THE EXPERIENCES OF PRAISE AND CRITICISM OF ACTING STUDENTS IN SPLIT

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The Experiences of Praise and Criticism of Acting Students in Split

Final thesis

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Content

1 Introduction

Humans are judgmental. We consistently evaluate events and people based on their positive or negative attributes, often without being aware of doing so (Zajonc, 1980, as cited in Gray, 2020). Feedback is an integral part of human life from a young age. Praise and criticism play important roles in shaping people's self-perception and performance, influencing how they tailor their future. Individuals differ in their responses to feedback. While some handle it well, others find it challenging to cope with. Furthermore, some may not attach much significance to feedback, whereas others consider it very important.

According to Brummelman (2020), praise is likely the most used technique to influence others. The power of praise stems from the fact that people are social beings who survive and thrive in the context of supportive social relationships (Baumeister & Leary, 1995, as cited in Brummelman, 2020). When used appropriately, praise can encourage people, make them feel better, and enhance their social relationships. Nevertheless, praise often fails to achieve its intended purpose and may cause harm. Undoubtedly, Farson (1963) highlights that the most concerning aspect of praise is the pressure it places on an individual to be praiseworthy. If we accept praise and internalise positive beliefs about ourselves, we are compelled to act by those beliefs. This can be unsettling for us as human beings. Suppose we truly embrace compliments about our competence, intelligence, or beauty. In that case, we are continually under pressure to live up to those expectations, not only in the eyes of the person who praised us but more importantly, in our own eyes. The responsibility of always striving to be at our best, to live up to our talents and abilities, is perhaps one of our most challenging problems in life – and we naturally defend against it (Farson, 1963, as cited in Brummelman, 2020). Given the potential of praise to drive people toward great achievements or undermine them, it is essential to comprehend the various forms of praise; their effects on motivation, self-concepts, and relationships; and what type of praise, given by whom, in what social context has beneficial or toxic effects (Brummelman, 2020).

Besides praise, criticism can be a powerful tool to influence others. Criticism is a common and often distressing experience. Individual differences, particularly in stress reactivity, play an important role in how people handle criticism and other forms of negative social evaluation (Servaas et al., 2013). Being criticised might evoke fear, shame or anger, and feed into one's insecurities about being unworthy or incompetent. Winston Churchill (1939) likened criticism to physical pain—an unpleasant yet necessary experience for personal growth and learning. He also suggested that being criticised is positive as it signifies standing up for

something. Criticism can be a means of asserting power and social control, or neutralising competition. Still, it can also communicate a genuine grievance or speak up for oneself (Greenberg, 2014). At times, criticism introduces us to new ideas, and sometimes it encourages us to debate with critical pronouncements. Art is particularly susceptible to criticism. Art criticism is the verbal act of criticising artworks. Criticism encompasses various activities, including reasoned evaluation. Literate consumers of the arts rely on critics to help them navigate the avalanche of artworks across different media. According to Caroll (2009), there is more criticism than ever before, and more art is available now than in any other period of history. We look to critics to recommend and guide our selection of what we shall attend to and to assist us in understanding and appreciating the vast amount of work that confronts us (Carroll, 2009).

Previous research on praise and criticism:

1.1. Parental Feedback and Influence

Bronfenbrenner's ecological model of developmental processes (1979, as cited in Li et al., 2024) proposes that a person's mental and behavioural development can be influenced by their surroundings. Accordingly, parents can influence their children's emotions and behaviours through language and conduct (Bornstein, 2006; Stiles et al., 2020, as cited in Li et al., 2024). Social feedback from parents profoundly impacts the development of a child's self-concept. Common belief suggests that praising a child as a whole or praising his or her traits is beneficial. According to Dweck and colleagues, praise can be delivered using person ('you are clever') or process terms ('you worked hard'). Kamins & Dweck (1999) examined the hypothesis that criticism and praise conveying the person or trait judgments might communicate a message of conditional worth and weaken subsequent coping. Findings pointed out that children exhibited significantly more "helpless" responses (including self-blame) following personal criticism or praise than process criticism or praise (Kamins & Dweck, 1999). Therefore, personal feedback, even when positive, can instil vulnerability and a feeling of conditional self-worth. It is important to note that how their parents respond to their performances can also influence children's psychological functioning. (Barger et al., 2022; Brummelman et al., 2017, as cited in Li et al., 2024). Communication between a parent and a child can impact the development of a child's abilities such as emotional regulation and social adaptation (Parke & Buriel, 2007, as

cited in Li et al., 2024). When parents express praise or criticism regarding their performance, children may internalise their parents' perspectives resulting in their beliefs about success and failure aligning with those of their parents. Therefore, if parents provide more criticism and less praise, children exhibit fewer positive emotions when they succeed and more negative emotions when they fail (Ng et al., 2007, as cited in Li et al., 2024). Success-oriented feedback enhances children's emotional well-being, resulting in lower levels of depression and anxiety, though it may not significantly improve performance (Ng et al., 2007; Wei et al., 2020, as cited in Li et al., 2024). In contrast, failure-oriented feedback can improve performance but eventually leads to increased anxiety and depression (Ng et al., 2007, 2019; Wei et al., 2020, as cited in Li et al., 2024). Parents use both types of feedback in daily life, but they may favour one over the other (Ng et al., 2019, as cited in Li et al., 2024). Previous studies have separately examined the effects of parental success- and failure-oriented feedback (Ng et al., 2019; Wei et al., 2020, as cited in Li et al., 2024), raising questions about the combined effects. Therefore, Li et al. (2024) conducted a study and found that children experienced significantly lower levels of depression when their perception of parental success-oriented responses was higher compared to failure-oriented responses. Moreover, children exhibited greater resilience when the success-oriented response exceeded the failure-oriented response. Consequently, this heightened resilience contributed to lower levels of depression. However, when both responses were simultaneously altered in equal amounts, they did not affect the child's depression, implying a "neutralisation effect." (Li et al., 2024). Another study suggests that cognitive vulnerability to depression may develop both directly in response to perceived criticism and indirectly through having limited opportunities to internalise praise (Hunter, 2004). Hunter's study considered the complex interrelationship between different sources of perceived praise and criticism in predicting self-evaluation across four domains: appearance, schoolwork, behaviour with friends and behaviour with family. Results indicated that total perceived praise and criticism across the four sources studied (mothers, fathers, teachers and peers) explained considerably more of the variance in self-evaluation than that from any individual source. These findings reinforce the importance of assessing perceived other-evaluation and self-evaluation at a domain-specific level and considering young people's wider interpersonal context. In addition, male participants reported marginally less perceived praise and more perceived criticism but reported more self-praise and less self-criticism (Hunter, 2004). Furthermore, van Houtum et al. (2022) investigated adolescents' affective and neural responses to parental social feedback, such as praise or criticism. The study results indicated that negative parental feedback worsened adolescents' mood, particularly when feedback did not match adolescents' self-views. Negative feedback

was associated with increased activity in the neural 'saliency network', including the anterior insula, anterior cingulate cortex and dorsomedial prefrontal cortex. Positive feedback improved mood and increased activity in brain regions supporting social cognition, including the temporoparietal junction, posterior superior temporal sulcus, and precuneus (van Houtum et al., 2022).

1.2   Feedback's Influence on Learning

Research has demonstrated that feedback is one of the top ten influences on learning (Hattie, 2009, as cited in Skipper & Douglas, 2012). However, different forms of feedback can have considerably different consequences. For example, following a meta-analysis of 131 studies, Kluger and DeNisi (1996, as cited in Skipper & Douglas, 2012) found wide variability in the effects of feedback, with some types of feedback having a positive influence on learning, some having a negative impact, and some having no influence at all. This is partly because feedback can be delivered on several levels. Specifically, feedback can be related to the *task*, involving basic performance feedback about correctness or incorrectness; the *process,* providing information on how the task was completed; *self-regulation* to make the learner more aware of learning processes; and finally, the *self*, including direct praise and criticism of the learner, often directing attention away from the task, processes, or self-regulation (Hattie, 2009, as cited in Skipper & Douglas, 2012). When a teacher praises or criticises, the most obvious consequence is adjusting the child's perception of how the teacher regards them. Therefore, researchers prefer to move immediately to changes in a child's appraisal of the teacher, self-appraisal, or academic performance. Yet a direct measure of the child's interpretation provides an immediate estimate of whether and how teacher-mediated influences are perceived by the children (cf. Davidson & Lang, 1960, as cited in Worrall et al., 1983). In a study conducted by Worrall et al. (1983), the results indicated that children did not appear to process praise or criticism as mirror opposites. Criticism appeared to be deflected into the teacher's negative ratings rather than the self (Worrall et al., 1983). Furthermore, Hyland & Hyland (2001) conducted an extensive analysis of the written feedback given by two teachers to their students throughout an entire course. The feedback was evaluated based on its functions as praise, criticism, and suggestions. Praise was the most commonly used function in the feedback of these two teachers. However, it was often employed to soften criticisms and suggestions rather than simply acknowledging high-quality work. Moreover, many criticisms and suggestions were mitigated by using hedging devices, question forms, and personal

attribution. While recognising the importance of mitigation strategies as a means of minimising the force of criticisms and enhancing effective teacher-student relationships, the research pointed out that such indirectness carries the real potential for incomprehension and miscommunication (Hyland & Hyland, 2001). Learners' responses to praise have also been mixed. In some studies, praise has led to improved performance (O'Leary & O'Leary, 1977, as cited in Skipper & Douglas, 2012), in others debilitated performance (Mueller & Dweck, 1998, as cited in Skipper & Douglas, 2012). In some, it has had no effect (Beaman & Wheldall, 2000, as cited in Skipper & Douglas, 2012). Research suggests that giving people process praise after success can help them deal better with subsequent failures because it attributes outcomes to effort rather than fixed ability (Skipper & Douglas, 2012). Skipper & Douglas's (2012) findings suggest that learners respond equally positively to person, process, and no praise when they succeed. Participants were pleased with their performance, showed positive affect, and intentions to persist. However, differences were found between the feedback conditions when they began to fail. Specifically, praising successes in personal terms led to negative responses to failure more than when the feedback was given in process terms, again replicating previous work (Kamins & Dweck, 1999, as cited in Skipper & Douglas, 2012). Thus, following a single failure, those who received personal praise showed fewer positive responses than those who received process praise. However, the results uniquely suggest that the positive effects of process praise may contribute little more than objective performance feedback (Skipper et al., 2012). Moreover, Su & Huang (2022) found that praise was rated significantly higher than criticism in usefulness. The students also claimed that praise boosted their motivation and facilitated efforts to internalise and transfer the feedback knowledge (Su & Huang, 2022).

1.3 Individual Differences in Feedback Response

Evidence also indicates that personality and sociocultural factors, including locus of control, sex, and ethnic group membership, can affect individuals' responses to feedback, particularly criticism. It was found that females were less likely to accept criticism than males (Garza & Lipton, 1978). Deutsch & Solomon (1959, as cited in Deutsch, 1961) found that an individual's reaction to positive or negative performance evaluations is influenced by their self-assessment of the performance. The individual ("ego") tends to react more favourably to the other person ("alter") when the alter's evaluation is consistent, rather than inconsistent, with the ego's self-evaluation. Moreover, the data demonstrated that praise is reacted to more favourably

than criticism regardless of context, but that context determines the relative effect of evaluative statements (Deutsch, 1961).

