

THE PSYCHOLOGICAL IMPACT OF PUNISHMENT ON ANDREW NEIMAN IN THE *WHIPLASH* MOVIE: OPERANT CONDITIONING APPROACH

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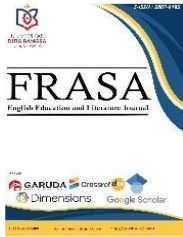
Abstract

B.F. Skinner's Operant Conditioning theory explains the role of punishment in shaping behavior change. This study examined the impact of punishment on Andrew Neiman's character in the Whiplash movie. Giving punishment to individuals caused a significant impact. In contrast to previous studies that only provide an overview of how punishment occurs, this study explores the impact experienced by Andrew's character in the movie using the Operant Conditioning approach. The theory used in this research is the theory of Operant Conditioning developed by B.F. Skinner. This research used data in the form of dialogue and narrative sentences from the Whiplash movie script, which were then analyzed using qualitative descriptive methods. The results of the analysis showed that the impact of the punishment received by Andrew was the emergence of negative feelings, the development of anxiety and depression, and widespread psychological consequences. Therefore, it can be concluded that the application of punishment experienced by Andrew affected him in a psychological context, including experiencing the emotional disorders of anxiety and depression.

Keywords: Operant Conditioning Approach, Punishment, Whiplash Movie

INTRODUCTION

Movie is a form of literature that focuses on how literature functions in psychological, social, political, and cultural contexts, not just on aesthetics (Eagleton, 2008). In the context of this research, the *Whiplash* movie is used as a data source to analyze the psychological impact of punishment on Andrew Neiman's character development. The visual and narrative representations in the movie allowed the researcher to identify how interpersonal interactions, particularly the authoritarian parenting applied by Terence Fletcher, affected Andrew's emotional and behavioral state. This is in line with psychological theory, particularly B.F. Skinner's Operant Conditioning, which explains how punishment can modify behavior and lead to psychological consequences.



Behavior is the way individuals react to something that happens to them. Skinner argues that behavior is a response to certain stimuli in the environment (Skinner, *Science and Human Behavior (New Impression)*, 1953). Therefore, behavior has an important role in the formation of individual character. With the operant conditioning method that focuses on reinforcement and punishment, Skinner believed that the behavior of each individual can be learned (Feist & Feist, 2008). Operant conditioning regulates how individuals show behavior and what the consequences are for the individual, where the operant conditioning process in the environment has the aim of shaping or creating consequences in the form of effects on individuals.

One movie that explores this theme in depth is *Whiplash* (2014), an American movie directed by Damien Chazelle. The movie follows the struggle of Andrew Neiman, a young drummer, in dealing with the high demands of his coach, Terence Fletcher, who is known for his harsh teaching methods.

Fletcher's methods, which are dominated by punishment, both verbal and physical, have a major influence on Andrew's character development. The concept of punishment in psychology, as explained by Skinner (1953), is a form of operant conditioning that aims to reduce or eliminate unwanted behavior through the provision of negative stimuli (Feist, Roberts, & Feist, 2021).

Punishment is more likely to create negative behavior because it is based on coercion. According to Skinner, punishment to control behavior has an unexpected impact (Skinner, 2014). Most likely the impact is less than optimal because punishment is synonymous with undesirable behavior. Studies indicate that prolonged exposure to punishment or negative stimuli without positive reinforcement can contribute to anxiety and depression. LaFreniere and Newman discovered that individuals with generalized anxiety disorder exhibit difficulties in probabilistic learning, suggesting that continuous negative reinforcement may lead to emotional instability (LaFreniere, 2019). Afifi found that severe physical punishment is associated with a higher likelihood of mood and anxiety disorders, underscoring its adverse effects on mental well-being (Afifi, 2012). Similarly, Liu revealed that individuals experiencing depression show diminished neural responses to both rewards and punishments, implying that persistent exposure to negative stimuli disrupts emotional regulation (Liu, 2022). These findings collectively highlight the detrimental psychological impact of sustained punishment without reinforcement.

