

An In-Depth Qualitative Examination of the Concept of ‘Otherization’ in Sociocultural Contexts

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of the study is to explore the potential of the intersectionality framework to provide deeper insights into the lived experiences and perceptions of difference among participants of diverse races, ethnicities, ages, genders, socioeconomic statuses, and other intersecting identities. Using qualitative methods, the study investigates personal experiences, intersectional dynamics, and their psychological and social implications. In this qualitative research on othering, the findings have revealed the complex ways in which stereotypes and biases drive the marginalization and exclusion of various groups within society. Through in-depth interviews and focus groups, the study identified diverse personal experiences, perceptions, and the strategies individuals employ to navigate and resist othering. The study contributes to a deeper understanding of how stereotypes and biases reinforce systemic inequalities and exclusion. By exploring the lived experiences and perspectives of individuals from diverse demographic backgrounds, the study provides a nuanced understanding of othering and its impact on both individuals and communities.

Keywords: Intersectionality, othering, social categorization, objectification, marginalization, cultural disparities, social division

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INTRODUCTION

The concept of “otherization” refers to the process by which individuals or groups are viewed as different from oneself or one’s own group.

The process of “otherization” involves constructing an “other” perceived as inferior, strange, or threatening, often based on characteristics such as race, ethnicity, religion, culture, or socio-economic status.

The concept of “otherization” and its mechanisms are relevant in both academic and social discourse. It is related to fields such as social psychology, sociology, cultural studies, and critical theory, and it represents an important issue concerning the differences between groups and their social construction. Edward Said, as one of the leading theorists, defines in his work “Orientalism” how the image of the “Orient” was created by Western discourse, in which the East reflected the hegemonic dominance of the West and was seen as exotic, primitive, and the opposite of the “West”.

The essence of “otherization” is often associated not only with different external signs but also with stereotypical representations and their influence on social relations. Distinguishing features between groups usually become associated with negative attributes and qualities for outsiders. This process can represent deep, essential stereotyping, which not only reinforces prejudices but also creates socio-political mechanisms that contribute to the dominance of one group over another.

Stereotyping and essentialism, as mechanisms, actively create ideological barriers that contribute to behaviors and perceptions of marginalized groups. These simplified representations often draw on cultural, religious, or ethnic markers that shape social perceptions and behaviors. These processes reinforce a polarized ‘us versus them’ distinction that fuels social division and discrimination.

The dehumanization that often accompanies these differences further increases the risks of hatred and violence. When people are no longer perceived as full individuals, it becomes less realistic to express well-being and compassion towards them. This can justify the infliction of violence, exploitation, and injustice on different groups because they are no longer perceived as “real” people.

Cultural and social exclusion manifests itself in the fact that certain groups often experience marginalization, placing them in a doubly complex situation: not only do they have limited social and political access, but they are also relegated to the inner world of social, economic, and cultural relations. This creates a narrow, segregated space where individuals and groups experience a lack of opportunities and unfair treatment.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Today’s social discourse and media have taken on a new form in which “otherization” often serves as the basis for public order. The media can perpetuate stereotypes that largely

reinforce discrimination against specific groups. Political discourse usually employs fear and uncertainty, demonizing this or that group and affecting not only their rights but also public life as a whole.

The impact of “otherization”, which we often encounter as potential problems, also serves to divide society. Social conflicts, which initially rest on differences between groups, usually raise theoretical and practical challenges that vary in their impact on identity formation. The constantly defined gaps between “us” and “them” contribute not only to the destruction of relationships but also to systemic inequalities through chain reactions.

Theoretical reviews of “otherization” and its impact, especially in Edward Said’s work “Orientalism”, show how the task of Western representation was created: the West is considered the norm, and the East is the “other”, whose misrepresentations express cosmopolitan and cultural complexities.

The concept of “otherization” and its mechanisms are relevant in both academic and social discourse. It is related to fields such as social psychology, sociology, cultural studies, and critical theory, and it represents an important issue concerning the differences between groups and their social construction. Edward Said, as one of the leading theorists, defines in his work “Orientalism” how the image of the “Orient” was created by Western discourse, in which the East reflected the hegemonic dominance of the West and was seen as exotic, primitive, and the opposite of the “West”. According to Said, these ideas, along with representations of colonial violence and domination, facilitated imperialist systems.

