

## NEUROTIC TRENDS OF TONYA HARDING IN *I, TONYA* MOVIE

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### **Abstract**

Psychological issue namely neurotics has always been an important matter in human life since long ago. There have been several literary works that represent this psychological issue. From many of those works which portray psychological problems, *I, Tonya* is one of the representative works. In this research, the writer did a film study by using the psychoanalysis approach. The source of the data is the script and scenes of the *I, Tonya* movie. From the research, it can be concluded that a neurotic personality is shaped due to several aspects. Tonya Harding's childhood and culture had an impact on how she behaved as an adult. Because of her experiences as a child and the competitive culture of American citizens, she develops an aggressive personality. We can infer that Tonya's neurotic trend is gravitating away from people who behave aggressively. Instead of being a survivor, Tonya ended up as an aggressive and hostile person. In conclusion, Tonya was only able to use one neurotic trend, acting violently and manipulatively, as a coping method because of her childhood and culture.

**Keywords:** neurotic trends, psychoanalysis

### **INTRODUCTION**

When a movie is watched and appreciated by its audience, different meanings can be found in it. This issue exists because movies can be seen as a result of a literary work, means of entertainment, or a free space of expression in a learning society. In addition, movies also can be seen as an empirical reality that recorded an honest social value that happened in society or social reality (Sobur, 2017, p. 32). Thus, movies have the strength to influence various social segments, which means a movie maker has the potency to influence or to create a perspective in society with the meanings they wanted to deliver their movie (Sobur, 2017, p. 32).

One movie that offers meaning and reflection of reality is *I, Tonya* as it was made based on a famous retired real-life figure skater, Tonya Harding. The movie as directed by Craig Gillespie and written by Steven Rogers, and was released in 2017. The movie is about Tonya, who was a controversial figure skater who becomes a target of the public

and media's critique for her allegedly aggressive behavior which resulted in an attack on her competitor during the 1994 Olympic Winters, Nancy Kerrigan. The movie was made based on a direct interview with most of the main players (Stewart, 2017). According to Harding herself, only five creative choices that stretched the truth were made because the movie was so accurately depicted (Pitluk et al., 2023). The movie showed Tonya's life before the incident and how her surrounding turned her into a temperamental and aggressive woman, to the point where she was not even afraid to berate the competition judge for not letting her win. Using a mocking documentary style, the movie addresses a wide range of issues under the stealth cover of humor, yet, it still managed to depict the reality of how a woman is treated for being herself (Felsenthal, 2017; Halligan, 2017). Consequently, what Tonya went through might be related to what the audience has gone through.

Due to its relevance to the audience, some research had been done to analyze the movie. Firstly, Wijaksono & Nugroho (2018) analyzed gender discrimination in *I, Tonya*. Wijaksono & Nugroho believed that the movie should be seen as a fight against discrimination toward women which often happened in rural places in America (p. 4208). Thus, this movie tried to construct the public's thoughts and encourage them to fight women's discrimination. Seeing a woman like Tonya Harding bravely speaks up about the harassment she experienced encourages people who suffered both physically and mentally to do the same. In addition, Wijaksono & Nugroho also studied the portrayal of feminism by using Barthes's semiotic approach. They concluded that the denotation is represented visually from the scenes which showed how women are marginalized in society. Then, the connotation is shown from the scenes which describe the fear that Tonya experienced. While the myth can be seen from the scene on how Tonya was discriminated whereas women must not experience any of the inconveniences in the 80s and 90s (p. 4209).

Secondly, Korzeniewska-Nowakowska (2021) analyzed the depiction of social rejection, American poverty, and denial of personal freedom in *I, Tonya*. She stated that not only the movie provides sporting endeavors but also a vivid social and economic background. In the case of Harding, Korzeniewska-Nowakowska stated that rather than rising from the lens of her talent, athletic prowess, and hard work, a post-self emanates from her personal, financial, and community-related struggles. *I, Tonya* depicted white poverty's reality and its complicated, ambivalent face, turning Tonya into a pitiful sufferer and mocking pariah at the same time. (p. 73).

