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Zainab Khudhair  
Abbas  
Prof. Marwa Ghazi  
Mohammed, PhD

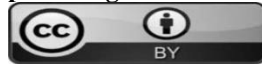
College of Education  
for Women, University  
of Baghdad

**Email:**

[zainab.abady2203m@coeduw.uobaghdad.edu.iq](mailto:zainab.abady2203m@coeduw.uobaghdad.edu.iq)  
[marwa\\_grery@coeduw.uobaghdad.edu.iq](mailto:marwa_grery@coeduw.uobaghdad.edu.iq)

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**The Unhealed Wounds in Tracy Letts's August: Osage County****A B S T R A C T**

This study examines familial relationships through the lens of toxic parental behavior and its influence on children, investigating the cyclical nature of such behaviors and their impact on character development through attachment theory. It explores how early parental relationships shape future relationships with partners and children, focusing on types of toxic parenting—dysfunctional, harmful, and psychologically damaging behaviors—and the resulting insecure attachment patterns: avoidant, ambivalent, and disorganized. Utilizing a psychological reading based on attachment theory, first presented by John Bowlby in 1978 and later developed by other theorists, the study analyzes how childhood attachment to parents affects future relationships. Findings suggest that toxic parenting significantly impacts self-esteem and self-worth, perpetuating similar behaviors across generations and affecting partner and child relationships. The study concludes that toxic parenting damages the parent-child bond and has far-reaching effects on all aspects of an individual's life, perpetuating a cycle of insecure attachments across generations.

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الجروح غير الملتئمة في "أغسطس: مقاطعة أوسيدج" لتريسي ليتس

الباحثة: زينب خضير عباس أ.د. مروه غازي محمد

جامعة بغداد / كلية التربية للبنات

**المستخلص**

الهدف من هذه الدراسة هو فحص العلاقات الأسرية من خلال عدسة سلوك الوالدين السام وتأثيرها على أطفالهم. تبحث الدراسة في الطبيعة الدورية للسلوكيات الوالدية السامة وتأثيرها على تطور الشخصية من خلال نظرية التعلق. كما يستكشف البحث كيف تؤثر العلاقات الأبوية المبكرة على العلاقات المستقبلية مع الشركاء والأطفال. يستكشف البحث أنواع الأبوة والأمومة السامة (سلوكيات الأبوة المختلة والضارة والمدمرة نفسيًا) وأنماط الارتباط غير الآمن الناتجة عنها -

المتجنبة والمتناقضة وغير المنظمة باستخدام القراءة النفسية المبنية على نظرية التعلق، التي قدمها جون بولبي لأول مرة في عام ١٩٧٨ ثم طورها منظرون آخرون، تحلل الدراسة كيف يؤثر ارتباط الطفولة بالوالدين على العلاقات المستقبلية. تشير النتائج إلى أن الأبوة والأمومة السامة تؤثر بشكل كبير على احترام الذات وتقدير الذات، مما يؤدي إلى إدامة سلوكيات مماثلة عبر الأجيال وتؤثر على العلاقات مع الشريك والأطفال. وخلصت الدراسة إلى أن الأبوة والأمومة السامة تدمر الرابطة بين الوالدين والطفل ولها آثار بعيدة المدى على جميع جوانب حياة الفرد، مما يؤدي إلى إدامة دورة من الارتباطات غير الآمنة عبر الأجيال.

**الكلمات المفتاحية:** التعلق ، التفضيل، "باربرا" ، الأبوة والأمومة .

## Introduction

Tracy Letts (1965- ) is an American actor and playwright. Letts was born and raised in Durant, Oklahoma, which is home to Southeastern Oklahoma State University. He is best known for his award-winning play *August: Osage County* (2007), which earned a Pulitzer Prize and five Tony Awards, including best play (Craine, 2024). Letts asserts that *August: Osage County* is based on a true story. Besides the setting, Violet represents his grandmother, and the incident involving his grandfather's suicide occurred when he was only ten years old (Fahy, 2020). He remembers the details, including how his grandmother was cruel to everyone. When he made his mother read the play script, her first comment was, "You've been very kind to my mother" (Letts, 2020, 3:31). This clearly illustrates her suffering at the hands of her mother. He acknowledges that the goal of writing this play is to help him accept his large family. Though he insists that he has an excellent connection with his family, particularly with his father, he enjoys including him in the performance. Letts' depiction of Jean's bond with her father is a reflection of his relationship with his own father.

