

CHAPTER IV

DATA ANALYSIS

In this chapter, the writer discusses defense mechanisms used by Mildred Hayes and how Mildred Hayes makes use of the defenses to deal with her anxiety. Using Sigmund Freud and Anna Freud theory of defense mechanisms, the writer finds eight out of fourteen defenses used by Mildred to overcome her anxiety in this study. They are **repression, reaction formation, denial, isolation, rationalization, undoing, regression, and sublimation**. In the discussion, the descriptions of the eight defenses by Mildred are then followed by explanation of the processes she goes through in making use of the defenses. To support the writer's explanations of defense mechanism, she includes important scenes and dialogues.

4.1 Repression

Repression is an action of holding down the conscious mind from unpleasant experience and evading unacceptable impulse from touching consciousness (Chaplin & Krawiec, 1960). Blackman (2011) states repression closes the thought content out of consciousness. For example, when a student fails in his exam, he chooses to hang out with his friend. His choice to go out with his friend is a repression defense aimed to make him less worried about the failed exam.

Mildred practices the repression defense three times. First, when she finds out that her son, Robbie, is unhappy with the billboards that she rents; second, when she

thinks about her late daughter, Angela; and the last, when she finds out that Charlie, her ex-husband, burns her billboards.

4.1.1. The First Repression: taking a deep breath, holding it, and lengthening the exhale

In the beginning of the movie, it's seen that Mildred is driving Robbie to school. Robbie looks surprised when he sees a billboard with a text 'How Come Chief Willoughby?'. Then, two others are written with 'And Still No Arrest' 'Raped While Dying'. He glances to his Mom with annoyance in his eyes. Mildred looks back at him with a worry look. When they arrive at school, Robbie gets out of the car and bangs the door. He does not say anything to Mildred. Then, Mildred takes a long breath, holds it in her mouth, and lengthens the exhale. She finally continues driving to her place of work.

The scene above can be seen from minutes 08:57 to 09:49. It is also described in the movie script as follows:

MILDRED drives ROBBIE, her 17-year-old son, past the billboards - checking his reaction. He sees them but gives nothing away. She drops him at school. He heads off without a goodbye. (Martin, 2017, p. 1)

The use of repression defense by Mildred can be seen when Mildred feels anxious about Robbie. Mildred worries about Robbie's reaction after seeing the billboards. She is afraid that Robbie will not support what she did to find justice for the unsolved case of Angela. The form of repression defense is shown when she takes a long breath, holds it, and lengthens the exhale (see Fig. 4.1).



Figure 4.1. Mildred takes a deep breathe, holds it in her mouth, and makes a long exhale (McDonagh, 2018, 09:49)

The actions show Mildred's effort to hold back her anxiety in order not to hurt herself or spoil her mood further. With this kind of action, Mildred is able to relax and be in control of herself again.

4.1.2. The Second Repression: having her head down and walking out

Mildred is opening Angela's room. The room is taking her back to the time when Angela was still alive. They were arguing about Mildred not allowing Angela to borrow the car. Mildred told Angela to walk. Angela said that she would walk and wished that she would be raped on the way. Mildred wished the same thing to Angela. After the flashback is over, Mildred has her head down and walks out of Angela's room.

The scene above can be seen from minute 33:57 to 35:09. The part when Mildred has a flashback and her conversation with Angela before she has died is also described in the movie script below:

*(She goes into ANGELA's room, sits on the bed a while.)
Angela (flashback): Mom?
Mildred (flashback): Yeah?*

In the Mildred's house, kitchen (flashback)

(It's ten months ago. Mildred was washing dishes. Robbie was drawing, Angela was dressed to go out)

Angela: You ain't going out again tonight, are ya?

Mildred: Denise said we might get us a coupla drinks later, yeah.

Angela: Denise gonna be driving ya?

Mildred: Angela, why don't you just ask me if you can borrow the car?

Angela: Can I borrow the car?

Mildred: No.

Angela: Bitch!