Lastly, linguistic research was done to study women's linguistic features in the movie *I, Tonya* (Purnata et al., 2021). The research showed that even though Lakoff's theory of women's language is still debatable, the researchers found out that nine types of women linguistics features were used by the female characters in the "I Tonya" movie. Furthermore, three women linguistics (lexical hedges or filler, intensifier, and avoidance of strong swear words) were used in the film. In short, the women's linguistic feature was

used to show uncertainty and to intensify and emphasize the utterance. In addition, linguistic features were also used to get a response and express feelings (p. 99).

All in all, the research above had shown how *I, Tonya* can be studied from different perspectives. Unfortunately, none of the studies above examined how Tonya's behavior is formed and affected by the environment. Whereas, *I, Tonya* showed that an individual's behavior and needs were powered by their surroundings and the culture they grew up in. On top of that, this movie embraces a bitter truth faced by underprivileged members of society and invokes a sympathetic perspective toward Tonya Harding's real incident (O'Sullivan, 2017).

As *I, Tonya* shows the issue of behavior forming, the writers are interested to use Karen Horney's theory which discussed how personality circulates on the impact of culture and childhood experiences. Horney agreed with Freud on one major point – the importance of the early years of childhood in shaping the adult personality. However, she differed from him on the specifics of how personality is formed. Instead of focusing on biological forces, Horney argued that social forces in childhood influence personality development. Consequently, the social relationship between children and parents becomes the key factor (Schultz & Schultz, 2017, p. 139).

Thus, this research focuses on the following objectives:

- a. to discover the impact of the childhood and culture of Tonya Harding's behavior in *I, Tonya* movie.
- b. to discover Horney's neurotic trends (toward, against, or away from people) which are represented by Tonya Harding's characterization as a result of her childhood and culture.

## METHOD

In this research, the writer did a film study by using the psychoanalysis approach. In analyzing the literary work, the writers choose a movie entitled *I, Tonya*. The writers focus on the characterization of the main character of a movie. Also, this movie is chosen because Karen Horney's theory of *safety needs* – by which she meant the need for security and freedom from fear (Schultz & Schultz, 2017, p. 139) can be richly discussed in the selected movie.

In this research, the writers focused on Horney's theory of neurosis. She believed that whether infants experience a feeling of security and an absence of fear is decisive in determining the normality of their personality development. Like other living organisms, Horney believed that people need favorable conditions for growth. Unfortunately, a diverse range of unfavorable circumstances could interfere with these vital conditions. If parents do not satisfy the child's needs for safety and satisfaction, the child develops feelings of basic hostility toward the parents. However, children seldom overtly express this hostility as rage; instead, they repress their hostility toward their parents and have no awareness of it. Repressed anger is followed by intense feelings of insecurity and a general sense of unease. This condition is called basic anxiety, which Horney defined as "a feeling

of being isolated and helpless in a world conceived as potentially hostile” (Feist et al., 2018, pp. 175-176). Regardless of how we express basic anxiety, the feeling is similar for all of us. In Horney’s words, we feel “small, insignificant, helpless, deserted, endangered, in a world that is out to abuse, cheat, attack, humiliate, betray. In childhood we try to protect ourselves against basic anxiety in four quite different ways: securing affection and love, being submissive, attaining power, or withdrawing (Schultz & Schultz, 2017, p. 140).

The four self-protective mechanisms Horney proposed above have a single goal: to defend against basic anxiety. They motivate the person to seek security and reassurance rather than happiness or pleasure. Horney believed that any of the self-protective mechanisms could become so permanent a part of the personality that it assumes the characteristics of a drive or needs in determining the individual’s behavior. Horney noted that as human beings, we all manifest these needs to some degree. For example, at one time or another, everyone seeks affection or pursues achievement. However, it can turn into neurotic when the person intensively and compulsively pursues their satisfaction as the “only” way to resolve basic anxiety (Schultz & Schultz, 2017, p. 142). Thus, in this research, the writers focus on analyzing Tonya Harding’s behavior based on Horney’s neurotic trends. Neurotic trends consist of three categories of behaviors and attitudes toward oneself and others that express a person’s needs. The term neurotic trends are Horney’s revision of the concept of neurotic needs.

