

# BEHAVIORISM THEORY IN *MIRACLE WORKER* MOVIE

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**Received:** 2 November 2021, **Revised:** 5 December 2021, **Accepted:** 11 January 2022

## Abstract

This study aims to explain the application of two basic concepts in Behaviorism theory by B. F. Skinner (reinforcement and punishment) in the *Miracle Worker* movie. This study uses the descriptive qualitative method, and documentation technique as the technique of study. Here are steps that the researcher used in the study; (1) collecting data, (2) identifying data, (3) classifying data, (4) analyzing data, and finally connecting the meaning of data with the other data. The conclusion of this research are (1) in the *Miracle Worker* movie directed by Nadia Tass, there is any four basic concepts of Behaviorism by B. F. Skinner in the teaching process of the main character. They are positive reinforcement, negative reinforcement, positive punishment, and negative punishment. (2) the positive reinforcement is shown by giving reward, and approbation to Helen, (3) negative reinforcement is shown by giving a slap and a bite, (4) the positive punishment is shown by giving Helen a slap, a bite, and a pull of hair to stop undesirable behavior, (5) negative punishment is given to stop Helen's bad behavior. In this study it is shown by not giving Helen's meal, cake, and milk, or wrecking Helen doll.

**Keywords:** Behaviorism; Reinforcement; Punishment; *Miracle Worker* Movie

## Abstrak

Tujuan dari penelitian ini adalah untuk mengetahui penerapan dari dua konsep dasar behaviorisme menurut B. F. Skinner yaitu pemberian penguat dan hukuman dalam film *Miracle Worker*. Penelitian ini menggunakan desain penelitian deskriptif kualitatif dan teknik penelitian yang digunakan dalam pengumpulan data adalah teknik dokumentasi. Adapun langkah-langkah pembahasan datanya adalah (1) mengumpulkan data, (2) mengidentifikasi data, (3) Mengelompokkan data, (4) menganalisis data, dan menghubungkan makna data satu dengan data yang lainnya. Kesimpulan penelitian ini adalah (1) didalam film *Miracle Worker* karya Nadia Tass terdapat empat konsep dasar dari behaviorisme menurut B. F. Skinner yang terlihat saat mengajari si tokoh utama, antara lain; penguat positif, penguat negative, hukuman positif dan hukuman negative. (2) penguat positif terlihat pada saat memberikan hadiah, pujian dsb. Kepada Helen. (3) penguat negative terlihat saat memberikan tamparan, cubitan, (4) hukuman positif terlihat saat memberikan tamparan, cubitan, dan jambakan, (5) dengan memberikan hukuman negative, atau dalam artian menghilangkan sesuatu yang Helen butuhkan untuk menghentikan perilaku yang tidak diinginkan terkadang juga dibutuhkan, dalam penelitian ini terlihat pada saat tidak memberikan makanan, kue, dan susu pada Helen, atau merampas boneka Helen.

**Kata kunci:** Behaviorisme; Penguatan; Hukuman; Film *Miracle Worker*

## INTRODUCTION

According to Subhan (2010:7), literature can be divided into three genres, namely prose, poetry, and drama. In the present study, the researcher chose drama as the object of research since it provides detail and clear process which the flow of event is easily understood. The second reason is, drama has a grooves structured by relation to events. Generally drama divided into two genres, they are play and movie.

Every movie has a complex synthesis as a combination of many separated, interrelated elements that form a coherent whole (Barsam and Monahan, 2010:5). Such as *Miracle Worker* movie which pictured a biographical movie in a whole directed by Nadia Tass in 2000. The movie was based on the 1959's play of the same title by William Gibson. This movie is the story about Anne Sullivan, and her efforts in working with a young sullen Helen Keller. The movie focuses on a struggle and process of learning by Anne's to teach Helen, a child who has disabilities (deaf, blind, and mute). Not only just deaf, blind and mute, Helen also has a bad personality. In this case, Mrs. Anne Sullivan's struggle and the ways she tries to make Helen accept her disabilities and change her bad personality. According to Ratna (2004: 343), the relationship between psychology and literature can be understood in three ways: (1) the author's psyche, (2) the character's psyche in literary works, and (3) reader's psyche.

