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The Inclusion of Culture in Canadian Social Psychology Textbooks: A Content Analysis of Introductory Texts

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The Inclusion of Culture in Canadian Social Psychology Textbooks: A Content Analysis of Introductory Texts

Abstract

Cultural diversity features prominently in Canadian social and political life. Canadian social psychologists, for their part, have led a rich tradition of research on intercultural relations. We identified the undergraduate social psychology textbooks used to introduce students of psychology in Canada to the field and examined the extent that culture is incorporated into the teaching of introductory social psychology. Through a content analysis of Canadian-published introductory social psychology texts, we found that these textbooks are inclusive of cultural diversity, although not all textbooks covered culture with the same depth. Across textbooks, cultural coverage was broad, with many hits across textbooks, whereas discussion of cultural differences was not particularly deep, with most hits being elaborated under one page of text. Results are discussed alongside past research on the inclusion of culture in the teaching of generalized introductory psychology courses in the United States (Lonner & Murdock, 2012; Rumpel, 1988).

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Introduction

As a major change in this edition, we have moved coverage of culture throughout the text, including it in every relevant chapter. As this literature has grown and formed an important subfield in social psychology, it seemed that comprehensive coverage of this topic required more than just a single chapter.

Myers, Spencer, & Jordan (2012, p. xii)

When we began writing this book, our overriding goal was to capture the excitement of social psychology...including cross-cultural research...

Aronson, Wilson, Fehr, & Akert (2013, p. xxi)

Special attention has also been paid to cultural psychology, which is integrated throughout the entire Canadian edition. Some examples of content exploring topics and issues to do with cultural psychology are the recognition of emotion and culture, cultural factors in the fundamental attribution error, culture and self-esteem, and cultural explanations of passionate love, among many others.

Baron, Byrne, Branscombe, & Fritsley (2012, p. xiv)

Unlike some social psychology textbooks that discuss the relevance of culture in a separate chapter, *Social Psychology, Canadian Edition* examines the relation between cross-cultural psychology and social psychology in each chapter...allow[ing] students to see the powerful influence of culture in a wide range of topics within social psychology.

Sanderson & Safdar (2012, p. xv)

The quotations above highlight an evolving emphasis on culture among social psychology educators¹. As the world we live in becomes increasingly interconnected and globalized, the nature of our social relationships and personal experiences with diversity are changing. As cross-cultural interactions become increasingly commonplace, the psychological study of cross-cultural dynamics has grown in scope. By the turn of the twenty-first century, the psychological study of culture had made a “quantum leap,” generating “one of the more fascinating developments in psychology during the past 50 or 60 years” (Lonner & Murdock, 2012, p. 2). Cross-cultural psychology formed as a research field in 1970 with the founding of the *Journal of Cross-Cultural Psychology*, followed by the inauguration of the International Association for Cross-Cultural Psychology (IACCP) two years later (Segall, Lonner & Berry, 1998). In 1980, forty years after the founding of the

¹ We thank an anonymous reviewer for suggesting we examine how the authors of the texts in our analysis incorporate culture into the marketing of their texts.

Canadian Psychology Association (CPA), section 10 of the CPA was established and 'International and Cross-Cultural Psychology,' became an institutionalized field in Canadian psychological research. With 15 full, honorary, student members in 1980, the section had grown steadily to 220 members in 2013 (Bhatt, Tonks, Randal, & Berry, 2013).

Cultural diversity is prominent in Canada, and there are many opportunities to apply psychological research on culture to social and political issues. Aboriginal colonialism and the challenges of reconciliation, the political shift from biculturalism to multiculturalism, the co-existence of diverse national identities across the confederation, and the need for a pro-active integration strategy that facilitates the adjustment of newcomers have all contributed to an ever-growing body of knowledge from Canadian psychologists. As the country seeks to attract and retain high-skilled foreign students and workers to meet a growing labour shortage and facilitate economic growth (Scott, Safdar, Desai Trilokekar, & El Masri, 2014), special training in intercultural relations will remain relevant to policy makers, civil society, and the general population for the foreseeable future. Furthermore, Canada, in 1971, was the first country in the world that adopted an official policy of multiculturalism (Government of Canada, Citizenship and Immigration Canada [CIC], 2012), meaning that Canadian laws and policies formally recognize cultural diversity, and these rights are guaranteed through the Canadian Constitution (Government of Canada, CIC, 2012). As the psychological study of culture and cultural differences continues to develop, it is important to take stock of the extent to which these developments are incorporated into our teaching. In an effort to understand how culture has been incorporated into the field, we undertake a systematic analysis of the inclusion of cultural content in the teaching of introductory social psychology in Canada.

