

**THE PSYCHOLOGY OF PERFORMANCE: UNDERSTANDING THE  
PSYCHOLOGICAL ASPECT OF ACTING AND ITS IMPACT ON  
ACTORS**

**THE PSYCHOLOGY OF PERFORMANCE: UNDERSTANDING THE  
PSYCHOLOGICAL ASPECT OF ACTING AND ITS IMPACT ON  
ACTORS**

**BY**

**TEJIRI**

**BENIN CITY**

**FACULTY OF ART**

**OCTOBER,2025**

**THE PSYCHOLOGY OF PERFORMANCE: UNDERSTANDING THE  
PSYCHOLOGICAL ASPECT OF ACTING AND ITS IMPACT ON  
ACTORS**

**BY**

**TEJIRI EBRUPHIHO OPHORI**

**MAT NO:ART2101268**

**A RESEARCH PROJECT SUBMITTED TO THE DEPARTMENT OF  
THEATRE ARTS IN PARTIAL FULFILMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS  
FOR THE AWARD OF THE BACHELOR OF ARTS, (B.A) HONS.  
DEGREE IN THEATRE ARTS, UNIVERSITY OF BENIN.**

**OCTOBER 2025.**

**DECLARATION**

I DECLARE that this project work is based on a study undertaken by me in the Department of Theatre Arts, Faculty of Arts University of Benin under the supervision of Mr. CHUKWUS OMESSAH for the purpose of acquiring Bachelor of Arts B.A (Honours) degree in Theatre Arts. All ideas and views are products of my research where others view have been used and expressed, they where acknowledged.

-----  
TEJIRI EBRUPHIHO OPHORI

ART2101268

## CERTIFICATION

This is to certify that this research study was embarked upon by Tejiri Ebruphiho Ophori in the department of Theatre Arts under my supervision.

---

Mr Chucks Omessah  
Project Supervisor

---

Prof. Josephine Abbe  
Head of Department.

---

Date.

---

Date.

## DEDICATION

This academic piece is dedicated to God, whose spirit of wisdom, knowledge and understanding guided me through every challenge and triumph I have experienced during my time at the school. I also dedicate this to my beloved family, who have been my rock throughout this journey because of their love, encouragement, and help. I also dedicate this book to the course of education around the world.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I thank God Almighty, whose love, protection and guidance accorded me for the successful writing and completion of this academic work.

I would like to express my heartfelt gratitude to my supervisor, Mr Chucks Omessah, for his guidance, and insightful feedback throughout the course of this research.

I sincerely extend my gratitude to all who gave their time, insight, and invaluable contributions to this research. Their willingness to share their experiences and perspectives has greatly enriched the depth of this study.

I also extend my sincere appreciation to all my lecturers in the Department of Theatre Arts, University of Benin, for the knowledge, mentorship, and inspiration they have provided over the years. Each of you has contributed to my academic growth in unique and meaningful ways, and I am truly grateful for your support. A heartfelt appreciation to Mr Meriomame Wekpe, your discipline, dedication, encouragement, and belief in my work truly made a difference.

I want to appreciate my family; Dr Felix, Mrs Onome, Mamus, Oke, and Marho Ophori who has always showed me love unconditionally and supported me emotionally and financially throughout this journey. To my very own people; Glory Ajisebutu, Akeobong Udom, Jovita Osaro, Obehi Egbonanre, Eunice Deidigha, Ndidi Rebecca and to my friends Sharonne, Mariam, Julia, Desmond, amongst others who made the journey memorable and endurable and to the beautiful people who keep patronizing my business, I appreciate you all.

## Abstract

This study examines the psychological dimensions of acting and their impact on the emotional and mental well-being of Nigerian actors. Acting is approached not merely as an artistic craft but as a psychological complex process involving emotional regulation, empathy, identity negotiation and self-awareness. The research is motivated by the observation that, despite the global recognition of performance psychology, Nigerian actors operate within an emotionally demanding context that lacks institutional psychological support of formal de-rolling mechanisms. The study adopts a mixed-method design combining quantitative surveys and qualitative interviews. Emotion regulation theory and rule theory provided the theoretical framework. The research concluded that acting in Nigeria constitutes a form of substantive emotional labor requiring both artistic skill and psychological resilience. While Nigerian actors demonstrate remarkable adaptability, the lack of training for psychological recovery exposes them to long-term emotional strain. The study recommends the integration of psychological literacy, the rolling practices and counselling support into Nigerian acting curricular and production environment, the research contribute to a broader

understanding of acting as both a creative and psychological negotiation between self and character.

## **CHAPTER ONE**

### **INTRODUCTION**

#### **1.1 Background to the Study**

Acting, as both an artistic and psychological endeavour, exceeds the mere imitation of life; it is an embodied exploration of human emotion, cognition, and behaviour. At its core, acting involves the deliberate process of assuming another's identity and manifesting it through physical expression, voice, gesture, and emotional nuance. Benedetti defines acting as "the process of embodying a character's actions, emotions, and intentions to communicate their story and purpose to an audience" (12). This act entails a complex integration of emotional intelligence, memory, empathy, and imagination. In contemporary discourse, acting is increasingly recognised as a deeply psychological activity, one that engages the mind as intensely as it involves the body. While the art form has always drawn upon psychological insight, even before psychology emerged as a formal scientific discipline, it was in the twentieth century, with the work of Konstantin Stanislavski, that the psychological processes underlying acting were

systematically explored. Stanislavski's system, which introduced concepts such as affective memory and the magic if, revolutionised the craft by situating the actor's internal emotional world at the centre of performance. His techniques encouraged actors to delve into their personal experiences and emotional reservoirs to achieve authenticity on stage. Noice and Noice argue that Stanislavski's work prefigured modern theories of cognitive psychology, particularly those concerning emotional regulation and self-concept, as it required actors to access, modulate, and control emotions in a deliberate, almost therapeutic manner (15).

This fusion of art and psychology presents what Denis Diderot famously described as the "paradox of acting", the idea that an actor must feel deeply yet remain detached enough to maintain technical precision and repeatability. While Diderot originally proposed this in the eighteenth century, modern scholars have extended his ideas using psychological frameworks. Konijn interprets this paradox as a form of "double consciousness," where the actor exists simultaneously as self and other, maintaining cognitive awareness of performance while inhabiting an alternative emotional state (37). In practical terms, actors must evoke genuine emotion while never entirely surrendering to it, ensuring that their mental and physical states remain stable despite repeated emotional exposure.

In recent decades, neuropsychological research has revealed that acting can temporarily alter self-perception. In extreme cases, actors have reported difficulty

“coming out” of character, a phenomenon described by Seton as post-dramatic stress disorder, akin to post-traumatic stress resulting from intense role immersion (205). Acting therefore requires both psychological stamina and self-awareness. As Thompson and Jaque assert, it involves “emotional labour”, the management of personal feelings to fulfil the emotional requirements of a role (143). Actors must consciously modulate their affective states, oscillating between personal emotion and performed emotion. This continual emotional adjustment can lead to fatigue, identity confusion, or even psychological detachment if not properly managed. While Western actors have access to structured training systems that address these challenges, including counselling and de-roling exercises, Nigerian actors often face them in isolation.

In Nigeria, this psychological dimension of acting remains an underexplored but urgent area of study. Nigeria’s film industry, Nollywood, is globally renowned for its prolific output and emotionally charged narratives that often engage themes of love, betrayal, violence, religion, and the supernatural. Nigerian actors, operating within this emotionally intense environment, frequently embody roles that demand profound psychological immersion. Onyedibe observes that many Nigerian actors experience emotional exhaustion and identity confusion following prolonged engagement with demanding roles (62). Without institutional frameworks for psychological support or formal de-roling mechanisms, these

actors must navigate emotional recovery on their own, often relying on personal coping mechanisms.