Table 1. Summary of Horney’s Neurotic Trends (Feist et al., 2018, p. 182)

<b>Defense against anxiety</b>	
<b>Normal defenses</b>	<b>Neurotic defenses</b>
<b>Spontaneous movement</b>	<b>Compulsive movement</b>
<b>Toward people (Friendly, loving personally)</b>	<b>Toward people (Compliant personality)</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Affection &amp; approval</li> <li>• Powerful partner</li> <li>• Narrow limits to life</li> </ul>
<b>Against people (a survivor in a competitive society)</b>	<b>Against people (Aggressive personality)</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Power</li> <li>• Exploitation</li> <li>• Recognition &amp; unassailability</li> <li>• Personal admiration</li> <li>• Personal achievement</li> </ul>
<b>Away from people (Autonomous, serene personality)</b>	<b>Away from people (Detached personality)</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Self-sufficiency and independence</li> <li>• Perfection and prestige</li> </ul>

Source: Feist et al. (2018, p. 182)

Although the previously stated neurotic trends are part of Horney's theory of neurosis, they also apply to normal individuals. Between normal and neurotic attitudes, there are, of course, significant differences. Whereas normal people are mostly or

completely conscious of their strategies toward other people, neurotics are unaware of their basic attitude (Feist et al., 2018, p. 179).

The data collection procedure of this research is started by watching the *I, Tonya* movie five times to be able to grasp the essence of the story. Next, the writers found the transcript of the dialogue by downloading subtitles and finding samples (screenshots) that match the theory. Lastly, the writers listed all data subtitles and screenshots from the film and classify them as proof in analyzing the problem of this research.

## FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

### Findings on the Impact of Childhood

The findings that the authors discovered regarding the first research question about Tonya Harding's childhood and culture are listed below. It is clear from scenes and dialogue examples how her upbringing and culture strongly shaped her hostile behavior.

Throughout the early part of the film, various scenes and dialogue reflect Tonya's unpleasant childhood experience. Horney underlined the role of childhood events in the development of neurotic personalities. Horney stated that one of the significant impacts that shape a child's personality is traumatic events such as neglect, physical abuse, sexual abuse, verbal abuse, and rejection (Schultz & Schultz, 2017, p. 139).



Figure 1. Tonya (in pink) is trying to prevent her dad from leaving  
(From *I, Tonya* [00:10:47], by Craig Gillespie (director), 2017)

#### DATUM 1

Tonya	: I'm sorry.
Al	: It's not your fault, Tonnie.
Tonya	: Then take me with you.
Al	: I'm gonna be working 12-hour night shifts. I can't look after you.
Tonya	: You could if you want to.
Al	: We'll talk on the phone. It'll all work out. You gotta move now, honey. (00:10:47).

Figure 1 and Datum 1 show the conversation between the 9 years-old Tonya with her father. At that time, her father, Al, decided to go out of their house because he was abused by Lavona, Tonya's mother. The scene shows that Tonya's father, an important figure in her early life, neglected and rejected her when she was a child. Figure 1 also shows that Tonya tried to prevent her father from moving out by stopping his car. She stood in front of the car while crying. Tonya's behavior was undoubtedly influenced by the fact that her father abandoned her.

The second piece of data, which reflects Tonya's difficult childhood, is shown below.



Figure 2. Lavona abused Tonya since she was a child  
(From *I, Tonya* [00:07:23], by Craig Gillespie (director), 2017)

#### DATUM 2

Lavona (in voiceover): To hear her tell it, I would operate on her daily without anaesthesia. One fuckin' time. I hit her one time, with a hairbrush. (00:07:23/01:59:59).

In Figure 2, the scene showed that Lavona is hitting Tonya with a hairbrush because Tonya does not skate well. In addition, Datum 2 shows Lavona's dialogue within the voiceover of the interview. She said, even though Tonya would suffer during the procedure without anesthesia, Lavona also stated that she would perform it. Thus, from Lavona's statement above, outside the ice ring, Tonya's mother does not give any signs of affection such as affirming words like "you have done this right" or "I'm proud of you". Instead, Tonya received emotional and physical abuse as if she never does anything well enough to satisfy her mother's standards. Lavona defended herself by saying that she did it for Tonya's benefit. If Lavona never demonstrates compassion, in her opinion, Tonya will become stronger and a better skater.

Horney believed that childhood was dominated by the safety need, by which she meant the need for security and freedom from fear. Whether infants experience a feeling of security and an absence of fear is decisive in determining the normality of their personality development. A child's security depends entirely on how the parents treat the child. The major way parents weaken or prevent security is by displaying a lack of warmth and affection (Schultz & Schultz, 2017, p. 139). From the scenes provided above, it could be seen that Tonya Harding did not receive love and security from both parents. Here lies the reason why Tonya develops hostility and anxiety behavior.

