

Freakalization: Unpacking the Social and Psychological Mechanisms of Marginalization and Othering

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Abstract: This paper introduces the term "Freakalization" to describe the psychological process where individuals distort the image of others in their minds, perceiving them as "freaks" due to perceived differences such as race, ideology, or physical characteristics. Freakalization encapsulates the unjust labeling and marginalization of individuals who deviate from societal norms. The paper examines the mechanisms of freakalization, including media representation, cultural narratives, social interactions, and institutional policies. It also discusses the factors contributing to freakalization, such as race, disability, and ideology. Through historical and contemporary case studies, the paper illustrates the manifestations and consequences of freakalization. By understanding and addressing freakalization, the paper aims to foster a more inclusive and empathetic society.

Keywords: Freakalization, Social Exclusion, Psychological Marginalization

1. Introduction

Freakalization is a newly introduced term to describe a psychological process in which individuals distort the image of others in their minds, perceiving them as "freaks" due to perceived differences. These differences can be based on race, ideology, skin color, disabilities, or any other characteristic that sets someone apart from what is considered the norm. The term "freakalization" is derived from "freak," a word historically used to denote abnormality or oddity. This term encapsulates the unjust and often subconscious labeling and marginalization of individuals who deviate from societal expectations.

The concept of freakalization is crucial for understanding contemporary social dynamics and the psychological mechanisms that drive exclusion and discrimination. In a world increasingly marked by diversity, the irrational fear and prejudice towards those who are different can lead to significant social consequences. By introducing and defining freakalization, this paper aims to highlight how this process contributes to social exclusion, discriminatory behaviors, and even violent reactions. Understanding freakalization is essential for addressing the root causes of these biases and fostering a more inclusive and empathetic society [1].

In today's interconnected world, where interactions among diverse cultures and ideologies are commonplace, recognizing and addressing freakalization is more relevant than ever. The phenomenon of

freakalization helps explain why differences in race, ideology, or appearance can lead to heightened tensions and conflict. By examining this concept, we aim to provide a framework for understanding how prejudices form and persist, ultimately informing strategies to promote social cohesion and acceptance [2].

The impacts of freakalization are profound and multifaceted. Psychologically, individuals labeled as "freaks" often experience significant distress, including lowered self-esteem, identity struggles, and mental health challenges. Socially, these individuals face marginalization, discrimination, and exclusion, which perpetuate societal divisions. Recognizing the roots and consequences of freakalization is vital for developing comprehensive approaches to combat prejudice and foster a more equitable society [3], [4].

Introducing the term freakalization and exploring its various dimensions, this paper seeks to contribute to the broader discourse on social perceptions and biases. By examining the mechanisms, factors, and impacts of freakalization, we aim to foster a deeper understanding of this psychological process and its implications. Ultimately, our goal is to encourage more empathetic and inclusive attitudes, challenging the irrational fears and prejudices that arise from perceiving others as fundamentally different and abnormal.

2. Literature Review

The concept of freakalization aligns with various historical and theoretical frameworks that examine the social construction of otherness and the stigmatization of individuals based on perceived differences. This literature review explores similar terms and approaches within this field, highlighting relevant research.

One of the foundational theories relevant to freakalization is Erving Goffman's concept of stigma. In his seminal work "Stigma: Notes on the Management of Spoiled Identity," Goffman discusses how society labels individuals who deviate from the norm, leading to their marginalization and exclusion. Stigma, as described by Goffman, encompasses physical deformities, character blemishes, and tribal stigmas such as race, nation, and religion. The process of freakalization can be seen as an extension of this stigmatization, where perceived differences are exaggerated to the point of dehumanization [5].

Edward Said's "Orientalism" introduces the concept of "othering," a process through which Western cultures have historically constructed Eastern societies as fundamentally different and inferior. Said's analysis reveals how these perceptions are rooted in power dynamics and cultural hegemony. Similar to othering, freakalization involves constructing an exaggerated image of the "other" as strange or abnormal, which justifies exclusion and discrimination [6].

Sigmund Freud's essay "The Uncanny" explores the psychological responses to things that are both familiar and alien, causing discomfort and fear. The uncanny highlights how slight deviations from the norm can provoke intense emotional reactions. Freakalization can be viewed through the lens of the uncanny, where individuals who are somewhat familiar yet different are perceived as unsettling and threatening [7].

Research on dehumanization and infrahumanization provides additional context for understanding freakalization. Dehumanization, as discussed by Haslam, involves perceiving others as less than human, often leading to moral disengagement and justification of mistreatment. Infrahumanization, a concept explored by Leyens et al., refers to the tendency to attribute more human qualities to one's in-group while denying them to out-groups. These processes are closely related to freakalization, where individuals are stripped of their humanity and viewed as bizarre or monstrous [8], [9].

The role of media in perpetuating stereotypes and shaping public perceptions of different groups is

well-documented. In "Media and the Racialization of Poverty" by Clawson and Trice, the authors discuss how media representations contribute to the stigmatization of racial minorities by reinforcing negative stereotypes. Similarly, the portrayal of individuals with disabilities in media often emphasizes their differences in ways that contribute to social exclusion. These media-driven narratives play a significant role in the process of freakalization by amplifying perceived differences [10], [11].