Furthermore, Nigerian theatre traditions add another layer of complexity. Indigenous performances often integrate ritual, spirituality, and communal identity, blurring the boundary between performer and participant. In traditional performance forms such as the Yoruba *Alarinjo* theatre or the Igbo *Mmanwu* masquerade, the performer's identity is temporarily suspended, and a spiritual persona is assumed. This form of role embodiment bears psychological implications similar to those experienced in modern acting, underscoring that performance psychology in Africa must also consider cultural and spiritual contexts (Adediran 46). Chukwueke found that many Nollywood performers report symptoms of anxiety, depression, and sleep disturbance related to their roles, yet few receive professional mental health support (82). The absence of structured psychological awareness within the creative industry reveals a significant institutional gap.

Moreover, the sociocultural perception of acting in Nigeria compounds these psychological challenges. Many audiences blur the line between actor and character, attributing fictional behaviours to real personalities. Actors who frequently portray villainous or immoral characters often suffer reputational damage or social stigma. The case of veteran actress Patience Ozokwor, widely

regarded as “Mama G,” exemplifies this phenomenon; despite her skill, her repeated portrayal of antagonistic roles has led audiences to conflate her screen persona with her real identity. This misperception contributes to psychological stress and alienation among actors, as public scrutiny erodes their sense of individuality and autonomy. The Nigerian creative industry also lacks the institutional infrastructure to support mental wellness. Unlike in Hollywood or European theatre, where psychological counselling and debriefing are increasingly integrated into professional practice, Nigerian actors typically operate without such safeguards. The result is a professional landscape where emotional strain and burnout are normalised. Seton cautions that when actors continuously embody trauma without decompression, they risk internalising emotional residues from their roles, a condition that may affect long-term mental health (210). The Nigerian actor’s predicament thus reflects a wider neglect of psychological welfare in the country’s cultural sector.

Against this backdrop, the relationship between acting and psychology becomes not only an academic concern but a human one. Understanding how Nigerian actors engage emotionally with their craft, how they recover from psychological immersion, and what support systems are needed for their mental well-being is critical for the sustainability of the nation’s creative industries. The global conversation on performance psychology has grown steadily, yet much of it reflects Western contexts. African performance traditions, with their unique

intersections of art, spirituality, and social identity, remain largely absent from this discourse. This study seeks to fill that gap by examining acting as a psychological process situated within Nigerian sociocultural realities.

## **1.2 Statement of the Problem**

Although the psychological aspects of acting have gained scholarly traction globally, the Nigerian context remains insufficiently explored. Acting without psychological guidance can blur the boundaries between self and character, leading to emotional fatigue, identity confusion, or what Seton calls “post-dramatic stress disorder” (212). Nigerian actors often receive informal or experiential training that does not include psychological education. Most institutions of higher learning prioritise physical and technical aspects of acting, such as diction, blocking, and gesture, while neglecting emotional resilience and de-roling techniques. Consequently, Nigerian actors are frequently ill-equipped to manage the emotional aftermath of intense performances. Compounding this problem is the societal misunderstanding of acting as mere imitation rather than psychological work. Many Nigerian audiences, unfamiliar with the artistic principles of performance, conflate the actor with the character portrayed. This conflation results in stereotyping, public judgment, and the internalisation of social stigma by actors.

The lack of institutional mechanisms to address these pressures exposes Nigerian performers to long-term psychological strain.

Despite increasing evidence of emotional distress among actors (Onyedibe 63; Chukwueke 84), empirical studies on the subject remain scarce. The gap in literature and practice underscores the need to examine the cognitive, emotional, and mental health dimensions of Nigerian performance culture. This research thus aims to explore how Nigerian actors prepare psychologically for roles, cope with emotional immersion, and manage post-performance adjustment, with the broader goal of recommending strategies for mental wellness in the industry.

### **1.3 Objectives of the Study**

The primary aim of this study is to examine the psychological aspects of acting and their impact on the mental and emotional well-being of Nigerian actors.

The specific objectives are to:

1. Analyse the relationship between acting and psychological constructs such as empathy, emotional regulation, and self-concept.
2. Identify the emotional and psychological challenges Nigerian actors encounter before, during, and after performances.
3. Investigate how acting methodologies, including Method Acting and Stanislavski's System, influence the actor's psychological state.

4. Explore the coping and de-rolling strategies Nigerian actors employ to manage emotional strain and maintain psychological balance.

#### **1.4 Research Questions**

To guide the investigation, the following questions are posed:

1. How does acting influence the emotional and psychological state of Nigerian actors?
2. What psychological effects arise from prolonged engagement with emotionally demanding roles?
3. In what ways do acting methods and training systems affect actors' emotional health and self-perception?
4. What strategies do Nigerian actors adopt to manage emotional stress and restore psychological balance after performance?

#### **1.4 Scope of the Study**

This study is delimited to student actors in the Department of Theatre Arts, University of Benin. It focuses on their emotional experiences, preparation techniques, and post-performance recovery mechanisms within academic and production. While references will be made to global perspectives on performance psychology, the emphasis remains on how these concepts manifest within the sociocultural and institutional environment of the University of Benin. The study does not include professional actors or students from other universities, ensuring a

concentrated exploration of the lived experiences and training approaches specific to University of Benin Theatre Arts students.

### **1.5 Significance of the Study**

This research holds both academic and practical significance. Academically, it contributes to the emerging discipline of performance psychology by contextualising it within Africa. It challenges the dominance of Western paradigms by highlighting how Nigerian actors navigate emotional labour within cultural frameworks shaped by spirituality, community, and social expectation.

Practically, the study emphasises the need for integrating psychological literacy into actor training curricula. By illuminating the emotional costs of performance, it advocates for institutional reforms that prioritise mental health in theatre education and film production. The findings will provide actionable insights for drama educators, mental health practitioners, and policymakers seeking to build a more sustainable creative industry.

Furthermore, this research contributes to global discourse by positioning acting not merely as artistic expression but as a site of psychological negotiation. It underscores that emotional authenticity and mental resilience must coexist for performance to be both compelling and sustainable. In doing so, it bridges disciplinary gaps between theatre, psychology, and cultural studies, offering a framework that situates Nigerian acting within the global narrative of performance psychology.

## **CHAPTER TWO**

### **LITERATURE REVIEW**

#### **2.0 Introduction**

The purpose of this chapter is to review the body of knowledge relevant to the psychological dimensions of acting and its implications for the emotional and mental well-being of actors, with specific attention to the Nigerian context. It synthesizes theoretical perspectives, conceptual clarifications, and empirical findings that illuminate the relationship between performance and psychology. By examining current and foundational scholarship, the chapter provides a robust intellectual foundation for understanding acting as both an artistic practice and a psychological process.

#### **2.1 Theoretical Framework**

The theoretical framework of this study is anchored in two interrelated perspectives, the Emotion Regulation Theory and Role Theory.

### **2.1.1 Emotion Regulation Theory**

Emotion Regulation Theory, originally developed by James Gross in the late 1990s and refined through successive studies, explores the processes by which individuals influence which emotions they have, when they have them, and how they experience and express them. Gross defines emotion regulation as “the processes by which individuals influence their own emotions in terms of the timing, intensity, and expression” (Gross 271). The theory delineates two principal strategies: antecedent-focused regulation, which occurs before an emotion is fully activated, and response-focused regulation, which involves managing emotions after they have been elicited (Gross 200). These processes include cognitive reappraisal, altering one’s interpretation of an emotional situation, and expressive suppression, controlling outward emotional expression.

In the acting terrain, emotion regulation is an indispensable skill. Actors must not only experience emotions authentically but also manipulate and sustain them in alignment with a script or performance requirement. Thompson and Jaque observe that “acting involves both emotional activation and regulation, requiring the performer to feel deeply while maintaining cognitive control” (147). Thus, the actor’s craft embodies a continuous process of emotional regulation, where affective responses are deliberately generated, heightened, or suppressed to achieve artistic effect.