*August: Osage County* (2007) is a three act play that digs into the toxic relationships of the Weston family, focusing on the matriarch, Violet Weston, and her three daughters, Barbara, a forty-six-year-old lady, Ivy, a forty-four-year-old lady, and Karen, a forty-year-old lady. Violet, a pill-addict and emotionally unstable lady, is dealing with the sudden disappearance of her husband, Beverly, and the resulting collapse of her family. As the family meets at their Oklahoma home to address the problem, old scars resurface as tensions rise. Violet's toxic behavior, which includes verbal abuse, manipulation, and emotional brutality, is at the root of the family's problems. Her tendency to exercise power via criticism and manipulation has badly traumatized her daughters, influencing their own relationships and self-esteem.

## Generational Influence and Attachment Patterns.

In addition to a future emphasis on how toxic parenting might harm relationships, it is beneficial to examine the past. People with destructive parenting approaches were often victims of hostile parenting themselves. Parents' connections with their children may reflect their own childhood anxieties, shortcomings, and worries. In certain situations, it is evident that toxic parents suffer from emotional wounds, leading them to either lash out and harm

others or cling so tightly to their children that they impede their development. Certain forms of insecure attachment might manifest themselves in abusive relationship behaviors. Attachment anxiety can be caused by problems in the parents' relationships, fights, or fears of rejection, separation, or loss. Parents may abuse their children to keep them in line and keep them emotionally and physically close (Dunham & Dermer, 2011). In his attachment theory, Bowlby believes that the attachment pattern that children create with their parents (if those parents are positive and responsive) is essential to the development of emotional, social, and cognitive skills in childhood. He believes that a child's history of relationships with his /her parents laid the groundwork for the child's sense of self (i.e., whether the child considers himself /herself to be loving) and the child's ability to control emotions in an acceptable manner. Conversely, if the child's attachments with their parents are insecure or lacking in positivity or responsiveness, this could also have a negative impact (Gillath et al., 2016).

In *August: Osage County*, Violet's attachment with her mother is one of the factors that contribute to her toxic parenting style. This is revealed in numerous discussions throughout the play. Violet's angry reminiscences of her youth are one illustration of her insecure attachment with her mother. In the dinner scene, Violet begins assaulting every member of the family, but when Barbara tells her to stop attacking them, she replays, "You ever been attacked in your sweet, spoiled life?!" (Letts, 2008, p. 94). And she starts explaining to Barbara what attacking the family means. She tells her a tale of how one of her mother's boyfriends attacked her with a hammer, but her sister, Mattie Fae, took the strike and saved her. This illustrates the character of the mother and the ambiance of their household. Another instance that shows how Violet has a toxic mother is when Jean asks her mother to stop lying since Barbara tells the family about how Jean is not a real vegetarian. The atmosphere is all laughing until Violet interferes and says, "Y'know ... if I ever called my mom a liar? She would've knocked my goddamn head off my shoulders" (Letts, 2008, p. 91), then the silence begins. That reveals the kind of relationship she used to have with her mother.

Violet demonstrates how awful her upbringing was. In further illustration, she shares a childhood experience that exemplifies her unhealthy relationship and insecure attachment with her mother. Violet longs for a pair of cowboy boots to impress a crush, but her mother maliciously replaces worn-out men's work boots as a Christmas joke, leaving her disappointed and ridiculed. This encounter highlights Violet's need for praise and affection, which contrasts with her mother's proclivity for ridicule and emotional brutality. The incident emphasizes the profound scars caused by her mother's ignorance. That influences Violet's caustic temperament and poor relationships with her kids, particularly when she remarks, "My mommy was a nasty-mean old lady. I suppose that's where I get it from" (Letts, 2008, p. 107). This demonstrates Violet's intense hatred and anguish from her childhood, emphasizing the toxic nature of her parental connection. That represents a generational cycle of dysfunction. Violet's connection with her mother becomes more difficult as she experiences periods of weakness and cravings for parental affection. In spite of her brash personality and corrosive attitude, Violet has a deep-seated need for her mother's approval and affirmation. Violet's vulnerability highlights the devastating impact of parental neglect on her mental health.

