

# Lincoln and booth: sibling tensions in topdog underdog



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Suzan-Lori Parks once explained that her play *Topdog/Underdog* “ isn’t just confined to a man’s experience,” furthermore, “ I think it’s about what it means to be family and, in the biggest sense, the family of man, what it means to be connected with somebody else.” A major theme found throughout the play is sibling dynamic, and Booth’s explanation about the world in scene five depicts this dynamic perfectly.

Booth explains to Lincoln that, “ Thuh world puts its foot in yr face and you don’t move. You tell thuh world tuh keep on stepping. But Im my own man, Link. I aint you.”. This is after Lincoln has tried to educate Booth on how to be a better card player. Booth gets over confident in his ability and paired with his anger by getting “ played” by Grace he walks out in a fit of anger. Lincoln ends the scene by acknowledging that the two aren’t similar but through his actions he proves to be proud of the fact.

Although in depth it seems that Lincoln is not the Top dog or allows Booth to feel as if he has the potential to be top dog, it is apparent Booth isn’t capable of taking this responsibility. A complete opposite of Lincoln, Booth is in a constant desire to be Top dog but can never achieve it, because frankly, he is not Lincoln. Just as Booth criticized Lincoln for not moving when “ Thuh world puts its foot in yr face” Booth need to stop moving. Although deeming Lincoln has an honest job and is realistic. You can’t go through life without being “ kicked” down a few times, that is real life and literally and figuratively Booth is moving from life. He can’t commit to Grace and although he tries, he is never truly enough for her. Perhaps this because Booth does not have the courage to sacrifice getting “ kicked in the face” of risk getting hurt. This mentality also taints him when it comes to his “ work”.

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Booth believes he can make a living from 3 card monte and stealing. Booth has no real job experience and mostly like never gain any. What he saw as world continuous stepping on Lincoln is really constant experience that can be used for the future. Booth sabotages himself and acts like he has it handled in hope to not project his own uncertainty in himself. Towards the end of scene three where Booth “ helps” Lincoln how to be shoot properly, in actuality Booth has no experience with Lincoln’s and is in no position to help. This is an example of Booth trying to overcompensate to show he is capable of being like Lincoln.

Lincoln is the older brother, top dog, and main source of income but, it seems that Booth portrays himself as the leader of the two. This can be seen as the surface cliché of an older brother who feels saddled with responsibility, while the younger who felt he never had a chance to shine, overcompensates by putting the older down. But, through Booth and Lincoln’s mannerisms throughout the play it is apparent Lincoln’s and Booth sibling dynamic is the constant need to switch rolls with each other. The play focuses on who the world thinks you’re going to be, and how you struggle with that. When Booth mentions “ Thuh world puts its foot in yr face and you don’t move.” he is not only referring to Lincoln but himself. Yes, Booth is correct in which Lincoln allows the world to put their foot in his face and he does nothing about. He did it when it came to his marriage, he does it when it comes to his job, and he does when he allows Booth to talk to him as such.

Cookie, Lincoln’s ex-wife, is constantly brought up as a failure for Lincoln.

Not only did she leave him, but she had an affair with his brother. Although

unspoken, Lincoln is clearly envious of this and shows how Lincoln might  
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want to be more like his little brother. It is very possible even that even Booth wouldn't be able to keep Cookie as a wife, but as with Lincoln's silence on the matter he has belittled himself as an underdog in the situation.

Lincoln also reduces himself to an underdog in his very ironic job. Lincoln's arcade job of an Abraham Lincoln impersonator, "assassinated" daily by paying customers. He is literally and figuratively letting life put him in an undermining position. Getting even more in depth in the situation it seems that even when Lincoln is put in a relatively top dog position, such as a black man as such an important historical figure he is still killed and lowered back to his status. This exemplifies the second part of Booths saying claiming that Lincoln "tell thuh world tuh keep on stepping" To make matters worse, it seems the his "underdog" brother manages to bring home an equal amount of items through a quicker and less demeaning way. In fact Booth is constantly showing signs of knowing more than Lincoln. Booth constantly brings up his "happy" relationship, his strong hustle game, and independent nature as he explains "Im my own man". This diminishes Lincoln's masculinity and emphasizes that Lincoln is indeed not Booth and not a true Topdog.

Booth's last phrase in the quote from scene five depicts perfectly the major theme of Lincoln and Booth's sibling dynamic. "I aint you". In fact, it seems that the pair are complete opposites, but want similar things from each other. Like there is no Lincoln without Booth and vice versa, no Topdog without an Underdog, or older brother without little brother Lincoln and Booth need each other for their strengths and weakness. Throughout the play the pair search to complete themselves through each other.