The first impact of punishment is the emergence of negative feelings. This is due to the emergence of aversive stimuli with punished behaviour (Feist & Feist, 2008). Negative feelings that arise can be anger, fear and sadness that cause a person to cry and get angry. According to Kreech, emotion classification includes fundamental emotions such as joy, anger, fear, and sadness, which are regarded as primary

emotions. When individuals encounter situations that evoke these emotions, their reactions are intrinsically linked to the actions they generate. Moreover, such situations can heighten internal tension, highlighting the strong connection between emotions and the responses they trigger (Kreech, 1974).

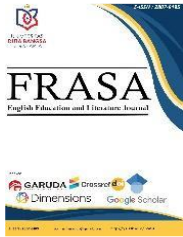
Anxiety and depression are also one of the things that accompany when individuals receive punishment (Skinner, 2014). Negative stimuli that are given continuously without being balanced with reinforcement cause individuals to experience emotional disturbances because individuals feel uncomfortable with themselves or feel unsafe when with the punisher.

When avoiding punishment from someone who is perceived to have higher power, individuals will tend to vent their negative emotions to people who are equal to them. This is because he is unable to express his emotions directly to the punisher. According to Refugee Aggression Theory explains how individuals who are unable to retaliate against stronger provocateurs direct their aggression towards innocent targets (Denson, 2006). This occurs through rumination in anger (continuing to think about provocation), revenge planning (contemplating retribution), and behavior that replaces aggression (acting aggressively toward others). Repressed anger increases the likelihood of aggression in unrelated contexts, such as workplace conflict and domestic violence. This theory highlights how power dynamics influence the displacement of aggression, where individuals take out their frustrations on those of equal or lower status instead of confronting the true source.

In the *Whiplash* movie, punishment not only impacts Andrew's performance, but also his mental health and relationships with those around him. Andrew experiences emotional instability due to unbalanced operant conditioning. This is in accordance with the Psychological Well-Being (PWB) Theory introduced by Ryff based on studies in the fields of clinical psychology, developmental psychology and mental health (Ryff, 1989). This theory defines psychological well-being as an individual's ability to accept themselves and others in various conditions, as well as having social independence that allows them to adapt to the environment. This independence plays a role in helping someone face various life challenges more effectively.

In developing the concept of psychological well-being, Ryff combined various theories, such as theories of human development put forward by Erikson, Buhler, and Neugarten, as well as clinical theories regarding self-growth, including Maslow's concept of self-actualization, individuals functioning optimally according to Rogers, Allport's maturity theory, and the individual process theory explained by Jung.

This research aims to analyze how the punishment Andrew receives affects his character and personality. Through a behavioral analysis approach, this study identifies the impact of the punishment depicted in the movie on Andrew's emotional



development. This research is relevant given the importance of understanding the impact of harsh education or training methods on individuals, both in the context of literature and everyday life.

Previous research shows that punishment often has negative consequences, including the emergence of stress, anxiety, or even despair (Gershoff, 2022). Previous research relevant to this study was written by Mahardika (2023) with the title "Reinforcement and Punishment Depicted by Pip's Behavior in the Novel and Movie *Great Expectations* by Charles Dickens". The results of the study can be concluded that Pip's behavior has been controlled by negative reinforcement, where he eliminates unpleasant stimuli in his environment.

Although various studies have explored the concept of punishment in the context of literary works, there is still a significant lack of analysis that examines its psychological impact on characters in the movie especially in the context of the *Whiplash* movie.

METHOD

This study uses a qualitative descriptive method to analyze the dialogues and narrative sentences from the *Whiplash* movie script. The meaning of qualitative research is research that intends to understand phenomena about what is experienced by research subjects, for example motivation, behavior, perceptions and others, through explanations in the form of words and language in a special natural context with scientific methods (Moleong, 2008). This analysis is based on interpreting and describing data (Ahmadi, 2019). Qualitative descriptive research refers to research that seeks to describe existing problems based on data, including data analysis and presentation. (Narbuko & Achmadi, 1997).