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Frantz Fanon (1952) expanded on the psychological dimensions of otherization in “Black Skin, White Masks,” analysing how colonialism and racism lead to the internalization of inferiority and alienation among marginalized groups. Michel Foucault (1976) explored the mechanisms of power and knowledge that construct “other” identities. His work on discourse analysis highlights how institutional practices and discursive formations perpetuate otherization.

Sara Ahmed (2000) examined the cultural politics of otherness, emphasizing how discourses of multiculturalism and diversity can inadvertently reinforce hierarchies and exclusions by framing certain groups as exotic.

Bell Hooks (1992) critiqued the intersectionality of race, gender, and class in the process of otherness, arguing for an intersectional approach that considers how multiple axes of identity shape experiences of marginalization and exclusion.

Scholars such as Stuart Hall (1980) and Michel Foucault (1976) have explored how media representations reinforce stereotypes and otherness. The authors have identified specific ways in which stereotypes influence public perceptions and social attitudes toward marginalized groups.

Claude Steele (1997) and Jennifer Eberhardt (2019) have examined the psychological effects of stereotypes and racial bias on the lowered self-esteem in target groups.

Research on social identity theory by Tajfel and Turner (1979) and Sheriff (1961) has examined how group categorization and intergroup relations influence perceptions of difference, which in turn affect social cohesion and conflict.

A critical examination of the literature on “otherization” allows for identifying the mechanisms and real-world manifestations of “otherization”.

Edward Said and Franz Fanon highlighted the historical roots and theoretical underpinnings of “otherization”. Their analyses help us understand how perceptions of difference are constructed and perpetuated through discourses of power and domination.

Scholars such as Michel Foucault contribute to our understanding of the mechanisms through which difference operates. Their work on discourse analysis and power dynamics shows how institutions and societal norms shape perceptions of “us” versus “them” and reinforce hierarchical structures.

Sarah Ahmed and Belle Hooks explored how diverse identities intersect and experience marginalization differently, challenging monolithic and essentialist notions.

Stuart Hall and Michel Foucault’s analysis of media representation provides empirical evidence about how difference manifests itself in everyday life.

Lilie Chouliaraki (2006) analyzes how Western news media portray distant suffering and positions vulnerable populations as moral “others,” often reinforcing global hierarchies along West/non-West lines.

Mikko Pelttari (2020) explores how places and spaces are constructed as “other” through mythologization, drawing on concepts from folklore studies and semiotics.

Judith Butler (2020) destabilizes binaries between Self and Other by highlighting shared vulnerability, arguing against dehumanization that often accompanies othering.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

These works provide a comprehensive framework for realizing the complex dynamics of otherization. The integration of different approaches enriches the research by advancing grounded science and theoretical discourse on social identity, power relations, and cultural representation.

We present the research questions that allow for exploring the concept of “otherness” in more depth:

To what extent can the intersectionality framework be considered an effective tool for revealing profound insights into the lived experiences and perceptions of difference among participants of diverse ethnicities, ages, genders, and socioeconomic statuses?

How do people perceive (ethnic, racial, generational, and socioeconomic) differences,

and how does this perception affect their daily lives, identities, social interactions, and societal dynamics?

These questions seek to reveal how otherness is created and operates and how individuals perceive otherness in different social, cultural, and psychological contexts.

Methodological approach:

Qualitative analysis employed in the study enabled the interpretation of specific social issues from the perspectives of different social groups.

Qualitative Sampling:

The study engaged approximately 120 participants from diverse sociocultural backgrounds to explore the concept of Otherization. This diverse group included individuals of varying race, ethnicity, age, gender, and social-economic status to capture a wide range of perspectives and lived experiences.

Participants came from multiple racial and ethnic backgrounds, including African American/Black; Caucasian/White; Asian (East Asian, South Asian, Southeast Asian); Indigenous/Native American; Middle Eastern.

Participants' ages ranged from young adults (18–27) to older adults (60+), encompassing different generational perspectives on othering and sociocultural identity.

The study included individuals across the gender spectrum, including men and women, Transgender and non-binary individuals. This inclusion allowed for nuanced insights into how gender identity intersects with experiences of othering.

Participants represented varied socioeconomic backgrounds, including working-class and blue-collar workers, Middle-class professionals, Students and recent graduates, Individuals experiencing economic hardship or living below the poverty line, and Business owners and professionals in managerial or executive roles. This diversity facilitated exploration of how class and economic factors influence the processes and perceptions of otherization.