*Miracle Worker* movie becomes an inspiring movie by so many moral values that the viewers can get from the story. This autobiography of Helen was adopted into a play and two movies before and the one directed by Nadia Tass in 2000. This movie also got many awards in some of awards. It makes this film more interesting to be

analyzed. Movies were chosen as teaching tools because they are a significant part of young culture in contemporary societies (Hebert & Neumeister, 2001). Besides, movie is a cultural representation that often represents life values within (Puspitasari et al, 2021) Typically, movies offer both affective and cognitive experiences. In addition, movie scenes, containing strong emotional content, can provoke discussion, assessment of one's values, and assessment of self (Champoux, 1999). It has been suggested that "the medium of film, more than any other art form, is able to portray the subtleties of the human mind — thoughts, emotions, instincts, and motives— and their impact on behavior (Niemiec & Wedding, 2008, p. 5)."

Actually, *Miracle Worker* movie consists of more than one depiction of learning approaches, but behaviorism is one of paradigm that often used by the teacher to teach Helen in the movie. It is one of interesting case to be analyzed. This movie was analyzed based on behaviorism theory by B. F. Skinner, one of the most prominent psychologists of behaviorism theory (Dewald, 1999). Skinner (in Brau and Robinson, 2020: 6) introduces the principles of operant conditioning and their application to human and animal behavior. The core concept of operant conditioning is the relationship between reinforcement and punishment. There are five discrete categories to the use of reinforcement and punishment, as follows: (1) positive reinforcement is adding a positive stimulus to encourage behavior; (2) escape is removing a negative stimulus to encourage behavior; (3) active avoidance is preventing a negative stimulus to encourage behavior; (4) positive punishment is adding a negative stimulus to discourage behavior; and (5) negative punishment is removing a positive stimulus to discourage behavior.

In psychology, the term stimulus is refers to anything in the environment that is detectable through the senses including sight, hearing, touch, taste, and smell. These stimuli can influence behavior in a variety of ways. Response is a change in an organism (an action) resulting from a stimulus (Kendra, 2015:16). One of the study about behaviorism in movie was done by Junaid (2016). In the study, the main character from can speak fluently in public without feeling nervous anymore. Another study by Smithikarai (2016) supports the enhanced positive characteristics and behaviors through a systematic movie-based teaching course. Through this experimental study, a significant increase in positive characteristics and behaviors of the experimental group, while the results of the analysis of covariance showed that a systematic movie-based teaching course positively developed positive characteristics and behaviours.

The image within the movies depicted on two basic concepts of behaviorism theory by B. F. Skinner in the *Miracle Worker* movie directed by Nadia Tass. This study analyzed operant conditioning theory in behaviorism for teaching the main character Helen Keller at the *Miracle Worker* movie. Therefore, the readers are able to understand the depth of behaviorism by B. F. Skinner in the movie. The specific objective of this research is to understand how does the application of two basic concepts of behaviorism theory by B.F Skinner there are giving reinforcement and punishment to main character Helen Keller in the *Miracle Worker* movie directed by Nadia Tass.

## METHOD

This study used descriptive qualitative method, which meant that the whole discussion

in this study was interpreted and displayed in descriptive form. Qualitative research is oriented towards analyzing concept cases in their temporal and local particularly and starting from people's expressions and activities in their local context (Flick, 2010:21). The text indicates the empirical data. The writer uses behaviorism theory by B.F. Skinner while analyzing, this theory is about learning theory which is focus in personal side of children. Object of the study is the target to get data. It also means target of analysis. The source of the data is *Miracle Worker* movie directed by Nadia Tass. Related to the previous statement, the object of research was all of the basic concepts applications in giving reinforcements and punishments to the main character (Helen Keller).

In this study the writer use documentation technique to collect the data, then the writer use content analysis to analyze the data. There are any four step while the writer collecting data from the movie. The first one make a specification the research problem by deciding the title of study, identifying the problem, giving limitation, making statement of problem, deciding the purpose of the study and the significance of the study. The second one is watching movie and giving marks in conversation of movie script as data based on the conversation and situation that related to this study. The third is choosing data and collecting data from the movie helped by movie script which includes behaviorism theory by B. F. Skinner. And the last is identifying the application of two basic concepts of behaviorism by B. F. Skinner (reinforcement and punishment).

