

Navigating Toxic Parental Relationship: A Study of Attachment Theory in August Wilson's *Fences*

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Abstract

August Wilson, in his play *Fences*, presents the father-son relationship as the character of the father stands for toxic parent. This paper investigates the intersection between attachment theory and the concept of toxic parental relationships in the play. Attachment theory divides into two sections: one is secure and the other is insecure, which divides into three patterns (avoidant, ambivalent, and disorganized). The aim of the study is to delve into the characters' attachment patterns and how they shape their interactions within the familial context. The study attempts to understand the dynamics of attachment between the protagonist, Troy Maxson, and his sons, Lyons and Cory, through an analysis of their relationship within themes of love, control, and generational trauma. Furthermore, the research examines the implications of these attachment patterns on familial conflicts and individual development. Through a nuanced exploration, it contributes to a deeper understanding of the complex interplay between attachment theory and the portrayal of toxic parental relationships in literary narratives.

Keywords: Attachment Theory, Family, Relationship, Parents, Toxic, *Fences*



دراسة العلاقة الأبوية السامة: دراسة نظرية التعلق في "الأسوار" لأوغست ويلسون

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المستخلص

يقدم أوغست ويلسون، في مسرحيته (الأسوار) العلاقة بين الأب والابن حيث تمثل شخصية الأب الوالد السام. تبحث هذه الورقة في التقاطع بين نظرية التعلق ومفهوم العلاقات الأبوية السامة في المسرحية. تنقسم نظرية التعلق إلى قسمين: أحدهما آمن، والآخر غير آمن، والآخر ينقسم إلى ثلاثة أنماط (متجنب، ومتناقض، وغير منظم). الهدف من الدراسة هو التعمق في أنماط ارتباط الشخصيات وكيفية تشكيل تفاعلاتها ضمن السياق العائلي. تحاول الدراسة فهم ديناميكيات الارتباط بين بطل الرواية تروي ماكسون وأبنائه ليونز وكوري، من خلال تحليل علاقتهم ضمن موضوعات الحب والسيطرة وصددمات الأجيال. علاوة على ذلك، يبحث البحث في آثار أنماط التعلق هذه على الصراعات الأسرية والتنمية الفردية. من خلال استكشاف دقيق، فإنه يساهم في فهم أعمق للتفاعل المعقد بين نظرية التعلق وتصوير العلاقات الأبوية السامة في الروايات الأدبية.

الكلمات المفتاحية: نظرية التعلق، الأسرة، العلاقة، الوالدين، السامة، الأسوار

1. Introduction

August Wilson (1945–2005) is a playwright who wrote a series of critically acclaimed plays depicting African American life, each set in a distinct decade of the twentieth century (Herrington, 2022). His play, *Fences*, explores the complexity of family relationships, with a particular emphasis on the toxic relationship within the Maxson family. The main character, Troy Maxson, is the man of the family who takes on the responsibility of providing his family with food and money. His past experiences with racism have had a great impact on his personality since he is an African American male in American society. His upbringing by a toxic father has built his desire to control his children's lives and shaped Troy's dictatorial manner and troubled connection with his children.

Though *Fences* is not a biography of Wilson, there is much evidence that resembles his life. Wilson's relationship with his stepfather, Bedford, was fraught with strife. In *Fences*, David Bedford serves as a model for Troy. Bedford, a poor but bright high school football player in the 1930s. Since he did not get the scholarship he desired, he turns to crime. Bedford murdered a man while robbing a shop and served twenty-three years in jail for it. Bedford, like the fictitious Troy Maxson in *Fences*, never reached his athletic goals, but he is unlike Troy in that he thought his stepson would fulfill them. Unlike Cory, Wilson aspired to be a writer, not an athlete (Bogumil). Since Troy resembles Wilson's stepfather, Rose may resemble his mother since his mother's name is Daisy, which is a kind of flower just like Rose's name meaning is.

2. Theoretical Framework

2.1 Key Words

2.1.1 Toxic Parenting

Toxic parents are parents who routinely act in ways that make their children feel guilty, fearful, or obligated to do something. Their behaviors are not isolated incidents but rather recurring patterns of conduct that have a detrimental impact on their child's life. The fact is, parents are human beings. That implies parents may make errors, shout excessively, or do potentially harmful things to their children even unknowingly. However, they feel an overwhelming need to improve and put things right. A toxic parent, on the other hand, is more interested in their personal wants than in the pain or damage they are causing. They are unlikely to admit that their actions are incorrect. The neglect or abuse tends to be continuous or increasing (Marcin, 2020).

