**Female audiences shape male courtship displays in a lek-mating bird**

## ABSTRACT

Animal behavior research usually assumes that the characteristics of courtship displays, such as quality or complexity, are intrinsic traits of the organism performing the display. Here we provide evidence that the constituent behavioral elements (repertoire) and arrangement of elements (syntax) during courtship displays are shaped more by female audience context than male performer identity in lek-mating Golden-winged Manakins (*Masius chrysopterus*). We used video observation to analyze 422 male courtship displays in three audience contexts: Solo displays with no audience (SOLO, n = 307), unsuccessful displays for a female audience (AUDI, n = 108), and rare, successful displays for females ending in copulation (COP, n = 13). Using entropy and a novel metric we call compressibility, we find that the arrangement of behavioral elements, or syntax, is most complex (i.e., most unpredictable and varied) in SOLO displays, less complex in AUDI displays, and least complex in COP displays. Using Jaro string distance, a method from record-linkage theory, we directly quantify similarities in the syntax of display elements. Displays vary more by audience context than by individual male performer: COP displays were most similar to other displays in the COP context, regardless of male identity. Finally, we show that males perform different behaviors based on the location and reaction of their female audience. We found no evidence that males are intrinsically constrained or consistent producing a successful display repertoire or syntax. Our results suggest the courtship displays of Golden-winged Manakins are dynamic interactions between females and males, not controlled demonstrations of individual male characteristics. Studies of sexual selection and mate choice should distinguish intrinsic features of organisms (e.g., plumage ornaments) from interactive features of multiple individuals responding to one another at the moment of courtship (e.g., dances).

**KEYWORDS**

string compression, entropy, intra-action, Jaro distance, lek, repertoire complexity, syntactic complexity

## **INTRODUCTION**

Studies of sexual selection and animal behavior traditionally ask how performer traits (e.g., a peacock’s tail) influence audience behavior (e.g., a peafowl’s decision to copulate; Darwin, 1871; Prum, 2017). A vast amount of empirical work in animals investigates how audiences judge the properties of performer traits during mate choice (Andersson, 1994; Rosenthal, 2017). Although recent research increasingly posits environmental, social, or age-related plasticity in female preferences and male traits (e.g., DuVal et al., 2023; Fox et al., 2019), this perspective still assumes that preferences and traits are, at the moment of a courtship display, identifiable properties of audiences and performers, respectively.

However, some studies of animal courtship suggest we cannot understand mate choice strictly in terms of audience preferences for intrinsic performer traits. For example, male Satin Bowerbirds (*Ptilonorynchus violaceus*) decrease the intensity of their movement displays in response to female crouching signals (Patricelli et al., 2002), and male fiddler crabs (*Austruca perplexa*) change the frequency of claw-waving displays when females approach (How et al., 2008). In these species, a female cannot objectively judge movement intensity or claw-waving frequency as intrinsic male traits; those characteristics change with respect to the expression of her own behaviors.

Here, we ask whether female audiences or male performers are most important in determining the repertoire (constituent elements), and syntax (arrangement of elements), of display elements in the courtship displays of a tropical, lek-mating bird, the Golden-winged Manakin (Passeriformes: Pipridae: *Masius chrysopterus*, monotypic in the genus and hereafter *Masius*). Male *Masius* perform acrobatic courtship displays to entice prospective female mates, thereafter providing no parental care (Prum & Johnson, 1987; Snow & Snow, 1992). We used video observations to characterize hundreds of *Masius* displays in three audience contexts: solo male displays (SOLO), unsuccessful displays for a female audience (AUDI), and successful displays for a female audience that ended in copulation (COP).

First, we show that display characteristics—duration, repertoire size, entropy, and compressibility (a measure of simplicity and repetition)—vary across audience contexts, with COP displays being the simplest and most repetitive. Second, we use a novel application of record-linkage theory (Jaro string distance; Fellegi & Sunter, 1969; Jaro, 1989) to show that displays are more similar to those performed by different males in the same audience context than to those performed by the same male in a different audience context. Third, we show how simple female behaviors directly influence the repertoire and syntax of the behavioral elements in male displays. These results indicate that *Masius* courtship displays are dynamic interactions between audiences and performers, rather than straightforward demonstrations of intrinsic performer traits.

