

THE LATE NIGHT REVOLUTION:

How Jimmy Fallon Is Redefining The Talk Show

By Stephen Winzenburg

For only the second time in TV history, there are multiple dramatic changes being made to the late night TV line-up. And this time it's more than just the reshuffling that occurred when Johnny Carson left "The Tonight Show" in the early 1990s.

Instead, sixty years after the creation of the late night talk show format the entire genre is undergoing a revolution, led by Jimmy Fallon's dramatic cutting down on the amount of "talk" and turning it into a more scripted "show."

Fallon's 2014 transition to hosting "The Tonight Show" has been an overwhelming ratings success, and one of the reasons may be that Fallon has decided to jettison much of the talk aspects of the program in favor of creative monologues and comedy sketches made to live on as viral videos. Major entertainment and political celebrities have made rare comedic TV appearances with Fallon, often without ever having to submit to boring interview questions.

The former "Saturday Night Live" star has turned "The Tonight Show" into something that's no longer a true talk show. While previous hosts used over 50% of the non-advertising program content for interviews with guests, Fallon has only averaged using 37%. He has shifted the focus of the program to comedic segments during the monologue, musical spoofs, celebrities playing beer pong, and corny gimmicks that seem straight out of "SNL."

While the program might be able to be categorized as a variety show or a sketch comedy show, it certainly is not a talk show based on the genre's historic definition. For six decades the term has implied that a majority of the program is unscripted conversation between two or more people. When not counting ad time, Fallon uses most of his show for non-talk: 21% for the monologue, 23% for comedic sketches, and 14% for music. If you include the ads, he spends 19 minutes of each hour in commercials while only 13 minutes are used for talk.

Historically, Johnny Carson and Jay Leno both used 51% for talk. Most of the other current late night talk shows use about the same or more. David Letterman, Conan O'Brien, and newcomer Seth Meyers all are just over 50% and Jimmy Kimmel is at 48%. So Fallon's 37% is a dramatic departure from the norm and may be revolutionizing the format's definition.

This subjective analysis measures how the major late night shows use their program time. It is based on a content analysis tool I first developed at the University of Minnesota and have used for decades in monitoring a variety of television program formats. Late night segments were timed and rounded to half minutes for five airings during May of 2014. Those program segments were then categorized as either “talk,” “monologue,” “comedy/sketch,” “music,” or “in/out/clips” which includes non-original program content such as introductions, scenes from movies being promoted, outside videos used in the show, and program endings. Advertising time was also measured and percentage results are reported based on both program-only (without ads) or the entire show (with ads).

LATE NIGHT TALK SHOW CONTENT (PROGRAM-ONLY)					
	show totals may not equal 100% due to rounding of averages				
	TALK	MONOLOGUE	COMEDY	MUSIC	IN/OUT/CLIPS
WATCH WHAT HAPPENS	77%	3%	13%	0%	7%
CHELSEA LATELY	76%	4%	13%	0%	7%
CONAN O'BRIEN	53%	18%	18%	8%	4%
DAVID LETTERMAN	51%	17%	19%	10%	4%
SETH MEYERS	51%	16%	22%	7%	4%
JIMMY KIMMEL	48%	21%	16%	10%	5%
ARSENIO HALL	48%	13%	27%	7%	5%
CRAIG FERGUSON	43%	14%	34%	5%	5%
JIMMY FALLON	37%	21%	23%	14%	6%

Note that Fallon not only has much less content than the other shows, but that he comes in dead last in talk while having the longest monologue and the most music. His monologues have gotten rid of any political bite that previous “Tonight Show” hosts had by focusing on weird news items. He uses his musical abilities to spoof songs or sing along with guests, which is rarely done by other late-night stars.

Probably the biggest surprise is that Fallon’s “Late Night” replacement Seth Meyers is doing a pretty traditional talk show format along the lines of David Letterman, who was the original host of “Late Night.” Considering that Meyers follows Fallon’s reduced-talk ratings success, it seems like a step backward to see the new “Late Night” become another bland old-fashioned program that should instead be appealing to a younger audience at a later hour.

After sitting through dozens of hours of late night shows, I individually analyzed each program in relation to others in the genre (listed here in order of amount of talk time).