This intentionally diverse participant composition provided a rich, multidimensional understanding of Otherization as experienced and perceived across different sociocultural contexts. The qualitative design enabled participants to share their unique reflections. The sample was sufficient to reconcile different views and experiences.

Data collection methods:

In-depth interviews: Semi-structured interviews allowed participants to give meaning to their experiences. Questions covered topics such as ethnic and cultural differences, exposure to social and economic inequalities, stereotypes, discrimination, etc.

Focus groups: The use of focus groups enhances the value of group discussions, providing a collective perspective.

Sample structure:

The respondents for the study were selected to capture qualitative diversity, allowing ex-

ploration of definitions of identity and otherness across different social contexts.

Using this methodological approach, the study comprises both individual experiences and the analysis of the broader social context.

RESULTS

Contemporary social discourse and media have taken on a new form in which “otherization” often serves as the basis for public order. The media can perpetuate stereotypes that largely reinforce discrimination against specific groups. Politics, in turn, usually uses fear and uncertainty to demonize this or that group, affecting not only their rights but also public life in general.

The impact of “otherization”, which we often encounter as potential problems, also serves to divide society. Social conflicts, which initially rest on differences between groups, usually raise theoretical and practical challenges that vary in their impact on identity formation. The constantly defined gaps between “us” and “them” contribute not only to the destruction of relationships but also to systemic inequalities through chain reactions.

Qualitative analysis of in-depth interviews and focus groups revealed profound insights into the lived experiences and perceptions of difference among the diverse participants. A thorough examination was conducted of how people perceive differences and how these perceptions affect their daily lives, identities, social interactions, and societal dynamics. The study found that the concept of otherness is a multifaceted phenomenon that influences all aspects of individual and collective life.

Participants expressed a range of emotions related to how otherness affects their sense of identity and belonging. According to many participants, they feel marginalized, misunderstood, or stereotyped, often linked to cultural, racial, or socio-economic characteristics. This feeling led to a sense of being separate, excluded, or less valuable in society.

The study found that being different strongly influenced participants’ mental health and well-being. Many participants had experienced systemic discrimination, aggression, and other forms of inequality. All this significantly lowered their self-esteem. Differences intensified frustration and a self-imposed struggle for one’s place in society.

Participants discussed various strategies and forms of resistance to combat otherness and reduce its social and psychological effects. The most common of these was community activism, through which they attempted to challenge stereotypes and strengthen cultural pride. Such movements contributed to the destruction of other roles and gave people a new, more equal perspective.

Participants noted that collective solidarity and empowerment were crucial factors in combating the psychological and social effects of difference and marginalization. They recognized that the only effective way for them would be to support each other and amplify the voices of those who at different times only experience “other” purpose.

Power dynamics and the establishment of social stereotypes are broad, multifaceted research topics that involve analyzing various social contexts. This study aims to explore how critical discourse analysis (CDA), the intersectionality framework, the psychosocial approach, postcolonial theory, and media representation analysis can help deepen understanding of stereotypes and power dynamics.

Critical discourse analysis is a method that focuses on language as an instrument of power and social control. Such approaches have influenced public attitudes, which can contribute to the formation of stereotypes that influence political agendas and public attitudes.

Intersectionality explores how different forms of identity - such as race and gender - operate in different contexts. The application of this approach is illustrated in research that focuses on the unique forms of discrimination faced by black women in the workplace. This research demonstrates how they may experience different kinds of difficulties when these two identities are combined with other social factors, such as social class and education. The intersectionality framework emphasizes that the deployment of power and social stereotypes is often complex and influenced by multiple factors.

Postcolonial studies highlight the processes of marginalizing and misrepresenting indigenous peoples as “primitive” or “exotic”. Such representations in the media and literature not only create difficulties for these small groups but also have a decisive impact on their social integration and cultural self-perception.

The media is one of the most powerful tools for defining and influencing public opinion. Television shows and films often create negative stereotypes that can affect certain ethnic and religious groups.

These research findings often aim to understand the processes underlying the operation of social stereotypes and power dynamics. Observable mechanisms that help participants, including through communication and activism, are pretty crucial for defeating stereotypes and stabilizing their social roles.