New research regularly backs up the idea that family bonding is important for young people's internal assets. Based on Bowlby's (1977)

attachment theory, the level of security or insecurity in a relationship depends on how well parents care for their children, especially how sensitive and responsive they are to their needs. In this way, a safe connection gives a child the ability to deal with stress and build healthy bonds with others. Insecure connections, on the other hand, raise the risk of social and emotional problems. These can range from issues with self-control in infants to bullying and bad behavior among peers in kids and teens. Parental control or overprotection happens when parents are too controlling and overbearing, making the kid feel like a baby and stopping them from growing up to be an independent person (Sek-yum Ngai & Cheung, 2009). Teenagers in the US who took part in studies about mental health issues in school were more likely to exhibit signs of depression, phobia, and anxiety. Such behavior would happen if their parents showed "affectionless control" traits, which include not caring much and having a lot of control (Canetti et al., 1997). And this indicates that teenagers in general, if they don't get enough attention or affection from their parents, will suffer from depression, phobia, and anxiety.

2.2 Related Works

While numerous studies have delved into attachment theory, little attention has been given to its application in analyzing August Wilson's *Fences*, which is rich in familial themes. This research examines familial dynamics within the play through a familial lens. For instance, Dunham's (2011) work, *Poisonous Parenting: Toxic Relationships Between Parents and Their Adult Children*, provided a thorough exploration of toxic parental relationships. Similarly, Sek-yum and Cheung's (2009) study on "The Effects of Parental Care and Parental Control on the Internal Assets of Adolescent Children in Hong Kong" shed light on the impact of parental behavior on their children. Edelstein and Shaver's (2004) examination of "Avoidant Attachment: Exploration of an Oxymoron" discussed how avoidance of attachment shapes individuals' personalities. In "Larger than life: Mythicizing the Life and Death of August Wilson's *Fences*' Hero" (2021), Mohsen k. Abbas studied Wilson's aims to equalize the African American experience with white culture and inspire hope for a brighter future. Harith Turki in his paper "Double Consciousness in August Wilson's *Fences*" (2021), examined the characters' double consciousness between their two identities, African and American. In "Fatherhood and Socio-Economic Responsibilities towards Children as Seen through *Fences* by August Wilson" (2022) Senankpon Raoul Ahouangansi studied the stable household that fathers can provide for their children and how Troy missed doing that, just like his father could not provide it for him. In her essay

"Racism in August Wilson's Selected Plays: A Historical Background" (2023), Sami Abed Hasan explored the play from a racist viewpoint and highlights the torture of African-American individuals in the 1950s.

3. The Analytical Part

3.1 Methodology of the Study

New research supports the idea that family bonding is important for young people's internal assets. Based on John Bowlby's (1977) attachment theory, a relationship's level of security or insecurity depends on how well parents care for their children, especially how sensitive and responsive they are to their needs. In this way, a safe connection gives a child the ability to deal with stress and build healthy bonds with others. Insecure connections, on the other hand, raise the risk of social and emotional problems. These can range from issues with self-control in infants to bullying and bad behavior among peers in kids and teens. Parental control or overprotection happens when parents are too controlling and overbearing, making the kid feel like a baby and stopping them from growing up to be an independent person (Sekyung Ngai & Cheung, 2009). Teenagers in the US who took part in studies about mental health issues in school were more likely to exhibit signs of depression, phobia, and anxiety. Such behavior would happen if their parents showed "affectionless control" traits, which include not caring much and having a lot of control (Canetti et al., 1997). And this indicates that teenagers in general, if do not get enough attention or affection from their parents, they will suffer from depression, phobia, and anxiety.

3.2 Data Analysis

3.2.1 Shadow and Light

Wilson emphasizes toxic parent types by using the juxtaposition between Rose and Troy personalities. Troy's insecure attachment mixed with toxic traits and Rose's secure attachment mixed with healthy traits are captured by the essence of their contrasting personalities and their impact on the family. Secure attachment's individuals have a good working picture of themselves and others, so they are at ease with both intimacy and independence. Such people often demonstrate openness in communicating feelings and ideas. They find comfort in both relying on others and having others rely on them, or in asking for help and support (Jan, 2022). While avoidant attachment is marked by a dislike of closeness, an inability to rely on others for comfort and safety, and an excessive need for self-reliance, people who are high on the avoidance dimension often use techniques to stop attachments from happening. Because of this, they often ignore or hide signs that have to do with love, feelings, and relationships (Gillath 16).

