

# Jason Dixon's Personality Development as Seen in Martin McDonagh's *Three Billboards Outside Ebbing, Missouri* (2017)

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## Abstract

This paper is aimed to reveal the personality development of Jason Dixon as seen in Martin McDonagh's *Three Billboards Outside Ebbing, Missouri* (2017). The change of Dixon personality made the researcher interested in analyzing the personality dynamic. In analyzing the data, the study uses descriptive qualitative methods. The data is collected through data collection techniques from the dialogue and any related data from outside the movie. After the data are collected, the researcher then reads, classifies, identifies, and selects the data. This study relies on Psychological literature theory and psychoanalysis by Sigmund Freud as the theoretical framework. Through the analysis we found out Dixon psychological changes from his id which is him respecting his senior, Bill Willoughby and it triggers his ego to do violence to people whom he thought has been involved in the billboard project that is to confront Bill Willoughby. However, as the movie goes by his personality changed because of his superego that is the letter from Bill Willoughby that shifted his moral.

**Keywords:** movie, psychoanalysis, psychological literature, personality change

## Introduction

Psychology is described as the scientific study of the mind and behavior. The word "psychology" originated from the Greek word "psyche" or life and "logia" or explanation. Psychology is the systematic, scientific study of behaviors and mental processes (Plotnik & Kouyoumdjian, 2010: 4).

Literature is a product of human thought. It can be influenced by the environment of the author; even it may contain the author's way of life. Whilst, most people consider that literary works are a mirror of human life. In other words, literary works are used by authors for telling what they feel and see and what they face in social life involving

human activities. Literary works are known by people in the written form, those are novels, poetry, and also play (Sangidu, 2004:2).

According to Wellek & Warren (1956:92-93), by applying psychological concepts to literary work, psychology can be conducted to evaluate and explain things and phenomena in humankind. "Psychology may have tightened particular conscious artists' sense of reality, enhanced their powers of observation, or allowed them to fall into previously unseen patterns. However, psychology is primarily a preface to the act of creation, and psychological truth is only an artistic value in the work if it enhances consistency and complexity, in other words, psychology is a work of art.

Psychoanalysis is a set of psychological theories and therapeutic practices that originated with Sigmund Freud's work and theories. The psyche, according to Freud, is divided into three parts: the id, ego, and superego. Those are the systems, not parts of the brain, that grow at various times throughout life. These three components are combined to produce complex human behavior. Individual id is based on instincts, ego is based on reality, and superego is based on morals. The concept that everyone has subconscious, emotions, wants, and memory is at the foundation of psychoanalysis. People can experience catharsis and acquire understanding into their current predicament, according to psychoanalysis, by bringing the content of the unconscious into conscious awareness. A person can find relief from psychological pain through this procedure. Psychoanalysis also claims that a person's unconscious urges impact their behavior.

Conflicts between the conscious and unconscious mind are often at the foundation of emotional and psychological issues like despair and anxiety. Early childhood experiences have a significant impact on psychological development. People use defense mechanisms to protect themselves from information contained in the unconscious (Fromm, Erich, 1992: 12-13).

## **Literary Review**

### **1. *Psychology of Literature***

The psychology of literature can be defined as the study of an author as an individual, the creative process, the psychological types and laws in a literary work, and the effect of the literary work on the readers (Wellek & Werren, 1956: 81). The author's views, dreams, conscious or unconscious mind, and variations between the author's

personality and the author in the book are all considered in the psychological approach (Wellek & Warren, 1956: 90).

## 2. *The Id, The Ego, and The Superego*

Freud's analysis model introduces three new personality systems that complement the previous theory about the conscious-unconscious mind. The three new systems are the id, the ego, and the superego. Those three systems work together to help the individual interact with his or her environment. The ego and the superego as the two systems that deal with reality help repress the id's needs since the id is the primordial system that aims to get excitation. When the three systems are odd with each other, the individual is said to be maladjusted (Hall, 1959:22).

<b>The Systems</b>	<b>Aspect</b>	<b>Principle</b>	<b>Function</b>	<b>Process</b>
<b>ID</b>	Biological	Pleasure	Keeping constancy	Reflect & primary process
<b>Ego</b>	Psychological	Reality	To connect the individual into the objective world	Secondary process (reality testing)
<b>Super Ego</b>	Sociological	Moral	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Repressing the id's aggressiveness</li> <li>○ Helping the ego to do something morally acceptable</li> </ul>	The ego-ideal & the conscience

## 3. *Dynamic of Personality*

The dynamic of personality is a system in which the three major systems, the id, the ego, and the superego are operated. Those three systems fulfill the needs of each other and interact with their environment. The id, by meaning, is the system that operated on the

unconscious hence, its action is such a reflex. When the id energy does not get what it wants, the energy will be shunted from one to the other object which is called displacement (Hall, 1959:39). Then there is the ego which will consider the action by judging it from reality with the help of the superego as the moral system.

