the notions of “unique science”, a caution toward “borrowed theory”, a hierarchical model of theory, the language of metaparadigms, incommensurable paradigms, and so on. These ideas and related practices of theorizing have culminated in what I call the American disciplinary nursing matrices that shape the visibility and intelligibility of alternative practices of theorizing in the discipline of nursing. I show the ways in which these matrices are consequential for how postmodern and post-structural philosophical ideas are understood, discussed, and deployed (or not) in American nursing literature; indeed, I argue that these continental ideas, vital for nurses' ability to critically reflect on the discipline and the profession—are unintelligible as a form of nursing knowledge within the American nursing theoretical matrices.