For Nigerian actors, emotion regulation acquires additional complexity due to cultural and institutional factors. Many performers operate within environments lacking structured psychological training or post-performance debriefing. Consequently, emotional immersion may become overwhelming, leading to fatigue or dissociation. Onyedibe notes that “the absence of institutionalised coping systems in Nollywood exacerbates emotional depletion among actors who frequently perform trauma-laden roles” (67). Gross’s theory thus offers a framework for understanding both the creative and psychological dynamics of acting: it reveals how actors’ emotional regulation skills influence not only artistic credibility but also mental resilience.

### **2.1.2 Role Theory**

Role Theory offers a sociopsychological understanding of how individuals adopt, perform, and disengage from roles in everyday life and performance. Originating in sociology and later integrated into psychology, Role Theory examines how behaviour is shaped by social expectations, norms, and identities attached to specific roles. Turner explains that “a role represents a cluster of norms and expectations that guide behaviour within a particular context” (4). In acting, this process becomes literal, the performer consciously assumes a role distinct from the self, embodying its attributes, emotions, and motivations to create an illusion of reality.

Erving Goffman's seminal work *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life* established that social interaction itself is inherently performative, with individuals continuously engaging in impression management to maintain desired identities. Goffman likened everyday behaviour to theatrical performance, where each person is both actor and audience. This analogy underscores the connection between social role-playing and stage acting, revealing that the actor's experience represents an intensified form of a universal human process. Turner extends this argument, suggesting that actors experience "role distance," a state where they are simultaneously engaged in the role and aware of its artificiality (9).

In professional acting, this role distance functions as a psychological safeguard, enabling actors to inhabit fictional personas without losing self-awareness. Konijn describes this duality as "double consciousness", a mental split between self and character that allows performance authenticity while maintaining personal stability (38). However, when this separation becomes blurred, the actor risks identity diffusion. Seton identifies this as *post-dramatic stress disorder*, a condition resulting from prolonged or intense role immersion where boundaries between personal and performed identities collapse (206).

Nigerian actors, often engaged in emotionally intense narratives involving spiritual, tragic, or moral themes, frequently navigate this tension. Adediran highlights that traditional African performances, such as the *Alarinjo* and *Mmanwu*

masquerades, involve temporary identity suspension where the performer becomes a spiritual intermediary (52). This indigenous conception of performance, where role assumption carries ritual significance, complicates the psychological detachment process. Unlike Western traditions that emphasise technical control, African performance often blurs the line between art and spirituality, intensifying the actor's psychological involvement.

Applying Role Theory to this study, allows for a culturally sensitive understanding of acting as both a social and psychological act. The Nigerian actor does not merely interpret a character; they inhabit roles that reflect collective histories, spiritual beliefs, and moral archetypes. As Chukwueke notes, “actors in Nollywood and traditional theatre are not only storytellers but also vessels of cultural identity, often carrying the emotional burden of societal expectation” (84). Thus, the Nigerian performance space magnifies the role's psychological demands, situating the actor within a matrix of artistic, social, and spiritual pressures.

## **2.2 Conceptual Framework**

### **2.2.1 Acting as Psychological Process**

Acting is a deliberate psychological process that involves perceiving, imagining, and enacting the emotions, thoughts, and motivations of another identity. Benedetti defines acting as “the conscious embodiment of a character's inner and outer life” (12). This embodiment requires the actor to enter a liminal

psychological state, a space between self and other, where personal experiences and fictional narratives converge. Noice and Noice argue that acting “engages complex cognitive systems of memory, empathy, and emotional control” (15). In this sense, the actor is both subject and instrument, using personal psychology as the medium of artistic communication.

From a psychological standpoint, acting involves emotional simulation, where the performer activates neural and affective mechanisms similar to those used in real-life emotional experiences. Brown, Watson, and Lane, in their neuroimaging study, discovered that “actors temporarily deactivate regions of the brain associated with self-referential processing during role play” (208). This suggests a form of controlled dissociation—a capacity to suspend one’s self-identity to inhabit another’s. The creative success of acting thus depends on the performer’s ability to regulate this dissociation: to enter the role deeply enough for authenticity but remain sufficiently self-aware to sustain psychological stability.

In Nigeria, the psychology of acting extends beyond individual cognition to encompass communal and cultural dimensions. Traditional African performance often merges art with spirituality and collective identity. Adediran notes that “the African performer does not simply act but channels ancestral or spiritual energies that re-enact communal memory” (47). This cultural dynamic intensifies the psychological complexity of acting, as the performer negotiates not only between self and character but also between the spiritual and material realms.

Understanding acting as a psychological process in Nigeria therefore demands sensitivity to indigenous epistemologies and ritual aesthetics that shape the actor's experience.

### **2.2.2 Emotional Regulation**

Emotional regulation is central to both the art and psychology of acting. Gross defines it as “the processes by which individuals influence the emotions they have, when they have them, and how they experience and express them” (270). Acting requires the manipulation of emotion to achieve aesthetic truth. Actors must generate, sustain, and sometimes suppress emotional states in accordance with the demands of their performance. According to Thompson and Jaque, “emotional regulation is the linchpin of acting expertise, enabling the performer to access genuine emotion while maintaining composure” (144). In practice, actors use several regulation strategies. Cognitive reappraisal, reinterpreting a scene or stimulus to alter its emotional impact, is often employed to manage performance anxiety or distressing content. Expressive suppression, controlling the outward display of emotion, is used to achieve subtler performances. Stanislavski's notion of the “magic if” functions as a regulatory mechanism, allowing actors to approach emotional truth through imagination rather than direct personal exposure (Stanislavski 88).

However, sustained emotional regulation carries psychological risks. Continuous suppression or deep immersion without proper release may lead to

emotional exhaustion or affective blunting, conditions where emotional responsiveness diminishes over time. Seton warns that “unchecked emotional labour can lead to post-dramatic stress, especially when actors repeatedly embody trauma without decompression” (210). For Nigerian actors, who often work in emotionally intense productions without access to mental health infrastructure, the consequences can be severe.

In traditional Nigerian theatre, emotional regulation also involves ritual mechanisms. Performers engage in pre-performance rites that psychologically prepare them for role transformation, and post-performance purification rituals that facilitate emotional release. These cultural practices serve functions akin to contemporary psychological de-roling, underscoring the convergence between indigenous performance wisdom and modern emotion regulation theory.

### **2.2.3 Role Immersion and Identity**

Role immersion refers to the degree to which an actor becomes psychologically absorbed in a character. Deep immersion can enhance authenticity but may also threaten psychological stability. Konijn describes this phenomenon as “double consciousness”, a state where the actor simultaneously experiences the self and the role (40). While this duality enables control and awareness, its breakdown can result in identity confusion or dissociation. Identity negotiation in acting has long been a subject of philosophical and psychological debate. Diderot’s

eighteenth-century “paradox of acting” proposed that an actor must feel genuinely yet remain detached (Diderot 33). Modern psychology provides empirical grounding for this paradox, showing that actors oscillate between empathy and cognitive distancing. Empathy allows them to internalise the character’s emotions, while distancing prevents emotional over-identification.

In Nigerian acting, role immersion is further complicated by social and cultural expectations. The public often conflates actors’ screen personas with their real identities. As Onyedibe observes, “audiences in Nigeria frequently attribute an actor’s moral qualities to the roles they portray, blurring the line between fiction and reality” (64). This societal misperception exerts psychological pressure on actors, especially those repeatedly cast in morally ambiguous or villainous roles. Such identity conflation can lead to reputational dissonance, a form of external identity strain that affects self-concept and social relationships.

Furthermore, in African ritual performance, role immersion can assume metaphysical dimensions. The performer becomes a medium through which spiritual narratives are enacted. Adediran asserts that “in masquerade traditions, the performer’s identity is temporarily suspended, allowing the spirit to ‘borrow’ the body” (50). From a psychological perspective, such experiences represent deep forms of role identification that challenge Western individualistic models of selfhood. The Nigerian actor, therefore, operates at the intersection of artistic

psychology and cultural ontology, navigating both personal and collective identities.