Empirical studies provide evidence of the effects of social exclusion based on perceived differences. For instance, a study by Williams on ostracism highlights the psychological and social impacts of being excluded from social groups. Similarly, research by Puhl and Heuer on weight-based discrimination demonstrates how societal biases against individuals who are overweight lead to stigmatization and exclusion. These studies underscore the importance of understanding freakalization as a factor contributing to social exclusion and discrimination [12], [13].

3. Conceptual Framework

3.1. Mechanisms of Freakalization

Freakalization occurs through various mechanisms that distort the perception of individuals based on their differences, leading to their marginalization and dehumanization. One of the primary mechanisms is media representation. Media plays a pivotal role in shaping public perceptions by often sensationalizing portrayals of certain groups and depicting them in negative contexts. News outlets and entertainment media frequently emphasize the differences of marginalized groups, reinforcing stereotypes and perpetuating fears. Studies have shown that repetitive negative portrayals can lead to entrenched biases in the audience's minds, making them more likely to view these groups as "other" or abnormal [10], [11].

Cultural narratives also contribute significantly to freakalization. These narratives create archetypes and stereotypes that simplify and exaggerate the differences of certain groups. Historical depictions of ethnic minorities, people with disabilities, or those with different ideological beliefs often present them as exotic, dangerous, or deviant. These cultural stories, found in literature, folklore, and historical accounts, contribute to long-standing perceptions of certain groups as "freaks." For instance, the portrayal of people of different races during the era of freak shows as curiosities or oddities highlights the deep-seated cultural impact of these narratives.

Everyday social interactions further reinforce freakalization. The process of labeling someone as a freak often begins with subtle social cues and microaggressions. Social psychology research shows that even minor differences in behavior, appearance, or belief can lead to significant social exclusion [12]. Peer groups, community norms, and family attitudes all play a role in reinforcing these labels, making freakalization a deeply ingrained social phenomenon. The cumulative effect of these interactions can significantly impact the perceived normalcy and acceptance of individuals within society.

Institutional policies and practices can institutionalize freakalization by legitimizing the exclusion and discrimination of certain groups. Laws and regulations that discriminate against specific populations, as well as organizational practices that marginalize employees or clients based on their differences, perpetuate freakalization. Historical examples include segregation laws, discriminatory immigration policies, and biased hiring practices. These institutional mechanisms not only perpetuate freakalization but also make it more difficult to challenge and change these perceptions.

3.2. Factors Contributing to Freakalization

Several factors contribute to the process of freakalization, each adding a layer of complexity to how individuals and groups are perceived and treated. Racial differences are among the most significant factors. Historically, racial minorities have been portrayed as exotic or dangerous, contributing to their marginalization. Contemporary media continues to perpetuate these stereotypes, often depicting racial minorities in roles that emphasize their difference from the perceived norm [6].

Disability is another major factor contributing to freakalization. Individuals with disabilities have long been subjected to freakalization. Despite advances in disability rights, media portrayals and societal attitudes still often emphasize the differences and limitations of disabled individuals rather than their abilities and potential [11]. This emphasis on difference continues to reinforce negative stereotypes and marginalization.

Ideological differences, including political, religious, and social beliefs, can also lead to freakalization. Individuals holding views that significantly differ from the mainstream or dominant ideology may be perceived as threats or abnormalities. Historical and contemporary examples include the treatment of political dissidents, religious minorities, and activists advocating for social change. These ideological differences often become focal points for freakalization, leading to social exclusion and conflict.

3.3. Case Studies

To illustrate the conceptual framework, several case studies can be examined. These case studies provide concrete examples of how freakalization manifests in different contexts and the impact it has on individuals and groups. Examining racial and ethnic differences, we can explore historical and contemporary examples of racial freakalization, such as the portrayal of African Americans in the United States during the Jim Crow era and the treatment of indigenous peoples in various colonial contexts.

Analyzing disability, we can look at the portrayal of individuals with disabilities in media and society, including the transition from freak shows to modern-day representations in films and television. These portrayals often emphasize the limitations and differences of disabled individuals, perpetuating their marginalization.

Exploring ideological differences, we can examine how political and religious differences lead to freakalization. Examples include the treatment of political dissidents during the Cold War and the marginalization of religious minorities in various countries. These case studies highlight how ideological differences can become grounds for exclusion and conflict, further entrenching societal divisions.

By understanding these mechanisms and factors, we can better address the root causes of freakalization and develop strategies to counter its effects, fostering a more inclusive and empathetic society.

4. Conclusion

Freakalization is a critical concept for understanding how societal biases and prejudices are formed and perpetuated. By defining freakalization as the process of perceiving and labeling individuals as "freaks" based on perceived differences, this paper has highlighted the significant impact of this phenomenon on both individuals and society. The mechanisms through which freakalization occurs—media representation, cultural narratives, social interactions, and institutional policies—create a complex web that reinforces exclusion and discrimination.

The factors contributing to freakalization, such as race, disability and ideology, illustrate how deeply

ingrained and multifaceted this issue is. Historical and contemporary case studies provide concrete examples of how freakalization manifests in various contexts, emphasizing the profound psychological and social impacts on those who are labeled as "freaks."

Ultimately, addressing freakalization requires a concerted effort across multiple levels of society. By understanding the roots and consequences of freakalization, we can develop more effective approaches to combat prejudice and foster a more inclusive and equitable society. The goal is to encourage empathetic and inclusive attitudes, challenging the irrational fears and biases that arise from perceiving others as fundamentally different and abnormal. Through these efforts, we can move towards a society that values and celebrates diversity, where all individuals are seen and treated as equal members of the human community.

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