Due to her past experience with her mother, she has created an anxious ambivalent attachment pattern. It is defined by a fear of abandonment, a strong need for connection, and an excessive reliance on others for validation and comfort (Robinson et al., 2021). Throughout the play, Violet demonstrates actions and characteristics associated with ambivalent attachment. She has a great dread of abandonment, especially in her dealings with her husband, Beverly, and daughters. Violet's dependence on prescription drugs as a coping method indicates a desire to relieve her worry and mental suffering via external means. Violet has created that kind of attachment due to her relationship with her mother, which is not healthy or stable. Violet clung to her sister from a young age because of her mother's absence. This trait was evident when her sister, Mattie Fae, rescued her from one of their mother's partners when she was young. Later, in the presence of her daughters, Violet points at Mattie Fae and says, "This woman came to my rescue" (Letts, 2008, p. 94). She describes her sister as her savior, though Violet knows Mattie Fae has an affair with her husband Beverly and has a son from him. She chooses to ignore this fact.

Her over-reliance on her husband, Beverly, demonstrates her steadfast attachment to others. He provides all her needs as he hires Johnna to assist his wife prior to his suicide. He tells Violet that he has hired her "To cook and clean, take you to the clinic" (Letts, 2008, p. 14). Furthermore, one could interpret Violet's desire to manipulate and rely on people, particularly her daughters, as an attempt to preserve control and safety in her relationships. She takes advantage of her daughter's gullibility by planting seeds of guilt and accusing and condemning them for things they are completely ignorant of. People often use guilt to get one to accept blame for something that is not one's fault. When the individual feels guilty, he or she is more inclined to follow the other person's wishes. This includes attempting to fix the problem for them. When a family member repeatedly uses guilt to make one feel awful or do things one does not want to do, it typically indicates manipulation. Some parents influence the victim by assuming their position. They may blame others for their problems, minimize their own responsibilities, and avoid taking any steps to improve themselves (Raypole, 2020).

When Beverly disappears, Violet manipulates her daughter Barbara emotionally, accusing her of breaking Beverly's heart by moving away. Barbara does not believe that, and she defends her father. Violet tells her about Beverly's disappointment in not choosing to be a writer just like him. Barbara also doubts that claim, asserting to Violet that her father gives his approval without solicitation. Violet tries her best to emotionally abuse and manipulate Barbara, making her feel guilty. When Violet fails to attribute Beverly's absence to Barbara, she shifts the blame to Barbara's attendance instead. Violet said, "You couldn't come home when I got cancer but as soon as Beverly disappeared you rushed back-" (Letts, 2008, p. 41). Barbara's remorse and apology prompt her to engage in emotional manipulation, which shows that Violet has succeeded in her attempt to manipulate Barbara effectively.

Violet's emotional instability and unpredictable behavior create an uncertain and unstable environment for those around her, revealing the underlying concerns and insecurities that drive her attachment pattern. When her husband left, she turned to her daughter, Barbara,

because she could not be independent on her own. She needs someone to rely on. When her elder daughter, Barbara, arrives, she keeps telling her that she should not leave them and that she should stay near them. In the final scene, after Barbara's departure, Violet seeks solace in Johnna, despite having previously criticized her. However, Violet soon recognizes that Johnna is her sole remaining source of support, upon whom she leans heavily.

Violet's behavior often reflects her own challenges and disputes within the family. Her name "Violet" carries several symbolic connotations. In addition to its association with flowers, the name derives from the Latin word *viola*, which signifies the color purple (McNamara, 2024). Purple is associated with mystery, ambiguity, and complexity (Foskett, 2019). Violet's character is shaped by her experiences with an abusive mother, a cheating husband, an unfaithful sister, her illness, and her unhealthy relationship with her daughters. All these circumstances make her a toxic figure. Instead of being just like a flower, Violet turns out to be just like a color, which indicates ambiguity rather than beauty. Instead of the flower, her name becomes associated with the violence that she exercises against her family. She is enigmatic and complex, displaying a wide range of emotions and behaviors throughout the play. She is a deeply troubled woman grappling with addiction, bitterness, and a history of abuse. Additionally, the violet flower is often associated with secrets and hidden depths, reflecting Violet's tendency to conceal truths and manipulate those around her. Her personality reflects aspects of her name.

