

# STAGES AND THEOREMS OF PROBLEM-SOLVING BEHAVIOR OF THE CHARACTERS IN DRAMA-BASED MOVIE *DOUBT* BY JOHN PATRICK SHANLEY

Muhammad N. Daroini, Berlianza D. Sansabila, Alif N. Askha, Adam D. Fretes  
Universitas Negeri Malang  
dhifm29@gmail.com, berlianza24@gmail.com, agushagane@gmail.com,  
adamdefretes10@gmail.com

---

**Abstract:** This article examines the problem-solving behavior of three characters in a drama-based movie, *Doubt* by John Patrick Shanley, with a theory about stages and theorems of problem-solving proposed by Irving Tallman. It contains an analysis of three characters of the movie based on the characterization theory proposed by Janet Burroway. It also used the explanation of problem-solving stages and theorems advanced by Irving Tallman, and a categorization of the characters' behaviors to analyze the problem. The three characters that are analyzed are Sister Aloysius, Sister James, and Mrs. Miller. They are chosen because they choose different approaches to solve the main problem in the movie. The data are taken from all dialogues and actions of Sister Aloysius, Sister James, and Mrs. Miller in the film. All data are transcribed, analyzed, and categorized into four stages of problem-solving.

**Keywords:** characterization, problem-solving, stages, and theorems of problem-solving

---

## INTRODUCTION

Problem-solving is an activity that the main aim is to attain a specific goal in changing an undesirable state of affairs by overcoming, eliminating, or removing a barrier (Tallman, Leik, Gray, & Stafford, 1993). As problems may appear to all creatures in the world, the characters in the drama-based movie entitled *Doubt* by John Patrick Shanley do have problems to be fixed.

Every character in the movie, then, may behave differently toward the main problem which is served to them. The reason for the different behaviors in solving the problem shown by each character is the characters' behaviors or characterization. This study analyzes how the different behaviors or characterization of the characters affect the way they choose the problem-solving strategy to solve the same problem. Problem-solving is not a single action, but an activity that involves several stages. It includes the perception of the problem (awareness), the decision to engage in the problem-solving process: information search, the decision to act, and the evaluation process (Tallman, et al., 1993).

The characters with problem-solving behavior, from the drama-based movie *Doubt* by John Patrick Shanley, are Sister Aloysius, Sister James, and Mrs. Miller. Those three characters are chosen as they are involved in the main problem of the movie regarding suspicious homosexual abuse that is suspected to be done by the priest of the church's parish school, Father Flynn, to the school's only African-American student, Donald Miller. This study aims at analyzing the three characters' different problem-solving behavior toward the main problem. Characters in literature are taken from or the representation of human beings, especially in terms of the inner self (Roberts, 1963). Therefore, this study wants to find the correlation between the characterization of the three characters or the characters' behaviors and the factual psychological condition which underlies the action taken by the characters. To be precise is problem-solving behavior proposed by Irving Tallman, Robert K. Leik, Louis N. Gray, and Mark C. Stafford (1993).

As this study analyzes how each character of the three characters chose to behave toward the main problem, this study, then, aims at finding the characterization of each character. Later, this study continues to analyze how the characters' behaviors are categorized in terms of stages and theorems of problem-solving behavior by referring to the findings proposed by Irving Tallman, Robert K. Leik, Louis N. Gray, and Mark C. Stafford (1993) through analyzing the action that each character solve the problem according to their characterization. Thus, considering the characterization and problem-solving behavior of the three characters, this study holds the title "Stages and Theorems of Problem-Solving Behavior of the Characters in Drama-Based Movie *Doubt* by John Patrick Shanley".

## METHOD

This study is designed with descriptive qualitative research as it results in discovery and is presented in a descriptive approach. This study uses the drama-based movie *Doubt* by John Patrick Shanley and a scientific article entitled “A Theory of Problem-Solving Behavior” by Irving Tallman, Robert K. Leik, Louis N. Gray, and Mark C. Stafford (1993) as the main primary sources. Other sources are also used to find any description needed and to analyze the data.

