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The positive psychology of African cultural practice: Stages and rituals of community intervention in grief work in Africa

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Western literatures on bereavement acknowledge the tendency to pathological grieving among some bereaved persons. The phenomenon of pathological mourning, however, is rare in Africa because of the presence of coherent and positive transformative rituals of mourning made available by the community to bereaved individuals. This presentation argues that such rituals and performative experiences heal through provision of positive psychological resources that help to prevent the grief of the bereaved from degenerating into pathological mourning. The paper elaborates on the content, process, symbolic meanings and clinical potency of these rituals. The paper demonstrates by means of a case study that whereas Western researchers have largely been concerned with the individual's reaction to loss, the African perspective focuses on the spiritual/systemic/cultural nature of healing in grieving and the variety of resources which the community makes available to assuage the pain and the impact of people's bereavement. The significance of the presentation is to highlight and underscore the African community's contributions to facilitating healing in the bereaved. It is believed that such an account will complement the work already done in the bereavement field by Western investigators.

Biography

Augustine Nwoye is a Professor of Psychology at the University of KwaZulu-Natal, South Africa and a Member of the School of Applied Human Sciences. Through his research and writings, he has made original and unique contributions to the definition and study of African Psychology as an emerging specialization very much in demand in the curriculum of many departments of psychology in the South and other regions of Africa. He has held distinguished teaching positions in several universities in Africa, including: The University of Jos, Nigeria; Kenyatta University, Nairobi, Kenya, The University of Dodoma, Tanzania and Covenant University, Lagos, Nigeria. He has also won several visiting fellowships and given public lectures in many universities in continental Africa, Asia, Europe and North America. He has received his PhD from the University of Nigeria and was recently in the United States as a Fulbright Scholar at Howard University and the College of the Holy Cross, Worcester, Massachusetts.

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