The elder daughter, Barbara, has developed a disorganized attachment pattern that is characterized by conflicting or chaotic actions in relationships that are often the result of unresolved trauma or uneven care. These people may struggle with closeness, have difficulties managing emotions, and exhibit unpredictable conduct in relationships (Robinson et al., 2021). Barbara's relationship with her parents, Beverly and Violet, is complicated and tense. Barbara has a strained connection with her mother. Violet's toxic actions and relentless criticism have had a lasting impact on Barbara throughout the years, producing anger and emotional instability. Despite their fractured connection, Barbara maintains a sense of duty and commitment to her mother. Barbara's connection with her father, Beverly, is seen to be considerably closer. Beverly is an alcoholic and poet who attempts to remain calm in the face of the family's instability. Barbara and her father seem to have a stronger understanding and relationship, as they are both more contemplative. An example of her ability to step into Beverly's role is when, after Beverly's disappearance, Barbara takes charge of the situation and makes an effort to find him. She demonstrates a sense of responsibility and cares for her mother in a manner similar to Beverly's. Violet is jealous. Her jealousy stems from the dynamic between Barbara and Beverly. Violet wants Barbara to focus her attention exclusively on her, not on Beverly.

Barbara's troubled connection with her parents, especially her mother Violet, has a huge influence on her relationships with the rest of the family. Barbara's turbulent childhood, along with the psychological burden she carries from her attachment to her parents, might make it difficult for her to build positive and loving relationships with other family members.

Barbara is the last link in the chain of toxic parenting, which begins with Violet's mother and continues through Violet's relationships with her children. Barbara does not

intend to continue the cycle, but the devastating circumstances and hidden secrets that she reveals and discovers make her turn out to be just like her mother, a toxic figure to Jean. On the other hand, Jean is described as an outspoken, observant, and brilliant girl. She is a sophisticated girl beyond her years, with a caustic and sarcastic sense of humor. Jean is not hesitant to express her opinions and often criticizes the toxic relationships in her family. However, it is vital to remember that the family's experiences and circumstances influence Jean's personality. As the play progresses and reveals the family's secrets and tensions, Jean's character transforms and confronts her own personal struggles. At the start of the play, she chooses to inform Johanna about her parents' separation: "My Mom and Dad are separated now" (Letts, 2008, p. 42) and her father's adultery: "He's fucking one of his grad students" (Letts, 2008, p. 42), instead of confronting her mother.

Later, as the play unfolds and the family's secrets are revealed, Jean grows increasingly frustrated with her parents and the turmoil that surrounds her. She starts to express her individuality and moves away from her family's toxic environment. This voyage of self-discovery and rebellion against dysfunctional family dynamics influences Jean's personality and connection with her mother. She is brave enough to defend herself when they find out that she is preparing to have a romantic relationship with an elderly man. Her father warns her of being too young for that, to which she aggressively responds that her age is "only a few years younger than you like 'em" (Letts, 2008, p. 120) in front of Barbara. Jean's relationship with her mother is complicated and tense, mirroring the problematic dynamics of the whole Weston family. At the beginning of the play, Jean's relationship with Barbara looks distant and tense. Barbara passes a difficult period in her life, coping with the separation of her marriage and the decreasing health of her mother, Violet. This puts a strain on her relationship with Jean, and they often disagree on numerous subjects. Barbara's lack of emotional availability adds to Jean's sense of dissatisfaction and loneliness. Because of her fragile connection with her parents and her strong personality, she is willing to face people and pursue her own desires without concern for others. She smokes despite her mother's disapproval, demonstrating her avoidant attachment pattern. This suggests that she is independent, since she does what she wants without seeking anyone's approval and does not rely on her parents or anyone else.

### **Embracing Toxicity**

Infidelity produces pain and relationship issues for the individual, the couple, and even their children. It relates to depression and anxiety which leads to divorce. Infidelity may not only have a catastrophic effect on a marriage, which could result in separation or divorce, but it may also significantly affect the partners' overall emotional wellness, leading to increased depressive symptoms and poorer self-esteem (Rokach & Chan, 2023). How people react to cheating is very different from one another. Different people often have different ideas about what an affair means based on how they want to understand it. When someone cheats on his /her partner, it can be seen as either a danger or an attempt to make a compromise. This is called causal attribution. How happy people are in their relationships may also have an impact on how they deal with and understand these acts. However, partners

who are not happy in the relationship may see cheating as a bigger threat, which could make the breakup more likely. On the other hand, some people may forget about the mistake and keep their marriage (Grøntvedt et al., 2020).