In Canada, the teaching of cultural content in psychology courses at the undergraduate and graduate level is relatively well represented. Beginning in 1969 at Queen's University, John Berry taught the first psychological course in culture entitled 'Cultural Psychology,' which was offered over three decades until 1999 (Bhatt et al., 2013). Today, the majority of psychology departments offer courses in the scientific study of culture. A recent survey of Canadian psychology departments (Bhatt et al., 2013) determined that out of 50 Canadian universities, 54% of them offered at least one course with a focus on culture. Out of the 53 psychological courses on culture, 33 were offered at the undergraduate level, while 20 were graduate courses. As cross-cultural psychologists have long contended, "[i]ntergroup relations is arguably the single most important domain in which cross-cultural psychology has important ideas, theories and facts to contribute" (Segall et al., 1998, p. 1107).

It follows that the field of social psychology is particularly well positioned for the psychological study of culture. Past research has highlighted the degree of inclusion of cultural material in undergraduate psychology texts in the United States. Specifically, Lonner and Murdock (2012) and Rumpel (1988) examined the breadth

of coverage of culture in introductory psychology texts, while Adamopoulos and Smith (2008) examined the coverage of culture in social psychology texts². However, similar research has yet to be conducted for Canadian psychology textbooks. The lack of research in this area is particularly surprising, given Canada's rich history of cultural diversity and Canadian multiculturalism. Understanding students' exposure to cultural antecedents of human thought and behaviour can bring important insights to the teaching of psychology (Lonner, 1989). The present research aims to address this gap in knowledge by examining the inclusion of culture in Canadian social psychology textbooks.

The Present Study

Here, we explore whether Canadian social psychology textbooks have captured the importance of culture in psychology through a content analysis of popular introductory texts. In the United States, the depth and breadth of cultural inclusion in introductory psychology textbooks has tripled between 1988 and 2008, and today, contemporary introductory textbooks with little mention of culture are a clear minority (Lonner & Murdock, 2012). In a content analysis of forty introductory psychology textbooks used in the United States, Lonner and Murdock (2012) determined that it is no longer a question of "if" the influences of culture are covered in a given introductory psychology textbook, but "to what extent." In line with these findings (see also Rumpel, 1988), and given the centrality of cultural diversity to Canadian history, politics, and society, we expect that introductory Canadian psychology textbooks include a rich coverage of cultural analysis that is both broad in its inclusion of diverse cultural materials and deep in its discussion of culture and social psychology. Building on a recent review by Lonner and Murdock (2012; see also Rumpel, 1988) of introductory psychology textbooks in the United States, we sought to investigate the extent to which texts in general, and each one separately, included information, data, discussion, analysis, or even brief mention of 'cultural' factors in the teaching of introductory social psychology courses in Canada. In what follows, we document the inclusion of culture across commonly used English-language³ introductory social psychology textbooks in Canada.

² Adamopoulos and Smith (2008) presented their research on coverage of culture in 10 American social psychology textbooks at the International Conference on the Teaching of Psychology, though the authors examined a different set of questions than ours, including what topics were covered most or least frequently from cultural viewpoints and percentage of photographs with non-Caucasian individuals included in the texts. In our research, we focus on the depth and breadth of cultural materials as studied by Lonner and Murdock (2012).

³ French-language textbooks were also identified, however, as they were not published in North America they were excluded from the analysis.

