Affective Communication in *Kathakali* Performance

Vishnu Achutha Menon*
Department of Media Studies
Kristu Jayanti College (Autonomous), Bengaluru-560067, India
Corresponding author
Email: vishnuachuthamenon@gmail.com

N Boobalakrishnan*
Department of Media & Communication,
School of Communication, Central University of Tamil Nadu
Thiruvarur Tamil Nadu- 610005, India
Email: boobalakrishnan@cutn.ac.in

Received Date: **01.10.2023**; Accepted Date: **31.11.2023**; Available Online: **01.01.2024**

* *These authors contributed equally to this study*

ABSTRACT

This study delves into investigating the extent of individual differences in expressiveness among *Kathakali* actors participating in the Red Beard Festival. The research employs Howard S. Friedman's Affective Communication Test (ACT), a self-report measure specifically designed to assess variations in individual expressiveness among *Kathakali* actors. The study selected 33 *Kathakali* actors who took part in the Red Beard Festival of *Kathakali* in 2021, utilising a purposive sampling method to gather participants. The Affective Communication Test (ACT) was administered to the selected participants, and a quantitative analysis was conducted to analyse the data. The descriptive measures were employed to obtain the socio-demographic profile of the participants. The results of the study revealed a range of scores on the Affective Communication Test (ACT) between 70 and 117, with a mean score of 111.55 and a standard deviation of ± 1.46. The inferential statistical analysis demonstrated no significant differences in individual expressiveness among the participants in relation to gender, age, educational qualification, occupation, or marital status. Moreover, correlation analysis revealed that neither the number of years of training nor the years of experience had a significant impact on individual expressiveness.

Keywords: *Affective Communication Test (ACT), Kathakali, Individual Expressiveness, Kathakali Actors.*

INTRODUCTION

Expressiveness has been used to mean different attributes including acting, natural sending, communication, emotionality, femininity, extraversion, responsibility, and empathy (Friedman et al., 1980). Charles Darwin wrote in his book that "the force of language is much aided by the expressive movements of the face and body " (Darwin, 2005). "Dance/theatre is human thought and feeling expressed through the body: it is at once organised physical movement, language, and a system of rules appropriate in different social situations (Blacking & Hanna, 1986). This art form holds a profound

significance as it goes beyond mere entertainment and serves as a powerful means of communication, self-expression, and learning. The enchanting synergy of dance and theatre creates a mesmerising platform where emotions, ideas, and stories find a compelling voice through the graceful motions of the performers. The amalgamation of dance and theatre allows individuals to articulate and convey emotions, thoughts, and narratives that might be challenging to express through traditional language alone. Through intricate choreography and expressive movements, dancers and actors communicate on a level that transcends spoken words. The body becomes the canvas, painting vivid tales of joy, sorrow, love, or conflict, enabling a deep emotional connection with the audience.

Dance/theatre is not only an artistic endeavour but also a valuable educational tool. In particular, for children, it proves to be an effective mode of expression, communication, and learning (Bond, 1994). As they engage in dance/theatre activities, children develop physical coordination, discipline, and a heightened sense of body awareness. Moreover, the artistic process fosters creativity, imagination, and problem-solving skills, nurturing holistic development. Children learn to collaborate with peers, express themselves confidently, and cultivate a sense of empathy as they delve into the characters and emotions they portray. In the realm of education, dance/theatre offers an experiential and kinesthetic approach to learning, where students embody historical events, literary characters, or scientific concepts. This embodied learning experience deepens their understanding and retention of knowledge, making the educational process both enjoyable and effective. Beyond the individual benefits, dance/theatre serves as a cultural repository, preserving and celebrating the heritage and traditions of diverse communities. Through traditional dances and theatrical performances, cultural stories, rituals, and values are passed down from one generation to the next, fostering a sense of identity and collective belonging. In essence, dance/theatre represents the embodiment of the human experience, bridging the gaps between language barriers, cultural differences, and emotional complexities. It speaks a universal language that resonates with people of all ages, backgrounds, and walks of life. Whether as an art form, an educational tool, or a cultural treasure, dance/theatre continues to enrich lives, elevate human expression, and unite us in our shared journey through the boundless realm of human emotions."