## METHODS

### Study Site

We collected data in 2015-2016 (December, June-August) and 2017 (September-December) at the Milpe Bird Sanctuary of the Mindo Cloudforest Foundation, in northwestern Ecuador (~0°1’48”N, 78°57’12” W). Milpe comprises 100 ha of west slope Chocó-Andean forest (1,100 m elevation) with a network of maintained trails.

*Study Species*

Male *Masius* tend small sections of fallen, mossy, slanted logs (~20–60 cm2 surface) on which they perform acrobatic displays (Prum & Johnson, 1987). Display logs are often in aural, but rarely in visual, contact with one another as part of a broader, dispersed lek (Bradbury, 1981). As in many other manakin species, female *Masius* have an overall green plumage while males undergo a two-year process of plumage maturation from predefinitive (green) to definitive (black and golden-yellow) plumages over multiple years (Schaedler et al., 2021). Some older predefinitive-plumaged males can be identified by waxy nape feathers, a golden horn-like crest, or golden forehead feathers. Females have been seen to copulate only with definitive-plumage males (*pers. obs.*).

### Field Methods

We used mist-nets (6 or 12 m length, 30 mm mesh) to capture and mark individual birds. All *Masius* were banded with a numbered aluminum band and a unique combination of plastic color bands. Other species were released immediately. Some individuals were banded as part of an earlier study in 2013-2014. All field methods were approved by the University of Wyoming Institutional Animal Use and Care Committee (Protocol#20160602DM00242-02).

After regular in-person observations to identify *Masius* display logs, we monitored logs with video cameras. We prioritized video surveillance at logs with high manakin activity or female visitation, or at newly discovered logs. Individual cameras (Sony Handycam HDR-CX405 or Sony Handycam HDR-CX240, Sony Corp., Tokyo, Japan) were housed in weatherproof containers and powered with external batteries (12v motorcycle battery or 10,000 mAh GETIHU power bank, Shenzhen Top Star Industry Co. Ltd., China). Recording ended when the memory card reached capacity, the batteries died, or weather necessitated camera retrieval. We ran 4 to 6 cameras daily, one per log, with each camera recording approximately 7 hrs of video. Footage was flagged with a motion detection program (<https://github.com/ltaylor2/Masius_Movement>) using OpenCV v3.3 (Bradski, 2000) in Python v2.7. Motion clips were then manually verified and bookmarked for subsequent coding.

*Displays and Behavioral Elements*

We defined a display as a sequence of distinct behavioral elements during which time males were never absent for >60 s. We included only sequences that lasted >60 s and that included at least one of two core behavioral elements that indicate *Masius* courtship behavior: “Audible log-approach dive” or “Side-to-side bow” (Prum & Johnson, 1987; Taylor et al., 2020).

*Masius* displays can involve multiple males and females both as performers and audience members (Prum & Johnson, 1987; Taylor et al., 2020). For this study, we excluded all displays featuring multiple males dancing during the same display (n = 26) and displays where the only audience was confirmed males (n = 4, including one copulation). All displaying males in our final dataset had definitive plumage.

We categorized the remaining 422 male displays into three contexts: SOLO, AUDI, and COP. SOLO displays were solo male performances, AUDI displays featured a female audience member at some point during the display but did not end in successful copulation, and COP displays ended in a successful copulation. For our main analyses, we ended COP displays at first copulation. A comparison of pre- and post-copulation displays is given in Supplementary Material.

We coded display elements using Behavioral Observation Research Interactive Software (BORIS), an open-source event logging tool (Friard & Gamba, 2016). A total of 41 elements occurred in the raw BORIS logs (Table S1). We subsequently excluded tracking elements (e.g., “Start”), movement-based elements (e.g., “Male1 On Log”, “Female Movement”), female responses (e.g., “Female Tracking Male”), and male behaviors not directly involved in display dances (e.g. “Vocalization,” “Gardening”). Finally, we retained only one half of paired elements (e.g., merging “Side-to-side bow Left” and “Side-to-side bow Right” into “Side-to-side Bow”) and excluded “Attempted copulation” and “Copulation” elements. The 12 remaining, core behavioral elements—including pauses (“Zero”)—are described in Table 1.

