

Case Studies to Accompany the reading: An Overview of Sexual Dysfunctions

Judy and Ira: A Loving Marriage?

Judy, a married woman in her late 20s, reached a clinic staff member on the phone and reported that she thought her husband, Ira, was having an affair and that she was upset about it. The reason for her assumptions? He had demonstrated no interest in sex during the past 3 years, and they had not had sex for 9 months. Ira was willing to come into the clinic.

When he was interviewed, it became clear that Ira was not having an affair. In fact, he did not masturbate and hardly ever thought about sex. He noted that he loved his wife but that he had not been concerned about the issue until she raised it because he had too many other things to think about and he assumed they would eventually get back to having sex. He now realized that his wife was quite distressed about the situation, particularly because they were thinking about having children.

Although Ira did not have extensive sexual experience, he had engaged in several erotic relationships before his marriage, which Judy knew. During a separate interview, Ira confided that during his premarital affairs he would get a "hard-on" just thinking about his lovers, each of whom was quite promiscuous. His wife, in contrast, was a pillar of the community and otherwise unlike these women, although attractive. Because he did not become aroused by thinking about his wife, he did not initiate sex.

Mr. and Mrs. C... Getting Started

Mrs. C., a 31-year-old successful businesswoman, was married to a 32-year-old lawyer. They had two children, ages 2 and 5, and had been married 8 years when they entered therapy. The presenting problem was Mrs. C's lack of sexual desire. Mr. and Mrs. C. were interviewed separately during the initial assessment, and both professed attraction to and love for their partner. Mrs. C. reported that she could enjoy sex once she got involved and almost always was orgasmic. The problem was her lack of desire to get involved. She avoided her husband's sexual advances and looked on his affection and romanticism with great skepticism and, usually, anger and tears. Mrs. C. was raised in an upper-middle-class family that was supportive and loving. From age 6 to age 12, however, she had been repeatedly pressured into sexual activity by a male cousin who was 5 years her senior. This sexual activity was always initiated by the cousin, always against her will. She did not tell her parents because she felt guilty, as the boy did not use physical force to make her comply. It appeared that romantic advances by Mr. C. triggered memories of abuse by her cousin..

Bill: Long Marriage, New Problem

Bill, a 58-year-old white man, was referred to our clinic by his urologist. He was a retired accountant who had been married for 29 years to his 57-year-old wife, a retired nutritionist. They had no children. For the past several years, Bill had had difficulties obtaining and maintaining an erection. He reported a rather rigid routine he and his wife had developed to deal with the problem. They scheduled sex for Sunday mornings. Bill had to do a number of chores first, however, including letting the dog out,

washing the dishes, and shaving. The couple's current behavior consisted of mutual hand stimulation. Bill was "not allowed" to attempt insertion until after his wife had climaxed. Bill's wife was adamant that she was not going to change her sexual behavior and "become a whore" as she put it. This included refusing to try K-Y jelly as a lubricant appropriate to her postmenopausal decrease in lubrication. She described their behavior as "lesbian sex."

Bill and his wife agreed that despite marital problems over the years, they had always maintained a good sexual relationship until the onset of the current problem and that sex had kept them together during their earlier difficulties. Useful information was obtained in separate interviews. Bill masturbated on Saturday night in an attempt to control his erection the following morning; his wife was unaware of this. In addition, he quickly and easily achieved a full erection when viewing erotica in the privacy of the sexuality clinic laboratory (surprising the assessor). Bill's wife privately acknowledged being angry at her husband for an affair that he had had 20 years earlier.

At the final session, three specific recommendations were made: for Bill to cease masturbating the evening before sex, for the couple to use a lubricant, and for them to delay the morning routine until after they had had sexual relations. The couple called back 1 month later to report that their sexual activity was much improved.

Greta and Will: Loving Disunion

Greta, a teacher, and Will, an engineer, were an attractive couple who came together to the first interview and entered the office clearly showing affection for each other. They had been married for 5 years and were in their late 20s. When asked about the problems that had brought them to the office, Greta quickly reported that she didn't think she had ever had an orgasm—"didn't think" because she wasn't really sure what an orgasm was. She loved Will and occasionally would initiate lovemaking, although with decreased frequency over the past several years.

Will certainly didn't think Greta was reaching orgasm. In any case, he reported, they were clearly going in "different directions" sexually, in that Greta's interest was decreasing. She had progressed from initiating sex occasionally early in their marriage to almost never doing so, except for an occasional spurt every 6 months or so, when she would initiate two or three times in a week. But Greta noted that it was the physical closeness she wanted most during these times rather than sexual pleasure. Further inquiry revealed that she did become sexually aroused occasionally but had never reached orgasm, even during several attempts at masturbation mostly before her marriage. Both Greta and Will reported that the sexual problem was a concern to them because everything else about their marriage was positive.

Greta had been brought up in a strict but loving and supportive Catholic family that more or less ignored sexuality. The parents were always careful not to display their affection in front of Greta, and when her mother caught Greta touching her genital area, she was cautioned rather severely to avoid that kind of activity.

Gary: Running Scared

Gary, a 31-year-old sales representative, engaged in sexual activity with his wife three or four times a month. He noted that he would have liked to have had sex more often, but his busy schedule kept him working about 80 hours a week. His primary difficulty was an inability to control the timing of his ejaculation. Approximately 70% to 80% of the time, he ejaculated within seconds of penetration. This pattern had been constant since he met his wife approximately 13 years earlier. Previous experience with other women, although limited, was not characterized by premature ejaculation. In an attempt to delay his ejaculation, Gary distracted himself by thinking of nonsexual things (scores of ball games or work-related issues) and sometimes attempted sex soon after a previous attempt because he seemed not to climax as quickly under these circumstances. Gary reported masturbating seldom (three or four times a year at most). When he did masturbate, he usually attempted to reach orgasm quickly, a habit he acquired during his teens to avoid being caught by a family member.

One of his greatest concerns was that he was not pleasing his wife, and under no circumstances did he want her told that he was seeking treatment. Further inquiry revealed that he made many extravagant purchases at his wife's request, even though it strained their finances, because he wished to please her. He felt that if they had met recently, his wife probably would not even accept a date with him because he had lost much of his hair and she had lost weight and was more attractive than she used to be.

Jill: Sex and Spasms

Jill was referred to our clinic by another therapist because she had not consummated her marriage of 1 year. At 23 years of age, she was an attractive and loving wife who managed a motel while her husband worked as an accountant. Despite numerous attempts in a variety of positions to engage in intercourse, Jill's severe vaginal spasms prevented penetration of any kind. Jill was also unable to use tampons. With great reluctance, she submitted to gynecological exams at infrequent intervals. Sexual behavior with her husband consisted of mutual masturbation or, occasionally, Jill had him rub his penis against her breasts to the point of ejaculation. She refused to engage in oral sex. Jill, an anxious young woman, came from a family in which sexual matters were seldom discussed and sexual contact between the parents had ceased some years before. Although she enjoyed petting, Jill's general attitude was that intercourse was disgusting. Furthermore, she expressed some fears of becoming pregnant despite taking adequate contraceptive measures. She also thought that she would perform poorly when she did engage in intercourse, therefore embarrassing herself with her new husband.

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