

CASE STUDY OF SPECIFIC PHOBIA

Maureen, a 35-year-old advertising executive, sought treatment due to her fear of birds. Her husband had encouraged Maureen to seek treatment because he thought that her avoidance was "over the top". Maureen's fear of birds began when she was a child. For as long as she can remember, the flapping of birds' wings has caused her to become afraid. Her heart beats rapidly, she shakes, and experiences a need to run away. If a bird is nearby, she believes that she must protect herself by waving her arms around until she can escape or the bird flies away. She has become very self-conscious of "losing the plot" when birds are around following an incident at an open air café with a potential client. While discussing business over lunch, a bird alighted on a nearby wall, and Maureen started to become shaky and to sweat. She was unable to put into words the specific danger that the bird represented, but said "I was afraid that it might flap around my head and touch me. I know it probably wouldn't hurt even if it did, but I just couldn't stop myself being afraid". She then started to wave the menu around to scare the bird off, but the bird remained because it was too far away. Nonetheless, Maureen remained terrified and needed to ask to move inside. Even though this caused her a great deal of embarrassment, the relief she felt upon going inside was enormous.