Methodology

We investigated the coverage of cultural factors across two dimensions: breadth and depth. In accordance with Lonner and Murdock (2012), “a text high on breadth will have many cultural hits while one high on depth will have considerable discussion of a given topic” (p. 8). For consistency, we adopted the following operationalization of cultural content from Berry, Poortinga, Breugelmans, Chastiosis, and Sam (2011): “The study of similarities and differences in individual psychological functioning in various cultural and ethnocultural groups; of ongoing changes in variables reflecting such functioning; and of the relationships of psychological variables with sociocultural, ecological and biological variables” (p. 5).

Research assistants were trained as coders and were provided with a list of keywords ('hits') (see Table 1). Hits were based on past research (Lonner & Murdock, 2012) with some additions (i.e., geographic origin, “multicultural”). To avoid coding “false hits” that included our keywords but do not bear the same meaning as our operationalization of culture (e.g., *organizational culture*), we trained our coders to remain within our framework by discerning whether the authors placed psychological theory, discussions, and references, at least to some degree, in a cross-cultural context. Table 1 presents a complete list of key terms coded for in the analysis. In addition to the keywords listed in Table 1, coders were trained to truncate keywords to identify and code important variations of potential hits (e.g., Latin* to include Latinos and Latinas, and culture* to include its plural version).

Table 1
Keywords for Content Analysis

Themes	Geographic Origins
Culture	European
Cross-cultural	Asian
Ethnicity	Caribbean
Multicultural	Latin
Race	Africa
Diversity	Pacific
International	

Procedure

First, the authors identified the most current social psychology textbooks being used by introductory undergraduate social psychology lecturers at forty-one Canadian post-secondary institutions (Dehaas, 2012). Course descriptions, syllabi, and, when necessary, university bookstores were consulted to identify the specific textbook being used in the most recent offering of the course. Textbooks were selected in December 2013. Considerable overlap between textbooks was apparent across undergraduate courses, leading to a final list of eight texts⁴. The publishers generously made digital versions of the textbooks available to facilitate access and coding.

Two research assistants independently searched and coded the keywords for each text. Overall, ten research assistants worked on the project under the close

Table 2

Introductory Social Psychology Textbooks Most Commonly Used in Canada

Author(s)	Title	Year Published (Edition)
1 Aronson, E., Wilson, T. D., . Fehr, B., & Akert, R. M.	<i>Social Psychology</i>	2013 (5 th Canadian ed.)
2 Baron, R. A., Byrne, D., . Branscombe, N. R., & Fritzley, V. H.	<i>Mastering Social Psychology</i>	2012 (1 st Canadian ed.)
3 Duff, K. J., & Peace, K. A. .	<i>THINK Social Psychology</i>	2013 (1 st Canadian ed.)
4 Gilovich, T., Keltner, D., . Chen, S., & Nisbett, R. E.	<i>Social Psychology</i>	2013 (3 rd ed.)
5 Kassin, S., Fein, S., & . Markus, H. R.	<i>Social Psychology</i>	2013 (9 th ed.)
6 Kassin, S., Fein, S., Markus, . H. R., & Burke, T. M.	<i>Social Psychology</i>	2013 (2 nd Canadian ed.)
7 Myers, D., Spencer, S., & . Jordan, C	<i>Social Psychology</i>	2012 (5 th Canadian ed.)
8 Sanderson, C. A., & . Safdar, S.	<i>Social Psychology</i>	2012 (1 st Canadian ed.)

Note. Myers et al. (2012) and Aronson et al. (2013) were the most commonly used texts with eight and six undergraduate introductory social psychology courses assigning these texts, respectively.

⁴ Originally, we identified ten textbooks, but because we could not secure digital access, the following two texts were excluded: Baumeister and Bushman (2012) and Olson, Breckler, and Wiggins (2011).

supervision of both authors to ensure the accuracy of coding. Research assistants carefully reviewed each passage identified as a potential ‘hit’ to ensure it met our inclusion criteria (i.e., false hit). If the keyword met the inclusion criteria, coders documented the content of the hit and classified it in terms of its depth of coverage using a scoring system borrowed from Lonner and Murdock (2012). Specifically, hits were classified from A to E, depending on the space on the page the authors used when discussing each hit. A score of “A” was given when a hit was discussed across three or more pages (including related graphs, photos, etc.); a score of B was assigned when discussion extended between one to two pages; C for most of a single page; D for a paragraph between six and twelve lines; and E for a discussion of five lines or less.