### Findings on the Impact of Culture

According to Horney, culture was acknowledged as the primary base of personality development. Horney sees the world as a place where everyone is competing against each other. Western society highlighted the insatiable demands for accomplishments and success. This was illustrated by the fact that an individual's accomplishments, regardless of how great they were, were never adequate and they ought to aspire and accomplish more. Horney mentioned that Western society played a major role in the rising

competitiveness. She argued that Western society displayed the contrary of humility and kinship—the society instead, displayed aggressiveness and the drive to be superior or to always win (Feist et al., 2018, p. 175).

The aggressiveness and the drive to be superior over others are illustrated through the findings below.



Figure 3. Jeff (left) is emphasizing the fact on the threat against Tonya (right).  
(From *I, Tonya* [00:59:18], by Craig Gillespie (director), 2017)

DATUM 3  
 Sheriff : I've received a death threat.  
 Tonya : From Jeff?  
 Sheriff : Against you.  
 Tonya : What the F?!  
 Jeff : What'd they say exactly?  
 Sheriff : If Harding skates today, she'll get a bullet in the back.  
 Diane : How serious should we take this?  
 Jeff : Right? I mean, girl skaters at this level  
 (00:59:18).

From Figure 3 and Datum 3 above, we can see a conversation happening between the sheriff, Tonya, Jeff, and Diane Rawlinson. The sheriff interrupted Tonya's practice to tell her that she received a death threat saying that if Tonya skated that day, she would get a bullet in the back of her head. Receiving such a threat, Tonya's coach, Diane asked if the threat should be taken seriously. Jeff added that such a threat during the competition always happened since girl skaters often mess with each other's skate blades and costumes.

Based on that conversation, it can be identified receiving such a death threat during the competition is very common in Western society. Although Western society advocates freedom and encourages individuals to reach for their dream, however, the concept of freedom was severely limited due to the individuals' privileges, such as their social status, heredity, and community-imposed social standards (Feist et al., 2018, p. 175).

Another issue related to Tonya's limitation to fulfilling the community-imposed social standards can be seen in the excerpt below.

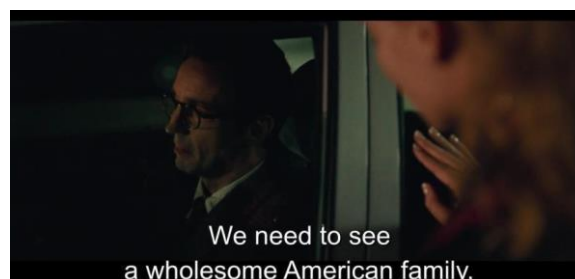


Figure 4. Judge (left) is being sarcastic towards Tonya (right).

(From *I, Tonya* [00:54:34], by Craig Gillespie (director), 2017)

DATUM 4	
Tonya	: Sir? Excuse me. Can we talk a minute about my score?
Judge	: [in a sarcastic tone] Happy to.
Tonya	: I know you don't like me. But I'm landing all my jumps out there.
Judge	: Tonya... It's never been entirely about skating. I'll deny I ever said it honey, but you're just not the image we want to portray. You're representing our country, for goodness' sake. We need to see a wholesome American family. And you refuse to play along.
Tonya	: I don't have a wholesome American family. Why can't it just be about skating? (00:54:34)

Based on Figure 4 and Datum 4, Tonya is trying to get an explanation because she had been judged unfairly during the competition by talking to one of the judges before the judge heads home. In the conversation, the judge said in a sarcastic tone that he would be happy to share. Tonya argued that her technique was good since she always lands all her jumps. However, the judge answered that skating was not only about technique, it is also about the image the judges wanted as a representation of the country, which is a wholesome American family, and Tonya does not have it. In the scene, they want Tonya to represent a wholesome family as the face of America. For Tonya, it is something that she could not afford. The privilege to have a loving, financially stable, and supportive family is something that Tonya could not get from any member of his family neither from his husband nor mother. Tonya also struggles with poverty as she had to wear her handmade costumes while another contestant could just buy them off.