1.4   The Role of Feedback in the Workplace

Furthermore, researchers and practitioners have advocated the use of praise (positive feedback) and criticism (negative feedback) as methods to reward or discipline an employee (Arvey & Ivancevich, 1980; Hamner & Hamner, 1976, as cited in Earley, 1986). A study by Earley (1986) examined the usefulness of performance feedback in shaping workers' behaviours. Results suggest that workers valued and responded to praise and criticism differently and that the influence of the feedback was partially mediated by a worker's trust in the feedback source and perceived importance of the feedback (Earley, 1986). Results of previous studies also imply that praise had a positive effect on job satisfaction (Robbins, 2005; Sveinsdóttir et al., 2015; Elgharyani et al., 2013; Ayub & Rafif, 2011, as cited in Bernburg, 2020).

1.5   Feedback and Performance

Moreover, it has been suggested that praise does not straightforwardly reinforce performance but that the type of praise affects how praise is cognitively processed, and how praise is processed affects how it influences performance. A similar perspective can be taken on the effects of criticism. Neapolitan's (1988) research examined four types of evaluation – specific product praise, general actor praise, specific product criticism, and general actor criticism – and the effects of these evaluations on performance. Results pointed out that for both praise and criticism, the type of evaluation significantly affects whether the actor improves, declines in, or maintains performance. Specific product praise had a significantly positive effect on performance; general actor praise had a primarily benign impact, and the effect of specific product criticism was variable. General actor criticism positively affected performance, which approximated or equalled that of specific product praise (Neapolitan, 1988). Furthermore, the research by Rees et al. (2013) indicates that failure feedback can be motivating or demotivating depending on its form and source. Participants initially performed the task better in the presence of an ingroup versus an outgroup member. Following this, performance worsened only after discouraging feedback from an ingroup member and improved only after encouraging feedback from an ingroup member. Motivation mediated these effects: Those motivated to prove the

outgroup wrong and the ingroup right were most likely to recover from earlier poor performance. Therefore, downward performance spirals are not inevitable; they can be reversed by harnessing ingroup influence and intergroup competition (Rees et al., 2013.).

1.6   The Complexity of Feedback in Motivation

Thus, are people more motivated by praise or criticism? Research suggests there is no universal answer to this question. Rather, the motivating power of both praise and criticism depends on how people interpret these responses (Eskreis-Winkler & Fishbach, 2020). One of psychology and education's core principles is emphasising praise over criticism to engender change. The rationale is that it's easier for someone to do more of what they already do than to get them to change. Additionally, praise builds self-esteem and, in turn, people's belief that they can improve their weaknesses (Nemko, 2014). Several past motivation theories propose that positive feedback, more than negative feedback, increases confidence, outcome expectancies, and commitment, and as a result, motivates behaviour. For instance, since people strive for consistency (Bem, 1972, as cited in Eskreis-Winkler & Fishbach, 2020), self-perception theory posits that once an action is successfully carried out, this increases the likelihood that it will be repeated in the future. Similarly, self-efficacy theory suggests that positive feedback enhances an individual's sense of competence or efficacy and that this, in turn, boosts motivation (Bandura, 1991, as cited in Eskreis-Winkler & Fishbach, 2020). However, Lepper and Green (1978, as cited in Neapolitan, 1988) found that praise can interfere with the development of intrinsic motivation. Davis and Brock (1972, as cited in Neapolitan, 1988) found that excessive praise can lead to self-derogation and interfere with good performance. Kanouse and Pullan (1981, as cited in Neapolitan, 1988) found that praise linked to future performances may lead to increased performance anxiety and a decline in performance. Hence, criticism may sometimes be an even more powerful motivator than praise. Other theories predict that motivation arises as a result of the gap between one's present achievements and the desired end state (Carver & Scheier, 1998; Higgins, 1987; Kluger & DeNisi, 1996; Locke & Latham, 1990; Miller, Galanter, & Pribram, 1960, as cited in Eskreis-Winkler & Fishbach, 2020). Positive feedback, which reduces this discrepancy, is less motivating than negative feedback, which psychologically highlights it. Indeed, according to Cybernetic theory, negative feedback is a more effective motivator than positive feedback because it draws attention to the difference between current and desired achievement states (Eskreis-Winkler & Fishbach, 2020). Furthermore, action representation also affects

motivation. It involves how an individual interprets their behaviour, specifically, whether they interpret an action as a sign of commitment or progress. Commitment is one's sense that the goal is attainable and valuable (Fishbein & Ajzen, 1974, as cited in Eskreis-Winkler & Fishbach, 2020), and progress is the sense that one has reduced the gap between the present state and goal completion (Carver & Scheier, 1998, as cited in Eskreis-Winkler & Fishbach, 2020). Building on research on the dynamics of goal motivation, it is suggested that praise motivates goal pursuit when it signals an increase in goal commitment. In contrast, criticism motivates goal pursuit when it signals insufficient goal progress. By this logic, negative feedback should increase motivation when it signals progress but should decrease motivation when it signals commitment (Eskreis-Winkler & Fishbach, 2020). Individual differences in commitment and expertise often determine whether individuals see their actions as a signal of commitment or progress (Finkelstein & Fishbach, 2012; Koo & Fishbach, 2008, as cited in Eskreis-Winkler & Fishbach, 2020). Uncommitted individuals and novices, uncertain about their level of commitment, rely on feedback to infer whether they are committed. They seek feedback on their dedication and interpret their successful actions as indicators of their commitment, suggesting that they value the goal and can achieve it. Committed individuals and experts, in contrast, already know they are committed, and, therefore, they use feedback to infer progress; that is, they take their actions as a signal that progress has been made (Eskreis-Winkler & Fishbach, 2020). Therefore, nonexperts are typically more motivated by praise than criticism (Eskreis-Winkler & Fishbach, 2020). Additionally, Meyer (1992) considered the effects of praise and criticism from an attributional perspective. Empirical evidence shows that praise and criticism can paradoxically affect the recipient's self-perception of ability. Praise can lead to the inference that the other person evaluates the recipient's ability as low. Similarly, criticism can lead to the inference that the recipient's ability was estimated as high (Meyer, 1992). Moreover, Möller (2005) revealed that dimensional and social comparisons following praise and criticism elicit paradoxical effects of perceived ability. Paradoxical effects occurred even when praise and criticism were presented independently without forced comparisons. Additionally, neutral feedback was perceived as indicating less ability than criticism (Möller, 2005).

1.7   Praise and Criticism in the Context of Art

Despite numerous studies on praise and criticism, there is a significant gap in research focused on these phenomena within the context of art, particularly in the lives of actors. Artists, including actors, often receive more praise and criticism than individuals in other professions.

Therefore, the present study aims to investigate and understand the experiences of praise and criticism of acting students, encompassing their personal, academic and professional lives. Most existing studies are quantitative, leaving a noticeable lack of qualitative research. Given that actors regularly experience praise and criticism, there is a need for more qualitative investigations into these experiences within the art world. Reviewing previous studies on praise and criticism has provided deeper insights into the topic and comprehension of its connection to the lives of actors. The present study will focus on their feelings and views regarding praise and criticism, the influence of feedback on their lives, and explore their coping mechanisms.

2 Methods

2.1 Research question

The initial question of the present study was: ***How do current and former acting students experience praise and criticism?*** We structured it according to the SPIDER formulation as follows:

(S)ample – Current and former acting students in Split

(P)henomenon of (I)nterest – The experiences of praise and criticism of acting students in Split

(D)esign – Semi-structured interview study

(E)valuation – The perceived influence of praise and criticism on actors' personal and professional lives, including their well-being

(R)esearch type – Qualitative

Finally, we formulated the research objective: ***To qualitatively explore acting students' experiences with praise and criticism and gain a deeper understanding of the potential effects of positive and negative feedback on different aspects of acting students' lives, such as self-confidence, perceived ability, or coping strategies.***

2.2 Theoretical and methodological framework

The researchers considered a qualitative approach best suited to answering the study's research question. Within the qualitative framework, we followed a realist pragmatic theoretical

position - seeking to understand and describe people's experiences and perspectives by focusing on practical outcomes and the real-world context in which these experiences occur. Moreover, this approach aligned well with the lead researcher's early stage of qualitative research experience, as this study constitutes her bachelor thesis research.

Data collection was conducted through a one-on-one, in-person, semi-structured interview method. The questions centred on the participants' experiences with praise and criticism and their impacts on their personal, academic, and professional lives. Qualitative interviews enabled participants to speak freely and at length about aspects that cannot be fully unpacked without deeply exploring one's feelings and perspectives, thus providing rich data embedded in personal experiences and practices.

For data analysis, the researchers took an inductive, data-driven coding approach, aiming to identify patterns, themes, and categories directly from the raw data without preconceived notions or theoretical frameworks, allowing the openness to unexpected findings and exploration of new ideas and concepts. The methodological approach followed Braun and Clarke's framework for conducting thematic analysis with an experiential approach to interpretation, focusing on participants' experiences and perspectives expressed in the data and exploring their meanings. However, the data analysis remained descriptive rather than interpretive or reflexive. Thus, the methodology of this study is best described as codebook thematic analysis.

2.3   Study sample and recruitment

The participants in this study were selected using a combination of convenience and snowball sampling. Recruitment was conducted through personal invitations shared on social media and within student study groups. Interested individuals who provided their contact information were contacted by phone to receive more research details and confirm participation.

The sample consisted of current (undergraduate and graduate) and former acting students (professional actors) from the University of Split's Arts Academy. There were 17 participants, nine women (53%) and eight men (47%), aged 21 to 34 (Table 1). To ensure a diverse and representative sample, the researchers aimed to include participants varying in gender, age, year of study, and success on their first attempt at enrolling in the acting program at the Academy (Table 1). Therefore, the entire span of the Arts Academy acting program, which biennially enrolls new students, was covered. This encompassed 1st-year undergraduates, 3rd-year undergraduates, 5th-year graduates, and professional actors, each

comprising 4-5 participants (Table 1). The inclusion criterion required participants to be current or former acting students from the Arts Academy in Split.

Table 1. Demographic information of all 17 interview participants.

Participant	Gender and Age	Year of Study	Success on First Attempt at Acting Studies Enrolment
P01	Female, 21	1st year	-
P02	Male, 23	1st year	+
P03	Male, 22	1st year	-
P04	Female, 21	1st year	-
P05	Female, 21	3rd year	+
P06	Male, 25	3rd year	+
P07	Female, 21	3rd year	-
P08	Male, 21	3rd year	+
P09	Male, 27	5th year	-
P10	Female, 24	5th year	-
P11	Male, 23	5th year	+
P12	Male, 25	5th year	-
P13	Female, 24	professional	+
P14	Female, 27	professional	-
P15	Female, 27	professional	+
P16	Female, 28	professional	-
P17	Male, 34	professional	+

+/- indicates the participants' initial enrolment success: a plus (+) denotes success on the first attempt, while a minus (-) signifies multiple attempts were needed.

