# "Showmance:" Is performing intimacy associated with feelings of intimacy?

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**Abstract**

Many actors report, anecdotally, a phenomenon known as a "showmance," whereby actors develop romantic and/or sexual feelings for acting partners, often in the process of portraying romance onstage together. Because acting partners spend so much time together and may be engaging in several activities that facilitate emotional and physical closeness, it is possible that performing intimacy may influence feelings of actual intimacy. In this study, we aimed to understand the association between the type of onstage relationship that an actor portrays with their acting partner and the degree of intimacy–specifically nurturance and eroticism–that they feel toward this partner. We surveyed actors (amateur and professional) about their past theatrical experiences performing with a romantic acting partner (*romantic/intimate*), a non-romantic but still intimate partner (*non-romantic/intimate*; e.g., friendship, parent-child), and a non-romantic and non-intimate partner (*non-romantic/non-intimate*; e.g., strangers, colleagues). We found that actors reported significantly higher levels of nurturance when recalling romantic and non-romantic/intimate onstage roles, compared to non-romantic/non-intimate roles. We also found that actors reported significantly higher levels of eroticism when recalling romantic onstage roles compared to other roles. Finally, we found that actors reported having experienced a significantly greater proportion of romantic/sexual feelings across their acting careers toward romantic acting partners, compared to other acting partners. The findings of this study provide a better understanding of the bidirectional relationship between behaviour and affect, as well as the predictors of intimacy, through a theatrical lens.

*Keywords:* intimacy, relationships, romance, theater, theatre, acting

## Introduction

What leads to intimacy? Is it possible to experience actual feelings of intimacy by simply pretending to experience those feelings? A common phenomenon among actors known as a “showmance” suggests that portraying intimacy in a performance can lead to increased intimacy offstage. In theatre and film, showmances occur when actors engage in sexual relations, date, and/or fall in love with one another, often when the two actors portray romantic partners together onstage. Though extant research is limited, there is consensus among theatre researchers that as actors aim for authenticity (“bringing the character to life” through genuine emotions), the lines between self and character can blur (Burgoyne et al., 1999; Pace, 2020; Sina, 2014; Shawyer & Shively, 2019). This extends to performances of intimacy onstage, which may contribute to romantic feelings offstage, and in turn, the presence of showmances (Sina, 2014; Shawyer & Shively, 2019). Showmances, however, have yet to be explored in psychological research on intimacy and affect.

### Effects of Behaviour on Emotion and Physiology

The feelings associated with showmances may occur because of the performance of intimate behaviours. Previous research has shown that acting or performing can impact hormones. For example, trained actors show increased levels of testosterone after performing a gendered behaviour (wielding power by acting out the firing of a subordinate; van Anders et al., 2015a). Other research has demonstrated that acting out a certain emotion via a particular configuration of breathing, muscular activation, and facial expression might cause one to actually feel that emotion, demonstrating a sensory-emotion feedback mechanism (Bloch et al., 1987). For example, trained actors expressing joyful emotions during a stage performance felt happier (Bloch et al., 1987).

Researchers have also explored the facial-feedback hypothesis, a related concept that proposes impacts of facial activity on affective response (Duclos et al., 1989; Ekman et al., 1983; Kleinke et al., 1998; Laird et al., 1989; Noah et al., 2018; Strack et al., 1988). For example, when individuals held a pen in their mouth in ways that facilitated facial muscles typically linked with smiling, they reported presented cartoons to be more amusing, compared to those holding the pen in an inhibitory manner (Noah et al., 2018; Strack et al., 1988). Additionally, Kleinke and colleagues (1998) determined that participants experienced an increase in positive mood upon engaging in positive facial expressions, but decreased positive mood when engaging in negative facial expressions. Thus, when actors are asked to perform certain behaviours with concomitant facial expressions, this may lead to parallel affective responses.

**What about Intimate Behaviours?**

While research has assessed the effects of various behaviours on physiology and affect, very little has explored intimate behaviours specifically. Intimacy has been commonly defined as a sense of closeness or connectedness between two objects or persons (Moss & Schwebel, 1993; Sexton & Sexton, 2012; Sternberg, 1997; Timmerman, 1991). However, intimacy is a multidimensional construct, with facets including both sexual and emotional closeness (Clinebell & Clinebell, 1970; Jamieson, 2007; Olson, 1975, 1977; Schaefer & Olson, 1981; van Anders, 2015).

One theoretical framework that is useful for developing hypotheses about the diverse experiences of romantic and intimate feelings is sexual configurations theory (SCT; van Anders, 2015). SCT partitions intimacy or sexuality into two components: nurturance (e.g., warm and loving feelings) and eroticism (e.g., sexual arousal). While these two categories can be distinct,

they can also be intertwined, and can include multiple levels including emotions, bodily states, behaviours, and relationships (Diamond, 2003; van Anders, 2015; van Anders et al., 2011).

**The Role of Nurturance in Feelings of Intimacy**

Nurturance can be defined as warm, loving feelings and closeness, feeling supportive, and potentially having a committed connection (van Anders, 2015). Research on intimacy highlights four key aspects: trust (e.g., a feeling of safety in being oneself), emotional closeness (e.g., thoughts, behaviours, and emotions being interconnected), open communication of thoughts and feelings (e.g., self-disclosure, confiding deeply personal information), and reciprocity (e.g., sharing one's personal thoughts and the other listening attentively and responding) (Falk & Wagner, 1985; Hook et al., 2011; Parks & Floyd, 1996; Pines, 2005; Reis & Shaver, 1988; Schaefer & Olson, 1981; Timmerman, 1991). But what leads to such feelings?

Similarity in attitudes, interests, values, and/or intelligence tends to facilitate intimacy (Parks & Floyd, 1996; Pines, 2005; Sprecher et al., 2013). High degrees of time, togetherness, and nurturant touch (e.g., hugs, cuddling, or sympathetic touch), can facilitate the development of emotional intimacy, which most likely occurs when there is an unusually high degree of proximity or physical contact over sustained periods of time (Diamond, 2003; Register & Henley, 1992; van Anders, 2015).

All of these above elements of nurturance may be present when actors portray romance onstage and thus might influence actors' feelings of emotional intimacy toward one another. Perhaps while performing a story of two characters developing and experiencing nurturance, exhibiting behaviours such as self-disclosure and reciprocity, actors feel as if they are personally doing so as well. It is also probable that these actors experience emotional closeness from spending a great deal of time together in close proximity during the rehearsal and performance

process. Through this process, they may be gaining trust as they share these vulnerable experiences, exploring their characters’ feelings and emotions. As well, they are supporting one another, discovering shared similarities in attitudes and interests, and exhibiting physically nurturant behaviours via the stage directions provided by the director and the script. This is supported by previous research, which has found that trained actors portraying behaviours typically associated with “tenderness” actually experience this emotion (Bloch et al., 1987). As a result, it is possible that, in portraying nurturant gestures, actors activate nurturant feelings toward scene partners.

**The Role of Eroticism in Feelings of Intimacy**

Eroticism is defined by specific components of sexuality that bring genital or bodily pleasure, orgasm, and arousal (van Anders, 2015). The arousal element of eroticism is particularly relevant and can be identified as an emotional or motivational state, elicited by both internal and external stimuli (Toates, 2009). These stimuli can be determined by central (including verbal), peripheral (including genital), and behavioural (including action tendencies and motor preparation) responses (Janssen, 2011). Interestingly, arousal need not necessarily be sexual to lead to sexual attraction: arousal caused by another emotion (such as fear) can be misattributed to sexual arousal and/or enhance every other reaction we have, including attraction (Dutton & Aron, 1974; Meston & Frohlich, 2003; Pines, 2005).

What predicts such feelings and responses? Previous research has found that individuals exposed to increases in non-verbal behaviours such as eye contact, positive facial expressions (e.g., smiling), touch, and physical proximity exhibit an increase in their level of arousal, as measured through physiological responses such as an increased heart rate and skin conductance response (Coutts et al., 1980; Helminen et al., 2011; Patterson, 1976; Pönkänen & Hietanen,

2012, p. 20212). Furthermore, an increase in adrenaline plays a role in situational arousal, which in turn, can impact feelings of attraction and intimacy (Krahenbuhl, 1975; Meston & Frohlich, 2003). This is because arousal does not have to be initiated in a sexual context for it to be associated with feelings of sexual intimacy. A general state of arousal is similar for all strong emotions and includes physiological responses such as a rapid heartbeat, fast breathing, nervous tremor, and flushing (Walster & Berscheid, 1971).

These aspects of arousal–specifically eye contact, positive facial expressions, touch, physical proximity, and misattributed arousal - may explain the romantic and sexual feelings present in a “showmance.” Since actors portraying romance onstage likely share a great deal of eye contact, are in close proximity, touch each other, and exhibit positive facial expressions with one another, they may consequently feel aroused. Furthermore, actors may experience higher levels of adrenaline prior to and during a performance, which may influence arousal levels and in turn, result in misattribution, transfer, or facilitation, in which the actor then feels a romantic connection to their scene partner. Actors spend several days a week together and, if they are romantic acting partners, they are repeatedly portraying romantic and sexual gestures onstage (Shawyer & Shively, 2019).

In addition, performing behaviours associated with eroticism (e.g., relaxed posture and facial muscles, even breathing pattern, head tilted backwards), can activate subsequent feelings of eroticism (Bloch et al., 1987). As a result, the content of the script, along with the non-verbal communication involved in the blocking (staging/movement), could be associated with experiencing emotional and physical arousal, which might contribute to feelings of intimacy and romantic love (Shawyer & Shively, 2019).