This research used a qualitative descriptive method with a focus on data analysis in the form of dialog and narration from the *Whiplash* movie script. Data were collected through observation by highlighting dialog and narrative sentences that describe the interaction between Andrew Neiman and Terence Fletcher, especially when Fletcher gives physical and verbal punishment and the impact shown on Andrew. The excerpts from the movie script were then categorized based on the type of punishment and the psychological impact, such as the emergence of negative feelings, anxiety, depression, or widespread impact. The analysis was conducted with reference to B.F. Skinner's Operant Conditioning theory, where punishment is considered a stimulus that aims to reduce or eliminate certain behaviors. In this context, each excerpt was analyzed to identify how Fletcher's punishment affected Andrew's behavior and psychological state, including his emotional responses and mindset. The results of the analysis are

then presented thematically to illustrate the relationship between punishment and the psychological impact experienced by Andrew.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

This study found that the punishments applied by Fletcher, as Andrew's music instructor, had a significant impact on Andrew's character. Although Fletcher's intention was to encourage Andrew's musical abilities, his methods were harsh. Fletcher uses various forms of punishment, both physical and verbal. The following data shows that Andrew received punishment from Fletcher.

A. The Punishment That Occurred in The *Whiplash* Movie Based on Andrew's Experience

According to Skinner, Punishment is when something unpleasant is given or something pleasant is removed, to reduce the likelihood of recurrence of unwanted behaviour (Feist, Roberts, & Feist, 2021). The punishment that Andrew received is evident from his emotional reactions. Fletcher kept telling Andrew to repeat his drumming several times, but he got angry and threw a chair at Andrew because Andrew failed to correct his mistake. Fletcher's students in the class were very surprised. As well as Andrew, he was very surprised and frightened. Then Fletcher asked Andrew whether the tempo of his drumming was too slow or too fast, but Andrew could not answer the question.

Andrew plays WHIPLASH STUDIO BAND REHEARSAL ANDREW #3, expecting another stop -- but it doesn't come. Fletcher nods, as though now satisfied, then slowly turns around. Puts his hand on a spare chair. Looks like he's about to sit down, when...

...like a flash of lightning he WHIPS up the chair and HURLS it straight at Andrew's head.

Andrew DUCKS, as the chair CATCHES the top of the bass drum, almost toppling it over. An EAR-PIERCING CLANG OF CYMBALS, as Andrew's sticks go flying and the chair hits the floor.

Then -- total silence in the room. Andrew is shell-shocked, beyond shaken, what in the fuck just happened???

FLETCHER (CONT'D): (as though discussing the weather) Why do you suppose I just hurled a chair at your head, Neiman?

ANDREW: I...I...I d--don't kn--

FLETCHER: Yes, you do.

ANDREW: I... The...the tempo...

FLETCHER: Were you rushing or were you dragging?

ANDREW: I... I don't... I don't--

The data proves that Fletcher gave something unpleasant to Andrew to stop Andrew's unwanted behavior. The negative stimulus or something unpleasant is in the form of Fletcher throwing a chair at Andrew, while Andrew's unwanted behavior is his mistake in playing the drum tempo. Fletcher intended to eliminate Andrew's behavior by punishing Andrew. As Skinner said that punishment can occur when a negative stimulus is given.

When Andrew still did not know what he did wrong, Fletcher's emotions began to rise. He told Andrew to count to find out the tempo by slapping Andrew. In addition, Fletcher also spoke harshly to Andrew because Andrew did not immediately realize the location of his mistake. The following dialogue shows this,

Fletcher BOUNDS up to him, almost RUNNING -- suddenly beast like, terrifying, veins set to BURST--

FLETCHER: Start counting.

ANDREW: (like a deer in the headlights) ...Five-six-seven--

FLETCHER: In four, damnit!

ANDREW: One-two-three-four...

(Fletcher SLAPS Andrew on his left cheek. Then--)

FLETCHER: Keep counting!!

ANDREW: One-two--(another slap) --three--(a third slap) --four--

FLETCHER: Was I rushing or I was dragging?

ANDREW: I -- I don't -- I don't know--

FLETCHER: Start counting again.

ANDREW: **One-two--(a slap on his left cheek) --three-four-o-- (another slap) --ne-two-three--**

FLETCHER: Was I rushing or was I dragging?

ANDREW: R--rushing...

FLETCHER: **So, you do know the difference! If you dare to sabotage my band I will fuck you like a pig. (MORE)**

FLETCHER (CONT'D): Now are you a rusher, are you a dragger, or are you going to be ON MY FUCKING TIME!?!?