The research aims to detail the impact of stereotypes across key areas of individual identity, such as race, gender, and ethnicity. In this process, many people not only experience social exclusion but also often have their rights and opportunities threatened, which negatively affects their quality of life.

The results of the qualitative analysis of the cohort reveal several important patterns that relate to the experiences of groups affected by education, social dynamics, and difference. The themes identified in the research process are united by several key coordinates: ethnic identity, gender dynamics, socioeconomic status and access, generational differences, social resilience, and collective action. Each of these reflects how stereotypes and other social problems operate at the individual, group, and societal levels.

Cohort 1: In-depth interviews

Cohort 1: In-Depth Interviews (30 participants)

Demographics: Gender: 60% female, 40% male; Ethnicity: 40% Black, 30% Latinx,

20% Asian, 10% White; Age: 18–45 (average age: 29); Socioeconomic background: 50% low-income, 30% working class, 20% middle class.

Limited Opportunities due to Stereotyping and Discrimination: 73% reported experiencing reduced educational or employment opportunities due to racial or ethnic stereotyping; 65% described institutional barriers that hindered career advancement or academic support.

Identity and Social Belonging: 68% experienced identity crises or internal conflicts related to cultural or racial stereotyping; 72% reported negative societal attitudes impacted their self-perception and sense of belonging.

Gender and Racial Microaggressions: 80% of women reported encountering sexist microaggressions in public or professional settings; 90% of Black women experienced “double burden” stereotypes based on both race and gender; 66% of women said these experiences negatively affected their self-esteem and social confidence.

Psychosocial Effects: 60% reported ongoing anxiety or lowered self-worth linked to recurring stereotyping and exclusion; 55% experienced withdrawal or reduced social interaction due to perceived othering.

The findings from Cohort 1 underscore the pervasive impact of intersecting forms of marginalization on individuals from diverse racial, ethnic, and gender backgrounds. Participants’ narratives reveal that stereotypes – particularly at the intersection of race and gender – significantly limit opportunities in education and employment, while also eroding self-esteem and complicating identity development.

The data highlight the structural nature of otherization, especially for Black women, who face compounded challenges. These experiences are not only professionally restrictive but also psychologically and socially damaging – they cause exclusion and internal conflict.

Overall, the data confirm that otherization is not a singular or isolated experience – it is a multidimensional process deeply embedded in social interactions and institutional frameworks. This process requires an intersectional and systemic approach that recognizes the complexity of identity and promotes equity across all levels of society.

Cohort 2: Focus Groups (35 participants)

Age groups: 18–30 years: 60%; 31–50 years: 25%; 51+ years: 15%.

Identities represented: LGBTQ+: 30%; Ethnic/racial minorities: 70%; Varied educational and socioeconomic backgrounds.

Attitudes Toward Inclusion and Diversity: 91% believed that diversity, inclusion, and equality should be central to social standards and public discourse; 87% agreed that societal transformation requires actively replacing outdated stereotypes with inclusive norms; 78% emphasized the importance of activism and policy reform.

Role of Education and Awareness: 84% considered education to be essential for dismantling systemic stereotypes and raising awareness; 76% supported curricular reform and public campaigns as tools to promote social justice principles.

Generational Perspectives

Among young participants (18–30): 92% expressed a strong desire to challenge and redefine cultural norms; 85% stated they have actively engaged in advocacy and social media activism.

Among older participants (51+): 68% reflected on the persistence of generational stereotypes, often rooted in historical narratives; 54% emphasized the need for critical engagement with inherited cultural norms rather than passive continuation.

LGBTQ+ Community and Collective Empowerment: 95% of LGBTQ+ group members highlighted the importance of community solidarity in building resilience; 89% reported that collective empowerment helped them combat stigma and promote positive self-identity; 82% felt that visible advocacy and pride events contributed to reducing social prejudice and building awareness in broader society.

The focus group discussions in Cohort 2 reflect a growing awareness and commitment to social justice - especially among younger respondents, who emphasized the need to transform outdated cultural norms. These respondents strongly supported diversity, inclusion, and the active dismantling of stereotypes through education, awareness, and collective resistance. They consider social change urgent and see themselves as active agents in molding a more equitable and inclusive society.

In contrast, older respondents provided valuable context by reflecting on how traditional narratives and generational teachings have contributed to systemic stereotypes. Their perspectives underscore the deep-rooted nature of otherization and the significance of inter-generational dialogue in cultural transformation.