Individual levels of expressiveness in acting in theatre pertain to the diverse degrees to which actors can proficiently convey and articulate emotions, thoughts, and intentions through their performances. It encompasses the actor's capacity to exhibit a broad spectrum of emotions and embody multiple characters with depth and authenticity, captivating the audience and eliciting emotional responses. Scholarly literature has identified specific emotional expressions associated with various dance forms, including joy, sadness, and anger, each intricately linked to particular factors (Shikanai et al., 2013). In the context of theatrical art, the dynamic nature of expressiveness assumes a paramount role in establishing a profound connection between performers and their audience. Notably, interactive participation during performances fosters a closer affective space between actors and the spectators, intensifying the emotional impact of the theatrical experience (Guzzanti, 1969). Moreover, the art of dance as a nonverbal mode of communication facilitates the conveyance of emotive messages, transcending linguistic barriers and resonating deeply within the spectators' psyches. This communicative essence of dance stems from its inherent ability to prompt responses and evoke emotions within the observers (Smyth, 1984). The efficacy of expressiveness in acting stems from a complex interplay of diverse factors. A multifaceted skill set underpins an actor's ability to effectively convey emotions and immerse themselves in their characters. Integral to this skill set is the actor's emotional range, enabling the portrayal of a diverse array of feelings with authenticity and genuineness. Complementary to emotional range, physical expression, encompassing body language, facial expressions, gestures, and postures, serves as a rich communicative tool for conveying emotions and character traits. Furthermore, voice modulation adds an additional layer of nuance to the actor's portrayal, allowing for the adept adjustment of tone, pitch, volume, and rhythm to suit the character's intricate emotions and persona. Intriguingly, an empathetic and profound understanding of the characters' emotions and experiences forms a vital foundation for actors to establish an emotional connection with their roles, resulting in more compelling and convincing performances. The ability to adapt and transform into various roles with ease and finesse is another hallmark of expressiveness, empowering actors to seamlessly transition between divergent characters, genres, and theatrical styles.

The concept of vulnerability assumes paramount significance in the realm of expressiveness, as actors tapping into their own vulnerabilities are better equipped to breathe authenticity and rawness into their portrayals, forging a profound emotional bond with the audience. Adequate rehearsal and preparation further amplify the actor's expressiveness by providing a robust understanding of their characters and the contextual milieu, thereby enhancing the overall quality of the performance. The collaborative interaction among co-actors and the ensuing connection with the audience contribute to the heightened impact of the theatrical experience. The on-stage chemistry and authenticity in co-actors' interactions lend credence to the portrayal of characters and their relationships, rendering them more believable and engrossing. In tandem, the connection with the audience allows actors to evoke emotional responses and engender a shared experience that lingers in the hearts and minds of the spectators long after the final curtain descends. Likewise, in dance, expressive body movement holds a pivotal role in facilitating emotional communication between performers and the audience, generating vitality and resonance within the art form (Broughton & Stevens, 2009). The intricacies of body language and the artful expression of emotions in dance bestow life and verve upon the performance, imparting a sense of continuity and rhythm reflective of the human experience (Lu, 2022). In summation, individual levels of expressiveness in acting encompass a diverse array of attributes, including emotional depth, physical expression, vocal adaptability, empathy, adaptability, vulnerability, preparation, connection with co-actors and the audience, and the capacity to thrive in live performances. The rich tapestry of expressiveness enables actors to traverse the realms of human experience, imparting a lasting impact and eliciting profound emotional responses from audiences. As such, their artistry becomes a conduit for the intricacies of human emotion, fostering an enduring bond between performers and spectators, and affirming the enduring power of theatre and dance as vibrant modes of emotional expression and communication.

Proficient actors possess an inherent ability to adeptly portray a diverse spectrum of emotions, ranging from positive states such as joy and love to more negative ones, including anger, fear, and sadness. Their performances are enriched through the assimilation of personal experiences or empathetic understanding, allowing for the portrayal of characters with an unparalleled authenticity. Crucially, the effective conveyance of emotions and character traits is achieved through the skillful utilisation of body language, facial expressions, gestures, and postures, showcasing the actors' remarkable expressiveness (Keltner et al., 2019). Similarly, the artful modulation of their vocal elements, encompassing tone, pitch, volume, and rhythm, is fundamental in conveying emotions and nuanced aspects of their roles (Hokuma Karimova, 2017). This vocal prowess enables the evocation of diverse moods and feelings, endowing depth and complexity to their portrayals (Brundin et al., 2022).