Individuals who are secure may typically be self-sufficient since they have discovered that their relationship partners consistently give protection, support, and encouragement when required. They do not have protected blocking circuits that stop them from feeling all emotions. This impacts how they see themselves and their relationships, which shapes their healthy relationships with others. Both secure and avoidant people see themselves as having high self-esteem, but avoidant self-images are maintained by a mix of protective projection of their own undesirable features onto others and repression or suppression of dangers and worries. Secure people tend to make excellent relationship partners because they are skilled, sympathetic caretakers. Avoidant people do not react well to partners in need and have difficulty delivering empathetic care (Edelstein & Shaver, 2004).

Troy's speech about his father reveals that he has an abusive father. He talks about his father with Lyons and Bono. Troy's anger at his father drove numerous negative events throughout his life. Troy's father did not leave him with a house or other financial things. Instead, he left him with psychological problems, which could manifest as generational trauma or toxic behaviors. Psychological issues have determined Troy's behavior as both father and husband. As a child, Troy saw how his father brutally treated his mother and siblings. His father was mean to his family because they were farmers, so Troy and his family had to work hard on his father's farm. Troy claims that his father was selfish and prioritized his wants above the interests of the family, which proves he is a toxic father. The behavior of Troy's father led him to feel that his pain went beyond what was humanly conceivable, and that can be seen when Troy said, "When my daddy turned to face me, I could see why the devil had never come to get him...cause he was the devil himself" (Wilson, 1985, p. 55). In other words, Troy's metaphor emphasizes the tragedy of his circumstances as an adolescent. His father was more than simply harsh; he was the devil, a symbol of absolute hatred and wickedness. Troy's father's actions toward him drove him to flee at an early age, forcing him to steal and rob.

Troy mentioned that when he was fourteen, he had a love affair with a girl his father rejected. Therefore, Troy had to leave home since his father hit him with a leather strap. Troy thought that was because he did not finish his job, but the real reason was different. As Troy said, "so he could have the gal for himself" (Wilson, 1985, p. 55). That incident dealt the final blow since Troy said, "When I see what the matter of it was, I lost all fear of my daddy. Right there is where I become a man" (Wilson, 1985, p. 55). Troy left home because he could not stand his father's behavior and felt cheated by the man he looked up to. Lies, violence, and unsolved problems shaped Troy's relationship with his father. Troy's mother left him early in his life.

Therefore, he has formed an avoidant attachment style. People with an avoidant attachment style are so afraid of intimacy that they avoid emotional connections with others. They would rather not depend on other people or have other people depend on them (Robinson et al., 2021). It is mirrored in Troy's life since his actions reveal that he is a narcissistic person. Narcissistic personality disorder (NPD) is a personality condition in which people have an unrealistic view of themselves. They also have a strong need for the attention and admiration of others (Kerr, 2012). People with narcissistic personalities and those who have avoidant attachment patterns have similarities. Both individuals seem to be confident. Although they may have many friends and sexual partners, these connections are often superficial. They both have great self-esteem and value their independence. They dislike people and reject the importance of developing deep ties and personal relationships (The Attachment Project, 2020). Narcissistic, histrionic, borderline, and dependence disorders caused by early attachment wounds are often linked to severe kinds of toxic parenting (Dunham et al., 2011). According to John Bowlby, talking about avoidant attachment patterns, "... an individual attempts to live his life without the love and support of others, he tries to become emotionally self-sufficient and may later be diagnosed as narcissistic." (Bowlby, 1988, p. 124). A growing body of literature argues that the unidimensional conception of narcissism may be inadequate due to the differentiation of at least two subtypes: grandiose, also known as overt, and vulnerable, also known as covert. Grandiose narcissists are domineering, self-assured, exhibitionistic, and aggressive, while fragile narcissists are defensive, hypersensitive, and nervously worried about their adequacy, despite an underlying feeling of significance (Meyer & Pilkonis, 2011). Grandiose narcissism was associated with nonanxious and, to some degree, avoidant attachment patterns, showing positive self- and ambivalent other-models (Meyer & Pilkonis, 2011). Consequently, Troy's narcissistic personality is grandiose, as he also exhibits an avoidant attachment style. Troy developed this personality because of his toxic father's behavior. This personality has a great effect on his relationship with his family.

