

Case Study: Maria

Client Name: Maria López

Age: 25

Occupation: Freelance graphic designer

Presenting Problem: Social anxiety

Background Information:

Maria is a 25-year-old Puerto Rican woman who recently moved to a large city to expand her freelance graphic design business. Despite her professional talent, she struggles with social interactions, particularly in professional settings like networking events, client meetings, and group collaborations. Her anxiety has led her to decline opportunities that require direct interaction, limiting her career growth.

Presenting Symptoms:

Maria reports the following symptoms:

1. **Physical Symptoms:**
 - Racing heart, sweating, and trembling during social interactions.
 - Tightness in her chest and nausea before attending meetings or events.
 2. **Cognitive Symptoms:**
 - Persistent worry about being judged, criticized, or rejected.
 - Negative self-talk, such as *"They'll think I'm incompetent"* or *"I'm going to embarrass myself."*
 3. **Behavioural Symptoms:**
 - Avoidance of social and professional events, such as client calls and industry meetups.
 - Frequently relying on email or text communication to avoid face-to-face interactions.
 4. **Emotional Symptoms:**
 - Feelings of shame, frustration, and sadness over missed opportunities.
 - Loneliness, stemming from her inability to form new friendships in the city.
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Relevant History:

- Maria recalls being shy as a child but says her anxiety has worsened since high school. She frequently felt judged by peers and avoided group activities.
- In college, she struggled with class presentations and skipped many due to fear of public speaking, which affected her grades.
- She has no history of significant trauma or abuse, though she describes her parents as highly critical, particularly about academic and professional success.

Current Coping Mechanisms:

- Maria avoids anxiety-provoking situations, which provides temporary relief but reinforces her fear.
- She tries to calm herself with deep breathing and music before stressful situations but finds these techniques minimally effective.
- Maria confides her struggles to a close friend, who encourages her to seek professional help.

Goals for Therapy:

Maria seeks therapy to:

1. Learn strategies to manage her anxiety in social and professional settings.
2. Build confidence to engage in networking events and client meetings.
3. Develop a healthier self-image and reduce her fear of judgment.
4. Foster new personal and professional relationships in her new city.

This case study provides a rich foundation for exploring treatment approaches like **Cognitive Behavioural Therapy (CBT)** to challenge Maria's negative thought patterns, **Humanistic Therapy** to help her build self-acceptance, or **Behavioural Therapy** to gradually expose her to anxiety-provoking situations.