### Display Characteristics

We calculated five metrics related to the constituent elements, organization and complexity of *Masius* courtship displays: (A) Duration, in seconds; (B) Length—the number of total elements; (C) Repertoire size—the number of distinct elements; (D) Entropy; and (E) Compressibility. Duration was calculated from the raw data before behavioral filtering. Whereas repertoire size measures a display in terms of the number of behavioral elements (Catchpole, 1987; Nowicki & Searcy, 2004), entropy and compressibility measure syntax, i.e. the arrangement of a given repertoire of elements. First-order entropy (Shannon, 1948) is a common measure of syntactic complexity in animal behavior (e.g., Da silva et al., 2000; Freeberg & Lucas, 2012; McCowan et al., 2002; Palmero et al., 2014; Vanderbilt et al., 2015). A low-entropy system is associated with predictable patterns, whereas a high-entropy system is associated with greater “surprise.” However, entropy is more technically a probabilistic property of a source (e.g., a system that produces a display) than a direct property of a message (e.g., a display itself). To characterize display syntax more directly, we therefore also used compression methods from computer science, which condense data based on redundant elements or repeated motifs (Huffman, 1952; Ziv & Lempel, 1977). A display with a simple or repeated syntax will be highly compressible. High compressibility is only possible in low entropy systems (Shannon, 1948), meaning these two metrics are not entirely independent of one another.

To calculate entropy and compressibility, we transformed displays into strings, where each type of behavioral element was a distinct alphabetic character (Table 1). We computed first-order entropy of display strings using the *entropy* function in R package *acss* (Gauvrit et al., 2016). The resulting entropy values depend on the empirical frequency of each element in each individual display. We thus scaled each value by the maximum possible entropy for a display—given as log2[number of distinct elements]—for a final metric between 0 and 1 (Vanderbilt et al., 2015). We computed compressibility using a standard text compression algorithm (LZ77, with Huffman Coding) implemented with default parameters in the R package *brotli* (Ooms & Google, Inc., 2022). Our final compressibility metric was compression ratio—the length of the uncompressed string divided by the length of the compressed string.

We compared our five metrics across display contexts (SOLO, AUDI, COP) with linear models, using AUDI as context intercept and including male ID and observation month as discrete fixed effects. Unidentified males were assumed to be unique individuals. To address our small sample size of COP displays (n = 13), we compared COP metrics to a randomized distribution. Across each of 100,000 replicates, we randomly selected (without replacement) 13 displays from any context in our full dataset. We then compared the distribution of randomly-selected metrics to empirical COP metrics. All analyses were conducted with the tidyverse packages in Program R v4.2 (R Core Team, 2022; Wickham et al., 2019).

### Display Similarity: Male performer vs. Audience context

We investigated whether the syntax of displays varied more in terms of audience context (SOLO, AUDI, COP) or in terms of individual male identity, using Jaro string distances. Jaro (1989) developed an elegant method for matching census records from disparate sources. The algorithm analyses the number of transpositions and mismatches between two strings of data and assigns a distance between 0 (no matches) and 1 (complete match). Low Jaro distance indicates that two displays have a similar syntax.

We calculated the Jaro distance between all pairs of display strings with the R package *stringdist* (van der Loo, 2014)*.* Using only displays from identified males, we calculated four sets of distances between displays across the three contexts (SOLO, AUDI, COP): (A) same-male/same-context, (B) same-male/different-context, (C) different-male/same-context, and (D) different-male/different-context. For example, a “COP same-male/different-context” comparison gives the Jaro distance between a COP display and an AUDI or SOLO display performed by the same male, whereas an “AUDI different-male/same-context” comparison gives the Jaro distance between an AUDI display and another AUDI display before by a different male.

We used a randomization procedure to conduct two COP-related comparisons. First, we compared COP different-male/same-context Jaro distances (n = 39 distances) to COP same-male/different-context distances (n = 2,030). Second, we compared COP different-male/same-context distances (n = 39) to different-male/same-context distances from AUDI (n = 3,289) plus SOLO (n = 29,358) displays. For both comparisons, we drew 100,000 random sets of 39 distances, without replacement, from the comparison dataset.

### Female Behavior

We assessed whether two aspects of female courtship participation behaviors directly influenced the constituent elements and syntactic arrangement of male courtship displays. For each male behavioral element in the dataset, females were marked as on or off the display log. When on the display log, females were marked as either above or below the male (i.e., upslope or downslope). We quantified the behavioral elements performed by males when females were on/off the log and above/below the displaying male for both AUDI and COP displays. Elements were excluded when female location was not coded.

