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Social Identity and the Perceived Effectiveness of Interrogation Methods

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Abstract

To date, research on interrogation has not given much attention to how social and cultural forces possibly influence the interactions between interrogator and detainee. In this paper, we applied the principles of Social Identity Theory (SIT) to explore interrogators' perceptions of how effective various interrogation methods are with detainees who are similar to themselves (i.e., in-group members) versus those who are dissimilar (i.e., out-group members). The social identity characteristics measured were culture, language, gender, and age. Using a sample of 225 interrogators and investigative interviewers from 10 countries who participated in an anonymous online survey, we found support for our hypothesis that interrogators were significantly more likely to report interrogation methods (defined as the six domains of Kelly et al.'s (2013) interrogation taxonomy) as being 'very effective' with in-group detainees than with out-group detainees. Additionally, we found that interrogators who reported higher levels of effectiveness and comfort with detainees from other cultures were significantly less likely to demonstrate in-group bias. Implications for practice and future research were considered.

Keywords: *Human intelligence; interrogation methods; perceived effectiveness; interrogation domains*

Introduction

In the course of questioning uncooperative individuals who are suspected of having been party to criminal or terroristic plots and organizations, an understanding of the role of social and

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cultural differences between interrogator and detainee¹ have on their interactions is of paramount importance. It cannot be assumed that the effectiveness of interrogation methods will be the same when the interrogator and detainee are from similar backgrounds as when they are from different ones. More fundamentally, it is unknown whether interrogators employ the same methods, or perceive them to be effective, when the detainee is like them or not like them. The transnational nature of intelligence gathering leads to an increased likelihood that interrogators and detainees will be from different cultures, though a paucity of research exists on this matter. The present study sought to establish a baseline understanding of the phenomenon of cross-cultural interrogation using an international sample of criminal law enforcement and military/human intelligence (HUMINT) interrogators.

A framework that will help to explore the relationship between interrogators and detainees in this manner is Social Identity Theory (SIT; Tajfel & Turner, 1979; 1986). SIT posits that the actions of individuals are partially determined by the nature of the group to which they identify (Hopkins & Reicher, 2011). Based on this theory, interactions are influenced by the social characteristics of the participants and vary depending on whether the individuals are the same or similar (henceforth, in-group) or are different from another (out-group). The theory, we contend, broadens our understanding of the interrogative process to include the social and cultural influences on the dynamic between interrogator and detainee. Further, applying the principles of SIT can assist in describing and explaining the methods interrogators perceive to be effective in their efforts to collect information and intelligence from human sources.

The SIT framework has been applied to an analogous area of research focused on how interactions between criminal justice system actors and the public are shaped by perceived similarities and differences in social identity (Jacques & Rennison, 2012; Koons-Witt & Schram, 2006). This research has demonstrated that similarities and differences can influence the way in which the law is carried out, specifically that out-group members are subjected to differential treatment by justice system officials. Given the power differential between, for example, correctional officers and inmates (Haney & Zimbardo, 1998), we have good reason to suspect that similar dynamics may emerge when interrogators and detainees are examined. It is thus critical to understand how social and cultural differences affect the interrogation of out-group members because of the high probability that interrogators and detainees will be from different social groups. As a practical matter, these differences could have implications on what methods are employed in the course of eliciting reliable information and how successful the interrogator is to this end. In this study, we analyzed interrogators' perceptions of the effectiveness of various interrogation methods when the detainee is from similar or different backgrounds in an attempt to contribute to the literature a preliminary understanding of if (and how) social and cultural factors influence information elicitation.

Social Identity Theory

According to SIT, individuals' identities are tied to their social and environmental connections which form what they consider their social group (e.g., ethnicity, nationality, religion,

¹ For consistency, we use the terms "interrogator" and "detainee" throughout the manuscript but in the most generic sense possible. We broadly define interrogation as the act of eliciting information from an individual who is thought to be in possession of information deemed valuable by the interrogator. Additionally, we acknowledge the possible connotations readers may attribute to these terms, but we believe that interviewer, operator, or investigator and source, suspect, or target could also apply to the present research. There is certainly merit to having an open debate about the appropriateness of using the terms in this manner, though this goes well beyond the scope of this article.