#### **4. The Ego Defense Mechanism**

The ego defense mechanism is the irrational mechanism used by an individual when they get anxiety because of distorting, hiding, or denying reality. It can be used as an effective ego activity nonetheless, when the mechanism is too dominating the individual, it can suspend the adaptability and flexibility of the ego (Hall, 1959:97). There are some types of ego defense mechanisms which are:

a. Displacement

Displacement is the process when the psychological energy is displaced to the other object.

b. Sublimation

Sublimation is a mechanism where the individual rechanneled their id's needs into the objects that have high cultural goals or something intellectual, humanitarian, artistic, or cultural pursuits.

c. Repression

Repression is the mechanism to subdue the cathexis of the id, the ego, and the superego.

d. Projection

Projection is when an individual is having anxiety by a cathexis, they attribute the causation to the other object.

e. Reaction Formation

The reaction formation is a mechanism when an individual feels anxious by the cathexis of their id that contradicts the norm, the person will hide it using the opposite object.

f. Rationalization

Rationalization is the mechanism where the individual is in the cathexis. They will try to find a reason that seems logical.

g. Regression

Regression is the ego defense mechanism where the individual will act in contradiction to their stage level of development.

#### **5. American Police Law Enforcement**

Human being cannot be separated from rules and ethics. Instead, rules and ethics are those that help people to organize their life. They set a boundary for people's actions. Rules and ethics do exist in every part of a human's life from family, school, at work, etc. Speaking of the work environment, police institutions as the law enforcers have their law and enforcement that organize their officers. That law and enforcement also have the role to organize morality. Here are the law and enforcement of the American Police Department. Here is the American Police Law Enforcement:

*As a Law Enforcement Officer, my fundamental duty is to serve mankind; to safeguard lives and property; to protect the innocent against deception, the weak against oppression or intimidation, and the peaceful against violence or disorder; and to respect the Constitutional rights of all men to liberty, equality, and justice.*

*I will keep my private life unsullied as an example to all; maintain courageous calm in the face of danger, scorn, or ridicule; develop self-restraint, and be constantly mindful of the welfare of others. Honest in thought and deed in both my personal and official life, I will be exemplary in obeying the laws of the land and the regulations of my department. Whatever I see or hear of a confidential nature or that is confided to me in my official capacity will be kept ever secret unless revelation is necessary for the performance of my duty.*

*I will never act officiously or permit personal feelings, prejudices, animosities, or friendships to influence my decisions. With no compromise for crime and with relentless prosecution of criminals, I will enforce the law courteously and appropriately without fear or favor, malice, or ill will, never employing unnecessary force or violence and never accepting gratuities.*

*I recognize the badge of my office as a symbol of public faith, and I accept it as a public trust to be held so long as I am true to the ethics of the police service. I will constantly strive to achieve these objectives and ideals, dedicating myself.*

## **Methods**

This research uses a descriptive qualitative research method to analyze the film "Three Billboards Outside Ebbing, Missouri". Although the techniques are similar, qualitative methods use text and picture

data, have distinct data processing steps, and use a variety of designs (Cresswell, 2014: 223). This study applies several theories such as psychology literature by Wellek & Werren (1956) and psychoanalysis theory by Sigmund Freud (1923).

The object of the study is a movie directed by Martin McDonagh in 2017 entitled "Three Billboards Outside Ebbing, Missouri". The movie is from DVD rip and was watched repeatedly and carefully to gain a piece of thorough knowledge and understanding about the story. The data is collected through data collection technique from the dialogue after the data are collected, the researcher then reads, classifies, identifies, and selects the data. Furthermore, the procedure of analyzing the data processing and preparing data for the analysis, reading the whole data, displaying, finally interpreting the data.

## **Findings and Discussions**

### **1. Dixon's Ego at the Beginning of the Movie.**

In Three Billboards Outside Ebbing Missouri, Jason Dixon was characterized as a temperamental person. At first, Dixon was also portrayed as a problematic cop who, in his status as a justice enforcer, did not do his responsibility, instead he ignored them. In this context, it can be seen from how he handled Angela Hayes' case where he was supposed to solve the problem and find the perpetrator but on the contrary, he abandoned it. Furthermore, Dixon even attacked the owner of the billboard agent, Red Welby, in [12:20] because of the billboards he found previously that exposed Bill Willoughby for not handling Angela Hayes' case properly. The three billboards said; "HOW COME CHIEF WILLOUGHBY?", "STILL NO ARRESTS?", "RAPED WHILE DYING". Later, Dixon also confronts Red Welby in a bar regarding the billboards issue. Dixon said:

*"Willoughby is a good man. Hey, look at me. I'm talking nice to you now. Am I? I'm talking nice to you. He shouldn't have this be the only thing he thinks about, the last months left to him."*  
[18:44]

The monologue above shows how Dixon cares about Bill Willoughby's condition and he has high respect for Bill Willoughby. Bill Willoughby is the chief of Ebing's police department and Jason Dixon admires and respects him. As a result, Dixon became angry when he saw the billboards. Moreover, Bill Willoughby suffered from cancer; he only had a short period to live. Since Dixon admires

his senior, which is also the embodiment of his id. So that, the id drives his ego to confront everyone who is involved in the billboard project because in Dixon's mind, the billboard has disturbed the good image of Bill Willoughby. That also disturbed his ego to respect him.

## 2. *Dixon's Ego Defense Mechanism.*

Jason Dixon's problematic character occurs because of some reasons. Importantly, the problematic actions he has done were the result of Dixon's ego that has been distracted by his mom's ego. Mama Dixon is portrayed as a tough woman. Mama Dixon, despite her toughness, actually put a lot of care towards Dixon nonetheless, her care towards Dixon is implemented in the wrong way that makes Dixon lose his idealism. One of Mama Dixon's toughness can be seen from the evidence when she talked about Mildred Hayes' case. Dixon explained to his mother that Mildred Hayes was such a tough woman to handle, the following quotation shows Mama Dixon's response:

*Mama* : *Oh. Why don't you just fuck over thru her*  
*Dixon* *friends then?*  
*Dixon* : *Huh?*  
*Mama* : *You know. Why don't you fuck her friends*  
*Dixon* *then? You can bring her around out way. Has*  
*she got some friends you could fuck over?*  
[41:25 - 41:40]

As a result of his mother's response, Dixon did what his mother had told him about. as a result on the next day after their conversation, Mildred Hayes' friend, Denise Watson got arrested for possessing marijuana cigarettes In the next scene it is told that Dixon got fired, he told his mother about his condition, Mama Dixon's response towards her son's condition is emotional, she said that she wanted to meet the chief and ask them to give his son's job back.

*Mama* : *Well, do you want me to go down and talk to*  
*Dixon* *them?*  
*Dixon* : *No I don't want you to go down and talk to*  
*them. Somebody sending their goddamn*  
*mother down to talk to the goddamn police.*  
*And say what?*

Mama Dixon : *And say to give your job back and get rid of the black guy.* [01:09:26 - 01:09:43]

The dialogue above shows how Mama Dixon cares about her son but in a false way, Dixon was no longer a child that should be protected every time he got into a problem. Moreover, Dixon's action of throwing someone from the window is wrong and against the police enforcement. Dixon's uncontrollable action occurred because of his anger regarding the death of Bill Willoughby, the person whom Dixon admired. The action above shows that Dixon has violencing his original intention to become a good police and the law enforcement. As stated in the law enforcement below:

*"As a Law Enforcement Officer, my fundamental duty is...to protect the innocent against deception, the weak against oppression and intimidation, and the peaceful against violence..."*

*"I will never act officiously or permit personal feelings, prejudices, animosities, or friendships to influence my decisions.... never employing unnecessary force or violence..."*

However, Dixon's relationship with his mother is complicated. Mama Dixon's treatment towards Dixon has made Dixon's id and ego disturbed. Dixon's id and ego is in confusion, that Dixon often did something out of his rational. He is confused to choose between fulfilling his own id to be a good police officer or obeying his mother's will. As a result, Dixon is easily triggered by any statements related to his mother. He becomes defensive towards his mother every time someone talks about how his mother treats or calls out to her. Those can be seen from the below quotation when Jason Dixon, Red Welby, and that guy and Mildred Hayes were in the bar. Red Welby and Dixon were arguing before Mildred Hayes interrupted and pulled the mother card towards Dixon so that Dixon could leave.

Mildred Hayes : *Ain't it about time you got home to your momma Dixon?*  
Dixon : *No it ain't a time I got home to my momma. I told her I was gonna be out till twelve.* [19:20-19:29]



Another thing is when Mildred Hayes came to the police station to confront Dixon about arresting Denise Watson. Dixon was the one who handled Mildred Hayes but then she used Dixon's mother to confront him because he is easily triggered by it. The prove can be seen below:

- Mildred Hayes* : *You fucking prick*  
*Dixon* : *You do not call an officer of the law a fucking prick in his own station house Mrs. Hayes or anywhere actually*  
*Mildred Hayes* : *What's with the new hard-boiled attitude Dixon? Your momma been coaching ya?*  
*Dixon* : *No. My momma doesn't do that. [42:48-43:11]*

In addition, when in the investigation room where they talk about Mildred Hayes' action of exposing the cops' treatments towards black people. Dixon here confronts Mildred Hayes of her action because of it.

