



Understanding Mental Disorders

Your Guide to DSM-5®

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Paraphilic Disorders - Fetishistic Disorder

Leonard's Story

Leonard, a 65-year-old salesman for a large firm, had a psychiatric evaluation after his wife threatened to leave him. Although he said he was embarrassed to discuss his issues with a stranger, he described his sexual interest in women's undergarments in a matter-of-fact manner. This interest had begun several years earlier and had not been a problem until he was caught masturbating by his wife 6 weeks before the evaluation.

Upon seeing him dressed in panties and a bra, she "went nuts," thinking he was having an affair. After he clarified that he was not seeing anyone else, she "shut him out" and hardly spoke to him. When they argued, she called him a "pervert" and made it clear that she was considering divorce unless he "got help."

Leonard's habit began with his wife's severe arthritis and likely depression, both of which reduced her overall activity and interest in sex. His "fetish" was the bright spot during his frequent and otherwise dreary business trips. He also masturbated at home but waited until his wife was out of the house. He masturbated about twice weekly, using bras and panties that he had collected over several years. He said that intercourse with his wife had faded to "every month or two" but was mutually satisfying.

Leonard had been married for over 30 years, and the couple had two grown children. He had planned to retire comfortably later that year, but not if the two choices were either to "split the assets or to sit around the house and be called a pervert all day." He had made a show of throwing away a half dozen pieces of underwear, which had seemed to reassure his wife, but he had saved his "favorites" and "could always buy more." He did not want to end his marriage, but he saw nothing harmful in his fetish. "I'm not unfaithful or doing anything bad," he says. "It just excites me, and my wife certainly doesn't want to be having sex a few times a week."

Leonard denied any problems with his sexual function, adding that he could maintain erections and achieve orgasm without women's undergarments. He recalled being aroused when he touched women's underwear in his teenage years and had masturbated often to that experience. That fantasy had stopped when he became sexually active with his wife.

Leonard was diagnosed with *fetishistic disorder*. He has a several-year history of sexual arousal from women's underwear. His behavior caused him no problems until he was caught wearing women's underwear by his wife. At that point, Leonard began to feel distress. If his wife accepted or embraced his fetish and his own distress faded, he would likely no longer have a disorder.

Leonard was referred to an expert in sexual disorders. In therapy, Leonard learned that while the fetish harmed no one, it distressed his wife, who felt that he had lost interest in her. Leonard was encouraged to better communicate with his wife, and to focus on satisfying their mutual sexual needs. Leonard was still aroused by women's undergarments, but learned to make these fantasies a part of his sexual relationship with his wife.

Learn more and purchase *Understanding Mental Disorders* at www.psychiatry.org/UnderstandingMentalDisorders.

DSM is the manual used by clinicians and researchers to diagnose and classify mental disorders. The American Psychiatric Association (APA) published the DSM-5 in 2013, culminating a 14-year revision process. For more information, go to www.DSM5.org.

APA is a national medical specialty society whose more than 36,000 physician members specialize in the diagnosis, treatment, prevention and research of mental illnesses, including substance use disorders. Visit the APA at www.psychiatry.org. For more information, please contact theAPA at press@psych.org.

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