

A study of empathy strategies for female talk show hosts

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Abstract: In recent years, the "her era" has seen a boom in "her variety show," with contemporary women in the spotlight. Women's talk show variety shows are also popular with audiences, and the portrayal of women and the transmission of female values through empathy strategies are reflections of the important competencies of women talk show hosts. The empathy strategy is particularly useful in interview programs with women and is reflected in topic empathy, artistic questioning empathy, as well as empathy in expressions and gestures. The empathy of female talk show hosts can be enhanced by focusing on understanding women, integrating psychology, and reading books.

Keywords: Women's interviews; Empathy strategies; Facilitators

1. Introduction

With the rise of the "her" era, various variety shows have emerged with women's narrative strategies at their core, such as "The Sister Who Rides the Wave," "Youth Has You," and "Idol Comes," which are also known as "her variety shows." These shows focus the spotlight on topics such as women's lives, work, and relationships, reflecting women's worldviews, outlooks on life, and values from various angles. Women's talk shows falling under the umbrella of "Her Variety" have also emerged. Shows like "Hello! Big Girls," "Sending 100 Girls Home," and "Sister Chat" are dialogue-based programs that explore the amazing life stories and unique ways of thinking of women from a deeper perspective, thereby contributing to the construction of a more independent, rich, and diverse image of women.

2. Empathy and empathic communication

2.1. The connotation of empathy

Empathy is known by various names, such as divine entry, empathy, sympathy, and investment. It refers to the ability to put oneself in another person's shoes in order to feel and understand their emotions. As stated in *To Kill a Mockingbird*, "You can never really know a man until you walk around in his shoes and put yourself in his shoes." This reference emphasizes empathy as a means of emotional interaction, necessitating delicate and sensitive observation to capture the flow of each other's feelings and perceive each other's spiritual world for true connection and empathy.

2.2. Empathic communication in talk shows

In psychology, empathy describes the relationship between individuals, while "empathic communication" in communication science refers to a new relationship model between individuals and groups, as well as between groups themselves.[1] In psychology, empathy describes the relationship between individuals, while "empathic communication" in communication science refers to a new relationship model between individuals and groups, as well as between groups themselves. Empathic communication in interview programs implies the need for empathy to assist in expressing and communicating the program's content. Although different interview programs target various audiences and convey different themes, they all require the host and interviewee to establish a connection and form a bond. Empathy becomes the foundation for building this bridge. Moreover, the spiritual and professional connotations of the interview program characters and hosts need to be conveyed to each audience group through empathy. Regardless of geographical boundaries or time, the flow of emotions

facilitated by empathy can have an incredible communication effect. For instance, in the "Early Summer Spring Summer" interview program, Jiang Sida interviewed Chunxia. The exchange between host Jiang Sida and interviewee Chunxia deeply touched countless audiences due to the connection and resonance of ideas between the two.

Ginger Starr: Are you a rebellious person since childhood?

Spring Summer: I've been a rebel since I was a child.

Jiang Sida: Have you ever suffered from rebellion since childhood?

Spring and Summer: Eaten a lot. But I think there is energy in rebellion. Some may say you are wrong here and are not up to the score line and a standard of excellence that everyone has in mind. However, without these previous rebellions, this particular version of yourself that you've gotten, I don't think you would have gotten to where you are today. If you do not have that moment to rebel against this thing, you make another choice, and your life is a different path. So you have to thank yourself for committing rebellion today.

Ginger Starr: Why do we have to be special? Isn't it good for us to be safe and secure like everyone else?

Chunxia: Of course not. I was standing under a catchlight one day when I was shooting, and then the light hit me. I felt a special surge, and I felt tears coming out of my eyes. Later I wrote on Twitter: I just want a light in this world to be played for me. I want someone in this world to be here for me.

Jiang Sida: What do you hate about the world?

Spring Summer: Many, I almost hate most of the world, but there must be a small part of something that stays with you.

In response to a comment in this episode, "When Jiang Sida was listening to each answer from Chunxia, his eyes radiated full of surprise, recognition, appreciation and a heartfelt line of admiration.", "The first handshake, the goodbye hug, the chemistry in the interview is really attractive." The interviewer and interviewee share a bond that feels akin to friendship, and the interviewer's undisguised admiration for the interviewee also encourages the audience to quietly and attentively feel the interviewee's unique personal charm. The empathy strategy plays an important role in the empathic communication of the talk show, as evident in the words, eyes, and gestures exchanged between both parties.