The issue depicted in Figure 4 and Datum 4 has highlighted the insatiable demands for accomplishments and success that were introduced by Western society. This was demonstrated by the fact that an individual's accomplishments, regardless of how great they were, were never adequate and they ought to aspire and accomplish more. Besides that, Western civilization has been advocating for people's freedom as the concept of freedom evolve, claiming that everyone could dream big and achieve everything they wanted with patience and hard effort. However, the concept of freedom was severely limited due to the individuals' privileges, such as their social status, heredity, and community-imposed social standards. Henceforth, Tonya's neurosis is a result of erratic behavior, a hostile atmosphere, discrimination, lack of respect, disparaging attitudes, isolation, injustice, lack of reliable warmth, and indirect domination.

### Findings on the Portrayal of neurotic trends on Tonya Harding

To address the second research issue of Harding's neurotic trends, the writers present the findings below. Based on Tonya's characteristics and her attitude as she grew up, Tonya could be considered a neurotic individual. Horney believed that a neurotic individual is a person who, when faced with similar problems that affected normal people, experienced the problem to a greater degree. While normal, healthy individuals can use



various maneuvers when facing problems, neurotic individual compulsively repeats the same strategy (Feist et al., 2018, p. 176). Neurotic can only do one of three movements a healthy person can do, which is: moving towards others, against and away. Thus, in this research, the writers found out that Tonya's neurotic trend is the *movement against people*.

### The Need for Power

According to Horney, neurotic people whose response toward hostility is moving against people, tend to need power. Neurotic people with this need tend to control other people and avoid feeling weak and stupid (Feist et al., 2018, p. 178). This kind of need is usually combined with the need for prestige and possession. Tonya's need for power can be seen through the excerpts below:



Figure 5. Tonya is threatening other skaters in the skating rink.  
(From *I, Tonya* [00:01:18], by Craig Gillespie (director), 2017)

This scene above happened during a practice in the skating rink. In this scene, Tonya disliked it when other people skate near her because they only hindered her practice. Instead of understanding that the skating rink does not belong solely to her, Tonya skates toward the other skater and displayed authority toward them. In the scene in Figure 5, Tonya skates toward the other skater even though they do not interact with each other before. Tonya tells the other skater to go away because they are in Tonya's way. However, Tonya threatened them rather than telling them in a polite manner, which caused the other skater to become intimidated and skate away.

This behavior of Tonya showed a sign that Tonya strives for power. According to Horney, the need for power is frequently paired with a desire for prestige and ownership, manifesting as a desire to exert control over others and avoid thoughts of weakness or stupidity (Feist et al., 2018, p. 178).

In the scene before, we can see how Tonya claimed that the skating rink is hers. She was angry when other people used the same skating rink as her. Meanwhile, the skating rink that she used was open to the public. What is more, she even thought that those people in the same skating rink were disturbing her during her practice and hindered her success. In conclusion, the manifestation of Tonya's need to control other people can be seen clearly from the way she claims the skating rink. By owning the skating rink for herself, she showed that she is powerful and superior to other people.

### The Need for Social Recognition

According to Horney, neurotic people need social recognition and unassailability. People with this kind of neurotic need always try to be the most important, to be first, or to attract attention to themselves (Feist et al., 2018, p. 178). Tonya's need for social recognition and unassailability can be seen through the excerpts below:



Figure 6. Tonya, in modern day, is talking about herself.

(From *I, Tonya* [00:02:08], by Craig Gillespie (director), 2017)

DATUM 6  
Tonya

: What's people's impression of me? That I'm a real person. That I didn't ever apologize for growin' up poor or bein' a red neck which is what I am. In a sport where the friggin' judges want you to be this old-timey version of what a woman's supposed to be. Um. For bein' the first U.S. woman to land a triple axel. So fuck 'em. (00:02:08/00:03:30)

A neurotic has the potency to show the need for social recognition or prestige and unassailability. A person with this need wants themselves to be the most important, the most attention-grabbing, and the first (Feist et al., 2018, p. 178). In the Figure 6 and Datum 6 above, Tonya is interviewed about herself and how other people have an impression of Tonya. Tonya explained how she became a strong person despite her growing up in a poor family. She shows that she is still a professional figure skater. By mentioning this part, she demands that society acknowledge her and respect her accomplishment. Tonya also added about 'the first U.S. woman' which is an attention-grabbing title, and an important title. The way she talks about herself is also her way of being known by society.