Rose seems to be the opposite of Troy, even in their names. Mohammed's and Berzenji's (2023) study confirm that naming is tremendously significant in constructing people's identities, as it unavoidably defines them. Troy's name metaphor is the city of Troy in the Trojan myth. The walls of Troy are very sturdy, and the Trojans bravely guarded the city for nine years of fierce warfare (Donnellan, 2019). The similarity between the city and the personality of Troy is clear in the play. Troy builds great walls around him in order to shield himself from the influences of others and to establish his independence. Troy is emotionally unreachable, like the city, as both a father and a husband. Unlike his wife's

name, Rose is a Latin girl's name that means "rose" and "flower." It refers to the eternal and lovely bloom (Yip, 2022). That resembles her personality. She is a very kind woman who treats everyone around her with love. She provides everyone around her with emotion and care.

Rose's responsibilities include being a wife, mother, and guardian. She gives up her own needs to meet those of others. She struggles, and she is always worried about her family's safety. She is a realistic lady who embodies the mother role. She gives her family tangible things like food and shelter, as well as intangible things like love and attention. She takes on the role of mother for her son, Cory. She also cares for many others, including those for whom she has no legal obligation. Rose is the mother of Troy's brother Gabrielle, Troy's son Lyons (from a different woman), and Troy's daughter Raynell (from a different woman). Just as she did for Cory, Rose becomes a mother figure to them since she has a secure attachment. She stands with her husband in times of need when Troy finds out that Alberta has died. Rose is there to support him. She tells him, "I am your wife. Don't push me away." (Wilson, 1985, p. 80). However, as an avoidant, Troy does not want anyone to be near him. He wants to be independent by himself without the help of others. He tells her, "I ain't pushing nobody away. Just give me some space. That's all. Just give me some room to breathe" (Wilson, 1985, p. 80).

Because of Troy's avoidant attachment style, he just wants to be independent by himself, without his father or anyone else interfering. His attachment style had an impact on how he dealt with familial relationships. This reveals how parents' actions can change their children's lives and views. Troy appears to be a man with a haunting past. Troy's avoidant attachment to his father shapes his relationships with both his wife and his boys. Multiple factors have shaped Troy's relationship with Rose. His father was a man who could not be in a stable relationship with women, which can be seen when Troy says, "All his women run off and left him. He wasn't good for nobody" (Wilson, 1985, p. 38). Troy's mother abandoned him, leaving him without affection from a parent or anybody to teach him how to respect ladies. These two events in his life impact Troy's mature relationship with Rose since he cheats on her and never blames himself for that. He simply does not know how a stable relationship should be; therefore, he cannot be a part of one.

Individuals, particularly those who have experienced trauma or abuse, struggle to open up. And if they get too intimate, they may have an avoidant attachment reaction, which means they cheat to escape. People with avoidant attachment patterns rarely develop a stronger connection with an alternative lover than they have with their long-term partner. They seem to

perceive intimacy as a pleasant diversion or a source of thrilling enjoyment. Often, they have no plan for ending their relationship (Shorey, 2019).

On the contrary, he gives himself an excuse that he needs something to relieve his tension over his family, regardless of Rose's feelings. His justification is, "I can sit up in her house and laugh. Do you understand what I'm saying, I can laugh out loud. And it feels good. It reaches all the way down to the bottom of my shoes." (Wilson, 1985, p. 72). He believes that this is a sufficient reason to cheat.

Since he is narcissistic, he believes he should do everything that brings him joy without considering others' feelings. Then he tells Rose, "I done locked myself into a pattern trying to take care of you all that I forgot about myself." (Wilson, 1985, p. 72). That indicates that he does not think or care about anyone but himself. Rose answers him, "What the hell was I there for?" (Wilson, 1985, p. 72). She sacrifices everything for a family without blaming him or making him feel guilty. People with NPD may be dissatisfied and upset when they do not get the praise or attention they feel they deserve. Others may see them as arrogant, and they may not like their company (Kerr, 2012). Rose is aware of Troy's narcissistic personality. When he tells her about Alberta, Rose speaks with him in a long speech that starts with, "I been standing with you! I been right here with you, Troy. I got a life too." (Wilson, 1985, p. 73). She continues telling him that she has been standing in the same spot, that she supports him too, and that he has no excuse for his cheating. She ends her speech by "You always talking about what you give .. and what you don't have to give. But you take too. You take ... and don't even know nobody's giving!" (Wilson, 1985, p. 74). From her speech, Troy does not excuse her or blame himself for what he does. Instead of considering her agony, he is surprised because she tells him that he has not given his family anything, and he says, "You say I take and don't give!" (Wilson, 1985, p. 74). He only cares for the part where she has not praised him and belittled his role in the family. NPD individuals take pleasure in always focusing on themselves, they are in a position where they have little option but to do so. They suffer from basic uncertainties over their fundamental value as human beings. The worry they experienced as children limited their growth, resulting in their becoming very self-absorbed. In this sense, their pride is more comparable to the self-preoccupation of a person who suffers from chronic pain, as opposed to the self-centeredness of someone who just cannot get enough of themselves (Gibson, 2022).