## RESULTS

### Displays and Behavioral Elements

Our final dataset includes 422 *Masius* displays across 15 display logs (1-109 displays per log), with 307 SOLO, 102 AUDI, and 13 COP displays. Across all displays, 405 were performed by 11 different, identified males (1 to 199 displays each, Table S2). All displays occurred between 24-Jun and 14-Jan, with 77% of displays (323/422) occurring between October and December (Fig. S1). The earliest AUDI display was 30-Jun and the earliest COP display was 26-Oct. The dataset featured 33 AUDI displays with one of 10 identified females (1 to 8 attendances each) and 4 COP displays with one of 3 identified females (1 to 2 copulations each; Table S3). All 13 COP displays were performed by one of 3 identified males (1 to 9 copulation each; Table S4).

By definition, every display in our dataset featured at least one Audible log-approach dive or Side-to-side bow. Representation of the remaining behaviors differed in terms of display context (Table 1, see Table S5 for raw frequencies). Silent log-approach dives were frequent across SOLO displays but present in only 1 AUDI display and 0 COP displays. To-and-fro flights were common in AUDI displays (84/102 displays) but relatively rare in SOLO (84/307) and COP (2/13). Neck twists were common in AUDI (97/102) and COP (9/13), but rare in SOLO (27/307). Head-down bows were present in most SOLO (288/307) and AUDI (89/102) displays, but absent from COP. However, there were Head-down bows and the rare Metronome element in 2 and 1 post-copulation displays, respectively (Supplementary Material). Pauses, Mixed behaviors, and Other behaviors were more common in SOLO displays than in AUDI or COP displays (Table 1).

### Display Characteristics

All five display characteristics—duration, length, repertoire size, entropy, and compressibility—varied significantly across audience contexts (Fig. 1). In terms of display duration, AUDI displays (mean ± SD: 204 ± 128 s) were significantly longer than either SOLO displays (133 ± 63 s) or COP displays (125 ± 41 s; model estimate AUDI *vs*. SOLO: -82, *P* < 0.001; AUDI *vs.* COP: -79, *P* = 0.001; overall *P* < 0.001, adjusted *R2­* = 0.18; Fig. 1A). In terms of display length, AUDI displays (94 ± 70 elements) were significantly longer than both COP displays (62 ± 16 elements) and SOLO displays (23 ± 13 elements; AUDI *vs.* SOLO: -76, *P* < 0.001; AUDI *vs.* COP: -37, *P* < 0.001; overall *P* < 0.001, *R2­* = 0.42; Fig. 1B). COP displays had significantly smaller repertoires (3.2 ± 0.8 distinct elements) than AUDI displays (5.5 ± 1.3 distinct elements), the latter of which did not differ from SOLO displays (5.6 ± 1.2 distinct elements; AUDI *vs.* SOLO: 0.1, *P* = 0.32; AUDI *vs.* COP: -2.3, *P* < 0.001; overall *P* < 0.001, *R2­* = 0.15; Fig. 1C). Across 100,000 replicates of 13 randomly-drawn displays, mean repertoire size was never less than the empirical mean of the 13 COP displays (Fig. S2).

SOLO displays had significantly higher entropy (0.87 ± 0.08) than did AUDI displays (0.70 ± 0.16), which in turn had significantly higher entropy than did COP displays (0.26 ± 0.16; AUDI *vs.* SOLO: 0.17, *P* < 0.001; AUDI *vs.* COP: -0.44, overall *P* < 0.001, *R2­* = 0.64; Fig. 1D). There was an identical pattern in compressibility, measured as the ratio of uncompressed to compressed display string length. SOLO display strings had significantly lower compression ratios (1.05 ± 0.31) than did AUDI display strings (2.73 ± 1.14), which were significantly less compressible than COP display strings (3.65 ± 1.01; AUDI *vs.* SOLO: -1.78, *P* < 0.001; AUDI *vs.* COP: 0.87, *P* < 0.001; overall *P* < 0.001, *R2­* = 0.45; Fig. 1E). None of 100,000 random sets of 13 displays had lower mean entropy or higher mean compression ratio than the empirical set of 13 COP displays (Fig. S2).

There were additional significant effects of observation months and individual males for some metrics (Supplementary Material). As dictated by theory (Shannon, 1948) entropy and compressibility were significantly correlated across our dataset (Fig. S3). Our choice of compression algorithm (LZ77 and Huffman Coding) and our final compression ratio metric created an overall positive correlation between display length and compressibility (Fig. S4).

