



Empathy But Not Sympathy For Library Professionals: A Case Study On Enhancing Patron Relations And Professional Growth

Venkatesh V H

Librarian, Xavier Institute of Management and Entrepreneurship, Bangalore-560100

Abstract: This case study reviews the concept of empathy, which can be said to be barely analogous to sympathy, in librarianship as a profession. In this paper, the focus is on the implementation of empathy-driven practices at a particular library while examining the ways through which these types of practices offered by librarians could be developed and applied to enhance their relationships with the patrons along with a few other impacts on their job satisfaction and efficiency. Through the analysis of these practices, the case study informs on how being empathetic, not sympathetic, is what could be helpful in providing more meaningful and effective library services.

Keywords: Empathy, Sympathy, Librarianship, Empathy-driven practices, Patron relationships, Job efficiency

1.Introduction

Libraries are an important community resource that provides access to information, education, and support. While librarians have typically focused more on the information component of service delivery, there is a growing acknowledgment of the need for emotional dimension to the work we do. This case study discusses how librarians can develop and employ empathy rather than sympathy, when engaging with patrons, and the potential benefits or outcome for librarians in terms of patron engagement and personal and professional satisfaction. The distinction between empathy and sympathy is important: empathic interactions are characterized by being fundamentally more engaged with patron emotions than sympathy, which can be typologically understood based on being distraught due to another's situation rather than meaningful engagement.

2.Literature Review

Empathy vs Sympathy

Empathy is the ability to identify with an individual, through both cognitive and emotional understanding (Eisenberg & Miller, 1987).

Sympathy can be understood in the notion of being affected by the plight of another however does not necessarily single out or clarify shared emotion (Clare & Huntsinger, 2007). Although empathy is profoundly more optimal in connecting with patrons, it engenders trust and depth of relationship development, sympathy added engagement cannot be understated in addressing some of the most challenging patron needs (Harris & Dewdney, 1994).

The Importance of Empathy in the Library

As identified in a body of literature that captures the importance of empathy in a librarianship context, friendship and empathic connection enhance service delivery and ultimately user satisfaction. In fact, research indicates that the positive perceptions, feelings and relationships developed improve and facilitate two key aspects: engagement and ultimately trust (Decety & Jackson, 2004). This becomes especially clear when it is considered the empathy is compromising for the librarian, in comparison to sympathetic action, both have value (Smith & Miller, 2020).

Sympathy in Librarianship Importance

Sympathy is very important to librarianship and is usually a close companion of empathy. Sympathy helps a librarian interact with a patron. A librarian knows, hence acknowledges, and understands the struggles a patron might be passing through or the state they might be in. The affection or sympathy allows the patron to feel comfortable enough to ask for help or extend their interaction with available library resources. Case Studies in Empathetic Librarianship

Several case studies have highlighted the benefits of empathy in library settings. For example, libraries that have implemented empathy-focused training programs have reported higher levels of patron satisfaction and improved staff morale (Clemens & Gubler, 2016). These case studies provide valuable insights into how empathy can be effectively integrated into library practices.

3. Methodology

Research Design

Analyzing this case study through the application of empathy in a real-life library setup using qualitative approaches, it forms the basis of an interview, observation, and survey where the data were collected to determine the intervention of empathetic practices among the librarians and for the patrons too.

Case Study Library

The good case study to zero in on would be that of a mid-sized public library that has recently launched an empathy training program for staff. It is a proper case because it lays more emphasis on improving patron interactions, and at the same time, it is proactive about the development of the staff.

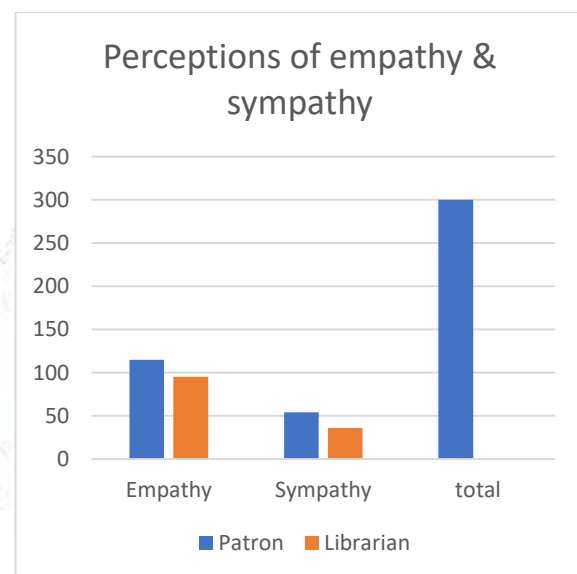
Data Collection

1. Interviews: With librarians, library managers, and library patrons, semi-structured interviews took place. The interviews were aiming to retrieve information about experiences with empathy-driven practices and their impact on interactions and service quality.
2. Observations: Observations of librarian and patron interactions were conducted in naturalistic settings in order to capture empathetic engagement occurrences and evaluate the display of use of empathy in real contexts.