Mildred: But I'll give you money for a taxi if you ask me nice and don't call me bitch.

Angela: So are ya gonna let me borrow the car or what?

Mildred: Why don't you just walk, Angela? Why don't you just walk?

Angela: You know what, I will walk, I will walk. And y'know what? I hope I get raped on the way.

(storms out...).

Mildred: Yeah? Well I hope you get raped on the way too!

(Door slams, flashback over.) (Martin, 2017)

When Mildred commented, "Why don't you just walk, Angela", she is satirizing angle about the limit use of the car yet also informing her how dangerous is to go home late as someone may take the opportunity to rape Angela it

Mildred uses repression defense when she thinks about her late daughter. She feels guilty and regrets what she said to Angela who was dead because of sadistic rape and murder. The form of repression can be seen when Mildred walks out of Angela's room with her head down. The scene when Mildred shows the form of her repression defense can be seen in Fig. 4.2



Figure 4.2. Mildred is having her head down while walking out from Angela's room (McDonagh, 2018, 35:09)

The writer interprets Mildred's head down gesture as her guilt feeling and regret for wishing Angela raped. But, the part when she walks out of the room implies her intention to put the anxiety behind, in her deepest mind, so she will be able to survive the lost and the guilty feeling.

4.1.3. The Third Repression: shaking her head and laying her back on the chair

Mildred is having a dinner with her friend, James. Surprisingly, Charlie and his girlfriend, Penelope come to the same restaurant. Charlie suddenly comes to Mildred's seat and apologizes to Mildred about her billboards. He says that he was drunk and angry. Initially, Mildred found her billboard was burnt at night. After hearing what Charlie says, Mildred is staring at him with unbelievable look. She is then slightly shaking her head while laying her back on the chair.

The scene above can be seen from minute 1:33:47 to 1:34:48. The scene is also described in the movie script below:

Mildred and James at dinner at a nice restaurant... Charlie and Penelope enter and pass, Charlie smiling at the sight of Mildred with a dwarf. Mildred has a fleeting look of embarrassment, which James registers.

...
James goes off to the toilet. Charlie comes over... sits in James seat, smiling.

Charlie: Listen, I didn't come over to break your balls, you can date as many midgets as you want. No, I came over to say I was sorry, actually.

Mildred: Sorry for what?

Charlie: I'm sorry about what happened to your billboards and all.

Mildred: Yeah well, that's all water under the bridge now, I guess.

Charlie: Good. I'm glad. I was pretty drunk, but it still don't excuse it.

Mildred just stares at him. (Martin, 2017)

In this part, Mildred uses repression defense when she deals with Charlie's confession. She feels disbelief and angry at the same time when Charlie says he accidentally burned her billboards because he was drunk. The form of repression defense that Mildred used depicted in the way she slightly shakes her head and lays her back on the chair. Her posture (see Fig. 4.3) implies her effort to restrain her anger by calming herself down:



Figure 4.3. Mildred holds back her anger toward Charlie (McDonagh, 2018,

01:34:48)

This kind of defense helps her to avoid making a scene in the public place. Charlie's expression when he apologizes to Mildred for burning her billboards and Mildred's reaction when she knows that Charlie burned her billboards are also shown Fig. 4.3.

4.2. Reaction Formation

Reaction formation alters a socially unacceptable desire into its opposite (Baumeister et al., 1998). Chaplin & Krawiec (1960) state that reaction formation is a technique that aims to substitute repressed wishes by their opposites. For example, when a girl finds out that her friend got new car. Instead of showing her envy, she compliments her friend's car.

Mildred uses reaction formation defense when she is confronted by Willoughby about her ex-husband's girlfriend and when she sees Charlie and Penelope, Charlie's girlfriend.