In the process of collecting the data, this study uses a library research process in which writers use a step-by-step process in gathering the information collected through citing and note-taking. Citing is used in this study to get the information needed from the written sources, such as articles and textbooks. Meanwhile, in collecting data from the movie, this study uses the note-taking approach to find the information needed to be analyzed in this paper. The steps of data analysis are watching the movie, reading the related literature, finding important details, correlating the details found in the movie and theories found in the related literature, analyzing the characterization and problem-solving behavior, and making a conclusion.

## FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

### CHARACTER ANALYSIS

#### a. Character

Character is a crucial part of the story because the character executes how the story goes. Characters in a story can be a human, animal, or other creatures. They can be classified into two types, flat character and round character (Klarer, 1998, p. 17). A flat character is a character that is uncomplicated and never changes from the beginning of the story until the end of the story. A round character is a character that is complicated and more complex than other characters in the story.

In a story, characters are divided into two categories, protagonist and antagonist. The protagonist usually refers to the hero while the antagonist refers to the villain in the story. There are three types of characters in the story. The types are the main character, the secondary character, and the supporting character (Tarigan, as cited in Udayana, 2017, p. 4).

The main character is the focus of the story. It explains to the viewer about the story such as the plot and other characters in the story. A secondary character is a character that usually has the closest relationship with the main character in a story. A supporting character is a character that supports the main character and secondary character in the story. Supporting characters usually support the protagonist in the story. The main character in a story is usually a protagonist or a hero. However, the protagonist does not have to be a hero character in the story. An author can make a story that focuses on the protagonist.

#### b. Characterization

Characterization is the way the author presents and reveals the characters in a story (Udayana, 2017, p. 4). In other words, characterization is the characters' information in the story. The information can refer to age, personality, gender, motivation, etc. Characterization is also used to differentiate the character in the story.

There are three levels of characterization that describe the basic information of the character. The three levels are Physical, social, psychological. (Werek and Warren, as cited in Udayana, 2017, p. 6)

Physical is the appearance, physical condition, or the build of the character such as height, sex, and age. Physical is the basic level because it shows the appearance of the character and viewers can easily recognize it. While, social is the status of the character in the story such as social level, religion, and profession. It also shows the character status in the character environment of the story. Then,

psychological is the character's inner self. Psychological refers to how the mindset of the character, intention, motivation, and things related to the character's feelings and emotions.

According to Klarer (1998, p. 18), there are two different methods of explanatory characterization and dramatic characterization. Explanatory characterization is the method that a narrator describes the characters' personalities or direct comments. The narrator becomes a media that shows the viewer the personalities of each character. Meanwhile, dramatic characterization is the method that describes characters' personalities through the way they interact with other characters and how the characters act in the story.

Other characterization methods are the character on character method, contextual characterization method, and mixing method (Kenney, as cited in Udayana, 2017, p. 5). The character on character method is the method that describes a character's personality from the perspective of other characters. The contextual method describes a character's personality from the environment where the character lives. The mixing method is the method that describes a character's personality using more than one method of characterization.

## **PROBLEM-SOLVING BEHAVIOR**

### **a. Problem Solving**

According to Tallman, Leik, Gray, and Stafford (1993), problem-solving is an activity that is done to attain a specific goal in changing an undesirable state of affairs by overcoming, eliminating, or removing a barrier. Unlike coping mechanisms which the goal is to overcome the problem to reduce the stress. According to Carver and Smith (2009), coping is usually defined as efforts to prevent or reduce negative things that associate with stress.