Though Violet's personality is very different from her daughters, they share some aspects of their personalities. Violet and her three girls all choose to stay with their partners despite realizing their relationships are inappropriate for them—whether because of infidelity or any other reason—and they all end up clinging to their partners. Violet and Barbara experience sexual infidelity from their husbands, yet their responses vary. Beverly has cheated on Violet with her sister, but her ambivalent attachment pattern prevents her from confronting both her husband and her sister. Her dependence on others has caused her to accept her husband and sister's infidelity, which reveals her underlying anxieties and fear of rejection. She is aware of her husband and sister's infidelity, as well as the fact that her sister's son is from Beverly, but she has remained silent out of fear that they might abandon her and leave her alone.

In Violet's life, she does not have anyone except her sister and her husband. Only her sister and her sister's family are present at her husband's funeral; no friends attend. So, she is not ready to lose any of them. Unlike her daughter, Barbara, who has a cheating husband, he is cheating on her with one of his students, a teenage girl. She could not stand that, and she dismissed him from her house. She hides the cheating from everyone, and she gets angry when someone talks about it in front of her. Like her mother, she avoids confrontation with others. She always asks her husband why he is cheating on her, but she never receives a response. She wants anything to justify what he does, but there is none. She deeply wants to forgive him and get back to him, though she knows he is cheating on her. She hesitates in her decision because of her disorganized attachment pattern. She has mixed feelings about staying with him or leaving him; the former is because she draws the line at being alone, while the latter is due to her disgust with his infidelity. She is lost, not knowing the right decision. Both Violet and Barbara have pride. Barbara's pride manifests when she conceals her husband's infidelity. Violet's pride comes to light when she refuses to acknowledge, discuss, or confront her husband's infidelity.

Barbara's relationship with her husband, Bill Fordham, is described as difficult and complicated. The turmoil in the Weston family puts their relationship under further strain. Barbara is greatly saddened when she discovers early in the play that Bill is having an affair with a much younger lady. The revelation of the affair adds a layer of stress and treachery to an already strained relationship. In addition, Barbara and Bill's relationship looks emotionally distant. They struggle to talk freely and honestly with one another, sometimes turning to sarcasm and hostility. They are not intimate or emotionally connected. Barbara and Bill frequently engage in intense fights and power struggles. They utilize verbal sparring to establish power and dominance over one another. Their interactions are often characterized by rivalry and emotional alienation. And the proof of her instability and her disorganized attachment can be seen when Bill tells her, "You're thoughtful, Barbara, but you're not open. You're passionate, but you're hard. You're a good, decent, funny, wonderful woman, and I

love you, but you're a pain in the ass" (Letts, 2008, p. 77). Barbara, as the family's caregiver and mediator, often relies on her connection with Bill to provide stability amid the Weston family's turbulence. However, their tumultuous connection adds to her anger and disappointment as she searches for the support and stability she seeks. That might explain why she refuses to leave him and continues to beg him to tell her the reason for his cheating. She seeks any justification for his actions, hoping to maintain a stable relationship with him and steer clear of her mother's path.

Bill Fordham's persona is deep and multidimensional. He is a college lecturer. Bill is shown as clever and well-educated. Throughout the play, Bill is dealing with personal troubles and undergoing a midlife crisis. Barbara asks him if his infidelity and relationships are "all symptoms of your male menopause" (Letts, 2008, p. 46). He doubts his own identity and purpose, feeling unsatisfied and unhappy with his existence. This inner anguish adds to his troubled relationship with Barbara and leads to his infidelity. Infidelity is a key feature of Bill's character. He has an affair with a much younger lady, which creates friction and strain in his marriage to Barbara. His willingness to cheat shows his inner troubles and frustration, but it also demonstrates his defective and ethically problematic decisions.

Bill recognizes his wrongdoing. He tries to get closer to his wife, Barbara, by attending her father's funeral as a form of expiation. He also gives his daughter the freedom to pursue her desires, regardless of their moral implications, all in the hope of seeking redemption and their love. He desires their love unconditionally, without reservation or hesitation, and is willing to embrace it at any cost. Bill's character is emotionally detached and tends to compartmentalize his feelings. He frequently seems aloof and restrained, as if he is unable to express himself freely. This emotional detachment adds to the poor relationship between him, Barbara, and their daughter Jean. Since he could not convey his love for Jean, he chose to let her do everything she wanted, including smoking. Bill's character is frustrated and resentful, especially over his relationship with Barbara and the dynamics inside the Weston family. He becomes more dissatisfied with his marriage, which lacks emotional connection and fulfillment.