### The Need to Exploit Other People

Horney mentioned that neurotic individual tends to need to exploit other people. Neurotic people tend to be manipulative and believe that other people exist to be used, but they dislike being exploited by others (Feist et al., 2018, p. 178). Tonya displays the need to exploit people through the scene when she married Jeff.



Figure 7. Tonya is having a wedding party by being married to Jeff Gilooly.  
(From *I, Tonya* [00: 30:34], by Craig Gillespie (director), 2017)

DATUM 7

Tonya (in voiceover): You do dumb things when you're young. Like marrying Jeff. The wedding was nice. I mean, I could have insurance, good benefits all around. He had a car. Plus I was doing 6 hours a day of practice while I worked a drill press, I did welding, I ran a forklift. But now, now I could just skate like all those other girls. (00:30:34)

From Figure 7 and Datum 7, Tonya stated she did dumb things when she was young, that as marrying Jeff. Though she did marry Jeff out of love back then, she admitted that by marrying Jeff, she could have insurance and other good benefits.

It was shown throughout the movie that Tonya was poor and every penny her mother made was used as an investment in her skating career; Tonya must work hard to receive what she wanted. As she was growing up, she had to provide for herself by doing various jobs. Tonya would practice 6 hours a day while working a drill press, welding, and running a forklift, which made her life harder than it was. When Tonya agreed to marry Jeff, she knew that she did not marry him because she loved Jeff. She knew that the wedding was nice because by marrying Jeff, she could get the insurance and other benefits Jeff received at work.

### The Need for Personal Achievement

Horney mentioned that individuals with the need for personal achievement most often tend to have ambitions to be the greatest and greater than other people. Neurotic people with this kind of need feel dissatisfied when they could not be at the top or not receive the highest achievement and defeat other people to confirm their superiority (Feist et al., 2018, p. 178). This was illustrated through the scene below:

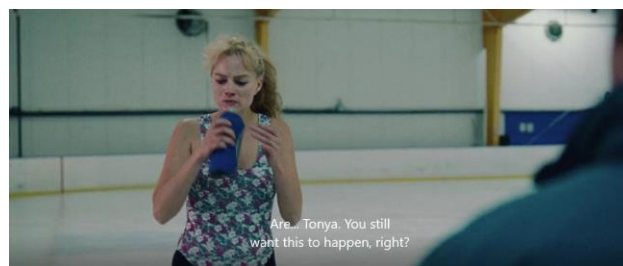


Figure 8. Shawn (right) is questioning Tonya's decision.  
(From *I, Tonya* [01:04:42], by Craig Gillespie (director), 2017)

DATA 8

Shawn : Whoa! You can't call it off. This baby has moving parts. Balls are already being played with.

Jeff : Too bad. All they had to do was mail fucking letters, Shawn!

Shawn : These are not the kind of guys you want to double cross. Trust me.

Jeff : That's your problem. And get me my thousand bucks back. They didn't do anything.

Shawn : Are... Tonya. You still want this to happen, right? I can still make this happen.

Tonya : I don't care, Shawn. I clearly have bigger shit to fry. (01:04:42)

Figure 8 shows a scene where after Tonya received a death threat, Jeff and Shawn hired people to send a death threat to Nancy Kerrigan in the hope that Nancy Kerrigan would feel threatened and stop practicing. The discussion as shown in Data 8 was not done secretly but in front of Tonya. When the idea of sending a death threat to Nancy Kerrigan arise, Tonya does not oppose the idea. Instead, she even supported the idea by looking for information on where Kerrigan practices. In the conversation between Jeff and Shawn above, Jeff was asking Shawn to call the idea off because he sensed that something is not right about the guy, they send to deliver a death threat to Kerrigan. Shawn tried to prevent Jeff from calling it off by asking Tonya whether Tonya still want to do the proposed idea. Although Tonya recognized from the conversation just happened between Shawn and Jeff that there is a possibility that things might go wrong, she pays no heed to it since she was already upset and dissatisfied enough for pausing her practice for several days due to the death threat sent to her.

Horney stated that neurotic people have a strong desire to be the best and most superior, even if it means defeating other people (Feist et al., 2018, p.178). Though Tonya knew that the plan is about to go wrong, Tonya does not care about Nancy Kerrigan's safety despite claiming that Kerrigan was Tonya's friend and that she had shared rooms with her during the away competition. Knowing that her friend—and her competitor at the same time are facing a threat, instead of being fair by trying to stop the plan and proceed to healthy competition with Kerrigan, Tonya just shrugged it off, saying that she cares more about achieving things for herself.