### **Stages and Theorems of Problem Solving**

Referring to Tallman, Leik, Gray, and Stafford (1993), problem-solving is divided into four stages which are the perception of the problem (awareness), the decision to engage in the problem-solving process: information search, the decision to act, and the evaluation process. These 4 stages of problem-solving happen sequentially. Stage 1 is about the perception or awareness of a person about the problem that exists. This stage consists of 3 theorems, theorem P1 up to P3. After getting through stage 1, a person feels that there is a problem in existence, then the character needs to consider whether she/he should find out more about the problem or not. This phenomenon is called stage 2 is about the decision of a person to engage in the problem-solving process. This stage consists of 8 theorems, theorem P4 up to P11. Next, stage 3 is about the decision to act. When a person decided to perform information searches and found some courses of action that have a probability to solve the problem, a person will be faced with 2 options whether he/she will take the action to engage in the problem-solving process or not. This Stage consists of 2 theorems, theorem P12 up to P13. Stage 4 is about the evaluation process. In this process, when in stages 3 before a person decided to take action or engage in a problem-solving activity, he/she is faced with two courses of action: they will either continue or discontinue the problem-solving activity. If they believe the problem is solved, they will stop the problem-solving activity. This stage only consists of 1 theorem, which is theorem 14. This is the list of the theorems:

1. Theorem P1 (TP1). The probability of a person aware of the existence of the problem is directly proportional to the threat of the problem to that person's survival.
2. Theorem P2 (TP2). The probability of a person is aware of the existence of the problem is directly proportional to the immediate of the problem.
3. Theorem P3 (TP3). The interaction between theorem P1 and P2 can be seen in Theorem P3 which explains the probability of a person feels the event as a problem is directly proportional as the threat of the problem to that person's survival and immediate of the problem.

4. Theorem P4 (TP4). The decision that a person made is influenced by 2 factors. They are the combination of the benefits ratio between the character take action and the cost when not taking action and vice versa.
5. Theorem P5 (TP5). A person will likely search for information when the problem is related to avoiding loss than getting an additional benefit.
6. Theorem P6 (TP6). Continued from the theorem P5, the possibility of a person will take action to perform an information searches process when the problem is related to avoiding loss despite the chance of success is greater than when the problem is related to getting greater benefit.
7. Theorem P7 (TP7). A person will take action through information searches until they found a satisfying result. When they found enough information, they will stop the information searches process.
8. Theorem P8 (TP8). The bigger the problem is directly proportional to the effort to search the information. This theorem may be modified when the Theorem P9 is introduced.
9. Theorem P9 (TP9). When the higher amount the information gained is directly proportional to the complexity of the problem and makes a person doubt the success rate of the action, the information searches process stop.
10. Theorem P10 (TP10). When a person facing negative feedback, the higher amount of his/her self-efficacy is directly proportional to the possibility to continue the information searches process.
11. Theorem P11 (TP11). A person will likely stop the information searches process when she/he is faced with another problem that feels more threatening or more proximate.
12. Theorem P12 (TP12). The greater the faint of a person that at least one of the actions he found will succeed, the more likely a person will take action in the problem-solving process.
13. Theorem P13 (TP13). The greater the character's possibility of taking action in the problem-solving process is directly proportional to the amount of time and effort he/she already put in the information searches process.
14. Theorem P14 (TP14). The higher amount of time and effort a person already put in the problem-solving process is directly proportional to the possibility of person continue the problem-solving activity even when confronted with negative feedback

## **ANALYSIS OF CHARACTER'S PROBLEM-SOLVING PROCESS**

### **a. Sister Aloysius**

Sister Aloysius is the main protagonist of this movie. She is depicted as an old woman and a senior member of St. Nicholas. Sister Aloysius is the school principal of the parish school. She is a strict woman who is respected by her colleagues and feared by her students. She is also an old-school woman, which is shown so many times by her perception towards modern things such as a ballpoint pen and track music tape that her students bring. Throughout the movie, she is the only character that is very persistent in searching for any information and proof to prove that Father Flynn is guilty.