Troy's personality exhibits traits commonly associated with narcissism and insecure attachment, which justify his toxic behavior as a father. Troy regularly engages in exaggerated behavior, bragging about his accomplishments and abilities while disparaging others. He always seeks

attention and reinforcement from people around him, highlighting his own significance at the cost of others. When he says, "I've done seen a hundred niggers play baseball better than Jackie Robinson. Hell, I know some teams Jackie Robinson couldn't even make." (Wilson, 1985, p. 13). Troy minimizes the value of Jackie Robinson's accomplishments as a pioneering person in baseball who broke the color barrier in Major League Baseball. Troy's comment demonstrates his exaggerated feeling of superiority and self-importance since he feels he knows guys who are better than Robinson. This comment exemplifies Troy's arrogance and desire to undervalue others' achievements to elevate himself.

Rose is the opposite of Troy. She is a very kind woman. Evidence of her kindness in the play can be seen in the way she treats Gabriel, Troy's brother. She treats him like a mother with her little son, when she asks him, "You gonna stay for supper, Gabe? Want me to fix you a plate?" (Wilson, 1985, p. 51). Rose's connection with Gabriel demonstrates her loving and compassionate personality, as she recognizes the value of family and helping those in need. When Rose keeps asking Troy about Gabriel, he says, "What you want me to do about it, Rose? I done did everything I can for the man" (Wilson, 1985, p. 30), then she tells him, "Least he be eating right" (Wilson, 1985, p. 31). That shows how differently they treat and consider Gabriel.

A rose in the jungle may not live long, unlike the one in the garden that is protected by fences. That is exactly what Rose tries to do: to prevent her family from being outside; she wants them to be saved and gathers them around her. Bono tells Troy, "Some people build fences to keep people out . . . and other people build fences to keep people in. Rose wants to hold on to you all. She loves you." (Wilson, 1985, p. 64). Though that has not been achieved, she does not change her good personality. Rose resembles the light, the clarity, and the guidance that she provides everyone around her with love and care, unlike Troy, who resembles the shadow. He is not clear with anyone, as a husband. He cheats on his wife, and as a father, he does not support his sons.

3.2.2 Broken Fences

In order to know how bad parenting can hurt relationships in the future, it is also helpful to look at the past. People with destructive parenting approaches are often victims of hostile parenting themselves. Parents' attachment to their children may reflect their own childhood anxieties and worries. When parents experience pain, it is easy to understand how toxic they can become; their anguish may lead them to inflict harm on others. Certain forms of insecure attachment might manifest themselves in toxic relationship behaviors and control their children's lives (Dunham et. al.,

2011).

Creating this cycle of toxic parenting behavior is called generational trauma. It is defined as a trauma that is passed down from generation to generation. It starts when a group goes through a catastrophic occurrence that creates economic, cultural, and family pain. As a result, members of that group may have a variety of symptoms, both mental and physical (Brown-Rice, 2013). Research has indicated that generational trauma increases the incidence of depression and anxiety among African Americans. Generational trauma often originates from toxic and abusive behaviors, in which learned habits pass down from parents to children over generations (Grande, 2022). Having more problems with family can make a person more mentally stressed, angry, and unhappy with their life (Alsaadi & Alomosh, 2023). Maxson's family members exhibit a marked tendency to adopt stereotypical behaviors. Troy has been bearing witness to his father's toxic manifestations of control and physical violence since his father hit him with the leather strap. Troy's experiences with a toxic father have been reflected in his sons, which makes him continue the cycle of toxic parenting, which resembles generational trauma.

