

Framing the Marginalised: An Analysis of Themes in History and Sociology Book Reviews

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ABSTRACT

Adopting a quantitative and corpus-based methodology, the present research examines the framing of the minority-related themes in academic book reviews in History and Sociology. Two corpora of book reviews (1,000 reviews in total, 500 for each discipline) from 2000 to 2024 were compiled and utilised for data analysis purposes. A theory- and data-driven keyword taxonomy, consisting of seven main themes and 27 keywords, emerged from the literature review, concordance analysis and expert validation. Keyword frequencies were generated, normalised, and transformed into a comparison using AntConc software. Inferential statistics such as Chi-square, Z-test, and hierarchical clustering methods were used to find out significant differences and thematic clusters of keywords in disciplines. Findings show strong disciplinary leanings: reviews in history are much more likely to discuss themes such as “native” and “indigenous”, which is consistent with historical understandings of ethnicity and marginalisation. In contrast, Sociology reviews foreground contemporary and intersecting concerns, frequently employing keywords such as “queer”, “gender” and “racialised”. This lexical pattern reflects a critically engaged stance, highlighting the discipline’s active negotiation of identity, diversity, and social justice in current scholarly debates. These findings demonstrate how book reviews both reproduce and produce disciplinarity, providing important indications toward knowledge dissemination and minority discourse. The methodology exemplifies that thematic patterns can be recognised using corpus-based and statistical analyses. It has significant implications for diversity efforts, disciplinary pedagogy and corpus-based research beyond and including academic discourse analysis, providing insight into the more general disciplinary involvement in marginalisation.

Keywords: minority-related themes; corpus-based; quantitative; book reviews; History and Sociology

INTRODUCTION

Book reviews are central to scholarly communication, acting both as assessments and as tools for the construction of disciplinary knowledge. They not only help new academic books make their debut in scholarly communities, but also critically evaluate and locate these works in existing traditions of thought (Cheng, 2014; Junqueira, 2013). Because they are inherently evaluative, book reviews are more than evaluations of scholarly work—they are also windows into the values, norms, and priorities of the discipline that they structure (Hyland, 2000; Nicolaisen, 2002). The manner of writing book reviews, the themes that are privileged and the kind of language employed all are, as such, deeply connected to the general ethos and intellectual genealogy of these disciplines.

In History and Sociology in particular, book reviews frequently constitute lively engagements with minorities-related topics. Such texts can help to draw vibrant attention to issues of marginalisation, identity, race, gender, and other forms of difference (Laurie & Khan, 2017; W. Liu et al., 2016). As the disciplines of History and Sociology work through problems of social justice, equity, and the representation of marginalised groups, book reviews stand as artefacts of value in tracking ways that disciplinary communities are negotiating and articulating minority experiences and perspectives. The conversations themselves within these reviews share the common goals of both critiquing the academic merits of works reviewed and informing – and influencing – current debates about inclusion, power, and boundaries in disciplinary knowledge making.

Although these themes are central, research into the analysis of minority discourse in the academic book review genre is still relatively limited, particularly from a data-driven or corpus-based perspective. While qualitative research has offered insights into the rhetorical and evaluative discourse practices of the book review genre (Hyland, 2000; Nicolaisen, 2002), there is still uncertainty about broader patterns, thematic clusters, and linguistic tendencies that organise discourse on minority concerns in this academic genre. The application of a corpus-linguistic approach provides an effective means of uncovering such patterns, rendering visible the frequency, distribution, and thematic clustering of minority-related keywords within and between disciplines.

Through the lens of a corpus-based, statistical approach, this study aims to broaden the discussion on how the minority-related themes are framed in the History and Sociology of book reviews. By doing so, it contributes to the rapidly developing field of corpus-based academic discourse analysis and demonstrates how communities of practice in academia are negotiating, resisting and circulating the discursive narratives of marginalisation and diversity.

LITERATURE REVIEW

MINORITY THEMES IN ACADEMIC DISCOURSE

Minority discourse in academic literature fundamentally challenges the narratives of marginalised groups defined by race, gender, sexuality, disability, and other social identification categories. It focuses on marginalised groups' political and social struggles, their identity formation, contestation against dominant norms, and the redefinition of academic and cultural canons (Laurie & Khan, 2017). In particular, research on minority discourses aims at decentring dominant discourses, promoting inclusivity and fostering an understanding of social and cultural diversity.

Critical Race Theory (CRT) and Feminist Standpoint Theory (FST) are among the critical theoretical approaches that have influenced studies of minority themes. CRT describes racism as a persistent and ordinary aspect of social life, embedded in the fabric of institutions—including academia. It argues for colour blindness and meritocracy to foreground marginalised voices, critique dominant ideologies, and understand how power and privilege are maintained in the structures of society. (Rodriguez et al., 2022). Similarly, FST embraces the concept that one's social position, especially gender, race and class, influences how one sees and comes to know, and that standpoints from marginalised groups can produce valuable knowledge about social reality. This approach promotes work informed by the lives and experiences of the marginalised communities and pushes us to generate knowledge from the perspectives of those who have been previously silenced. (Rodriguez et al., 2022).

An important development in minority research is the concept of intersectionality, first and foremost articulated by Crenshaw (1991). Intersectionality understands race, gender, class and other identities as points of intersection which co-create complex and multiplied systems of marginalisation and entitlement. This concept has become ubiquitous in the humanities and social sciences and has subjected so-called single-axis analyses to scrutiny, particularly where multiply marginalised people are overlooked, especially in academic and professional contexts. (Kendrick et al., 2025). Intersectional approaches are now considered necessary to identify subtler legal biases and to make social justice progress in all fields.