(This is a new Fletcher we're seeing. An animal. But no one but Andrew seems surprised--)

The data shows that Fletcher gives physical and verbal punishment to Andrew. As Skinner said that punishment occurs when a negative stimulus or something unpleasant is added to stop unwanted behavior. Here giving a slap to Andrew's face and saying harsh sentences to Andrew is included in adding something unpleasant. While Andrew still does not realize where his mistake is unwanted behavior. From the data it can be concluded that Andrew gets punishment from Fletcher.

A. The Impact of Punishment on Andrew in The *Whiplash* Movie

Negative Feelings

As discussed earlier that punishment can cause negative feelings for the recipient of punishment (Feist & Feist, 2008). The impact of the punishment received by Andrew was very clear that it caused a strong negative emotional reaction. It can be seen that the teaching methods applied by Fletcher triggered Andrew to respond with anger and even cry. This is based on Goleman's statement that forms of negative feelings can be anger and sadness (Goleman, 2009).

As in the following dialog, Fletcher invites Connolly after Andrew's class is over to find out who is the better core drummer for the next session's class. Andrew, who was still the core drummer, felt that this was a threat to him. When the two of them were tested by Fletcher to play drums alternately, Andrew made the mistake of not being able to adjust the tempo of the music which resulted in him being displaced from the core drummer position. Andrew, who did not accept the decision, was angry because he felt Connolly's drumming was not better than his drumming so far.

FLETCHER (CONT'D): No... That's not quite my tempo...

ANDREW: I'm -- I'm sorry -- I'll--

FLETCHER: Let's see if Connolly can do it, ok?

(Beat. Andrew looks at Ryan. Heart pounding, he switches with him. Fletcher CLAPS. Ryan BEGINS. And he plays perfectly.)

FLETCHER (CONT'D): Connolly -- that was excellent. See, this is the beauty of Studio Band. You come in an alternate -- but a minute later, you could be the new core.

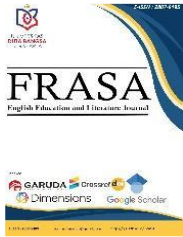
(Andrew's eyes widen again.)

ANDREW: Are you serious? That Shit?

(Fletcher looks at Andrew -- as though shocked Andrew talked back. A moment of silence. Then -- BZZZZZ. Fletcher's cell.)

FLETCHER: Connolly, the chart's yours. See you both tonight at 9. (answering the phone) Hi, this is Terence...

(He heads to his OFFICE. Andrew is still. *What just happened...?*)



From the dialog, it is evident that Fletcher's punishment evoked a negative emotional response in Andrew, specifically anger. Andrew's anger arises as a reaction to the punishment in the form of replacing his position from the core drummer, which Fletcher gave because of Andrew's inability to set the tempo of his drumming. According to B.F. Skinner's Operant Conditioning theory, punishment is a stimulus that aims to reduce or eliminate certain behaviors. In this context, Fletcher used punishment as a way to correct Andrew's mistakes and force him to reach the desired standard. Skinner explains that punishment can have side effects such as anger which is evident in Andrew's emotional response. This suggests that long-term psychological effects can be detrimental, as experienced by Andrew.

The next form of negative feelings that appear in Andrew's character is crying. Still with the same case, namely Andrew who has not been able to set the tempo of his music while practicing, causing Fletcher to yell and say harsh words to Andrew. As in the following dialog,

FLETCHER: What are you, in a fucking a Capella group?? Play the goddamn set!!

(Andrew plays the measure on the drums. Shaking, terrified.)

FLETCHER (CONT'D): Now answer my question -- were you rushing or were you dragging?

(because Andrew hesitates--) ANSWER!!!!

ANDREW: R--r--r--rushing...

FLETCHER: Dear God, is that a tear in your eye? Are you one of those single-tear people? Do I look like a double fucking rainbow to you??

(Andrew tries to hide his tear, mortified, wipes it, cowers--)

Fletcher's action of yelling at Andrew when he could not distinguish the tempo of the drums being played is a clear example of the application of punishment in Operant Conditioning theory. In this context, Fletcher uses verbal (yelling) and emotional (fear-inducing) punishment as an attempt to correct Andrew's mistake in playing the drum tempo. However, the effect was that Andrew not only became more aware of the tempo, but also experienced intense emotional responses, such as fear and crying. This shows that Fletcher's punishment not only affected Andrew's behavior in the context of drumming, but also affected his psychological state. The crying can be interpreted as an emotional response to his inability to meet Fletcher's demands, as well as a form of learned helplessness.