2.4   Procedure and data collection

The first author collected all the data through semi-structured interviews. We chose this method because of its flexibility, enabling rapport and engagement, participant-centered approach, and contextual understanding (Brinkman & Kvale, 2018). A topic guide tailored to the research aim provided the main structure of exploring the topics of interest but without the obligation of strict adherence (Table 2). Informed by existing literature, the topic guide encompassed four primary areas of investigation with two or three topics each (Table 2). We then developed specific questions and prompts related to each topic and, according to the semi-structured interview method, adjusted them during the interviews (for a detailed topic guide, see Appendix 1). The interviewer followed the topic guide to cover all the content but kept the interviews flowing naturally.

In some cases, the respondents spontaneously answered some questions, and the researcher was open to exploring the unplanned topics relevant to the research aim, prompting the participants to expand on relevant and interesting responses (Brinkmann & Kvale, 2018). As interviews progressed, additional questions were incorporated based on initial findings, refining the guide for subsequent sessions. The interviews focused on the participants' experiences of receiving praise and criticism in their personal, academic, and professional lives and their impact on well-being. Participants' emotional responses, perspectives, and coping strategies during these experiences were the focal issues of our topic guide.

Interviews were conducted one-on-one and face-to-face in Croatian and English, using a topic guide and an audio recording device to document the responses. These took place at a prearranged location and time, depending on the participant's availability and agreement with the interviewer. The researcher took notes afterward. Interviews lasted between 30 to 90 minutes. Data collection ceased after the 17th interview when we reached data saturation, following the guidelines and parameters described by Hennink et al. (2022) and based on the researcher's notes on recurring themes (for more details on saturation, please see the Data Analysis section). The interviews were recorded and transcribed verbatim for further analysis and reporting.

Table 2. Key areas of investigation and associated topics

A key area of investigation	Topics
Introductory information:	● Personal and professional background ● Decision to study acting at the Art Academy in Split
Experiences related to praise and criticism in personal and academic life:	● Praise and criticism in close relationships ● Feedback from professors ● Coping strategies
Experiences regarding public appearances:	● Exams ● Audience – ovation and criticism ● Public appearances
Conclusion of the interview:	● Conclusion of the experience ● Final feelings about the topic

2.5 Data analysis

As per the qualitative research guidelines outlined by Hennink et al. (2022), for determining sample sizes to achieve saturation, 17 interviews were conducted. The main themes emerged as early as the 6th interview, while by the 9th interview, most subthemes and codes were identified. With the 17th interview, we had achieved full saturation of detailed codes and meaning. The collected data was analyzed using the six-step thematic analysis method outlined by Braun and Clarke (2006). According to them, the thematic analysis includes the following steps: familiarisation (transcribing audio data to text), coding (identifying coding patterns or themes), creating themes, reviewing themes, finalizing themes, and report writing.

Firstly, the researcher got familiar with the data by reviewing the transcripts of the interviews, followed by a coding phase. Furthermore, the researcher took an inductive (bottom-up), data-driven coding approach, aiming to identify patterns, themes, and categories directly from the raw data without preconceived notions or existing theoretical background, allowing the openness to unexpected findings and exploration of new ideas and concepts. Labeled codes were combined into broader ´umbrella´ themes that were constructed, reviewed, and finally defined. Thus, the final themes were not set in advance but were derived inductively, based on interview data, and developed during coding. NVivo 14, a qualitative data analysis software, was used to manage the analysis.

The codebook and thematic map were developed and referenced when writing the thematic analysis. The main researcher revised them in consultation with her supervisor to ensure an accurate presentation of the results. The interpretation of the data adhered to an

experiential approach, emphasizing the participants' experiences and perspectives as expressed in the data and exploring their meanings. However, the researcher predominantly focused on maintaining the codes, themes, and sub-themes at a descriptive level rather than interpretive or reflexive.

2.6   Ethical aspects and securing study quality

The Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences Ethics Committee approved the study (document No. 2181-190-24-00002). All interviewees received an informed consent letter with information about the study and what participation entails. They provided written informed consent by signing and returning the document to the interviewer while retaining a copy for themselves. Participation was voluntary, and individuals were free to decline without providing reasons. Participants were informed of their right to withdraw from the study at any point. We de-identified or masked any identifying information about the participants during data analysis and reporting. Only the researchers (leading researcher and her supervisor) had access to the data. The leading researcher and her supervisor had regular consultations to ensure study quality. The supervisor provided active involvement and support, as well as feedback and suggestions throughout the planning, writing, coding, data analysis, and creation of thematic maps to maintain methodological integrity and quality. Additionally, we followed relevant reporting guidelines for qualitative research to ensure comprehensive and detailed reporting of methods (COREQ; Tong & Craig, 2007, see Appendix 2).

2.7   Researcher reflexivity

The researcher's familiarity with some participants facilitated a more flexible data collection process, particularly for easier recruitment. This familiarity offered several advantages, including a smaller age gap, a closer researcher-participant relationship, and participants' willingness to disclose personal information and honest standpoints relevant to the topic. However, the lead researcher's sociodemographic characteristics—a 22-year-old female with experience in art performance—and familiarity with some participants may have introduced biases in data collection and interpretation. The researcher had a background in public art performances and theatre, which involved facing the fear of performing in front of an audience and receiving praise and criticism. This prior experience provided her with a deeper understanding and personal perspective on various aspects of the research topic from the outset.

These factors present potential limitations to the study. The subjective nature of the data requires careful consideration of multiple perspectives, themes and patterns. It is challenging, as it requires the researcher to detach from personal experiences and beliefs. The researchers' connection to the topic and related experiences might have impacted the formulation of questions, potentially steering responses in a particular direction. However, it also contributed to a deeper understanding of the topic.

The researcher kept reflective notes to address these considerations throughout the data collection and analysis. These notes helped identify potential personal biases that might affect communication with participants and influence data analysis. The reflective diary also captured interesting observations and ensured a rich, balanced interpretation of the data. This practice enabled the interviewer to reflect on her technique and style with her supervisor for subsequent interviews. The researcher aimed to maintain professionalism and approach each interview without preconceived expectations or stereotypes while fostering a warm and welcoming atmosphere. This approach ensured confidentiality and created a comfortable space for participants to speak freely. The researcher was mindful of nonverbal behaviour and the phrasing of questions, allowing participants to respond from their experiences without imposed answers, and paraphrased their responses to ensure accurate understanding. Exposure to various perspectives and opinions deepened the researcher's understanding of the topic, highlighting the importance of raising awareness in this field. These reflexive practices, combined with participants' accounts, led to a broader view and generated ideas for future research on praise and criticism in the lives of actors, particularly within university settings.

3 Results

We defined six main themes (see Figure 1) and twenty-six sub-themes within the collected data. Participant quotes are provided within each sub-theme. Complete demographic information for each participant from P01 to P17 is presented in Table 1.

Figure 1. Thematic map of findings with relationships between main themes.
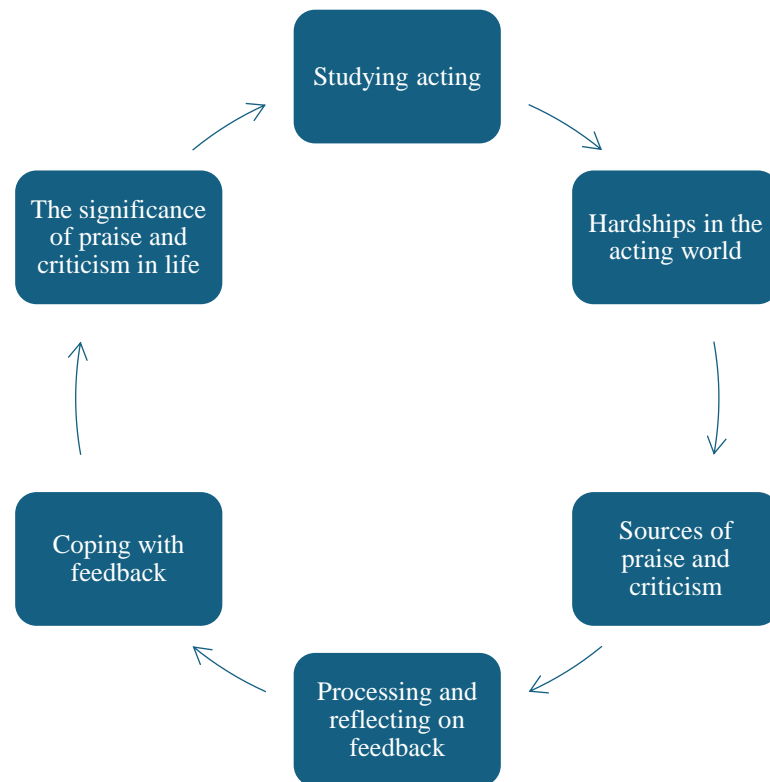
The first theme, "Studying acting," builds upon "Hardships in the acting world," which encompasses various challenges. These experiences naturally lead to "Sources of praise and criticism," integral to an actor's daily life. Following this, the themes progress through "Processing and reflecting on feedback" and "Coping with feedback," ultimately culminating in "The significance of praise and criticism in life." This final stage, informed by previous experiences, loops back to the initial theme, fostering progress, adaptation, and a deeper understanding of studying acting.

3.1   Studying acting

The first theme pertains to the academic experiences of acting students. This includes the distinctive characteristics of the acting faculty in comparison to other academic faculties, the students' experiences with admissions and examinations, the unique challenges encountered within the faculty, and the students' perspectives on these aspects. Within this theme, we identified five sub-themes (Figure 2).

Figure 2. Studying acting - main theme and sub-themes.

Studying acting
- Study specificity
- Entrance exam experiences — Persistent enrollment efforts
- Stressful experiences with exams
- The importance of class homogeneity
- Developing resilience to feedback
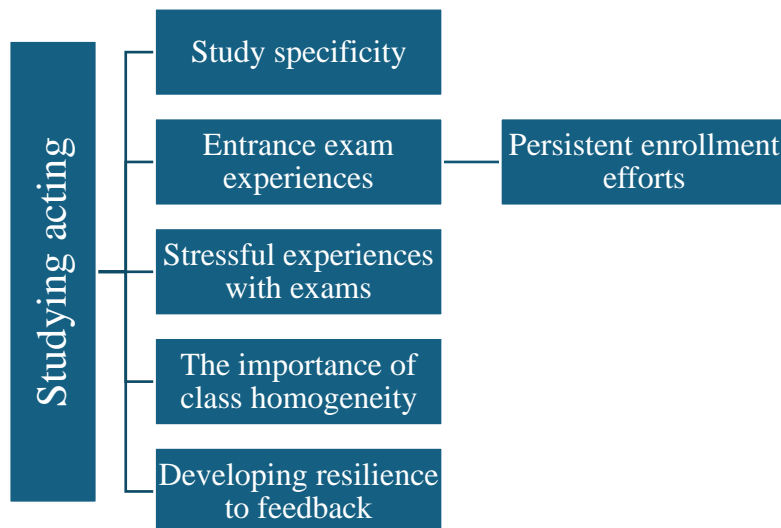
3.1.1 Study specificity

The participants highlighted the unique aspects of studying acting. Unlike most academic programs, they *"don't have a classic written exam"* (P12). Instead, they spend *"12 hours a day"* (P15) at the faculty. The *"very subjective"* (P07) nature of artistic expression is both a beauty and a challenge during evaluations. One participant noted, *"The tempo is very fast and dynamic"* (P07). Additionally, they emphasized the unique relationships with professors and peers, describing the class as a *"second family"* (P15).