	WATCH WHAT HAPPENS LIVE (Bravo)					
	TALK	MONOLOGUE	COMEDY	MUSIC	IN/OUT/CLIPS	ADS
Program Content (no ads)	77%	3%	13%	0%	7%	
Entire Show (with ads)	55%	2%	9%	0%	5%	30%

The Sunday to Thursday live gabfest, hosted by Andy Cohen, is a true talk show in every sense of the word. It's filled with great questions and conversation. The program manages to attract big name celebrities by asking pointed questions in a light-hearted way. The alcohol served by the nightly guest bartender helps loosen the lips of everyone from Oprah to Lady Gaga.

This is probably the best talk show on late night, if not on television. It manages to include goofy games, live callers, Twitter questions, retro clips, and deeply personal questions that stars are forced to answer in a segment called "Plead the Fifth." It has just the right amount of comedy mixed in with new gimmicks and repeated favorites. This show, and not Jimmy Fallon's "Tonight Show," truly modernizes the talk show genre by integrating the comedy without losing the talk elements.

Over three-fourths of the program content is direct dialogue with guests, and 13% is used for clever games based on the celebrities' interests. "Watch What Happens Live" also uses a lot of clips from stars' past work or upcoming projects, devoting more time to clips than any other program in this study.

There are only two problems with this program. First is the overuse of the network's "Real Housewives" stars as guests and topics of discussion. The ladies are, for the most part, boring, repetitive, and not worth devoting so much time to. Even when non-Housewives are on Cohen wants to discuss a movie star's obsession with one of the Housewives programs.

Second is the very biased host, whose effusive praise of stars borders on flattery and who encourages marijuana smoking, heavy drinking, sexual promiscuity, and bad language. It's doubtful that the show would be as entertaining without Cohen, but if viewers looked beyond his non-threatening persona they would find a self-promoting propagandist of limited talent. In one of his popular "Mazel" and "Jackhole" segments at the end of each program, Cohen slammed Ryan Seacrest by saying, "Those who can do, those who can't host." Never was a phrase more appropriately spoken.

	CHELSEA LATELY (E!					
	TALK	MONOLOGUE	COMEDY	MUSIC	IN/OUT/CLIPS	ADS
Program Content (no ads)	76%	4%	13%	0%	7%	
Entire Show (with ads)	51%	3%	8%	0%	5%	33%

Chelsea Handler is an acquired taste; a potty-mouthed, demeaning know-it-all who uses R-rated insult humor with a sourpuss face. Her show is essentially improv comedy and is not traditional question-and-answer talk.

The bulk of the program (two of the three talk segments) has Handler hosting a panel of comedians who comment on the day’s pop culture hot topics. These sections seem loosely scripted, where Handler feeds questions to mostly unknown roundtable participants that make droll jokes.

For one segment on each episode a celebrity guest appears for about six minutes, a star that is adored by the overly-enthusiastic studio audience and slammed by Handler with put-down humor. If it’s a hunky successful movie star like Channing Tatum, Chelsea makes sure to tell him how ugly he is or how his last movie sucked. Very little actual adult conversation goes on during the interview—it’s mostly two people joking with each other to the point of almost flirting and sometimes Handler never even discusses the project the performer is on to promote.

As a talk show “Chelsea Lately” is not successful in the area of interviewing but that’s not why viewers watch. It’s all about Chelsea and not about the guests, which means it appeals to people who are attracted to a sardonic bleached blonde who has nothing but bad to say about the world. It’s hard to believe that when this show ends in August she will attract enough viewers to justify her pay raise at Netflix, where she will probably be allowed to spew her four-letter words without fear of censorship.

	CONAN O'BRIEN (TBS)					
	TALK	MONOLOGUE	COMEDY	MUSIC	IN/OUT/CLIPS	ADS
Program Content (no ads)	53%	18%	18%	8%	4%	
Entire show (with ads)	36%	12%	12%	5%	3%	31%

The biggest surprise when watching the former “Tonight Show” host’s TBS talk show is how much it looks like the old “Tonight Show.” While O’Brien may have been considered the hip underdog when he took over “Late Night” on NBC in 1993 or even “Tonight” in 2009, he has transformed into a rather dull, repetitive, hound dog-faced host who often seems to just go through motions instead of trying to compete in the modern media environment.

His numbers show that he is average in every way, comparable to other late night hosts. He uses 53% of his program content for traditional talk interviews, which is close to what David Letterman does now or Jay Leno did in the past. As a matter of fact, his averages almost mirror Letterman’s. So if you like an old-fashioned talk show with celebrity question-and-answer, then Conan may be the show for you.