BOOK REVIEWS AS EVALUATIVE AND DIALOGIC GENRE

Book reviews, recognised as dialogic and evaluative academic texts, occupy a vital space within scholarly communication, facilitating critical dialogue, disciplinary cohesion, and knowledge dissemination (Cheng, 2014; Spier, 2024). The inherently evaluative nature of book reviews primarily involves appraisal through appreciation—evaluating the scholarly works themselves—while judgment (evaluating the author’s credibility or competence) and affect (expressions of personal emotions) also appear, albeit to lesser extents (Martin & White, 2005). Evaluative language in reviews serves multiple functions: it not only expresses scholarly opinions but also establishes relationships among academics and organises scholarly discourse (Thompson & Hunston, 2000).

Early linguistic and rhetorical studies on book reviews have identified recurrent rhetorical structures: introducing and contextualising the reviewed work, summarising content, critically evaluating specific elements, and concluding with broader evaluative judgments or implications (Junqueira, 2013; Motta-Roth, 1998). These rhetorical moves help reviewers fulfil community expectations and maintain disciplinary norms. Cross-cultural analyses further illustrate variations in evaluative practices, influenced significantly by cultural attitudes toward conflict and critique. English-language reviews, notably, tend to employ direct, explicit criticism more frequently than their counterparts in other languages, such as Spanish or Brazilian Portuguese, which typically adopt more descriptive and indirect evaluative stances (Suárez & Moreno, 2008).

Book reviews are inherently intertextual and dialogic, responding to previous publications and actively contributing to ongoing disciplinary debates (Hyland, 2004; Vassileva, 2022). Particularly in disciplines heavily reliant on interpretation and argumentation—such as linguistics, history, and law—reviews serve as arenas for scholarly confrontation, engaging in critical dialogues that may range from collegial critique to overtly adversarial exchanges (Tannen, 2002; Vassileva, 2022). Within this context, the evaluative and attitudinal language employed by reviewers functions strategically, simultaneously managing face and positioning scholarly arguments within broader disciplinary conversations (Hyland, 2000; Thompson & Hunston, 2000).

Corpus-linguistic advancements underscore that meanings in academic reviews are often constructed through phraseological items—highly frequent, semi-fixed multi-word expressions rather than isolated vocabulary (Römer, 2010; Sinclair, 2004). Römer’s (2010) phraseological profile model highlights the abundant use of standardised phraseological units in academic book reviews, serving specific rhetorical purposes such as expressing evaluations, structuring commentary around the organisation of reviewed works, and managing textual cohesion and discourse flow. Such phraseological patterns define and reinforce genre conventions, assisting both novice and experienced scholars in navigating the complexities of academic evaluation and writing in their fields (Ferris, 2019).

Text-mining research on book reviews further reveals trends in evaluative practices, notably highlighting a persistent “positivity bias”, wherein reviewers tend to offer more praise than criticism, a trend that has been observed to intensify over recent decades (Hamdan et al., 2016; Liu & Zhu, 2024). However, the balance between positive and negative evaluations, and the rhetorical strategies employed to negotiate evaluative stance and face-threat, vary significantly across disciplines, cultures, and reviewer status (Cheng, 2014; Hyland, 2000; Spier, 2024). Cross-disciplinary comparisons, for instance, consistently demonstrate how English-language reviews emphasise explicit criticism and subjective judgments, whereas reviews in Chinese, Spanish, or Portuguese often foreground authorial background or adopt more indirect evaluative strategies (Junqueira, 2013; Karunakaran & Ang, 2025; Suárez & Moreno, 2008).

Disciplinary differences further shape how book reviews function within academic communities. For instance, book reviews in “soft” disciplines such as history and linguistics typically foreground interpretive and argumentative elements, contrasting with the more concise, descriptive, and less evaluative style often found in scientific fields (Hyland, 2004; Vassileva, 2022). In History specifically, book reviews hold a crucial place due to the discipline’s reliance on thematic and periodisation frameworks. Reviews play pivotal roles in situating historical works within ongoing historiographical debates, reinforcing or challenging dominant disciplinary narratives, and promoting emerging scholarly trends (Breisach, 2007; Hérubel, 2008). These reviews not only contextualise scholarly contributions but also shape collective understandings of historical knowledge, reflecting and reinforcing disciplinary conventions around periodisation and thematic specialisation (Bender et al., 2004; Stieg, 2005).

Despite extensive analyses focusing on structural, rhetorical, and evaluative features of academic book reviews, thematic content—particularly regarding minority and marginalised issues—remains under-explored. Limited attention has been directed toward how book reviews in History or Sociology foreground, background, or omit critical themes related to race, gender, indigeneity, disability, or other intersectional identities (Cheng, 2014; Deo, 2019; Hartley, 2006; Liu & Zhu, 2024). Given that these disciplines have increasingly prioritised diversity, equity, and inclusion, it is imperative to undertake empirical, corpus-based analyses to systematically map how minority-related themes are represented within book reviews. Addressing this gap is crucial, as book reviews function not merely as scholarly assessments but also as public-facing texts capable of reinforcing or challenging dominant disciplinary narratives and reflecting broader societal changes (Delgado, 1984; Deo, 2019; Vassileva, 2022).

Therefore, this study adopts a quantitative, corpus-based approach that examines History and Sociology book reviews. It incorporates statistical methods, including frequency distribution analysis, hierarchical clustering, heatmapping, and correspondence analysis. This study intends to:

- 1) Compare how often minority-related keywords appear in History and Sociology book reviews.
- 2) Determine how minority-related keywords cluster by theme based on their frequency in History and Sociology book reviews.

METHODOLOGY

CORPUS COMPILATION

This research takes a corpus-based, quantitative approach to how minority-related themes are represented in History and Sociology book reviews. Two corpora of book reviews were compiled: 500 reviews for History (700,000 words) and 500 from Sociology (580,000 words), spanning from the year 2000 to 2024. These book reviews were retrieved from JSTOR, a well-established digital database of academic journals, ensuring the inclusion of refereed and reputable academic content. All book reviews were first downloaded as PDF files and then converted into plain text. Following this, data cleaning was performed to increase data quality and analytic consistency: headers, footers, bibliographies, references and all non-content metadata were removed. This was an essential step to ensure that only substantive review content was included in the analyses.