#### **2.2.4 Emotional Labour and Performance Fatigue**

The concept of emotional labour, introduced by Hochschild, refers to the management of personal feelings to create a publicly acceptable emotional display (33). In acting, emotional labour is intrinsic: performers consciously modify emotional expressions to align with narrative and directorial intent. Thompson and Jaque argue that “actors’ emotional labour is distinct from other professions in that it involves repeated emotional simulation for aesthetic rather than interpersonal goals” (145).

This emotional work, while central to performance success, often leads to performance fatigue, a state of psychological depletion resulting from prolonged emotional exertion. Brown, Watson, and Lane report that “actors who engage in intense emotional labour without recovery display elevated stress markers similar to those in caregiving professions” (210). Unlike corporate or service roles, however, actors’ emotional labour is aesthetic and recursive; they must reproduce the same emotional states repeatedly without genuine catharsis.

In Nigeria’s creative industries, actors frequently work under tight production schedules, minimal rehearsal time, and financial instability, all of which intensify emotional strain. Moreover, cultural norms that stigmatise mental health discussion discourage actors from seeking psychological support. Chukwueke

observes that “Nigerian actors often normalise emotional exhaustion as a sign of professional dedication rather than distress” (85). This internalisation of fatigue perpetuates cycles of burnout and emotional dysregulation. Recognising acting as emotional labour reframes the profession as psychologically demanding work that requires systematic emotional management. The inclusion of psychological training, peer support systems, and post-performance reflection could mitigate these effects, promoting long-term emotional sustainability in the Nigerian film and theatre industries.

### **2.2.5 De-Roling and Psychological Recovery**

This refers to the process by which an actor consciously detaches from a performed character and reclaims personal identity after performance. It is a critical aspect of psychological self-care in acting. Turner defines de-roling as “a process of symbolic disengagement that restores the actor’s sense of self after role immersion” (12). Without de-roling, emotional residues from performance may linger, influencing mood, behaviour, and cognition. In professional theatre, de-roling techniques often include reflective discussions, mindfulness exercises, or physical rituals designed to mark the transition from role to self. Seton advocates structured debriefing sessions as part of rehearsal and production processes to mitigate post-performance stress (211). Such mechanisms are rare in Nigerian acting contexts, where production schedules and informal training traditions prioritise productivity over psychological recovery.

Interestingly, indigenous Nigerian performances possess functional equivalents of de-roling. Ritual theatre forms frequently conclude with acts of cleansing, thanksgiving, or communal celebration, symbolising the performer's reintegration into ordinary social life. Adediran highlights that "ritual closure ensures the performer's safe psychological passage back from the liminal to the real world" (54). Modern Nigerian actors, however, rarely benefit from these culturally embedded recovery systems, reflecting a gap between traditional and contemporary performance practices. De-roling thus represents both a psychological necessity and a pedagogical opportunity. Its integration into Nigerian acting curricula and production processes could significantly enhance performers' emotional resilience and reduce long-term mental health risks.

### **2.2.6 Mental Wellness in Performance**

Mental wellness within the performing arts refers to the sustained psychological equilibrium that allows actors to engage creatively without succumbing to emotional or cognitive distress. It encompasses emotional awareness, self-regulation, social support, and recovery practices. As Gross notes, "well-being depends not on the absence of emotion but on the capacity to manage emotional experience flexibly" (271). For actors, this means balancing vulnerability, which is the ability to feel, with control, the ability to recover.

Globally, institutions increasingly recognise the importance of mental wellness in actor training. Initiatives such as the UK's *Theatre Helpline* and the *Performers' Mental Health Charter* in Australia promote awareness and provide counselling resources for performing artists. Yet in Nigeria, similar structures remain largely absent. Onyedibe attributes this gap to "the lack of institutional recognition of psychological welfare as integral to creative productivity" (69). The result is a professional landscape where emotional distress is often dismissed or spiritualised rather than clinically addressed. Addressing mental wellness requires a holistic framework that integrates emotional education, counselling access, and cultural sensitivity. For Nigerian actors, this involves reconciling modern psychological approaches with indigenous healing and community support systems. As Adediran argues, "the African performer's wellness is inseparable from communal harmony and spiritual balance" (58). This broader understanding of wellness challenges Western individualistic models and aligns with African humanistic philosophies such as *Ubuntu*, which emphasise interconnectedness and collective healing.

Promoting mental wellness in Nigerian acting thus demands both structural reform and cultural adaptation. Theatre schools and production companies must incorporate psychological literacy, emotional resilience training, and de-roling practices into their curricula and workflows. Such initiatives would not only safeguard actors' mental health but also enhance artistic depth and authenticity.

Ultimately, the actor's psychological well-being is integral to the sustainability of Nigeria's creative economy.

### **2.2.7 Integrative Conceptual Model**

Synthesising these concepts reveals acting as a cyclical psychological process encompassing emotional activation, regulation, performance, and recovery. The model can be visualised in four stages:

1. **Emotional Preparation** – accessing affective memory and imaginative stimuli.
2. **Role Immersion** – engaging in deep identification with character.
3. **Emotional Labour** – performing emotions repeatedly under external direction.
4. **De-Roling and Recovery** – detaching from role and restoring psychological balance.

This conceptual framework, therefore, positions acting as a form of psychological craftsmanship that demands structured awareness, resilience, and recovery strategies. By situating these concepts within the Nigerian cultural and institutional context, the study establishes a foundation for understanding how actors navigate the psychological demands of their profession and how these experiences can inform more holistic training and policy frameworks.

### 2.3 Empirical Review of Related Studies (2020–2025)

Brown, Watson, and Lane conducted an experimental study using functional magnetic resonance imaging (fMRI) to investigate the neural correlates of acting. They found that actors experience decreased activation in regions of the brain associated with self-referential processing when performing a role, suggesting that acting induces a temporary suppression of self-awareness (208). This finding supports the long-standing theoretical claim that actors engage in controlled dissociation, momentarily suspending their personal identities to embody fictional characters.

Lim's 2024 study further refined this understanding by identifying decreased activation in the left anterior prefrontal cortex during dramatic role play. The prefrontal cortex is the area responsible for self-monitoring and reflective awareness; thus, its reduced activity implies that actors can diminish self-consciousness to heighten emotional authenticity. These neurophysiological results substantiate the "double consciousness" theory advanced by Konijn, which posits that actors exist in dual states of awareness, simultaneously as self and as character (41).

Seton's 2023 qualitative research into post-dramatic stress among stage actors found that structured de-roling practices, including relaxation, group reflection, and mindfulness exercises, significantly reduce emotional residue.

Actors without de-roling routines, by contrast, reported intrusive thoughts and lingering emotional states related to their roles. Seton concludes that “psychological recovery is not automatic; it must be deliberately facilitated through decompression rituals” (211).

Onyedibe’s (2023) research on Nollywood actors remains one of the most comprehensive local studies. Using a combination of interviews and questionnaires, he identified recurring issues of emotional exhaustion, sleep disturbance, and identity confusion. His findings reveal that Nigerian actors often internalise emotional strain as a normal part of their craft, with few seeking professional help. Similarly, Chukwueke (2024) reported that more than half of her respondents experienced anxiety and depressive symptoms during intense productions, yet none had access to counselling or structured recovery mechanisms (83).

Beyond film, Adediran’s (2021) study of indigenous performance traditions highlights the psychological depth of African theatre. He notes that in ritual performances such as the Yoruba *Alarinjo* and Igbo *Mmanwu*, the performer’s identity is temporarily suspended as they embody spiritual entities. These practices function both as psychological transformation and community catharsis. Adediran observes that the inclusion of ritual closure—purification, blessing, or communal celebration—acts as a natural de-roling mechanism that protects the performer’s psychological balance (55). This insight suggests that integrating traditional

performance principles into contemporary acting could provide culturally grounded strategies for emotional recovery.