But his guest list is odd, ranging from the stars of the latest blockbuster movie to comedians few have ever heard of. His comedy bits seem outdated, like he is repeating concepts he did ten years ago when he was the hip late night host. And the only thing that makes his program different from the others is that he has his announcer sit with him on the couch the way Ed McMahon used to do for Johnny Carson. Andy Richter is given little to do and often seems oblivious to why he's even there.

When both the host and the sidekick have dazed and confused looks on their faces, as if they'd rather be anywhere other than doing a talk show, then the audience is going to be equally as bored. With Conan's comedy pedigree this program should be much, much better than it is and needs to update itself to compete against Jimmy Fallon.

LATE SHOW WITH DAVID LETTERMAN (CBS)						
	TALK	MONOLOGUE	COMEDY	MUSIC	IN/OUT/CLIPS	ADS
Program Content (no ads)	51%	17%	19%	10%	4%	
Entire Show (with ads)	33%	11%	11%	7%	3%	35%

The reigning king of the genre, who has been on the air in various incarnations longer than any other network late night talk show host in history, is getting ready to retire and it's none too soon. Letterman is the definition of "average" when it comes to a late night talk show. He spends a typical amount of time in monologue, comedy, talk, and music. But none of it is inspired and he's just going through the motions.

It's hard to believe that 32 years ago this was the hip host who attracted all the college viewers on the original "Late Night" on NBC. The sarcastic jokes, the silly gimmicks, and the goofy grins all seemed so fresh and fun back then. Today Letterman just seems cranky, repetitive, and at times clueless.

His guest list is often made up of old timers that we've seen many times before, from Regis Philbin and Barbara Walters to Adam Sandler and animal expert Jack Hanna (who was given three segments totaling 17 minutes on one episode!). Letterman often asks bizarre questions meant to throw the guests off, and most stars are noticeably nervous to have to face the host.

The monologues aren't particularly funny and his comedy bits can be outdated with a heavy emphasis on fake TV ads and fake news reports. He also spends too much time trying to keep the studio crowd laughing through inside jokes that the home viewers won't get, with grainy dark images of some lady in the audience that he makes fun of. While this may have been amusing thirty years ago when few people could see videos of themselves, it seems out of place in a modern era where everyone can upload their own YouTube videos.

Since Letterman is leaving the air, he has no motivation to change the show in order to adapt to the challenge from Jimmy Fallon. That's too bad because Dave was the Jimmy Fallon of the 1980s with fresh ideas and cutting-edge ironic humor. The problem is that Letterman's still doing the same shtick thirty years later instead of bringing his style into the modern era.

	LATE NIGHT WITH SETH MEYERS (NBC)					
	TALK	MONOLOGUE	COMEDY	MUSIC	IN/OUT/CLIPS	ADS
Program Content (no ads)	51%	16%	22%	7%	4%	
Entire Show (with ads)	33%	10%	14%	4%	3%	36%

Jimmy Fallon's replacement on "Late Night" seems to have gone under the radar in all the brouhaha over Fallon taking over "The Tonight Show." And that may be a good thing.

Like Fallon, Seth Meyers is a "Saturday Night Live" alumnus with a background in scripted sketch comedy. So it would be natural to assume that his show is similar to Fallon's and that the two hosts, close to each other in age, would both create programs that appeal to the younger demographic. Instead, Seth has merely delivered another mediocre talk show that seems similar to Conan and Jimmy Kimmel by doing mostly traditional talk with a few modern segments tossed in.

He uses an average amount of airtime to interview guests in a somewhat formal way. Meyers seems uncomfortable and tries too hard to be a good conversationalist. Being a talk host doesn't appear to come naturally to him and he would seem more relaxed doing scripted "Weekend Update" fake news segments each night.

It doesn't help that he mixes former "SNL" guests like Tina Fey, whose professionalism overshadows Meyers, with guests the audience has never heard of, like author Jonah Keri. Meyers thought he had a coup in scoring Adam Duritz from Counting Crows for the musician's second talk show appearance in twenty years. But there was a reason the guy hadn't been on the couch before—he's a terrible guest! And when Duritz gave short answers Meyers looked flustered beneath his cheesy smile.

It's hard to say why Meyers was chosen for this job, other than that "SNL" producer Lorne Michaels also oversees this show. Meyer's monologue delivery skills are unpolished, his comedy bits seem forced, and his banter with bandleader Fred Armisen goes nowhere.

So while the averages show that Meyers has decided to play it safe and do a show that is similar to others in late night, his skills need a lot of polishing and his writers need to make the program much more contemporary. This is the show following

Jimmy Fallon and the younger late, late audience needs more than just rehashed “SNL” material.

