

Expository essay: when does a fear become a phobia?

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It would be fair to say that there are plenty of things in the world that are scary. With nearly 7.5 billion people currently living on the planet, you can pretty much assume that there is at least one person in the world who shares the same kinds of fears as you do, whether they are completely common or much more unusual. Fear is a completely normal emotional state that occurs in humans when they feel as if they are in danger.

However, what about phobias? By very definition, the presence of a phobia is the fear of something 'irrational', something that a human being doesn't actually need to be fearful of because it doesn't pose any real danger to them. Some of the most common 'phobias' are often things and concepts that are very understandably frightening. A fear of heights, a fear of flying in an aeroplane, a fear of swimming in deep water... These things in particular are easy to understand, easy to see why they would cause certain individuals distress: from a great height, a person can potentially fall and seriously injure themselves; from an aeroplane, the prospect of crash landing can be overwhelming; and in deep water, the potential to lose energy and one's ability to swim is a real concern. There are indeed proper Latin names for these phobias, but in lieu of their tangible dangers, it could be argued that they are not strictly phobias but simply rational fears that are perfectly acceptable to harbour. Of course, the state of a fear can often determine whether you are experiencing a 'phobia' or not.

For example, it can be perfectly normal to be nervous whilst taking a flight, but if you are a person who cannot even stand the sight of a plane in the air, let alone entertain the prospect of travelling in one, then perhaps your own emotions are what justify the phobia classification. For somebody to be

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classed as having a phobia of something, there is generally a set of physical reactions that accompany the experience. When faced with the object of their phobia, a individual might begin to feel panic attack symptoms, a tightening of the chest, elevated heart rate, noticeable sweating, crying, all classic indicators of a body's distress in a given situation. If you find yourself reaction in these ways to something fairly trivial, then you may will have a phobia, but again, if these symptoms are occurring from a genuine trauma, an attack perhaps, then it would not be appropriate to state that you had a phobia of being mugged in the street. This would be the type of reaction that every individual had to that particular event.

When a fear truly enters in to the realms of phobia, I believe, is when a person is experiencing those reactions in the face of something completely innocuous or unusual. Some of the most common 'irrational' fears for people include things like spiders, small spaces, thunder and lightning, clowns, public speaking, medicinal needles and even the fear of falling in love. Though there are obviously negative aspects of all these examples, what makes them 'true phobias' is that fact in and off themselves, they are not objects of concepts that are going to pose real danger to people, therefore there is no logical reason to be so fearful. There is a common belief that most phobias stem from an initial trauma that occurred, most often as a child, and that if you can trace back to that point of trauma, you can begin to rid yourself of that particular phobia to improve your quality of life.