P07: We often have different opinions, I guess that's the wealth of the fact that no one sees things the same way (…) You hate and love each other so much, but you still depend on each other. It was difficult for me to find that middle ground with unknown people with whom I suddenly spent so much time and who knowingly and unknowingly learned so much about me.

P15: It was a terrible shock for all of us when we graduated, to be without that class. I didn't know (…) how much it would involve my personal life and reflections, and how much insight the professors would have into my private life. I think that some personal maturity means a lot to study something like this, you have to know who you are to "become someone else".

P12: I think that the general problem with the education of actors is that Bologna system requires grades (…) students compare themselves. I think that the grade should be very individual because it is not something measurable, (…) but you can see progress. In my opinion, it would be ideal if after the exam the students only get a comment on how to progress further, but if we have to have a grade, then let that grade be how much the student progressed compared to how much the professor estimated that he could progress in that semester. (…) it seems to me that there is no concrete value system.

Overall, this sub-theme highlighted the distinctiveness of acting studies, emphasizing the unique relationships among colleagues and professors marked by close personal bonds that may sometimes be uncomfortable because of excessive invasion of privacy. It revealed an unconventional learning mode that involves personal life intrusion, deeper introspection, heightened physical exertion, and extended time at the university—setting it apart from the traditional book-centric learning and examination formats in other faculties. Additionally, it underscored the nuanced challenge of assessing students' work due to the subjective nature of artistic evaluation.

3.1.2 Entrance exam experiences

Our interviewees described their entrance exams as very *"stressful"* (P10) and dynamic, which is understandable given the success rate of enrolment on the first attempt at the Academy is less than 50% (see Table 1). Some participants said they *"barely remember the entrance exam"* (P08), while others thought they *"will never forget it because it was so important"* (P05). Many highlighted the college entrance exam period as *"the most turbulent month"* (P07) of their lives. They also noted the distinctiveness of the entrance exam in Split compared to other cities, portraying it as *"tense"* but with a more relaxed, *"Dalmatian approach"* (P16).

> **P10: It reflected on my health, physical and mental condition. But I learned a lot.**
>
> **P08: It went by so quickly for me, it was 3-4 days, which were so adrenaline-charged, that I practically forgot everything.**
>
> **P10: I think both are useful for an actor to experience, in Split they were kinder and more humane towards me. While in Zagreb, I was treated more like a cow in a barn that has its five minutes.**

3.1.2.1 Persistent enrolment efforts

Within the sub-theme "Entrance exam experiences", we identified a code relating to the experiences of those who failed on their first entrance exam attempt ("Persistent enrolment efforts") and how this influenced them.

It is common for individuals to attempt entry to the Academy multiple times. Although the process *"shakes your confidence"* because they *"don't accept you for who you are"* (P09), the participants in our study did not give up. Their determination stemmed from the fact that it was something they had *"always wanted"* (P01) and a belief that they hadn't yet given their all. Initial rejection made some participants *"feel less worthy"* (P01), causing them to question their choices and abilities. They described being eliminated from the broader selection as having a *"band-aid effect"* (P09). It was less painful than investing extensive time and effort into tests and exercises only to fall out of the shortlist. Despite these challenges, they found their way back and learned from the experience.

> **P01: Over time, my euphoria gradually diminished. Panic increasingly took hold of me, and I felt like maybe this wasn't for me. Am I on the right path or not? And somehow, every shortlist was like a new wind at my back. As if it was good, but that I still needed to work on something a bit more.**

> **P09: When you already practically know your group and perceive them as a class in a way (…) and realize that you won't continue next week with them after all (…) A shock at first, but after some time I said, come on, let's go again, it doesn't matter, chin up and carry on, because damn it, today, tomorrow, I'll also go to some audition for a theatre or a film and they won't pick me for it, because, you know, I don't have a mole here, but I have it here.**

Given the subjective nature of art, even college entrance exams reflect diverse perspectives and opinions, varying with each judge. What one evaluator might dismiss as inadequate; another may consider extraordinary.

> **P11: The professor asked, "Why do you call it a comedic monologue when there's nothing funny about it?" Then I went home, cried, and said, "I don't want to do this." But just a week before that, the teacher with whom I rehearsed that particular monologue was thrilled, dying of laughter. A bit later, I realized it was a lesson—there would be more of this in life.**

3.1.3 Stressful experiences with exams

Since exams in practical subjects take the form of public performances, *"the atmosphere is quite agitated"* (P01) beforehand. *"Stage fright is always present"* (P14), but most participants see it positively, showing they care. The excitement and stress sometimes make eating difficult, but *"supporting yourself energetically until that evening hour of the exam"* (P10) is crucial, and they often do it together as a group.

P14: I think after 20 years of work experience, you still have that stage fright, and it's like a drug because it's a kind of adrenaline that you hate and love at the same time. But it's different now because I know how to calm down and regulate myself, which was, of course, very difficult for me at the beginning. I had physical reactions, and many of us did too. But today, I know breathing techniques and how to calm my thoughts. It's much easier.

P10: Before the exam, you live with that project, and you go to sleep with it.

P16: It was due to stress (...) The exam day came, and I woke up with absolutely no voice (...) And the first word I spoke that day was the first line in the play, so I went out, not knowing if my voice would come out. And the voice comes out, but it's like I'm 50 years old and smoke seven packs of cigarettes a day.

However, the effort appears worthwhile due to the support and profound satisfaction experienced after a performance. This satisfaction motivates and inspires a continual desire to create.

P08: You finish what you've been working on, sometimes you can be really proud (…) your families come, sometimes the actors come, and then you're all like, wow! (…) And then the day after, you feel, I want more, I want more, it's such beautiful energy. If you ask any actor why he does it and if you ask him how he feels after the performance, I think 99% of people would tell you that's the reason.

3.1.4   The importance of class homogeneity

Spending so much time with their class requires responsibility and commitment, as they are important as individuals and depend on each other. They *"can't be sick or absent"* (P05) because everyone has a role in a play, and others can't perform if someone is missing. Furthermore, they must support each other and work together towards a common goal, which in turn stimulates creativity and motivation within the group.

P08: As an individual, you have to be confident in yourself and that the other person is confident in their part. And when that's the case, everything goes fluidly. And then friendship can develop, and you help each other. I think we are still in the process of understanding each other privately, but professionally it turns out to be a good group energy.

P16: In a joint performance, no matter how important we all are as separate wheels, we all make up that truck together, so we are aware that if I fall off the rails, she and he will probably fall off, but maybe a fourth person will manage to bring us all back.

3.1.5 Developing resilience to feedback

Given the unique nature of their studies and the daily exposure to both praise and criticism, as well as the need to prepare for the future, students were taught and cautioned from the beginning not to take everything to heart.

P17: Right away at the Academy, we were taught to accept criticism as simply as humanly possible. They told us, always make sure that if that criticism comes, never let it stay in your head for more than a second, whether it's good or bad. Because as soon as you start taking it personally, you dig in and don't move, and as soon as you don't move, it's dangerous, really dangerous for actors.

However, participants observed that this "tough love" principle may have influenced their future perspectives on praise and criticism, as they encountered much more criticism than praise.

P14: We were doing the play at the Croatian National Theatre (…) How is it possible that there's no criticism at all? My whole life I've been hearing criticism at university. It's an interesting observation to me that you reach a stage where you want someone to say something bad because you're used to hearing it, and it's impossible that everything is good.

3.2 Hardships in the acting world

The second theme pertains to the hardships of acting as a way of living. It includes the financial viability within the profession, ego management and its significance, the challenges faced in embracing a role, and maintaining a balance between private and professional life. Within this theme, we identified four sub-themes (Figure 3).

Figure 3. Hardships in the acting world - main theme and sub-themes.

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                    ┌─────────────────────────┐
                    │   Living off of acting   │
                    └─────────────────────────┘
 Hardships in       ┌─────────────────────────┐
 the acting world   │  Challenges in embracing │
                    │        the role          │
                    └─────────────────────────┘
                    ┌─────────────────────────┐
                    │   Ego management in      │
                    │        acting            │
                    └─────────────────────────┘
                    ┌─────────────────────────┐
                    │  Striking a balance -    │
                    │ private and professional │
                    │          life            │
                    └─────────────────────────┘
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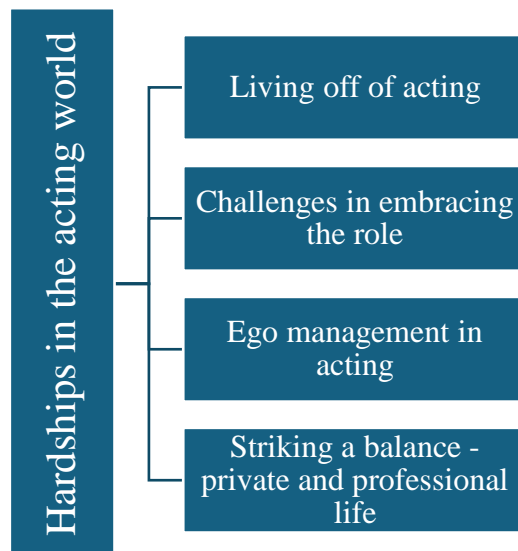
3.2.1   Living off of acting

When hearing about the idea of enrolling in acting as a career, many parents were *"concerned about the existential side of art"* (P03). Professionals also noted that *"acting alone is not enough to survive"* (P14). Despite these concerns, the desire to create was stronger.

> *P06: They told me that I wouldn't have money and so on, but a certain romantic spirit awoke in me that through art everything is possible and then I naively started to believe it and decided that I would really do acting and again out of spite for everyone who said that you can't make a living from it and here today (…) it's the best thing that has happened in my life.*

3.2.2   Challenges in embracing the role

The participants emphasized that portraying certain roles is a demanding process that often *"requires digging"* (P07) into their personal lives, leaving them *"very mentally exhausted afterwards"* (P07). It is challenging to *"expose"* and *"be vulnerable on stage"* because *"you are just playing yourself in that situation"* (P14). They often seek commonalities between the characters and themselves, trying to find similar situations from which to draw inspiration. However, they sometimes *"don't have the years or the smarts"* (P09) to convincingly play a role that requires understanding complex psychological states. Thus, it requires significant commitment and engagement.

P01: Even the most negative character should not be negative to the person performing it, but rather one should find why they defend that character and why that character is right, what their truth is.

