

## **Othering**

This short lesson introduces otherism: how people draw a line between “us” and “them,” and why that matters. We look at what otherism is, how it forms, and how it appears in real social and political conversations, including examples from the Russo-Ukrainian war.

The goal is to help you recognize the *process* behind “us vs. them” language, not to judge any particular group.

### **What Exactly Is Otherism?**

- At its core, *otherism* is when a group treats another group as fundamentally different or less deserving. It often shows up in subtle ways, not always as outright insults.

Otherism usually involves:

- Building up an ingroup (“people like us”)
- Drawing boundaries around who does *not* belong
- Framing the outgroup as a threat
- Justifying harsh treatment (“we have to protect ourselves”)

This sequence appears across many conflicts and political contexts.

### **How Groups Create an “Other”**

1. Ingroup identity: A group names what makes them who they are — values, culture, language, etc.
2. Moral high ground: The group emphasizes its virtue (“we’re the reasonable ones,” “we’re defending what’s right”).
3. Excluding others: Boundaries form around who is “not us.” Sometimes this is based on language, culture, or political belief.
4. Portraying the outgroup as dangerous: Claims that the outgroup threatens safety, culture, morality, or survival.
5. Justifying harm: Once a group seems dangerous, harsh actions can be framed as necessary or even noble.

### **Why This Matters**

otherism is:

- Flexible: it adapts to whatever situation is happening
- Topical: it attaches itself to current events
- Influential: it can shape how people view entire groups
- Potentially dangerous: it can normalize prejudice or even violence

Even mild “they’re not like us” language can build a foundation for more harmful narratives later.

### **Case Study: War Bloggers and the Russo-Ukrainian War**

A few things stand out:

- Different communities emphasize different themes
- Narratives shift as events unfold
- Even unrelated stories tend to circle back to portraying an outgroup as threatening

One of the narrative examples is the “biolabs in Ukraine” storyline.

Different versions of this story mention things like:

- UN involvement
- Secret funding
- Dangerous experiments
- Concealment by outside powers

### **Beyond War: Otherism in Everyday Politics**

Otherism shows up in many places, not just in wartime. It can appear in news commentary, political speeches, or online debates. Sometimes it overlaps with “fear speech,” where groups are framed as threats.

This language can feel more acceptable than overt hate speech because it often sounds like concern, warning, or “just asking questions.”

### **Why Otherism Is Hard to Detect**

- It depends heavily on context
- It changes form from one community to another
- It often avoids direct insults
- It attaches itself to real news stories

### **Takeaways**

- Otherism is widespread and often overlooked
- It’s more dynamic than hate speech
- It can reshape how groups understand reality
- Understanding the process helps us recognize when narratives start steering public opinion toward an “us vs. them” mindset