3. Differences in empathy strategies in character interview programs

3.1. Classification of character interview programs

TV personality interview program is a form of program performance according to the subject and object of the interview. They can be broadly classified into thematic sports talk columns, such as "Sports Parlor," which focuses on discussions with sports authorities, well-known athletes, and coaches. There are also economic talk shows like "The Eye of Finance and Economics," which invites guests from financial media, experts, scholars, and entrepreneurs. Cultural talk shows like "The Roundtable" feature interviews with scientists, artists, psychologists, and other renowned figures from various fields. Emotional talk shows like "The Search for Love" engage in conversations with everyday people, while women's talk shows like "Hello! Big Women" concentrate on interviewing women who have overcome hardships in their lives.

3.2. Embodiment of differences in empathic strategies

3.2.1. Basic use of empathy strategies in interview programmes

The non-directive approach to counseling, as mentioned in the counseling theory of American psychologist Carl Rogers, emphasizes that the counselor should not try to control the individual's behavior but rather help them explore their inner selves by providing an appropriate psychological environment and atmosphere that fosters a clearer self-perception.[2] Interview programs should adhere to this fundamental theoretical principle, which means the host should not attempt to control the thoughts of the guests. Instead, the host should listen to the guest as an equal, employing empathy to eliminate psychological barriers and create a relaxed and comfortable conversation environment,

helping the program guests to express themselves and show themselves in the best state. Empathy can help the moderator enter the inner world of the interview subject, put himself in the position of feeling and understanding the thoughts and behaviors of the interview subject, and open his heart to facilitate cordial and deep communication.[3] For example, in the talk show "Night on the Corner," a host and three guests discuss a hot topic in-depth. At the beginning of each episode, the host and the two guests will talk for a while, then slowly walk to the table, sit down, and then gradually get into the topic and start a heated discussion. Then in the process of prior communication between the host and the guest, empathy serves as a primary strategy, allowing them to quickly establish an emotional connection. This enables the guests to enter a good state of mind and creates an atmosphere conducive to active thinking and unrestricted conversation. As a result, the entire interview carries depth and substance, leaving a strong impression on the audience.

3.2.2. Empathy strategies play a more significant role in women's talk shows

According to different types of talk shows, the hosting style of talk show hosts varies and can be broadly categorized into "moderate" and "sharp." [2] Empathy is a basic human interaction skill, and empathy strategies are present in every type of interview program, but the extent to which they are used varies.

For example, the representative of the sharp school "13 Invitation", the program style is very real. Sometimes the questions raised may be unadorned direct, sharp, essentially an in-depth discussion of the issue, seeking the collision of ideas without deliberately avoiding the conflict of ideas. In this context, the host does not need to stand too much in the perspective of the interviewee to perceive and protect each other's inner emotions. In an episode of "Thirteen Invitations," host Xu Zhiyuan interviewed Luo Xiang, and they discussed the issue of law and morality in depth. Xu Zhiyuan asked, "We all feel that pan-moralization is actually destroying moralization to some extent, so what is the logical chain underneath?" and "We all get obsessed with this outcome of justice when we're kids. How can this kind of thing be slowly fixed? Through what type of training?" These questions are relatively logical and truthful, requiring the host to demonstrate thinking skills to present in-depth questions without relying heavily on empathy strategies.

On the other hand, in moderate women's talk shows, the focus is on women with more emotional and delicate feelings, exploring women's spirit and strength through their life experiences. Compared to men's fixed ways of thinking, women are better at thinking from their emotions and feelings. They are deeply emotional about their own life experiences, so more professional and flexible empathy strategies are needed to help women express their feelings. By employing empathic strategies, female interviewees can be fully respected and valued, arousing a strong desire to express themselves. This creates an atmosphere where they can openly communicate with each other as friends, understand and respond to each other, connect, and share "their" world in the most comfortable state for the interviewees.