**Non-Romantic Intimacy**

Feelings of closeness and intimacy can also be present in non-romantic relationships (e.g., parent-child, siblings, and friends). However, each of these types of relationships differs in nurturance and eroticism, as they are accompanied by different kinds of intimate behaviours. For example, parent-child relationships are characterized by high levels of nurturance (e.g., hugs, verbal statements of love, support) and the absence of eroticism (Brown et al., 1999; Locke & Prinz, 2002; van Anders et al., 2011). The degree of these nurturant behaviours vary upon the age and development of the child, and are often asymmetrical (Brown et al., 1999; Collins, 1996; Lerner & Steinberg, 2009; Locke & Prinz, 2002). Sibling relationships also include generally high nurturance and the absence of eroticism. Research has suggested that siblings who report warm and intimate feelings with one another are more likely to share information and rely on each other for emotional support (Buhrmester & Furman, 1987; Howe et al., 2001). Thus, intimacy between siblings often involves similar nurturant behaviours as romantic relationships, such as self-disclosure, reciprocity, mutual trust, and emotional understanding (Buhrmester & Furman, 1987; Buhrmester & Prager, 1995; Dunn, 1983; Howe et al., 2001; Jamieson, 2007). Regarding friendships, previous research has identified similar nurturance-related phenomena, such as self-disclosure, similarity in interests and characteristics, reciprocity, duration, trust, and open communication of feelings (Bauminger et al., 2008; Jamieson, 2007; Parks & Floyd, 1996; Shulman et al., 1997; Sprecher et al., 2013).

Some research suggests that people may experience lower levels of intimacy in non-romantic relationships compared to romantic relationships in general, but this is far from universal and likely varies by conceptualization of intimacy (Barry et al., 2009; Monsour, 1992; Parks & Floyd, 1996). By portraying these kinds of non-romantic intimacy, it is possible that actors may experience some degree of nurturance with a non-romantic onstage partner,

depending on the nature of the relationship being performed. However, these types of relationships do not include eroticism, at least onstage. As a result, they may have differing impacts on the potential for a "showmance."

**The Current Study**

In this study, we investigated whether performing intimacy in a theatrical setting influences actors' actual feelings of intimacy toward scene partners. To assess this, we surveyed actors about past experiences performing both romantic and non-romantic roles in theatrical productions. We examined the association between the type of onstage relationship that an actor portrayed with scene partners and the degree of nurturance and/or eroticism they felt toward those acting partners. We examined three types of onstage relationship: *romantic/intimate, non-romantic/intimate*, and *non-romantic/non-intimate* and tested three hypotheses. Hypotheses one (*H1*) and two (*H2*) concerned recalled feelings of nurturance and eroticism associated with three individual salient acting experiences (one for each level of onstage relationship). Hypothesis three (*H3*) concerned the total number of each of the three onstage role types that actors had performed over their career, and how frequently they experienced romantic/sexual feelings in each.

In *H1*, we hypothesized-that actors would recall the highest feelings of nurturance for a salient acting experience with a romantic/intimate acting partner, intermediate feelings of nurturance with a non-romantic/intimate acting partner, and the lowest feelings of nurturance with a non-romantic/non-intimate acting partner. We thought that factors such as self-disclosure, trust, similarity, and general emotional closeness were likely to be the most prominent in the romantic/intimate condition compared to the other two. At the same time, portraying non-

romantic/intimate relationships would be associated with some feelings of nurturance toward their scene partner but to a lesser degree compared to romantic scenarios.

In *H2*, we hypothesized that actors would recall experiencing the most eroticism for a salient acting experience with a romantic/intimate acting partner compared to acting experiences with both a non-romantic/intimate and non-romantic/non-intimate acting partner (which we did not expect to differ from each other). We thought that factors such as increased eye contact, touch, and misattribution would be most prominent in the romantic condition relative to the other two.

In *H3*, we hypothesized that the frequency with which actors would recall experiencing romantic/sexual feelings toward their acting partner *across their career* would be highest for performing romantic/intimate roles, intermediate for non-romantic/intimate roles, and lowest for non-romantic/non-intimate roles.

While showmance itself is a phenomenon of circumscribed interest, the impact of performing intimacy on feeling intimacy has broad impacts. The findings of this study may thus facilitate a further understanding of the psychological intricacies of intimacy and interpersonal relationships, as well as the interconnections between behaviour and affect, in a unique, theatrical context.

## Method

### Participants

This investigation examined participants from across Canada and the United States. To achieve 80% power to detect a small/medium effect size (Cohen's $d$ =.3) across onstage role conditions (described below) in a within-subjects design, we aimed to recruit a minimum of 100

participants. A total of 139 participants started the survey and 125 participants completed it.[1] Participants answered an open-ended question asking, "What is your gender and/or sex?" and a multiple-choice question asking, "Have you transitioned gender and/or sex, are you transitioning, or will you?" We categorized participant gender/sex based on their responses to these two questions. Our sample *(N* = 125) was comprised of women (*n* = 64), men (*n* = 54), and non-binary (*n* = 6) participants.

Participants also self-identified their sexual identities/orientations, which we categorized as heterosexual/straight (*n* = 90), gay/lesbian/homosexual (*n* = 11), bisexual/pansexual (*n* = 16), queer (*n* = 3), mostly heterosexual (*n* = 1), and demisexual/asexual (*n* = 1). Two participants did not disclose this information. Participants self-identified their races/ethnicities/nationalities, which we categorized as white (*n* = 88), Middle Eastern (*n* = 1), Asian/Asian Canadian (*n* = 10), First Nations (*n* = 1), African American/Black (*n* = 3), European (*n* = 6), Multiracial (*n* = 10), Latinx (*n* = 1), and Jewish (*n* = 3). Two participants did not disclose this information. The majority of participants stated that they were currently living in Canada (*n* = 99) and some stated that they currently lived in the United States (*n* = 26). Ages ranged from 19-67 years old ($M_{age}$ = 33.91, *SD* = 13.39).

We recruited participants primarily from Facebook, Kijiji, and printed advertisements posted around Queen's University and Kingston, ON. Eligibility criteria included: being an actor (professional or amateur), at least 18 years old, and holding at least three years of acting experience and/or training (chosen to ensure similarity in skill sets and backgrounds among the participants). Actors' experience had to include performing both romantic and non-romantic

[1]17 additional participants were excluded from our primary analyses. We describe these exclusions and our rationale in our analyses section below.

roles with onstage acting partners. The participants were given the opportunity to enter a raffle to win a $100 CAD Amazon gift certificate as incentive.

## Materials

### *Scene Partner Questionnaire*

Participants were asked to think of a specific, significant experience in which they shared a great deal of onstage time and dialogue with a scene partner, with one of three prompts: that the relationship between the two characters must have been (1) romantic, (2) non-romantic but still intimate (e.g., close friends), or (3) non-romantic and non-intimate (e.g., colleagues). Participants were only presented with the prompts that they had previously reported having experienced in the background questionnaire. We counterbalanced the order of these prompts to avoid order-effects. The prompt for each condition included a series of open-ended questions, exploring the details of the relationship between the characters being reflected upon, the relationship between the actors themselves, the participant's relationship status at the time of the experience, as well as the perceived gender/sex and sexual orientation of the participant's scene partner.

### *Affect and Arousal Scale (AAS)*

After completing the Scene Partner Questionnaire, participants completed an Affect and Arousal Scale (AAS) for each condition (romantic/intimate, non-romantic/intimate, and non-romantic/non-intimate), which is a collection of items that researchers have used (and adapted) to measure physiological and affective responses to stimuli (Heiman & Rowland, 1983). For this study, we removed 14 items that we perceived to be unnecessary, such as "dirty" and "feminine", and we added 7 new items aiming to assess a new subscale called nurturance, including "supported," "vulnerable," and "connected," for a total of 33 items. We have removed and added

items onto this scale successfully in several previous studies (e.g., Chadwick & van Anders, 2017; Goldey & van Anders, 2016). Participants rated the degree to which they felt these affective and physiological responses when they performed with their scene partner on a scale from 1-7.

***Romantic/Sexual "Feelings-to-Shows Ratio" Questionnaire***

Participants completed a questionnaire assessing the frequency, throughout their acting career, of experiencing romantic/sexual feelings toward scene partners, in romantic/intimate, non-romantic/intimate, and non-romantic/non-intimate onstage scenarios. The items for the romantic/intimate condition were, for example, "How many shows have you performed in where your character had a love interest played by another actor?" and "In how many of those shows did you feel romantic/sexual feelings toward the actor playing your love interest?"[2]

**Procedure**

The study was conducted online and approved by the Queen's University General Ethics Review Board (no. 6025131). We first provided participants with a joint letter of information and consent form, describing the basic purposes of the study, the option to leave the study at any point with no penalty, and the opportunity to ask any questions before or after the study. Participants who gave their informed consent then completed a background questionnaire (e.g., questions pertaining to their demographics, sexuality history, and level of acting experience. Specifically, we asked about their experience with roles where they had substantial dialogue and stage time with (a) an actor who played their love interest (i.e., romantic/intimate), (b) an actor whose character shared a non-romantic but still intimate relationship with their character (i.e.,

[2] Actors typically understand "show" to mean the entire run of one production, including rehearsals and performances, which was our intended interpretation. Due to our lack of explicit definition of "shows," it is possible that participants interpreted 'shows' to refer to *individual* performances or rehearsals, but we think this is unlikely, given that our sample was comprised entirely of experienced actors.

romantic/non-intimate), and (c) an actor whose character shared a non-romantic, non-intimate relationship with their character (i.e., non-romantic/non-intimate).

After the background questionnaire, participants completed the Scene Partner Questionnaire followed immediately by the AAS for each of the three onstage roles they had previously indicated that they had experience performing. We randomized the order in which the scene partner questionnaire and AAS for each onstage role was presented. Finally, participants completed the 'romantic/sexual feelings-to-shows' questionnaire, were debriefed, and then given the opportunity to enter a random draw one of three $100 CAD Amazon gift certificates via a separate survey.