Each male character in *Fences* has a dream, but some cannot follow it due to parental control, age, or racial prejudice. Troy and Cory love baseball, and Lyons enjoys music. Despite their disagreements, the father and his two kids face similar challenges in pursuing their goals. Troy loves baseball because it represents dignity and pride. The reason that crushed Troy's hopes of playing baseball, he says, "I just wasn't the right color." (Wilson, 1985, p. 42). Troy claims it was racial prejudice that left him resentful. Rose has admitted that Troy's age is the reason. If Troy does not pursue his dream due to his age, it means his father did with him just like he did with Cory. He could achieve what he wants, but his father stops him. If Troy's father had provided him with a healthy and stable family relationship, he could have achieved his goals. Neither of those things happened. Troy's relationship with his father affects his relationship with his son, Cory. Troy is a toxic father who controls everyone and everything around him, including his son's dreams.

Cory, has an ambivalent attachment style. Cory tries very hard in the play to impress his father and gain his approval. People with ambivalent attachment styles are more likely to have had inconsistent parenting styles as infants, with one parent being involved and sensitive to their needs and the other being unavailable or preoccupied. This contradiction could have caused them to feel uneasy and uncertain about fulfilling their demands in this initial relationship (Robinson et al., 2021). That is similar to Cory's condition; Rose has a secure attachment style and provides him with love

and care, while his father, Troy, has an avoidant attachment style; therefore, he is unavailable and does not support his son.

Since Cory has an ambivalent attachment style, his desire to become a baseball player is not a challenge to his father; instead, he does so to impress his father. Troy considers it disrespectful to him: "Thinking he's gonna do what he want, irrespective of what I say." (Wilson, 1985, p. 52). Rose tells Troy, "He's just trying to be like you with the sports." (Wilson, 1985, p. 42). Troy responds that he does not want his son to be like him in anything, including his experiences. He prevents his sons from learning from their experiences. When we base our knowledge on personal experience, we can see how basic concepts like hatred and love differ from one person to the next according to their unique set of life events (Fahmi, 2024). Additionally, Lyons tells him that Cory is a grown man now and approves that when he tells Troy that everything Cory does is just "trying to fill out your shoes." (Wilson, 1985, p. 53).

Cory tries his best to make his father consider him a man or to gain his father's respect. Yet Troy responds, "I don't care what he's doing. When he gets to the point where he wants to disobey me . . . then it's time for him to move on." (Wilson, 1985, p. 53). Rose has told Troy that Cory is trying to gain your approval. She says, "Everything that boy do . . . he do for you. He wants you to say, "Good job, son." That's all." (Wilson, 1985, p. 42). For Troy, desires and needs do not exist; everything revolves around obedience or disobedience, just like how his father used to deal with him. Troy wants his son to do whatever he wants without regard to what his son really wants. Troy is afraid of repeating the cycle of his relationship with his father and his relationship with his sons, regardless of his son's feelings. He is afraid that Cory will do the same thing he does with his father, disrespecting him and looking down upon him. When Cory wants to achieve what he wants with no regard for Troy's opinion, that incident reminds Troy of what happens with his father.

Troy is a toxic and narcissistic father; he is afraid that Cory might be better than him. An individual of a healthy family should consider himself a part of his family, and there is no difference between his individuality, "me," and his family, "we." Impaired differentiation happens in a family with toxic parents. When toxic parents in a family see danger in their children's independence and achievement, a parent's insecure attachment or narcissism may cause such responses to a child's healthy development. Children are not allowed to have a distinct "me" and must be defined completely by "we." (Dunham et al., 2011). Cory's relationship with his father is toxic, which can be seen when Cory questions his father's love for him. Troy answers, "Liked you? Who the hell say I got to like you? What law is there say I got to like

you?" (Wilson, 1985, p. 40). It shows that the healthy relationship between father and son is absent. Cory's desire to become a baseball player is met with disapproval, regardless of Cory's ambition and desires. He is afraid that Cory may be better than him in baseball. Cory tells him, "Just cause you didn't have a chance! You just scared I'm gonna be better than you, that's all." (Wilson, 1985, p. 61). He always says that he cannot play baseball due to his color, but he never admits that it is because of his age. Rose asks him, "why don't you admit you was too old to play in the major leagues?" (Wilson, 1985, p. 42). This indicates that the issue is not his skin color but his age. So as a narcissistic person, he does not admit that the wrong is with him; he always blames others for the things that he could not achieve.