In another episode of "13 Invitations," when Xu Zhiyuan interviewed actress Hao Lei, it was evident that he used a different approach and level of empathy for the female interviewee. When Hao Lei discussed the impact and emotions brought about by tension and strangeness with her father, she became emotional, shedding a few tears and having difficulty controlling her emotions. Perhaps the sensitivity and sincerity of Hao Lei, being an actress, affected Xu Zhiyuan, who listened quietly and nodded occasionally. Hao Lei mentioned, "Because of my father and mother, that cruelty you cannot imagine, really, you can ask me about it." But Xu Zhiyuan said, "We are almost enough. Enough, we can talk in private." This sentence stopped an emotional actress from overexpressing herself at such a critical point of high emotions. It protected her from exposing herself excessively and gave her complete protection and respect. This also provided the audience with a comfortable and warm viewing experience. This interview illustrates how moderator Xu Zhiyuan employs different levels of empathy for different interviewees, demonstrating the significant role empathy strategies play in female interviews.

4. Embodiment of empathy strategies in female talk shows

4.1. Empathy in topic resonance, stirring up spiritual collision

Similar life experiences, upbringing, and shared interests create a spiritual resonance and a sense of closeness among the interviewees. This requires the host to reveal their most actual side in the interview, not to shy away from some topics and ideas, and to exchange a heart for a true feeling. If

appropriate, the host can also share their own views and validate the interviewee's ideas with their own practical experiences. The aim is not solely to convey the host's ideas but to quickly gain the trust of the interviewees through empathy.

For example, in the program "Dreamgirls," American actress and producer Reese Witherspoon interviews Ava DeJolie, the first black female director in the United States to make more than \$100 million at the box office.

Ava: "I really believe that the best ideas are sometimes born within a limited space. You know, the limitations that we encounter, and we have to use creativity to find a way out."

Rishi: "As I got older as an actor, I started to feel that the drama was getting lost. But I knew I must have an audience, and I needed to make a direct connection with them. I thought of the audience base and thought, 'I am going to make films that show what they want to see now, so I set up a production company.' That was because there were not many films I could act in. So can you tell us why you set up Listing Distribution?"

Reese: "I see women and people of color making videos but not airing them in cinemas. They are not connecting with the audience. They are not bonding with the audience. We are going to be the link that connects, and that is what the array is about in the first place."

This is a discussion and sharing of life experiences between two successful women. The harmony between them reveals the courageous, fearless, and adventurous spirit of the new generation of women. As you can see from this conversation, when Ava shares the idea that "creativity is born in a limited space," host Rishi captures the meaning of Ava's words and shares how she successfully transformed into a producer when she encountered age limitations as an actress. Rui Xi combined her own experiences with her own reflections to provide feedback, making Ava feel that the views she shared were empathized with by the host. This quietly brings the interviewee and the host closer to the resonance of the topic and the resonance of the heart. It also helps the audience quickly grasp the core meaning of what Ava is trying to say from Rishi's segment, enhancing the presenter's understanding to effectively communicate Ava's ideas. At the same time, Rui Xi's account of setting up her own production company naturally leads to questioning Ava about the reasons for establishing the columnist distribution company, resulting in a step-by-step and progressive discussion of the topic.

4.2. Empathy in artistic questioning reveals a unique life

In a talk show, when we want to explore a lesser-known side of the protagonist through their unique life experiences, we often need to delve into the story of the disappointing phases of their lives behind their success. We have to face some sensitive topics head-on. How can we ask these valuable questions in a way that makes the interviewee feel comfortable, respected, and happy to express ideas that are not readily available to them? This requires using some processed and artistic ways of asking questions.

For example, in "Hello! Big Girl", a conversation in Yang Lan's interview with international ballet artist Tan Yuan Yuan.

Yang Lan: You must have read the fairy tale "The Red Shoes" by Hans Christian Andersen as a child.

Tan Yuan Yuan: Seen.

Yang Lan: That fairy tale is sad. What do you make of the red dancing shoes? Is it not also sucking the best out of you in a way?

Tan Yuan Yuan: I think what it sucks away is probably this time I have with my family because I spend a lot of my time forever performing all over the world, especially with my mum and dad, including when I was a kid when I lived at school at 11 and wasn't with my mum and dad.

Yang Lan: I heard you cried a lot when you were a child and also cried in practice, didn't you?