Moreover, the significance of empathy emerges as a defining attribute of proficient actors, allowing them to establish profound connections with the emotions and experiences of their characters, thereby infusing their performances with a profound sense of authenticity. The attainment of a comprehensive understanding of the characters' backgrounds, motivations, and conflicts plays a pivotal role in delivering compelling portrayals. Furthermore, their versatility is exhibited through seamless transitions between divergent roles and theatrical styles, adeptly encompassing comedic, dramatic, or tragic performances (Panero & Winner, 2021). Notably, their skillful embodiment of characters from disparate temporal, cultural, and social contexts further exemplify their prowess as performers (LePage, 2021). The essence of vulnerability assumes a paramount role in acting, necessitating that actors draw from their innermost emotions to portray characters with genuine sincerity (McDonald et al., 2020). This emotional openness and availability during performances contribute substantially to the authenticity and emotive impact of their portrayals. Adequate rehearsal and preparation emerge as critical factors in enhancing an actor's expressiveness (Ohikuare, 2014). Actors who engage in thorough preparation exhibit a heightened understanding of their characters and the contextual backdrop, culminating in performances characterised by increased depth and resonance (Jorns et al., 1975). Beyond the confines of the stage, an expressive actor establishes a profound emotional bond not only with co-performers but also with the audience. This intimate connection effectively engages the spectators, drawing them deeply into the narrative and ensuring an immersive and captivating experience. The shared communal encounter during live performances transcends individual experiences, engendering a collective and relational phenomenon that interconnects performers and spectators within a specific temporal and spatial framework (Barbour &

Hitchmough, 2014). The realm of dance, and indeed all performing arts, derives its aesthetic impact from the successful transmission of messages between performers and spectators (Orgs et al., 2016). This mutual understanding engenders dance with a powerful and evocative medium for expression and communication.

Friedman (1980) also stated that the expression of affect occurs through facial expressions, tone of voice, gestures, and body movements. Along with extrinsic factors, intrinsic or individual elements are also considered to be affecting performance levels, though the prescribed training highlights the need for control of highly personalised involvement with the act. Individual levels of expressiveness are suggested as a key determinant of the effectiveness of non-verbal communication in Kathakali, however, existing literature has not covered the role of demographic elements and individual training in determining the extent of expressiveness. Hence, the Affective Communication Test (ACT) was incorporated into the current study for obtaining an empirical understanding of individual expressiveness concerning the socio-demographic and training profile of *Kathakali* actors.

What is the Affective Communication Test (ACT)?

The Affective Communication Test (ACT), is a self-report measure of nonverbal emotional expressiveness (Manusov & Patterson, 2006). The measure assesses individual differences in the ability to transmit emotions and to use non-verbal cues to move, lead, inspire or captivate others. A study conducted by Friedman et al. (1980) among 577 undergraduate students showed ACT to be a reliable and valid measure of individual differences in expressiveness or charisma, which is (a) an element of influence in face-to-face social interaction, (b) a basic trait of personality, and (c) a focus point in contemporary nonverbal communication research. It consists of 13 self-report items, and reliably distinguishes individuals on a number of dimensions of social interaction, thereby pointing out individual differences in expressiveness. The respondents are expected to rate each item on a 9-point scale, ranging from -4 to +4 (from "not at all true of me" to "very true of me"). Items 2, 5, 6, 8, 9, and 11 have to be reverse-scored. Five points will be added to each item (to eliminate negative numbers) and the individual items will be summed up to obtain the total score obtained in the Affective Communication Test (ACT).

Objective

To explore the extent of individual differences in expressiveness among *Kathakali* actors of the Redbeard festival.

METHODOLOGY

This study employs Howard S Friedman's Affective Communication Test (ACT), a self-report measure to study differences in individual expressiveness of *Kathakali* actors. 33 *Kathakali* actors who performed in the Red Beard Festival of *Kathakali* in 2021 were selected as participants using a purposive sampling method. ACT was circulated among the participants and quantitative analysis was carried out using SPSS Software (Version 23). Descriptive measures were used to obtain the socio-demographic profile of the participants. As the data were not normally distributed, non-parametric tests including the Mann-Whitney U test and Kruskal - Wallis H test were performed to investigate the extent of individual expressiveness across groups based on gender, age, educational qualification, occupation, and marital status. Spearman's Rank Order Coefficient was calculated to understand the impact of years of training as well as years of experience on individual expressiveness among the participants.