etc., Hogg & Abrams, 1988; Hopkins & Reicher, 2011). Much of SIT scholarship focuses on intergroup dynamics – that is, how people come to see themselves as being part of one group vis-à-vis those in another (i.e. in-group versus out-group), and the social and behavioral outcomes associated with this self-identification process (Turner, Hogg, Oakes, Reicher, & Wetherell, 1987). Identification with an in-group member involves self-stereotyping – people’s belief that they share characteristics representative of the in-group – and produces favoritism toward the in-group member. Conversely, stereotypes of out-group members generally highlight the negative characteristics thought to characterize a category of people and tend to bias behavior against members of this category. The negative effects of interactions between in-group versus out-group members may be further compounded by the power differential that can exist between groups (e.g., wealthy versus poor). In these situations, an in-group member, who also has the position of power, may use this point of advantage to exert an extreme or harsh response or action towards an out-group member (Katz, 1988; Sollund, 2007).

Over the course of time, studies involving SIT have investigated the underlying forces (e.g., cognitive processes) which have led to negative intergroup dynamics (e.g., discrimination and violence (Hopkins & Reicher, 2011; Oldmeadow & Fiske, 2010). This research has shown patterns of disparities in treatment and in-group biases based on perceptions of social identity (Perreault & Bourhis, 1998; Rennison, Grover, Bosick, & Dodge, 2011). Winstok (2009), for example, compared the responses by Jewish and Muslim youth to hypothetical situations in which conflict was present. In these various scenarios, the opponent’s characteristics were altered (e.g., religion, race, and gender). After reviewing these situations, the subjects were asked whether aggression was a reasonable response, and findings showed that respondents were less likely to view aggression as appropriate if the person was of a similar religion as themselves.

SIT, the Criminal Justice System, and Interrogation

The in-group and out-group conflicts associated with SIT are a concern within the criminal justice system as well (Taylor & Hosch, 2004). Criminal justice officials, such as police officers, prosecutors, judges, and corrections personnel, are tasked with the responsibility of maintaining standards of equity and fairness in the commission of procedural and substantive due process. Despite these standards, however, there is often the potential for discriminatory treatment towards those considered part of the out-group or acts of favoritism towards those perceived as part of the in-group.

Research has demonstrated that how criminal justice officials treat offenders or the public at large is often influenced by perceived differences in numerous factors, including race/ethnicity (Koons-Witt & Schram, 2006; Murphy & Cherney, 2012; Rice & White, 2010), gender (Koons-Witt & Schram, 2006; Schram, 1999), relational distance (i.e., closeness/familiarity between individuals; Jacques & Rennison, 2012), cultural differences (Jacques & Rennison, 2012), age and social status (Schram, 1999). In many of these instances, social and cultural minorities, and other marginalized groups, have been subjected to differential treatment based on group membership.

More specifically, research involving interactions between interrogators and detainees has garnered a great deal of interest (Lassiter & Ratcliff, 2004), but attention on this subject has been historically focused on the effectiveness of interrogation methods on confession outcomes (Kassin et al., 2007; King & Snook, 2009; Wachi et al., 2013) including false confessions (Kassin et al., 2010), and in detecting deception (see generally, Vrij, 2008). With the possible exceptions of research on interrogating juveniles (Cleary, 2014; Feld, 2012; Meyer & Reppucci 2007, Redlich, Silverman, Chen, & Steiner, 2004; Reppucci et al., 2010) and on racial/ethnic differences of interrogator and suspect (Nadjowski, 2011; Ratcliff et al., 2010), researchers have largely not

considered how the social and cultural characteristics may shape the interactions between interrogator and detainee.

A small body of evidence exists, however, to suggest that characteristics associated with social identity may influence the interrogative process (Beune, Giebels, Adair, Fennis, & Van Der Zee, 2011; Beune, Giebels, & Sanders, 2009; Beune, Giebels, & Taylor, 2010; Goodman-Delahunty, O'Brien, & Gumbert-Jourjon, 2013). Beune and colleagues (2009), for example, examined the impact of cultural differences on interviewing strategies. They found that a rational persuasive strategy (i.e., arguments referring to logic and rationality) is more effective in terms of admissions among detainees from low-context cultures (cultures in which communication is direct and content-oriented) whereas being kind (i.e., active listening, rewarding, and offering) improves outcomes with high-context groups (cultures which communicate in a more indirect and context-oriented manner). These findings were further supported in subsequent research conducted by Beune and others showing that cultural differences play a key role in influencing the interrogative process (Beune et al., 2010; 2011). Although these studies were limited to measuring differences based on cultural identity, they provide some insight into how in-group and out-group biases may influence the interrogative process and the perceived effectiveness of interrogation techniques.