THEMATIC KEYWORD TAXONOMY DEVELOPMENT

Before conducting quantitative analyses, it was necessary to establish a systematic taxonomy of minority-related keywords. While most comparative studies adopt a corpus-driven keyword extraction approach to identify potential keywords for analysis, a purely corpus-driven comparison risked generating statistically frequent items that were not thematically relevant to the study's focus—for example, structural markers such as author or chapter, or discipline-specific jargon with little connection to minority discourse. To address this limitation, the present study developed a thematic taxonomy designed to ensure analytical precision by filtering out noise and aligning the analysis with established theories of discourse and evaluation. This approach offered three key advantages: (1) theoretical grounding, achieved through the integration of discourse analysis (van Dijk, 2008) and appraisal theory (Martin & White, 2005), which highlight recurring dimensions of minority representation; (2) cross-disciplinary comparability, enabling History and Sociology to be analysed against a shared conceptual baseline despite differences in terminology; and (3) analytical interpretability, ensuring that statistical techniques such as clustering, heatmapping, and correspondence analysis were applied to keywords directly relevant to minority-related themes. The development of the taxonomy followed a three-stage process:

- 1) Conceptual grounding – Drawing on discourse analysis (van Dijk, 2008) and appraisal theory (Martin & White, 2005), initial thematic categories were selected to reflect the core concerns of minority studies. These thematic categories provided the conceptual basis for identifying keywords such as minority, race, and gender.
- 2) Empirical refinement – A pilot concordance analysis was conducted using 100 book reviews from each discipline. Candidate keywords hypothesised to represent each theme were extracted using AntConc software (Anthony, 2022) and examined in context for both frequency and relevance. This step ensured that keywords were not only theoretically motivated but also demonstrably salient in book review discourse.
- 3) Expert validation – The proposed categories and their associated keywords were reviewed by senior academics in History and Sociology. Experts evaluated representativeness, specificity, and disciplinary soundness, offering feedback that led to refinements. This included the addition of overlooked yet significant keywords, and the substitution or removal of terms deemed ambiguous.

This triangulated approach ultimately produced a finalised taxonomy consisting of 27 keywords distributed across seven themes (as shown in Table 1), offering a balanced integration of thematic breadth and lexical specificity. The rational design of the taxonomy significantly

reduced the likelihood of false positives—irrelevant matches triggered by superficial frequency—as well as false negatives, where salient instances might otherwise be overlooked. By minimising both types of error, the taxonomy enhanced the accuracy and interpretability of results, thereby providing a reliable foundation for subsequent statistical analyses such as frequency comparisons and clustering.

TABLE 1. Themes and 27 keywords

Theme	Keyword
Race	race, racism, racial, racialised
Gender	gender, feminist, feminism, queer, LGBTQ
Disability	disability, disabled
Migrant	migrant, immigrant, refugee, asylum, migration
Colonialism	colonialism, decolonisation, decolonial, postcolonial
Native	native, indigenous, aboriginal, indigeneity
Minority	minority, marginalised, underrepresented

QUANTITATIVE ANALYSES

The quantitative analyses were conducted in four main steps, each designed to systematically capture and analyse the distribution of minority-related keywords across the two disciplines.

Step 1: Frequency extraction and normalisation. AntConc software (Anthony, 2022) was used to generate frequency counts for all 27 keywords across the corpus. To enable fair comparisons between differently sized corpora, frequencies were normalised to occurrences per 500,000 words. This procedure follows standard practice in corpus linguistics, ensuring proportional analysis and reducing bias arising from disparities in corpus size.

Step 2: Data matrix construction. The normalised frequencies were then organised into a two-dimensional data matrix, with the 27 keywords arranged as rows and the two disciplines (History and Sociology) as columns. This 27×2 matrix formed the basis for all subsequent statistical and visualisation procedures, facilitating direct thematic comparison between the disciplines.

Step 3: Statistics and visualisation. Descriptive statistics provided an initial overview of thematic prominence by presenting normalised frequencies and distributional proportions of each keyword across the two disciplines. Inferential statistics were then employed through the Chi-square (χ^2) test of independence, which tested whether differences in keyword usage across disciplines were statistically significant. To further refine interpretation, standardised residuals and Z-scores were calculated to identify which specific keywords were driving any significant differences observed. This twofold procedure allowed us to detect overall patterns while attributing them to particular thematic drivers (Agresti, 2018).

Step 4: Hierarchical clustering. As the final stage of analysis, hierarchical clustering was applied to the normalised frequency matrix after descriptive and inferential statistics had identified patterns of difference between disciplines. This method groups keywords into clusters based on the similarity of their frequency distributions across History and Sociology. Similarity was measured using Euclidean distance, a standard metric that calculates how far apart two items are in multidimensional space, with smaller distances indicating greater similarity in usage patterns. To determine how the clusters were formed, Ward's linkage criterion was employed, which iteratively merges items or clusters in a way that minimises the increase in variance within each cluster. This combination of distance measure and linkage method ensured that the resulting clusters were both statistically coherent and thematically interpretable. The results were visualised

through a dendrogram, which illustrated the hierarchical structure of the clusters, and a heatmap using a viridis colour scheme with annotated frequencies, which highlighted the degree of convergence or divergence between the two disciplines. Together, these visualisations provided a transparent representation of the thematic organisation of minority-related keywords across the corpora (Murtagh & Contreras, 2012).