**Analyses**

***Composite Scores for Eroticism and Nurturance***

To test *H1* and *H2*, how an actor's experience of nurturance and eroticism is affected by the type of onstage relationship that they portray, we first created composite variables for nurturance and eroticism based on AAS responses to items related to nurturance and eroticism. To determine which items related to nurturance and eroticism, we conducted an exploratory factor analysis (EFA) for each of our three repeated measures prompts: romantic/intimate ($n$ = 121), non-romantic/intimate ($n$ = 118), and non-romantic/non-intimate ($n$ = 118). We used an oblique (oblimin) rotation and chose our initial factor solution based on a holistic assessment of scree plots, parallel analyses, and conceptual fit (Fabrigar et al., 1999; Sakaluk & Short, 2017). Only items that had a factor loading $\geq |.4|$ were assigned to a primary factor. In the event that an item had substantial cross-loadings (i.e., a loading $\geq |.4|$ on more than one factor) we had planned to assign the item to the factor on which it loaded most highly, but we did not have any items that fit this criterion.

Our factor structures varied somewhat by condition, so we decided *a posteriori* to use the structure from the romantic/intimate role responses to determine which items to include in our nurturance and eroticism composites because the romantic/intimate EFA seemed most central to the showmance phenomenon, which is the focus of this study.

For each EFA, we included/excluded participants based on their response to the open-ended prompt, "Describe the relationship/context between your character and your scene partner's character." If a participant's response matched the condition–for example, one actor responded with, "I did the play You Can't Take It With You and played Alice who is engaged to Tony" when presented with the romantic prompt–we included their responses to the AAS in our EFA for that category. If the participant's response was nonsensical or did not match the condition–for example, one actor responded to the romantic prompt with, "In Moby Dick, I played Starbuck, 1st mate to Captain Ahab. We clashed over his obsessive need for revenge on the whale, Moby Dick. It led to harsh words and sometimes close to fighting"–we did not include their response. In total, we excluded four responses from the romantic/intimate EFA, seven responses from the non-romantic/intimate EFA, and seven responses from the non-romantic/non-intimate EFA.

***Nurturance and Eroticism by Onstage Role***

To test hypotheses 1 and 2, which concern the relationship between type of onstage relationship portrayed and experiencing nurturance and eroticism, we conducted two separate linear mixed models. Our dependent measure for our test of our first hypothesis was the nurturance composite based on our EFA, and our dependent measure for our second hypothesis was the eroticism composite. For each, our independent measure was the onstage relationship

participants had portrayed (romantic/intimate, non-romantic/intimate, and non-romantic/non-intimate).

We also included years of acting experience as a covariate in each model to account for the possibility that actors with more experience may be more or less impacted by the emotions they are performing (Bloch et al., 1987). If actors with more experience are less impacted by performing intimacy/romance, then we would expect them to recall similar levels of nurturance and eroticism across conditions. If, on the other hand, they are more impacted, we would expect them to recall greater differences in levels of nurturance and eroticism across conditions.[3]

To test *H1*, that people would report the highest level of nurturance when recalling a romantic/intimate onstage role, a lower level of nurturance when recalling a non-romantic/intimate role, and the lowest level of nurturance when recalling a non-romantic/non-intimate role, we used a planned linear contrast (weights: romantic/intimate = 1, non-romantic/intimate = 0, non-romantic/non-intimate = -1). To test *H2*, that participants would report higher feelings of eroticism when recalling romantic/intimate roles than both types of non-romantic roles, we also used a planned contrast (weights: romantic/intimate = 2, non-romantic/intimate = -1, non-romantic/non-intimate = -1).

We excluded participants who failed to complete the AAS for a romantic/intimate onstage relationship and at least one other condition ($n$ = 12) as well as participants who were in a romantic relationship with their onstage partner at the beginning of the acting experience ($n$ = 4). After all exclusions, we had data from 108 participants for our main analyses. We also ran both models with and without including participants who had an onstage partner of a gender/sex

[3] We also tested each model with the number of shows each actor had participated in throughout their career as a covariate *instead* of years of experience. We provide these results in our supplement, as they did not substantially differ from our results with years of experience as a covariate.

that branched from their sexual identity (e.g., a lesbian woman whose onstage partner was a man), but this did not impact the pattern of our results (so we include the results with these exclusions in the supplement).

***'Feelings-to-Shows' Ratio***

For *H3*, we tested whether actors experienced proportionally more romantic and/or sexual feelings towards onstage partners depending on the onstage relationship they portray over the course of their career. To do so, we first constructed a 'feelings-to-shows' ratio variable by dividing the number of times participants experienced romantic/sexual feelings towards their acting partner during shows by the total number of shows they had performed over their career, then multiplied the value by 100 to create a percentage.

If a participant's answer was vague and impossible to assign a value (e.g., "many") or the value did not make sense (e.g., a participant stated that they had experienced romantic/sexual feelings 5025 times out of 75 shows), we excluded their data from our analysis ($n$ = 21; nineteen vague/un-assignable responses and two nonsensical responses). If a participant responded with a word representing a proportion (e.g., "half"), we measured half of the total value that they previously provided (i.e., if they had performed in 14 shows in which their character had a love interest, but only experienced romantic/sexual feelings for "half" of those shows, we coded it as 7 shows). When participants provided a range (e.g., "between 5-7"), we recorded the average value (e.g., "6"). Finally, when participants provided a value as an anchor for an estimate (e.g., "20+"), we recorded the anchor value (e.g., "20"). We applied these transformations to at least one response from 30 participants in total.

To test *H3*, we again conducted a linear mixed model with onstage role (romantic/intimate, non-romantic/intimate, and non-romantic/non-intimate) as our independent

measure. Here, however, our dependent measure was 'feelings-to-shows' ratio. Because our hypothesis was that actors would report the highest ratio of romantic/sexual feelings to shows when recalling romantic/intimate roles, a lower ratio when recalling non-romantic/intimate roles, and the lowest ratio when recalling non-romantic/non-intimate roles, we again included a planned linear contrast (weights: romantic/intimate = 1, non-romantic/intimate = 0, non-romantic/non-intimate = -1).

### *Statistical Software*

We ran all linear mixed models via the MIXED command in SPSS (ver. 27) and measures of effect size (and their confidence intervals) via the apaTables (Stanley, 2021) and effect size (Ben-Shachar et al., 2020) packages in RStudio (ver. 1.2.5033; R ver. 4.0.5).

## Results

### Exploratory Factor Analysis on Affect and Arousal Data

Parallel analysis and conceptual fit suggested that the EFA for romantic/intimate roles had three factors, which together explained 53.1% of the variance in scores. We labeled the factors *Nurturance*, which explained 29.6% of the variance (11 items; e.g., loving/loved, emotionally close), *Anxiety*, which explained 19.4% of the variance (14 items; e.g., worried, stressed), and *Eroticism*, which explained 4.1% of the variance (6 items; e.g., sexually aroused, attracted). Two items (guilty, bored) did not having a primary factor $\geq |.4|$ and were therefore not assigned to a factor. For factor loadings and communalities, scree plots, and parallel analyses for all conditions, see supplemental material. See Table 1 for means and standard deviations (SD) of our composite scores for eroticism and nurturance for each condition.

### Test of *H1*: Nurturance by Onstage Role

A linear mixed model revealed that onstage role was significantly related to nurturance, $F(2, 97.2) = 6.51$, $p = .002$, $\eta_p^2 = .12$, 90% CI [.03, .21]. Years of acting experience (included as a covariate) was not significant, $F(1, 101.7) = 0.80$, $p = .372$. Our planned linear contrast was significant, providing support for our hypothesis, $t(99.1) = 3.52$, $p < .001$, $\eta_p^2 = .11$, 90% CI [.03, .21].

Pairwise comparisons, however, provided only partial support for our hypothesized linear relationship between acting conditions. Actors recalled experiencing significantly more nurturance during their performance of romantic/intimate roles ($M = 4.53$, $SE = 0.14$) than non-romantic/non-intimate roles ($M = 3.89$, $SE = 0.15$), $t(99.1) = 3.51$, $p < .001$, $M_{dif} = 0.64$, $\eta_p^2 = .11$, 90% CI [.03, .21]. And, actors experienced significantly more nurturance during non-romantic intimate roles ($M = 4.44$, $SE = 0.14$) than non-romantic/non-intimate roles ($M = 3.89$, $SE = 0.15$), $t(108) = 2.78$, $p = .006$, $\eta_p^2 = .07$, 90% CI [.01, .15]. However, the level of nurturance that actors experienced in romantic/intimate and non-romantic/intimate roles did not differ significantly, $t(90.7) = 0.54$, $p = .610$. See *Figure 1* for a visual representation of the data.

**Test of *H2*: Eroticism by Onstage Role**

A linear mixed model revealed that onstage role was significantly related to eroticism, $F(2, 102.6) = 32.07$, $p < .001$, $\eta_p^2 = .38$, 90% CI [.26, .48]. Years of acting experience was not a significant covariate, $F(1, 104.28) = 0.49$, $p = .485$. Our planned contrast was significant, providing support for our hypothesis, $t(104.24) = 7.89$, $p < .001$, $\eta_p^2 = .37$, 90% CI [.26, .48]. Pairwise comparisons revealed that actors recalled experiencing significantly more eroticism during their performance of romantic/intimate roles ($M = 3.82$, $SE = 0.16$) than either non-romantic/intimate roles ($M = 2.63$, $SE = 0.12$), $t(101.8) = 6.62$, $p < .001$, $\eta_p^2 = .30$, 90% CI [.18, .41] or non-romantic/non-intimate roles ($M = 2.54$, $SE = 0.12$), $t(105.7) = 7.66$, $p < .001$, $\eta_p^2 =$

.36, 90% CI [.24, .46]. The levels of eroticism experienced by actors in non-romantic/intimate and non-romantic/non-intimate roles, however, did not differ significantly, $t(102.5) = 0.59$, $p = .553$. Thus, our hypothesis was supported. See *Figure 2* for a visual representation of the data.

**Test of *H3*: Ratio of Romantic/Sexual Feelings to Shows**

A linear mixed model revealed that onstage role was significantly related to the ratio at which actors experienced romantic/sexual feelings, $F(2, 103.7) = 10.97$, $p < .001$, $\eta_p^2 = .17$, 90% CI [.07, .27]. Our planned linear contrast was significant, providing support for our hypothesis, $t(104.8) = 3.43$, $p = .001$, $\eta_p^2 = .10$, 90% CI [.03, .20].