They also mentioned that method acting is not part of their practice, as it can harm an actor's well-being and lead them to confuse criticism of the character they play with criticism of their performance.

P14: I am P14 who is madly in love with Romeo, our families hate each other. Method acting is complete immersion and becoming that other person. And on the first day of college, we were told not to do method acting because it is very dangerous. I understand that any criticism is addressed to me, we are not two different people, I am the one.

Participants acknowledged that they understand criticism is directed at them personally, not at a character they are portraying, as there is no separation; it is they themselves in that particular situation.

3.2.3 Ego management in acting

Furthermore, searching for justification within oneself makes it *"hard always to protect your ego from that exploration and digging that you consciously do"* (P06). Participants were divided on the importance of having a high ego in the acting industry, but most agreed that maintaining a healthy balance is crucial.

P08: I think that's very important because when you come on stage, you have to show yourself, you have to have a lot of respect for your colleague, that's the first important thing, but a big part of that respect for your colleague has to come from the fact that you are confident and steady like a pillar in the Roman Forum, so you can give him that reply with enough emotion, with good action. You have to have some defiance because if you don't, you'll lose yourself in front of the audience.

Encountering praise and criticism in the acting world can sometimes be very harsh, and learning to handle them is necessary. Acting is *"a profession where your ego is constantly exposed to others' criticism"* (P06), and you are part of public life. It can *"easily escape up or down,"* so to keep it balanced, one should be *"aware and self-aware"* (P03). Instead of becoming overly confident, praise should motivate one to *"strive for perfection, which is non-existent and impossible"* (P02), as there is no growth in considering oneself perfect. Conversely, there should be space for privacy *"outside of being a public figure"* (P06) that should be protected from public criticism.

P06: I have to think long-term about how to stay healthy (…) most likely, it would be in human nature for all those criticisms to affect and change our view of ourselves, or rather how others perceive us. But I think it's necessary for anyone who decides to pursue acting to build some kind of "pseudo-ego" that will be there to be exposed to the public and criticism and to protect the private, those private moments that are there for close ones, and to be a private person.

P09: Miro Gavran once said, "Spit out the taste of fame before it poisons you", also along these lines is Stanislavski who said, "Love the art in yourself, not yourself in the art". And those are some of my guiding thoughts in this profession.

3.2.4   Striking a balance - private and professional life

Striking a balance between private and professional life is not an easy task. It can sometimes seem impossible, as these two spheres are "quite intertwined" (P01).

P14: We are instructed to leave all our problems outside the classroom. We even had an exercise called "empty the box," where you imagine putting all your personal matters in a box and you have to cross the boundary to enter as clean and neutral. And, of course, sometimes it's not possible because you might have so many personal problems that you simply can't focus. This work isn't just come and go; you carry it with you, and you're constantly there.

Sometimes, private issues affect focus in the professional sphere, while work can encroach too much on personal life. The Arts Academy isn't a typical faculty because *"it becomes a way of life"* (P17). Even during everyday activities like drinking coffee, students are *"gathering moments from others' movements that could be useful"* (P17) for portraying their characters. As they build stamina and begin to understand *"acting as a craft"* rather than *"some sacred, unattainable art,"* actors become like engineers who know their machine, enabling them to operate more mechanically and *"not so emotionally"* (P10). It is important to learn how to control emotions and ensure that one *"never gets lost in the character"* (P10).

P10: The character was so complicated and had such a huge problem that it occupied me privately as well (…) the body remembers (…) I played the role in a cramped position (...)How can this harm me if I control it? That's why there's this theatre hygiene that you take off your shoes before entering, you don't go out in the same clothes after the performance, to keep that mask as a mask, and yourself as yourself.

Sometimes, participants were criticised unfairly due to their inability to focus, stemming from the mismatch between their private and professional lives. At times, this criticism had a counter-effect, making participants feel bad instead of serving as encouragement and an opportunity to learn.

P16: If I have to come to the stage that day, and if my character is extremely happy, satisfied, and confident, but I am not like that, that day (…) then you will still get negative criticism, but in the wrong way and then you will be ashamed because of that criticism, instead of learning something from it, so I think they are quite harsh with praises and criticisms.

3.3   Sources of praise and criticism

The third theme pertains to the main sources of praise and criticism that actors encounter. This includes audience and media reactions, consultations with colleagues and professors, feedback from their personal circles, self-assessment. Within this theme, we identified six sub-themes (Figure 4).

Figure 4. Sources of praise and criticism - main theme and sub-themes.
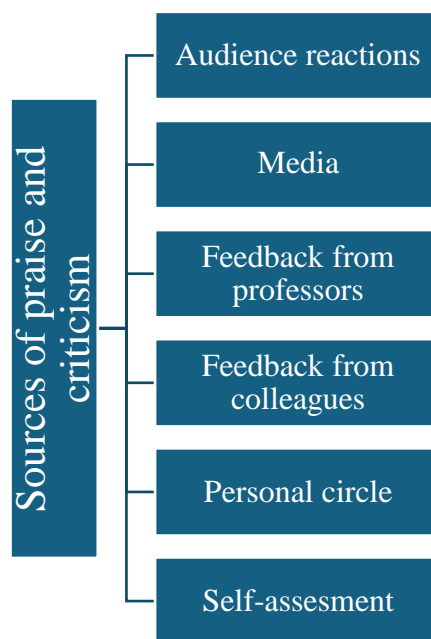
3.3.1   Audience reactions

Participants highlighted the importance of the audience. While some care less about audience reactions, others perceive the audience as *"the most important"* because they *"depend on them"* and *"do everything because of them"* (P17). They enjoy performing for themselves but are primarily *"there for others"* (P06). Although they must concentrate on the play, they always *"listen to the audience with one ear"* (P09). It's challenging when the audience only sees

one performance and quickly judges it without knowing about *"your fever at that moment, which family member died that day, or who left you"* (P12). One of the best feelings is when the audience and the actor share the same experience after the performance, meaning the actors feel satisfied and succeed in delivering a message to the audience. Typically, when they feel *"satisfied, the audience is satisfied"* (P17), but sometimes they try hard, and it stings when the audience does not respond as expected. However, they understand they *"can never completely satisfy the audience"* due to different views and preferences. Even if the audience reacts well, they *"don't like to leave the stage feeling dissatisfied"* (P17) because their inner feeling is equally important.

> **P09: It's not indifferent to you, so, you play an entire comedy piece, and the audience doesn't laugh. That is a bit worrying. We often like to hear laughter because it's a sign that they are following, they like it, they got the point. We get that boost. It lifts our performance. It gives us some higher energy, and we also raise everything. Of course, we must not be too guided by the audience's reactions because that can lead us in a different direction. We can exaggerate and stray far from what we intended.**

> **P10: I shamelessly want applause for myself, which is one of the reasons I enrolled in this, not for applause like 'you are famous,' but for applause meaning 'you have conveyed something to us, and we received it.' For me, that's the greatest reward in theatre.**

For some participants, it is essential that a performance induces a reaction, whether positive or negative, because it influences people in different ways. *"Every performance must disappoint, hurt, and delight someone"* (P12). They consider a performance unsuccessful only if it fails to elicit any reaction. Therefore, it doesn't bother them when some people get up and leave the theatre, as it is not necessarily an indicator of their quality.

3.3.2 Media

Participants don't place much importance on media feedback. While it feels nice to read a positive review, what bothers them most is the media's strong influence on the audience. It saddens them that people *"will decide whether to attend the performance based on someone else's review"* (P11). Audiences often form opinions based on these subjective impressions, even if they haven't seen the performance themselves. Participants also emphasized their experiences with reviews from theatre critics that were not constructive, often merely retelling the plot and offering subjective opinions.

P11: People read it and automatically form an opinion about the performance, maybe even if they haven't seen it, based on that subjective impression. Because you are someone who calls themselves a critic, a theatre critic.

P09: When you read his reviews, he commented on her nose. It doesn't make sense; it's a personal comment. In that play, or rather in the review of that play, her nose had no function, it wasn't mentioned at all, and there was no emphasis on the nose. (...)That bothers me in a way. In those reviews... come on, be specific. If your nose is as it is, so what?

3.3.3 Feedback from professors

Furthermore, feedback from professors was perceived as very important, serving as a guide, but it often led to misunderstandings and made participants take *"everything too personally"* (P10). Looking back, participants realized that most professors *"just wanted to help"* (P10) with their professional insights, but since professors also have subjective opinions, *"figuring out whom to listen to and how much"* (P10) was sometimes challenging. Each professor has *"their own method and approach"* (P09), and not all have the same pedagogical competence. Some professors spend each day with students, so how they provide praise and criticism is important. Participants believe it would be beneficial if professors received *"education in drama pedagogy or psychology"* (P14).

P14: These professors must know how to communicate with people. (…) they think it is their conscious tactic to be harsh and cold because they know this will motivate some students to push harder and do better the next day. Some students function that way, but I don't. (…)

However, one professor who was characterized as *"one of the best educators at the faculty,"* (P14) asked them what was good in the performance, and participants didn't know how to respond because they had *"only listened to what was wrong"* (P14). They appreciated his method of teaching how to identify their and their colleagues' strengths, and how to give constructive and gentle criticism. Participants also noted that professors adapt their approach based on whom they are addressing, as each individual is unique and responds differently to the same type of feedback. This makes the task challenging for professors. They have to *"analyse eight individuals precisely"* (P10) and find the right way to communicate with each one, which is challenging because not everyone *"has the breadth to understand every person"* (P10). Sometimes, professors do this correctly, but other times, they get it wrong, and students perceive it as unfair.

3.3.4 Feedback from colleagues

Class homogeneity is crucial for effective group dynamics, so feedback from colleagues is often precious and generally supportive, as they are *"all in the same mess"* (P10). Spending so much time together lets them know each other well, leading to honest feedback. However, because they know each other's struggles and share similar experiences, they sometimes *"sugarcoat things a bit"* (P16) to avoid being brutally honest and potentially hurting one another.

> *P11: I really appreciate what they say as well because they essentially know me best. They know my abilities, what I can do, what I can't do. And somehow, I trust them the most to be honest. Because we can really tell each other everything that bothers us, what doesn't bother us, what was good for us, and what wasn't. Of course, with some elaboration.*

3.3.5 Personal circle

For most participants, feedback from their loved ones was often seen as lacking objectivity but remained highly valuable *"from an emotional perspective"* (P06). The various parenting styles experienced by participants influenced them in different ways.

> *P14: A child who was either criticised or praised. There was no in-between. Either I did something very wrong, or I was perfect. And that is perfect for developing this mild, narcissistic disorder, which I am sure I have. Of course, when it came to acting, everyone around me was thrilled with the idea that I would go there. Everyone supported and helped me in whatever way they could. I know that I sought approval from my family and friends. Maybe unconsciously at the time, but now, over some period, I have become aware that I complain but just want them to praise me. I was very sensitive to the criticisms of my loved ones, but not in a way that would shut me down or make me sad, but it would make me angry. It would trigger me in the moment, and I would go into a fight. So it doesn't come from a place of vulnerability but from a place of defence, and defensive mechanisms.*

Although parents and friends were always seen as supportive, primarily offering praise, participants also described them as providing the *"most honest criticism"* (P03). While colleagues played a significant role in recognizing participants' strengths and weaknesses, loved ones were also considered crucial sources of feedback. They were familiar with the participants' acting journey, knowing where they started and how they developed, and could thus offer valuable comparisons with their current skill and performance. This perspective made their feedback particularly useful for participants as they sought to move forward.