RESULTS

COMPARISON OF THE FREQUENCIES OF MINORITY-RELATED KEYWORDS BETWEEN HISTORY AND SOCIOLOGY BOOK REVIEWS

In this section, 27 minority-related keywords were quantitatively compared between the two corpora. To ensure comparability, all keyword frequencies were normalised with a base of 500,000 words. In Table 2, we present normalised frequency and standardised residual Z-scores of each keyword under seven thematic categories for History and Sociology book reviews. Figure 1 provides a visual comparison that schematises the respective thematic focus of both disciplines with respect to minority-related themes.

TABLE 2. Normalised frequency counts (per 500k words) and standardised residuals Z-scores

Theme	Keyword	History	Sociology	History_Z	Sociology_Z
race	race	278	407	2.14	-1.59
	racial	255	396	1.48	-1.1
	racism	54	214	-4.26	3.18
	racialised	16	80	-3.12	2.33
gender	gender	245	502	-1.33	0.99
	feminist	75	128	0.3	-0.22
	feminism	48	49	2.27	-1.69
	queer	20	176	-5.98	4.45
native	LGBTQ	2	46	-3.66	2.73
	native	294	31	16.52	-12.31
	indigenous	162	55	9.6	-7.16
	aboriginal	3	3	0.59	-0.44
migrant	indigeneity	2	1	0.9	-0.67
	migrant	36	244	-6.4	4.77
	immigrant	82	371	-6.27	4.67
	refugee	49	113	-1.16	0.87
minority	migration	65	241	-4.23	3.16
	asylum	5	39	-2.7	2.01
	minority	43	86	-0.45	0.34
	marginalised	20	47	-0.8	0.6
colonialism	underrepresented	0	9	-1.79	1.34
	colonialism	44	44	2.24	-1.67
	postcolonial	13	24	-0.06	0.04
	decolonisation	12	11	1.32	-0.98
disability	decolonial	0	7	-1.58	1.18
	disability	32	57	0.04	-0.03
	disabled	25	4	4.55	-3.39

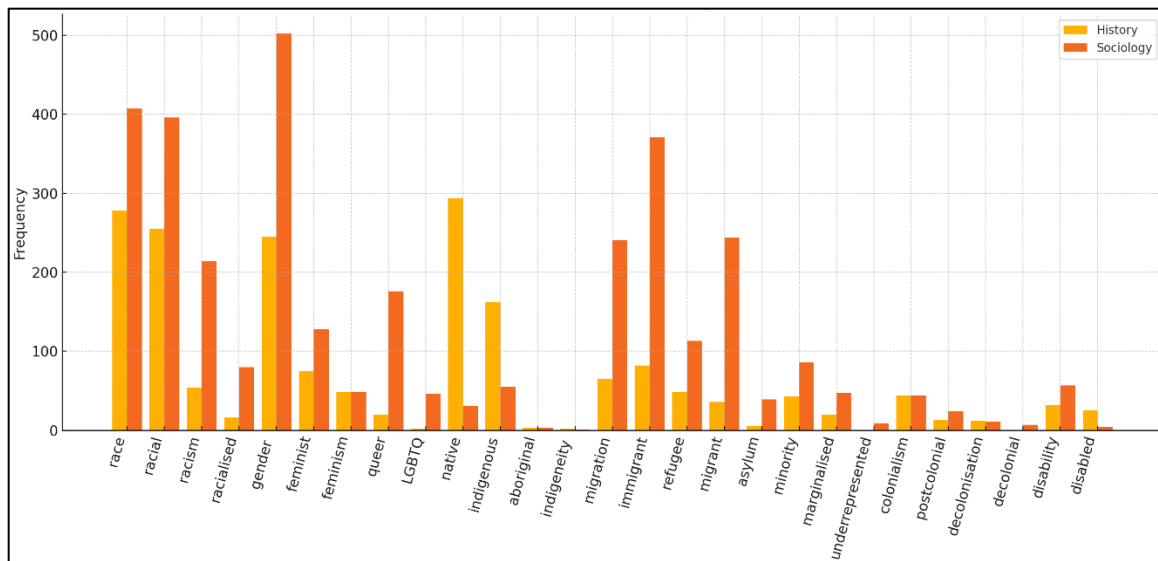


FIGURE 1. Visual comparison of keywords in History and Sociology book reviews

HISTORY'S EMPHASIS ON NATIVE AND COLONIAL THEMES

The analysis reveals that History book reviews are particularly distinguished by their emphasis on themes related to indigeneity and native identity. The keywords “native” (frequency = 294, $Z = 16.52$) and “indigenous” (162, $Z = 9.60$) occur far more frequently in History than in Sociology, where the respective frequencies are only 31 and 55. In the Sociology corpus, these keywords carry strongly negative Z-scores (-12.31 and -7.16), indicating that their occurrence is significantly lower than would be expected relative to the overall distribution. In other words, these terms are markedly underrepresented in Sociology compared to History. This pronounced disciplinary contrast highlights the centrality of indigenous peoples, native histories, and related narratives within historiographical discourse. Such terms are not only quantitatively dominant but also qualitatively emblematic of History’s engagement with the *longue durée* of colonial encounter, dispossession, and the politics of representation. Similarly, the theme of colonialism is weighted more heavily in History, where “colonialism” itself appears with a frequency of 44 and a positive Z-score (2.24), compared to an identical frequency but a negative Z-score (-1.67) in Sociology. The keyword “decolonisation”—although low in overall frequency—is more likely to appear in History, again reflecting the discipline’s preoccupation with the legacies and aftermath of colonial rule. This thematic orientation aligns with History’s traditional concern for temporal processes, social change, and the critical recovery of marginalised voices in the archive.