### **The Need for Personal Admiration**

According to Horney, neurotic people need personal admiration. Neurotics have a strong desire to be admired for who they are rather than what they have. Others' admiration and approval are necessary to keep their inflated self-esteem (Feist et al., 2018, p. 178). In Tonya Harding, the need for personal admiration can be identified through the excerpt below:

DATUM 9

Tonya (in voiceover) : He was calling all the time saying "I've been to therapy. I love you. We belong together. Take me back." I want to be loved. And I hoped it would work. So, I went back.

Tonya : I don't think I can make it to the Olympics without you.

Tonya (in voiceover) : I figured it was just for 3 weeks. The second I  
made the team I was gonna dump his ass.  
(00:41:30)

In Datum 9, Tonya had a conflict with herself regarding what she felt toward Jeff. At first, she wanted to be loved, so she went back to Jeff's side even after Jeff abused her. She even admitted that she cannot make it to the Olympics without Jeff. However, she then admitted that she only wanted to go back with Jeff for 3 weeks so that she could participate well in the Olympics.

Horney stated that others' admiration and approval are necessary to keep the neurotics continuously having self-esteem (Feist et al., 2018, p. 178). The scene showed that at first, Tonya leaves Jeff because Jeff could not give her the personal admiration she wanted. Tonya's admiration was also accompanied by her need for personal achievement. To feel confident when performing in the Olympics, she needed to receive admiration from Jeff. In the movie, during the three weeks, Tonya got back together, Jeff showed admiration for Tonya by giving Tonya encouragement that she is better than other skaters. In conclusion, Tonya needed admiration from Jeff to boost her confidence.

## DISCUSSION

The first research question being investigated in this study is how Tonya Harding's childhood and culture influenced her behavior in *I, Tonya* movie. Horney explained that neurotics condition was caused by a hostile environment, starting from the family of the individual and the cultural impact on the individual (Feist et al., 2018). This aligns with the findings from Korzeniewska-Nowakowska (2021) and Hanifah & Rokhman (2020) research which highlighted that the main character's anxiety and hostility were shaped by their life experience. In addition, the writer found out that Tonya Harding's neurosis was also caused by Tonya's life experience of facing a hostile environment starting from her own family, other people, and the cultural condition surrounding her. Tonya is abandoned by her father, and she received constant abuse from her mother.

The situation that happens to Tonya aligns with the research (Jannah & Safrina, 2018) which stated that because children still have many parts that are growing or developing, they require a safe environment. As a result, being in such a harsh environment or being abused can have a variety of effects on children, including dating abuse. What is more, a recent study even suggests that child abuse is a predictor for the development of aggressive behavior in humans (Ran et al., 2022). Here lies the reason why Tonya's neurotic trend is *moving against people*. Tonya's experience of childhood is an essential factor in the development of aggressive behavior.

Next, regarding the issue of culture, study shows that competition invariably increases motivation and effort. An individual's competitive orientation may interact with the nature of the competitive environment (Ives et al., 2020). In addition, Marian Beane the director of International Students at The University of North Carolina at Charlotte stated that American culture emphasizes achievement. The drive to compete is frequently

what drives people to work harder. The Americans often compete with themselves as well as others (Beane, 2021).

Unfortunately, the cultural condition does not favour Tonya's poor economic condition since she is under the pressure of endless achievement in an aggressive competitiveness condition. There are insatiable demands for accomplishments and success that were introduced by Western society - one of which is showing a wholesome American family. Unlike Nancy Kerrigan, Tonya Harding did not strive to present her class and gender seamlessly. Tonya's attempts to influence the media appeared awkward, graceless, and occasionally irritatingly inappropriate without the girlish, or the pitiful charm of Monica Lewinsky, for instance, or the sulky self-possession of Amy Fisher (Foote, 2003).

A study from Barker & Barclay (2016) shows that harming behavior may be favored when competition for resources occurs locally because it increases individuals' fitness relative to close competitors. Their study also suggests that local competition in human groups not only promotes a willingness to harm others in general but also causes ingroup hostility. Here lies the reason Tonya develops aggressive behaviour. From the findings above, in competition, girl skaters often mess with each other's skate blades and costumes. This action proves Barker & Barclay's study which concluded that when a competition was local, people were more willing to harm ingroup members than outgroup members because ingroup members were the relevant competitive targets. Here lies the reason why Tonya Harding developed aggressive behavior as an adult. The discussion will be further elaborated below.

