

A Response to Aubrey Young

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Aubrey Young's essay, "Sing Us a Song; You're the Piano Man: The Patriarchal Discourse of Music Education," evaluates a transcript of a private piano lesson to "reveal" the system of music education as a "subconscious indoctrination into a patriarchal system" (86). In the effort to expose the effects of that patriarchy, Young analyzes the transcript with emphasis on "the pedagogical imbalance of power between teacher and student, the physical indoctrination of body movement performed by the teacher on the student, and the pervasive use of masculine metaphors by the teacher." All of which, she argues, encode a masculine "way of behaving" (86). Young dissects the transcript to demonstrate that through language the student's body movements and thought processes are manipulated into the patriarchal system. For instance, Young posits the teacher's focus on the student's hands, their speed and agility, along with their tension or firmness, comprises the realm of patriarchy concerning "an obsession with control [involving] ... the oppression of women" (Johnson qtd. in Young 86). On a larger scale, Young claims the patriarchal "Strict Father Metaphor" with its emphasis on qualities like "control, discipline, punishment, and obedience to authority" is inherent to the pedagogy of education itself and cites it at work as an underlying structure in the lesson (Koza qtd. in Young 88). While Young concludes that the participants of the lesson deem it successful, "with the student performing to the expectations of both the teacher and the overarching patriarchal system of music education, neither one suspect[s] the indoctrinating nature of the activity they have just participated in" (Young 90).

Young's analysis is initially important in that a woman seemingly outside the field of music breaks through the barrier of this patriarchal system. Central to feminism's motivations is to reveal the realms within our society that discriminate against women and expose the effects of that inequity. Young's identification of gender imbalance in the field of music education could generate positive awareness and modifications in the discipline. Though Young admirably broaches a topic that I, as a female music student, am likely affected by, her attempt to demonstrate the existence of a patriarchal system falls short. Her use of a single case study with the intention to prove a system- or culture-wide phenomenon presents many methodological issues, which undermine her claims. This becomes clear if we fit Young's essay within the paradigm of a case study, which can be defined generally as "an inquiry concerning a particular event, process, object, phenomenon, or state of affairs" (Evers and Wu 513). Young herself is the researcher examining a case—the singular piano lesson between a female student and a female teacher, via transcript.

In "Case in Case Study Methodology," Christine Meyer outlines essential considerations involved in case studies, stressing the importance of the researcher to clearly define methodological decisions regarding issues such as the selection of cases, choice of population to sample, method of sampling and data collection, and analysis and application of the findings. Meyer remarks that the lack of "specific requirements guiding case research" allows the case study to be tailored by the researcher, which can be helpful for "responding to *how* and *why* questions about a contemporary set of events" (Meyer 329-30). Young, however, approaches the case study from a

different angle by attempting to use it to prove a “what” question: the patriarchal discourse within music education exists and subsumes the entire field into a patriarchal system. *How* it happens, which she dedicates most of her time to elaborating, is used as evidence that it does. She subtly extends her argument from her initial proposition of the patriarchal discourse at work within one music lesson to stating, through an inferential leap, that the entire pedagogy is a wholly patriarchal system. The lack of explicitly stated design choices in initiating and conducting her evaluation underlies the limits of Young’s conclusions and ultimately hinders her claim.

Perhaps the single most defining (and limiting) design factor of Young’s essay is her choice of case. For Young, this case shows that patriarchy “is so pervasive in music education that even a music lesson in which both participants are female does not escape the effects” (Young 86). However, Meyer reminds us the shortcoming of using a single case, with its limitations for generalization and possible information and researcher biases (332), can be overcome by increasing the number of cases examined: “By looking at a range of similar and contrasting cases, we can understand a single-case finding, grounding it by specifying how and where and, if possible, why it behaves as it does” (Miles and Huberman qtd. in Meyer 333). Had Young chosen to compare her case against another case, perhaps between a male teacher and female student or a female teacher and male student, she could further illustrate the pervasiveness of the patriarchal discourse as it works across many music lessons.

The focus on a single case also affects Young’s sampling methods, which contain a similar drawback. The audience does not know if this lesson is representative of all lessons between the teacher and student, let alone the teacher and student versus all music teachers and students. This issue of representation is at the crux of Young’s claims. Through this single case, a music lesson between one female teacher and one female student, Young seeks to prove that the entire system of music education is patriarchal, but “in order for such an inference to be reasonable, we need to know that the sample is representative of the population” (Evers and Wu 514). This issue of representation can also be solved “by requiring that the sample be obtained in an unbiased way, which usually means randomly” (Evers and Wu 514). Young offers no indication that the transcription of the lesson she chose was obtained randomly and without bias, leaving the reader with doubts as to the generalizability and validity of her claims.

Further complicating this inferential leap is the potential biases in Young’s method of analyzing the transcript, particularly the portion concerning the language and metaphors used throughout the lesson. Though Young clearly defines the aspects of the lesson she intends to magnify for her assessment—the balance and length of conversational turns between teacher and student, focus on body movement, and use of masculine metaphors—and grounds the first two subjects against theoretical sources, her discussion of the language used in the lesson seems to rely on an unannounced, personal system of evaluation rather than a theoretical source. Without defined criteria for her evaluation of gendered or patriarchal language, the reader may suspect that Young approached the material with a personal motivation to prove that language used in the lesson, words such as fast, start, or crash, is gendered or relies on patriarchal metaphors. Researchers are warned against entering research or data with a preexisting expectation or motivation: “To be ‘theoretically sensitive’ or open to the best possible ways of interpreting data, one should enter the research setting with as few predetermined ideas as possible... This is in order to reduce the effect of pre-existing biases that will prevent theory from truly emerging from the data” (Evers and Wu 516). Young’s lack of scholarly research to ground her analysis of the gendered language and her murky, qualitative evaluation of the male-dominated metaphors at work in the student and teacher’s language hinders the credibility of her analysis.

By measuring Young’s essay against the case study model, we become aware of the methodological flaws, which undermine her assessment that patriarchy in a music lesson constitutes a sys-

tem-wide patriarchy. The issue of representation in her single case and the possibility of observer bias reveal the unsoundness of her inferential leap. Even without drastic alteration in her approach and article, Young could have overcome these faults by, as Meyer proposes, confronting “the particular need to be explicit about the methodological choices one makes” (329) and reassessing her claims and evaluation as necessary. Despite these methodological concerns, Young’s analysis of how patriarchy can subtly manifest itself within a private lesson is a valuable recognition that, through future research and multiple case studies, can bring a new lesson to music education.

Works Cited

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