Table 3

Mean (SD) Breadth of Cultural Coverage (Number of Hits) with Interrater Reliability Across Texts

Textbook	Mean (SD)	ICC [95% CI]	F(12, 12)
1. Aronson, Wilson, Fehr, & Akert	57.50 (10.61)	.99 [.97, 1.00]	97.11***
2. Baron, Byrne, Branscombe, & Fritzley	67.50 (4.95)	.97 [.91, .99]	35.40***
3. Duff & Peace	90.50 (65.76)	.18 ⁵ [-1.70, .75]	1.22***
4. Gilovich, Keltner, Chen, & Nisbett	208.50 (4.95)	.99 [.98, 1.00]	199.88***
5. Kassin, Fein, & Markus	96.50 (2.12)	.98 [.94, .99]	51.19***
6. Kassin, Fein, Markus, & Burke	162.00 (32.53)	.95 [.84, 1.00]	20.97***
7. Myers, Spencer & Jordan	87.50 (3.54)	.99 [.95, 1.00]	70.53***
8. Sanderson & Safdar	69.50 (9.19)	.99 [.96, 1.00]	73.63*

* $p < .05$; *** $p < .001$. Note. ICC = Intra-Class Coefficient. Reliability checks compared the complete textbook coding for both research assistants matched to each text.

⁵ The coders showed a high level of discrepancy for this textbook. We are unable to provide a reasonable explanation for the high number of discrepancies for this textbook. All coders received the same training and supervision. Additionally, each coder’s report was reviewed by one of the authors to ensure its accuracy.

Results

Breadth of Cultural Inclusion

Not surprisingly, Canadian introductory social psychology textbooks all incorporate cultural phenomena, though to varying degrees. Table 3 summarizes the means, standard deviations, and inter-rater reliability (intra-class coefficient) for each of the eight texts. With one exception (Duff & Peace, 2013), inter-rater reliability was quite high, and hits were averaged between coders for each text. The number of hits identified per text ranged from 57.50 to 208.50⁶. When examined by Lonner and Murdock (2012), the most hits any one of forty introductory psychology textbooks used in the United States was approximately seventy. In our analysis, only one text (Aronson et al., 2013) had fewer than sixty hits.

