

A Practical Study on the Publicization of Female Narratives: Taking "The King of Stand-up Comedy" as an Example

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ABSTRACT

The "publicization of female narratives" represents a gender-based approach to redefining public spheres, fundamentally challenging the binary division between public and private domains. By elevating female experiences to public visibility, this movement shifts societal focus from "womens issues" to "human issues." The collective emergence of female stand-up comedians in "The King of Stand-up Comedy" provides a vivid empirical example supporting this theoretical framework. This study categorizes female narratives within the program into two trajectories: "self-reflection" and "social engagement," with an in-depth analysis of the Xi HA meme featuring a flight attendant uniform. Research reveals that the core mechanism of narrative publicization lies in transforming private experiences into public discourse, compelling institutional responses and reforms. From laughter to change, female narratives are redefining the boundaries of public discourse.

KEYWORDS

Narrative publicization; Female talk shows; Gender discourse; Institutional critique; Habermas

1 Introduction

Contemporary sociologist of culture Jeffrey Alexander observed that "what governs the world are often subjective, internal emotions." This insight hits the nail on the head when applied to stand-up comedy. Yet during the early stages of stand-up comedy development, female narratives were consistently excluded from mainstream storytelling. Take the widely recognized show "Talk Show Conference" as an example. In the first season, there was only one female contestant, Siwen, and even the female guest, Liu Yan, was not spared from the unrestrained lewd jokes of male actors. Female narratives were not only scarce but also lacked equal discourse power. Female narratives were not only scarce in quantity but also lacked equal voice in the industry.

However, with the improvement of Chinas womens economic status, the reversal of gender structure in higher education, the rise of the fourth wave of feminism, and the vigorous development of media technology empowerment, the communication ecology of gender issues has been reconstructed. The "The King of Stand-up Comedy" focused on in this article is a typical example of this reconstruction process. Produced by iQIYI and initiated by Stephen Chow, the show has rapidly become a phenomenal comedy IP since its premiere in 2024. In the intense competition format, actors need to choose topics with the strongest resonance to win audience votes, and gender issues, due to their broad social foundation, have become a rich source of creativity for many contestants.

As a result, a wave of female stand-up comedians has emerged: Tang Xiangyu satirized her unmarried status at thirty being "judged" by fellow villagers, deconstructing traditional marriage norms through the line "What doesnt kill me will eventually kill me"; Cai Cai shattered the veil of "menstrual shame" with an eight-minute performance, transforming intimate and taboo female experiences into a social media movement #RejectMenstrualShame; Xiao Lu mocked workplace gender bias with her "job offers that make your heart race," humorously bringing gender discrimination into public discourse.

Although these women's expressions have faced skepticism, such as "exploiting the female dividend," as an increasing number of actresses collectively "take the stage," they employ humor as a weapon to transform personal suffering into public laughter. While deconstructing gender biases, they are also reshaping the authentic image and profound emotional needs of contemporary women.

2 Conceptual Definition of "Publicization of Female Narratives"

The concept of "narrative publicization" originates from Jurgen Habermass theory of the public sphere, which requires three essential elements: a public audience, collective consciousness, and mass media. Its core characteristics include: public opinion formed through discussion and freely circulated; the public sphere open to all citizens; and citizens acquiring public attributes through dialogue. However, this classical theory exhibits significant gender biases, as female experiences have long been excluded from public discourse. Issues such as domestic life, childbirth, bodily experiences, and emotional matters are categorized as private domains, lacking legitimacy in public discussions. This theoretical

dilemma precisely constitutes the challenge addressed by the concept of "female narrative publicization" in this study.

The most compelling critique of traditional public sphere theory stems from the seminal thesis articulated during the second wave of feminism in Europe and America: "The personal is political." This proposition reveals that female experiences traditionally categorized as private—such as domestic labor, bodily autonomy, and emotional needs—are profoundly shaped by power structures and social institutions, thereby acquiring public significance. Applying this perspective, female narratives in talk shows constitute a form of political rights practice. They bridge the gap between social issues and the public, offering a nuanced entry point for discussing public affairs.