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

RQ 1: What is the extent of individual expressiveness among Kathakali actors?
RQ 2: Does gender, age, education, occupation, and marital status impact expressiveness?
RQ 3: Do the duration of the training and experience of the actor impact expressiveness?

Results

Table 1. Frequency Distribution and Percentages (n=33)

Domain	Category	Frequency	Percentage
Age	16-45 years	22	66.7
	46-75 years	11	33.3
Gender	Male	30	90.9
	Female	3	9.1
Educational Qualification	Higher secondary	7	21.2
	Under graduation	17	51.5
	Post-graduation	8	24.2
	Graduation	1	3.0
Occupation	Student	12	36.4
	Self-employed	15	45.5
	Private sector	4	12.1
	Public sector	2	6.1
Marital Status	Unmarried	11	33.3
	Married	22	66.7
Years of Training	0-5 years	4	12.1
	5-10 years	11	33.3
	Above 10 years	18	54.5
Years of Experience	0-5 years	12	36.4
	5-10 years	2	6.1
	Above 10 years	19	57.6
Total (*n*)		33	100

Table 1 demonstrates the socio-demographic profile of the participants through frequency and percentage distributions. The sample consists of two age groups, 16-45 and 46-75 years respectively and the majority are males (90.9%). Higher secondary education remains the basic educational qualification and most of them have pursued undergraduate studies (51.5%). A good number of participants are either

self-employed (45.5%) or continuing their studies (36.4%). More than half of the participants (54.5% and 57.6% respectively) have acquired more than 10 years of training as well as experience in Kathakali.

RQ 1: What is the extent of individual expressiveness among *Kathakali* actors?

Table 2 - Descriptive Statistics showing the extent of individual differences in Expressiveness

	N	Range	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Standard Deviation	Variance
Expressiveness (Total ACT Score)	33	47	70	117	111.55	1.46	8.41

Table 2 illustrates descriptive statistics showing the extent of individual differences in expressiveness among kathakali actors. Findings suggest that the minimum and maximum scores obtained by the participants are 70 and 117 respectively (Mean = 111.55, SD ± 1.46).

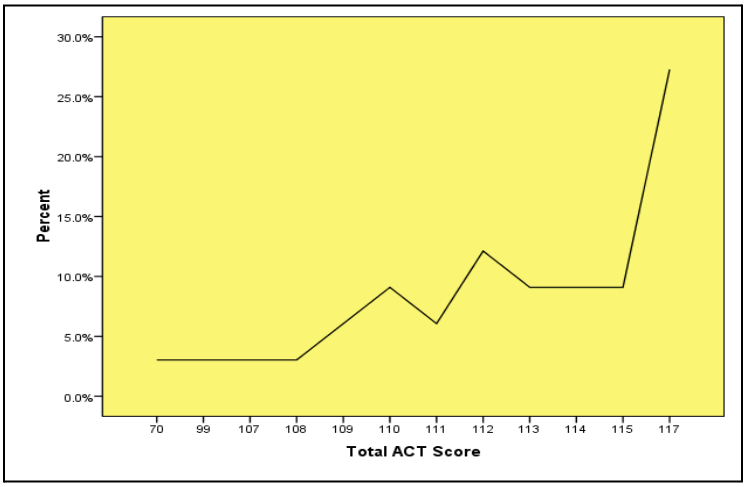

Figure 1. Distribution of scores of Expressiveness obtained through ACT

The distribution of scores obtained for all items of ACT was found to be p<.001, suggesting that the data is not normally distributed. Hence, non-parametric tests were preferred for further analysis.

RQ 2: Does gender, age, education, occupation, and marital status impact expressiveness?

Table 3. *Mann-Whitney U test comparing Expressiveness based on Gender*

Variable	Group	N	Mean Rank	*U*	*Z*	*Sig.*
Gender	Males	30	16.58	32.50	-.79	.42
	Females	03	21.17			
	Total	33				

*p<0 .05

Table 3 demonstrates that there is no significant difference in individual levels of expressiveness across categories of Gender (U = 32.50, z =-.79, p = .42).

Table 4. Mann-Whitney U test comparing Expressiveness based on Age

Variable	Group	N	Mean Rank	*U*	*Z*	*Sig.*
Age	16-45 years	22	16.59	112	-.34	.74
	46-75 years	11	17.82			
	Total	33				

*p<0 .05

Table 4 demonstrates that there is no significant difference in individual levels of expressiveness across different age groups (U = 112, z =-.34, p = .74).