Anxiety and Depression

In addition to causing negative feelings, extreme punishment can affect the psychological state of individuals. Skinner said that anxiety and depression are things that often accompany when individuals receive punishment (Skinner, 2014). In the *Whiplash* movie, Fletcher uses extreme teaching methods that often apply punishment in the form of swearing, and physical intimidation that makes Andrew feel depressed to make him experience emotional disorders.

Andrew, who had a severe accident while picking up his drumsticks left behind at a car rental place, ran straight to the stage with blood pouring from every part of his body. He hid his broken left hand and endured the pain he felt. Andrew pushed himself because he was worried that he wouldn't be able to finish his performance perfectly.

His left hand still hidden, Andrew props up his music and pulls out a pair of sticks. Tries to hold his left stick properly -- but it keeps giving way. With his index finger broken, it's impossible to keep the stick steady...

He looks at the music: "Caravan". Looks back at his hand... Tries to move his left fingers, mimicking the stick patterns... Just up ahead -- Fletcher. Animal intensity...

Andrew closes his eyes... Tries to block out the anxiety... The pain... The stress that just keeps mounting and mounting... Gropes inside his STICK BAG. Pulls out his bag of pills. Drops it. Pills scatter. Picks a pill up, pops it, out of sight.

As Jeffrey says that anxiety is an emotional state characterized by physiological arousal, unpleasant feelings of tension, and feelings of worry that something bad will happen (Jeffrey, 2005). This is evident in the competition scene where Andrew feels tremendous tension while playing the drums. His fear of making mistakes and receiving punishment from Fletcher reflects how the Operant Conditioning mechanism works in shaping his behavior. Andrew not only felt anxious because of the pressure to perform perfectly, but also because of the fear of the negative consequences (punishment) he would receive if he failed. This shows how punishment in Skinner's theory causes psychological side effects such as anxiety and emotional tension.

The next impact is depression. Depression is a condition where a person feels sad, disappointed when experiencing a change, loss, failure and becomes pathological when unable to adapt (Towsend, et al., 2009). After the tragedy of his assault on Fletcher, Andrew decided to stop drumming. For several months, Andrew was depressed due to the extreme punishment he received.

Blinds closed, as Andrew and Jim sit and watch "North by Northwest" on TV. We PAN from a few college applications on a table, past the walls -- no decorations at all -- to Andrew and Jim seated.

We linger on Andrew's face. There's a sadness in his eyes. He looks tired, even after months, and resigned.

The impact of the excessive punishment Andrew Neiman received not only suppressed his emotions, but also left him physically and mentally exhausted. Even several months after the incident, as seen in the quote, Andrew still showed signs of depression. This shows that the punishment given by Fletcher through his extreme teaching methods was excessive and had long-term effects. In Andrew's case, extreme punishment led to negative consequences, including loss of self-identity and prolonged feelings of sadness. Skinner explained that punishment that is too harsh or disproportionate can have side effects such as loss of self-identity. In addition, excessive punishment can also inhibit an individual's ability to respond adaptively to their environment, as seen in Andrew who felt isolated and disoriented.

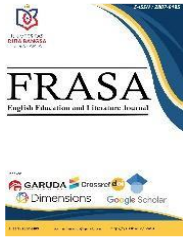
Widespread Impact

Fletcher's pressure on Andrew led him to obsessive behavior towards perfection in music which resulted in Andrew's interpersonal relationships with the people around him. This is what is called the widespread impact, the subsequent impact of punishment (Feist & Feist, 2008). In addition, to avoid punishment, people sometimes vent their negative feelings on something or someone who is nearby.

In the following dialog, Andrew meets with his girlfriend, Nicole, to end their relationship.

ANDREW: Ok, I'm going to just lay it out. This is why I don't think we should be together. We're back in the city, at a coffee shop. Andrew is seated across from Nicole, who just looks at him. Clearly, she did not think this is how the conversation would begin.