SOCIOLOGY'S SALIENCE OF MIGRATION, GENDER, AND QUEER DISCOURSES

Conversely, Sociology book reviews demonstrate a pronounced orientation toward migration, mobility, and identity politics grounded in contemporary social realities. The cluster of migration-related terms—including “immigrant” (371, $Z = 4.67$), “migrant” (244, $Z = 4.77$), “migration” (241, $Z = 3.16$), “refugee” (113, $Z = 0.87$), and “asylum” (39, $Z = 2.01$)—are all far more frequent in Sociology than in History, where frequencies and Z-scores for these terms are substantially lower or even negative. This strong pattern signals Sociology’s ongoing engagement with the dynamics of global mobility, border regimes, displacement, and the negotiation of identity in

transnational contexts. Gender and sexuality also figure far more prominently in Sociology. The keyword “gender” is used twice as often in Sociology (502) as in History (245), with a positive Z-score (0.99), while “queer” (176 vs. 20) and “LGBTQ” (46 vs. 2) are overwhelmingly associated with sociological writing, as reflected in their high positive Z-scores (4.45 and 2.73, respectively). These patterns reflect the discipline’s critical engagement with intersectionality, gender identity, and sexual orientation as structuring forces in contemporary society. Sociology’s discursive focus thus foregrounds lived experience, identity politics, and structural inequalities as analytical lenses for understanding minority status and representation.

THEMATIC OVERLAP: SHARED AND BRIDGING KEYWORDS

Despite clear disciplinary orientations, there are noteworthy points of convergence between History and Sociology in the treatment of certain minority-related keywords. “colonialism” stands out as a theme of shared concern, appearing with identical frequency (44) in both disciplines, though its Z-score reveals greater thematic salience in History ($Z=2.24$) than in Sociology ($Z=-1.67$). Likewise, the term “minority” registers a presence in both corpora (43 in History, 86 in Sociology) with Z-scores near zero, indicating that both disciplines regularly address minority status and related issues—though the theoretical framing and context may diverge. These overlaps suggest areas where disciplinary boundaries are more porous, with each field engaging with processes of marginalisation, albeit through different methodological and conceptual vocabularies.

DISCIPLINARY SPLITS: DIVERGING EPISTEMOLOGIES AND FOCI

Several themes illustrate stark disciplinary splits, reflecting the differing historical trajectories and epistemological commitments of History and Sociology. The native/indigenous theme is, as shown, overwhelmingly the domain of History, while the migration/refugee theme is decisively sociological. The analysis of race-related keywords provides another window into disciplinary contrast. “Race” and “racial” themselves are somewhat more common in History (278 and 255) than Sociology (407 and 396), but Sociology is much more likely to employ critical terms such as “racism” (214, $Z = 3.18$) and “racialised” (80, $Z = 2.33$), which have lower frequencies and negative Z-scores in History. This suggests a divergence not only in thematic emphasis but also in analytic register: History tends to use race as a descriptive or classificatory term, while Sociology foregrounds critical and structural analyses of racism and racialisation. The theme of disability also reveals subtle differences. The term “disability” appears moderately in both fields (32 in History, 57 in Sociology), but “disabled” is more frequently found in History (25 vs. 4), with Z-scores indicating a stronger historical focus, possibly linked to the analysis of disability as a category within specific social or historical contexts.

MARGINAL AND LOW-FREQUENCY KEYWORDS

Certain keywords, such as “aboriginal”, “indigeneity” and “decolonial”, appear infrequently in both disciplines, with near-zero or single-digit frequencies and Z-scores clustering around zero or slightly negative. Their marginal presence may reflect either terminological preference for alternatives (e.g., “indigenous” over “aboriginal”) or the relatively recent adoption of these terms in academic discourse. It is also possible that their use is more common in specialised subfields or emerging research areas that are not yet fully mainstream in either discipline. Similarly, the keyword “underrepresented” is rare, especially in History, though it appears occasionally in

Sociology, perhaps reflecting ongoing efforts to foreground the visibility of specific social groups in contemporary sociological analysis, and the gradual incorporation of diversity-related terminology into academic reviews.

INFERENTIAL TESTING OF DISCIPLINARY DIFFERENCES: CHI-SQUARE TEST OF INDEPENDENCE

A Chi-square test of independence was conducted to determine whether there is a significant association between discipline (History vs. Sociology) and the frequency of minority-related keywords. The Chi-square test of independence yielded a significant result ($\chi^2 = 929.92$, $df = 26$, $p < 0.001$), confirming substantial differences in keyword distributions between the two disciplines. The extremely low p-value (far below the conventional threshold of 0.05) indicates a highly significant association between the discipline and the frequency distribution of minority-related keywords. In other words, the pattern of keyword usage is not independent of disciplinary context: History and Sociology reviews differ markedly in how frequently they discuss various minority-related themes. This statistical result corroborates and quantifies the qualitative and descriptive findings, confirming that the thematic emphases observed—such as History’s focus on native and colonial themes and Sociology’s emphasis on migration, gender, and queer issues—are not due to random variation but reflect genuine disciplinary differences in the representation and prioritisation of minority discourse.

CLUSTERING OF MINORITY-RELATED KEYWORDS BY THEME BASED ON THEIR FREQUENCY IN HISTORY AND SOCIOLOGY BOOK REVIEWS

HIERARCHICAL CLUSTERING: DENDROGRAM AND HEATMAP

The frequency of each keyword in History and Sociology is represented as a two-dimensional data point. Hierarchical clustering was performed using Ward’s method with Euclidean distance, resulting in a cluster tree. This structure is visualised with a dendrogram (Figure 2) and a heatmap (Figure 3).