Table 5. Kruskal-Wallis H test comparing Expressiveness based on Educational Qualification

Variable	Group	N	Mean Rank	*Kruskal Wallis Chi-Square*	*Sig.*
Educational Qualification	Higher secondary	7	12.93	4.14	.24
	Under graduation	17	16.97		
	Post-graduation	8	21.75		
	Graduation	1	8.00		
	Total	33			

*p<0 .05

As shown in Table 5, the Kruskal-Wallis H test performed to compare expressiveness based on educational qualification does not yield any statistically significant differences across groups ((H = 4.14, p = .24).

Table 6. Kruskal-Wallis H test comparing Expressiveness based on Occupation

Variable	Group	N	Mean Rank	*Kruskal Wallis Chi-Square*	*Sig.*
Educational Qualification	Student	12	14.54	3.11	.37
	Self-employed	15	16.83		
	Private sector	4	20.50		
	Public sector	2	26.00		
	Total	33			

*p<0 .05

Results of the Kruskal-Wallis H test illustrated in Table 6 shows that there is no significant difference in individual levels of expressiveness based on occupation (H = 3.11, p = .37).

Table 7. Mann-Whitney U test comparing Expressiveness based on Marital Status

Variable	Group	N	Mean Rank	*U*	*Z*	*Sig.*
Gender	Unmarried	11	14.64	95.00	-1.0	.31
	Married	22	18.18			
	Total	33				

*p<0 .05

Table 7 illustrates that there is no significant difference in individual levels of expressiveness between unmarried and married individuals (U = 95.00, z =-.1.0, p = .31).

RQ 3: Do the duration of the training and experience of the actor impact expressiveness?

Table 8. Spearman's Rank Order Correlation Coefficient of Years of Training, Years of Experience and Expressiveness

Variable	**Years of Training**	**Years of Experience**	**Expressiveness**
Years of Training	1	.00	.13
Years of Experience		1	.17
Expressiveness			1

*p< 0.01 level (2-tailed)

Spearman's Rank Order correlation analysis results, as illustrated in Table 8, suggests that there is no statistically significant association between years of training and individual levels of expressiveness (p=0.45) as well as years of experience and expressiveness (p=0.33).

SUMMARY & DISCUSSIONS

The range of scores obtained by the participants on the Affective Communication Test (ACT) was found to be 70-117 (Mean = 111.55, SD ± 1.46). Inferential statistical analysis suggested no significant difference in individual expressiveness among participants concerning gender, age, educational qualification, occupation, and marital status. Correlation analysis further indicated that years of training, as well as years of experience, do not have a significant impact on individual expressiveness. The results of ACT pertain to the degree of achievement of success in the depiction of *Bhav*a or mood of the performer i.e. before its communication or transference into Rasa in the minds of the connoisseur. In other words, it infers that the systematic training of *Kathakali* involving the expression of eyes complimented by movements of facial muscles and dancing suffices the expression of emotional state as far as the proponent is concerned. This is the fact irrespective of age, gender, and duration of training by the lecturer. The actors get satisfied even with short training periods like 3-4 years, though he/she has to go further along in the process, as far as the Art or audience is concerned. There are two distinctly separate aspects to this achievement. One is that the process of analysis of the microstructure of all human relations described in Natyashastra has universal appeal. Two, the training process in *Kathakali* has embedded universal aspects of the depiction of the mood demanded by the occasion. That means that effective enacting, based on Kalari, is more or less impersonal, i.e. if a specific procedure of physical and

facial enacting is rather mechanically performed, the intended Bhava is fulfilled. This is the classical element of enacting. This means that continuous repressive training imparted reaches deep into the subconscious mind and becomes the habit or behaviour of the proponent. However, the quality of aesthetic involvement of the transference and hence that of *Rasa* might influence the personality or individual talent of the actor. Although the sample satisfied the criterion for statistical analysis, the generalizability needs to be evaluated in a wider population. Covid-19-related restrictions placed a severe constraint on expanding the current sample size. A comparison of individual expressiveness among performers across various cultural, linguistic, and geographic groups may thus be considered an important direction for future research. Mixed method evaluations consisting of both subjective and objective evaluations can also throw light on the characteristics and dimensions of individual expressiveness in Kathakali.