Pairwise comparisons, however, provided only partial support for our hypothesized linear relationship between acting roles. The ratio at which actors experienced romantic/sexual feelings when recalling romantic/intimate onstage roles ($M = 29.26$, $SE = 2.81$) was significantly higher than when recalling non-romantic/intimate roles ($M = 15.07$, $SE = 2.07$), $t(99.17) = 4.66$, $p < .001$, $\eta_p^2 = .18$, 90% CI [.08, .29], and non-romantic/non-intimate roles ($M = 17.95$, $SE = 2.59$), $t(104.8) = 3.42$, $p < .001$, $\eta_p^2 = .10$, 90% CI [.03, .20]. However, the ratio at which actors experienced romantic/sexual feelings in non-romantic/intimate roles and non-romantic/non-intimate roles was not significantly different, $t(103.0) = 1.09$, $p = .276$. See *Figure 3* for a visual representation of the data and Table 1 for the means and standard deviations of the 'feelings-to-shows' ratio by condition.

## Discussion

In this study, we investigated whether performing intimate behaviours led to actual feelings of intimacy in a theatrical context. This was based on past empirical research that demonstrates that embodying behaviours can influence affect. For example, performing gendered behaviours influences feelings of masculinity/femininity (van Anders et al., 2015). We explored

three hypotheses testing how different kinds of roles (romantic/intimate, non-romantic/intimate, and non-romantic/non-intimate) were related to feelings of intimacy.

*H1* was partially supported: Actors performing romantic/intimate relationships reported the highest nurturance and those performing non-romantic/non-intimate relationships reported the lowest nurturance. However, contrary to our predictions, there was no significant difference between levels of nurturance when performing romantic/intimate and non-romantic/intimate roles. Thus, performing intimacy, whether romantic or not, was associated with feeling significantly more nurturance with acting partners.

We had predicted that non-romantic/intimate relationships would be associated with less nurturance than romantic/intimate relationships based primarily on research about friendships (Barry et al., 2009; Monsour, 1992; Parks & Floyd, 1996), imagining that most acting roles that were non-romantic/intimate would be friendships. There is also a wide range of nurturant behaviours in other non-romantic intimate relationships, such as in parent-child and siblings. However, participants responded with a mix of familial and friendship relationships when presented with the non-romantic/intimate prompt. This likely explains our finding that nurturance in the non-romantic/intimate condition was not significantly different from that in romantic/intimate relationships, due to the high levels of nurturance that characterize familial relationships.

*H2* was supported: We found that actors performing romantic/intimate relationships onstage reported significantly higher levels of eroticism than when performing either type of non-romantic relationships onstage. This suggests that, since romantic intimacy involves an erotic component that non-romantic relationships often lack, performing romantic intimacy may facilitate erotic affect/arousal.

We also included years of acting experience, as well as the total number of shows each actor had been involved in, as a covariate when testing our first two hypotheses, because actors with more experience may have a greater ability to control the emotions being portrayed onstage (Bloch et al., 1987). However, results did not support this prediction; the impact of years of acting experience on nurturance and eroticism was non-significant in either model. It is possible that, contrary to previous research, more experienced actors do not have an advantage in controlling their emotions/affect onstage, at least when it comes to eroticism and nurturance. The opposite–that actors with more years of experience would have greater affective involvement in their characters–also did not seem supported given the non-significance of years of experience.

*H3* was partially supported: We found that actors reported a significantly greater proportion of romantic/sexual feelings throughout their acting career when performing romantic/intimate relationships with onstage partners, but we did not find a linear trend (i.e., romantic/intimate relationships leading to the highest degree of nurturance, followed by non-romantic/intimate, and then non-romantic/non-intimate exhibiting the least nurturance). This therefore suggests that performing romance specifically, as opposed to general intimacy, is what leads to a higher likelihood of feeling romantic/sexual feelings.

These findings dovetail with the results of our analyses for our first two hypotheses: romantic/intimate and non-romantic/intimate roles did not differ significantly in levels of nurturance, but romantic/intimate roles were associated with higher levels of eroticism. When recalling romantic/sexual feelings onstage over the course of their career, actors may have made these attributions based on eroticism or the combined experience of eroticism and nurturance, rather than nurturance alone.

It is also notable that performing intimate roles, regardless of whether they were romantic or not, were associated with experiencing more nurturance towards onstage partners. While these nurturant feelings may not facilitate romantic relationships, they may partially explain the strong connections that cast members have anecdotally reported feeling with one another during and after a show (D’Almeida, 2018). The focus on sexuality in North American culture (i.e., sexual normativity) might draw more focus toward showmances, but the other kinds of nurturant connections (e.g., friendships) that may develop through performing intimacy are intriguing and warrant further study (van Anders, 2015).

Taken together, these findings support the idea that performing certain behaviours (on stage) can influence one’s actual feelings and emotions offstage. One possible alternative explanation is that feelings of intimacy simply arise due to high degrees of time and togetherness shared between actors. However, our study explored three types of onstage relationships that all involved substantial amounts of time and togetherness which suggests that role type facilitates nurturance and eroticism above and beyond time spent together.

**Implications**

These findings have implications for research exploring the association between behaviour and affect, as well as investigations of interpersonal relationships. While research often examines how emotion shapes behaviour, explorations of the inverse relationship are less common. Our results suggest that performing certain intimate behaviours may in fact influence associated feelings of intimacy. Thus, these findings provide further evidence in favour of a bidirectional relationship. Furthermore, this study provides a greater understanding of the complexities of interpersonal relationships and nurturant/erotic intimacy.

Our findings also buttress the practice of using 'role-play' in clinical settings to address issues around sexuality and/or intimacy (McCarthy, 1993; Zilbergeld & Ellison, 1979). Clinicians could potentially utilize these findings as a foundation to develop interventions for couples in particular that involve portrayals of romance/intimacy during therapy. This could be used in tandem with other practices, such as intentionally engaging in sexual fantasy about one's partner (or partners), which has been shown to increase sexual desire and engagement in relationship-promoting behaviours (Birnbaum et al., 2019). These findings may be useful for cognitive behavioural therapy (CBT) practitioners as well. Given that our findings suggest strong links between romantic behaviour and cognition, clinicians could, for example, have patients attend to and adjust patterns of behaviour/cognition (e.g., time spent apart, presence/absence of physical touch, facial expressions) in intimate situations, in addition to the practices described above.

These findings are also relevant for actors, directors, and theatre researchers. As detailed by Pace (2020), staging intimacy and/or sex comes with a host of boundary and consent related challenges that actors and directors rarely receive formal training in negotiating. The present research provides evidence that the "offstage" relationships between actors are not independent from the "onstage" relationships they perform. Performing intimacy, or other situations that may push the boundaries of actors' comfort levels, can cause emotional distress, so knowledge of the ways that showmances develop when performing in different roles may help actors and directors anticipate and respond to potentially complex interpersonal issues that may develop (Burgoyne et al., 1999; Sina, 2014). To accommodate this, intimacy directors could, for example, be hired to facilitate safe intimacy choreography onstage (Burns et al., 2020; Richardson et al., 2019; Sina, 2014). Theatre directors/teachers could also implement theatrical intimacy techniques and

lessons that incorporate research on showmances, such as the present study (Noble, 2011; Shawyer & Shively, 2019).

Future research could investigate whether the ways in which intimacy/sex is staged impacts the likelihood of a showmance. More traditional approaches, such as directives to actors to "just kiss" or "be more passionate" and active attempts to foster genuine passion/attraction between actors, seem more likely to contribute to actual intimacy and attraction. New approaches articulated by Pace (2020), on the other hand, which emphasize consent, use desexualized language to describe all aspects of sexual/intimate scenes (e.g., "open and close the distance between pelvises" instead of "hump"), and specific choreography (as opposed to leaving it up to actors); these may reduce the incidence of showmance. An empirical investigation of directing techniques with respect to sex and intimacy could provide valuable practical as well as theoretical insights.

**Limitations**

One limitation to this study is that we measured *recalled* affect and arousal. This retrospective design may have introduced bias and/or inaccuracy when reflecting upon past experiences. For example, it is more likely that participants who ended up developing romantic feelings toward their onstage partner will remember their affect and arousal as being at levels more typically associated with romantic feelings, even if this was not the case at the time. Likewise, an offstage romantic relationship that ended poorly could bias recall towards lower levels of eroticism/nurturance. There may also have been response bias, as individuals who saw an advertisement looking for actors who have played romantic roles may have had an idea of what the study was about. Further, some of our participants were recruited from the

experimenters' personal networks and may have been more susceptible to desirability effects as a result.

When asked about the frequency of experienced romantic feelings and number of shows performed, the majority of participants responded with a precise number of shows (e.g., "7"; $n$ = 91). Some ($n$ = *34*), however, gave less precise answers, such as "5-7 shows" or "at least 15", or an answer that we could not interpret, such as "I've lost count" or "too many to count". One benefit of allowing participants to provide open ended responses to these questions was that participants were able to answer in a way that was consistent with their level of recollection, which we could then assign numerical values to, based on an explicit system. This reliance on participants' recollection of their theatre history, however, resulted in some loss of response precision and usable responses.

In addition, most of our participants were white Canadians and Americans. This limits the generalizability of our findings – both among actors and more generally. There is a wide range of norms across cultures for how romantic love progresses (and the very importance of 'romance'), degree of emotional investment, how love is expressed, and more (Karandashev, 2015). Future research should investigate showmances among participants who are diverse along multiple axes (e.g., race/ethnicity/culture, nation, sexual identity/orientation, socioeconomic status).

Lastly, we did not specify in our prompts that these recalled experiences had to be with only one acting partner. Thus, we received some responses regarding multiple partners. This may impact the accuracy of reported feelings of intimacy when participants are recalling multiple partners instead of a single, dyadic relationship.