4.2.1. The First Reaction Formation: smiling instead of getting angry

Mildred is interrogated by Chief Willoughby after she drills a dentist's tumb. After talking for a while, Willoughby changes the question to Mildred personal life. He asks Mildred about Penelope, Charlie's girlfriend. The first and second scene show Mildred's annoyed expression in response to Will's questions about Penelope. But, Will keeps asking about Penelope. The third scene shows Will's satisfied expression after seeing Mildred cornered by his question. The last scene shows how

Mildred changes her annoyed expression with a smile while saying to Will to keep trying to bother her.

The dialogues which show the scene above can be seen from minutes 30:29 to 30:51

In the interrogation room

Willoughby: How is ole Charlie, by the way? He still shacked up with that pretty little intern works down at the zoo?

Mildred: He's still shacked up with some chic who smells of shit. I don't know if the zoo's got anything to do with it. Although I'd hope so.

Willoughby: How old is she? Nineteen? That must smart.

Mildred: (*smiling*) Keep trying, Officer. Keep trying. (Martin, 2017)

Mildred uses reaction formation when she feels threatened by Will's question.

Mildred who hates Penelope is forced to keep answering Will's question about Penelope. The form of reaction formation can be seen in Fig. 4.4. when Mildred changes her annoyed expression with a smile and challenge Will to keep bothering her.

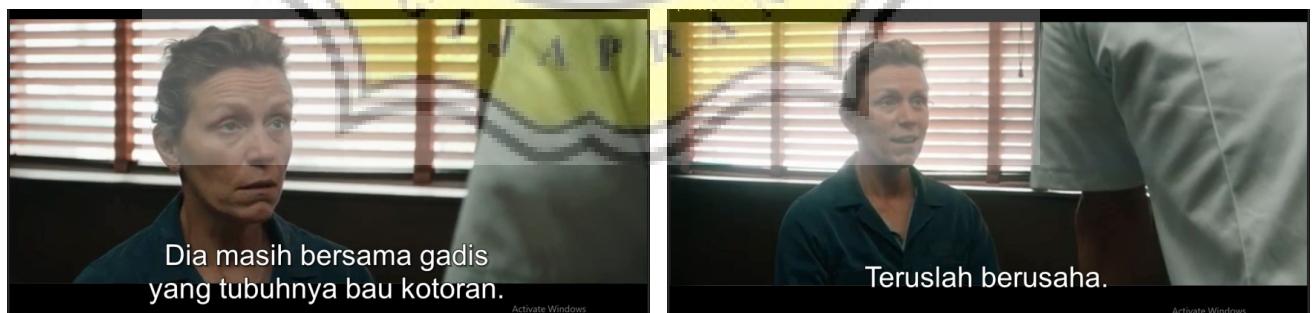


Figure 4.4. Mildred holds back her anger and changes her expression by smiling (McDonagh, 2018, 30:51)

Mildred knows that when she shows her anxiety to Will, he will continue to annoy her. So, like seen in the captured screen on the right, Mildred is seen to protect herself by smiling, which is a contrast to showing anxiety.

4.2.2. The Second Reaction Formation: Giving wise advice instead of getting

Angry

After Charlie's confession that he burned the billboards (4.1.3). Mildred takes a while for thinking before she walks to Charlie and Penelope's seat with a bottle of wine in her hand. Charlie looks surprised when he sees Mildred coming to his seat. Mildred walks closer to Charlie then she stares at Charlie and Penelope for a moment. She told Charlie, who abused her during their marriage, to take care of Penelope. She finally puts the bottle on Charlie's table.

Those part above can be seen from 1:35:58 to 1:37:05. It is also described in the script below:

In the restaurant

(Mildred comes to Charlie and Penelope's seat. She looks at them a moment... then places the bottle on the table for them to finish.)