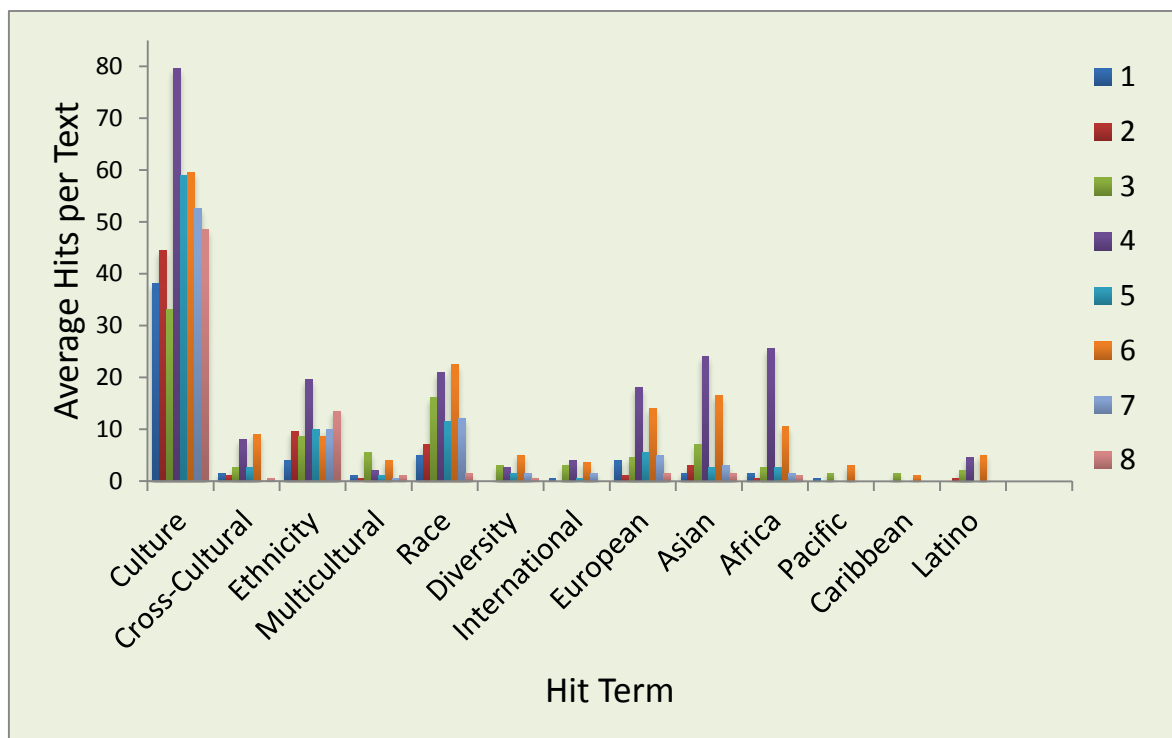


Figure 1. Mean frequency of hit terms between coders and texts. Textbooks are numbered in accordance with the above tables (Table 2 & Table 3).

The most common keyword identified was *culture*, followed by *race* and *ethnicity* (including related terms like “cultures” and “cultural,” “racial,” and “ethnic,” among others). There were more references to *cross-cultural* and *ethnicity* in Gilovich, Keltner, Chen, and Nisbett (2013) and Sanderson and Safdar’s (2012) textbooks

⁶ Hit terms are not exact numbers because of averaging between coders.

than other texts. Surprisingly, very little reference was made to *multiculturalism*, with no coder identifying more than 7 hits in any text and most coders finding less than 3 hits ($M = 1.94$, $SD = 1.91$). In general, authors made sparse reference to specific cultural groups based on geographic origin. Gilovich et al. (2013) and Kassin et al. (2013b) made more references to Europe/Europeans, Asia/Asians, and Africa/Africans, and Sanderson and Safdar (2012) made more references to Pacific and Latino cultural groups than the other texts analyzed. Overall, when discussing geographic origin, there was more content on Europe, Asia, and Africa than on Latin American, Caribbean, or Pacific regions. Figure 1 highlights the variation in cultural references between texts, while Figure 2 summarizes the average results across all textbooks.

