

## BOOK REVIEW

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### **Shirae, E.B. & Leary, D.A. (2016). *Cross-Cultural Psychology: Critical Thinking and Contemporary Applications*. New York, US: Taylor & Francis, 361 p.**

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When looking back, cultural content has come a long way in its place in the curricula in psychology and related disciplines over the last 50 years. In 2008, about 90% of all introductory text books featured cultural content in at least some way, as opposed to only roughly 30% in 1988 (Lonner & Murdock, 2012). This increasing inclusion also was accompanied by standalone text books on cultural psychology and/or cross-cultural psychology, and the term culture has become a widely used label to also market textbooks in the social sciences.

There are a number of textbooks introducing Cultural Psychology to students, among them the fifth edition of “Cross-Cultural Psychology: Critical Thinking and Contemporary Applications”, written by Eric B. Shirae and David A. Leary<sup>1</sup>. In the following, I will provide a general assessment of strengths and weakness of this textbook for use as an introductory resource in these undergraduate courses, both in terms of

content and presentation. I will refer to other sources in the domain of cultural and cross-cultural psychology as supplements wherever this appears useful. I will conclude by providing a more in-depth perspective of how I have used the textbook in my courses and end with a general summary.

#### **Which content is featured?**

The book features a number of different sections, which can be found in Table 1. In addition to that, supplemental material, both for students as well as instructors can be found on the website of the publisher. This supplemental material includes quizzes for the students, as well as a range of different exam questions that can be used by the instructor (i.e., multiple choice, short answer, true/false, essay questions). The content provided in the supplemental material is very professionally presented and useful for both the students as well as the instructors.

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<sup>1</sup> Please note that the book recently transitioned from Pearson to Taylor & Francis. The book has multiple different editions, tailored for instance for the US market, but it also has an international edition. Editions in the past years have been updated frequently, often with new editions coming out every academic year. This can lead to confusion

among students having to order the textbook. To minimize ambiguity, referring to the current page might help:  
<http://www.routledgegettextbooks.com/textbooks/9780205253234/default.php>

The illustrations (tables, figures), text boxes, and case studies are generally very accessible and provide useful information and critical learning points. Particularly noteworthy are the boxes on critical thinking that are regularly inserted to keep students active and curious about the issue of

perspectives. Exercise at the end of the chapters provide engaging food for thought, and the chapter summaries and key terms are useful in assisting student rehearsal (the latter can also be practiced via the online supplemental material).

Table 1. *Brief Table of Contents (5<sup>th</sup> Ed.)*

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Chapter 1 Understanding Cross-Cultural Psychology
Chapter 2 Methodology of Cross-Cultural Research
Chapter 3 Critical Thinking in Cross-Cultural Psychology
Chapter 4 Cognition: Sensation, Perception, and States of Consciousness
Chapter 5 Intelligence
Chapter 6 Emotion
Chapter 7 Motivation and Behavior
Chapter 8 Human Development and Socialization
Chapter 9 Psychological Disorders
Chapter 10 Social Perception and Social Cognition
Chapter 11 Social Interaction
Chapter 12 Applied Cross-Cultural Psychology: Some Highlights

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The included chapters present established content in the areas they are focusing on, particularly with regard to the importance of critical thinking in the study of psychology and culture. The textbook features and explains experimental studies although, as often is the case in introductory textbooks, it does not provide much in-depth perspective on methodological issues (but see also below). It is refreshing that the textbook does not uniquely focus on the US market and the US population (which is facilitated by the culturally diverse author team). Since Cultural Psychology, and the inclusion of non-Western findings is an ever-evolving field, coverage of more recent developments is often lacking, but (with several noteworthy exceptions) not critical.

There are several areas that are not covered extensively (or not at all), which would likely need to be supplemented by additional material for an introductory course to Cultural Psychology.

First, there is the lack of a section covering important biases and pitfalls in the study of culture. Critical thinking is included, but to a large extent covers aspects like the fundamental attribution error, and specific

cognitive fallacies, but not yet an in-depth perspective of methodological problems in cross-cultural research. Being able to understand what separates the study of culture from simply conducting ‘a’ study in two cultural settings is likely one of the first learning goals when giving a course on cultural psychology. Students who master this learning goal quickly benefit more strongly from the rest of the courses, and are able to ask more informed and critical questions. Additional sources on the notions of equivalence and bias (van de Vijver & Tanzer, 2004) would help students prepare in that direction, and they can be revisited in some of the content areas (e.g., intelligence).

Second, the study of culture is a relatively young endeavor in Psychology, and there are multiple scholarly directions present in how it is being done. The textbook includes an introductory chapter that provides a first orientation to students. Some textbooks (e.g., Berry et al., 2013) focus very extensively on this, which may not be necessary (depending on your course). However, a clarification of terms seems quite in order, and could help interested students orient themselves towards more nuanced distinctions in the study of

culture and psychology. For instance, what is the difference between Universalism, Relativism, Absolutism, and moderate Universalism? I also did not find a dedicated section on indigenous psychologies, which have increasingly become important in the last decade or so (e.g., think of the Chinese Personality Assessment Inventory, CPAI developed by Fanny Cheung, or the South African Personality Inventory, SAPI project). These approaches and perspectives provide a necessary counter position to the Western approach present in mainstream psychology, aptly titled WEIRD (Western, Educated, Industrialized, Rich, Democratic, see Henrich, Heine, & Norenzayan, 2010). References to this widely cited notion are not incorporated, but are useful in understanding why cultural psychology is an important element of the curriculum.

