MITIGATING THE MATILDA EFFECT ON ARLENE M. C. YOUNG: CELEBRATING HER PIONEERING INFLUENCE IN COUNSELLING AND SOCIAL JUSTICE IN DISTANCE EDUCATION

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ABSTRACT

The *Matilda Effect* shines a revealing light on the widespread inclination to disregard, belittle, or marginalize women, depriving them of the recognition, credit, and inclusion they rightfully deserve in their professional fields and academic research. In short, it pertains to the systemic undervaluing of women's achievements within scientific domains (Rossiter, 1993). This paper highlights the transformative impact of Arlene M. C. Young, from her role as a counsellor to that of a professor, while tirelessly serving as a stalwart advocate for social justice and gender inclusivity in distance education. Young's biographical profile, encompassing her educational journey and notable publications, is acknowledged, leading to an examination of three select pieces that she authored.

Keywords: Matilda Effect, distance education, women's research, online learning, social justice, assertiveness, counselling, Arlene M. C. Young

INTRODUCTION

In this paper, I explain the Matilda Effect and profile Arlene M. C. Young, a woman who made remarkable contributions to women's empowerment in distance education (DE) throughout her career. I provide her biographical background, share her work, and then review three pieces of her published contributions to DE.

Embracing the insights within this paper is but one step toward advancing our roles as educators and researchers in the 21st century, fostering awareness of the invaluable contributions made by women throughout history. This leads us to the remarkable work of Susan Bainbridge and Norine Wark, whose encyclopedia was developed "to capture and share the voices and contributions of female pioneers in online learning" (Bainbridge & Wark, 2022, p. 3). I vividly recall Susan's revelation during a cohort meeting for one of my Masters' courses. She said that neither she nor Norine had set out to compile an encyclopedia. Nevertheless, their years of meticulous research and unwavering dedication culminated in a captivating tribute to the women of DE. Through their book and subsequent publications and presentations, they share the stories of women who had been unfairly marginalized by the *Matilda Effect*. It is my hope that this article can serve to further illuminate the fine work and selfless dedication of one female pioneer, Arlene Young, and, in doing so, help to weaken the Matilda Effect in our field.

1

THE MATILDA EFFECT

The *Matilda Effect* illuminates the pervasive tendency to overlook, diminish, or exclude women from receiving due acknowledgment, credit, or inclusion in academic research and recognition within their respective fields. The term was coined by Rossiter (1993) when she drew attention to the Matilda Effect on women in science. Rossiter noted both contemporary and historical events where women were given "unequal credit for co-discoveries" (p. 328). In her research, Rossiter also noted that women were receiving honourary degrees and being declared *woman of the year,* which was "compensatory recognition for those women whom the mainstream prize committees had overlooked" (p. 330).

Rossiter (1993) coined the term, the Matilda Effect, after Matilda J. Gage, a nineteenth-century American suffragist and feminist critic who articulated this phenomenon. Similar to the struggles that Matilda J. Gage noted in her time, Rossiter (1993) recognized that, rather than denying women receive less attention and recognition for their contributions to a field, "the sexist nature of much of the women's systematic under-recognition should be acknowledged, noted and even high-lighted [sic]" (p. 337).

Considering the widespread influence of the Matilda Effect in science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM), and social sciences, it is plausible to surmise that the field of DE is similarly affected by this phenomenon "due to the location of our field within the social sciences, and its reliance on computing and emerging technologies (Makarova et al., 2019; Schmidt et al., 2021)" (Bainbridge & Wark, 2022, p. 444). This hypothesis illuminates some of the research results documenting the female pioneers' cumulative challenges, accomplishments, and gender-related comments in Bainbridge and Wark's (2022) encyclopedia, including observations about the domination of men in leadership, administrative, and conference presentations.

What is the impact of not recognizing the contributions of women in DE?

Concerning the concept of positionality, the historical marginalization of women in academia may manifest within DE, leading to a lack of recognition for female pioneers and their invaluable contributions. Such oversight undermines the diversity and inclusivity of DE discourse and perpetuates systemic gender disparities.