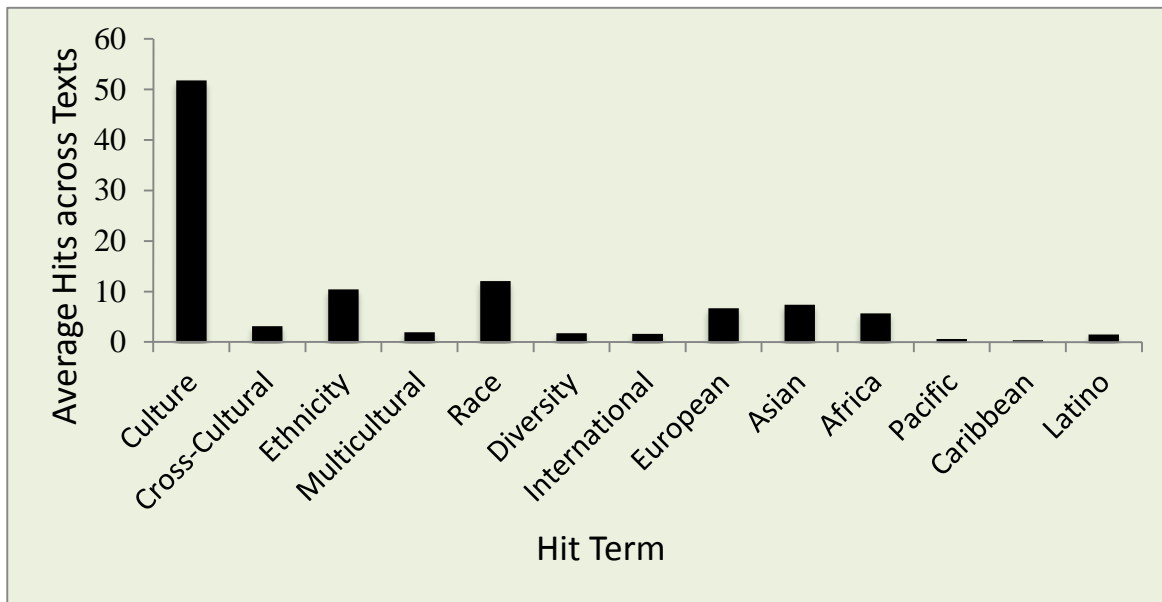


Figure 2. Mean frequency of hit terms across Introductory Social Psychology textbooks commonly used in Canada.

Depth of Cultural Inclusion

With respect to the depth of coverage, Table 4 summarizes the means, standard deviations, and inter-rater reliability for each text. While texts have many cultural references, these hits are generally not discussed in extensive detail. As a reminder, our classification system of depth of cultural coverage is as follows: A score of “A” is given for keywords that are discussed across three or more pages, while lower scores were awarded for discussions extending between one to two pages (B), most of a single page (C), a paragraph between six and twelve lines (D), and a description of five lines or less (E). Generally, authors did not allocate more than a page to the elaboration of

Table 4
Mean (SD) Depth of Coverage Scores (A – E grading) with Interrater Reliability Across Texts

Textbook	Level of Depth	Mean (SD)	ICC, [95% CI]	F(4, 4)
1. Aronson, Wilson, Fehr, & Akert	A	1.0 (0)	.87, [-.26, .99]	7.64*
	B	10.0 (1.41)		
	C	10.5 (3.54)		
	D	19.5 (0.71)		
	E	16.5 (7.78)		
2. Baron, Byrne, Branscombe, & Fritzley	A	0 (0)	.94, [.43, .99]	16.82**
	B	3.5 (3.54)		
	C	13.0 (0)		
	D	25.0 (0)		
	E	26.5 (7.78)		
3. Duff & Peace	A	0 (0)	.98, [.79, 1.00]	46.53**
	B	6.5 (0.71)		
	C	10.0 (0)		
	D	25.5 (4.95)		
	E	35.5 (6.36)		
4. Gilovich, Keltner, Chen, & Nisbett	A	9.0 (0)	.92, [.24, .99]	12.60***
	B	17.0 (1.41)		
	C	18.5 (7.78)		
	D	29.5 (2.12)		
	E	40.0 (5.66)		
5. Kassin, Fein, & Markus	A	2.5 (0.71)	.99, [.86, 1.00]	66.22**
	B	10.0 (1.41)		
	C	16.0 (0)		
	D	17.0 (2.83)		
	E	51.0 (5.66)		
6. Kassin, Fein, Markus, & Burke	A	4.0 (0)	.47, [-4.14, .94]	1.87
	B	16.0 (11.31)		
	C	15.0 (4.24)		
	D	23.0 (11.31)		
	E	27.5 (10.61)		
7. Myers, Spencer & Jordan	A	1.5 (0.71)	.98, [.76, 1.00]	39.72**
	B	5.0 (1.41)		
	C	9.0 (1.41)		
	D	14.5 (2.12)		
	E	57.0 (9.90)		

Table 4 continued

Textbook	Level of Depth	Mean (SD)	ICC, [95% CI]	F(4, 4)
8. Sanderson & Safdar	A	12.0 (2.83)	.95, [.51, 1.00]	19.53**
	B	8.5 (2.12)		
	C	8.5 (4.95)		
	D	14.0 (1.41)		
	E	26.5 (0.71)		

* $p < .05$; ** $p < .01$; *** $p < .001$.

cultural content. Hits that discussed in detail were rare, with only 30 hits (4.58%) being scored as A. In contrast, 68.42% of documented hits were scored as either C or D, reflecting less than one page of discussion. Two of our texts (Baron et al., 2012; Duff & Peace, 2013) did not receive any “A” scores. Sanderson and Safdar (2012) received the most “A” scores for depth of cultural coverage followed by Gilovich et al. (2013) (see Figure 3).