P03: For me personally, but for many actors as well, it is said that the hardest thing is to perform in front of your own audience. Even if they don't understand acting that well, their criticism will somehow affect you the most, touch you the most, because they are your people.

3.3.6 Self-assessment

Despite the opinions of others, participants emphasised that feedback would not have a significant impact if they did not personally agree with it. This can sometimes seem paradoxical. If participants are dissatisfied with their performance and someone praises them, they might feel that the praise is given out of *"some kind of pity"* (P11). Given their familiarity with receiving critiques at the faculty, many participants admitted they *"don't know how to handle compliments"* (P11) and feel quite uncomfortable when they receive them. They prefer critiques, as these offer opportunities for learning and improvement. Excessive praise can create pressure, making them fear that they *"will never be that good again"* (P12). Some participants are driven by a continuous desire for progress and are never fully satisfied. When praised with a suggestion that they've succeeded, they *"don't know how to move forward"* because they believe there is *"never the peak"* (P04).

P02: My mind always focuses on what I could have done better. Not on what was good. And then, simply after an exam or a performance, I think... "I could have done this and that better and I'm not satisfied." I will never be satisfied, but that's the nature of the job (…) I am quite self-critical.

At the end of the day, actors consider their own opinions the most important and only truly known to them. They also find it very important because once they leave the faculty, they will be on their own, and there will be no professors to offer feedback and guidance.

P12: It's like a driving school for acting. I would say here, we learn about our vehicle and how to start and stop it, and later you learn to drive. We are learning the basics. There are different ways to start the engine, and later we'll understand how we start our own engine. And what kind of engine we are, what fuels us, and what kind of roads do we like.

3.4 Processing and reflecting on feedback

The fourth theme pertains to the processes of receiving and reflecting on feedback. It includes emotional responses to praise and criticism, taking an objective perspective for

selective evaluation, distinguishing between person-focused and process-focused criticism, and assessing feedback based on its source. Within this theme, we identified four sub-themes (Figure 5).

Figure 5. Processing and reflecting on feedback - main theme and sub-themes.

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Processing and reflecting on
feedback
                          ┌─────────────────────────┐
                          │   Emotional responses   │
                          └─────────────────────────┘
                          ┌─────────────────────────┐
                          │   Discerning valuable   │
                          │       evaluation        │
                          └─────────────────────────┘
                          ┌─────────────────────────┐
                          │    Person vs. process   │
                          │        feedback         │
                          └─────────────────────────┘
                          ┌─────────────────────────┐
                          │  Source-based evaluation │
                          └─────────────────────────┘
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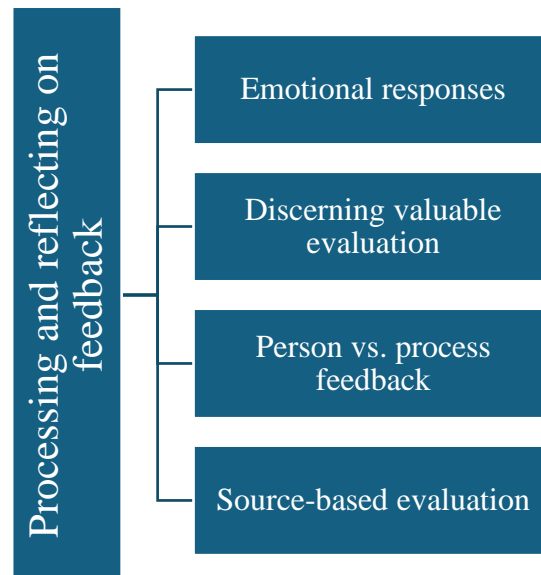
3.4.1 Emotional responses

Although emotional responses to feedback are highly individual, some reactions are common among participants. Praise is often seen as *"a boost"* (P09) and serves as encouragement for *"confidence and security"* (P14). However, for some, it can also create pressure to perform at *"a higher level"* (P05) next time and elicit a sense of *"expectations from the other side"* (P12). Conversely, criticism may trigger an *"inferiority complex"* but often serves as a motivator *"to work more"* (P11).

> ***P10: I thought I was under-capacitated and that this was impossible. I thought that this was simply where things stopped for me, this is my acting reach. What I have managed, I can do, but beyond this, I cannot. I don't have the experience, life knowledge, or emotions in me to carry it out (...) this sometimes lowered my self-confidence because I was not succeeding.***

3.4.2 Discerning valuable evaluation

Another step in processing feedback involves discerning valuable evaluation to determine which feedback should be retained for further consideration and which should be

disregarded. Participants *"accept it selectively"* (P07), incorporating only the parts they find useful. They are naturally *"interested in how it looks to people from the outside"* (P11) because they can never view their performance objectively. Therefore, they *"depend on the audience"* (P04) for perspective. To achieve a sense of objectivity, some participants strive to accept praise and criticism *"equally"* (P10).

> **P10: It doesn't matter to me whether it's a compliment or criticism. To me, it's an insight, and I'm grateful that the person came to me and told me. Because as a performer, that's the only normal thing we can do at the moment. So, I try to look at it equally, I try to get what I can out of it, and if it's unproductive and unclear to me, then I just dismiss it, I don't bother with it.**

Criticism does not significantly affect some participants; instead, it motivates them to *"hear and understand what the person meant"* (P12). They believe it is *"important to be open to receiving critiques"* because these are also *"suggestions"* (P05). The profession offers space for exploration, so receiving constructive criticism signals opportunities for improvement. Participants generally prefer detailed feedback over general comments. Detailed criticism indicates that someone has followed their work closely and therefore carries more significance, whereas general criticism is seen as simpler and *"less meaningful"* (P02).

> **P14: I'm looking for constructive criticism, but very few people know how to give constructive criticism, especially people who are not in the theatre. But okay, I'll use it, take something good out of it.**

Not only criticism but also praise should be viewed from an objective perspective to differentiate between genuine praise and mere courtesy. Praise should not be taken too seriously, as *"sometimes people can let words slip out of their mouths too easily"* (P11).

> **P09: Everyone says, oh wonderful, it's great. No one will come to the premiere and say, it's bad. I'm not saying it's hypocrisy, but it's a kind of courtesy where that's just how it has to be. But let's be clear, I've also been to many performances that weren't good, and in many situations, I've really shaken my colleagues' hands and sincerely said, okay, congratulations. And nothing more than that. Because I won't, of course, say at the premiere, listen, this is all wrong. You don't do that. I'd rather sit down with you for coffee the next day and say it.**

3.4.3 Person vs process feedback

Participants frequently emphasised that feedback on their creations is more important than comments on their personal characteristics.

> *P11: Something I have created holds more value to me than who I am. Whether I am smart or stupid doesn't really matter—I know who I am and what I am. Whether I am talented or not is just your opinion. But the work I have done, something I put effort into and dedicated a certain amount of time to, is tangible.*

However, criticism directed at their personal traits can be more hurtful than feedback on their work and may also be misread.

> *P06: So, if it's someone close to me, I would be more hurt if the criticism was directed at me personally. But if it's someone from the industry, someone who works in the field, I would be more hurt if they commented on the technical or acting aspect.*

Some participants highlighted the close connection between their personal and professional lives, noting that these spheres "go hand in hand" (P07). As a result, they often do not distinguish between criticism directed at them personally and criticism of their work, because, as one participant put it, "I am my work" (P13). However, personal criticism tends to have a more lasting impact, as they "carry themselves longer than one product" (P13).

3.4.4 Source-based evaluation

Participants also said they "try to separate the feedback based on who it comes from" (P01) and discern their intentions. As mentioned earlier, feedback from loved ones is often taken *"with a grain of salt."* In contrast, the most valuable professional feedback comes from those *"who see things that the regular audience doesn't"* (P06), e.g. comments from directors, actors, and industry professionals. They place a high value on the opinions of individuals they consider competent in the analytical aspects of performative work. Additionally, they find it both interesting and valuable to receive feedback from people who *"do not go to the theatre"* (P12).

> *P04: If someone who doesn't know me gives me praise, it means that the praise has greater strength. On the other hand, criticism from people close to me would hurt me a bit more than criticism from someone who looks at the situation objectively.*

3.5 Coping with feedback

The fifth theme addresses how actors cope with feedback, including their strategies for managing feedback, filtering opinions, their need for conversation and support, and how these

coping mechanisms evolve with personal growth and development. Within this theme, we identified four sub-themes (Figure 5).

Figure 6. Coping with feedback - main theme and sub-themes.
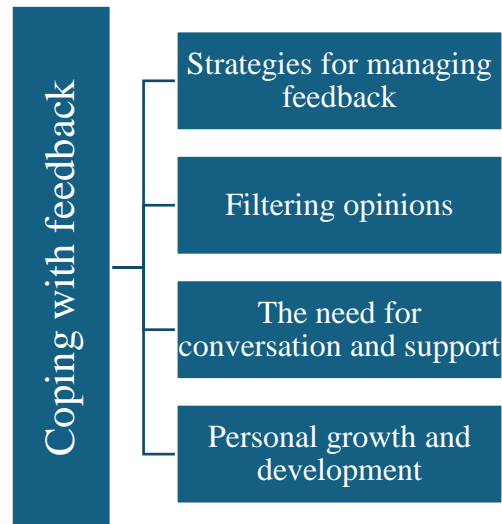
3.5.1 Strategies for managing feedback

Participants employ various strategies to cope with feedback. Some choose to express their emotions by crying, keeping a *"diary of emotions"* (P10), and discussing their feelings with close ones. Others *"try to rationalise both praise and criticism"* (P07) by analysing the reasons behind the feedback and then deciding whether to accept it. Some prepare in advance by mentally reviewing their performance, assessing their satisfaction, and contemplating how the feedback might impact their performance or self-perception. They often conclude with the thought, *"It is just one opinion after all"* (P13). Another strategy involves *"digesting"* feedback: taking it in, breaking it down, analysing its relevance to their own truth, and considering how they might *"apply it to make things better"* (P12).

P05: Maybe I am trying to prepare myself from the start that it shouldn't bother me, because this is a part of our job, from beginning to the end, and maybe I'm just trying to prepare myself for what will be in 5 years or 10 years, that now I kind of... master it. But it's also, like, not the easiest thing, and I also have times when things just get to me, but I'm trying to control it, like, from the start. (…) Like, if somebody is mean, they will be mean. And that's when I realized that I shouldn't care that much about opinions. I think that this is a process where you, as a person, need to learn that you can hear everybody's opinion, but you shouldn't take everyone's opinion the same way.

