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It involves the active elaboration of their personal construct systems. Accommodation involves changes in the bereaveds' system of personal constructs. Many of these changes are used to defend against the overwhelming onrush of events, but other changes involve them in the active elaboration of their personal construct system. Bereaved people who are distressed sense a need to reorganise their construct systems. This is done slowly because they systems as they stand are essential charts for their personal adventures, and such reorganisation must take into account the hierarchical organisation of the construct systems. The bereaved will usually live with their anxiety and keep opening themselves to moderate amounts of confusion in order to be able to revise their construct systems continuously.

IMPLICATIONS OF THE NEW APPROACH

From the vantage point of this personal construct approach, each bereaved person can be seen as involved as an active participant in his or her bereavement reaction. The personal construct approach emphasises that the bereavement reaction is a conscious experience, accessible to evaluation, introspection, and, if necessary, counselling. By applying personal construct theory the bereavement reaction can be anticipated, understood, and assisted.

The adaptability of the personal construct system of each bereaved person determines the efficacy of his or her adjustment to bereavement. For example, the widow who has defined her identity and the meaning of her life inflexibly in terms of her marriage and husband may become a prisoner of her own construct system. The widow whose prior beliefs about herself and her marriage have encompassed a broader perspective has a better chance of discovering those choices which lead to her freedom.

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Widowed People's Sexual Needs

In the introduction to our recent article (Vol. 4, No. 1) about the Sexual Needs of the Widowed, we invited future contributions about this rarely discussed subject.

We are glad to publish below the adapted text of a talk given by Margaret John to the counsellors at Greenwich Cruse Branch, and subsequently to Bexley Cruse Branch's AGM. **EDITOR**

As counsellors we should surely be aware of the sexual need of the bereaved. This may not manifest itself in actually talking about the subject but in physical problems like headaches, tension, aches and pains, also short-tempered behaviour — particularly towards any children.

Women particularly find it difficult to admit that they actually miss a sexual relationship. I think this may be because society often expresses more surprise at a bereaved woman embarking on another relationship than a man. I have not, however, found the sexual need following bereavement any greater in men than women, nor does age seem to have any significant effect on how someone copes with the problem.

I remember a lady of 63 and a man turned 70, who expressed quite strong and honest desires following the death of a partner, whilst a woman in her twenties and a man in his thirties expressed very little concern. This could of course, be linked with the fact that the younger people had to cope with young families, probably leaving them exhausted and not much able to give thought to their own feelings.

I think we must be ready to hear an almost silent plea from a bereaved person. Just the words "You must miss being cuddled" can be all they need to enable them to speak about a subject which they may feel they have not been able to mention to anyone else.

Not all people are reticent. I remember one man who embarrassed his teenage children and his in-laws considerably, because he seemed to talk on little else but what he and his wife had done in the privacy of their bedroom. In this instance all I could do when I was hearing everybody's thoughts on the subject, was to ask them to be tolerant, and try not to worry about what he had been saying afterwards. I personally felt that his sex life probably had not been in actual fact as absolutely fantastic as he was trying to say it was. I obviously did not say this to his family. It did eventually cease when he found someone to whom he could relate, and although he has not yet remarried, I feel sure that he will in the near future. I did gently suggest that it was a bit distressing for his family, but that did not even seem to enter his thoughts. The family have, I presume, put it to the back of their minds, because everything seems to be all right, and I do keep in touch with his teenage children as well.

Some of the problems which arise can be helped in practical ways. I always suggest to someone to sleep inside a double bed sheet folded in half, lengthways. Then one's feet cannot reach over to the empty side.

I was asked once how I coped with not being made love to. My initial answer was "with great difficulty". When the laughter stopped, although I was serious, I said "with a cold shower, a walk up and down the garden, a strong coffee and a good book, though not necessarily in that order" or "I would knock hell out of the Hoover for an hour".

Whilst I would not recommend sleeping around, I do not feel that someone should feel guilty at feeling a sexual attraction towards another person. Some people are worried because they can feel quite a strong attraction for another person relatively soon after bereavement. I would only suggest people to be very careful not to become too involved too quickly, and rush headlong into marriage because that seems the right thing to do. A close friend I know has remarried for the third time, following two tragic bereavements, and it is proving disastrous. He just felt that he could not take someone to bed without being married, and he is only in his early fifties, so the so-called promiscuous attitude does not prevail everywhere.

I have also had several conversations with a bereaved homosexual, and wished I could have helped him more with the devastating loss of a partner after a long relationship. This is particularly sad because the bereaved person feels such a sense of isolation.

Briefly concerning incest, I have heard of mothers who have taken their children to bed for comfort, but *I personally* do not have any experience of incest resulting, although I believe that difficult situations have arisen as a result.