

Okonkwo's  
narcissism in chinua  
achebe's things fall  
apart



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## Tragedy of the Prideful Father: An Analysis of *Things Fall Apart*

There is no truer reflection of a person's humanity than their treatment towards their offspring. In Chinua Achebe's *Things Fall Apart*, Okonkwo is the father figure of two contrasting relationships; his relationship with Ezinma, and his relationship with Nwoye. It is apparent, through his interactions with the children, that Okonkwo is plagued with an egotistical disposition. To begin, Okonkwo only values the qualities in his children that are an imitation of his own. Ezinma's similarities to Okonkwo wins the affection of her father, while her more alien brother is ridiculed and eventually cast aside. Furthermore, Okonkwo sees his children as tools for his personal gain. Ezinma and Nwoye are treated as material possessions, and are only given attention when they can serve the purpose of advancing his status within Umofia. Finally, Okonkwo neglects his offspring. He is so absorbed by his own hyper masculinity that he intentionally makes himself emotionally unavailable and coldhearted towards his family. Ultimately, Okonkwo's relationship with Ezinma and with Nwoye is a reflection of his own narcissistic tendencies.

The first sign of Okonkwo's narcissism is his exclusive favouritism towards qualities in his children that are align to his own. Generally, narssastic fathers have a self righteous view of themselves, and uses this view as a code of right and wrong behaviour; thus rejecting anything that contradicts their own mannerism. After all, imitation is the finest form of flattery. His relationship to Ezinma is affectionate and accepting, for the explicit reason of their similarities. To begin with, Okonkwo measures Ezinma's worth by her masculinity. Ezinma carries herself with a masculine confidence, her " feeling <https://assignbuster.com/okonkwos-narcissism-in-chinua-achebes-things-fall-apart/>

of importance [is] manifested in her sprightly walk" (Achebe 81). Okonkwo responds to Ezinma's energy because it reminds him of his own confidence. He too "seemed to walk on springs" (Achebe 4). Her response to Okonkwo's high and masculine standards is to conform. She looks to Okonkwo to lead and she shapes her personality to satisfy, in hopes to earn a fraction of his affection. Her personality, then, is closely knit with his own; thus, Okonkwo believes that she is worthy of his affection. The relationship between Okonkwo and Ezinma is not a healthy unconditional love, but instead is a narcissistic value system that casts judgement on Ezinma, based on the precedence of his own personality. Furthermore, Ezinma also shares Okonkwo's entitlement, contributing to his fondness of his daughter. Both Okonkwo and Ezinma are the only child of their family, and consequently they both grew up with the full attention of their mother. Ultimately, Ezinma grows up to be bold, and "it was impossible to refuse Ezinma anything" (Achebe 76). She sees herself as among authority rather to under it, which is similar to Okonkwo's mindset, seen as he rises through the village rankings in his early teenagehood. Okonkwo, again, is able to see himself in Ezinma. Seeing himself comes as a comfort, as it often does to a narcissist, thus justifying his preference for Ezinma over his son, Nwoye.

Unlike Okonkwo's relatability with Ezinma, Nwoye is a stark contrast to Okonkwo. The contrast between their natural tendencies makes it impossible for Nwoye to live up to Okonkwo's high standards, and ultimately leads to failure and disapproval. The first failing factor of their relationship is Nwoye's lack of brute masculinity. Okonkwo places a high value on his own masculinity, and so masculinity stands as a prerequisite to his love.

However, even upon instilling this rule, " Nwoye knew that it was right to be masculine and to be violent, but somehow he still preferred the stories that his mother used to tell" (Achebe 53). Nwoye does not naturally fit Okonkwo's standard, which leads him to feel as though he can never measure up.

Eventually, Nwoye accepts his apparent incompetency and does not even try to impress his father, settling for being lazy over being a failure. Masculinity in itself is not the most valuable trait to Ibo life or society, but yet Okonkwo uses it to judge and condemns Nwoye. The second characteristic of narcissism is his judgement of Nwoye's interests. Nwoye is leading a very different life than Okonkwo. Nwoye does not have ambition to be a farmer, while " at his age [Okonkwo] was already fending for himself" (Achebe 66). Okonkwo sees his childhood as right, and Nwoye, who does not share the same path, as wrong. Okonkwo does not believe that his own child is worth affection, because the only thing proved worthy is a thing made in his own image. Ultimately, Okonkwo is self absorbed, seen as he only accepts the child that reminds him of himself, and casts away the child that defies his character.