One of the defining characteristics of narcissism is a lack of empathy for others. Troy shows a heartless indifference to the sentiments and needs of those closest to him, putting his own goals and aspirations before anything else. That can be seen through his description of why he meets his family's needs to Cory. "Not 'cause I like you! 'Cause it's my duty to take care of you. I owe a responsibility to you!" (Wilson, 1985, p. 41). He provides them with shelter and food as a responsibility and duty, not because of empathy or love. Troy repeats in the play that he regards his family as a job that he does not like to do, but he has to do it, and that can be seen when he says, "It's my job. It's my responsibility!" (Wilson, 1985, p. 41). He always reminds his family that he shelters them. He provides them with food, though the shelter he has provided is because of his brother's injury. He only does his job as a man of the family, but he always makes them feel thankful. He knows the responsibilities of fathers and that he should provide his family with everything they need since he says that his father does not leave them and he has provided them with everything they need, but empathy: "he felt a responsibility toward us. Maybe he ain't treated us the way I felt he should have ... but without that responsibility, he could have walked off and left us ... made his own way" (Wilson, 1985, p. 54). He does the same. He provides his family with what they need but with a lack of empathy.

Troy considers Cory a rival or someone who should obey him. The final scene that gathers Cory and Troy together is when Cory tries to enter the home, but Troy prevents him from doing so. Cory tells Troy, "You in my way. I got to get by." (Wilson, 1985, p. 87). This line reveals that Troy is the obstacle in Cory's future, not only home. He cannot go anywhere without stepping over his father. His father is in his way, sitting there and never allowing him to go anywhere. Then Troy tells him, "You just gonna walk over top of me?". (Wilson, 1985, p. 88). This is a metaphor because Troy does not stand in Cory's way to home only; he also stands in Cory's future. Cory cannot achieve anything without stepping over his father. When Troy

begins to praise himself, Cory responds, "You always talking this dumb stuff." (Wilson, 1985, p. 89). Troy praises himself, telling Cory that he has spent his entire life thinking about his family. Cory says, "You talking about what you did for me...what'd you ever give me?" (Wilson, 1985, p. 89). Troy responds that he has given him bones, a heart, and feet, which is not what Cory means. Then Cory confronts Troy with the truth, telling him that he has never given him anything. Confronting him with the fact that he is just holding him back and that he is terrified of the possibility that Cory is better than him or maybe better. Cory informs Troy that he has always been afraid of him. But now he is rebelling. Cory has developed his personality and becomes a man. He confronts Troy with things that no one in the play dared to tell him about, which is, "It ain't your yard. You took Uncle Gabe's money he got from the army to buy this house and then you put him out." (Wilson, 1985, p. 90). Then he tells him, "You can't whup me no more. You are too old. You are an old man." (Wilson, 1985, p. 90). That irritates Troy, so he hits Cory, which makes him an abusive, toxic father, and kicks him out without any consideration of the familial bond. He declares, "You're just another nigger on the street to me." (Wilson, 1985, p. 90). That unveils the relationship between father and son in the play, which is the opposite of mother and son.

Lyons, who is Troy's son from a previous relationship, has a main problem: the absence of a father figure in his life. His father has been in prison since Lyons's childhood. His upbringing with his mother suggests a secure attachment to her. That can be indicated through his relationship with his wife. He mentions that she is working and never talks badly about her, so he seems to have a stable relationship with her. He blames Troy for not being present during his childhood and tells him that he has no right to tell him how he should behave. When Troy ironically informs Lyons that his mother has taught him how to behave, Lyons responds accordingly.

You can't change me, Pop. I'm thirty-four years old. If you wanted to change me, you should have been there when I was growing up. . . . ask for ten dollars and you want to talk about how I was raised. You don't know nothing about how I was raised (Wilson, 1985, p. 21).

Lyons does not consider Troy a father figure; he asks him for money and has to repay it. Lyons considers Rose his mother since she gives him what he wants and asks whether he is hungry. Unlike Troy, he considers her his mother, who should have been his father but could not. Troy refuses Lyons's help because he is arrogant and wants independence. Lyons' choice to repay Rose rather than Troy symbolizes his independence and liberty.

Despite Troy's own enthusiasm for baseball, he does not regard Lyons'

passion for music or Cory's interest in baseball as equally genuine. His desire for his sons to find a solid career reflects his own prejudices. When he tells Lyons that he has to find a stable job instead of playing music, and when he tells Cory that playing baseball is not a real job, he has to find a solid career to gain money. That is emphasizing the gap between parental expectations and individual agency. Lyons' desire to follow his musical goals despite his father's objections exemplifies the younger generation's tenacity and stubbornness in forging their own paths. Wilson expertly weaves together Troy's and Cory's love of baseball and Lyons' love of music to explore themes of parental control and the complicated nature of family expectations. The parallel paths of Troy and Cory serve as a powerful reminder of parental control's power in limiting their offspring's dreams. The controllers' parents are toxic. They employ blame, abuse, and even manipulation to shape their children's lives. Their children lack the opportunity or encouragement to attempt, explore, master, or risk failure; they often feel powerless and inadequate (Forward & Buck, 2010).