Therefore, this paper defines "the publicization of female narratives" as follows: It refers to the practice of reconstructing the public sphere through a gender perspective, fundamentally aiming to deconstruct the binary opposition between public and private domains. By granting public visibility to women's experiences, it facilitates a shift in societal cognition from addressing "women's issues" to exploring "human issues."

3 Textual Practice and Discourse Strategies of Publicizing Female Narratives

3.1 Two Pathways: Internal Exploration and External Engagement

The female narratives emerging in "The King of Stand-up Comedy" can be broadly categorized into two orientations: "self-reflection" and "external competition."

Actresses who adopt an "inner exploration" approach focus their narratives on the psychological world of women: urban white-collar workers' job anxieties, introverts' social exhaustion, and the existential dilemmas faced by educated women. Shi Yan stands as a representative figure. With her introverted i-person charisma, she delivers daily life scenarios with razor-sharp precision: When recounting encounters with eccentric property owners who complained about motion-sensor lights "turning on to summon ghosts and turning off to leave them nowhere," she responded with a cold remark, "When you don't know where ghosts are, they're usually right behind you." She candidly described the secret longing for romance after over a decade of marriage, stating, "I guard the kitchen while he keeps watch in the bathroom—neither of us wants to enter the bedroom," and observed how "many men after marriage gravitate toward domineering CEOs—possessing all flaws except a perfect family background." Shi Yan's performances carry a "sullen yet sharp" intensity, with evasive gazes and measured pacing that consistently deliver incisive commentary, earning her the audience's description as "the most innocent face delivering the harshest words." This narrative approach prioritizes public engagement over vehement accusations, instead exposing the psychological struggles of introverts and emotional detachment in middle-aged couples, sparking resonance and discussion.

The "Outward Struggle" movement focuses on structural pressures from the external world: marital judgments within rural clans, gender discrimination in workplaces, and societal constraints on female body shapes. Actresses like Tang Xiangyu, Cai Cai, Xiao Lu, and Echo courageously confront these institutional barriers through their lived experiences. Rooted in rural communities, Tang Xiangyu counters traditional gender biases with her defiant declaration: "What doesn't kill me will eventually kill me," while satirizing pervasive "involution" through the line: "I thought leaving the workplace meant I wasn't a top performer, but everywhere I look, there are cowboys." Qi Qi tackles body insecurity by asserting: "My predecessors fought for dining rights; I fight for full meals," challenging societal "food shame" and exposing the homogeneity of screen aesthetics through the observation: "All types of female leads get cast except plus-size girls." This sharp critique of the "slim-is-righteous" social norm empowers women to reclaim bodily autonomy. Unlike mild critics, their performances radiate intense anger, bringing long-buried female experiences into mainstream media visibility. When "forced-marriage girls" become protagonists who shape their own destinies, and plus-size women transcend stereotypes as embodiments of diverse beauty, female narratives transition from personal stories to collective narratives. Transformation of common topics.

These two trajectories collectively form the complete narrative framework of contemporary women: encompassing both philosophical aspirations for upward exploration and practical resilience grounded in everyday existence. It is precisely this multifaceted collective discourse that has fundamentally challenged the singular, male-dominated modes of public discourse. Among all expressions, Xi HA texts most vividly demonstrate the blurring of public-private boundaries and even catalyze tangible social transformation.

3.2 Case Study: Xi HA and Institutional Critique of "Stewardess Uniforms"

"She is a vigorous wild grass, a heroine who emerges from nowhere, and a passionate flight attendant ready to fight when the time comes. She demonstrates that speaking out loud truly makes a difference, and we are grateful to 'The King of Stand-up Comedy' for Xi HA." This was the unreserved praise for Xi HA by program guest Pang Bo, which also resonated with the audience's sentiments.

The public's stereotypical image of flight attendants is typically refined and elegant—dressed in impeccably styled uniforms and wearing standardized smiles. Yet in the show, the Xi HA flight attendant wears loose, vibrant T-shirts paired with crisp, gender-neutral hairstyles, presenting a distinctly tomboyish appearance. She even quipped: "With this look,

passengers might mistake me for a hijacker when I board the plane." Ironically, it's precisely this defiant, unconventional attire that establishes her as the central figure in her subsequent critique of industry norms.