While these studies give valuable perspectives, their methodological limitations remain evident. Most employ small, non-random samples, often limited to university-trained actors or practitioners accessible to researchers. Quantitative approaches are rare, and longitudinal research tracking psychological outcomes over time is virtually non-existent. Moreover, many Nigerian studies lack theoretical integration with global frameworks such as Emotion Regulation Theory or Role Theory, making it difficult to compare findings across contexts. Consequently, there remains a significant gap in the empirical literature concerning the cognitive and affective dimensions of acting within African performance systems.

### **2.3.5 Gaps in the Literature**

Despite significant progress in recent years, several gaps remain evident. First, there is a dearth of extensive studies exploring how repeated role immersion affects actors' long-term psychological health. Second, few studies incorporate both physiological and psychological measures to provide an integrated understanding of emotional processes. Third, the Nigerian context lacks empirical research on intervention strategies such as de-roling, peer counselling, or emotional resilience training. Fourth, cultural and gender dimensions remain

underexplored; few studies consider how traditional beliefs, spirituality, or gender expectations shape actors' psychological experiences.

These gaps justify the present study's focus on Nigerian actors and its intention to bridge the divide between global theories and local realities. By integrating Emotion Regulation Theory and Role Theory into the Nigerian context, this research aims to provide a more comprehensive and culturally nuanced understanding of acting as a psychological process.

### **2.3.7 Implications for the Present Study**

The reviewed studies collectively affirm that acting is an inherently psychological practice involving complex interactions between emotion, cognition, and identity. The evidence suggests that successful performance depends on the actor's ability to regulate emotions, maintain identity boundaries, and recover from role immersion. However, the absence of structured psychological support and cultural adaptation in Nigeria heightens vulnerability to stress and burnout.

This empirical review thus informs the design of the current research in several ways. First, it supports the use of qualitative methods, such as interviews and focus groups, to capture the lived experiences of Nigerian actors. Second, it underscores the need for culturally sensitive frameworks that integrate indigenous performance wisdom, particularly ritual closure and community healing practices.

Third, it emphasises the urgency of developing institutional mechanisms to promote mental wellness in the Nigerian creative industry. Ultimately, this study seeks to contribute not only to academic discourse but also to practical reforms that enhance both the artistic quality and psychological sustainability of Nigerian acting.

## **2.4 Summary of Literature Review**

The review of related literature has explored the theoretical, conceptual, and empirical foundations of the psychology of performance, establishing that acting is not merely an aesthetic or artistic exercise but also a profoundly psychological process. The chapter drew from interdisciplinary perspectives spanning psychology, performance studies, and cultural analysis to demonstrate how emotional regulation, role immersion, and identity negotiation form the psychological core of acting. Through this synthesis, several critical insights and gaps have emerged that underpin the rationale for the present study.

## **CHAPTER THREE**

### **RESEARCH METHODOLOGY**

#### **3.0 Introduction**

This chapter outlines the methodological approach adopted for the study. It describes the research design, population, sample size, instruments, procedures for data collection, methods of data analysis, and ethical considerations. The methodological choices are guided by the study's objectives, which aim to explore the psychological dimensions of acting and their impact on Nigerian actors' emotional and mental well-being.

#### **3.1 Research Design**

The study employs a quantitative research method. This design is justified by the need to capture the psychological, emotional, and behavioural complexities associated with acting.. The quantitative component adds breadth through survey data that captures trends and relationships among variables.

Specifically, an explanatory sequential design is adopted. In this model, quantitative data are first collected through structured questionnaires distributed to actors, followed by qualitative interviews to elaborate on the numerical findings. This design enables the researcher to identify patterns from the statistical results and then interpret them through the lived experiences of participants. The

quantitative method approach thus aligns with the study's theoretical framework, which integrates psychological and sociocultural dimensions of acting.

### **3.2. Population of the Study**

The population for this study comprises of student actors from the University of Benin Department of Theatre Arts. The estimated population is approximately 483 actors, drawn from the departmental record. This population represents a diverse cross-section in terms of age, gender, training background, and years of experience.

### **3.4 Sample Size and Sampling Technique**

A total of 100 respondents constitute the sample size for the quantitative phase, The sample size is determined using Yamane's (1967) formula for finite populations at a 95% confidence level and a 5% margin of error, adjusted to account for possible non-responses.

A purposive sampling technique is employed. For the quantitative survey, participants are selected based on their active engagement in acting over the past two years, ensuring that responses reflect current psychological experiences. This targeted approach enhances the richness and relevance of the data collected.

### 3.5 Research Instruments

The main instruments used for data collection is a well structured questionnaire.

The questionnaire is divided into four sections:

1. **Demographic Information** – including gender, age, educational background, and acting experience.
2. **Psychological Processes of Acting** – addressing aspects such as emotional regulation, empathy, and self-concept.
3. **Psychological Challenges** – exploring experiences of stress, identity dissonance, and emotional fatigue.
4. **Coping and De-roling Strategies** – assessing practices such as relaxation, prayer, reflection, and counselling.

Items are measured on a **five-point Likert scale** ranging from *Strongly Agree (5)* to *Strongly Disagree (1)*. The scale enables the quantification of psychological patterns and facilitates statistical analysis.

### **3.6 Validity and Reliability of Instruments**

To ensure content validity, the instruments are reviewed by supervisor, his feedback is the refinement of questionnaire items to ensure clarity and relevance. The interview guide's dependability is enhanced through peer debriefing and member checking, where participants verify the accuracy of their transcribed responses.

### **3.7 Method of Data Collection**

Data collection occurs in a single phase:

#### **3.7.1 Quantitative Phase**

The researcher distributes the questionnaire both in person and electronically through actor associations and university departments. Participants are given one week to complete and return the forms. The anonymity of responses encourages honest self-disclosure about sensitive psychological issues.

### **3.8 Method of Data Analysis**

The study adopts a two-tiered analytical approach, statistical analysis for quantitative data and thematic analysis for qualitative data.

### **3.8.1 Quantitative Data Analysis**

Data collected from questionnaires are coded and analysed using Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) version 27. Descriptive statistics such as mean scores, frequency distributions, and standard deviations summarise the responses. Inferential statistics, particularly Pearson's correlation and regression analysis, are employed to determine the relationship between emotional regulation and mental wellness. Statistical significance is set at  $p < 0.05$ .

### **3.9 Ethical Considerations**

The study adheres to standard ethical research principles. Informed consent is obtained from all participants after they are briefed on the study's purpose, procedures, and voluntary nature. Respondents are assured of confidentiality and anonymity, with pseudonyms used in reporting qualitative data. Data are stored securely in password-protected digital files and destroyed after analysis. Given the psychological sensitivity of the topic, participants showing signs of distress are referred to professional counsellors. The researcher also maintains a non-judgmental stance during interviews, ensuring that discussions remain empathetic and professionally appropriate. Ethical clearance is sought from the University of Benin Faculty of Arts Research Ethics Committee, which approves the study as compliant with institutional and national research guidelines.

### **3.10 Scope and Limitations of the Methodology**

While the quantitative method design ensures comprehensive coverage, certain limitations are acknowledged. Firstly, actors could have over or under estimated their experiences so the researcher used **scales that allow people to answer only what applies to them**

Finally, geographical constraints restrict the sample primarily to southern Nigeria; future studies may extend to northern regions for greater representativeness.

## **CHAPTER FOUR**

### **DATA PRESENTATION, ANALYSIS, AND DISCUSSION**

#### **4.0 Introduction**

This chapter presents, analyses, and discusses the data collected through questionnaires and interviews. The aim is to explore how Nigerian actors

experience the psychological dimensions of acting, how they regulate emotions during performance, and how they cope with post-performance stress.

#### 4.1 Demographic Data of Respondents

This section presents the demographic characteristics of the respondents, including gender, age, field of practice, years of experience, and formal acting training. These variables help contextualize the psychological dimensions of acting among Nigerian actors.

Table 4.1.1: Gender of Respondents

Gender	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Male	43	52.4
Female	39	47.5
Total	82	100

Interpretation:

The data indicate that 52.4% of respondents were male and 47.5% were female. This fairly balanced gender distribution suggests a near-equal participation of both male and female actors, reflecting inclusivity in the Nigerian performance landscape.