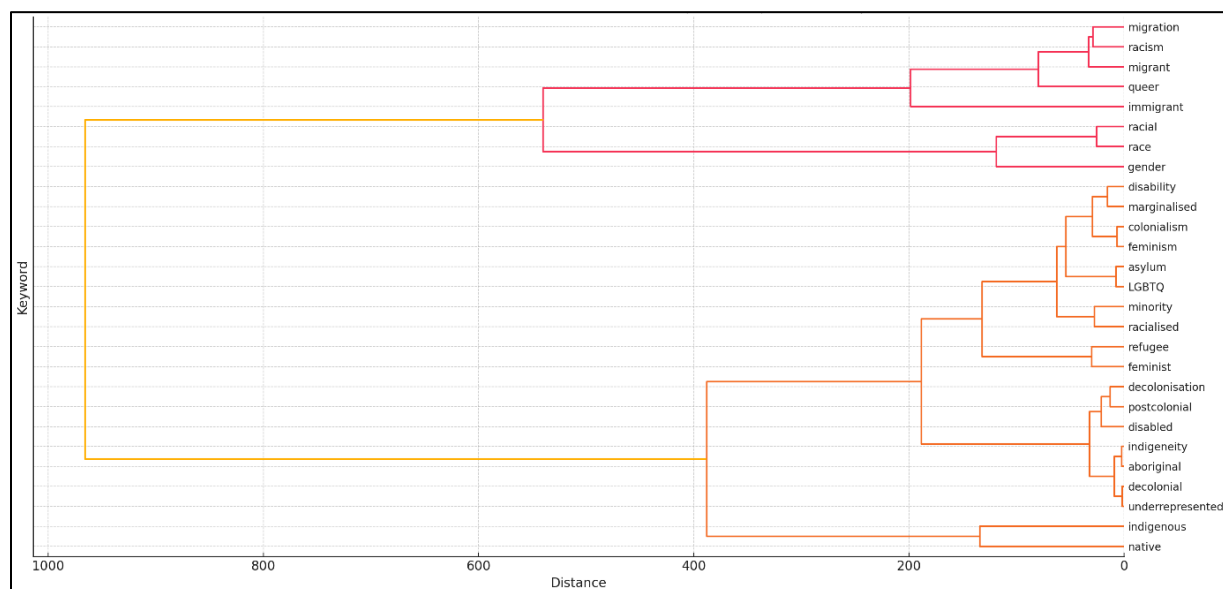


FIGURE 2. Dendrogram of keywords (History vs. Sociology)

Figure 2 displays the dendrogram of keywords, offering a visual representation of the topic landscape which differentiates History and Sociology reviews. At the broadest level, the two cluster associations of keywords reflect two different disciplinary orientations and two distinct sets of research focus. The first cluster includes keywords particularly prominent in the sociological discussion, such as "migration", "migrant", "immigrant", "racism", "queer", "racial", "race" and "gender." These keywords are in or near proximity to each other, which suggests their high co-occurrence and conceptual link in sociological discourses. This is a close-knit cluster, symptomatic of the focus on contemporary social processes — migration and mobility, identity formation, intersectionality and structural inequality — in Sociology. The keywords for migration—"migration", "migrant" and "immigrant"—could be seen as creating a separate cluster of their own, which draws our attention to Sociology's fascination with the phenomenon of global mobility, displacement and experiences of transnational subjectivity. Alongside, race and gender-related keywords are similarly clustered, reflecting Sociology's integrated approach to analysing how various axes of identity interact to produce complex forms of marginalisation and social difference. The inclusion of keywords like "queer" in proximity to "race" and "gender" underscores the discipline's commitment to examining intersectional identities and experiences, as well as its attentiveness to new and evolving forms of minority discourse.

In contrast, the second major cluster consists of a set of keywords that are pivotal in historical studies: "native", "indigenous", "aboriginal", "indigeneity", "decolonial" and "postcolonial". These keywords cluster together in the dendrogram, implying that History book reviews often focus on these concepts in similar contexts revolving around colonial histories, fights for recognition and remnants of imperial power. The proximity of "native" and "indigenous" also underscores History's profound involvement with issues of indigeneity and the recovery of marginalised voices in the past. Keywords such as "decolonisation" and "postcolonial" are also tightly clustered, reflecting the historical discipline's sustained interest in the processes and legacies of colonisation, as well as the intellectual movements that challenge and seek to deconstruct them. The relative distance between this cluster and the sociology-oriented terms indicates that these indigenous and colonial concepts are less central in sociological discourse and are discussed within very different thematic frameworks.

Interestingly, the dendrogram reveals a handful of keywords that occupy more intermediate positions, such as "feminist", "feminism", "minority", "asylum" and "marginalised". These keywords do not cluster as tightly with either the sociological or historical domains, suggesting that they may function as bridging concepts, appearing in both disciplines but adapted to their distinct methodological and theoretical traditions. For instance, "minority" is a foundational keyword relevant to both history and sociology, though the nature of analysis and context of usage likely diverge. The intermediate placement of these keywords points to possible zones of interdisciplinary dialogue, where conceptual boundaries are less rigid and cross-disciplinary borrowing may occur.

The distances between branches in the dendrogram are also significant: shorter branches indicate terms that are frequently discussed together and share high thematic similarity, while longer branches suggest greater divergence and less overlap in use. The clear bifurcation of the dendrogram into sociology- and history-oriented clusters—with only a few keywords bridging the divide—reinforces the findings from earlier frequency and statistical analyses, highlighting the distinct thematic preoccupations of each field. Overall, the dendrogram not only visualises the major axes of disciplinary difference in minority discourse but also uncovers the underlying

structure of scholarly conversations, pointing to both entrenched divides and emerging opportunities for cross-disciplinary engagement.