COP displays had a characteristic syntax (Table S2). Ten of 13 COP displays, across all 3 copulating males, ended with long (34+ element) stretches of Side-to-side bows followed by an Audible log-approach dive that immediately preceded the copulation. One display (ID#1455) differed by the insertion of a single Half-bow before the dive, while another (ID#1987) had two additional elements—To-and-fro flight and then a Neck twist—before the final bow and dive combination. The remaining, unusual display (ID#1824) consisted primarily of stretches of Neck twists; nevertheless, it ended with a bow and dive combination (Table S2). As discussed below, the female was also off the display log—unusual for a COP display—during the Neck twists in this display.

### Display Similarity: Male performer vs. Audience context

Using Jaro distance, displays in every context (SOLO, AUDI, COP) were on average more similar to displays in the same context than to displays in other contexts, regardless of the identity of the male performing the display (Fig. 2). Although increasing Jaro distance was positively correlated with differences in display length and repertoire size, these correlations explained only a small fraction of the variance (Fig. S5).

The mean Jaro distance for COP different-male/same-context displays (n = 39 distances) was lower than the mean of all 100,000 random draws (each n = 39) of COP same-male/different context distances (Fig. S6). On average, the COP displays performed by different males were more similar to one another (mean ± SD: 0.14 ± 0.10) than either AUDI (0.36 ± 0.11) or SOLO (0.41 ± 0.13 ) displays performed by different males. The mean for COP different-male/same-context distances (n = 39) was lower than the mean of all 100,000 random draws (each n = 39) of AUDI or SOLO different-male/same-context distances (Fig. S6). In other words, COP displays had a more uniform syntax than SOLO or AUDI displays when performed by the small set of different males.

Average Jaro similarity comparisons were not absolute rules. Of the 13 COP displays, 5 had the lowest Jaro distance to COP displays by the same male, and 2 to COP displays by a different male. However, 4 COP displays were most similar to AUDI displays by the same male and 2 to AUDI displays by a different male.

### Female Behavior

Female behaviors changed the repertoire of male behavioral elements during display (Table 2). Males almost universally performed Side-to-side bows when females were present on the log and standing downslope, which was the dominant situation in COP displays. Males were more likely to perform Head-down bows or Neck twists when females were instead standing upslope, which was far more common in AUDI displays. On the rare occasion a female was upslope of the male during the one unusual COP display (ID-1824), the male continued to perform Neck twists. When females were off the log, males performed a greater proportion of Neck twists, To-and-fro flights, and Switch behaviors (Table 2).

These female behaviors also differed between display contexts. By definition, no female behaviors occurred during SOLO displays. Females attended the display log for a significantly greater proportion of the elements in COP displays (92.0 ± 13.3% male elements with female on log) than in AUDI displays (53.5 ± 24.4%; *t* = -8.71, d.f. = 24.9, *P* < 0.001, two-tailed t-test). Counting only times when females were on the display log, they stood downslope of the male for a significantly greater proportion of COP displays (97.2 ± 10.0% male elements with female downslope) than of AUDI displays (74.7 ± 23%; *t* = -6.29, d.f. = 32.3, *P* < 0.001, two-tailed t-test). Indeed, females were only upslope of males for a total of 14 elements in a single COP display (ID-1824).

## DISCUSSION

Our first major finding is that male *Masius* courtship displays become steadily simpler as they progress from those performed by males without a female audience (SOLO), to those performed for females but not resulting in copulation (AUDI), to those resulting in a copulation (COP; Fig. 1). Successful displays (COP) had significantly smaller repertoires of behavioral elements than did SOLO or AUDI displays (Fig. 1C). Progressive simplicity is further captured by entropy, which estimates the predictability in the arrangement of behavioral elements in a display. Successful *Masius* displays had the most predictable arrangements followed by unsuccessful displays for an audience, with solo male displays being the least predictable (i.e., highest entropy; Fig. 1D). In parallel, we used a novel compression ratio metric to directly quantify simplicity and repetition in the arrangement of behavioral elements in male *Masius* displays. Successful displays were the most highly compressible, followed by unsuccessful and then solo displays (Fig. 1E). Longer displays on average had simpler arrangements, as measured by compressibility (Fig. S4); nevertheless, successful displays (COP) were shorter (Fig. 1B) and more compressible (Fig. 1E) than were unsuccessful displays for a female audience. As in many studies of tropical lekking birds, directly observing copulations was extraordinarily rare (n = 13 COP displays across only 3 males). However, COP displays had small repertoires, low entropy, and high compressibility, exceeding any of 100,000 mean values randomly drawn from the total dataset (Fig. S2). Further, multiple displays by copulating males across different audience contexts allowed our linear models to conclude that audience context was more important than male identity in determining the repertoire and syntax of courtship displays.