Mildred: *Be nice to her, Charlie. You got that?* (Martin, 2017)

The use of reaction formation defense is shown by Mildred, when Mildred has to deal with Charlie after she earlier represses her anger toward Charlie (see Fig. 4.5). The scenes when Mildred gives Charlie and Penelope wine even when she is angry toward Charlie can be seen below:

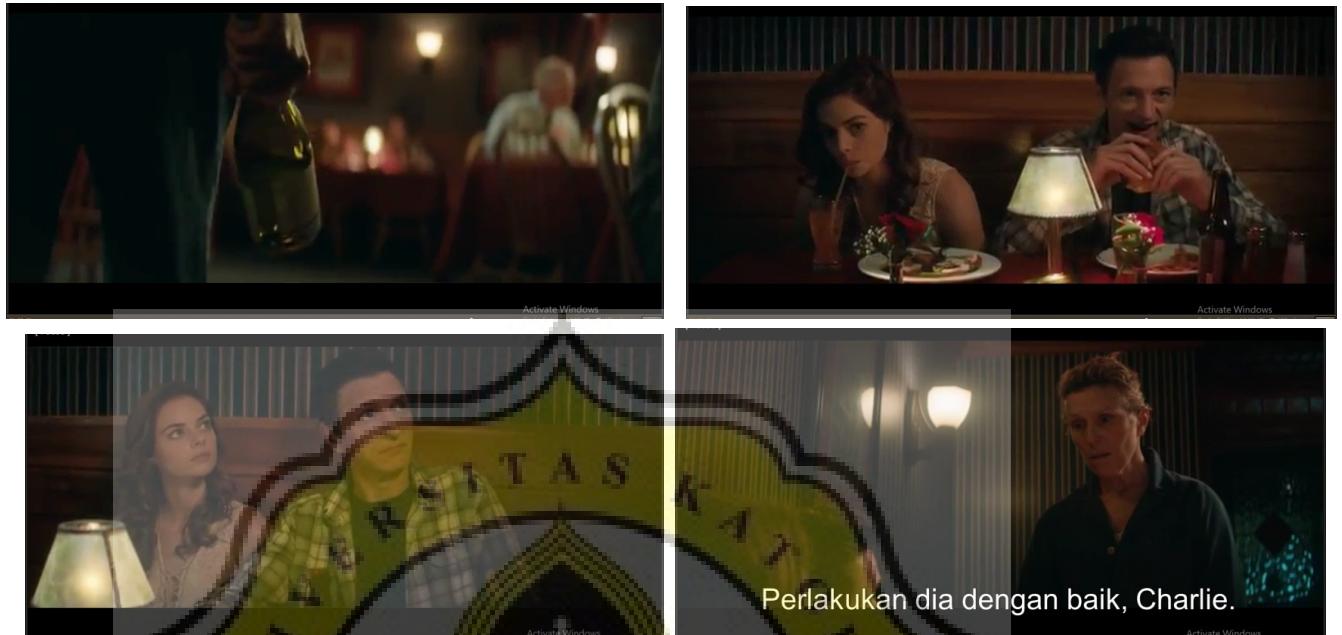


Figure 4.5. Mildred confronts Charlie and his girlfriend, Penelope (McDonagh,

2018, 01:37:05)

Mildred feels extremely angry to Charlie, but she knows she is in the restaurant and Penelope is sitting with Charlie. She does not want to fight Charlie in the public, especially in front of Charlie's girlfriend. The form of reaction formation is surely shown when Mildred reverses her anger to give kind advice and a bottle of wine to Charlie and Penelope. Her defense is important to avoid her getting angrier to Charlie.

4.3. Denial

Denial shuts external event from conscious mind (Boeree, 2006). For example, a popular rich boy likes an ordinary girl. He thinks she does not come from the same social level, then he says he doesn't like her in front of his friend because he

is ashamed of that fact. Denial defense is also used by Mildred when she disagrees with what Willoughby's opinion on her decision to rent billboard and when she doesn't believe when Charlie said that Angela wanted to move from with her father before she was dead.

4.3.1 The First Denial: Raising the voice and head

Mildred is interrogated by Willoughby in the interrogation room. Willoughby is asking Mildred if Charlie knows that he indirectly pays for the billboards that she rent. Then, Mildred raises her voice and says that she is paying for the billboards.