Although the available evidence suggests a relationship between social identity and interrogation, there is a limited amount of research which specifically addresses this issue. Because differences in social identity between the interrogator and detainee may shape the interactions that occur and/or influence the type of interrogation method employed, it is important to begin to study these issues in more depth. In an effort to address this gap in the literature, the present study examined whether social identity is associated with the type of interrogation method perceived to be effective with detainees who share social and cultural characteristics with the interrogator versus those who do not. Broadly speaking, we hypothesized that the interrogators, in accordance with social identity theory, would demonstrate an in-group bias with respect to the interrogation methods they perceive to be effective with detainees. Although we acknowledge that we are not examining actually employed interrogation methods with in- and out-group members (but rather perceptions), the import of this research is to begin shedding light on the influence social and cultural factors may have on the interrogation process and to sensitize researchers and practitioners to the issues surrounding social identity.

Prior to describing the study and its findings, it is important to clarify how the term 'bias' is used in the remainder of the paper. By bias, we mean that based on SIT, interrogators will perceive interrogation methods as more effective when considering detainees who are similar to themselves rather than those who are dissimilar. Put differently, interrogators are hypothesized to be biased toward employing interrogation methods with certain individuals (i.e., in-group members) more so than with others (i.e., out-group members). Bias, as used here, is not intended to have a negative connotation.

Method

Survey Development & Deployment

The organizing feature of the survey was the domains of an interrogation taxonomy (Kelly, Miller, Redlich, & Kleinman, 2013), specifically an examination of the six meso-level domains: *rapport and relationship building*, *emotion provocation*, *context manipulation*, *confrontation/competition*, *collaboration*, and *presentation of evidence* (see Table 1 for a description and example techniques from each). One of the benefits of employing the language of

the domains is that the six constructs are more descriptive than broader dichotomous categories (e.g., minimization versus maximization) yet more parsimonious than several dozen specific techniques and therefore better suited for research and descriptive purposes.

Table 1. Interrogation Domains & Social Identity Characteristics

Domain	Description	Example Techniques
<i>Rapport & Relationship Building</i>	A working relationship between interrogator and detainee	Find common ground; meet basic needs of detainee; build a bond with the detainee
<i>Emotion Provocation</i>	Targeting the detainee's raw feelings in order to trigger a response	Appeal to detainee's conscience, religion, or self-interest; offer rationalizations; flatter the detainee
<i>Context Manipulation</i>	Altering the physical or temporal space of the interrogation	Interrogate in a small room; place the detainee in a specific place; isolate the detainee prior to interrogation
<i>Confrontation/Competition</i>	Asserting authority and control over the detainee and creating a zero-sum condition	Emphasize authority over the detainee; challenge the detainee's values; threaten the detainee with consequences
<i>Collaboration</i>	Interrogator and detainee working together toward a common goal via an explicit or implicit exchange of favors or information	Offer special rewards for cooperation; bargain with the detainee; appeal to the detainee's sense of cooperation
<i>Presentation of Evidence</i>	Providing documentation of the detainee's guilt or complicity, including bluffs and fabricated evidence	Identify contradictions in the detainee's story; confront the detainee with actual evidence, including audio/visual aids
Characteristic	In-Group	Out-Group
Culture	The detainee is from a culture similar to yours	The detainee is from a culture that is dissimilar to yours
Gender	The detainee is the same gender as you	The detainee is the opposite gender as you
Language	You speak the same language as the detainee	The detainee speaks a different language than you
Age	The detainee is approximately the same age as you	The detainee is older than you; The detainee is younger than you

As such, in the first half of the survey, participants were introduced to the domains by rating the frequency with which they employ the various techniques, based on Kelly et al.'s (2013) formulation. A subsection of the survey was dedicated to each of the six domains with clearly labeled instructions to the participant that the following techniques were related to the domain (see Redlich, Kelly, & Miller, 2014, for these frequencies). In sections of the latter half of the survey, then, only the six domains were used as parsimonious indicators of interrogation methods

(as opposed to the individual techniques that made up the domains). For the present study, a subsection of the survey was dedicated to several social identity characteristics of detainees and whether the interrogators perceived the six domains to be 'very effective' when the detainee was an in- or out-group member. These measures are included in Table 1 and described more fully in the next section.