Sister Aloysius, as the parish school principal, is understandably the one who is eager to solve any problem which happens in her school. Since the movie throws a possibility of Father Flynn's homosexual abuse to the only African-American student of St. Nicholas, Donald Miller, she wants nothing but to prove that Father Flynn is guilty. However, due to the complexity of the problem, she cannot solve it without further information searches (Tallman, Leik, Grey, and Stafford, 1993). Her awareness of the problem which occurs shows that she is already in stage 1 of problem-solving. According to Tallman et al. (1993), the first stage of problem-solving is about how someone identifies a situation as a problem. Sister Aloysius recognizes the problem directly and without a doubt. It can be seen in her dialogue with Sister James. Sister James does not recognize any problem, but Sister Aloysius is convinced that Donald Miller is in a threat of homosexual abuse by Father Flynn.

Sister James : "I don't know that anything is wrong!"

Sister Aloysius : "Our first Negro student. I thought there would be fighting. A parent or two to deal with. I should have foreseen this possibility"

Sister James : “How could you imagine it?”

Sister Aloysius : “Well, it’s my job to outshine the fox in cleverness. That is my job!”  
(Shanley, 2008, 00:33:12)

It happens because of the high interaction between the immediacy and the threat level of the problem (TP3). An inappropriate relationship between Father Flynn and Donald Miller, even though it is not proven, is seen by her as a problem which threatens the survivability of Donald Miller. It can be categorized as sexual abuse and can endanger Miller’s physical and psychological well-being. Then, she also assumes that the problem needs to be resolved as quickly as possible to minimize its damage. Those two key factors are the reasons why Sister Aloysius quickly aware of the problem.

Someone’s awareness of a problem does not necessarily make him/her want to engage in a problem-solving process. The decision about whether or not someone decides to engage in information search to solve a problem is based on some factors which can be read in table 2. In this case, Sister Aloysius decides to go further to stage 2 of the problem-solving process because she assumes that the costs of not taking any action are bigger than the benefits of not taking action (TP4). Sister Aloysius knows that if she ignores the problem, the cost that must be paid is Donald Miller’s well-being. In this movie, it can be seen that what she does to solve the problem is significant. It is because she perceives that the problem is big and she needs to put big efforts to solve it (TP8). It is shown in this dialogue:

Sister Aloysius : “We are going to have to stop him by ourselves”  
(Shanley, 2008, 00:35:20)

She continues her information search until the very end of the movie. This long information search is caused by the complexity of the problem. The amount of time spent in information search depends on how the actor perceives the complexity of the problem (TP9). If someone sees the problem as a complex problem, he or she will spend more time searching for the information to solve the problem and also will show more persistence in his/her information search. In this case, Sister Aloysius sees the problem as a complex problem. It is not an easy task to expel Father Flynn from St Nicholas. Father Flynn is a priest which is respected by his colleagues and followers in the church. Moreover, Sister Aloysius has difficulty in proving that Father Flynn is guilty.

Despite getting negative results in her information search, Sister Aloysius shows great persistence to keep searching for information that she needs. Someone’s great persistence is influenced by their great self-efficacy (Bandura,1986). Sister Aloysius shows great self-efficacy even she is confronted by Father Flynn.

Father Flynn : “You haven’t the slightest proof of anything”

Sister Aloysius : “But I have my certainty. And armed with that, I’ll go to your last parish and the one before that. If necessary, I’ll find a parent. Trust me, Father Flynn, I will.”  
(Shanley, 2008, 01:24:03)

Sister Aloysius proceeds to the next stage of problem-solving, which is the decision to act. She decides to engage in problem-solving because she is sure that her action will succeed (TP12). She decides to tell Mrs. Miller about the sexual abuse towards Donald Miller. She tries to convince Mrs. Miller to take his son to another school. Sister Aloysius believes that it is one of the best solutions since her effort to kick out Father Flynn has not succeeded yet. This action is also failed, but she shows her persistence once again by looking for another solution. She has no choice but to confront Father Flynn, force him to admit that he is guilty, and resign from the school.