Third, and related to the previous point, I am missing a section on personality. Personality is arguably one of the most well-established fields in psychology in general, but also in cross-cultural comparison. The work by Costa and McCrae on the Big Five is an excellent example for methodologically rigorous cross-cultural comparisons, but is featured only in relation to national stereotypes in the textbook by Shiraev and Levy. In relation to different perspectives in the pursuit of understanding culture (see above), it would be useful to investigate and compare the Big Five as a manner of assessing personality originating in the Western world with equally methodologically rigorous approaches to personality that originate in non-Western settings, like the CPAI or the SAPI (for an overview see Cheung, van de Vijver, & Leong, 2011).

Fourth, the section on motivation presents classic models on motivation, that are likely covered in other areas of the curriculum; but they do not feature motivations for self-enhancement (see Sedikides work), face (Ting-Toomey, also later for intercultural communication), and the basic human needs (achievement, power, and affiliation), to name a few.

Fifth, there is a strong focus on classical stage models in developmental psychology, but not on the role of development in cultural transmission as it has been studied by eminent

researchers in cultural psychology (e.g., Greenfield, Kagitcibasi, Keller, Maynard). For instance, there is one reference to Heidi Keller's work, but it does not mention intuitive parenting programs, and while Cigdem Kagitcibasi is mentioned, but it is in relation to her suggestion of how to envision the interplay between the eco-cultural context of a family and the psychological make-up of adults growing up in different family constellations (Kagitcibasi, 2002, for an overview). It surely does not need to be the purpose of a textbook to clarify individual lines of research of specific researchers, but it could be useful to enrich the current list of stage models with such established insights that move beyond stage models and have clear implications also for our definition of what culture is.

Sixth, it will be useful to enrich the textbook with insights on acculturation and multiple cultural reference points. For instance, John Berry's work on acculturation is included in several chapters of the textbook, but there is no dedicated section on acculturation. There would be multiple sources by eminent researchers that could be included, like the work by Berry, Bourhis, Sam, Ward, to name a few. In relation to that, research on biculturalism or more generally multiple cultural reference points (for overviews and further literature see Aydinli & Bender, 2015; Morris, Chiu, & Liu, 2015) would be useful to add.

Finally, while there is a section on applied cultural psychology (Chapter 12), it is a collection of different aspects and does not feature in particular aspects related to intercultural communication (see Deardorff for an overview, but also Gudykunst and Ting-Toomey's work). A course using the textbook may want to provide a perspective on how cultural expertise could be transformed into communication skills when it is for students that might take Cultural Psychology as a minor and intend to work in marketing, business administration, or management.

### **For what course is this textbook useful?**

I have been using the text book for a number of different courses over the years,

including a first year large scale ( $N > 250$ ) introductory course to Cultural Psychology (for psychology students), in which I am using the book by Shiraev and Levy for the sixth year. The book was also used for a smaller ( $N \sim 80$ ) introductory course to Cultural Psychology for non-psychology students (ranging from Human Resource studies, Liberal Arts & Sciences, to Economics, and Management). In addition, the book has been used two times as a course companion for a summer school course on Cultural Diversity ( $N \sim 15$ ).

The textbook is an engaging and accessible read and includes examples from past research. Courses generally have become more interactive and use more and more supplemental material and assignments, which also applies to both introductory courses I am teaching. The supplemental material offered by the textbook is therefore highly valuable, as it provides at the very least a reference point and tie in for the course contents. What is problematic is that students do not always use the publisher's material, as it has so far been presented in pdf format, and not in an interactive environment in which they can just try out their knowledge with the quizzes (but have to invest quite some effort in comparing two pdfs to check their answers). There is clearly room for improvement there. To remedy this problem, we have used digital flash cards (like memory cards, but usable on smart phones) in the course to give students an easy way to learn the key terms of the course.

Another recurring problem is one shared with many other textbooks in psychology, namely that the prices are relatively steep (often in excess of 50 USD, but they also vary for different resellers). In combination with the book not truly working as a comprehensive standalone introduction is a potential weakness (see the above considerations regarding the content included in the most recent edition).

## Conclusion

I have been using the textbook by Shiraev and Levy for a number of years, a decision that has been mainly driven by its accessibility,

and excellent structure, and supplemental materials. Students have few issues understanding the language (also non-native speakers). One issue throughout the different editions has been the need to include additional material to cover the content necessary for an introductory lecture (e.g., with regard to methods, acculturation, development, and personality). This has led to some dissatisfaction among students as they prefer a unified textbook. It is clear that textbooks will always lag behind peer-reviewed journal publications, and some emerging and hot topics will always need to be included (currently this concerns for instance morality and inter-group conflict). In the next academic year, I will again use the textbook by Shiraev and Levy, but will be on the lookout for alternatives that are more encompassing and provide depth to several of the issues that are discussed in Cultural Psychology.

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