The next evidence supporting Okonkwo as a narcissist is the exploitation of Ezinma and Nwoye for his personal success. Ezinma, being in a lower class, allows her choices to be controlled by Okonkwo, who only cares to intervene when they can be used to benefit himself. To start off, Okonkwo uses Ezinma's beauty to elevate his status in Umofia. Okonkwo realizes that Ezinma has grown into an attractive young woman who " would attract considerable attention" (Achebe 173). Instead of playing the traditional father roll of concern and protection, Okonkwo immediately factors her

beauty into an opportunity to attract attention to himself. He convinces Ezinma to remain available until their return to Umofia, where attention on her is also attention on him. Okonkwo's status is of greater priority to him than the feelings or opinions of his daughter. Furthermore, Ezinma's beauty eventually leads to pursuits of marriage, which Okonkwo also uses for his gain. While in exile, he instructed his daughter to turn away all suitors, because in Umofia she will accept pursuits from "men of authority in the clan" (Achebe 173). Marriage in Umofia would allow Okonkwo to rise in status quicker, though it would bear no greater benefit to Ezinma. The life-changing milestone of marriage is taken for granted, and Okonkwo strips Ezinma of her full choice in suitor. Ultimately, the priority of Okonkwo lies in his own well being, showing he does not truly care if Ezinma is happy with her suitor. Habitually putting one's own success above that of one's children is a clear indication of narcissism, and this behaviour exhibited with both Ezinma and Nwoye proves the diagnosis of Okonkwo.

Similarly, Okonkwo sees Nwoye as a means to an end. Nwoye is merely part of Okonkwo's image, a part of his success that must be upheld. Nwoye's submissive personality is a taint on Okonkwo's prestigious record, and "sought to correct him by constant nagging and beating" (Achebe 13-14). The constant violence and dehumanizations of Nwoye reveals Okonkwo's willingness to harm his child if it will prevent shame on his own image. Okonkwo also attempts to manipulate Nwoye into the role as his successor. "He wanted Nwoye to grow into a tough young man capable of ruling his father's household" (Achebe 52). A son, for Okonkwo, serves the purpose of carrying his legacy, thus his pursuit is rooted in selfishness. While Nwoye has

his own unique strengths, Okonkwo pays no regard nor shows interest in his talents. Okonkwo instead uses physical manipulation, fear manipulation, and emotional manipulation, in attempt to force Nwoye into a narrow box of what he thinks he should be. Therefore, the narcissism in Okonkwo prevents him from recognizing the needs and well being of his children above his own.

The final and most condemning trait of a narcissistic relationship is Okonkwo's emotional absency. The clearest symptom of narsasism is one's struggle or inability to feel empathy. Showing in his relationship with Ezinma, Okonkwo refrains from showing affection or emotional affirmation. Okonkwo " was very fond of Ezinma...But his fondness only showed on very rare occasions" (Achebe 44). His fondness goes back to her masculine personality, and based on the value she can bring to him. Nevertheless, he is still unable to communicate his emotions in a way that connects to Ezinma, so she is often left emotionally unfulfilled by her father figure. Ezinma eventually grows to accept this lack of emotional connection, which builds resilience and insensitivity in the young child. Furthermore, Okonkwo goes out of his way to appear indifferent towards Ezinma. Fear is a common crutch for Okonkwo, and he uses it as a barrier between himself and his family. When Ezinma is taken by the village priestess, Okonkwo is secretly concerned about her well being. He is unable to sleep, and makes four trips to the oracle's cave, only to pay no acknowledgement to Ezinma when she returns. Okonkwo deals with his own emotions, but does not realize nor think to address the trauma his daughter has endured. By not showing empathy to Ezinma in a time of trauma, a child may internalize it as a lack of caring.

Thus, harm is done psychologically to Ezinma, and worse done onto Nwoye, because of the lack of empathy in Okonkwo.

Similarly, due to a severe case of egotism, Okonkwo emotionally neglects Nwoye. Okonkwo has no empathy for his son, and shows no sign of having the capacity for understanding Nwoye's psychological disposition. Okonkwo "rules his household with a heavy hand" (Achebe 13), intentionally aiming to instill fear in Nwoye. Nwoye longs for an emotional connection with his father, but the only response he receives is anger and disapproval. Okonkwo never approaches or acknowledges Nwoye with any sense of compassion, driving Nwoye to seek emotional fulfillment elsewhere. Nwoye finds refuge in the Christian church, and Okonkwo, who had no interest in his son's emotions, concludes that "living fire begets cold, impotent ash" (Achebe 153). Okonkwo cannot see beyond himself, so he is blind to the negative impact he has on his son. He sheds his blame and concludes that he is not responsible for his son's weakness, but that it is Nwoye's own fault. His stubbornness and inability to accept his flaws shows his preoccupation with his own ego, ultimately proving Okonkwo to be a narcissist.

Ultimately, Okonkwo's narcissism is reflected in his relationship with Nwoye and with Ezinma. To start, Okonkwo only places value on children who resemble him. The standards created by Okonkwo are manifestations of his conceited view of himself. Moreover, Okonkwo manipulates his children to serve his selfish purpose. He fails to acknowledge his children as independent human beings, instead seeing them as an extension of his superficial purpose. Finally, Okonkwo emotionally isolates himself from his offspring. In these situations, he is unable or unwilling to express empathy <https://assignbuster.com/okonkwos-narcissism-in-chinua-achebes-things-fall-apart/>

towards his children nor consider their point of view. Narcissism is a serious mental illness that is naked to the eye of the infected, but deathly to the hearts of their beloveds.

## Work Cited

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