The scene above can be seen from minutes 31:00 to 31:12. It is also described in the script below:

In the interrogation room

Willoughby: Charlie doesn't know about them (the billboards), does he?

Mildred: It's none of his business.

Willoughby: He's kinda paying for 'em though, ain't he?

Mildred: (*raising her voice*) I'm paying for 'em. (Martin, 2017)

The denial defense is used by Mildred when she is asked about the rent of her billboard. Mildred feels anxious when Willoughby knows the source of the money to rent the billboards. The form of denial is shown when Mildred neglects or does not accept the fact Willoughby said. What Willoughby said, in the writer's opinion, is a fact because Mildred actually sold Charlie's tractor to pay the rent of her billboards.

The dialogues below prove that Will is true about the source of the money:

In the interrogation room

Willoughby (min.30:21): What I heard was you had to sell off your ex-husband's tractor trailer to even pay for this month's billboards, that right?

...

At home

Charlie (min.37:46): How much those billboards cost?

Mildred (min.37:48): ‘Bout the same as a tractor-trailer. (Martin, 2017)

After stating that she pays the billboard with her own money when confronted by Will and denying that she sold Charlie’s tractor trailer, Mildred finally confesses that she sold the trailer. Her posture (see Fig. 4.6) implies her effort to neglect the fact that she sold Charlie’s tractor:



Figure 4.6. Mildred neglects the fact that Will said by raising her head and her voice (McDonagh, 2018, 31:12)

Mildred doesn’t want Willoughby to know where she got the money to pay for her billboards’ rent. She wants to protect her pride and prove that she is able to pay the billboards’ rent by herself. Meanwhile, actually she cannot afford the rent. She then denies the fact that she is unable to pay the rent by herself by raising her voice and head while replying Willoughby.

4.3.2 The Second Denial: Raising the voice and showing an expression of disbelief

Charlie comes to Mildred’s house to ask about the billboard. After talking and arguing, Charlie goes home. In his way out of the house, Charlie says that Angela told

him about Mildred and her who were arguing every day and she wanted to move. Mildred's unbelievable expression of what Charlie said. Charlie keeps saying about his regret not to let Angela moved with him. Then, Mildred standing from her chair while raising her voice and crying. She says that she does not believe in Charlie.

The scene when Charlie and Mildred are arguing can be seen from minutes 39:49 – 40:52. It is also being described in the script below:

In Mildred's house

Charlie: Yeah, alright, I'm such a shitty dad and you're such a great mom. Alright. So how come a week before she died she comes around asking if she can move in with me at my place, cause she couldn't stand the two of you bitching at each other no more, and fighting with each other no more...

Mildred: I don't believe you...

Charlie: And I said "No, stay at home, your mom loves you." And now I wish I hadn't, cos if I hadn't she'd still fucking be here!

Mildred: (*crying*) I don't believe you! (Martin, 2017)

Mildred makes use of denial defense when she neglects Charlie's story about what Angela told him before she died. Mildred feels sad and disappointed with the fact that Angela was not happy living with her. The form of denial is showed when Mildred is standing from her chair, raising her voice of disagreement, and crying. Mildred does not want to accept any reason from Charlie, even though she knows that Angela and she were really arguing a lot until the night before Angela was dead (see 4.1.2 when they are arguing):



4.7. Mildred stands up from her seat to neglect what Charlie said (McDonagh,

2018, 40:52)

Mildred doesn't want to be blamed that she is the reason of Angela's death. So, she protects her mind of guilty feeling towards Angela by denying the fact said by Charlie.

4.4 Isolation

Isolation is not including any emotions which aim to shut any endangering memories or impulses (Boeree, 2006). For example, when a nurse has a phobia with blood, she must take care of a patient who is bleeding because of an accident. The nurse uses isolation defense by not involving or blocking her fear of blood. Mildred also uses isolation defense when she is faced with Willoughby's suffering from cancer

4.4.1 The Isolation Defense: not showing any kinds of emotion on the face

Willoughby visits Mildred's house. He talks about Angela's case that has not improved in seven months and that the police already did everything to find Angela's murderer. Willoughby then changes the topic about his illness. Willoughby is sad when talking about his cancer. Mildred seems cold when she says that she knows about Will's condition. Will then wonders why she keeps renting the billboards.