In her interview, Young states, "I may not have made much by the way of contribution, but I certainly heard a lot of the discussions" (Bainbridge & Wark, 2022, p. 385). The silent, yet far-reaching contributions made by women like Young need to be recognized on a global scale. Whether achieved within a faculty or university community, such offerings hold profound significance. The impact of these contributions, though often unnoticed, resonate deeply with individuals. They may even prompt other women to realize their potential as well. At the very least, these contributions deserve celebration, remembrance, and acknowledgment.

BIOGRAPHICAL BACKGROUND

I have categorized Young's education and career milestones into two distinct sections: education and career. Each section is listed in chronological order. A proponent of overcoming barriers and developing techniques to allow students to succeed in DE, it is important to note that Young completed three monumental education programs at the University of Alberta (U of A) while working at Athabasca University (AU).

Education

1966: Bachelor of Arts in History and English, U of A

1984: Certificate in Educational Psychology, U of A

1987: Master of Education in Counselling Psychology, U of A

2003: Ph.D. in Educational Psychology, U of A

Career

1975: Supervisor in Personnel Services at AU

1977-1997: Counsellor at AU

1984-1985: Senior Counsellor at Northern Regional Office, AU

1987-1988: Acting Manager, Northern Regional Office, AU

1997: Associate Professor at AU

2003: Retired

2003 - 2015: Tutored students in Women's and Gender Studies (WGST) 266: Thinking Through Women's Lives and worked on the WGST 499: Applied Project at AU

Publication Timeline

Early Works: 1966 - 1987

1986: Young, A. (1986). *My experiences at an Open University summer school: An evaluation report for the London Regional Office*. **Open University.**

1987: Young, A. M. C. (1987). *The effects of an assertiveness training workshop for women on assertion and self-esteem* **[Unpublished master's thesis]. University of Alberta.**

Mid-Career: 1988 - 2002

1988: Young, A. M. C. (1988a). *The theme of nurturing in the counselling of women.* **Women's International Network Newsletter.**

1988: Young, A. M. C. (1988b). A renewed emphasis on nurturing in the counselling of women. *Developing distance education* **(pp. 447–449). International Council for Distance Education.**

1990: Young, A. (Ed.). (1990). *Coping with exam anxiety*. **Athabasca University.**

1994: Young, A., Hunter-Moffatt, R., & Oddson, L. (1994). *The Sunrise Project's success in extending Northern and First Nations education: An evaluation report for Athabasca University*.

1998: Young, A. (1998). *Student diary.* **Athabasca University.**

2000: Young, A. (2000). *University certificate: Counselling women*. **Progress Report.**

2001: Cavanaugh, C., Ellerman, E., Oddson, L., & Young, A. (2001). Lessons from our cyberclassroom. In E. J. Burge & M. Haughey (Eds.), *Using learning technologies: International perspectives on practice* **(pp. 61–71). Routledge/Falmer.**

Later Career: 2003 - Present

2003: Ph.D. in Educational Psychology Dissertation. Young, A. M. C. (2003). *Making sense of women's job loss experiences* **[Unpublished doctoral dissertation]. University of Alberta.**

2006: Young, A. (2006). *Selected study skills books in the AU Library: An annotated bibliography* **(2nd ed.).**

2010: Young, A. M. C. (2010). Telling stories to make sense of job loss. In L. R. Ross (Ed.), *Counselling women: Feminist issues, theory and practice.* Toronto Women's Press.

REVIEW OF WORK

In her interview (Bainbridge & Wark, 2022), Young acknowledges that, while she may not have a vast publication record, her profound impact on her students and her peers through counselling cannot be overstated. During the constant restructuring of the fledgling AU, the allocation of funding and human resources for student services and counselling was a tenuous subject. Arlene recalls:

> At one time, student services, and counselling in particular, were eliminated. It was struck out of the budget...I was still counselling students, but I was doing other things as well...but I still did counselling.
>
> I can still remember one supervisor said to me, "How many students are you counselling?"
>
> And I said, "Well, let me think about this for a moment. I'm not supposed to be doing any counselling, and you want me to give you statistics on how many students I'm counselling?"
>
> She looked sort of ashamed of herself and left. I thought, "Do you think I'm going to hang myself, for heaven's sake? No, I'm not." I just kept on doing what I was doing, and the staff referred people to me for counselling, so I just kept doing it. (Bainbridge & Wark, 2022, p. 387)

When selecting three of Arlene's works to review, I chose those that illuminate her core research focus: addressing issues affecting women in DE. For these reasons, I have reviewed her Master's thesis on *The Effects of an Assertiveness Training Workshop for Women on Assertion and Self-Esteem* (1987), her co-authored book chapter on using learning technologies in online education, *Lessons from Our Cyberclassroom* (Cavanaugh et al., 2001), and her Ph.D. dissertation, *Making Sense of Women's Job Loss Experiences* (2003)*.*

Master of Education in Counselling Psychology Thesis (Young, 1987)

Summary of Research

In her M.Ed. thesis, Young (1987) completed a formative evaluation of the assertiveness training workshop for women offered at AU. She found that women who completed the program reported increased assertiveness and self-esteem (Young, 1987).

In university programs, assertiveness workshops aim to "teach assertiveness concepts to women, to help them acquire assertive behaviour skills, and to reduce their anxiety about using those skills" (Young, 1987, p. 1). Young's dissertation includes a lengthy review of related literature on assertiveness training for women and program evaluation, with a focus on the areas of feminist theory, research findings, and literature that had the greatest impact.

Young's method and procedure for this study was to host a workshop on two successive Saturdays. The workshops consisted of lectures, role-playing, small-group coaching, and large-group discussions. In total, 17 women enrolled at AU from the Edmonton, Alberta area attended both workshops.

The data was collected via self-report inventories, specifically the Gambrill-Richey Assertion Inventory (Gambrill & Richey, 1975) and the Coopersmith Self-Esteem Inventory (CSEI, Coopersmith, 1981), and questionnaires immediately following the workshop. Two months after its completion. Young conducted a quantitative and qualitative analysis of the data that was collected and analyzed it thoroughly, as noted in her section on data analysis. The findings and conclusions of her research stated that she utilized *Stats Plus* computer software to analyze the data.

To summarize, "the analysis of the data indicated that the Assertiveness Training for Women Workshop was valuable for the subjects" (Young, 1987, p. 42). Young concluded that the workshop achieved its intended effect and met "the expectations of both the trainers and the participants" (p. 45).

Impression of the Research

Young's research could be used to improve future workshops, especially her findings in the qualitative data. "As predicted, subjects found some topics and approaches more useful than others but the specific subjects mentioned as particularly useful varied greatly between individuals" (Young, 1987, pp. 46-47).

I did not conduct any further research to see if her recommendations were considered for future assertiveness training workshops. Because of her positionality and extensive work experience, her research could have a profound impact on the quality of the workshops in helping women to increase their assertiveness. I did a brief search on the AU website, but could not find any current offerings for assertiveness training. In the three decades since her research, this topic seems to have faded away. Nevertheless, recent research in corporate (Exley & Kesler, 2019; Guillén et al., 2017; Lindeman et al., 2018) and academic (Bainbridge & Wark, 2022; King et al., 2017; Lincoln et al., 2020; Makarova et al., 2019; Miller et al., 2014; Nosek et al., 2009; National Science Foundation, 2015a, 2015b; Schmidt et al., 2021; Storage et al., 2020) fields suggest that such training continues to be critical for women's success in these fields.

Book Chapter: Lessons from our Cyberclassroom (Cavanaugh et al., 2001)

Summary of Research

This book chapter was a collaboration between Young and three of her coworkers who "welcomed the invitation to contribute to this book as an opportunity to reflect more systematically on a subject that is making a significant impact on our work and teaching practice" (Cavanaugh et al., 2001, p. 61). The chapter focused on three conversations that the women had in person, which were recorded and transcribed. The authors then communicated via e-mail and file sharing to complete the project (Cavanaugh et al., 2001). The women used the chapter to focus on "what we see as the gap between the promise of the technology and our experiences with it; our shifting roles as teachers in a computer-mediated learning environment; and the impact of computer technologies on working conditions and…our students" (Cavanaugh et al., 2001, p. 62).