Sister Aloysius’ action finally gets a positive result. Father Flynn decides to resign and move to another parish. However, it does not mean that she solve the problem entirely. She fails to prove her accusation towards Father Flynn until the end of the movie. At this point, she is in the fourth stage of

problem-solving, which is the evaluation process. In this stage, Sister Aloysius is faced with two choices: continue or discontinue the problem-solving activity (Tallman, 1993). Theoretically, Sister Aloysius would choose to continue her problem-solving activity due to the amount of time and resources that she has invested to prove Father Flynn's crime (TP14). However, she decides to stop her information search as well as her action to solve this problem, mainly because she feels that the chance of success has been lowered drastically since the resignation of Father Flynn. (TP9). She even finally admits that she doubts her accusation towards Father Flynn.

Sister Aloysius : "I have doubts. I have such doubts"  
(Shanley, 2008, 01:38:31)

By this scene, Sister Aloysius has terminated her problem-solving process. She stopped her information search as well as all her efforts to prove that Father Flynn is guilty.

#### **b. Sister James**

Sister James is one of the main protagonists of the story along with Sister Aloysius. She is categorized as a major character because she takes an important role in this movie. Her character is depicted as a naive young teacher who wants to make her students love what she teaches. She does not like the strict approach that Sister Aloysius uses. She is a positive person who does not easily accuse someone negatively. Even though she also suspects Father Flynn of doing homosexual abuse to Donald Miller, one of her students. She wants to believe that it is not true. That is why she is directly convinced when Father Flynn explains that Donald Miller acts strangely is because he drinks the altar wine.

In the movie, she is the first person who recognizes Donald Miller's strange behavior after meeting Father Flynn at the rectory, but she does not want to conclude out of it. At this point, she has not aware of the problem. Even after Sister Aloysius tells her about the possibility of sexual abuse, she denies it

Sister James : "But, maybe it's nothing"  
Sister Aloysius : "Then, why do you look like you've seen the devil?"  
(Shanley, 2008, 00:33:56)

According to Tallman et.al (1993), four factors make someone resists recognizing that the problem exists: the fear of failing to solve the problem, the uncertainty of the level of risk, stress, and pressure, also how big the effort, time, and resources that someone has to spend to solve the problem. However, Sister James proceeds to recognize the problem thanks to Sister Aloysius. She recognizes the immediacy and the level of threat of the problem (TP3). It means she is already in the first stage of the problem-solving process. Aware of the problem does not mean action will be taken. Sister James' doubt of Sister Aloysius's suspicion almost makes her not taking any action to engage in information search. Nevertheless, she moves to stage 2 of the problem-solving process because she starts to think that Sister Aloysius' suspicion can be right.

In stage 2, someone tries to search for any information to help him/her solve the problem (Tallman et.al, 1992). Sister James's effort in this information search stage is by helping Sister Aloysius in interrogating Father Flynn. It is shown in a scene taking place at Sister Aloysius's room where Sister James and Sister Aloysius try to make Father Flynn admit his wrongdoing. (Shanley, 2008, 00:45:27). Sister James is instantaneously convinced by Father Flynn's explanation, even though Sister Aloysius has tried to assure her that she has not been convinced yet.

Sister James : "Well, I'm convinced!"  
Sister Aloysius : "You're not. You just want things to be resolved so you can have simplicity back."  
Sister James : "I want no further part of this."  
(Shanley, 2008, 00:51:28).

At this point, Sister James's perception of the magnitude of the problem is lowered drastically. Later, Father Flynn convinces Sister James that he just wants to talk and give Donald Miller the attention that he needs. When someone's perception of the magnitude of the problem is low, he/she will lower the effort to search for information (TP8). Sister James is no longer see Father Flynn as a problem, hence she terminates her information search. Hereby, her problem-solving process is also stopped

### c. Mrs. Miller

Mrs. Miller is categorized as the side character of this movie. However, she has an important role in adding the dynamic of the problem and conflict in this movie. She is the mother of Donald Miller. She is a working-class woman who tries to give the best education to her son. It is not easy for an African-American family to lives in the USA at that time, but she hopes the best for her son's future. She is an optimistic yet realistic mother. It is shown in a scene when she hopes that her son can get into college and make a better life. On the other hand, she also realizes that it is a difficult thing and something must be sacrificed. In this case, she chooses to not stop anything that might happen between her son and Father Flynn. It is because she sees Father Flynn as a protector who can protect his son from bullies at least until he is graduated in June.