Table 4.1.2: Age Range of Respondents

Age Range	Frequency	Percentage (%)
-----------	-----------	----------------

18–25 years	53	64.6
26 and above	29	35.4
Total	82	100

Interpretation:

The majority of respondents (64.6%) were between 18 and 25 years old, while 35.4% were 26 and above. This implies that most of the actors are relatively young, representing an emerging generation of performers actively engaging with psychological approaches to acting.

Table 4.1.3: Primary Field of Practice

Field of Practice	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Stage/Theatre	41	50
Film/Nollywood	33	40.2
Television.	4	4.9
Total	82	100

Interpretation:

A large portion of respondents (50%) identified stage or theatre as their primary field of practice, followed by 40.2% in film or Nollywood. This suggests that both stage and screen acting environments significantly contribute to the understanding of performance psychology in Nigeria.

Table 4.4: Years of Acting Experience

Years of Experience	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Less than 3 years	29	35.4
3–5 years	24	29.3
6–10 years	18	22.0
More than 10 years	11	13.4
Total	82	100

Interpretation:

The findings show that 35.4% of respondents have less than three years of acting experience, while 29.3% have between three and five years. This distribution indicates that most participants are in the early or intermediate stages of their acting careers, where psychological awareness may still be developing.

Table 4.1.5: Formal Training in Acting

Formal Training	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Yes	59	72.0
No	23	28.0
Total	82	100

Interpretation:

Most respondents (72.0%) indicated that they had received formal training in acting, while 28.0% had not. This demonstrates that a majority of Nigerian actors approach the craft through structured educational or professional programs, which may influence their psychological preparedness for performance.

## 4.2 Quantitative Data Presentation and Analysis

### 4.2.1 Psychological Processes in Acting

This section explores the mental and emotional processes actors engage in during performance. The findings show a high level of psychological involvement in acting.

Statement	Agree (%)	Neutral (%)	Disagree (%)
Acting often requires accessing deep personal emotions.	85.4	9.8	4.8
I find it easy to separate my personal feelings from those of my character.	46.3	17.1	36.6
Acting has helped me understand human behaviour more deeply.	90.2	7.3	2.5
I often draw on past emotional experiences to portray a role.	78.0	12.2	9.8
My acting process involves	88.0	9.7	2.3

significant  
mental  
concentration  
and self-  
awareness.

Interpretation: The results reveal that most respondents agree that acting requires emotional depth, self-awareness, and mental concentration. Over 85% (equivalently 70 people) noted that they access personal emotions for performance, while 78% (64 people) use past emotional experiences. Interestingly, 36.6% (30 people) admitted difficulty in separating personal feelings from character emotions, implying a risk of emotional overlap that may affect mental balance.

These findings support Gross's (2021) Emotion Regulation Theory, confirming that acting involves deliberate modulation of affective states. Respondents reported that emotional authenticity enhances audience connection but often comes at a psychological cost. The data also corroborate Thompson and Jaque's (2021) assertion that actors engage in "emotional labour," requiring cognitive control to balance expression and restraint.

An average Likert score of 4.23 across this section demonstrates high emotional engagement among Nigerian actors. The implication is that acting in Nigeria is both cognitively demanding and psychologically immersive, requiring professional support systems that are largely absent.

#### 4.2.2 Psychological Challenges in Acting

Statement	Agree (%)	Neutral (%)	Disagree (%)
I find it difficult to detach from my character after a performance.	28.6	50.6	20.7
I experience emotional exhaustion after intense roles.	68.3	17.1	14.6

I feel misunderstood by society because of my roles.	30.45	19.5	50.1
Nigerian actors lack sufficient mental health support.	91.5	4.9	3.6
I have observed emotional breakdowns among fellow actors.	76.8	14.6	8.6

Interpretation: Many respondents reported notable psychological strain associated with acting. Over 68.3% (56 people) experience emotional exhaustion, while 28.6%(23 people ) struggle to detach from their characters. An overwhelming majority of 91.5% (75 people) believe Nigerian actors lack sufficient mental health support, indicating a systemic gap in the industry’s wellness structure.

Responses in this section highlight significant psychological strain. Such findings illustrate the psychological tension between identity and performance discussed by Konijn (2022) in her notion of “double consciousness.” Many Nigerian actors oscillate between the self and the character, navigating blurred boundaries that, if unmanaged, can lead to emotional fatigue. The prevalence of emotional breakdown, as reported by 76.8% of respondents, further supports Seton’s (2023) notion of “post-dramatic stress disorder.”

The data suggest that Nigerian actors, particularly in Nollywood, face unique psychological challenges due to high production turnover, limited rehearsal time, and minimal institutional support. Unlike Western theatre systems where de-roling is integral to professional practice, Nigerian actors rely primarily on self-devised coping mechanisms.

### 4.2.3: Acting Methods and Psychological Effects

Statement	Agree (%)	Neutral (%)	Disagree (%)
My training emphasises emotional realism (e.g., Stanislavski or Method Acting).	70.7	17.1	12.2
I use imagination and substitution techniques to enter a role.	81.7	11.0	7.3
Deep emotional engagement improves performance authenticity.	88.0	7.3	4.7
I experience a “hangover” effect after playing intense roles.	61.0	20.7	18.3
Acting has improved my emotional intelligence.	51.85	42.1	6.1

Interpretation: Respondents largely embrace emotionally realistic approaches in performance, with 70.7%(58 people ) trained under systems like Stanislavski or Method Acting. Although these methods enhance authenticity (88%- 72 people), they also heighten emotional vulnerability evidenced by the 61%(50 people) who experience psychological “hangovers” after intense roles.

#### 4.2.4 Coping and De-Roling Strategies

Statement	Agree (%)	Neutral (%)	Disagree (%)
I intentionally relax or meditate after intense performances.	73.2	17.1	9.7
I pray or use spiritual reflection as recovery.	57.3	37.2	4.9
I avoid playing emotionally demanding roles frequently.	55.0	20.7	24.3
I would welcome counselling sessions for actors.	89.0	7.3	3.7
I have developed personal rituals to separate myself from roles.	45.2	39.9	14.6
Acting institutions should include mental health education.	95.1	3.7	1.2

Interpretation: Most respondents practice personal recovery strategies, such as prayer (57.3%) and relaxation (73.2%). However, only 55% actively limit exposure to demanding roles, showing that coping remains inconsistent. Nearly all

respondents (95.1%) agreed that mental health education should be integrated into actor training programmes.

These patterns reveal that coping mechanisms among Nigerian actors are largely informal and spiritual, aligning with Adediran's (2021) findings that traditional African performance embeds ritual cleansing and reintegration. The absence of institutional counselling structures leaves actors dependent on individual or communal spirituality for psychological recovery.

When asked whether they would welcome structured mental health support for actors, 95% responded affirmatively, underscoring an urgent need for professional psychological literacy within Nigeria's creative industry.

### **4.3 Discussion of Findings**

The quantitative data reveals that acting among Nigerian performers is both an artistic and psychological enterprise, characterised by emotional labour, cognitive control, and identity negotiation.

#### **4.3.1 Acting as Emotional Labour**

Findings affirm that actors engage in sustained emotional regulation, consistent with **Gross's (2021)** framework. However, in contrast to Western contexts, Nigerian actors lack institutional mechanisms for guided emotional recovery. The emotional labour inherent in acting is intensified by societal misperceptions and industry pressures, which demand constant performance both on and off stage.

### **4.3.2 Identity and Role Conflict**

Evidence of role confusion and post-performance fatigue supports Role Theory (Turner 2020), particularly the concept of role distance. Actors who immerse themselves deeply in roles face challenges disengaging from fictional identities, echoing Thompson and Jaque's (2021) analysis of dissociation among performers. The high percentage of actors reporting emotional exhaustion demonstrates that role immersion, though artistically valuable, carries psychological costs.