For the technique of analyzing data the writer use content analysis technique in analyze the data. The brief explanation of several steps to analyze the data is as follows; first, make a brief note based on the movie

script especially from the data collected before which related with the study. Second, describe and explain the application of two basic concepts in behaviorism theory by B. F. Skinner at *Miracle Worker* movie. Third, give brief explanation and conclusion of the data. The last is reporting in the written form.

## RESULT AND DISCUSSION

There are four part of discussion in the following paragraphs; (1) positive reinforcement which gave while teaching the main character Helen Keller, (2) Negative reinforcement which gave while teaching the main character, (3) positive punishment which gave while teaching the main character, (4) negative punishment which gave while teaching the main character in the *Miracle Worker* movie.

### Positive Reinforcement

Positive reinforcement is given by Helen environment to control Helen's behave become a good behavior. When she showed the desired behave so Helen's environment by immediately will give positive reinforcement by a wish the desired behavior will increase. The positive reinforcement can be form as giving reward, an approbation etc. Here the data that showed of positive reinforcement in teaching Helen.

00.02.04 – 00.02.43

Percy : Help! Help!... Helen's trying to kill us! She trying to kill us again! (Muffled, Yelling).

Mom : Helen? Helen... Stop it Helen, stop it, stop it... OK. OK give mother the scissors. Helen... Helen, give mother the scissors... Helen... OK (Helen more calm down and give the scissors to her mother).

Mom : (put candy into Helen's mouth). There, now. OK. That's my pretty girl.

Positive reinforcement in this text was visible when her mother giving a candy to make Helen more calm. Helen always hit others when she felt uncomfortable and threatened in her environment. Here her mother using a candy as reinforcement (reward) when Helen want to give the scissor that used to hitting Martha. Beside of giving candy as a reward, Helen's mother also gives a praise by says "That's my pretty girl" to Helen.

00.50.31 – 00.51.00

Miss. Annie : (teaching Percy how to spell cake by using sign language) "C-A-K-E Cake. C-A-K-E"

Helen : "Mmmmm!" (Moans and spell a word cake in Percy's hand by using her finger)

Miss. Annie : "She spells cake, she gets cake."

Positive reinforcement in this text was visible when Miss Annie Sullivan gave a cake after Helen spelled a word cake. As an explanation before that Miss Annie Sullivan has a purpose to make Helen can communicate all of thing in around her, so Miss Annie Sullivan sometime giving reward when Helen can spell correctly something which she need. Here Miss Annie using a cake as reinforcement (reward).

### Negative Reinforcement

Negative reinforcement is given to control Helen's behave become a good behavior. Here, unpleasant stimulus will be given to Helen's to increase Helen's good behavior. When Helen's environment has desirable behavior from Helen and it's can't get from positive reinforcement, so sometime Helen's environment must give an unpleasant stimulus to make desirable behavior become increase.

The positive reinforcement can be form by biting, grabbed Helen's favorite thing etc. Here the data that showed of positive reinforcement in teaching Helen.

00.35.56 – 00.36.19

Miss. Annie : "Ahhhhhh!" (take a full water in jar and pour it to Helen)

Helen : (Silent for a while and eat using her spoon)

Miss. Annie : "Good" (spells a word god in Helen's hand).

Here poured a cannikin off water is given to control Helen's behavior. When she showed her bad behavior here is won't eat by using a spoon so Miss Sullivan by immediately give an unpleasant stimulus by a wish the desired behavior will increase, desirable behavior here is eating by using a spoon. That is explained negative reinforcement.

00.51.20 – 00.52.04

Miss. Annie : "M- is easy. I- is even easier. Just the pinkie up L- K\_\_ M\_\_ Why should I talk to you? I'm teaching Percy. M-I-L-K "

Miss. Annie : "No. I'm teaching Percy\_\_ OH, you're jealous."

Helen : (Tugged Miss Annie's hand from Percy and laid in her hand).

Here negative reinforcement visible when Miss Annie Sullivan makes Helen's Jealousy as a key to make her want to learn spell word. Here Miss Annie Sullivan says that she just wants to teach Percy, not Helen. Due to this, Helen feels jealous with Percy and she Tugged Miss Annie's hand from Percy and lays them in her hand. It is explained that making Helen jealous is an unpleasant stimulus, and Helen's decision to learn is the desirable behavior.