Mildred says that if he dies, the billboards have no meaning, so she rents them while Will is alive. Will is surprised when he hears Mildred answer. He goes while still looking at Mildred's cold expression. Mildred looks down and closes her eyes while moving her body back and forth at the swing.

The scene above can be found from minutes 16:11 – 17:05. It is also described in the script as:

Willoughby: There's something else, Mildred. (*pause*) I got cancer. I'm dying.
Mildred: I know it.
Willoughby: Huh?
Mildred: I know it. Most everybody in town knows it.
Willoughby: You know it, and you still put those billboards up?
Mildred: Well, they would not be as effective after you croak, right?
(Willoughby looks at her in disbelief, gets in his car, drives off.) (Martin, 2017)

Mildred makes use of isolation defense when she is faced with Will's condition. Mildred who is working hard to catch the murderer of her daughter is faced with Chief Will's condition, where he got cancer. As a normal human being, if hearing that someone is suffering from cancer and has a little time left will feel sympathy. However, Mildred isolates or closes her sympathy toward Will. The form of isolation defense can be seen when Mildred keeps on being cold stoned when Will tells her about his condition (see figure 4.8):



Figure 4.8. Mildred keeps her expression flat when Will is talking about his

illness (McDonagh, 2018, 17:05)

The defense helps Mildred to focus on Angela's case and do not give any excuses for Will to run the case slowly because of his condition. Mildred does not want Willoughby to take an advantage of his illness to run Angela's case slowly, so Mildred does not give him any sympathy.

4.5. Undoing

Undoing is to cancel something that has already happened or done by doing certain action (Boeree, 2006). For example, when two girls are being friends and they are arguing about a boy that they like, but they go out together after they argued. In the movie, Mildred also uses undoing defense by helping Willoughby after they are fighting.

4.5.1 The Undoing Defense: helping someone after being involved in a fight with him

Mildred and Will are arguing about the source of Mildred's money to rent the billboards. But, Willoughby is surprisingly coughing blood. He gushes a spray of blood to Mildred's face. Then Willoughby is looking at Mildred with a poor look and

trying to wipe the blood from Mildred's face. Mildred is staring at him with teary eyes and seems really surprised with what she just saw. Mildred then asks for help. When Willoughby is taken to the hospital, he asks other police to let Mildred go.

The scene above can be found from minutes 31:10 – 31:40. It is also described in the script as:

In the interrogation room

Mildred: I'm paying for them.

Willoughby: This month you are. How about when...

(Willoughby suddenly lets out a short sharp cough which spurts a spray of blood that hits Mildred in the face, wholly by accident. Horrified, shaking, Willoughby tries to wipe her face with a handkerchief, Mildred almost in tears at his embarrassment)

Willoughby : I didn't mean to....

Mildred: I know....

Willoughby: It was an accident...

Mildred: I know, baby.....

Willoughby: It's blood.

Mildred: I know.

(They're both in tears, and there's a desperation in his eyes, as he sits there shaking.)

Mildred: I'll go get somebody...

(She rushes out the door.)