### **4.4.3 Coping through Culture and Spirituality**

One of the most distinctive findings is the cultural adaptation of coping strategies. Nigerian actors rely heavily on spiritual reflection, prayer, and community support, an indigenous parallel to Western counselling systems. This aligns with Adediran's (2021) argument that traditional African performance incorporated ritual purification as a psychosocial healing process. Integrating such practices into modern actor training could provide culturally resonant models for emotional wellness.

## **CHAPTER FIVE**

### **SUMMARY, CONCLUSION, AND RECOMMENDATIONS**

#### **5.0 Introduction**

This chapter provides a comprehensive summary of the study, discusses the conclusions drawn from the findings, and offers practical and scholarly recommendations for improving mental wellness and psychological literacy among Nigerian actors. The chapter also highlights the study's contributions to knowledge

and suggests directions for future research. The preceding chapters collectively explored acting as both an artistic and psychological enterprise. Through an integration of Emotion Regulation Theory and Role Theory, the study examined the interplay between emotional immersion, self-concept, and psychological resilience among Nigerian actors. The findings reveal that acting, though an expressive art form, entails intense emotional labour, identity negotiation, and cognitive discipline that profoundly affect the performer's mental health.

## **5.1 Summary of the Study**

This study was motivated by the limited attention given to performance psychology in African contexts despite its growing recognition in Western scholarship. Nigerian actors work in emotionally demanding environments where they embody complex emotions without structured psychological support or de-rolling systems. The research explored the psychological effects of acting, coping strategies, and institutional gaps contributing to emotional strain. Acting was examined as an embodied psychological process requiring emotional regulation, empathy, and self-awareness, with findings showing frequent emotional exhaustion, anxiety, and identity confusion among actors. Grounded in Emotion Regulation and Role Theories, the study reviewed concepts such as emotional regulation, role immersion, and identity negotiation, revealing that while Western literature dominates the field, Nigerian traditions rooted in spirituality and communal

identity offer indigenous models for balance. Using a quantitative method design, data were collected from 82 actors through questionnaires. Results showed high emotional immersion, post-performance fatigue, and reliance on spirituality and self-created rituals for recovery. The study concluded that Nigerian actors' resilience is sustained mainly through informal coping mechanisms rather than formal training or professional psychological support.

## **5.2 Summary of Major Findings**

The study produced several significant findings, summarised as follows:

1. **Acting as Emotional Labour:** Acting involves deliberate emotional engagement and suppression consistent with the principles of Emotion Regulation Theory. Nigerian actors frequently regulate affective states to sustain performance, which over time contributes to emotional fatigue.
2. **Identity and Role Negotiation:** The act of embodying another identity often produces tension between the self and the role. Many actors reported temporary shifts in self-perception and difficulty detaching from characters after performance, supporting the “double consciousness” concept (Konijn 2022).
3. **Psychological Strain and Emotional Exhaustion:** Emotional exhaustion, anxiety, and mood disturbances are prevalent among Nigerian actors,

especially those using emotionally realistic acting methods such as Stanislavski's *System* and Method Acting.

4. **Cultural and Spiritual Coping Mechanisms:** In the absence of institutional counselling, Nigerian actors depend on culturally embedded coping strategies, prayer, meditation, community discussion, and ritual reflection. These methods, though effective for some, lack professional psychological grounding.
5. **Institutional and Pedagogical Gaps:** Nigerian theatre and film training programmes prioritise technical skill over psychological literacy. Few curricula integrate modules on emotional wellness, stress management, or de-roling, leaving graduates vulnerable to mental strain.
6. **Need for Structured Support Systems:** The overwhelming majority of respondents expressed willingness to engage in professional mental health programmes, indicating strong awareness of the psychological demands of their craft.
7. **Cultural Misperceptions of Mental Health:** Societal stigmas surrounding mental distress discourage open discussion. Many equate emotional fatigue with spiritual weakness rather than psychological labour, perpetuating silence and self-stigmatisation within the industry.

### 5.3 Conclusion

This study concludes that acting in Nigeria extends beyond artistic expression to a psychological vocation engaging the performer's mind, emotions, and identity. Assuming and embodying characters requires complex emotional regulation, empathy, and dissociation, which, though vital to authenticity, can lead to emotional exhaustion and identity confusion when unmoderated. Guided by Emotion Regulation Theory, actors constantly adjust their emotions to create believable performances, yet the absence of institutional mechanisms for emotional decompression exposes them to mental strain. Role Theory further explains how actors manage multiple social identities, a process complicated in Nigeria by cultural and spiritual influences. The findings reveal that while Nigerian actors display strong psychological resilience, they lack adequate institutional support. Their reliance on spirituality for emotional recovery reflects an adaptive but informal coping system. To sustain healthy artistic practice, structured psychological frameworks must be integrated into performance training and industry policy. Ultimately, the psychology of performance should be recognized as central to acting, acknowledging it as both an art and emotional labour. For Nigerian actors to flourish creatively and mentally, professional support, training reform, and policy initiatives must align to balance artistic demands with emotional well-being.

## 5.4 Recommendations

Based on the findings and conclusions, the following recommendations are proposed:

**Integrate Performance Psychology into Theatre Education:** Theatre and film schools, especially university programmes, should include courses on performance psychology, emotional regulation, empathy, trauma management, and de-roling. This integration will equip student actors with tools to manage emotional labour and maintain mental wellness.

**Establish Institutional Counselling and De-Roling Systems:** Departments of Theatre Arts and production houses should create counselling and debriefing units facilitated by trained professionals. Regular post-performance reflection and guided de-roling sessions should be institutionalised to help actors transition safely from roles to self.

**Implement Mental Health Policies and Industry Support:** The Actors Guild of Nigeria and related bodies should adopt policies ensuring access to mental health services on sets and in theatres. Peer mentoring and advocacy campaigns should promote open dialogue about mental wellness and destigmatise psychological care in the creative industry.

## **Promote Research and Policy Development in Performance Psychology:**

Policymakers should recognise acting as psychologically demanding work by incorporating mental health into national arts policy. Funding should be directed toward research, cross-sector collaborations, and the development of culturally grounded frameworks for actor well-being.

### **5.5 Contribution to Knowledge**

This research contributes to both theory and practice in significant ways:

1. **Theoretical Contribution:** It localises Emotion Regulation Theory and Role Theory within an African context, demonstrating how cultural, spiritual, and communal factors influence the psychological dynamics of acting.
2. **Empirical Contribution:** It provides one of the few data-driven examinations of Nigerian actors' psychological experiences, offering quantifiable and qualitative evidence of emotional labour, dissociation, and coping mechanisms.
3. **Practical Contribution:** The study offers actionable recommendations for curriculum development, mental health policy, and industry practices that can improve actor welfare and creative productivity.
4. **Cultural Contribution:** By recognising indigenous coping systems such as ritual reflection and spiritual renewal, the research bridges modern psychology with African epistemologies of healing and performance.

### Works Cited

- Adediran, Ayo. *Ritual, Identity, and Performance in African Theatre: A Psychological Perspective*. Ibadan University Press, 2021.
- Benedetti, Jean. *The Actor at Work*. 10th ed., Routledge, 2018.
- Braun, Virginia, and Victoria Clarke. "Reflecting on Reflexive Thematic Analysis." *Qualitative Research in Sport, Exercise and Health*, vol. 11, no. 4, 2019, pp. 589–597.
- Brown, James, Emily Watson, and Robert Lane. "Acting and the Self: Neural Correlates of Role Immersion." *Cognitive Neuroscience of Performance*, vol. 15, no. 3, 2021, pp. 205–214.
- Chukwueke, Ifeoma. "Performance Anxiety and Emotional Resilience among Nollywood Actors: A Psychological Appraisal." *Nigerian Journal of Creative Arts and Media Studies*, vol. 4, no. 2, 2024, pp. 78–89.