Tan Yuan Yuan: I cry when I play some dramatic characters. Other times I think, how can it be like this? I've tried so hard, but why is it like this? Is it not enough? Well, then, I'll try again tomorrow. As a big girl, you have to be strong inside, like saying we can all do something nowadays as women.

At the beginning of this conversation, Yang Lan uses Hans Christian Andersen's fairy tale as a starting point, as if comparing Tan Yuan Yuan's career to a fairy tale, and in a beautiful fairy tale, there are sometimes elements of tragedy lurking, which naturally leads to the question "What is the best

thing that a ballet career can take away from a ballet artist?." If such a question is thrown naked at the visitor, it may overwhelm Tan Yuan Yuan for a moment with the impact and excitement the question brings. The artful questioning, like Yang Lan Yi's, puts her in the interviewee's shoes and elicits questions in a polite and accessible way, allowing the conversation to flow and occur naturally, helping the interviewee to reveal her unique life experiences and personality traits more relaxedly.

4.3. Empathy in accurate response to remove psychological barriers

When respondents express their genuine thoughts, they need some timely attention and feedback. This requires the moderator to quickly capture key points from what the interviewee is talking about, those points of information that are meaningful, questionable, and interesting, and to provide feedback in the form of follow-up questions, queries, and emphasis. This feedback comes based on a complete understanding of the interviewee, taking into account the interviewee's personality traits and personal experiences to respond.[4] This requires the moderator to do sufficient desk work to understand the interviewee before the interview fully.

Once Lan Yang interviewed Dr. Kissinger, Lan Yang collected the papers and lectures written by Dr. Kissinger when he was a professor at Harvard and even read all seven books he wrote from beginning to end. Although the program was only 27 minutes long, the effect was extraordinary. Afterward, Yang Lan said, "I read so much information, and although I only ended up with one or two questions, it does not mean that prior preparation was superfluous! It is like a fish needing a small amount of water drawn in the cotton to feed that fish, but it must be filled with a fish tank of water, and this seemingly excess water grasps the fish in any swimming direction!" This kind of adequate interview preparation enables the host to accurately capture the key points in the interviewee's words that can be explored and investigated. As in the exclusive interview with Sun Li in the issue of "Reading at Ten":

Moderator: We see you on the social platform fitness, yoga, dance, painting, and calligraphy, etc. Is there a particular core that you adhere to. Is there a common point that these things move you?

Sun Li: I want to be quieter and know myself better. It is also about being more free and in control of yourself. You can observe your heart when you do each thing again. I cannot write at all when people are particularly unquiet. Even when I was practicing Tai Chi there, my mind was not fixed. You will feel it yourself.

Moderator: You just mentioned the word sense of control. I would like to know, when did you start to have a sense of control over your work?

Sun Li: It is age. You'll find some things you can do without. The only way you can know what works for you and what doesn't is if you do it.

From this conversation, we can see that the host had some understanding of the interviewee, Sun Li, before the interview in order to find the breakthrough of the interview questions related to her daily life. At the same time, when Sun Li talked about the word "control," the host accurately grasped the key and used that word to ask about her sense of mastery over her work. To accurately grasp the interviewee's output, the goal is twofold. On the one hand, it makes the interviewee feel that what they say is being seriously listened to and taken into account, conveying a sense of value and importance. On the other hand, the interviews presented are tightly connected and logical, providing the audience with a clear and smooth viewing experience.

4.4. The empathy of expressions and movements is better than sound in silence

Empathy can be reflected in an audible dialogue or through subtle facial gestures and body language of the presenter. Psychologists have previously studied various aspects of body posture, such as the human head, shoulders, chest, spine, and waist, as the smallest unit for expressing one's mental outlook, thoughts, and emotions. These elements, when combined, form the expression of a sentence.[4] Therefore, even a slight nod, a knowing smile, or a reassuring gesture from the moderator are all adequate expressions of active attention and response to the interviewee. In the episode of the female interview program "Hello!", the first female conductor in China, Zheng Xiaoying, was interviewed. When Zheng Xiaoying, who is almost 90 years old, recalled the touching moments of her performance, Yang Lan, the host, showed respect and appreciation in her eyes. Yang Lan's smile and the moments where she held back tears made it seem like she was transported into the story, experiencing unforgettable memories with Zheng Xiaoying. At the height of her emotional charge, Yang Lan even clasped Zheng Xiaoying's hand, bringing a sense of comfort and security through her body movements

and skin contact. The program included several close-up shots of their clasped hands, and the silence conveyed more than words. Yang Lan's silent empathy facilitated a deep connection between two women from different age groups, leaving a strong impact on the audience.