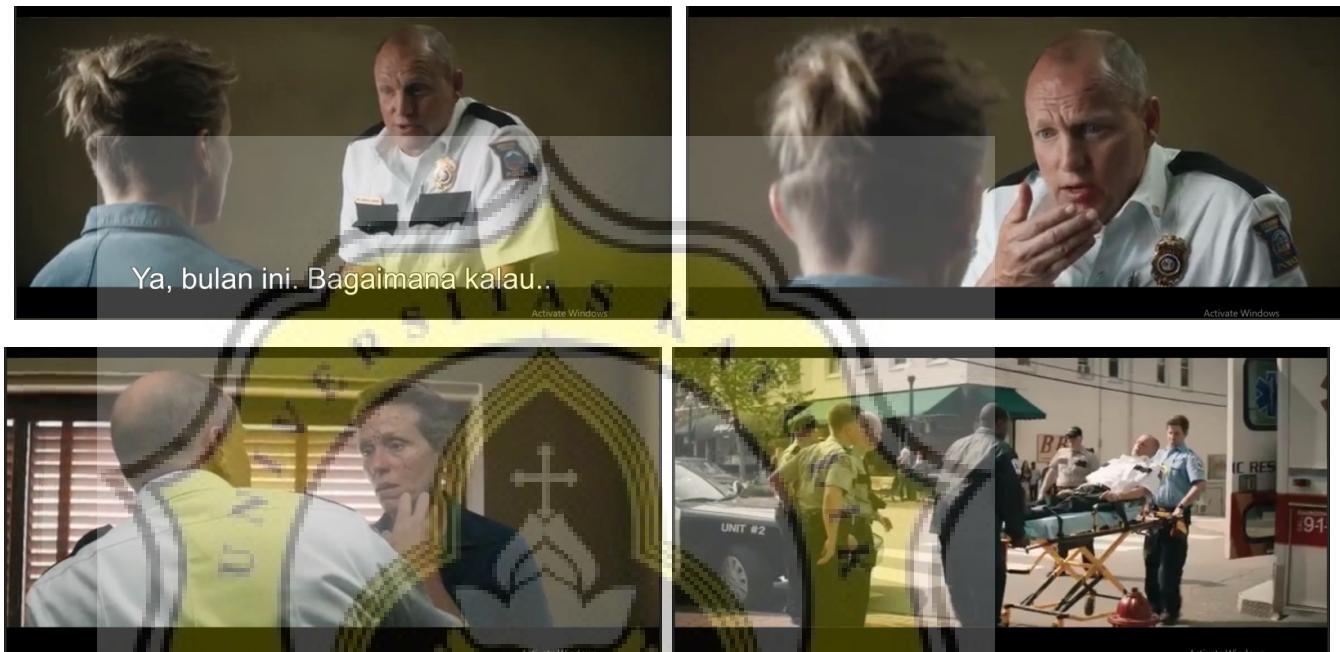
In front of The Police Station

(Willoughby is gurneyed into an ambulance past towns-people, Dixon beside him.)

Willoughby: Just let her go. (Martin, 2017)

The use of undoing defense is showed when Mildred helps Willoughby after they are arguing. Mildred is mad at Will for questioning the origin of the rent money for her billboards. The form of undoing is depicted when Mildred cancels or does the reverse of something that just happened. She is angry with Will, but when she sees

Will's poor condition she reverses or cancels the anger by helping Will (see figure 4.10):



**Figure 4.9. Mildred is looking for help after seeing Will got a bloody cough
(McDonagh, 2018, 31:40)**

This defense can help Mildred to keep her humanity because it shows even when she is angry with Will, she keeps helping him.

4.6. Regression

Regression is a setback of people's behavior to be more childish when they feel depressed (Boeree, 2006). For example, when an employee gets depressed with his work, he plays swing in the playground to make him more relax. Mildred also shows this regression defense when Robbie is angry with her.

4.6.1 The Regression Defense: throwing a spoon of cereal to someone

Mildred and Robbie are having breakfast. Robbie keeps quiet while eating his breakfast. Mildred looks at him with uncomfortable look. She then takes a short breath while looking at her bowl. Unexpectedly, Mildred is throwing a spoon of cereal to Robbie's head. Robbie is shocked and looks to his mother with cranky face. He then calls his Mom an old cunt. Mildred answers him that she is not old. Mildred and Robbie are looking at each other while smiling.