According to the problem-solving definition proposed by Tallman, what Mrs. Miller does cannot be categorized as problem-solving. Problem-solving is a process that requires the actor (the one who gets the problem) to perceive the situation as problematic. Mrs. Miller does not see the situation between Donald Miller and Father Flynn as problematic. She does not want to move Donald Miller to another school because she thinks that it will lower his chance to get a good high school. Theoretically, Mrs. Miller resists recognizing that a problem exists mainly because she tries to prevent the increase of stress in the short-run (Tallman et.al, 1993). Her denial can be seen in her statement:

Mrs. Miller: "Whatever the problem is, Donald just has to make it till June. Then he's off into high school."  
(Shanley, 2008, 01:07:01).

Mrs. Miller's acts can be categorized as coping rather than problem-solving. It is aimed to change or eliminate a problematic situation (Dostal, 2015). On the other hand, coping is aimed to adjust, avoid, rationalize, deny, or even accept the situation (Lazarus and Folkman, 1984). In short, Mrs. Miller is not even in the first stage of problem-solving, because she decides to deny the situation as a problem.

## CONCLUSIONS

Based on the analysis above, it is known that the three characters chose to be analyzed are Sister Aloysius, Sister James, and Mrs. Miller with their different characteristics show different problem-solving behavior towards the main problem served in the story. Sister Aloysius, the school principal of the parish school, is understandably the one who is eager to solve any problem which happens in her school. On the other hand, Sister James, though she is the first person who recognizes the strange behavior between Father Flynn and Donald Miller, tends to take less action and chooses to believe that what she suspects to the school's priest is just a misunderstanding. Meanwhile, Mrs. Miller acts nothing towards the problem found and chooses to just cope with the problem for what she wants is just her son's happiness though that may be from the strange relationship suspected.

From the analysis explained, it can be concluded that a problem-solving behavior which is taken by each character depends on what kind of character they hold. As has been mentioned that characters are the representation of human beings in real life, characters in the drama-based movie *Doubt* by John Patrick Shanley are also related to a factual psychological condition so that it can be analyzed the characters' problem-solving behavior which is divided into four stages: perception of the problem (awareness); the decision to engage in the problem-solving process: information search; the decision to act; and the evaluation process.

## REFERENCES

- Bandura, A. (1971). *Social Learning Theory*. New York City: General Learning Press.
- Carver, C. S., & Connor-Smith, J. (2009, July 2). Personality and Coping. *Annual Reviews Psychology*, 61, pp. 679-704. doi:10.1146/annurev.psych.093008.100352
- Klaler, M. (1998). *An Introduction to Literary Studies*. Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft.
- Lazarus, R.S., and Folkman, S. (1984). *Stress, Appraisal, and Coping*. New York: Springer.
- Martin, S. (1994). *An Introductory Guide to English Literature*. Harlow: Longman York Press.
- Robert, E. V. (1963). *Writing theme about literature (5th Edition)*. New Jersey: Prentice Hall.
- Rudin, S. (Producer), & Shanley, J.P. (Director). (2008). *Doubt*. United States of America: Scott Rudin Productions
- Sosiowati, I. G., & Malini, N. L. (Eds.). (2017). *English Prose Analysis: From Theories to Practices 1*. Denpasar: Cakra Press.
- Tallman, I., Leik, R.K., Gray, L.N, & Stafford, M.C. (1993). A Theory of Problem-Solving Behavior. *Social Psychology Quarterly*, 56(3), 157-1