**Future Directions**

Due to the exploratory nature of this study, there are several avenues for future investigation. One important future direction is determining why exactly actors developed feelings of intimacy. For example, the "showmance" phenomenon may occur because actors misattribute the physiological arousal that they experience onstage. Interestingly, however, most of the indicators for physiological arousal (e.g., 'faster breathing than normal') in our EFA loaded onto our 'anxiety' factor, rather than with other erotic items (e.g., 'sexually aroused'). Our findings suggest that misattribution may not be the mechanism through which romantic onstage roles facilitate eroticism, but more research focused specifically on testing this pathway is needed.

Additionally, future studies could assess the effects of an actor's relationship status or age on developing intimacy. It is possible that the relationship status of participants at the time of the experience may have played a role in the likelihood of their developing romantic/sexual feelings for someone else (i.e., their onstage partner). If romantically/sexually involved with a third party, then people may restrict themselves from feeling any sort of actual intimacy with their acting partner, depending on their own relationality (e.g., monoamory vs. consensual non-monogamy). Age differences between actors might also affect their feelings of intimacy, thus providing another avenue for investigation. For example, if the participant were 60 years old and their acting partner were 16 years old, regardless of the type of relationship being portrayed, this may have an impact on the experienced emotional or physical intimacy.

Another future direction would be to explore the impact of context intensity on feelings of intimacy. For example, if one romantic onstage experience discusses more complex subject matter (such as navigating a relationship) while another portrays a surface-level relationship

(such as navigating a grocery store), then it is possible that the experience exploring more complex and intimate content may lead to a greater degree of actual intimacy.

Furthermore, researchers can use this study as a structure to assess the relationship between performing behaviours and other feelings besides intimacy. As outlined previously, there is a limited amount of research exploring this phenomenon in general, such as the studies assessing the relationship between facial expressions and affective responses (Duclos et al., 1989; Ekman et al., 1983; Kleinke et al., 1998; Laird et al., 1989; Noah et al., 2018; Strack et al., 1988). Thus, it would be beneficial to further investigate other emotions that behaviour can impact, such as happiness, depression, and courage.

Finally, future research could build upon our findings through assessing the immediate impact on eroticism and nurturance of performing intimacy compared to other roles in a lab setting. In this type of study, researchers could measure physiology directly (e.g., hormones) in addition to the actors' feelings of eroticism and nurturance before and after performing various scenes.

**Conclusion**

In this study, we explored the association between performing intimate behaviours and experiencing actual feelings of intimacy. When recalling a salient romantic/intimate, romantic/non-intimate, and non-romantic/non-intimate role, we found that actors reported experiencing higher levels of nurturance for both intimate roles and higher levels of eroticism for romantic/intimate roles only. When recalling all acting experiences across their careers, actors similarly reported experiencing more romantic/sexual feelings towards onstage partners in romantic-intimate roles. These findings support a bidirectional relationship between erotic/nurturant behaviour and affect, and give insight into what predicts feelings of intimacy.

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## Tables

**Table 1**

*Means ± SD of nurturance, eroticism, and the 'feelings-to-shows' ratio.*

| | Romantic | Non-romantic/intimate | Non-romantic/non-intimate |
|---|---|---|---|
| Nurturance | 4.52 ± 1.46 | 4.51 ± 1.38 | 3.96 ± 1.46 |
| Eroticism | 3.80 ± 1.69 | 2.65 ± 1.23 | 2.55 ± 1.14 |
| Feelings-to-Shows Ratio | 29.45 ± 28.26 | 14.77 ± 21.02 | 18.02 ± 26.72 |

## Figures

**Figure 1**

*Nurturance Score by Type of Onstage Relationship*

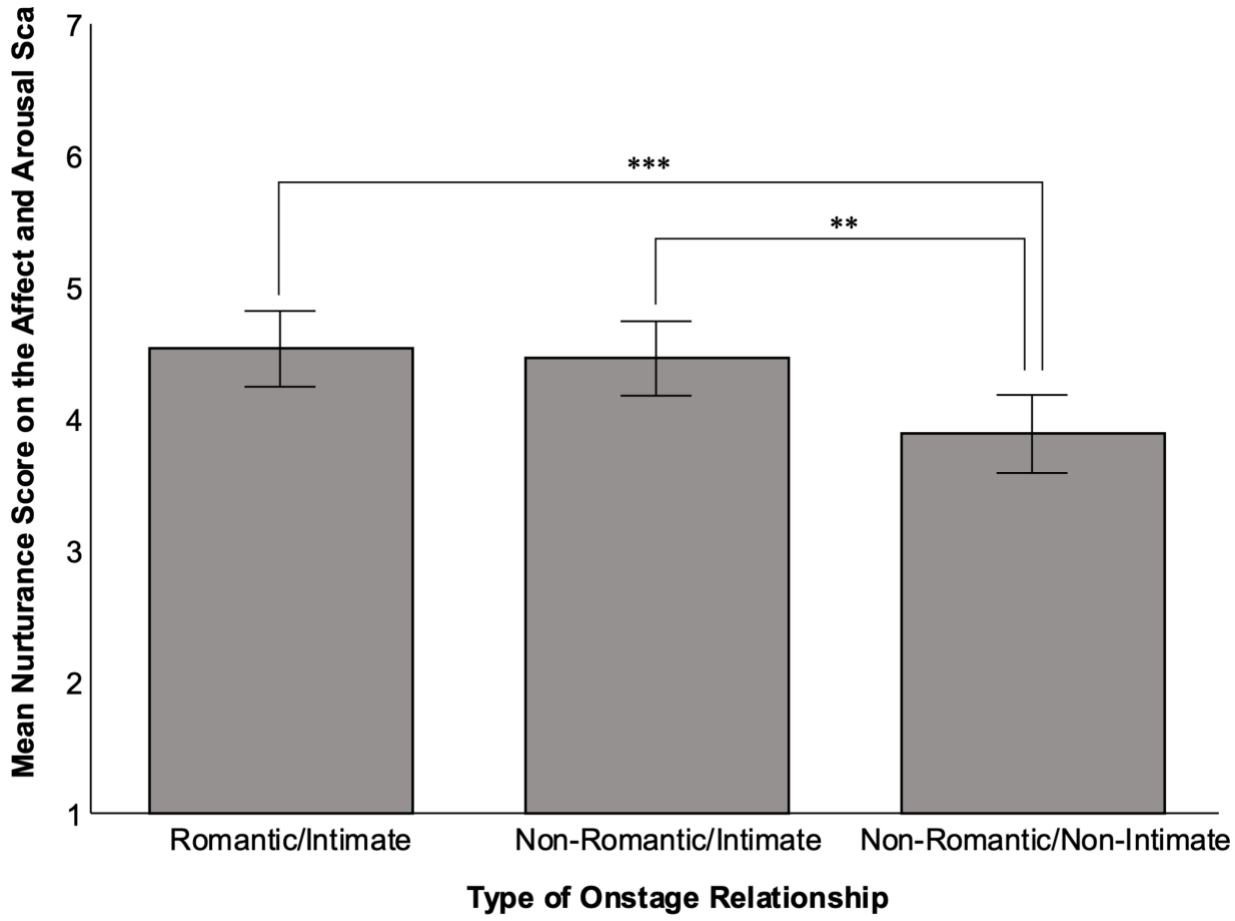

**Figure 1 Caption**

*Note*. Error bars represent 95% confidence intervals.

‘**’ indicates a significant difference at $p < .01$. ‘***’ indicates a significant difference at $p < .001$.

**Figure 2**

*Eroticism Score by Type of Onstage Relationship*

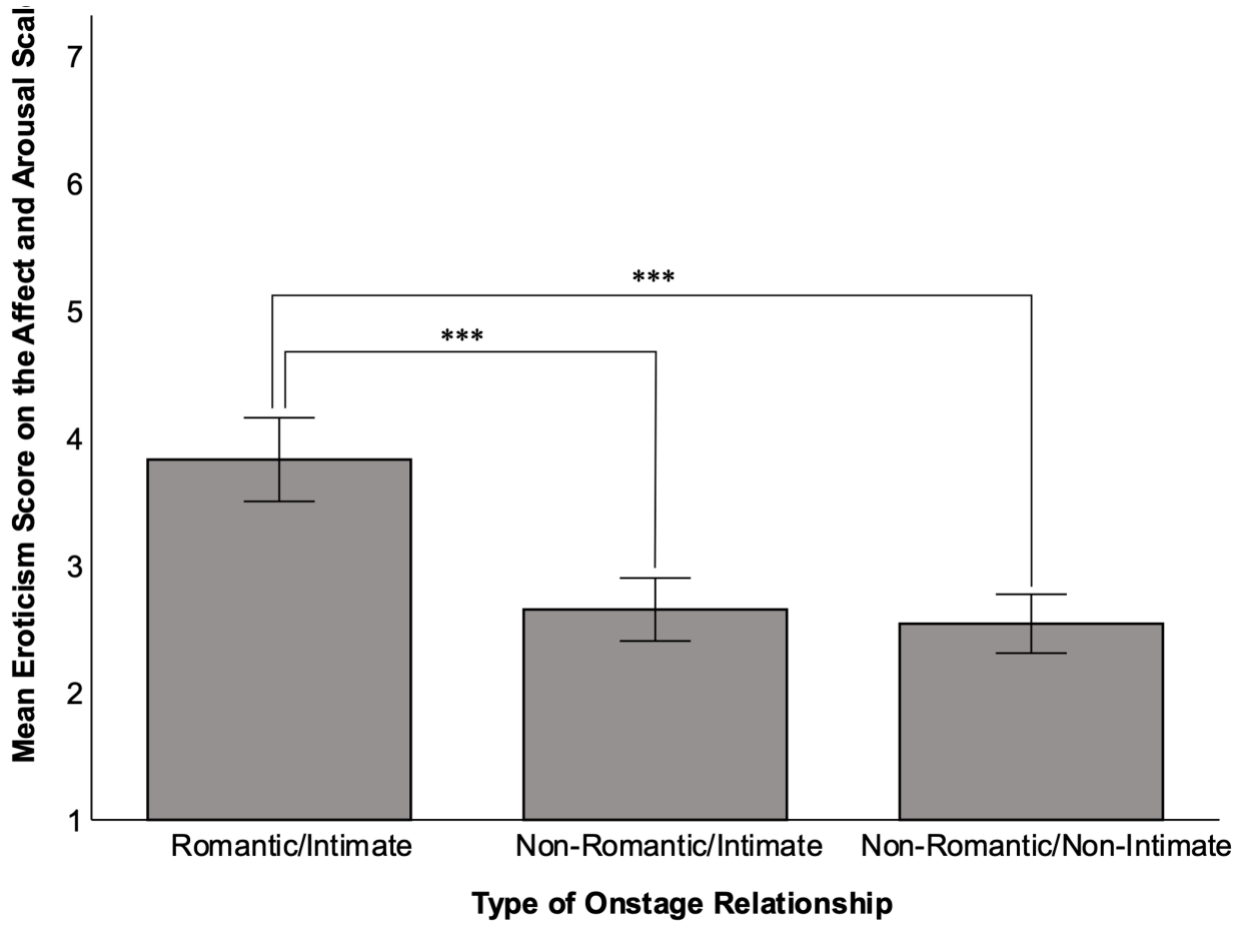

**Figure 2 Caption**

*Note.* Error bars represent 95% confidence intervals.