	JIMMY KIMMEL LIVE (ABC)						
	TALK	MONOLOGUE	COMEDY	MUSIC	IN/OUT/CLIPS	ADS	
Program Content (no ads)	48%	21%	16%	10%	5%		
Entire Show (with ads)	31%	14%	10%	6%	3%	37%	

Jimmy Kimmel has successfully straddled both the old-fashioned talk show world and the new social media video age by keeping most of the traditional talk show structure while mocking modern pop culture. Though he’s not quite as entertaining, energetic, or edgy as Jimmy Fallon, Kimmel understands the need to keep young viewers. So his program ends up being a blend of old-fashioned celebrity interviews and contemporary comedy gimmicks.

Kimmel’s monologue is more frenetic than most, with a heavy dependence upon video clips and comedy gimmicks in the middle of his stand up routine. He has done this for years and other late night hosts adapted his style of going beyond the normal punchline monologue to integrating fake visuals and pre-produced bits in the middle of his jokes.

Not all that Kimmel does works and he doesn’t seem to care. A caped Patton Oswalt riding a white horse into the studio to present Kimmel with an award comes across as lame instead of funny, though it was something that social media sites buzzed about the next day. Kimmel just tries to do something visually different and his show is made for ADHD viewers who like the opening 15 minutes of the show to be somewhat scattered.

The interview segments are extremely traditional but Kimmel never seems quite sure what to ask next. Kimmel enjoys being unconventional, such as the episode where Julia Roberts was the second guest for the night, following Sally Field. Why would megastar Roberts not be the person to go first? The audience is never told. But then Kimmel brought both stars out together for a third segment where they did a “celebrity curse off,” which really didn’t work but was an interesting concept. Its purpose appeared to be to make something that social media would talk about, and on YouTube the video has almost one million views.

Kimmel’s late night show was the first to begin to edge away from the talk aspect of the talk show. At 48% talk he does just slightly less than most competitors. But he has never really broken out of the traditional talk show mold. The band, the sidekick (Guillermo), the monologue, and the desk are all still there. His lethargic, dry sense of humor also gives the show a very old-fashioned feel, especially compared to Fallon’s hyperactive puppy act. So while Kimmel will probably never quite match Fallon’s popularity, the ABC host is doing just enough to keep his show successful.

THE ARSENIO HALL SHOW (synd)						
	TALK	MONOLOGUE	COMEDY	MUSIC	IN/OUT/CLIPS	ADS
Program Content (no ads)	48%	13%	27%	7%	5%	
Entire Show (with ads)	33%	9%	20%	5%	3%	30%

A pioneer in contemporary late night talk, Arsenio Hall came back to the airwaves 25 years after his original success to pretty much do the same thing he was doing a quarter of a century earlier. He looked a little older, was a little less hip, but still had a unique personality that appealed to an underserved audience.

He did a little less talk than average, but did much shorter monologues than others and spent more time on comedy gimmicks. Some of these routines fell flat and he seemed to have a second-string creative team that utilized old-fashioned ideas like Hall going into the audience to find out what people thought of Solange attacking Jay Z in an elevator or playing a scripted ghetto slang version of Password with Betty White. But having a swear jar? Building a shelving unit on stage? Trying to raise money to buy the L.A. Clippers? These concepts should have been killed in the writers' room.

Hall was famous for some of his exchanges with cutting-edge guests in the 1990s but here the show's talk segments were pretty conventional. Tom Bergeron did a long Skype session with a fan. Shannon Doherty talked about her latest TV movie. Bishop T. D. Jakes even showed up for an "inspirational" segment, which seemed a bit out of place. None of the episodes had the contemporary feel that Arsenio used to possess.

Hall seems like a nice guy who asks some good questions but got caught in a time warp. His smirk couldn't cover the fact that the program lacked anything beyond the average. While he may have once been one of the great hosts, in 2014 he just blended into the mix and was cancelled because of his inability to stand out in today's glut of late night hosts that are trying to attract a younger audience.

THE LATE, LATE SHOW WITH CRAIG FERGUSON (CBS)						
	TALK	MONOLOGUE	COMEDY	MUSIC	IN/OUT/CLIPS	ADS
Program Content (no ads)	43%	14%	34%	5%	5%	
Entire Show (with ads)	29%	10%	22%	3%	3%	33%

For almost ten years Scottish comedian Craig Ferguson has been going wild in the post-Letterman time slot that used to be hosted by Tom Snyder and Craig Kilborn. I hadn't been paying attention to what Ferguson was doing with the show, having not watched it in years, and was somewhat shocked when I saw its current incarnation.