3.5.2 Filtering opinions

A common principle among participants is not to regard everyone's opinion equally; instead, they filter these opinions to determine their relevance and value. With *"so many people and so many tastes"* (P05) in the audience, everyone has their preferences and connects with performances uniquely. Actors may envision their performance in a way they hope the audience will understand, but this isn't always the case, as *"each viewer interprets it in their way"* (P09). While audience feedback is valuable, it is essential to differentiate between personal opinions and constructive criticism when considering their responses.

P10: Personal impressions that mean nothing to me. I'm interested in the universal human experience, not yours. So even if it annoyed you, I am satisfied. I carefully choose which criticisms to take to heart and filter them through my mind after I receive them. And see if they mean criticism to me or maybe a compliment to me. Sometimes criticisms turned out to be compliments.

3.5.3 The need for conversation and support

Given the specificity of their studies and the challenges of embracing their roles, participants often feel *"exhausted"* (P08) after rehearsals. They sometimes wish they could *"mentally 'shower' at the end of the day"* because they tend to internalize everything, which can *"come out the wrong way"* (P08). Performing emotionally demanding scenes requires them to "draw that out from somewhere," and this process can become *"quite overwhelming"* (P02). Additionally, the "tough love" approach they frequently encounter at the faculty, while not discouraging expression in group therapeutic exercises, often makes such sessions feel like *"a luxury"* due to the demanding pace (P07). One participant noted that many colleagues see a psychologist not because they have issues but *"to prevent issues from developing"* (P07). They believe individual therapy could be *"quite useful,"* (P02) as it offers a chance for personal discussion beyond the group exercises with a psychologist. However, sometimes these needs can *"slow down the work"* at the academy, with *"every third hour someone breaking down"* (P10).

P16: I think that educating professors would be good, in that sense both professors and assistants and professional associates, and something for the students as well, so they know how to react to these things, how not to take everything that happens to heart. And having someone in the building would be good. You get really close to these people and they are the ones who in some way, are your vents, but in a way, it gets to the point where they just become your vents or you just spend all day despairing, instead of having someone tell you something objective.

Furthermore, finding fulfillment outside acting school and having support that provides strength during difficult times is essential. Some participants find it crucial that their loved ones support their performances, while others prefer not to burden those who may attend out of obligation rather than genuine interest.

P09: Well, you see, I grew up in a family where family members never came to our performances. I have absolutely nothing against that. Usually, when I say this out loud, everyone gets surprised, like, excuse me? They understand, I do theatre, and that's all nice, but it doesn't attract them. I'm okay with that because I don't want anyone in the audience, if I invite someone, to be there if they don't want to be. So, I don't want my sister, brother, mom, or dad to feel some obligation, like, oh, now I have to go because he is my son, brother, cousin, or something.

3.5.4 Personal growth and development

Participants noted that their opinions and strategies for dealing with feedback have evolved. Experienced professionals no longer equate criticism with their identity as they did at the beginning of their studies. Instead, they now view it as *"a tool or a guideline on how to do something better"* (P14). They also emphasized the role of maturity in this process, noting that *"as you become more experienced in life, it's logical that you should be a better actor"* (P17) because you have a richer pool of experiences to draw from. Over the years, participants have developed greater confidence and now perceive the world with *"completely different eyes"* (P16). When they were younger and new to the Academy, it felt like they were behind a curtain, unable to see things clearly.

P03: Now, my guiding principle is that acting is understanding. It's not just raw talent; it's skill. You need to understand a lot of those life things to be able to convey them on stage. It's just a benefit if you go through certain situations and experiences in life because you can relate to them more easily. I think it somehow comes with maturity. Understanding relationships.

P09: Well, it strengthens you, that's for sure. The entire period at the Academy, not just as an actor, but also as a person. Every day at college, in one way or another, you push some of your personal boundaries. Every day, let's say, your clothes get a bit shorter. Every day you become more and more exposed. So it has also strengthened me, and P09, who was quiet, withdrawn, polite, and didn't want to make an impression, today is someone who literally doesn't give a damn about anything.

3.6 The significance of praise and criticism in life

The sixth theme pertains to the significance of praise and criticism in the daily lives of acting students and actors. It includes how feedback influences self-reassessment, motivation, and its interpretation as a sign of commitment or progress. Within this theme, we identified three sub-themes (Figure 7).

Figure 7. The significance of praise and criticism in life - main theme and sub-themes.
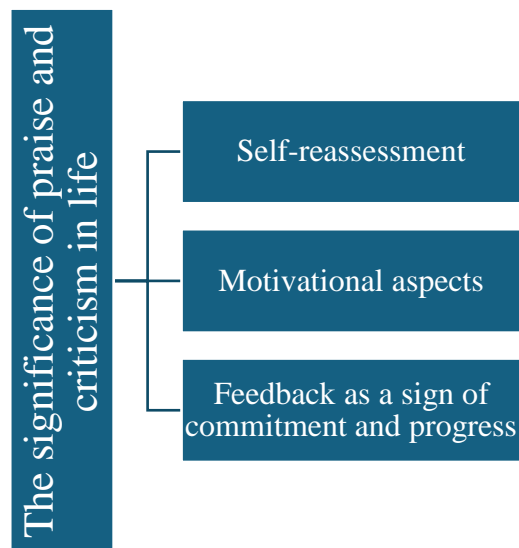
3.6.1 Self-reassessment

Regarding the balance between private and professional life, participants vary in how they handle feedback. For some, it has a significant impact, while for others, it barely affects them outside the faculty. The ego seems to be the area most influenced by feedback; however, participants appreciate that it neither elevates them excessively nor brings them down altogether. Those who struggle with feedback often have *"critical self-confidence"* (P07) and tend to scrutinize themselves harshly. Conversely, for some, feedback serves as a valuable tool for understanding their capabilities and determining how to progress.

P01: The most affected are actually my self-confidence, my perception of myself compared to how I was before, and my perception of myself in relation to my surroundings. It mostly affects me in a way that I question myself a lot, that I spend a significant amount of my private time on that, you know, actually on that self-reflection. Insecurity which sometimes results in me realising where I went wrong, and then I redirect myself to a better path, but sometimes, I don't know, it just stays empty and that's actually the worst for me.

P12: Well, it has never affected my self-confidence, but it has influenced some aspects of self-acceptance or realising my real capabilities or potential that I might have somewhere, but I need to work on it and figure out how. Criticism helps me with that. They don't affect, except my work ethic, which I am just trying to deepen, deepen, deepen.

3.6.2 Motivational aspects

Participants' sources of motivation varied widely, reflecting individual preferences. Some are motivated by praise, others by criticism, and some by both. The most crucial factor for motivation is that feedback is objective and provides clear guidance for improvement. Most participants have learned to handle feedback effectively, using even harsh criticism as a tool for growth, though it can still be painful at times. Conversely, those primarily motivated by criticism often struggle with praise; they may feel uncomfortable or perceive it as lacking in constructive value. These individuals see praise more as a source of *"comfort" and "peace"* (P06), providing reassurance during moments of self-doubt and reminding them to be gentler with themselves. Additionally, personality traits influence motivation: individuals with a stubborn nature may find criticism particularly invigorating, as it challenges them to prove themselves, while positive feedback can provide a boost but sometimes lead to complacency.

P07: Well, praise is a guideline on the path. It lets me know that I'm on the right path, but criticism would be like a hanging bridge that sways, which you have to cross. You have to cross it, but once you cross it, you'll continue on that good path you were on.

P13: Criticism motivates me more. But praise encourages me.

3.6.3 Feedback as a sign of commitment and progress

The way feedback is interpreted—whether as a sign of commitment or progress—affects how participants experience it. Some individuals may become complacent or "lulled" by praise, while others find it even more encouraging and motivating to persist. Similarly, while criticism may motivate some people to work harder out of spite, it can discourage others.

P14: I laughed because it often happened to me that when I was praised, I would, perhaps unconsciously, have a little less energy. And then they would know how to take advantage of that, and then teachers would justify it by saying, 'We don't praise you because you will work less hard.

P16: It definitely wouldn't lull me into complacency. Positive feedback is definitely something like, okay, I want such a result every time. I'm just exceptionally like that.

4   General discussion

The primary aim of this study was to explore and describe acting students' experiences with praise and criticism, examining how positive and negative feedback affects various aspects of their lives, including self-confidence, perceived ability, and coping strategies. The findings underscore that praise and criticism are rooted in the lives of actors, influencing them as they navigate their careers.

The study identified six main themes and twenty-six sub-themes within the collected data. The first two themes provide a contextual background for understanding the impact of feedback in acting. They begin with "Studying acting," which sets the stage for "Hardships in the acting world" and covers various challenges faced within the profession. These experiences are connected to "Sources of praise and criticism," which are integral to an actor's daily life. The themes then evolve through "Processing and reflecting on feedback" and "Coping with feedback," ultimately culminating in "The significance of praise and criticism in life." This final stage, informed by previous experiences, loops back to the initial theme, fostering progress, adaptation, and a deeper understanding of studying acting. This cyclical relationship among the main themes illustrates how feedback influences development and coping mechanisms throughout both academic and professional journeys.

The research emphasizes that the study of acting presents unconventional challenges compared to other academic disciplines. The academic challenges that acting students encounter often reflect broader issues within the acting profession. The stressful nature of acting entrance exams, coupled with initial unfamiliarity with the demands of the faculty, highlights the significant role of feedback in shaping students' experiences. Individual differences, especially in stress reactivity, significantly influenced how participants responded to criticism and other forms of negative social evaluation, reinforcing the findings of Servaas et al. (2013). Despite the initial stress, many students chose to reapply, demonstrating their resilience and commitment. Early education at the faculty emphasises developing a constructive relationship with feedback, teaching students to view criticism as a tool for growth rather than a personal attack. Participants' responses to praise have also been mixed—leading to improved performance in some, debilitated performance in others, or no effect at all—further supporting the findings cited in Skipper & Douglas (2012).

Family reactions to pursuing an acting career varied, with some expressing concern over its viability. Most participants emphasized the importance of family support. Reflecting on their childhoods, they experienced different parenting styles but noted that early support helped them

develop greater resilience. This aligns with the findings of Li et al. (2024), which suggest that children exhibit greater resilience when success-oriented responses outweigh failure-oriented ones. Despite concerns, participants remained committed to their decision, finding satisfaction in their careers and recognizing the need to manage their egos while balancing personal and professional lives. The challenges of maintaining this balance are evident, as actors often struggle to separate their professional identities from their personal lives. This overlap can disrupt their private lives and vice versa, making mental hygiene crucial for maintaining balance.