‘***’ indicates a significant difference at $p < .001$.

**Figure 3**

*The Ratio of Romantic/Sexual Feelings to Shows Performed (Feelings-to-Shows Ratio) by Onstage Role*

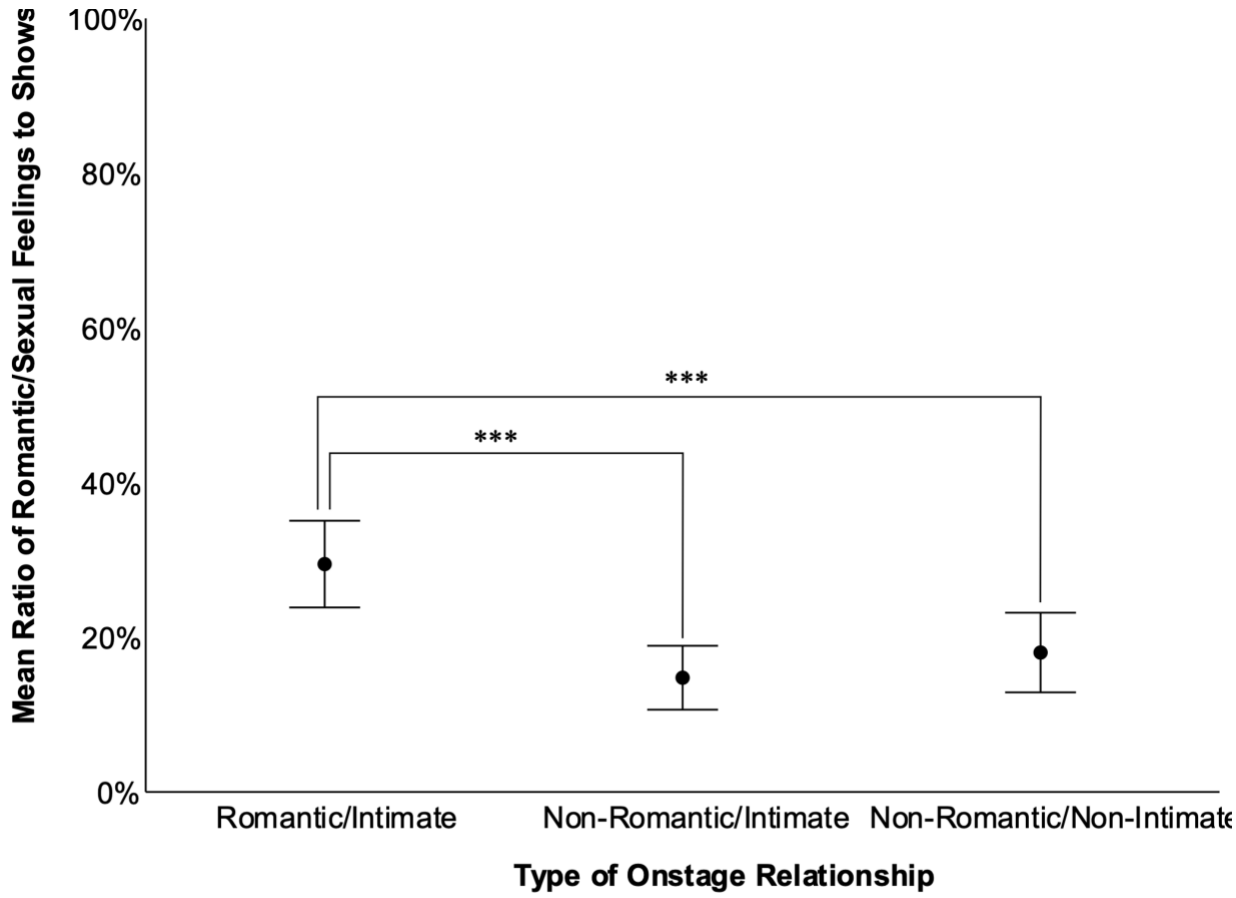

**Figure 3 Caption**

*Note.* Error bars represent 95% confidence intervals.

‘***’ indicates a significant difference at $p < .001$.

Supplementary Material

**Test of H1 (nurturance) with total number of shows as a covariate**

A linear mixed model revealed that onstage role was significantly related to nurturance, $F(2, 94.66) = 5.66$, $p = .005$, $\eta_p^2 = .11$, 90% CI [.02, .20]. The total number of shows each actor had participated in (included as a covariate) was not a significant covariate (i.e., it did not account for a significant amount of variance in actors' recalled levels of nurturance), $F(1, 95.09) = 0.123$, $p = .726$. Our planned linear contrast was significant, providing support for our hypothesis, $t(97.48) = 3.28$, $p = .001$, $\eta_p^2 = .10$, 90% CI [.02, .22]. Pairwise comparisons, however, provided only partial support for our hypothesized linear relationship between acting conditions. Actors recalled experiencing significantly more nurturance during their performance of romantic/intimate roles ($M = 4.50$, $SE = 0.15$) than non-romantic/non-intimate roles ($M = 3.90$, $SE = 0.15$), $t(97.48) = 3.28$, $p = .001$, $\eta_p^2 = .10$, 90% CI [.02, .22]. And, actors experienced significantly more nurturance during non-romantic intimate roles ($M = 4.41$, $SE = 0.14$) than non-romantic/non-intimate roles ($M = 3.90$, $SE = 0.15$), $t(105.17) = 2.55$, $p = .012$, $\eta_p^2 = .06$, 90% CI [.00, .16]. However, the level of nurturance that actors experienced in romantic/intimate and non-romantic/intimate roles did not differ significantly, $t(87.78) = 0.51$, $p = .617$. This pattern of results matches our findings for the same model but with years of acting experiences substituted for total number of shows, which we report in the main manuscript.

**Test of H2 (eroticism) with total number of shows as a covariate**

A linear mixed model revealed that onstage role was significantly related to eroticism, $F(2, 100.15) = 31.07$, $p < .001$, $\eta_p^2 = .38$, 90% CI [.25, .48]. Similar to our model for nurturance, the total number of shows each actor had participated in was not a significant covariate, $F(1, 97.25) = 0.73$, $p = .394$. Our planned contrast was significant, providing support for our hypothesis, $t(101.07) = 7.79$, $p < .001$, $\eta_p^2 = .37$, 90% CI [.23, .50]. Pairwise comparisons revealed that actors recalled experiencing significantly more eroticism during their performance of romantic/intimate roles ($M = 3.83$, $SE = 0.17$) than either non-romantic/intimate roles ($M = 2.62$, $SE = 0.13$), $t(98.94) = 6.61$, $p < .001$, $\eta_p^2 = .31$, 90% CI [.17, .44] or non-romantic/non-intimate roles ($M = 2.55$, $SE = 0.12$), $t(102.78) = 7.54$, $p < .001$, $\eta_p^2 = .36$, 90% CI [.22, .48]. The levels of eroticism experienced by actors in non-romantic/intimate and non-romantic/non-intimate roles, however, did not differ significantly, $t(99.81) = 0.43$, $p = .666$. Thus, our hypothesis was supported. This pattern of results matches our findings for the same model but with years of acting experiences substituted for total number of shows, which we report in the main manuscript.

**Figure S1**

*Scree plots with parallel analyses for the affect and arousal scale items for each condition*