These parts of Bill's character add to the play's depth by exposing his personal issues, faulty decisions, and the fragile connection he has with Barbara among the Weston family's instability. Even though he is cheating on her, he refuses to leave her whenever she tells him that their relationship is over. In their final conversation, Barbara informs him that they will never reunite as a couple. He replies, "Never say never" (Letts, 2008, p. 122), though later, he confirms that even if things do not work out with him and the girl he is dating, he will not get back to Barbara.

Bill's relationship with Barbara shows how the toxic environment of the parents can affect children, and the result is an avoiding daughter who does what she likes with no regard for anything else. Her family finds out that she is about to have a relationship with her aunt's fiancé, Steve. She has been on the verge of making a decision she should not have made, given the significant age difference between her and Steve, as well as his status as her aunt's upcoming spouse. She disregards any of these things, and when they blame her, she defends herself and her decisions. She smokes, though she is only fourteen. She is aware that her



mother does not condone smoking. The toxic environment she grew up in has articulated her character as avoidant and independent, giving no attention to others, including her family. There is a direct link between parental alcohol consumption and marital discord. As a result, studies have linked increased marital conflict to increased violence and alcohol use in children and teenagers (Windle, 1996). Because of Barbara and her husband's relationship, their daughter starts smoking.

Cicirelli (1991) proposes that adult children care for their parents in order to prevent the collapse of their attachment bond. Children become increasingly aware of their parents' impermanence as they age and weaken. Concerned about the loss of their attachment figure, children may provide support to strengthen their parents and keep the crucial attachment object. The attachment shows a clear and positive association with the care that girls provide for their mothers. According to Cicirelli's (1993) research on daughters who provide a caring attitude for their mothers, stronger attachment relationships are associated with more care, regardless of the mothers' functional reliance level. Researchers also linked stronger attachment relationships to less caregiver strain.

Adult children who have a secure connection to their parents are more likely to take good care of them because they want to preserve their relationship with a significant attachment figure. They may still feel comfortable in their attachment ties with their parents (Sroufe & Waters, 1977), and they may want to keep that stable basis as long as possible. Insecurely connected children, on the other hand, may be less willing to show affection and care for their parents if their parents have been unsupportive, since the psychological benefits of maintaining that connection are uncertain. When compared to peers with more stable bonds, their fear, suspicion, or discomfort may translate into a lack of interaction. Children with attachment insecurities may be less likely to provide emotional help due to the psychological dangers involved, but they may still be prepared to offer practical aid due to practical emotional safety. Moreover, the underlying anxiety in children with an insecure attachment pattern likely makes any care they provide distressing (Carpenter, 2001). This explains why Barbara maintains her attachment to her mother despite Violet's verbal and emotional abuse. Barbara's decision to leave Violet stems from her discovery that Violet was aware of Beverly's attempts to commit suicide and had not intervened to stop him. Barbara's close relationship with her father leads her to believe that Violet has caused her to lose her attachment to Beverly, which results in her abandoning her mother.

Barbara continues to lead the family even after her marriage. When she leaves her hometown, she finds out that her husband is cheating on her; despite this, she refuses to leave him. She longs for secure shelter, weary of bearing the responsibility, but that has not materialized; even her relationship with her daughter is not good. These circumstances push her to the brink of collapse. Her mother keeps blaming her for not being around when her father left. Ivy holds her accountable for her absence and her failure to inform them about her husband's infidelity. She finds out that Karen 's husband is harassing her daughter. She also discovers that her father has an affair with her aunt, and her sister has an affair with their brother. Ultimately, she discovers that her daughter's attraction to an elderly man stems from her father's involvement with a younger woman. She is no longer able to tolerate these issues,

as she is the only one who has to deal with this news and damaging information. She asks Bill to play his role as a father: "Be a father! Help me!" (Letts, 2008, p. 76), not only by name but in actions since he is absent, then she tells him,

I'm sick of being fair! I've seen where being fair gets me! I'm sick of the whole notion of the enduring female. GROW UP! 'Cause while you're going through your fifth puberty, the world is falling apart and I can't handle it! More importantly, your kid can't handle it! (Letts, 2008, p. 76).