ANDREW (CONT'D): I've thought about this a lot. If we're together this is what's going to happen. I'm going to keep pursuing what I'm pursuing, and it's going to take up more and more of my time. You're going to see me less and less. When you do, I'll be distracted, I'll be upset, I'll be playing things in my mind. And you're going to just grow to resent me. At a certain point, you'll tell me to ease up on the drumming, to spend more time with you. And I won't be able to. And I'll start to resent you for even asking me that. **I'll feel like you're dragging me down, you'll feel like you don't matter**



-- and before long, we'll hate each other. So, I think we should just cut it off now, cleanly, for those reasons.

(A beat. Nicole is silent. Finally, Andrew adds--)

ANDREW (CONT'D): Because I want to be great.

NICOLE: And you're not.

ANDREW: I want to be one of the greats

Andrew's decision to end his relationship with Nicole because he saw her as an obstacle to becoming the greatest drummer shows the widespread impact of Fletcher's punishment. Andrew's attitude was triggered by the incident when the lead drum position was transferred to Connolly during musical rehearsals, which made Andrew feel that he had to try harder and focus fully on his goal. The concept of learned helplessness may explain why Andrew felt he had to sacrifice his personal relationships to achieve success. The concept states that individuals who are constantly subjected to punishment or failure without having control over the situation may develop feelings of helplessness and a belief that their efforts will not pay off. In Andrew's case, Fletcher's punishment made him feel that the only way to achieve success was to isolate himself and sacrifice things that he perceived as "distractions," including his relationship with Nicole. This shows that the punishment not only affected Andrew directly, but also extended to his interpersonal relationships.

The next data that proves that widespread impact is one of the effects of punishment is found in the dialogue below. Here Andrew is on his way to the location of the summer competition using a rental car after the bus he was riding had a tire blowout. Previously, Fletcher had warned all band members to arrive at the competition site at 5am, but Andrew could not arrive on time.

(Andrew drives fast. His cell rings--)

ANDREW: Hello??

PIANIST (O.S.): Neiman, where the fuck are you? Call-time was 5.

ANDREW: I'm sorry -- I'm on my way. I'm almost--

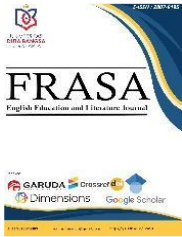
PIANIST (O.S.): We're on stage in twenty--

ANDREW: I know, I'm almost ther--

PIANIST (O.S.): --and Fletcher's got Connolly warming up in case you don't show.

ANDREW: God-fucking-damnit, I SAID I was on my way, you tell the redhead I'm ON MY FUCKING WAY!!

(He throws the phone against his seat.)



Andrew was angry with the piano player for telling him that Fletcher would replace him with Connolly as the main drummer in the competition, even though Andrew was supposed to hold the position. This substitution was Fletcher's punishment for Andrew's late arrival to the competition. Andrew's anger was a direct response to the punishment, and he vented his negative emotions to the piano player, who then felt Andrew's anger. This phenomenon illustrates the so-called widespread impact of Fletcher's punishment. Andrew, who feels disproportionately punished just because of his tardiness, shows signs of this helplessness through his explosive anger. The anger is not only directed at Fletcher, but is also vented at the piano player, showing how the effects of punishment can spread and affect Andrew's social interactions.

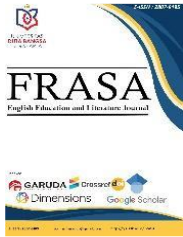
CONCLUSION

The results of this study reveal that physical and verbal punishment received by individuals can have a serious psychological impact, such as the emergence of negative feelings in the form of crying and attacking Fletcher, increased levels of anxiety and depressive symptoms, and venting their negative feelings to those around them, which is called widespread impact. This finding is consistent with Skinner's Operant Conditioning theory, which states that excessive punishment triggers negative behaviors that are not expected. Thus, this study reinforces the view that disproportionate punishment has the potential to have adverse effects on a person's mental health and social interactions.

The results of this study remind educators of the importance of avoiding excessive physical and verbal punishment methods, as these can lead to adverse psychological effects, such as negative emotional responses, anxiety, depression, and widespread repercussions. The findings also reinforce the understanding of how extreme pressure can affect a person's mental health, while confirming the importance of psychological interventions to help individuals traumatized by excessive punishment. As such, this study not only provides academic insights, but also offers practical recommendations for psychology educators and practitioners in contexts related to punishment and its impacts.

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