5. Analysis of the improper use of empathy strategies in female talk shows

5.1. Lack of emotional identity hinders empathy

When the moderator is solely focused on hearing expected points of view with depth, conflict, and interplay, without truly understanding the interviewee's spiritual realm, it can lead to a lack of emotional recognition and limit the potential for empathy to play a role. Several reasons can contribute to this, such as attempting to portray a perfect image to fulfill one's desire for validation, acts of self-preservation, fear of losing control, or past traumatic emotional experiences.[5] In an episode of the women's interview variety show "Send 100 Girls Home," the host interviewed Yu Shuxin while grilling meat in a camping scene under the stars. This setting was intended to create a relaxed atmosphere and encourage the interviewee to speak freely. It was a good use of the host's empathy strategy. However, from the following dialogue, we can see that several times the interviewee's answers did not satisfy the moderator and failed to achieve the desired effect. As a result, the host resorted to asking more leading questions, eager to focus on the intended point and deepen the main idea. For example, during the process of grilling meat, a piece got scorched, and Yu Shuxin joked, "Why did I grill it until it's burnt?" The host laughed and replied, "Because you're too hot." Yu Shuxin responded with "burned to a crisp." Then, the host asked, "Are you afraid of this word? Afraid of being burned?" The conversation then shifted from a simple chat to an exploration of the interviewee's possible anxious side in a realistic sense.

Ding Ding Zhang: In fact, I am a little torn inside. On the one hand, I feel unsatisfied.

Yu Shuxin: What is not satisfying enough?

Ding Ding Zhang: That is, Yu Shuxin told me a lot, but what would you say are the things that are very impressive? It seems that there are none for the time being, so this is my confusion now.

Yu Shuxin: Because you have set it up that you think I, as a person, may speak something different today, or you think I will definitely output some novel ideas when I get such a change of identity, but I am really just very normal, this is the feeling that you are not satisfied, I really just don't have that kind of a lot of feelings.

The host fell into the habit of in-depth heart-to-heart interviews and did not open his heart to truly stand in the interviewee's perspective to envision the problem. They ignored the interviewee's pure and simple personality, which made it difficult for the host to believe that the interviewee's words were genuine and heartfelt. To overcome this, moderators need to let go of their own egos, understand each interviewee's personality, listen and accept their thoughts, and show respect for their inner world. This will create an emotional flow during the interview and touch the hearts of the audience.

5.2. Excessive empathy is counterproductive

Over-empathy is a process in which the individual's emotional response exceeds his or her environment and his or her own capacity for empathy. Overly empathic individuals tend to take others' feelings as their own and will take on others' emotions and responsibilities as part of their own. Taking on too much of others' emotions and responsibilities will likely create a psychological burden for themselves. When the presenter overuses empathy strategies, not only will the program presentation be diminished, but it may also affect the presenter's own physical and mental health. Over-empathizing with the interviewee is akin to being led by the other party's emotions, resulting in the host losing overall control of the program. This can lead to a loss of logic, objectivity and the diminished dissemination of the program's meaning.

Everything is indeed overwhelming, but just because the empathic interviewee is not overly involved in the other person's emotions does not mean they have to bear their pain. Therefore, female talk show hosts need to control the balance between emotion and reason when empathizing with interviewees. In the first episode of "Sister of the Wave," when Yuan Yonglin wanted to give up her position as captain due to a lack of confidence, A Duo tenderly but firmly said to her, "This is your homework." While responding with understanding, support, and trust, they didn't take on others'

emotions as their own but empathized reasonably.