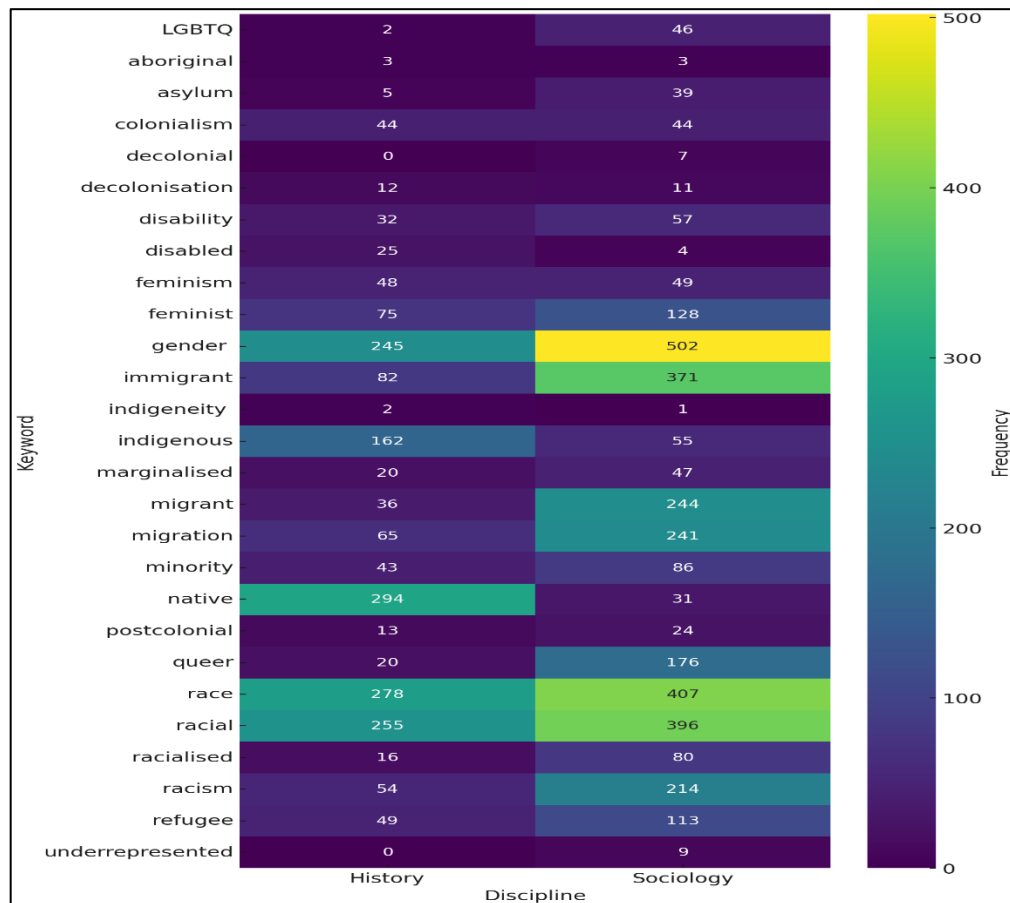


FIGURE 3. Heatmap of keyword frequencies (History vs. Sociology)

Figure 3 presents the heatmap, i.e. a clear and immediately interpretable overview of how frequently minority-related keywords appear in History versus Sociology book reviews. The contrasting intensity of colours across the two disciplines visually highlights which keywords are prioritised or marginalised within each field. In Sociology, there are pronounced areas of high intensity (brighter colours) for keywords such as “gender”, “immigrant”, “migrant”, “migration”, “race”, “racial”, “racism”, “refugee”, “queer” and “LGBTQ”. These patterns confirm Sociology’s central concern with contemporary social identities, mobility, intersectionality, and structural inequalities. For example, the much higher frequencies for “gender” (502 in Sociology versus 245 in History), “immigrant” (371 vs. 82), and “queer” (176 vs. 20) stand out as areas where Sociology not only leads in quantitative representation but also likely frames the discourse in more critical or intersectional ways.

In contrast, the heatmap reveals that History book reviews display their own distinctive peaks for a different set of keywords. The keywords “native” (294 in History versus 31 in Sociology) and “indigenous” (162 vs. 55) exhibit much higher frequencies and thus more intense colouring on the History side, underscoring the discipline’s enduring engagement with topics of indigeneity, colonial encounter, and historical marginalisation.

The heatmap also draws attention to a subset of keywords with relatively balanced frequencies across both disciplines, such as “colonialism”, “minority”, “feminism” and “feminist”. These bridging keywords appear as moderate or intermediate shades on both sides, suggesting that while they are discussed in both fields, they may be framed differently—possibly with History offering a longer-term or contextualised analysis, while Sociology may adopt a more contemporary or activist stance.

Conversely, several keywords are notable for their very low frequencies or near absence, resulting in dark or blank areas on the heatmap (e.g., “aboriginal”, “indigeneity”, “decolonial” and “underrepresented”). These keywords may either be emerging in academic discourse, be used more selectively, or simply represent concepts for which alternative terminology is preferred in both disciplines.

Overall, the heatmap presents an appealing visual corroboration of the statistical results: it neatly represents the divergent and overlapping thematic landscapes that bridge History and Sociology with respect to minority discourse. While some themes, such as indigeneity and colonialism, feature prominently in the History book reviews, migration, race, gender, and sexuality-related keywords are more prominent in Sociology. The visualisation, therefore, not only shows the frequency of keyword usage but also reflects wider epistemological divisions and convergences between the two fields in their consideration of minority representation.

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

The findings of this study support the idea that book reviews do more than simply evaluate scholarly works; they actively shape and reflect the values, norms, and thematic priorities of academic disciplines (Hyland, 2000; Nicolaisen, 2002). By employing a quantitative, corpus-based methodology, this research provides concrete evidence of how minority-related themes are presented differently within History and Sociology book reviews, illustrating each discipline’s unique intellectual focus and approach. The results highlight clear disciplinary distinctions. History book reviews frequently incorporate keywords like “native”, “indigenous” and “race”, emphasising traditional ways of categorising groups and narrating historical experiences of marginalisation. This pattern corresponds with earlier findings indicating that historians often contextualise minority experiences within larger historical events, such as colonisation, migration, and the structuring of historical periods. In doing so, History book reviews actively position scholarly works within broader historiographical discussions, reinforcing discipline-specific dialogues and conventions (Bender et al., 2004; Hérubel, 2008; Laurie & Khan, 2017; W. Liu et al., 2016).