The first episode of the Xi HA segment centers on the absurdity of flight attendants wearing stockings in their daily work. The narrative unfolds through three key points: First, it explains why attendants wear stockings—passengers claim they cause discomfort, but this argument is laughably flawed since the physical drawbacks of stockings include poor insulation and visible chafing. The Xi HA segment cleverly references sprinter Usain Bolt, whose 50-meter dash time of 58.69 seconds with stockings proves their ineffectiveness. Next, it highlights safety hazards: In fire emergencies, attendants must remove stockings as they become highly flammable in such conditions—a practice that remains unreasonable in the 21st century despite safety warnings. The segment then poses a critical question: "Why do we wear short skirts, stockings, and high heels in such complex high-altitude environments? Can't we just wear pants?" Through blunt language, it exposes how occupational requirements and industry standards under patriarchal structures are dangerous and unnecessary. Rather than abstract feminist theories, the Xi HA narrative uses real-life examples to demonstrate behavioral absurdity, encouraging viewers to critically examine institutional discipline. The episode concludes with a poignant reflection on workplace safety standards. In the Xi HA scene, performers fantasize about wearing jeans and smothering flames with a single motion, using the phrase the fire is under the crotch to juxtapose the body's most intimate area with the most hazardous scenario. This metaphorically addresses the public debate on the appropriateness of professional attire.

The viral skit quickly trended on social media platforms, sparking widespread public debate. In response, multiple airlines implemented uniform reforms allowing female flight attendants to opt for trousers instead of mandatory stockings. From the eight-minute stage performance to the exponential growth of social media discussions, and ultimately to policy adjustments at the institutional level, the Xi HA showcase vividly demonstrated how personal experiences evolve into public discourse and drive societal transformation. This phenomenon also aligns with the central theme of Part Two: Through the simple question "Can I wear pants?" Xi HA has elevated women's experiences to public visibility, transforming them into a catalyst for institutional change.

4 Epilogue

The essence of publicizing female narratives lies in challenging the implicit rule of "what is worth discussing." In traditional constructions of the public sphere, domestic affairs, reproduction, bodily experiences, and emotions were presumed to be private matters, with their narrators excluded from public discourse. The collective emergence of female performers in "The King of Comedy: Stand-up Season" subverts this assumption: through laughter, they demonstrate that experiences once dismissed as private are precisely the most crucial gateway to understanding our era.

The significance of this subversion extends far beyond simply making women "visible." Viewing and being viewed are inherently unequal: visibility does not equate to recognition, nor does being narrated necessarily mean being heard. The success of "Comedy Kings Solo Season" lies in bringing long-stigmatized personal experiences into the public domain, demanding visibility and serious consideration. When a society begins to confront menstrual pain, the absurdity of uniform mandates, and the pressure of forced marriage, and when institutions start addressing challenges once only whispered about in private corners, the public sphere shifts from a "who has the right to speak" filter mechanism to an open space of "what deserves attention," truly rewriting the rules of the stage.

The skepticism surrounding those who "reap the benefits of female dominance" ironically underscores the disruptive nature of such rewriting. The core of these doubts isn't about challenging the content itself, but rather attacking the very right to speak—essentially implying that you shouldn't be voicing your opinions here. Yet what truly unsettles them isn't women's presence in discourse, but their refusal to trade silence for dignity, choosing instead to illuminate society's ills through their words.

Effective communication serves as the foundation for enhancing mutual understanding, resolving conflicts, and advancing social progress, with candid storytelling being its essential first step. As more silent individuals transition from the audience to the center stage, courageously sharing their personal narratives, individual joys and sorrows converge into a river of public discourse. This process builds bridges of communication, enabling social civilization to reach greater heights through active listening and mutual comprehension.

In the future, we hope more marginalized groups will take the microphone, step from the audience to the spotlight, and share their stories—thereby marking the progress of a more open society.

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