

Fat Joke **Language Guide**

Why we use the word 'fat'

Fat activists, fat studies scholars, and fat communities use the word 'fat' for two reasons:

1. It is simply a descriptive term, akin to other adjectives such as 'short' or 'tall'. Thus, 'fat' can be used to identify someone who is fat.
2. For political purposes.

Fat Joke intentionally uses this word for both reasons. It is simply a fact that the majority of those working on this production are fat and identify as such. However, it is also important to emphasize the political uses of this word.

The word 'fat' is intentionally used in fat communities to emphasize the physical and symbolic violence inflicted by the pathologization of fatness as a "disease." As an act of protest, fat communities reject the use of words - such as "obese" or "overweight" - that medicalize naturally occurring body diversity.

Some fat people may prefer language such as plus-size, curvy, or large, and may be uncomfortable with others identifying them as fat. The persistence of fat stigma and the internalization of fatphobia (especially for those in bigger bodies) can make identifying as fat a jarring experience. A general rule of thumb in fat communities is to allow folks to opt-in to identifying as fat. Therefore, it is important to establish whether someone identifies as fat before referring to them as such. It is okay to ask someone what language they use to identify their positionalities, or how they would prefer to be spoken about! Consider this inquiry an important part of establishing an ethic of care in a specific space or interaction.

Categorizing fatness

What it means to be 'fat' is highly contested as the boundaries between fat and thin are increasingly blurred.

The fat spectrum is a useful tool to help categorize those who identify as fat. This categorization is important in identifying different experiences of fat people; experiencing discrimination and oppression on the basis of one's size increases as one moves along the fat spectrum.

Clothing size is generally the measurement for categorizing fatness along the spectrum. As you can see in the chart below, credited to Ash of thefatlip.com, categories within fat identity have been defined by level of access to things like clothing.



Throughout the performance, you will hear Cheyenne refer to some of these categories as a way of acknowledging different experiences of fatness. Acknowledging these differences may be uncomfortable for some, but it is important to recognize how proximity to thin privilege further fragments the lived experiences of fat people.

Further reading on these topics:

- [Inclusive language for higher weight people - Regan Chastain](#)
- [Fat isn't a bad word - it's just the way I describe my body - Aubrey Gordon](#)
- [Anti-fatness keeps fat people on the margins - NPR interview with Aubrey Gordon](#)

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If you have any further questions, please reach out to NewWorld's Community Engagement Manager, Angelica Schwartz at angelica@newworldtheatre.com