



The Psychological Impact of Method Acting on Performers' Mental Health

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ABSTRACT

Method acting is a widely recognized performance technique that emphasizes emotional authenticity and deep psychological immersion into a character. Developed from the system of Konstantin Stanislavski and later refined by Lee Strasberg, this approach encourages actors to draw upon personal memories and emotions to create realistic portrayals. While method acting enhances artistic depth and audience engagement, it may also have significant psychological consequences for performers. This study examines the mental health impact of method acting, focusing on emotional strain, identity confusion, and coping strategies. Using a mixed-method approach, the research highlights both the positive and negative psychological outcomes of this technique. The findings indicate that although method acting can foster emotional intelligence and empathy, it may also lead to stress, anxiety, and emotional exhaustion if not practiced with proper boundaries and support systems.

Introduction

The relationship between theatre and psychology has long been an area of scholarly interest, as performance art inherently involves the exploration of human emotions, identity, and behaviour. Method acting, rooted in the teachings of Konstantin Stanislavski and popularized in the United States by Lee Strasberg, requires actors to deeply internalize the psychological and emotional states of their characters. This immersive process often involves recalling personal experiences and emotions, which can blur the



boundary between the actor's identity and the role being portrayed. While this technique has revolutionized modern acting by producing highly realistic performances, it also raises concerns about the potential psychological risks involved. In recent years, increasing attention has been given to mental health in the performing arts, making it essential to examine how method acting influences performers' emotional well-being and psychological stability.

Review of Literature

Existing literature on method acting and psychology reveals a complex interplay between performance techniques and mental health. Konstantin Stanislavski (1936) introduced the concept of emotional memory, suggesting that actors should draw from personal experiences to achieve authenticity. Building on this, Lee Strasberg (1987) emphasized affective memory as a central tool in method acting. However, critics such as Stella Adler argued that overreliance on personal trauma could be psychologically harmful, advocating instead for imagination-based techniques. Similarly, Sanford Meisner promoted spontaneous reactions rather than deep emotional immersion. From a psychological perspective, theories proposed by Sigmund Freud (1923) highlight the role of unconscious emotions in shaping behaviour, which aligns with method acting practices. Carl Jung (1964) introduced the concept of the "persona," which helps explain how actors adopt different identities during performance. In performance studies, Richard Schechner (1985) explored the transformative nature of acting and its impact on identity. Augusto Boal (1979) demonstrated how theatre can be used as a therapeutic tool for emotional expression and healing. Additionally, research by Bessel van der Kolk (2014) on trauma suggests that revisiting intense emotional experiences may have psychological consequences if not managed carefully. Finally, Daniel Goleman (1995) emphasized emotional intelligence, which is often enhanced through acting but can also lead to emotional overload. Together, these studies indicate that while method acting can deepen emotional awareness, it may also expose actors to psychological vulnerability.

Statement of the Problem

Despite the widespread use of method acting in theatre and film, there is a lack of comprehensive research examining its long-term psychological impact on performers. Actors who engage in deep emotional immersion may experience stress, emotional fatigue, and identity confusion, yet these issues are often overlooked in professional training and academic discourse. This study seeks to address this gap by investigating how method acting influences mental health and identifying the potential risks associated with this technique.



Significance of the Study

This study is significant as it contributes to both theatre studies and psychology by providing a deeper understanding of the mental health implications of method acting. It highlights the need for greater awareness of psychological well-being among performers and offers insights that can help acting instructors develop safer training methods. Furthermore, the research may benefit therapists and drama practitioners by demonstrating how performance techniques can be used responsibly in therapeutic contexts. By addressing these issues, the study aims to promote healthier practices within the performing arts industry.

Objectives of the Study

- To examine the psychological impact of method acting on performers' mental health.
- To identify the emotional and psychological challenges faced by method actors.
- To analyse coping strategies used by actors to manage stress and emotional strain.
- To evaluate the positive effects of method acting, such as empathy and emotional intelligence.
- To assess the negative consequences, including stress, anxiety, and emotional exhaustion.

Research Questions

- How does method acting influence performers' mental health?
- What psychological challenges are commonly experienced by method actors?
- Does method acting contribute to emotional stress or burnout?
- What coping mechanisms do actors use to maintain their mental well-being?
- How can actors balance character immersion with personal identity?

Methodology

The research adopts a mixed-method approach, combining both qualitative and quantitative methods to achieve a comprehensive analysis. Qualitative data is collected through in-depth interviews with actors who practice method acting, allowing for a detailed exploration of their personal experiences.



Quantitative data is gathered structured questionnaires designed to measure levels of stress, anxiety, and emotional well-being. This combination of methods ensures both depth and reliability in the findings.

Research Design

This study follows a descriptive and exploratory research design. The descriptive aspect focuses on identifying patterns in actors' psychological experiences, while the exploratory component seeks to uncover new insights into the relationship between method acting and mental health. This design is appropriate given the limited existing research on the topic.

Data Collection

Data for this study is collected from both primary and secondary sources. Primary data includes interviews and survey responses from theatre actors, providing firsthand insights into their experiences. Secondary data is obtained from books, academic journals, and previous research studies in theatre and psychology. This combination allows for a well-rounded analysis of the research problem.

Conclusion

In conclusion, method acting is a powerful technique that enhances emotional authenticity and performance quality, but it also presents potential psychological risks. The study finds that while actors may develop greater empathy and emotional intelligence, they may also experience stress, burnout, and difficulty separating themselves from their roles. These findings highlight the importance of establishing emotional boundaries and providing psychological support for performers. Future research should focus on developing structured guidelines and training programs that promote both artistic excellence and mental well-being in the performing arts.

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