Troy does his best not to be like his father. However, he finds himself caught up in the exact patterns he had pledged to break free from. Despite a profound knowledge of generational trauma, Troy ultimately gives in to the toxic cycle, passing on the agony to his own boys. Wilson's depiction of Troy's attachment to his father is a striking examination of the cycle of toxic parenting and family relationships. Through Troy's experiences, the play emphasizes the significance of addressing the past and reconciling with the complexity of family connections to end the cycle of sorrow and anger.

Neither Lyons nor Cory have repeated their father's toxic cycle. Lyons is a musician and often has financial difficulties due to his musical career. On the other hand, Troy is a sensible and diligent guy who appreciates stability and works as a trash collector to support his family. Lyons' work and lifestyle choices differ significantly from Troy's. That reveals his determination to create his path rather than comply with his father's expectations. Lyons tells Troy that music matters; he plays music instead of working a stable job. Troy criticizes him, saying, "It don't matter how you gonna eat" (Wilson, 1985, p. 21). Lyons immediately replies annoyingly, "I know I got to eat. But I got to live too (Wilson, 1985, p. 21). It uncovers how a different perspective he has than his father. The line that proves the above words is when Lyons tells Troy, "You and me is two different people, Pop." (Wilson, 1985, p. 21). Lyons does not resemble his father and does not have any intention of being like him.

Cory shares his father's passion for becoming a baseball player, but his aspiration is different. Troy was a great baseball player who was prohibited from formal participation owing to age, or, as he claims, racial

discrimination. Cory wants to play baseball. Despite wanting to please Troy, Cory wants to make his own path in life. Troy tries to stop Cory's goals, implying a father-son conflict. Despite his father's disapproval, Cory's determination to pursue his dreams shows his yearning for independence. Cory is unlike his father. Troy is obstinate and arrogant, whereas Cory is sympathetic, compassionate, and open-minded. This is seen in the ending. Cory initially avoids Troy's funeral. When persuaded by his mother, he agrees, breaking Troy's pattern of alienation from his father until the end. This temperamental difference shows Cory chose not to follow his father's ideals but rather his own.

Troy puts up fences to control everyone he meets, even himself. The first fence he builds is between himself and his wife by cheating on her with Alberta. The second one is between himself and his son, Lyons, by denying him fatherly care. The third one is between him and his son Cory, who deprives him of fatherly love and refuses to sign his football scholarship paperwork. The final one is internal, as he indulges in alcohol to overcome the burdens of age, death, and discrimination. However, he constructs these fences to control everyone around him, only to find that no one complies with his wishes, just like a guard. This is similar to Jeremy Bentham's Panopticon (1791), a centrally organized prison where invisible guards view all prisoners simultaneously while unconscious of their observation (Chassib& Lazim, 2024). Even the internal one, since death, overcomes him and breaks the fence, just like the similarity between his name and the city of Troy in the Trojan War. Both of them were very strong, and no one could reach them. Ultimately, the Greeks succeeded in entering the city of Troy (Donnellan, 2019). In the play, Death, which Troy always challenges at the end, takes Troy's soul.

4. Conclusions

Fences provides a fascinating investigation into African-American family relations in the 1950s through the lens of attachment theory and toxic parenting styles. The play explores the complicated nature of attachment connections, generational trauma, and the effects of toxic parenting on family relationships through the characters of Troy and his interactions with his boys, as well as his wife. In *Fences*, Wilson emphasizes the differences through the use of juxtaposition. A secure, healthy mother and an insecure, toxic father coexist in the same household. Two distinct characters within the same family illustrate how parental influences shape their offspring's destinies. While doing so, the playwright contrasts the hopes and dreams of the current generation with those of the previous generation, who were unable to realize their dreams. As well as how the fences themselves make use of the unique viewpoints of each person. Some people use fences to

protect others, while others use them to isolate themselves. When people talk of fences, some people think of a kind of protection, while others think of a jail. And the most important part is that the cycle of toxic behaviors with the existing well can be broken. Since Rose keeps her name's meaning alive, though she is living in a toxic environment, she demonstrates kindness by providing the secure and healthy relationship to her family.

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