**CHARACTERISTICS OF THE TREATMENT OF “OTHERNESS” (This is known as Marginalization: Pushing them to the edges)  
  
1. Objectification**• The Other is treated as "mere object". Inability or refusal to consider the other as a "subject,"   
 as part of one's community (of humans, etc.).

• Social: Headless women on a billboard; Native Americans as team logo.  
• Ecological: Animals in factory farms; animals in advertisements (Chik-fil-A); nature as backdrop for selling SUVs.

**2. Difference and separation**• The Other is not like us. Inability or refusal to see similarity, continuity, etc.

• Social: Africans and Native Americans not seen as human beings.  
• Ecological: We are separate from (and above) nature. Culture is not part of nature. Animals   
 are machines that don‘t suffer.

**3. The Same as Us**• The Other is just like us. Inability or refusal to see difference and discontinuity.

• Social: The melting pot ideal. ―The Western Tradition‖ and ―human condition‖ as a single and   
 undifferentiated; thus white males can speak for all.   
• Ecological: Not usually applied to nature.

**4. Simplification**• Inability or refusal to see the differences among members of the "Other" group.

# • Social: "Oh, (blacks, women, etc.) are all the same." • Ecological: ―When you‘ve seen one redwood tree, you‘ve seen them all‖ (President Reagan). All wetlands are the same and therefore we can destroy one if we make another 5. Unchanging • Inability or refusal to see changes through time in a group. ―We can change and develop, but they can‘t.

# • Social: Native Americans had no history or development. • Ecological: Ecosystems in climax as unchanging.

# 6. Passivity • The Other is passive and receptive and lacks agency. Only the dominant group has the power to be active and affect things.

# • Social: Women as passive, needing men to solve problems or help them or create culture. • Ecological: We impact a passive nature that does not react to our control. We affect nature; nature doesn‘t affect (e.g., teach or control) us.

# 7. Invisibility • Inability or refusal to recognize their actual existence.

# • Social: Ralph Ellison‘s Invisible Man; no Hispanics in the media; historical model of NC farm with no women; the “New World” as “empty” (despite being populated by Native Americans). • Ecological: maps with only roads and state boundaries. 8. Devalued • The other has no value, or there is only instrumental value to "us."

# • Social: Women, blacks, etc., devalued in a wide variety of ways. • Ecological: Nature has instrumental value only; nature without human labor mixed in is just “raw land”

# What is Otherness? By Dr. Zuleyka Zevallos, Research Sociologist

The idea of ‘*otherness*’ is central to sociological analyses of how majority and minority identities are constructed. This is because the representation of different groups within any given society is controlled by groups that have greater political power. In order to understand the notion of The Other, sociologists first seek to put a critical spotlight on the ways in which social identities are constructed. Identities are often thought as being natural or innate – something that we are born with – but sociologists highlight that this taken-for-granted view is not true. Rather than talking about the individual characteristics or personalities of different individuals, which is generally the focus for psychology, **sociologists focus on *social*identities.**[**[i]**](http://othersociologist.com/otherness-resources/#_edn1)**Social identities reflect the way individuals and groups internalise established social categories within their societies, such as their cultural (or ethnic) identities, gender identities, class identities, and so on**. These social categories shape our ideas about who we think we are, how we want to be seen by others, and the groups to which we belong.

George Herbert Mead’s classic text, [Mind Self and Society](http://www.brocku.ca/MeadProject/Mead/pubs2/mindself/Mead_1934_toc.html), established that social identities are created through our ongoing social interaction with other people and our subsequent self-reflection about who we think we are according to these social exchanges. Mead’s work shows that identities are produced through agreement, disagreement, and negotiation with other people. We adjust our behaviour and our self-image based upon our interactions and our self-reflection about these interactions (this is also known as [the looking glass self](http://books.google.com.au/books?hl=en&lr=&id=Duzk5w-MOR0C&oi=fnd&pg=PR7&dq=Cooley,+Charles+H.+On+Self+and+Social+Organization&ots=8pbGr8c9kF&sig=xansngPyPwh-QO6wdsYb8l-aZVI#v=onepage&q=looking%20glass%20self&f=false)). Ideas [of similarity and difference](http://www.amazon.co.uk/Social-Identity-Ideas-Richard-Jenkins/dp/0415120535) are central to the way in which we achieve a sense of identity and social belonging. Identities have some element of exclusivity. Just as when we formally join a club or an organisation, social membership depends upon fulfilling a set of criteria. It just so happens that such criteria are socially-constructed (that is, created by societies and social groups). As such ‘we’ cannot belong to any group unless ‘they’ (other people) do *not*belong to ‘our’ group. Sociologists set out to study how societies manage collective ideas about who gets to belong to ‘our group’ and which types of people are seen as different – the outsiders of society.  
 The concept of The Other highlights how many societies create a sense of belonging, identity and social status by constructing social categories as binary opposites.  In the early 1950s, Philosopher Simone de Beauvoir argued that “[*Otherness is a fundamental category of human thought*](http://www.marxists.org/reference/subject/ethics/de-beauvoir/2nd-sex/introduction.htm)*.  Thus it is that no group ever sets itself up as the One without at once setting up the Other over against itself.”* PhilosopherEmmanuel Levinas makes a related point, that we can only define ourselves as a self by having an Other: ““I am defined as a subjectivity, as a singular person, as an ‘I’, precisely because I am exposed to the Other.  It is my inescapable and incontrovertible answerability to the other that make me an individual ‘I’” (*Dialogues*62). Similarly, sociologist Zygmunt Bauman writes that the notion of otherness is central to the way in which societies establish identity categories. He argues that [identities are set up as dichotomies](http://www.amazon.co.uk/Modernity-Ambivalence-Zygmunt-Bauman/dp/0745612423): “*Woman is the other of man, animal is the other of human, stranger is the other of native, abnormality the other of norm, deviation the other of law-abiding, illness the other of health, insanity the other of reason, lay public the other of the expert, foreigner the other of state subject, enemy the other of friend (Bauman 1991: 8).”* These dichotomies are set up as being natural and so often times in everyday life they are taken for granted and presumed to be natural. But social identities are *not*natural – they represent an established social order – a hierarchy where certain groups are established as being superior to other groups. Individuals have the choice (or agency) to create their identities according to their own beliefs about the world. Yet the negotiation of identity equally depends upon the negotiation of [power relationships](http://www.annualreviews.org/doi/abs/10.1146/annurev.soc.29.010202.100057). As Andrew Okolie [puts it](http://www.tandfonline.com/doi/abs/10.1207/S1532706XID0301_01?journalCode=hidn20#preview): *Power is implicated here, and because groups do not have equal powers to define both*self *and the*other*, the consequences reflect these power differentials.  Often notions of superiority and inferiority are embedded in particular identities (2003: 2).*

The notion of otherness is therefore used by sociologists to highlight how social identities are contested. We also use this concept to break down the ideologies and resources that groups use to maintain their social identities. Sociologists are therefore interested in the ways in which notions of otherness are managed in society. For example, we study how some groups become stigmatised as outsiders, and how such ideas change over time.