The LGBTQ+ focus group highlighted the power of community and collective action in resisting marginalization. Respondents demonstrated how solidarity and shared pride can serve as a counterforce to societal exclusion.

The analysis of the findings proves that social change must come from both activism and institutional reform. Education, collective empowerment, and inclusive cultural practices build a more just and cohesive society.

Cohort 3: Surveys (120 participants)

Participant Profile:

Age: 18–35 (90%), 36–50 (10%)

Education levels: High school or less: 20%; Some college/undergraduate: 50%; Graduate/postgraduate: 30%

Media Consumption and Critical Thinking: 83% reported that media that encourages critical thinking helps them recognize and challenge stereotypes; 76% said they actively avoid content that promotes biased or one-sided portrayals; 81% stated that exposure to diverse perspectives in media increased their awareness of social justice issues.

Impact of Critical Thinking: 79% agreed that developing critical thinking skills helped

them detect and question harmful stereotypes; 73% reported becoming more cautious of how media shapes public perceptions of race, gender, and class; 68% said critical thinking made them more likely to fact-check information or seek alternative viewpoints.

Role of Education: 85% of respondents with higher education (graduate/postgrad) showed low tolerance for discriminatory content and strong support for inclusion policies; 71% believed that formal education directly contributed to reducing their own stereotypical thinking; Among respondents with only high school education, 44% expressed awareness of media bias, compared to 89% of those with postgraduate education.

Support for Diversity & Inclusion: 88% supported policies and initiatives that promote diversity, equity, and inclusion; 74% said their awareness of such principles was directly shaped by media and educational content that fostered critical thinking.

DISCUSSION

The essence of “otherization” is often associated not only with different external signs but also with stereotypical representations and their influence on social relations. What distinguishes one group from another usually becomes a pairing of negative signs and qualities for outsiders. This process can represent deep, essential stereotyping, which not only reinforces prejudices but also creates socio-political mechanisms that contribute to the dominance of one group over another.

Stereotyping and essentialism, as mechanisms, actively create ideological barriers that contribute to behaviors and perceptions related to marginalized groups. Such simplified representations often rely on religious, cultural, or ethnic markers that people use to shape their thinking and actions. When these conditions persist, a kind of opposition between “us” and “them” arises, which reinforces the idea of separation, aggression, and discrimination against one group or another.

The dehumanization that often accompanies these differences further increases the risks of hatred and violence. When people are no longer perceived as full individuals, it becomes less realistic to express well-being and compassion towards them. This can justify the infliction of violence, exploitation, and injustice on different groups because they are no longer perceived as “real” people.

Cultural and social exclusion manifests itself in the fact that certain groups often experience marginalization, placing them in a problematic situation: not only do they have limited social and political access, but they are also relegated to the inner world of social, economic, and cultural relations. This creates a segregated environment where individuals and groups experience a lack of opportunities and unfair treatment.

CONCLUSION

The intersectional framework proves an exceptionally effective tool for uncovering profound insights into the lived experiences and perceptions of difference among participants from varied ethnic, age, gender, and socioeconomic backgrounds. By recognizing that social identities and power structures are not isolated but deeply interconnected, intersectionality allows researchers and participants alike to move beyond simplistic analyses of identity.

Intersectionality encourages a holistic approach and provides data that reflect participants' full identities and the multifaceted ways in which social structures impact individual lives.

In sum, intersectionality is an invaluable tool for capturing the richness of diverse human experiences in multicultural and stratified societies.

People perceive ethnic, racial, generational, and socioeconomic differences as key to their identity and social experience. These perceptions influence daily life by shaping self-understanding and relationships. Ethnic and racial identities provide cultural grounding but can also expose individuals to exclusion. Generational differences affect values and impact social cohesion. Socioeconomic status determines opportunities and social inclusion.

Overall, respondents' perceptions mold social interactions and societal dynamics, either fostering solidarity or reinforcing division and inequality. It should be mentioned that these views are fluid and can change through dialogue and education.

Ethics Approval and Conflict of Interest

This study was conducted in accordance with relevant ethical standards. The authors declare that there are no financial, personal, professional, or institutional conflicts of interest that could have influenced the design, conduct, interpretation, or publication of this work.

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Declaration of competing interest

The authors declare that they have no known competing financial interests or personal relationships that could have influenced the work reported in this paper.

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