Actors encounter praise and criticism from various sources, including audiences, media, professors, colleagues, and personal networks. While audience reactions are vital to performance, our results showed they can be both encouraging and detrimental. Additionally, media influence can also be powerful, aligning with previous findings that people rely on critics to guide their choices and help them appreciate the vast array of works (Carroll, 2009). Professors also play a crucial role; some adopt a "tough love" approach, which can be either beneficial or harmful depending on the student's personality, sociocultural factors, and their ability to cope with feedback (as cited in Deutsch, 1961). As a result, even though professors' feedback is valuable, students often encounter more criticism than praise, which can lead to discomfort when receiving positive feedback. Colleagues frequently provide honest and supportive critiques, while family and friends offer more subjective but still supportive perspectives. Self-evaluation is also significant, with self-criticism sometimes overshadowing external praise. Moreover, participants emphasized that feedback has little impact if they do not personally agree with it. This supports the findings of Deutsch & Solomon (1959, as cited in Deutsch, 1961), which showed that an individual's reaction to performance evaluations is influenced by their self-assessment, and they tend to respond more favourably to feedback that aligns with their own evaluation.

Feedback processing varies among individuals. Some find criticism occasionally painful but ultimately beneficial, while others find praise more encouraging. Constructive feedback is crucial for growth, and actors often discern the sincerity and relevance of feedback based on its source. Personal feedback, while impactful, tends to be less influential than feedback directed at one's work. This aligns with the findings of Skipper et al. (2012), which showed that following a single failure, individuals who received personal praise exhibited fewer positive responses compared to those who received process praise. Furthermore, our research supports Neapolitan's (1988) finding that the type of praise influences how participants cognitively process it, which in turn affects their performance. A similar impact is observed with criticism.

Participants demonstrated various ways of coping with feedback, emphasizing the importance of filtering opinions and distinguishing between personal opinions and constructive criticism. They also expressed the need for conversation and support while processing feedback, acknowledging the value of psychological help, as well as the importance of educating both students and professors on the effective use of praise and criticism. The role of maturity was highlighted in this coping process, as participants with more experience and knowledge tended to have different perspectives on certain situations and methods of coping.

These reflections underscore the overall significance of praise and criticism in life. This importance is most evident in how participants reassess themselves, influencing their self-confidence and self-perception. Moreover, it plays a crucial role in shaping participants' sources of motivation, which varied widely—some were motivated by praise, others by criticism, and some by both.

The study's results mostly align with previous research, confirming that parental responses to performance can influence psychological functioning (Barger et al., 2022; Brummelman et al., 2017, as cited in Li et al., 2024) and potentially shape attitudes toward praise and criticism. The findings challenge the notion that praise is the most common form of feedback in academic settings (Hyland & Hyland, 2001) noting that some professors employ a 'tough love' approach. Additionally, the study supports the idea that feedback's effectiveness varies based on individual self-assessment (Deutsch & Solomon, 1959, as cited in Deutsch, 1961). The study also reinforces the importance of specific feedback over general feedback, partially coinciding with Neapolitan (1988), and highlights differing motivational responses to praise and criticism (Eskreis-Winkler & Fishbach, 2020).

This research offers new insights into the impact of feedback in the context of acting, bridging gaps in existing literature and suggesting avenues for further exploration. Despite the subjective nature of qualitative research and potential limitations such as researcher bias, the study provides valuable contributions to understanding feedback dynamics in the arts. Future research should aim to delve deeper into this topic, integrating the existing literature and moving beyond the descriptive level to uncover the underlying meanings.

5 Conclusion

In conclusion, although the effects of praise and criticism are broadly studied, their specific impact on actors and the broader arts community deserves further exploration. This study advances our understanding of feedback dynamics in the arts and opens new directions for theoretical and practical applications. It underscores the importance of targeted education

for both students and educators on the role and influence of feedback in the performing arts and the need to provide appropriate support.

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6 Abstract

Introduction and aim: Despite numerous studies on praise and criticism, there is a significant gap in research focused on these phenomena within the context of art, particularly in the lives of actors. Artists, including actors, often receive more praise and criticism than individuals in other professions. Therefore, the present study aims to explore acting students' experiences with praise and criticism. The purpose of the study is to understand the potential effects of positive and negative feedback on different aspects of acting students' lives, such as self-confidence, perceived ability, or coping strategies.

Methods: Seventeen in-person semi-structured interviews were conducted with current and former acting students in Split. The data were analysed using a general inductive approach, guided by codebook-based thematic analysis.

Results: Based on the interviews, six main themes and 26 subthemes were developed including (1) Academic challenges, (2) Hardships in the acting world, (3) Sources of praise and criticism, (4) Processing and reflecting on feedback. (5) Coping with feedback and (6) The significance of praise and criticism in life

Discussion: This research offers new insights into the impact of feedback in the context of acting, bridging gaps in existing literature. The study advances our understanding of feedback dynamics in the arts and opens new directions for theoretical and practical applications. It underscores the importance of targeted education for both students and educators on the role and influence of feedback in the performing arts, as well as the need to provide appropriate support. Future research should aim to delve deeper into this topic, moving beyond the descriptive level to explore the underlying meanings. It should also seek to integrate existing knowledge to develop theoretical models that address the unique challenges faced by artists.

7 Sažetak

Uvod i cilj: Unatoč brojnim istraživanjima o pohvalama i kritikama, postoji značajan nedostatak istraživanja usmjerenih na ove pojave u kontekstu umjetnosti, posebice u životima glumaca. Umjetnici, uključujući glumce, često primaju više pohvala i kritika nego osobe u drugim profesijama. Stoga, ovo istraživanje ima za cilj istražiti iskustva studenata glume s pohvalama i kritikama. Svrha istraživanja je razumjeti potencijalne učinke pozitivnih i negativnih povratnih informacija na različite aspekte života studenata glume, poput samopouzdanja, percipirane sposobnosti ili strategija suočavanja.

Metode: Provedeno je sedamnaest polu-strukturiranih intervjua uživo sa sadašnjim i bivšim studentima glume u Splitu. Podaci su analizirani koristeći opći induktivni pristup temeljen na tematskoj analizi prema kodnom priručniku.

Rezultati: Na temelju intervjua razvijeno je šest glavnih tema i 26 podtema, uključujući (1) Akademske izazove, (2) Teškoće u svijetu glume, (3) Izvore pohvala i kritika, (4) Procesiranje i razmišljanje o povratnim informacijama, (5) Suočavanje s povratnim informacijama i (6) Značaj pohvala i kritika u životu.

Rasprava: Ovo istraživanje pruža nove uvide u utjecaj povratnih informacija u kontekstu glume, premošćujući praznine u postojećoj literaturi. Unapređuje naše razumijevanje dinamike povratnih informacija u umjetnosti i otvara nove smjerove za teorijske i praktične primjene. Ističe važnost ciljanog obrazovanja kako za studente, tako i za edukatore o ulozi i utjecaju povratnih informacija u izvedbenim umjetnostima, kao i potrebu za pružanjem odgovarajuće podrške. Buduća istraživanja trebala bi dublje istražiti ovu temu, prelazeći deskriptivnu razinu kako bi se istražila temeljna značenja. Također bi trebala težiti integraciji postojećih znanja kako bi se razvili teorijski modeli koji razrađuju jedinstvene izazove s kojima se suočavaju umjetnici.

APPENDIX 1

Table 3. Topic guide

A key area of investigation	Topics	Questions
Introductory information:	● Personal and professional background ● Decision to study acting at the Art Academy in Split	● Please tell me something about yourself. ● How did you decide to study acting in Split? Was it your first choice, and what influenced your decision? ● Could you describe your experience with the college entrance exam? Did you pass on your first attempt, or did you have to take it multiple times?
Experiences related to praise and criticism in personal and academic life:	● Praise and criticism in close relationships ● Feedback from professors ● Coping strategies	● How do your parents, friends, and close acquaintances express praise and criticism in general and towards your acting, and how do you respond to it? ● What is your experience with receiving feedback from your professors, and how do you feel about it? ● How do you perceive praise, as something positive, or as the other person has a low evaluation of your ability? Similarly, how do you interpret criticism, as negative or as the person perceives your ability as high? ● What motivates you more: praise or criticism? Has anyone's praise ever motivated you to pursue your goal or criticism to prove them wrong? Could you give me an example? ● What coping mechanisms do you use to handle praise and criticism in your personal and academic life?
Experiences regarding public appearances:	● Exams ● Audience – ovation and criticism ● Public appearances	● What do your exams look like? How do you and your colleagues discuss exam results and performance? ● How do you evaluate your performance, as an individual or as part of a group? ● How do you feel about public appearances? Do you worry about receiving negative feedback?

		● How does your audience respond to your performances? – In what ways do they provide praise or constructive feedback? ● How do you evaluate that feedback? What are your thoughts and feelings when someone praises or criticises your performance? ● How do you feel when receiving praise or criticism from close friends or colleagues compared to opponents or random individuals outside your social circle? Has it ever positively or negatively influenced your performance, perceived ability, or confidence? ● When you are receiving praise/critique, how do you differentiate between your real self and the character you are portraying? Can you give me an example? ● What type of feedback do you prefer: detailed or general? Are your preferences different for praise versus criticism? ● Do you prefer receiving personal praise/criticism or feedback directed at your work? Does praise or criticism impact you differently depending on whether it is addressed to you personally or to your work? ● How do you interpret feedback? Do you see it as a sign of commitment or progress? For instance, if your teacher praises you, does it motivate you or make you put in less effort next time? Similarly, if you receive negative feedback, does it discourage you or motivate you to put in more effort next time?
Conclusion of the interview:	● Conclusion of the experience ● Final feelings about the topic	● Do you feel like praise and criticism significantly impact your life? If so, which parts are most affected and how? Please offer some examples. ● Do you have any closing remarks or something you would like to add?

APPENDIX 2

Table 4: Consolidated criteria for reporting qualitative studies (COREQ): 32-item checklist

No	Item	The section in the document
Domain 1: Research team and reflexivity		
Personal Characteristics		
1	Interviewer/facilitator	Theoretical and methodological framework
2	Credentials	Title page
3	Occupation	N/A
4	Gender	Researcher reflexivity
5	Experience and training	N/A
Relationship with participants		
6	Relationship established	Researcher reflexivity
7	Participant knowledge of the interviewer	Researcher reflexivity
8	Interviewer characteristics	Researcher reflexivity
Domain 2: Study design		
Theoretical framework		
9	Methodological orientation and Theory	Theoretical and methodological framework
Participant selection		
10	Sampling	Study sample and recruitment
11	Method of approach	Procedure and data collection
12	Sample size	Study sample and recruitment
13	Non-participation	N/A
Setting		
14	Setting of data collection	Procedure and data collection
15	Presence of non-participants	N/A
16	Description of sample	Study sample and recruitment
Data collection		
17	Interview guide	Procedure and data collection
18	Repeat interviews	N/A
19	Audio/visual recording	Procedure and data collection
20	Field notes	Procedure and data collection

21	Duration	Procedure and data collection
22	Data saturation	Data analysis
23	Transcripts returned	N/A
Domain 3: analysis and findings		
Data analysis		
24	Number of data coders	N/A
25	Description of the coding tree	N/A
26	Derivation of themes	Data analysis
27	Software	Data analysis
28	Participant checking	N/A
Reporting		
29	Quotations presented	Results and discussion
30	Data and findings consistent	General discussion and conclusion
31	Clarity of major themes	Results and discussion
32	Clarity of minor themes	Results and discussion

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_____

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