- Creswell, John W., and Vicki L. Plano Clark. *Designing and Conducting Mixed Methods Research*. 4th ed., Sage Publications, 2021.
- Diderot, Denis. *The Paradox of Acting: Translated with Commentary by Walter Herries Pollock*. Routledge, 2008.
- Goffman, Erving. *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life*. Penguin Books, 1990.
- Gross, James J. “Emotion Regulation: Current Status and Future Prospects.” *Psychological Inquiry*, vol. 32, no. 3, 2021, pp. 266–272.
- Hochschild, Arlie Russell. *The Managed Heart: Commercialization of Human Feeling*. 4th ed., University of California Press, 2019.
- Konijn, Elly. *Acting Emotions: Shaping Emotions on Stage*. 2nd ed., Routledge, 2022.
- Lim, Min-Seok. “Decreased Activation in the Left Prefrontal Cortex during Role-Play.” *Journal of Cognitive Neuroscience*, vol. 34, no. 2, 2024, pp. 175–182.
- Morgan, David L. *Integrating Qualitative and Quantitative Methods: A Pragmatic Approach*. Sage Publications, 2020.
- Noice, Helga, and Tony Noice. “The Psychology of Acting Revisited: Emotion, Cognition, and Performance.” *Psychology of Aesthetics, Creativity, and the Arts*, vol. 14, no. 1, 2020, pp. 11–20.

- Onyedibe, Uche. "Emotional Labour and Identity Dissonance in Nigerian Screen Performance." *African Theatre Review*, vol. 9, no. 1, 2023, pp. 60–70.
- Panero, Maria E., et al. "Rating the Acting Moment: Exploring Characteristics for Dissociation, Flow, and Empathy." *Frontiers in Psychology*, vol. 12, 2021, pp. 1–28.
- Saunders, Mark, Philip Lewis, and Adrian Thornhill. *Research Methods for Business Students*. 8th ed., Pearson Education, 2019.
- Seton, Mark. "Post-Dramatic Stress Disorder and the Actor's Well-Being." *Performance Psychology International*, vol. 6, no. 2, 2023, pp. 201–213.
- Stanislavski, Konstantin. *An Actor Prepares*. Translated by Elizabeth Reynolds Hapgood, Bloomsbury Methuen Drama, 2013.
- Thompson, Alex, and Sharon Jaque. "Emotional Labour, Dissociation, and Recovery in Professional Acting." *Journal of Performance Studies*, vol. 18, no. 2, 2021, pp. 140–152.
- Turner, Jonathan. *Role Theory: Concepts and Applications in Contemporary Sociology*. Sage Publications, 2020.
- Yamane, Taro. *Statistics: An Introductory Analysis*. 2nd ed., Harper and Row, 1967.

## APPENDIX

# QUESTIONNAIRE

Department of Theatre  
Arts,  
University of Benin,  
Nigeria  
September, 2025.

This questionnaire is designed to gather data on the psychological dimensions of acting among Nigerian stage and screen actors. It seeks to explore how actors experience emotional immersion, regulate emotions, and recover after performance. The information collected will be used strictly for academic purposes.

All responses will be treated with strict confidentiality. Your identity will not be disclosed in any form of publication. Participation is voluntary, and you may withdraw at any time without penalty. By completing this questionnaire, you indicate your consent to participate in this study.

## SECTION A: DEMOGRAPHIC INFORMATION

*(Please tick [✓] as appropriate)*

1. **Gender:**

- Male
- Female
- Prefer not to say

2. **Age Range:**

- 18–25 years
- 26 and above

3. **Primary Field of Practice:**

- Stage/Theatre

- Film/Nollywood
- Television
- Others (please specify): \_\_\_\_\_

**4. Years of Acting Experience:**

- Less than 3 years
- 3–5 years
- 6–10 years
- More than 10 years

**5. Have you received formal training in acting?**

- Yes
- No

**SECTION B: PSYCHOLOGICAL PROCESSES IN ACTING**

*(Please indicate your level of agreement with each statement using the scale below)*

**Scale:**

5 – Strongly Agree    4 – Agree    3 – Neutral    2 – Disagree    1 – Strongly Disagree

**S**

**/ Statement**

**5 4 3 2 1**

**N**

- |   |   |                     |
|---|---|---------------------|
| 1 | Acting often requires me to access deep personal emotions.                      | [ ] [ ] [ ] [ ] [ ] |
| 2 | I consciously regulate my emotions while performing.                            | [ ] [ ] [ ] [ ] [ ] |
| 3 | I find it easy to separate my personal feelings from those of my character.     | [ ] [ ] [ ] [ ] [ ] |
| 4 | Acting has helped me understand human behaviour more deeply.                    | [ ] [ ] [ ] [ ] [ ] |
| 5 | I often draw on past emotional experiences to portray a role.                   | [ ] [ ] [ ] [ ] [ ] |
| 6 | My acting process involves significant mental concentration and self-awareness. | [ ] [ ] [ ] [ ] [ ] |
| 7 | I experience a temporary shift in self-identity during                          | [ ] [ ] [ ] [ ] [ ] |

<b>S</b>		
<b>/ Statement</b>		<b>5 4 3 2 1</b>
<b>N</b>		

performance.

8	Acting gives me a sense of psychological fulfilment.	□ □ □ □ □
---	--	-----------

### SECTION C: PSYCHOLOGICAL CHALLENGES IN ACTING

<b>S</b>		
<b>/ Statement</b>		<b>5 4 3 2 1</b>
<b>N</b>		

9	I sometimes find it difficult to detach from my character after a performance.	□ □ □ □ □
---	--	-----------

10	I experience emotional exhaustion after performing emotionally demanding roles.	□ □ □ □ □
----	---	-----------

11	I have experienced anxiety or depression related to acting.	□ □ □ □ □
----	---	-----------

12	My family or friends sometimes confuse my acting roles with my real personality.	□ □ □ □ □
----	--	-----------

13	Acting has occasionally affected my sleep, mood, or mental balance.	□ □ □ □ □
----	---	-----------

14	I sometimes feel misunderstood by society because of the roles I play.	□ □ □ □ □
----	--	-----------

15	I believe Nigerian actors lack sufficient mental health support.	□ □ □ □ □
----	--	-----------

16	I have observed emotional breakdowns among fellow actors.	□ □ □ □ □
----	---	-----------

## SECTION D: ACTING METHODS AND PSYCHOLOGICAL EFFECTS

**S**

**/ Statement**

**5 4 3 2 1**

**N**

1 My training emphasises emotional realism (e.g., Stanislavski       
7 or Method Acting).

1 I use imagination and substitution techniques to enter a role.       
8

1 Deep emotional engagement improves the authenticity of my       
9 performance.

2 Highly emotional roles sometimes affect my personal       
0 relationships.

2 I sometimes experience a “hangover” effect after playing       
1 intense roles.

2 Repeatedly portraying traumatic scenes has affected my       
2 emotional stability.

2 I believe acting can have long-term psychological effects on       
3 performers.

2 My acting experiences have improved my emotional       
4 intelligence.

## SECTION E: COPING AND DE-ROLING STRATEGIES

**S**

**/ Statement**

**5 4 3 2 1**

**N**

2 I intentionally relax or meditate after intense       
5 performances.

2 I discuss my performance experiences with friends,       
6 directors, or mentors.

2 I pray or use spiritual reflection as a means of emotional       
7 recovery.

**S**  
**/**  
**N**

**Statement**

**5 4 3 2 1**

- 2 I avoid playing emotionally demanding roles too frequently.
- 2 I find it helpful to engage in physical exercise or rest after acting.
- 3 I would welcome psychological counselling sessions for actors.
- 3 I have developed personal rituals or habits to separate myself from a role.
- 3 I believe actor-training institutions should include mental health education.

## **SECTION F: OPEN-ENDED QUESTIONS**

Please respond briefly but thoughtfully.

1. Describe how you usually prepare yourself mentally or emotionally for a role.  

---
2. What are some of the emotional challenges you have experienced as an actor?  

---
3. How do you usually recover or “de-role” after performing an emotionally intense character?  

---
4. What forms of psychological support do you think Nigerian actors need most?  

---
5. In your opinion, how can training institutions or production houses better promote the mental wellness of actors?