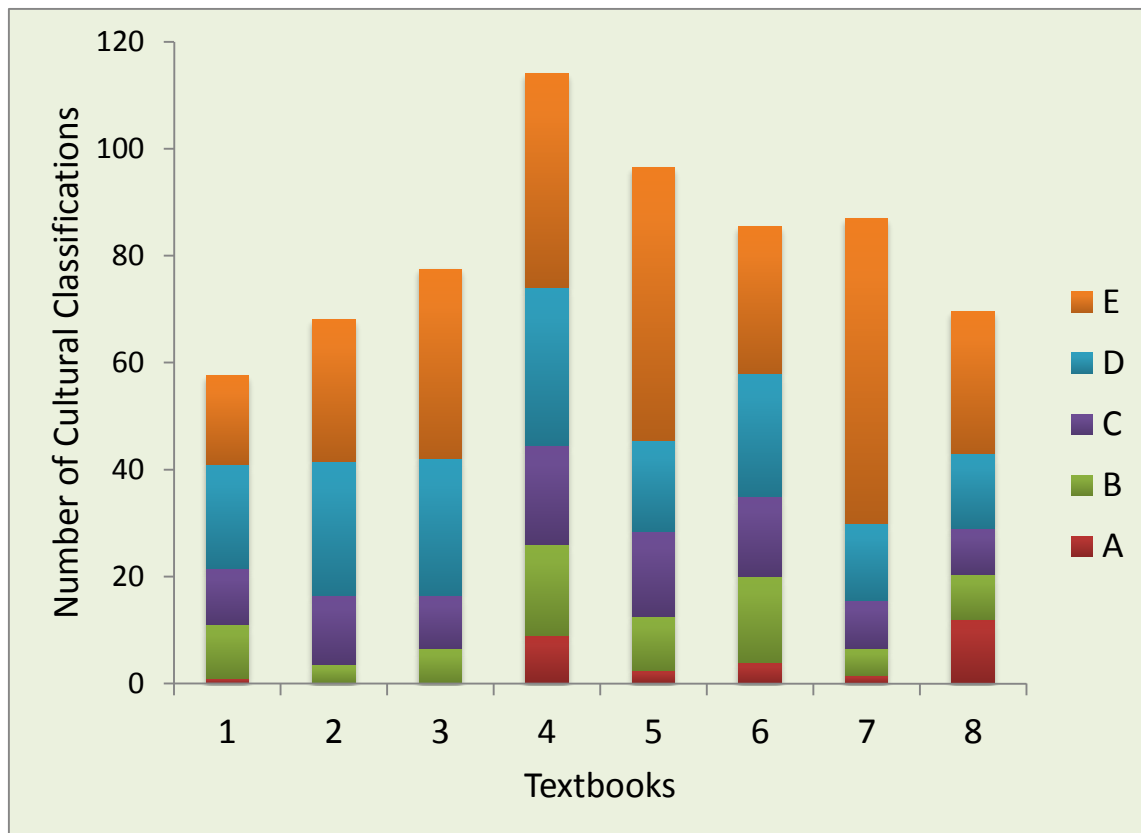


Figure 3. Mean number of cultural references, broken down by depth of coverage (A – E grading) per textbook. Textbooks are numbered in accordance with the above tables.

Discussion

The psychological study of cultural variation has increased substantially since the later half of the twentieth century, with very real implications for the teaching of psychology. In this study, we sought to investigate the coverage of cultural content in introductory social psychology textbooks in Canada. Given the prominence of cultural diversity and intercultural relations in Canadian social and political life, we expected the authors of Canadian textbooks aimed at undergraduate introductory social psychology students to include much discussion of cultural content.

Our analysis of the breadth and depth of cultural inclusion in introductory social psychology textbooks lend some insights into how cultural differences are taught to Canadian undergraduate students in introductory social psychology courses. First, introductory social psychology textbooks published in Canada include a great deal of cultural references. All textbooks analyzed here discuss cultural content to some extent, although there is much variation in the inclusion of cultural materials between textbooks. While not directly comparable, a review of our findings (Table 1 and Figure 1) alongside those of Lonner and Murdock (2012) suggests that Canadian social psychology textbooks, to a greater degree than introductory psychology textbooks used in the United States, include a broad coverage of culture. When discussing culture, Canadian texts tend to do so in direct reference to the term itself, with *race* and *ethnicity* also receiving a large number of hits relative to the other keywords included in our search. Geographical regions were not equally represented, with authors tending to discuss Asian, European, and African peoples to a much greater extent than those from Latin American, Caribbean, or Pacific nations. To our surprise, the discussion of cultural variables was not particularly deep. Our findings are comparable to Lonner and Murdock (2012) who also found depth scores of D and E to be commonplace.