Such results might usually be interpreted as follows: female *Masius* prefer simpler displays, only copulating when males perform simple displays. Males would therefore attempt to perform those simple displays in the presence of a female audience. Successful males would then be those who performed the simplest displays, to match female preferences. Indeed, numerous studies investigate how display characteristics such as repertoire size and syntactic complexity drive patterns in female mate choice (Catchpole, 1987; Da silva et al., 2000; Freeberg & Lucas, 2012; McCowan et al., 2002; Nowicki & Searcy, 2004; Palmero et al., 2014). These perspectives posit our display characteristics—duration, length, repertoire, entropy, compressibility—as intrinsic male traits. We consider this approach to be asking the wrong question. The question is not what ideal display females prefer, but rather how males adjust their displays for an audience—firstly, according to female presence or absence, and secondly, according to female reaction to the display.

That is, we argue that female audience context and behavior—not intrinsic male traits—shape constituent elements (i.e., repertoire) and arrangement of elements (i.e., syntax) in *Masius* courtship displays. We support this assertion with three lines of evidence. First, the repertoires and syntactic complexity of displays varied significantly with audience context after accounting for male identity (Fig. 1C-E). Second, displays were more similar to those performed by a different male in the same audience context than were displays performed by the same male in different contexts, as measured by lower Jaro distances (Fig. 2). For example, COP displays by male A are, on average, more similar to COP displays by male B than they are to male A's other COP displays. In other words, female audience context was the main source of variation in display arrangement, in contrast to the idea that success depends on the consistent individual patterns of a particular male's performance (Vanderbilt et al., 2015). Third, we find evidence that the female attendance behaviors directly shape the behavioral elements of male display. Whether or not a display ends in copulation, male *Masius* almost always perform the Side-to-side bow behavior when females are downslope on the display log (Table 2). During unsuccessful displays, females were often upslope on the log, or off the log altogether. As a result, males are more likely to perform different elements, especially Neck twists, To-and-fro flights, and Position switches, during unsuccessful displays (Table 2). When females remain downslope on the log preceding copulation, the consequence is a characteristic syntax and simple set of components for successful male displays: a uniform and predictable series of Side-to-side bows followed by an Audible log-approach dive that ends in a copulation (Table 1, Table S4). Both females and males can freely move around the log during a display, but our analyses suggest females could play a key role in directly composing male displays by adjusting their relative position.

We see no evidence that males were constrained from performing the proper display. By definition, all displays in our dataset contained one of the two key elements in successful displays: Side-to-side bows and Audible log-approach dives (Table 1). Successful displays were shorter and simpler than unsuccessful displays (Figs. 1). Solo displays had the largest repertoires (Fig. 1C). Any male *Masius* who performs a solo or unsuccessful display can thus perform the simple arrangements observed for successful displays. We thus cannot interpret the difference between solo displays and displays for female audiences as decreased effort or optimization on the part of solo males (How et al., 2008), nor can we interpret successful displays as primarily honest indicators of male vigor or quality (Andersson, 1994).

Current theories of evolution by sexual selection assume that variation in preferences and traits is related to heritable, genetic loci independently expressed in audiences and performers, respectively (Kirkpatrick, 1987; Kokko et al., 2003; Lande, 1981; Prum, 2010). In contrast, our analysis of *Masius* displays suggests that the expression of male traits (i.e., the constituent elements and syntactic arrangement of male displays) is molded by female behavior (e.g., female position on the display log). Females therefore co-determine the features of male “display traits” during the process of observation and assessment itself (*sensu* “intra-action;” Barad, 2006; Prum, 2023).

In their study of male bowerbirds responding to female cues, Patricelli et al. (2002) proposed that male responsiveness to females could itself be an intrinsic performer trait subject to sexual selection. How do certain males skillfully modulate their performance to please their female audience? Even more puzzling, how would females reliably select among variations in male responsiveness, when they can only assess that responsiveness through the controlled expression of their own preference behaviors? One promising outlet involves comparing three modes of displays: ornaments, songs, and dances. Ornaments, such as tail feathers, will remain relatively fixed with respect to audience behavior. Songs can vary with audience behavior, but audiences can hear songs from a distance without interacting. Dances, as shown here, may be expected to vary as audiences observe and interact with the display.

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