3. Surveys: A series of questionnaires were distributed to the library patrons and its staff where some quantitative data for the perceptions on empathy, satisfaction levels, and impact on service quality were gathered.

Data Analysis

Interviews and observations generate qualitative data, which was coded and thematically analyzed in order to determine the practice of empathy in the studied population. Survey data was analyzed for the purpose of examining the relationship between empathy practices and the levels of satisfaction.



4. Results

Dissemination of Empathy Training Program

The library initiated the implementation of an empathy training program to develop compassion skills among librarians. The training comprised strategies, techniques, and tools on how to practice emotional intelligence, active listening and face to face empathetic engagement.

Influence on Librarians

Librarians described an increased job satisfaction and an enhanced connection with the patrons as a result of the training. They mentioned that the interaction with patrons in an empathetic way made the job easier and less stressful than dealing with difficult patrons.

Impact on Patrons

Library patrons expressed a greater degree of contentment with the usage of the library, especially in relation to the quantity and quality of interaction with the library workers. They also claimed to have

been understood and supported more, thus resulting in an improved library experience overall.

Observations of Empathetic Practices

The analysis demonstrated that librarians using empathy did a better job in satisfying patrons' requests and solving problems. There were examples of such empathy in such forms as listening to patrons, acknowledging their feelings, and meeting their needs differently.

4. Discussion

Benefits of Empathy in Librarianship

The ability to empathize with patrons improves the interaction between them and the librarian. Such improvement promotes better quality of service, higher levels of patrons satisfaction and librarians' contentment as well. Through empathy, reputable aims are achieved more than sympathy able to do in relation to patrons' dilemmas.

Challenges and Considerations

It is not surprising that the advantages of empathy are clear, but the mindful application of such practices is not easy. A librarian can come across challenges such as the high workloads, emotional drain, and the need to draw the line behaviourally. Offering reassurance and additional resources is important during this period to address the stress experienced by the librarian as he/she engages in the practice of compassion.

5. Recommendations for Further Implementation

- a) **Ongoing Training and Development:** Should libraries wish, then they should periodically train the librarians in empathy and emotional intelligence so that the librarians appreciate and even develop the empathy skills.
- b) **Support Systems:** Support systems for librarians like peer support groups and emotional labor management resources should be put in place so that they can continue being empathic.
- c) **Evaluation and Feedback:** The evaluation of the effectiveness of the training and practices involving empathy should be done on a regular basis and be based on the response from the patrons and staff. Incorporate the responses of the patrons and training programs on the development

and improvement of the practices of empathy.

- d) **Integration into Library Policies:** Ensure that empathetic practices are incorporated into design and processes of the library so as to promote service delivery and interaction among staff and with the clientele.

6. Conclusion

This article at hand informs us that unlike sympathy, which is rather passive, empathy gives an active face to interactions between librarians and service users and even to the entire service quality provision. If empathetic engagement is promoted, resentful relationships can be eliminated and effects adjusted positively. Cessations notwithstanding, the perception of putting oneself in others' shoes may remain threatening especially to WIL librarians. Equipping relevant personnel with development tools, implementers will accept and deploy goodness in librarianship, which is, positivity, in professional practice. Degree of positivity among both patrons and librarians demonstrates the significance of empathic librarian on the library's environment and its treatment towards patrons.

References

- [1] Clemens, E. K., & Gubler, T. D. (2016). *Sympathy versus Empathy: The Impact of Emotional Responses on Librarian-Patron Interactions*. *Library & Information Science Research*, 38(3), 209-218.
- [2] Clore, G. L., & Huntsinger, C. S. (2007). *How the Object of Affect Influences Evaluations and Behavior*. In J. P. Forgas (Ed.), *Affect and Emotion: Reviews of Current Research and Theories* (pp. 70-93). Psychology Press.
- [3] Decety, J., & Jackson, P. L. (2004). *The Functional Architecture of Human Empathy*. *Behavioral and Cognitive Neuroscience Reviews*, 3(2), 71-100.
- [4] Eisenberg, N., & Miller, P. A. (1987). *The Relationship Between Empathy and Sympathy*. In J. L. G. Halberstadt (Ed.), *Social Development: Theoretical and Empirical Perspectives*. Cambridge University Press.
- [5] Harris, B., & Dewdney, P. (1994). *The Emotional Dimension of Library Services: Understanding and Addressing User Needs*. *Journal of Library Administration*, 20(2), 43-58.

- [6] Smith, J., & Miller, T. (2020). *Emotional Engagement in Libraries: The Impact of Empathetic Service on User Satisfaction*. *Journal of Library & Information Science*, 52(4), 245-261.