Future Research and Limitations

The present study is a short survey of the inclusion of culture in the teaching of introductory social psychology to Canadian undergraduate students. We followed a quantitative method of analysis in assessing the extent to which culture is examined in these textbooks. However, as Lonner (2016) commented in his article (also in this unit), there are other approaches, including qualitative and mix-methods. Future research should consider these options as each methodology has its own advantages and disadvantages (see Lonner, 2016 for review). Additionally, we argue that there should be a focus on other specific psychological subfields, as well as examining 'culture-content' across topical categories within the field of social psychology, such as aggression, cooperation, and attribution. Furthermore, it would be valuable to replicate the present study with representative samples of textbooks used in the teaching of introductory social psychology in other regions around the world and also in French-speaking Canada. We argue that future research would

benefit from longitudinal data. It would be valuable to repeat this study over time as new editions of texts become available to trace the growth of the inclusion of cultural variables in teaching of social psychology.

Our study had several limitations that could be addressed in future research. First, our analyses were limited to 8 out of the 10 most commonly used introductory social psychology textbooks identified in our survey of 41 Canadian post-secondary institutions. Second, our analyses were also limited to English-language texts published in North America; an especially interesting extension of the present research would be to compare and contrast the cultural content of English and French language textbooks used in Canada. Third, we had low inter-rater reliability for one of our textbooks that limits our ability to generalize the findings from the Duff and Peace (2013) text alongside the other texts included in our analyses.

Conclusions

Canada is a country rich in diversity. Long inhabited by First Nations, often the site of conflict between English and French colonial powers, and currently prioritizing the attraction and retention of skilled and temporary workers, cultural diversity and intercultural relations have figured prominently in Canadian social and political life. Since the 1940s, Canadian psychologists have made substantial contributions to the psychological study of culture (Bhatt et al., 2013). The institutionalization of cultural and cross-cultural investigation in Canadian psychological research and practice is well-established (e.g., Berry, 2003; Bourhis, Moïse, Perreault, & Senécal, 1997; Safdar, Struthers, & van Oudenhoven, 2009). How, then, is cultural content included in introductory teaching of the psychological study of social relations? In the present study, we find that cultural content is largely well-represented in the textbooks used to introduce students to the field of social psychology in Canada. However, there is still much variation in the extent to which cultural factors are discussed in relation to social psychological theory. Overall, although most of the texts we reviewed made many cultural references, they did not have a particularly deep discussion of culture (with the exception of two). Our suggestion to future authors and publishers who wish to highlight the importance of culture and cross-cultural comparisons in the teaching of psychology is to unpack and define culture, along with its implications for psychological processes, more clearly. The relevance of culture to psychological concepts should be examined more extensively and in more depth, as a superficial treatment of culture runs the risk of inaccurately representing groups, endorsing stereotypes, or neglecting the cultural nuances that shape human psychology.

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About the Authors

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Discussion Questions

1. Why do you think it is important for psychological textbooks to have culture-content?
2. Think about your experience with your previous and current university courses. How have cultural issues been incorporated into your course content? What differences have you noticed between different fields of study?
3. In addition to the methodology presented here, what other approaches could be used to assess the coverage of culture in the teaching of psychology?
4. Talk with other faculty and students in your department. When and where did they become exposed to cultural and cross-cultural analyses in psychology? Has there been a noticeable change over time?
5. In your opinion, in what fields (both within psychology, and beyond) has culture been given the most attention? Where is a “cultural lens” lacking?
6. If we were to run this study again in different countries, how might you expect the results to change? Why? How do you think new social dynamics influence the narratives surrounding culture and intercultural relations around the world?