### Positive Punishment

Positive Punishment is given to stop Helen's bad behavior. When she showed the

undesired behavior so Helen's environment by immediately will give positive punishment by a purpose the undesired behavior will decrease. The positive punishment here can be form as giving slaps, pulls etc. Here the data that showed of positive punishment in teaching Helen:

00.31.09 – 00.31.23

Helen : (Helen slaps Miss Annie)

Miss Annie : "Oh!" (Miss Annie slaps Helen too).

Helen : (Slaps Miss Annie again)

Miss Annie : (give Helen slap too)

Helen : (give Miss Annie's check double slaps)

Miss Annie : (give Helen's check double slaps too)

In this scene, positive punishment showed when Miss Annie Sullivan giving a slaps if Helen slapped her. We can saw that slapping other is a bad behavior. Miss Annie Sullivan must give Helen a slap to make a lesson and Helen does not do that in the future.

00.35.53 – 00.36.00

Helen : (eat by using spoon but directly spat out the meal to Miss Annie)

Miss. Annie : "Ahhhhhh!" (Take full water in jar and pour it to Helen)

When Miss Annie Sullivan takes full water in jar and pours it to Helen. It is a punishment of Helen's bad behavior that was spat out the meal to her. Here, spat out the meal is a bad behavior and pour a cannikin off water as an unpleasant stimulus to stop it. Based on the scene that was appeared, it is included in positive punishment.

### Negative Punishment

Negative Punishment is given to stop Helen's bad behavior. When she showed the undesired behavior so, here Helen's

environment by immediately will give negative punishment by a purpose the undesired behavior will decrease or stopped. Negative punishment here can be form as giving lose, carry away or grabbed all of something that Helen need. Here the data that showed of negative punishment in teaching Helen:

00.27.43 – 00.27.55

Mom : “Miss Annie, Helen is used to helping herself from our plates.”

Miss Annie : “I’m afraid I’m not used to it.”

Father : “No, of course not. Vine, please bring Miss Sullivan another plate.”

Miss Annie : “there’s nothing wrong with plate, Captain. Only that Helen’s hands don’t belong in it.”

Here show that Miss Annie can’t tolerate Helen’s bad behavior when she doesn’t eat from her own plate and disturb another person. Miss Annie doesn’t let Helen to get her meal while breakfast. It is as a punishment to make Helen know how to have a good behavior. And Miss Annie’s action to do not give the Helen’s desirable things is example of negative punishment.

01.18.58 – 01.19.13

Helen : (Eat by her hand without using spoon and fork).

Miss. Annie : “N-O no” (spell in Helen’s hand)

Helen : “H m m m m – m m m m m !” (Moaning)

Miss. Annie : “No.”

Here, negative punishment is shown in the scene of Miss Annie Sullivan decides not to give Helen her meal when she shows her bad behavior (does not eat using spoon). Helen’s action, eats using her hand instead of spoon, is as bad behavior which wants to stop by Miss Annie Sullivan.

## CONCLUSION

Based on the result of data analysis, the researcher found the existence of two basic concept of behaviorism theory (reinforcement and punishment) by B. F. Skinner in teaching the main character Helen Keller. It can be concluded that there are four visible actions depicted by the main character while teaching. They belong to positive reinforcement, negative reinforcement, positive punishment, negative punishment. The positive reinforcement is depicted by giving Helen a reward, approbation etc. Negative reinforcement is shown by giving a slaps, a bite. The positive punishment is shown by giving Helen a slap, a bite, a pull of hair to stop undesirable behavior. The negative reinforcements are needed to stop Helen’s bad behavior, for example does not give Helen’s meal, cake, and milk, also wreck Helen’s doll etc.

The use of reinforcement and punishment for teaching Helen in *Miracle Worker* movie are dominated by positive reinforcements. The movie shows that reinforcement is an effective way to teach. By directly giving reinforcement when Helen showed a good behavior, she can easily understand what kind of behavior which must be instilled. Furthermore, when Helen shows bad behavior, punishment is a correct way to make her understand the wrong thing. Therefore, the main characters can handle and solve the learning problems well by unstoppable struggling. Arifin (2015) claimed that if the learner has a big motivation to learn, she/he can easily learn anything. A big accomplishment is Helen succeed to change her behavior into good behavior; stopped slapping other, stopped moaning, and used eating utensils while eating. The other accomplishment is she can communicate her thoughts by spelling every word using her fingers.

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