To answer the second research question, the writers explore the portrayal of Horney's neurotic trend in the character of Tonya Harding. From here, it can be seen that Tonya's neurotic trend is moving against people. People with this type of trend assume that everyone is nasty and often behaves aggressively. Neurotically aggressive people have a strong desire to exploit people and use them for their gain; they are unwilling to accept their mistakes and are driven by a compulsive need to appear perfect, dominant, and better (Feist et al., 2018, p. 181). These movements are proven by Tonya's neurotic need for power, need to exploit others, need for social recognition and unassailability, need for personal admiration, and need for personal achievement.

First, Tonya's neurotic need for power can be seen as she wants to control the whole public skating rink only for herself. Second, Tonya's need to exploit others was shown through Tonya's motivation in marrying Jeff, which is only for insurance so that she can focus on her skating career. Third, Tonya's neurotic need for social recognition and unassailability was shown through Tonya's confrontation with the judges when she failed to win a competition. Tonya also sees Diane's criticism as an insult, making her decide to fire Diane. Tonya's need for personal achievement can be seen through Tonya's indifference albeit knowing the death threat sent by Tonya's husband towards Nancy Kerrigan. At last, Tonya's need for personal admiration can be seen through Tonya's

statement that she stayed with Jeff so that she can perform well upon receiving Jeff's admiration towards her.

Had Tonya been a normal person, she would be able to survive in a competitive society by using each of the neurotic trends to solve their basic conflict (Feist et al., 2018, p. 179). People who choose *to move against people* as a coping strategy figured out how to ramp up protest rather than clinging behavior. There is a sense that the other is bad or withholding. Those with moving against coping strategy are prone to interpret ambiguous stimuli as signs of injustice or attack and respond accordingly, enacting the old system of an angry child vigorously protesting at an unresponsive parent (Broom, 2010).

From the findings, Tonya can be seen as a neurotic individual. Instead of becoming a survivor in life, she compulsively does the mentioned actions as her coping mechanism to stay alive. For example, normal people would not be angry to share the skating rink since the place was open to the public. Tonya's behavior is in line with the studies which stated that neuroticism has a positive relationship with aggressive behavior (Dong et al., 2022; Safara et al., 2022). It can happen because individuals who experience high levels of anxiety feel uncomfortable so the tendency of aggression is increasing. This is the cause of her irritation with other skaters at the public rink.

Unlike Tonya who exploited Jeff for his insurance and benefits through their marriage, normal people would not feel the need to exploit other people to feel assured and stay alive. For neurotic individuals like Tonya, there is a strong need to outsmart or exploit others, and relationships are developed solely to better themselves (Coolidge et al., 2015). For this reason, Tonya claimed that the insurance and other favorable aspects were the only reasons she married Jeff.

Lastly, normal people would be able to accept not always winning all the time instead of confronting the judges for not winning a competition. Normal people would not be indifferent if their closest one was about to do something threatening their competitor in a competition. Normal people would also not be using manipulation to make themselves feel desired. But, since Tonya is a neurotic individual, her preference of manipulate people is in line with a study from Mandal & Horak (2016) which stated that manipulation tactics of neurotic patients are of morbid nature.

## CONCLUSION

In conclusion, Tonya Harding's childhood and culture influenced her behavior as an adult. She becomes an aggressive person because of her childhood experience and the competitive culture of American citizens. Thus, how someone lives as an adult depends on how one is treated when they are younger and the culture which shapes their perspective. If they were not growing up in a proper environment, they could become a neurotic person like Tonya. Lastly, it can be concluded that Tonya's neurotic trend is moving against people. Her aggressiveness prevents her from building a healthy and productive life and even may put others at a disadvantage. Tonya was only able to use one neurotic trend as a coping mechanism impulsively, and that was to act aggressively

and manipulatively. Finally, it is advised that future studies examine the *I, Tonya* movie using other behaviorism theories.

## COPYRIGHT

All the images used as the data were taken from *I, Tonya* movie directed by Craig Gillespie, produced by LuckyChap Entertainment, and released in 2017. This information has been cited accordingly and included in the references section.

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