Instead of an insightful, well-produced, humorous talk show, Ferguson has turned the late, late slot into a mish-mash of sloppy improv, ridiculous physical shtick, and bitter sarcasm. It's hard to describe how unlike any other late night show this program has become, and that's not a compliment.

Ferguson typically has a "cold" opening where he stands too close to the main camera and has someone from the audience in the background that he's ready to tease. This segment seems like a time waster and often is more embarrassing than funny.

Then after the credits comes a monologue with an animatronic robot sidekick named Geoff. This is apparently supposed to be funny, as the audience screams with laughter every time the robot responds to the host, but it looked stupid the first time I saw it and it still looked stupid after I watched all week. It cheapened the humor and made Ferguson appear amateur.

After a commercial break typically comes a segment where Craig gets a "phone call" from a fake celebrity or fake viewer with a complaint. To see this once for a minute or two might have been okay, but this was done most nights and the segment ran up to eight minutes long. It was sloppy improv and not very funny.

Worst was a dancing horse that popped up to waste time after commercial breaks. One night there was almost 90 seconds of the horse dancing and Ferguson trying to score a soccer goal through the horse barn doors. How did this get on the Tiffany Network?

Eventually Ferguson gets to the guest and he's actually a pretty good interviewer because he combines an outsider's insight with listening skills and his twisted sense of humor. The problem is that there's just not enough talk (43%). A couple episodes had just one guest while more time was spent goofing off with robot Geoff and taking the fake phone call. Ferguson said, "We are not like any other late night show." He certainly was right about that but he may not want to be bragging about it. It's good that he is leaving the air and giving the slot to someone who can take the time to do something creative and intelligent with it.

	THE TONIGHT SHOW WITH JIMMY FALLON (NBC)						
	TALK	MONOLOGUE	COMEDY	MUSIC	IN/OUT/CLIPS	ADS	
Program Content (no ads)	37%	21%	23%	14%	6%		
Entire Show (with ads)	22%	13%	15%	9%	4%	36%	

It doesn't take a rocket scientist to see that Fallon's ratings have gone up in direct proportion to the amount of reduction he has made in talk content. The less he does

a traditional talk show, the more people watch. So his program devotes the least amount of time to talk of any major late night program.

One reason may be that Fallon isn't a very good interviewer. His talents lie in sketch comedy and song parodies, not in asking a celebrity about her new movie. When he does conduct an interview he either overly kisses up to the guest or does something playful to distract from the fact that his interview skills are weak.

He takes the "SNL" approach of throwing whatever he can at the comedy wall and seeing what sticks. Some of it works, while other things flop. He just keeps moving and the audience doesn't seem to notice that some of the gimmicks go too long or that he wastes time padding a show with weak filler.

Fallon does have a good creative team that has put together some fun material for the monologues and comedy sketches. Unlike previous "Tonight Show" hosts, Fallon rarely jokes about politics and instead focuses on things that often only a kid could appreciate. Some may call it dumbed-down compared to past "Tonight Show" hosts but he's adapting himself to the millennial generation's sophomoric sense of humor.

Notable is that Fallon has refused to play by the traditional "Tonight Show" rules. Johnny Carson and Jay Leno used 51% of the show's program time for talk and had a minor amount of music. Fallon de-emphasizes the talk and pumps up the comedy while including the most music of any late night program.

As mentioned earlier, this truly can no longer be called a talk show (even though on the May 15th episode Fallon called it one) but that won't matter to the young viewers that are attracted to the high-energy host. There needs to be a new genre name given to these programs that do more scripted comedy than ad libbed interviews. "Talkedy," "Varietalk," or "Talkcom" are all possibilities, but the phrase "talk show" should not be used. No matter what you call it, he's the future of late night television and others need to begin to adapt to the changes he has made.

	THE TONIGHT SHOW (previous hosts)				
	TALK	MONOLOGUE	COMEDY	MUSIC	IN/OUT/CLIPS
Johnny Carson (1970s)	51%	15%	21%	10%	3%
Jay Leno (2014)	51%	21%	18%	8%	3%

When watching past "Tonight Show" episodes, what stands out compared to Jimmy Fallon is how calm Johnny Carson and Jay Leno were. They seemed to be intentionally taking a steady pace and not show a lot of emotion. Fallon, on the other hand, acts like the hyperactive kid that is high on too much sugar.