The part above can be seen from minutes 36:37 – 36:52. It is also described in the script below:

In the dining room

(Mildred and Robbie are getting their breakfasts in silence, Robbie more moody than she is. She tries to make him laugh, he ignores her. Finally, she takes a big spoonful of milk and cereal, and she slings it straight in his face and hair.)

Mildred: Slipped. Oops.

(She stares at him, deadpan, as milk and cereal drip down his face and hair.)

Robbie: You.... old.... cunt.

Mildred: (suppressing laughter) I ain't old, Robbie.. (Martin, 2017)

Mildred makes use of regression defense when she sees her son does not talk to her at breakfast. Mildred feels uncomfortable while she sees that Robbie does not talk to her when they are having breakfast. The form of regression defense can surely be seen when Mildred is throwing cereal to Robbie's head (see figure 4.11):





Figure 4.10. Mildred throws a spoon of cereal to Robbie's face (McDonagh, 2018, 31:40)

Throwing cereal or playing with food is something that child does. But, Mildred does that thing in order to release her anxiety. It can be proved because after throwing the cereal, Robbie and she can be in good term again.

4.7. Sublimation

Sublimation is a change of negative behavior to socially acceptable and productive behavior (Boeree, 2006). For example, a girl who is binge eating (uncontrolled eating) chooses to use her hobby of eating to be a food tester. Mildred uses sublimation defense when she turns all her disappointments and sadness of her daughter's death by chasing a rapist.

4.7.1 The Sublimation Defense: turning anxiety into something more valuable by catching a criminal

In the earliest scene, Dixon who is an ex-policeman and Will's friend caught a guy that was suspected as Angela's murderer. However, after being checked by police, the guy's DNA is not matched Angela's murderer. Dixon calls Mildred to tell her about it. Mildred is shocked after hearing what Dixon said. She is crying while still holding the phone and knocking the phone to her head. She cries for a while. Dixon then ensures Mildred to catch the guy. Even the guy is not Angela's rapist, but he stills a rapist. Then, Mildred changes her expression by showing strength and faith in her eyes. Mildred decides to catch the guy with Dixon tomorrow.

The scenes above can be found from minutes 1:44:16 – 1:50:17. It is also described in the script as:

Mildred: Hello?

Dixon: It's Dixon.

Mildred: (pause) Tell me.

Dixon: (pause) He wasn't the guy.

(Mildred crumples down beside the burnt patch of ground. She cries a quiet while, lets out a long, cold breath, then picks the phone back up.)

.....

Dixon: Um, there was one thing I was thinking.

Mildred: What's that?

Dixon: Well,... I know he isn't your rapist. He is a rapist, though. I'm sure of that.

.....

Dixon: I got his license plate. I know where he lives.

Mildred: Where's he live?

Dixon: Lives in Idaho.

Mildred: That's funny. I'm driving to Idaho in the morning.

Dixon: Want some company?
Mildred: (*pause*) Sure. (Martin, 2017)

Mildred makes use of sublimation defense when she decides to catch the guy that is a rapist. Mildred from the first story narrated as a mother who seeks for justice for her late daughter. But in this part, she changes all her sad, depressing, and regretful feeling of losing her daughter by doing a positive and productive action which is catching a rapist. That action represents the form of sublimation defense (see figure 4.12 when Mildred changes her expression):



Figure 4.11. Mildred changes her sadness to good spirit (McDonagh, 2018,

01:50:17)

From the first part at the movie, Mildred is always narrated as depressed mother who is seeking justice for her late daughter. However, in the end of the movie, Mildred chooses to change all her anxieties formed by the feeling of sadness, guilty, and depression into good and new spirit. She decides to catch a rapist by her own to bring justice for rape victim which has same unfortunate destiny as her daughter.

The writer finally concludes that Mildred uses the seven defense mechanisms to keep her mental health or for her psychological survival. In using defense

mechanism, Mildred does particular actions aim to deal with her anxiety. In this study, anxiety has broad meaning including anger, regret, disappointment, guilt, and others uncomfortable feeling.