She can no longer bear the responsibility of caring for others, and most importantly, she does not want her daughter to follow in her footsteps or take care of her father in the future. However, she acknowledges her own shortcomings, saying, "I fail. As a mother, as a daughter, as a wife. I fail" (Letts, 2008, p. 122).

### **Damaging Effects of Favoritism and Toxic Parenting**

All types of toxic parenting may have serious consequences for a child's mental health and development. Verbal abuse, including name-calling, transferring blame, or giving silent treatment, may destroy a child's self-esteem and leave psychological scars. Controlling actions, such as violating privacy or restricting autonomy, might impede a child's capacity to develop independence and self-esteem. Manipulation strategies, such as using guilt or shame to influence behavior, may instill feelings of fear inside children, doubt in themselves, and unworthiness (Marcin, 2020).

When parents choose a partner with a drinking problem, they may be putting their child at risk of developing an alcohol use disorder even before they are born. The idea behind "nonrandom partner selection" (also known as assortative mating) is based on studies showing that people with alcohol abuse problems are more likely to marry other people with alcohol abuse problems (Windle, 1996). That shows them as toxic parents before they become parents by choosing a partner who is an alcoholic just like them, so they may know what the environment will be like for their children in the future. In the play, Beverly and Violet both are alcoholic parents, and that can be seen when Beverly says, "My wife takes pills and I drink. That's the bargain we've struck" (Letts, 2008, p. 11). Unlike his wife, Violet, Beverly does not have many scenes in the play to show the effects of his drinking. Violet plays favorites over her daughters. Favoritism is not an indication of closeness; rather, it indicates enmeshment. It is possible that the desired sibling has a comparable psychological maturity level as his parents. If an individual has an independent, self-sufficient personality, his parents would not have seen him as a needy kid for whom he or she could perform the role of rescuing parents. Children who are self-sufficient and do not seek parental involvement often find themselves on their own, leading a more autonomous and self-determined life (Gibson, 2022).

While Violet does not directly show favoritism for anyone, there are a few situations that reveal certain patterns in her interactions with family members. Violet has a complicated and profound emotional relationship with her daughter, Barbara. They have multiple clashes during the play, but they also share moments of tenderness and understanding. This emotional

tie may indicate a preference for Barbara above other family members. She often depends on Barbara for support and help, especially while coping with her addiction and handling the family's finances. Since Violet relies on Barbara more than others, Barbara assumes a position of responsibility within the family, potentially leading to perceived favoritism. This becomes evident when she discovers Beverly's absence. Despite Ivy being with her and informing her that she also calls Karen, Barbara is the first person she asks for, indicating her lack of concern for any of them. Barbara's attendance is her primary concern. Violet acknowledges that Barbara is her favorite daughter, but she refuses to admit it. Instead, Violet tells Barbara that she is her father's favorite. When Barbara rejects this and asserts that her father loves all his children equally, Violet responds, "If you'd had more than one child, you'd realize a parent always has favorites. Mattie Fae was my mother's favorite. Big deal. I got used to it. You were your daddy's favorite" (Letts, 2008, p. 38). This indicates that she has personally encountered instances of favoritism. Though Violet always admits that Barbara is Beverly's favorite daughter, Ivy declares the opposite when Barbara asks her if Beverly was really hurt when she left, Ivy admits, "Well ... that's not true. You weren't his favorite. I was. You're Mom's favorite" (Letts, 2008, p. 104).

## **Conclusion**

There are many types of toxic parents. In addition to Violet's toxic parenting style as an alcoholic, she also practices other forms of toxic parenting with her children. She employs manipulative techniques with Barbara, verbal abuse with Ivy, and neglect with Karen. Due to her insecure attachment pattern, she creates a toxic environment that contains negativity and abuse toward her daughters. Her attachment pattern makes her a toxic mother, and her daughters have insecure attachment pattern for the same reason. Attachment pattern, just like toxic behavior, is a chain unless an individual breaks it by himself.

Violet, Barbara, and Jean are the victims, whether from their family, partners, or circumstances in general. Three females from different generations have been raised in a toxic environment. The play is a representation of how to be a victim in a toxic family with an insecure attachment pattern. Their early toxic environment, which led to the development of insecure attachment pattern, significantly impacted their ability to make sound decisions. They yearn for closeness and attention, which has taken them to another level of wrongdoing, reaching the point of collapse due to their parents. They are unable to distinguish between right and wrong. They only think about gaining understanding and approval of others.

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