

This week's question to consider:

**What exactly are people talking about when they talk about fatphobia? Also, what's the difference between fatphobia and anti-fat bias and why is this title referring to both terms?**

*Pro tip:* A phobia is a deep-rooted fear. A bias is a form of subconscious discrimination.



A **phobia** is an excessive and irrational fear reaction to an object, place, situation, feeling or animal. Phobias develop when a person has a heightened sense of danger about the object, place, situation, feeling or animal.

For example, a classic phobia, arachnophobia, which is the fear of spiders, is very much a thing that you must acknowledge exists in yourself when, for example, a very enormous spider lives essentially on your kitchen window. And sort of... dangles there, threateningly, when you sit at the dinner table.

(That spider is going to have a zillion spider babies and they are all going to crawl in my mouth, single file, I know it. I am never opening that window. Also, and this is not related to the larger topic at hand, but spider plants are spider-esque, encourage spider-osity and spider-ness, and it is a mystery why so many otherwise reasonable people insist on having them inside, indoors within their own homes where they live their lives. But I digress.)

A **bias**, however, is a different sort of fact we must acknowledge in ourselves. Biases are also based in experiences and in subconscious social cues, but they are not typically tied to a concrete experience in the same way as are phobias. Biases are dealt with differently.

This brings us to anti-fat bias vs. fatphobia. Fatphobia implies a fear of fat people. When seeing a fat person, is the person questioning whether they hold this point of view reduced to semi-coherent ramblings as I was above? No? Probably not talking about fatphobia then. Anti-fat bias is the preferred term for many reasons but perhaps most simply can be explained by the notion that when you hold a bias, you can change it with thought, education, and learning. Calling it a phobia renders it more complicated to address, and usually requires direct help from a professional. Addressing a bias can be done individually. If it's a phobia, it leaves people an out for change. (Exposure therapy for spiders sounds like the stuff of nightmares.) (For example.) (No thank you.)

When we call it a bias, the subconscious, internalized disgust, the fear of becoming a fat person, this can be tackled head on. Which we must do. Because the society we currently live in does not value fat people in the same way it does non-fats, and this has disastrous and long-reaching effects on a significant percentage of the population.

*Recommended Reading:*

Aubrey Gordon | “I’m a Fat Activist. I Don’t Use the Word Fatphobia. Here’s Why”:

<https://www.self.com/story/fat-activist-fatphobia>

Tune in next week for a tip on anti-racism!

Your friendly neighbourhood Anti-Racism & Equity Coach

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