The chapter provides detailed explanations of the women discussing their experiences working with emerging technologies. They explore the implications of technological advancements, noting how technology can exacerbate disparities for individuals, especially women, who lack access to computers, modems, and the internet.

Their chapter culminates in a comprehensive list of recommendations tailored for institutions, educators, instructors, tutors, and students. These suggestions are rooted in their values and practical expertise, offering strategic insights on tackling global challenges within the cyber classroom.

5

Impression of the Research

The women are pioneers in a shift in DE technology. "We reject the business model of education…and we support a collaborative model where students and instructions produce knowledge and seek change interactively and democratically" (Cavanaugh et al., 2001, p. 69). Their unique position offers a distinctive lens through which to examine the impact of technological advancements over the past four decades on women in DE. They recognize that the technology used to communicate influences how they interact (Cavanaugh et al., 2001, p. 65). What would they think of how courses, such as "Gender Issues in Distance Education," or all of the other AU courses, are run today?

I find that this book chapter has stood the test of time admirably; its relevance persists even today, and its content feels as if it were published within the last five years, thus maintaining its global significance.

Ph.D. in Educational Psychology Dissertation (Young, 2003)

Summary of Research

For her dissertation research, Young (2003) examined women's job loss experience from a feminist perspective, focusing on professionals in Alberta in the late 1990s. Young (2003) described her passion for and firsthand encounters with job loss, which became the foundation for her research. "As a result of my experience in organizational restructuring, I changed career direction…my close brush with job loss, despite its positive outcome, prompted me to wonder what women experienced when they lost their jobs" (Young, 2003, p. 17).

To conduct her research, Young meticulously undertook three qualitative case studies, refining her thesis through iterative exploration and insightful synthesis as she uncovered connections and deepened her investigation.

Young provided in-depth research in the form of case studies of three women. She explored the physical, emotional, and psychological challenges and changes that the women went through when they lost their jobs. Much discussion was focused on the identity and self-esteem of the women, and the domino effect that losing their jobs had on their lives. "Each woman was able to keep going after her job loss because she found hope for the future and a purpose for living" (Young, 2003, p. 129).

In conclusion, Young (2003) acknowledged the time and energy that the women put into their interviews with her. She recognized that there are many ways to lose a job and just as many ways to react to it. In a thought-provoking declaration, Young (2003) stated:

> Our work structures our time, gives us something meaningful to do, assigns us a status, allows us to engage with people outside of our families, and pursue collective goals. The loss of jobs with good pay and benefits threatens to leave many of us psychologically wanting." (p. 130)

Impression of the Research

I perceive Ph.D. dissertations as deeply personal research endeavours focused on topics that hold profound significance for the researcher. Young offers a distinctive viewpoint on the subject matter, rooted in feminist principles that serve as the cornerstone of her research, illuminating overlooked facets and advocating for inclusive perspectives in scholarly discourse. I appreciate the link to the feminist theory, "questioning and analyzing gender and social relationships to observe and bring to the surface what has formerly been taken for granted is central to the feminist theory" (Loesen, 1994; Stanley, 1993, 1997; Stanley & Wise, 1990, as cited by Young, 2003, p. 18).

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, this paper has profiled and summarized the accomplishments of Arlene M. C. Young in the field of distance education. Drawing upon her subjective experiences, fueled by a fervent commitment to advancing social justice for women within distance education contexts, Young's remarkable accomplishments demand acknowledgment and celebration. Apart from her inclusion in *The Encyclopedia of Female Pioneers in Online Learning* (Bainbridge & Wark, 2022), scant details about Arlene Young are available online. Despite her pioneering contributions to the counselling department at AU, particularly in spearheading assertiveness training initiatives, the current AU website fails to recognize her significant achievements. I assert that this provides supplementary evidence of the Matilda Effect within the realm of distance education.

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