

Construction of Socio-culturally Situated Identities and Relationships within the Context of Widowhood and Bereavement Rituals

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KEYWORDS Bereavement. Constructed. Socio-cultural. Widowhood. Identities Relationships

ABSTRACT This paper examined the socio-culturally situated identity and relationship building within the context of widowhood and bereavement rituals. Participants were Tshivenda-speaking widows located in the Vhembe District of the Limpopo province, South Africa. Six focus groups interviews were conducted with widows to gain their constructions of socio-culturally situated identities and relationships within the context of widowhood and bereavement. Discourse analysis was adopted in order to analyse the collected data. Participants used language that identified themselves as widows in relation to others, including the husband when he was still alive and when he was dead, through the use of “I”, “they” and “him” or “my”. They also used language that justified belonging to a collectivist culture. The paper concluded that the way in which participants constructed their socio-culturally situated identities and relationships represented their identities as widows in relation to others in the role of sympathisers within their experiences. The paper recommended that people have to understand the identity that widows construct for themselves and the relationship they have with people around them respect the association widows have with others.