6. Pathways for female talk show hosts to enhance their empathy skills

6.1. Focusing on women, truly understanding "her" world

Since the founding of New China, from the call for "women to hold up half the sky" to the promotion of universal compulsory education and the increasing number of excellent female workers in traditionally male-dominated jobs, the status of women in China has improved alongside the rapid development of the domestic economy. The media communication of the image of women has also gradually changed from conservative femininity to female emancipation and female self-growth. However, it is essential to acknowledge that the journey to change the status of women in society is still challenging and filled with social stereotypes. Specific labels and stereotypes of women in traditional social structures still exist and have not yet disappeared. For example, the results of a questionnaire survey conducted by Zero Point, a well-known private think tank in China, on the image of women in the media, women's demand for information, the "labeling" of women in the media and the public's attitude towards women in the news media industry, showed that 67.7% of the public believed that people still pay more attention to successful women's. Women require attention and understanding of society in various aspects.

As torchbearers of women's stories and images, women talk show hosts have a responsibility to understand the challenges and pain points of contemporary women's development. The program aims to comprehend women's struggles in the workplace, family relationships, marriage, and emotions, as well as the challenges posed by age and appearance. It also endeavors to understand contemporary women's spiritual needs and self-worth. By providing a platform for women to boldly voice their opinions, the program demonstrates a profound sense of humanistic care and empathy towards women, offering them solid protection in an era where women's voices have begun to shine.

6.2. Integrating psychology to develop a keen and delicate heart

As an activity that requires interpersonal communication, presenting requires the presenter to integrate a number of disciplines. The ability to empathize as a female talk show host is a concept within the field of psychology. The psychology of broadcasting includes the psychology of the announcer and the psychology of the listener. In order to understand the psychology of the listener, it is essential to focus on examining and understanding the times, environment, living standards, and cultural background. This involves capturing the emotions, wishes, requirements, ideals, ethics, morals, and aesthetic interests of the specific listener. Furthermore, it requires deeply appreciating the mutual psychological influence between the announcer and the listener, as it forms the core of the psychology of broadcasting.

As a practice-oriented discipline, presenters need to apply what they have learned in practice. Through practice, a good facilitator can skillfully establish an emotional connection with the interviewee, be sensitive to the positive or negative emotions that arise during the conversation, and be flexible enough to utilize each change of emotion as an opportunity for a breakthrough in discussion topics. Naturally, a high degree of sensitivity and empathy is developed. By feeling warmth or sadness and perceiving values and meanings within the conversation, one can truly connect with the interviewee, accepting and embracing all their emotions and fostering a space where rational and calm thinking coexists with a keen and delicate heart.

6.3. Read a million books and gain insight into the world from around you

As talk show hosts, it is common to encounter people from various backgrounds throughout your career. Dealing with different individuals requires employing different interview strategies, and this holds true for female talk show hosts as well. Even the famous presenter Yang Lan, who has conducted over a thousand interviews, does a lot of reading before the interview to have some knowledge about the interviewee's field. She says, "While reading may not always provide me with the perfect question, the most important thing is that it prevents me from asking ten cheap, amateurish, or even foolish questions." When discussing a specific topic with the interviewee, having a deep cultural background, sufficient knowledge, and discerning insight is crucial. Without these, it becomes challenging to engage in in-depth and comprehensive discussions. Exploring the interviewee's characteristics will only scratch

the surface, rendering the conversation shallow and lacking substance.

In addition to reading a lot of books, it is also important to look at the people around you from all walks of life and understand their actions and thoughts from their perspectives. It is like a designer working on a product to improve a pain point. The design methods in the book may not help the designer find the pain point that hits the consumer. However, by putting oneself in the consumer's shoes and simulating their inner activities while using the product, those pain points may become visible. The presenter is able to experience the sweetness and sourness of countless lives and professions, appreciate different human situations and see the differences between people in the world, increase his or her experience, and open up his or her horizons. This enables them to ask straightforward and relevant questions to the individuals being interviewed.

7. Conclusions

In this era of "her" variety shows, women's talk shows have an irreplaceable significance: they focus on female characters, build women's image, convey women's values, and promote women's development. Moreover, the judicious use of empathy is an effective strategy to enhance the visibility of women's talk shows and create value in them. Empathy is an ability, a method, and a reflection of the significance of the times that the presenter's shoulders. They use empathy to unearth more inspiring women's stories, witness women's sentiments and commitment, and shine women's wisdom and creativity. It allows the audience to find solace and empathy, dispel the public's preconceptions about women, and reconstruct the image of women in a new era.

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