Carson is no doubt the best and deserves to be called the greatest talk show host in TV history. His monologues were timed to perfection and his comedic sketches were mindlessly done with a wink, where the host assumes the audience is intelligent enough to know it's all just joking around. Carson's talk segments were filled with real conversation—sometimes including even long moments of dead air. There were a number of times when a conversation could go on for a minute or more without any laughter, which is a shock to modern ears that expect every line to get guffaws. Fallon tries to have the audience tittering the entire conversation, whereas Johnny took things slowly and knew how to use dead air to his advantage. But the Carson funny moments were hilarious; his double takes alone brought more laughter than Fallon will ever hear from his silly nervous twitches.

Leno's version of "The Tonight Show" was also low-energy. The host was overly polite and would try to chum around with his guests, taking the safe route during interviews and comedy segments. It was an inoffensive show with little that was memorable. A nice time was had by all, which was probably Leno's goal, but there was nothing edgy or groundbreaking about it. That may be one reason Fallon's ratings are up, because he seems much more invested in the program than Leno did.

Carson long ago established the structure of the modern "Tonight Show," and Jimmy Fallon has ripped the format apart. While Fallon's high energy and goofy sketches attract the "SNL"-influenced contemporary audience, often one wishes a network would bring back the good old days of a real talk show like Carson used to host. "Watch What Happens Live"'s Andy Cohen comes closest to recreating the mixture of true interview skills with unexpected reactions to guests, but no one has been able to capture the magic of Johnny.

THE COLBERT REPORT (COMEDY CENTRAL)						
	TALK	MONOLOGUE	COMEDY	MUSIC	IN/OUT/CLIPS	ADS
Program Content (no ads)	34%	0%	60%	0%	7%	
Entire Show (with ads)	23%	0%	41%	0%	5%	32%

THE DAILY SHOW WITH JON STEWART (COMEDY CENTRAL)						
	TALK	MONOLOGUE	COMEDY	MUSIC	IN/OUT/CLIPS	ADS
Program Content (no ads)	29%	0%	66%	0%	5%	
Entire Show (with ads)	19%	0%	44%	0%	3%	34%

These two popular cable late night programs aren't exactly talk shows but both have talk segments. "The Colbert Report" and "The Daily Show" are scripted comedic fake news programs that usually include one segment with a real author, celebrity or politician being interviewed by the comedian host. Both programs have been noted

as being heavily influential in swaying the opinions of viewers who use these fake news programs to get information about real news stories.

The shows are essentially liberal know-it-alls mocking the politicians and reporters they consider stupid. Stewart is particularly guilty of spewing anti-conservative hatred while hypocritically condemning Republicans for “hate speech.” He never gets close to blaming any of the current presidential administration’s problems on Barack Obama, instead saying it’s “we as a country” that need to take the blame! “The Daily Show” is filled with half-truths and vitriol, and Stewart is guilty of doing the very things he condemns conservatives and the media for.

“The Colbert Report” is just plain confusing. It’s obviously making fun of conservative blowhards like Rush Limbaugh and Bill O’Reilly, but while Colbert is making fun of Republicans he at times successfully makes their point better than they do. Sometimes what he says does make sense and it’s hard to know what he truly believes. How this will translate when Colbert takes over David Letterman’s “Late Show” is unknown but Colbert will obviously have to change his shtick to better reflect his real personality.

I’m unsure why anyone would want to appear as a guest on these programs, since they know they will be mocked and stuck in verbal swordplay with the hosts. It could be that this might be a good place to appear if someone running for office or promoting a new show wants to appear “cool.” But most of the talk segments can’t be taken seriously because both hosts use humor and mockery throughout the questioning.

DAYTIME TALK SHOW CONTENT (PROGRAM ONLY)					
	single episode totals may not equal 100% due to rounding				
	TALK	MONOLOGUE	COMEDY	MUSIC	IN/OUT/CLIPS
THE VIEW	97%	0%	0%	0%	3%
DR. OZ	90%	5%	4%	0%	1%
THE TALK	89%	0%	0%	0%	11%
TODAY SHOW 4TH HOUR	79%	0%	10%	8%	3%
DR. PHIL	79%	0%	0%	0%	21%
LIVE W/KELLY& MICHAEL	77%	0%	7%	11%	4%
WENDY WILLIAMS	51%	43%	0%	0%	6%
ELLEN	42%	3%	50%	0%	5%
RACHAEL RAY	38%	26%	22%	13%	1%

For comparison purposes single episodes of random major daytime talk shows were selected. These results are meant to be used to show the broad differences between late night and daytime TV, and are not statistical averages. While these may not reflect the typical episode and there may be a small shift in numbers if put to a larger test, these were all pretty normal based on my experience watching previous episodes. The only exception was the “Wendy Williams Show,” which will on

occasion host a roundtable host chat segment to discuss hot topics but in this episode spent almost half the show doing solo commentary on the latest celebrity gossip.