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, the Affective Communication Test (ACT) reveals that the systematic training of Kathakali enables performers to express emotions effectively, independent of age, gender, or duration of training. The impersonal nature of the enactment process, driven by continuous repressive training, allows the intended Bhava to be fulfilled mechanically. The study highlights the universal appeal of emotion depiction in Kathakali, transcending cultural boundaries, while the quality of aesthetic involvement influences the actor's personality and talent, contributing to the captivating essence of this traditional art form.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

The researchers express their gratitude to Prof. Howard S. Friedman for granting permission to utilise ACT.

REFERENCES

Barbour, K., & Hitchmough, A. (2014). Experiencing affect through site-specific dance. *Emotion, Space and Society*, *12*, 63–72. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.emospa.2013.11.004

Blacking, J., & Hanna, J. L. (1986). To dance is human: A theory of nonverbal communication. *Ethno Musicology, 30*(3), 584. https://doi.org/10.2307/851611

Bond, K. (1994). Personal style as a mediator of engagement in dance: Watching Terpsichore rise. *Dance Research Journal, 26*(1), 15. https://doi.org/10.2307/1477708

Broughton, M., & Stevens, C. (2009). Music, movement and marimba: an investigation of the role of movement and gesture in communicating musical expression to an audience. Psychology of Music, 37(2), 137–153. https://doi.org/10.1177/0305735608094511

Brundin, E., Liu, F., & Cyron, T. (2022). Emotion in strategic management: A review and future research agenda. *Long Range Planning, 55*(4), 102144. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.lrp.2021.102144

Darwin, C. (2005). *The expression of the emotions in man and animals* (S. Messenger, Ed.). Penguin Classics.

Friedman, H. S., Prince, L. M., Riggio, R. E., & DiMatteo, M. R. (1980). Understanding and assessing nonverbal expressiveness: The Affective Communication Test. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology, 39*(2), 333–351. https://doi.org/10.1037/0022-3514.39.2.333

Guzzanti, P. (1969). I-Reflexes: The affective implications of bodies in dance improvisation performance. PARtake: *The Journal of Performance as Research, 1*(2). https://doi.org/10.33011/partake.v1i2.379

Hokuma Karimova, M. A. (2017, December 24). The emotion wheel: What it is and how to use it [+PDF]. *Positivepsychology.com*. https://positivepsychology.com/emotion-wheel/

Jorns, D. L., McGaw, C., Dezseran, L. J., & Klein, M. (1975). Acting is believing: A basic method. *Educational Theatre Journal, 27*(4), 570. https://doi.org/10.2307/3206414

Keltner, D., Sauter, D., Tracy, J., & Cowen, A. (2019). Emotional expression: Advances in basic emotion theory. *Journal of Nonverbal Behavior, 43*(2), 133–160.https://doi.org/10.1007/s10919-019-00293-3

LePage, L. (2021). The importance of realism, character, and genre: How theatre can support the creation of likeable sociable robots. *International Journal of Social Robotics, 13*(6), 1427–1441. https://doi.org/10.1007/s12369-020-00637-w

Lu, Y. (2022). Analysis of body and emotion in dance performance. Advances in Social Science, Education and Humanities Research.

McDonald, B., Goldstein, T. R., & Kanske, P. (2020). Could acting training improve social cognition and emotional control? *Frontiers in Human Neuroscience, 14*, 348. https://doi.org/10.3389/fnhum.2020.00348

Ohikuare, J. (2014, March 10). How actors create emotions: A problematic psychology. *Atlantic Monthly* (Boston, Mass.: 1993). https://www.theatlantic.com/health/archive/2014/03/how-actors-create-emotions-a-problematic-psychology/284291/

Orgs, G., Caspersen, D., & Haggard, P. (2016). You move, I watch, it matters: Aesthetic communication in dance. In *Shared Representations* (pp. 627–653). Cambridge University Press.

Panero, M. E., & Winner, E. (2021). Rating the acting moment: Exploring characteristics for realistic portrayals of characters. Frontiers in Psychology, 11. https://doi.org/10.3389/fpsyg.2020.615311

Shikanai, N., Sawada, M., & Ishii, M. (2013). Development of the movements impressions emotions model: Evaluation of movements and impressions related to the perception of emotions in dance. *Journal of Nonverbal Behavior, 37*(2), 107–121. https://doi.org/10.1007/s10919-013-0148-y

Smyth, M. M. (1984). Kinesthetic Communication in Dance. *Dance Research Journal, 16*(2), 19. https://doi.org/10.2307/