- Mildred Hayes* : *So, how's it all going in the nigger-torturing business, Dixon?*  
*Dixon* : *It's persons of eyes torturing business, these days. If you wanna know, I didn't torture nobody. What's the matter with you, saying that goddamn on TV? My momma watches that station.*  
*Mildred Hayes* : *Your momma doesn't know about torturing?*  
*Dixon* : *No, she's against that kinda thing. Who's against what? My momma is against people of color torturing. She said "nigger torturing". I said "you can't say nigger torturing no more. You gotta say, people of color torturing. Isn't that right, Chief? [28:09-28:40]*

Thus, the result of the confrontation between Dixon's desire to be a good police officer and obeying his mother is the imbalance of Dixon's internal filter process regarding reality. Instead of

filtering what kind of input that comes to him, Dixon at the end shows his ego defense mechanism following his reality. Dixon's ego defense mechanism is displacement. It can be seen from how Dixon acts in reality towards his surroundings. The internal world of the id is divided into a subjective, inner world (the mind), and objective (the environment). If he is to be properly adjusted, the person can bring these two worlds into harmony with one another (Hall, 1954:41). That's why he becomes problematic as a police officer because his ego is against his id.

### **3. Dixon's Personality Changes Through His Superego**

Superego is the moral and judicial category of personality. Rather than the realistic system, it is the ideal system of a person. Superego is the moral code of mankind (Hall, 1954:31). Dixon's problematic attitude is the result of his ego defense mechanism which deals with the external world and restrains his id. Through the conflicts, Dixon finally changed his attitude which is the result of his superego that drove his moral compass. As Bill Willoughby stated in the early scene in the movie, Dixon is a good man at heart. It can be seen from the quotation below:

*Cedric* : *Why in hell you keep that man on*  
*Conolly*  
*Willoughby* : *He is good man at heart*[12:10]

Later, Willoughby also states about Dixon's real personality in his letter before he committed suicide. In his letter, Willoughby explains how Dixon has to change his personality to be a real detective. The personality is the real Jason Dixon according to Willoughby. Willoughby is the one who understands Dixon and his problems but did not have a chance to tell Dixon. The proofs can be seen below:

*"...I think you've got the makings of a really good cop, Jason and you know why? Because deep down you're a decent man. I do think you're too angry though and I know it all since your dad died and you had to go to look after your mom and all. But as long as you hold so much onto hate then I don't think you're ever going to become what I know you wanna become, a detective. Cos you know what you need to become a detective? And I know you're gonna wince when I say this but what you*

*need to become a detective is love. Because thru love comes calm and thru calm comes thought. And you need thinking to detect stuff sometimes, Jason. You don't even need a gun. And you don't need hate. Hate never solved anything. But the calm did and thought did. Try it. Try it just for a change. No one thinks you are gay and if they do, arrest'em for homophobia. Won't they be surprised? Good luck to you Jason, you are a decent man, and yeah you've had a run of bad luck but things are gonna change for you, I can feel it." [01:17:50-01:20:09]*

Through the quotations above, it can be seen that Jason Dixon has gone into a problematic person because of the external factor which comes from his home hence Dixon holds so much hate because of it. Willoughby, who knows the real side of Dixon through his letter tries to convince Dixon about his first intention of joining the law enforcer which also can be seen from the quotation below which takes place in the scene where Dixon tries to convince Mildred Hayes about not losing hope about her daughter's case. On the other hand, that also shows Dixon's effort to be a cop.

*"...well I didn't used to be very good at English at school, so it was more "All you can do is try and not be so crap at English" Cos you need English, really, if you wanna be a cop. If you wanna be anything. Really. Unless you live in Mexico or something. But who wants that?" [01:39:26-01:39:54]*

The quotation above shows how Dixon tried his best for mastering English so that he can be a cop which is interrelated to what Willoughby has stated in his letter that he knows that Dixon wants to be a detective. It is his dream and Willoughby has helped Dixon to bring back his passion and change his behavior from confronting Mildred Hayes to helping her to solve the case.

## **Conclusion**

The psychological aspect has influenced the characters in the film "Three Billboards Outside Ebbing, Missouri" especially Jason Dixon into serious psychological change. Dixon's ego that has been distracted by his mom led him to show his ego defense mechanism which type is displacement and made him violate the law of enforcement and act violently toward other people.

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