Clearly daytime talk shows have much more interactive conversation between multiple people. On “The View” and “The Talk” much of the discussion comes between the hosts in the opening host chat segments that feature what is commonly now called “hot topics.” They often have multiple people talking at the same time, and that can make for frustrating viewing when there are comedians trying to scream punchlines at each other.

“The View” rarely takes a breather for anything other than talk, with only a rare appearance by a musical guest or comedian. When Barbara Walters created the program she claimed she was trying to integrate differing viewpoints, but for the most part the thinking on the episodes I saw in May of 2014 was homogeneous. The regular hosts at the time, all actresses with poor track records at relationships, flaunted pretty progressive attitudes and with the departure of Elisabeth Hasselbeck in 2013 there was no real opposing viewpoint.

As a matter of fact, the three remaining “View” co-hosts at the time (Whoopi Goldberg, Sherri Shepherd, Jenny McCarthy) all come across as somewhat clueless. It was clear that something had to change so it was no surprise when Shepherd and McCarthy were let go a month later. Whatever happened to the intelligent conversation from hosts like Meredith Vieira or the extremist but articulate viewpoints of Rosie O’Donnell and Joy Behar? Even controversial Star Jones was intelligent enough to discuss a topic by cornering her opposition, making for interesting on-screen conflict. Instead the show in 2014 was very bland and for the most part played it safe.

“The Talk” is even worse. There is absolutely no reason to have five co-hosts on any television program, and here it seems like a waste of talent. Sara Gilbert, who is credited with “creating” this copycat of “The View,” adds nothing to any discussion and is totally out of her element. While Sharon Osborne is good for an out-of-left-field opinion, comedians Sheryl Underwood and Aisha Tyler are merely unnecessary background players. On the other hand, Julie Chen almost makes the program worth watching because she shows a surprisingly playful side of her personality and her ability to communicate intelligently while steering the conversation makes her one of the best daytime talk hosts.

Most interesting is that “The Talk” has the longest opening of any program in this study and wastes the most time by having the audience break into applause after almost any comment is made. On one recent episode there was applause for over 30 seconds when the co-hosts walked out on stage, then the audience applauded 14 times in the first two and one-half minutes of host chat, resulting in about 90 seconds of the first three minutes being applause. It’s a very annoying program to

watch because there's no need to have five women conduct a six-minute celebrity interview, giving each woman only one or two scripted questions to ask.

"Live with Kelly and Michael" actually started the daytime host chat segment with Regis Philbin and Kathie Lee Gifford in the 1980s. Since it has been produced by Michael Gelman from the beginning, it runs like a well-oiled machine and makes better use of airtime than the other host chat shows. There is always an opening host chat segment that can run from 12 to 18 minutes (by far the longest non-stop talk segment of any talk program), followed by a couple of celebrity guests and then either a musical number or some type of demonstration from a dancer, cook or athlete. The show hasn't changed much over the past couple decades except for a few more comedic elements where a star is involved in a game or a speed round of questioning. Younger audiences seem to have taken to the current co-hosting team, which is adequately pleasant, but it can't compare to the sparks that flew between Regis and Kathie Lee as the greatest host chat co-hosts ever.

NBC has tried to reproduce that magic by hiring Kathie Lee to co-host with Hoda Kotb on the fourth hour of the "Today Show." And for the most part it works, but it is much more female-focused than is "Live." "Today" topics range from celebrity gossip and makeovers to dating tips and cooking. The show moves at a breakneck pace and some segments are actually too short, with celebrities brought in for interviews that last just over four minutes. Instead of cramming the program with four guests, a game played by the co-hosts, and a musician, it might be nice to cut back on the number of different segments and go into more depth.