In contrast, Sociology book reviews have a clear and strong favouring for modern and intersectional themes such as “queer”, “gender”, “racialised” and “LGBTQ”. It is indicative of Sociology’s emphasis on politically critical, theoretically informed involvement with concerns of social justice, identity politics, and power relations (Crenshaw, 1991; Rodriguez et al., 2022). The salience of these keywords—supported by frequency profiles and hierarchical clustering analysis—illustrates the ways in which Sociology emphasises issues of social justice, inclusion, and criticism of structural inequalities in book writing and reviews. These results are in line with the work of CRT and FST scholars who advocate for the importance of attending to marginalised voices and for the recognition of knowledge production as social (Rodriguez et al., 2022).

As highlighted in existing literature, book reviews are inherently dialogic and evaluative. They serve not only to critique scholarly work but also play a critical role in shaping scholarly communities and fostering disciplinary discussions (Spier, 2024; Thompson & Hunston, 2000). This study enhances our understanding by revealing that the evaluative language and thematic choices within book reviews actively construct disciplinary boundaries around minority discourse. For example, in History book reviews, evaluative language appears in appreciation (e.g., “an essential contribution to indigenous historiography”), judgment (e.g., “the author neglects critical perspectives on race”), and occasionally affect (e.g., “a poignant account of indigenous struggle”). Besides, the hierarchical clustering analyses also show that History reviews frequently highlight themes related to indigeneity, ethnicity, and colonisation, closely aligning with the discipline’s historical and thematic priorities (Breisach, 2007; Stieg, 2005). Conversely, Sociology reviews predominantly feature themes focused on contemporary issues of social identity, critical race theory, and gender studies, underscoring the discipline’s engagement with intersectionality and social activism (Crenshaw, 1991; Kendrick et al., 2025).

The findings also suggest that book reviews themselves are a cultural battleground. The increased occurrence of minority discussion in reviews, as well as its notable variation from one discipline to the next, shows that book evaluations are not only evaluations about how good something is editorially. They also function as outward communication for society, which constructs and challenges narratives of marginalisation and diversity (Deo, 2019; Vassileva, 2022). The distinct distributions of keywords between History and Sociology reveal how each discipline defines and redefines the boundaries of inclusion, voice and representation.

In addition, the findings lend empirical weight to recent claims (Liu & Zhu, 2024; Spier, 2024) that increasingly, book reviews serve as vehicles to carry a variety of disciplinary values about diversity, equity and social justice. While History often foregrounds the historical context and traditional divisions, Sociology, in contrast, displays a greater degree of awareness about intersectionality and activist scholarship in general. This phenomenon reflects the wider trend towards reflexivity and critique throughout the social sciences.

The study has some significant implications for corpus-based academic discourse research and discipline-specific studies. First, this study illustrates how textual micro-patterns can reveal broader intellectual cultures and values, i.e., by showing that word usage patterns in book reviews are not random but represent systematic reflections of the epistemological and methodological stance of each field (Hyland, 2000; Römer, 2010). This highlights the relevance of corpus approaches to linguistic description, as well as to the more general sociological analysis of academia, to demonstrate how disciplines engage in reflexive identity work and boundary maintenance through language (Vassileva, 2022). Second, the use of hierarchical clustering in mapping thematic and distributional patterns suggests a methodological model for future research endeavours that seek to trace thematic or ideological streams across genres, periods, or branches of academia.

Beyond methodological advancements, the findings offer practical benefits for educators, journal editors, and policymakers. The clear differences observed between History and Sociology imply that instructional materials and reviewer guidelines can be effectively customised to reflect discipline-specific genre conventions and thematic priorities. For scholars committed to diversity, equity, and inclusion initiatives, the empirical insights from this study highlight how academic communities frame minority discourse, providing valuable guidance for fostering more inclusive and reflective disciplinary environments (Laurie & Khan, 2017; Rodriguez et al., 2022). Furthermore, by recognising book reviews as reflective indicators of evolving disciplinary

priorities, this research emphasises the importance of continually monitoring and critically evaluating academic communication. This approach is particularly relevant as academic fields increasingly address societal expectations related to social justice, equitable representation, and active scholarly engagement.

Although the study provides useful empirical information, it is not without its limitations. The study is limited to book reviews retrieved from JSTOR and English-language sources only, which may preclude the generalisation of results to non-English contexts or other publication databases. Second, the orientation on History and Sociology is, though enlightening for comparative disciplinary discussion, incomplete in capturing the total range of minority discourse, as can be found in other fields, for instance, literary studies, education or law. While the keyword taxonomy is carefully developed, it is necessarily selective and undoubtedly does not capture all that might be said about aspects of the minority discourse. Moreover, while normalisation will compensate for disparities in corpus size, subtle differences in style, review length and journal house style covering journal categories and time frames could still bias the reported figures. Finally, the study takes a predominantly quantitative perspective and does not explore qualitative or context-sensitive interpretations of the ways in which keywords operate as nuanced rhetorical or argumentative moves in individual reviews.

Future research should consider broadening the scope to include additional disciplines and languages, enabling a more comprehensive, cross-cultural analysis of minority discourse in academic book reviews. Expanding the corpus to incorporate open-access reviews and non-journal sources could also yield richer and more diverse datasets. Methodologically, integrating qualitative discourse analysis or critical reading of keyword contexts would add depth to the current findings, uncovering subtler discursive strategies and evaluative nuances. Furthermore, longitudinal analyses could investigate diachronic changes in the representation of minority themes, tracing how disciplinary attitudes toward diversity and marginalisation evolve over time.

In sum, this study not only maps the contours of minority discourse across disciplines but also highlights the ongoing evolution of academic engagement with issues of identity, power, and representation. It underscores the value of corpus-based, quantitative approaches in uncovering both explicit and latent trends in scholarly writing, and suggests directions for future research into disciplinary convergence, divergence, and transformation.

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