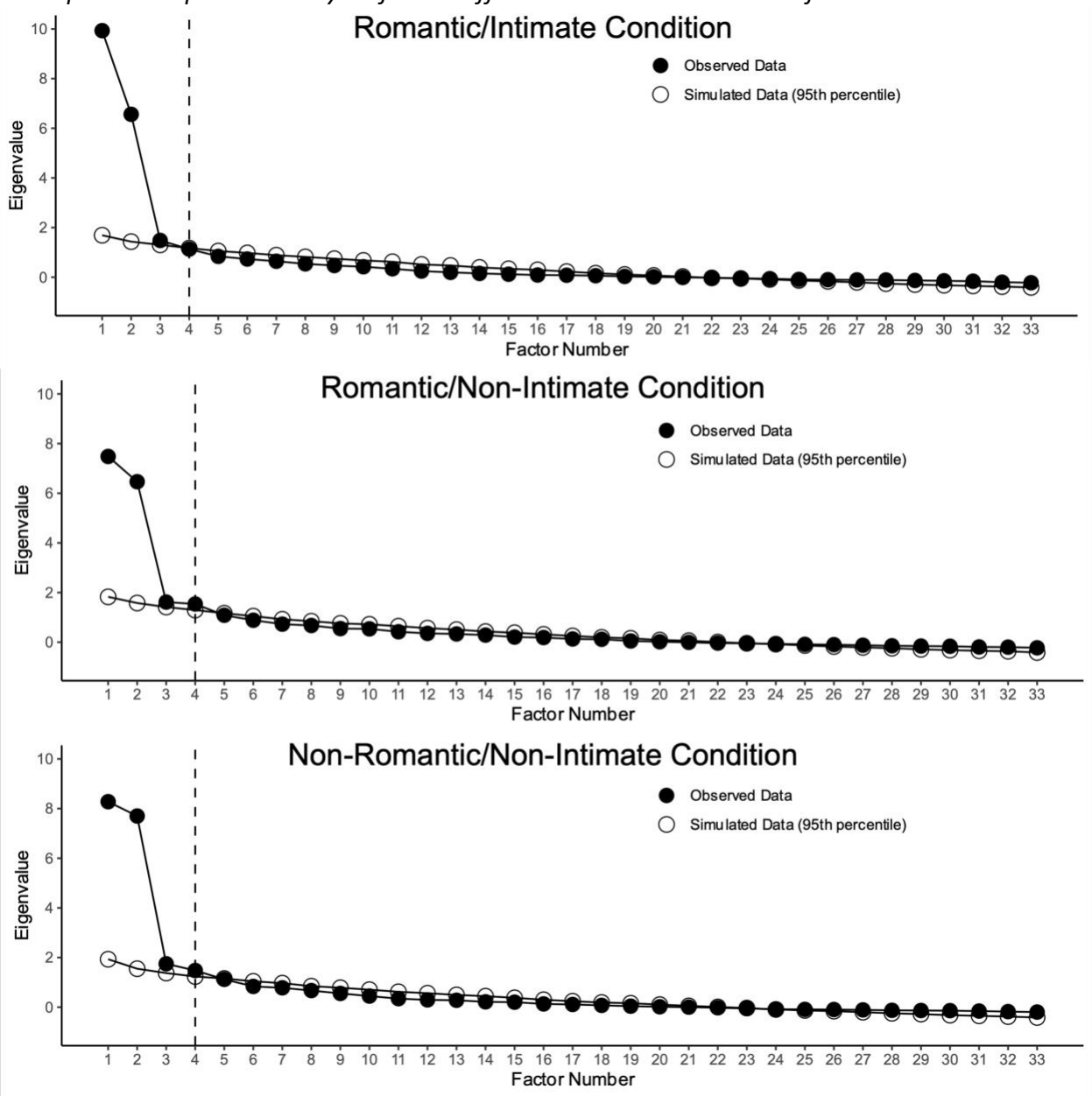

**Figure S1 Caption**

*Note.* Across conditions, there is an elbow at the third eigenvalue, and factor solutions with 1-3 factors have larger eigenvalues than comparable factor solutions based on simulated data. This suggests a three-factor solution. We constructed these plots via the psych package (Revelle, 2019) and code supplied by Sakaluk and Short (2017).

**Figure S2**

*Nurturance score by type of onstage relationship excluding participants who had an onstage partner of a gender/sex that branched from their sexual identity*

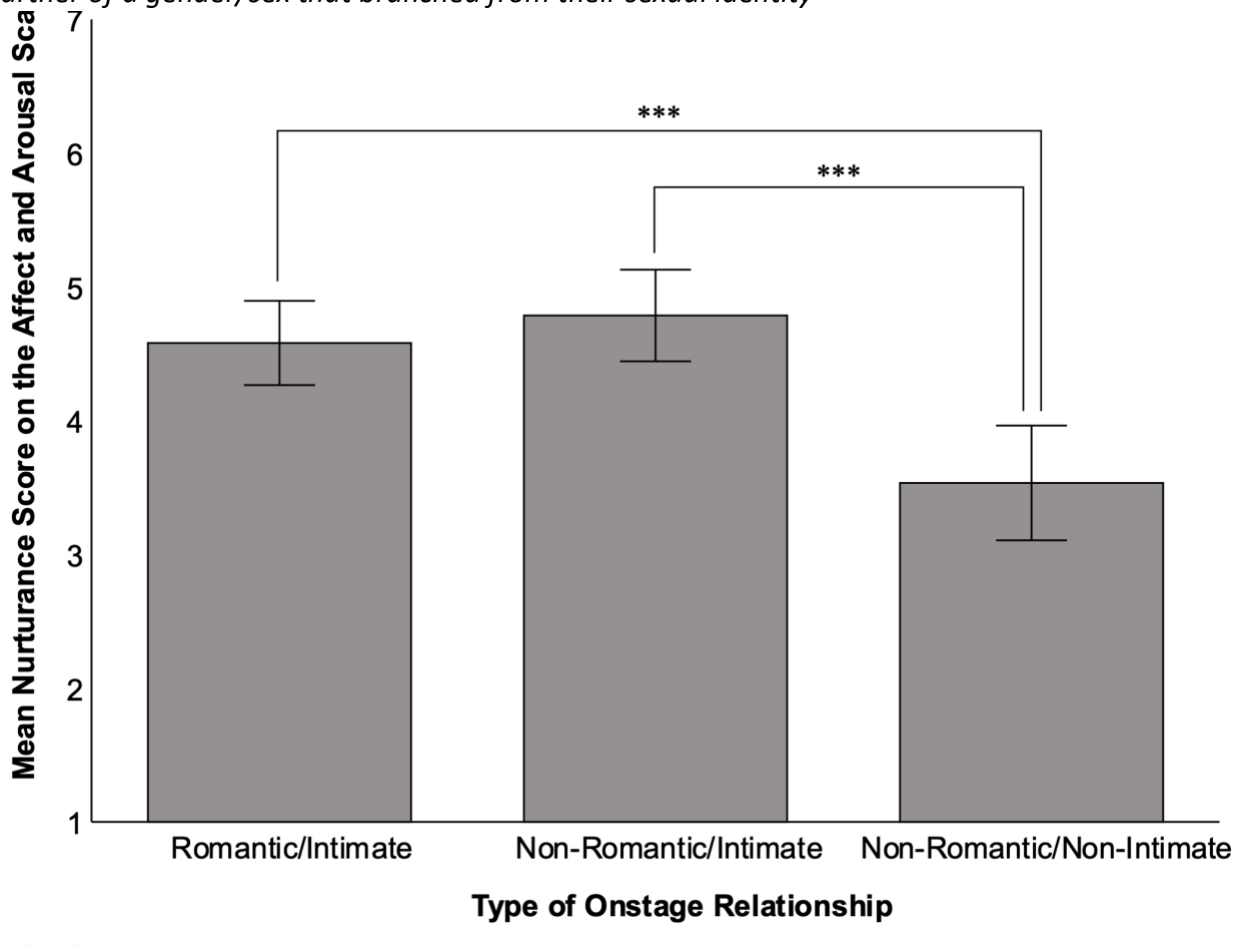

**Figure S2 Caption**

*Note.* A linear mixed model revealed that onstage role was significantly related to nurturance, $F(2, 48.94) = 15.37$, $p < .001$, $\eta_p^2 = .39$, 90% CI [.19, .51]. Years of acting experience (included as a covariate) was not significant, $F(1, 86.16) = 0.61$, $p = .437$. Our planned linear contrast was significant, providing support for our hypothesis, $t(59.65) = 4.54$, $p < .001$, $\eta_p^2 = .26$, 90% CI [.11, .40]. Pairwise comparisons, however, provided only partial support for our hypothesized linear relationship between acting conditions. Actors recalled experiencing significantly more nurturance during their performance of romantic/intimate roles ($M = 4.59$, $SE = 0.16$) than non-romantic/non-intimate roles ($M = 3.56$, $SE = 0.21$), $t(59.65) = 4.54$, $p < .001$, $\eta_p^2 = .26$, 90% CI [.11, .40]. And, actors experienced significantly more nurturance during non-romantic intimate roles ($M = 4.67$, $SE = 0.16$) than non-romantic/non-intimate roles ($M = 3.56$, $SE = 0.21$), $t(45.70) = 5.44$, $p < .001$, $\eta_p^2 = .39$, 90% CI [.21, .54]. However, the level of nurturance that actors experienced in romantic/intimate and non-romantic/intimate roles did not differ significantly, $t(53.56) = 0.48$, $p = .634$.

'***' indicates a significant difference at $p < .001$.

Error bars represent 95% confidence intervals.

**Figure S3**

*Eroticism score by type of onstage relationship excluding participants who had an onstage partner of a gender/sex that branched from their sexual identity*