Wendy Williams hosts a syndicated talker that features an unusual style of host chat that is usually done in the form of a monologue. Williams is a radio star who knows how to give her opinion while sitting alone in front of a microphone and she does the same in front of a TV camera. She reads her thoughts on celebrity gossip off a TelePrompter and asks the audience for group responses while doing it. On the episode I watched almost half of her program time was spent sitting in a chair by herself. On other days she'll spend more time interviewing guests and occasionally she'll include a roundtable panel to discuss Hollywood news. Segments go too long and Wendy can have a distant, uninvolved feel where she is just reading what producers have put on the Prompter. Williams is actually pretty good at what she does and could be a major TV talk star if the program were better produced and she was better prepared.

Ellen DeGeneres is also somewhat stuck to the Prompter, but unlike William's deer-in-the-headlights approach Ellen has found a way to make it seem casual. DeGeneres, like Jimmy Fallon, has a talk show where there really isn't that much conversation. Only 43% of the program is talk while 50% involves comedy or sketches. It's mostly her telling jokes, playing games, calling viewers at home, awarding prizes to unsuspecting audience members, and having guests on that you typically don't see on talk shows. She has become well known for dancing through

the audience and making a fool of herself participating in games, as well as interviewing talented children she has discovered on the Internet.

Ellen hosts more of a variety show than a talk show. The fact that she recently won the “Best Entertainment Talk Show” Daytime Emmy for the 8th time supports the idea that the genre needs a new name because less than half of her program is actual talk. She does do slightly more interviews than Fallon, but the purpose of Ellen’s program seems to be to make people laugh and reward people who support the host’s progressive causes. A number of major companies show their support by providing big gifts for audience members.

Rachael Ray hosts a slightly different type of talk show that features interviews with celebrities, cooking segments, and musical guests. Her monologue is her standing behind a stove demonstrating how to create a dish. Because the program is more food-focused, there is less interactive talk (38%) than most other daytime programs. She isn’t a great interviewer but usually sits with a celebrity at her kitchen table and chats the way she would with a friend. To enjoy watching this program you really have to like Ray because it’s centered on her perky personality.

Finally, there are the programs hosted by medical professionals, which have become very successful in daytime. Dr. Phil McGraw’s daily hour spends four-fifths of its airtime having the psychologist interacting with guests in crisis. His bull-in-the-china-shop style is dramatically more blunt than anything else in daytime and viewers have accepted his style ever since Oprah gave him her blessing.

The show spends more time in video clips than any other in daytime. To set up the conflict producers send video crews to the homes of those who are going to be interviewed on stage, playing edited segments throughout the show. While these can be helpful in illustrating what the guests are talking about, the clips are often too long and repetitive. They come across as flashy gimmicks to try to keep the audience from getting bored.

Then there’s the question of how sincere is Dr. Phil in trying to resolve issues? While he claims that his purpose is to help, he spends most of the time picking on people that either makes them look foolish or gets them to erupt. He comes across as a manipulator and not a problem solver. The two minutes he spends on solutions near the end of each program doesn’t balance with the 30 minutes of conflict-causing confrontation throughout the rest of the show.

McGraw is also not an objective interviewer and appears to be asking pointed questions that he knows will create good television. He is condescending, exploitive, and full of himself, saying things like, “I may be the most advanced lie detector test in the world.” He claims to have a B.S. meter, yet he doesn’t use it on himself because he’s often full of it and his trembling, mousy guests are unable to stand up to him. So while he parades himself as a healer, in truth he is opening scabs so audience members can gasp at the bloody mess—and he is getting great ratings by doing it.

Dr. Mehmet Oz is another Oprah find who has an extremely well-produced show, giving medical advice through the use of creative audience interaction. It's certainly not the traditional talk show, with him rarely sitting down to conduct interviews. Instead he pulls members from the audience (who have often gone through a rehearsal process) to talk about a physical issue and then he integrates them into his clever demonstrations. So while 90% of his program is talk, only one of the five segments on the day I viewed was in a sit-down conversation. Recent Congressional concerns were also validated because Oz does use "colorful" language to try to make points and often that wording is hyperbole used for entertainment purposes.

The conclusion is that daytime television has more talk and more variety than late night talk shows. That may be due to Ellen's success in the ratings and at the Emmy awards, which has caused other daytime talkers to emphasize entertainment elements.

So also Jimmy Fallon's dramatic increase in network and online viewership numbers may cause late night hosts to rethink how they approach the traditional talk show format. And with four of the nine major late night hosts leaving in 2014, it's an opportunity for the revolution that Fallon has started to be carried out by new late night stars.