

Fear of flying: A critical approach

Oral Presentation Working Paper

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Fear of flying (aviophobia) is not an uncommon experience yet the consequences can be debilitating especially for those whose anxiety precludes them from travel. In this paper we consider different approaches to fear of flying and report the experiences of a passenger with such fear. We firstly examine the conventional mental health approach which focusses on psychopathology and situates the problem, the impairment, with the person. We then suggest taking a critical sociocultural perspective which stresses the intersubjective nature of the construction of emotion where our understanding of safety and danger (inherent in fear) is the consequence of collective agreement. We suggest benefits in turning the gaze beyond the individual to the airline industry and media to understand the construction of fear. We raise the issue of social justice especially where individuals are prevented from engaging in air travel due to severe anxiety.