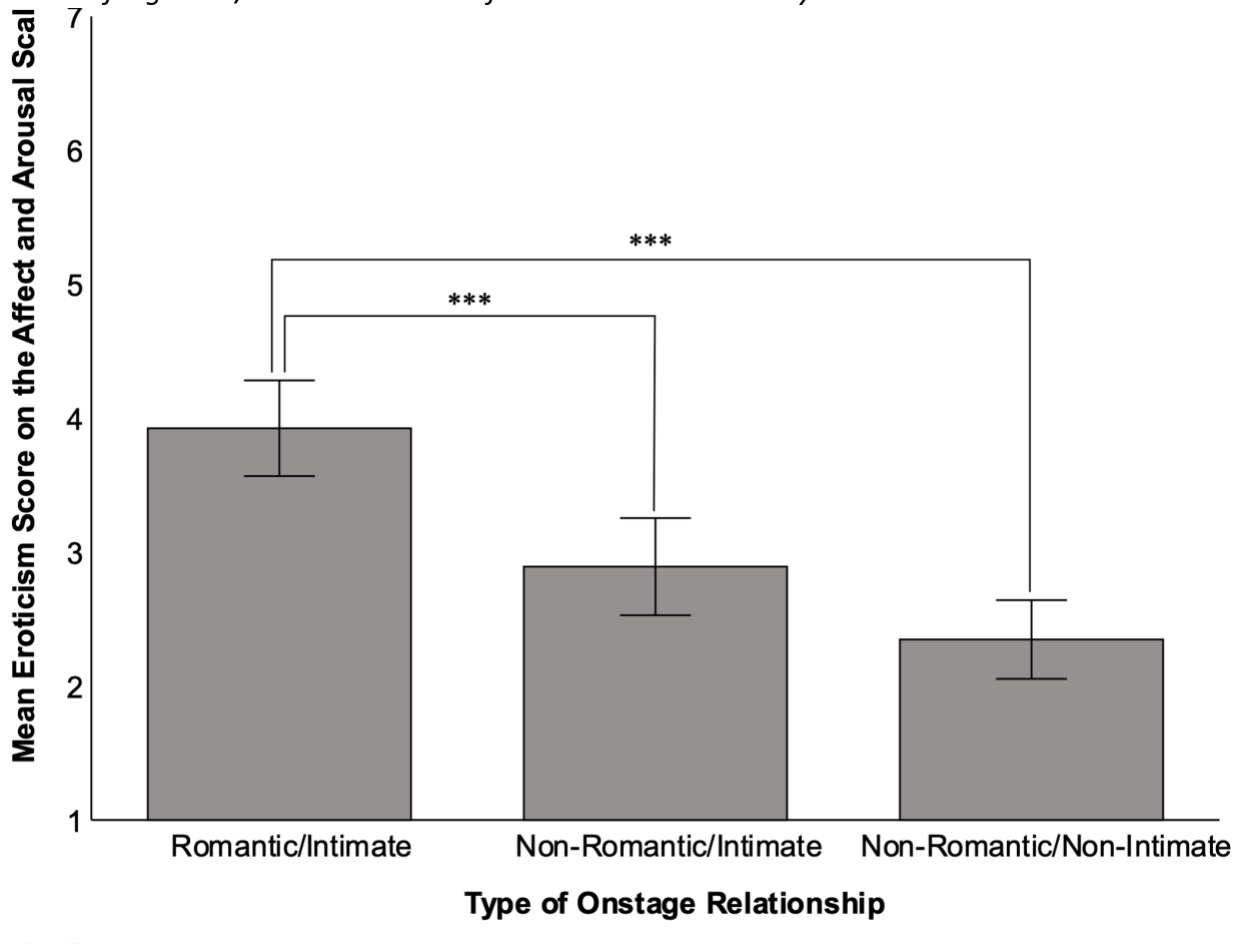

**Figure S3 Caption**

*Note.* A linear mixed model revealed that onstage role was significantly related to eroticism, $F(2, 61.38) = 33.82$, $p < .001$, $\eta_p^2 = .52$, 90% CI [.36, .62]. Years of acting experience was not a significant covariate, $F(1, 69.25) = 0.22$, $p = .644$. Our planned contrast was significant, providing support for our hypothesis, $t(80.93) = 8.01$, $p < .001$, $\eta_p^2 = .44$, 90% CI [.31, .55]. Pairwise comparisons revealed that actors recalled experiencing significantly more eroticism during their performance of romantic/intimate roles ($M = 3.92$, $SE = 0.18$) than either non-romantic/intimate roles ($M = 2.74$, $SE = 0.17$), $t(57.46) = 5.99$, $p < .001$, $\eta_p^2 = .38$, 90% CI [.22, .52] or non-romantic/non-intimate roles ($M = 2.39$, $SE = 0.14$), $t(76.11) = 7.88$, $p < .001$, $\eta_p^2 = .45$, 90% CI [.31, .56]. The levels of eroticism experienced by actors in non-romantic/intimate and non-romantic/non-intimate roles, however, did not differ significantly, $t(53.41) = 1.76$, $p = .084$. Thus, our hypothesis was supported.

'***' indicates a significant difference at $p < .001$.

Error bars represent 95% confidence intervals.

**Table S1**

*Estimates of rotated loadings for affect/arousal data: Romantic/intimate condition*

| | Loading | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Item | Nurturance | Anxiety | Eroticism | Communality |
| Protected | **.89** | .06 | .06 | .74 |
| Supported | **.89** | -.02 | .09 | .73 |
| Trusting | **.85** | -.10 | .07 | .70 |
| Connected | **.73** | .08 | -.26 | .77 |
| Happy | **.72** | -.06 | -.07 | .58 |
| Emotionally close | **.68** | .14 | -.27 | .74 |
| Loving/Loved | **.68** | .06 | -.25 | .68 |
| Feelings of warmth | **.61** | -.04 | -.38 | .73 |
| Relaxed | **.55** | -.38 | .01 | .48 |
| Special | **.55** | .11 | -.26 | .52 |
| Excited | **.46** | .14 | -.36 | .52 |
| Worried | .07 | **.87** | .19 | .68 |
| Stressed | -.07 | **.80** | .07 | .64 |
| Anxious | .02 | **.77** | -.05 | .61 |
| Embarrassed | -.18 | **.67** | .02 | .50 |
| Faster heartbeat than normal | .12 | **.59** | -.26 | .54 |
| Sad | .16 | **.59** | -.03 | .37 |
| Faster breathing than normal | .17 | **.58** | -.20 | .48 |
| Vulnerable | .23 | **.56** | .03 | .33 |
| Inhibited | -.21 | **.55** | -.01 | .37 |
| Perspiration | .20 | **.51** | -.19 | .41 |
| Incompetent | -.26 | **.51** | -.08 | .37 |
| Angry | -.04 | **.51** | .06 | .26 |
| Offended | .02 | **.51** | .02 | .25 |
| Disgusted | -.19 | **.48** | .05 | .28 |
| Attracted | .06 | -.11 | **-.89** | .79 |
| Sexually aroused | -.18 | .01 | **-.88** | .66 |
| A desire to be close to someone | .23 | .12 | **-.66** | .67 |
| Interested | .28 | .04 | **-.60** | .61 |
| Pleasure | .35 | .03 | **-.59** | .66 |
| Any physical reaction at all | .10 | .37 | **-.44** | .47 |
| Guilty | -.20 | .37 | -.37 | .34 |
| Bored | -.08 | .08 | .22 | .07 |

**Table 2S**

*Estimates of rotated loadings for affect/arousal data: Non-romantic/intimate condition*

| | Loading | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Item | Anger | Nurturance | Anxiety | Communality |
| Angry | **.98** | -.03 | -.10 | .90 |
| Sad | **.70** | .30 | -.14 | .51 |
| Disgusted | **.67** | -.26 | .01 | .52 |
| Worried | **.47** | -.01 | .41 | .55 |
| Stressed | **.47** | -.08 | .44 | .60 |
| Offended | **.43** | -.23 | .14 | .30 |
| Embarrassed | .40 | -.29 | .32 | .44 |
| Guilty | .34 | .29 | .19 | .30 |
| Emotionally close | .07 | **.79** | -.09 | .62 |
| Loving/Loved | .13 | **.78** | -.20 | .63 |
| Trusting | -.15 | **.78** | -.19 | .67 |
| Connected | -.03 | **.78** | -.07 | .61 |
| Feelings of warmth | -.10 | **.74** | .00 | .55 |
| Special | .04 | **.70** | -.04 | .48 |
| Supported | -.20 | **.68** | -.28 | .60 |
| Protected | -.01 | **.65** | -.19 | .44 |
| A desire to be close to someone | .13 | **.62** | .19 | .47 |
| Happy | -.30 | **.58** | -.03 | .42 |
| Excited | .06 | **.56** | .23 | .40 |
| Interested | .02 | **.56** | .19 | .37 |
| Pleasure | -.11 | **.46** | .26 | .28 |
| Vulnerable | .26 | **.45** | .29 | .44 |
| Attracted | .05 | .30 | .21 | .16 |
| Bored | .24 | -.27 | .07 | .15 |
| Relaxed | .19 | .39 | **-.72** | .56 |
| Anxious | .21 | .11 | **.58** | .51 |
| Faster breathing than normal | .14 | .17 | **.54** | .42 |
| Faster heartbeat than normal | .15 | .26 | **.54** | .46 |
| Inhibited | .03 | -.06 | **.51** | .28 |
| Incompetent | -.01 | -.22 | **.51** | .29 |
| Perspiration | .22 | .29 | **.48** | .46 |
| Any physical reaction at all | .14 | .38 | .38 | .38 |
| Sexually aroused | .03 | .23 | .35 | .19 |

**Table 3S**

*Estimates of rotated loadings for affect/arousal data: Non-romantic/non-intimate condition*

| | Loading | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Item | Anxiety | Nurturance | Disgust | Communality |
| Anxious | **.86** | -.01 | -.10 | .68 |
| Stressed | **.86** | -.11 | .09 | .81 |
| Worried | **.82** | -.05 | .08 | .73 |
| Incompetent | **.69** | .03 | .05 | .50 |
| Faster heartbeat than normal | **.67** | .13 | .17 | .59 |
| Vulnerable | **.62** | .31 | -.03 | .49 |
| Relaxed | **-.60** | .41 | .19 | .43 |
| Perspiration | **.59** | .12 | .20 | .50 |
| Embarrassed | **.59** | -.06 | .35 | .65 |
| Any physical reaction at all | **.58** | .13 | .19 | .47 |
| Faster breathing than normal | **.54** | .10 | .26 | .48 |
| Inhibited | **.45** | -.14 | .08 | .25 |
| Connected | .03 | **.83** | .07 | .69 |
| Protected | -.05 | **.81** | .01 | .66 |
| Emotionally close | -.04 | **.81** | .01 | .65 |
| Feelings of warmth | -.01 | **.81** | .08 | .64 |
| Trusting | -.05 | **.80** | -.13 | .69 |
| Supported | .03 | **.79** | -.24 | .73 |
| Happy | -.13 | **.79** | -.11 | .67 |
| Special | -.06 | **.71** | .06 | .50 |
| Loving/Loved | -.14 | **.68** | -.02 | .48 |
| Excited | .22 | **.68** | -.03 | .52 |
| Pleasure | -.05 | **.53** | -.03 | .28 |
| Interested | .35 | **.50** | -.10 | .39 |
| A desire to be close to someone | .16 | **.46** | .08 | .25 |
| Attracted | .04 | .38 | -.04 | .15 |
| Sexually aroused | -.03 | .24 | .02 | .06 |
| Offended | .04 | -.06 | **.84** | .76 |
| Disgusted | .07 | -.05 | **.81** | .72 |
| Angry | .22 | -.07 | **.75** | .76 |
| Sad | .19 | .10 | **.64** | .54 |
| Guilty | .36 | .03 | **.40** | .41 |
| Bored | -.05 | -.17 | .20 | .07 |