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Abstract

A doctorate degree is characterized in the literature as a time of high stress and uncertainty for students as well as subject to worrisome attrition rates, with an estimated 50% of doctoral students discontinuing their degrees. International doctoral students (IDSs) specifically face the additional challenges of adapting to new academic environments and cultures upon embarking on their doctoral journey. While existing research provides us with insight into the general challenges associated with the international doctoral experience, we have limited understanding of how these challenges contribute to their dropout. Drawing on life story interviews, this study qualitatively investigates the attrition experiences of IDSs at a Western European university. To analyze IDSs' discontinuation stories, we employ the concept of Othering. This concept draws our attention to students' perceptions of being marked as different by those in positions of power or privilege. We identify four types of Othering, where students were cast the Foreign, Academic, Financial, and/or Social Others and the role these played in their discontinuation. Findings suggest that Foreign Othering shadowed and reinforced additional Othering experiences; the IDSs lacked familiarity with the academic system,

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culture, and language which made them more vulnerable to acute academic challenges, financial hardship, and social exclusion. Based on these findings, we provide recommendations for a more barrier-free and inclusive doctoral experience. (HRK / Abstract übernommen)