Human subjects approval was granted by the researchers' University and the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) Institutional Review Boards. Recruitment for the study commenced in February 2011 and two primary methods of recruitment were employed: (i) drawing upon contacts from the High Value Detainee Interrogation Group (HIG; the funders of the survey) research staff and associated individuals, including academic contacts and networks of the authors; and (ii) developing new contacts in the interrogation and interviewing community. The first strategy included reaching out to active interrogators at the HUMINT Training – Joint Center of Excellence (HT-JCOE), the Federal Law Enforcement Training Center (FLETC), and the FBI training facility at Quantico. Additional active personnel recruitment was done through internal channels at the HIG and among a broader set of FBI agents. Most often, either contacts in the United States had professional contacts in other countries or were directly connected to foreign academics. The second strategy focused on developing contacts predominantly through retired agents' and military intelligence officers' associations found through internet searches and personal referrals. Further, notices were sent on the listserv of the International Investigative Interviewing Research Group, a professional organization that consists of both academics and practitioners. A recruitment letter was written and approved for distribution by the Director of the HIG that was circulated throughout the active practitioner community and associations found through extensive internet research.

Although a hardcopy version of the survey was available upon request, all participants took it via a secure website using a username and password that was included in the recruitment letters. All recruitment materials and the survey itself were written in English. Before participating, respondents provided consent by reading a statement informing them of their right to discontinue participation any time and that responses were anonymous and confidential. Once participants clicked 'agree' the survey began.

Participants, Measures, and Analytic Plan

The sample for the current study included 225 interrogators who logged onto the survey website, gave their informed consent, and initiated participation in the survey (see Table 2). The majority of the sample was male (88.0%) and active at the time they participated in the survey (77.6%). Slightly less than half of the sample was American (44.4%), with Canada (36.0%), the United Kingdom (5.8%), and the Netherlands (5.3%) representing most of the remaining non-American nations in the sample. Virtually all participants from countries other than the United States were in criminal law enforcement, but approximately 20% of the American subsample (8.1% of total) included military and federal-level interrogators (e.g., Federal Bureau of Investigation, Department of Homeland Security). The mean age of the sample was 48.56 years ($SD = 10.62$), and participants had slightly less than 20 years experience on average (19.82, $SD = 10.20$).

Table 2. Sample Demographics

	Mean (SD)
Male	88.0%
Age (years)	48.6 (10.6)
Active (versus retired)	77.6%
Law enforcement (versus military)	91.9%
Experience (years)	19.8 (10.2)
Country	
United States	44.4%
Canada	36.0%
United Kingdom	5.8%
Netherlands	5.3%
Ireland	4.4%
Other ^a	4.1%

a. 1-2 participants from each Australia, Fiji, Norway, New Zealand, South Korea

As stated above, the measures for the current study came from a section of the survey in which participants were asked to rate their perceptions of the six domains on various detainee characteristics. Importantly, participants were reminded of the techniques within the domain prior to responding to the survey items. The participants were given a set of detainee characteristics that were the focus of the current study: culture, gender, language, and age. Based on the existing literature, these characteristics closely reflect attributes which shape social identity (Hogg & Abrams, 1988; Hopkins & Reicher, 2011; Tajifel & Turner, 1986). Due to the assumption that the participants would vary among these attributes themselves, the items were worded such that they would be relative to their own social characteristics. In other words, interrogators were asked to rate the perceived effectiveness of the six domains with respect to both in-group and out-group membership of the detainee.

Specifically, each of the six domain batteries read, “[*Rapport and Relationship Building, Emotion Provocation, Context Manipulation, Confrontation/Competition, Collaboration, or Presentation of Evidence*] is very effective when the detainee is: from a culture similar to yours; from a culture that is dissimilar to yours; the same gender as you; the opposite gender as you; speaks the same language as you; does not speak the same language as you; approximately the same age as you; older than you; younger than you.” The participants were instructed to check the box next to the item to indicate an affirmative response. The absence of a check was coded to indicate the participant did not believe that the domain was very effective with the type of individual. Thus, participants had the opportunity to state whether for each domain, techniques were very effective, for example, when the detainee’s culture was similar and dissimilar, under neither or both conditions. In other words, the participants were not forced to choose whether the domain was effective with detainees from a similar culture *or* a different one; they could have said the domain was very effective with both in- and out-group detainees.

The nine characteristics across six domains resulted in 54 total variables: 24 in-group characteristics (e.g., same gender as you) and 30 out-group characteristics (e.g., the opposite

gender as you). The imbalance results from the additional relational item regarding age with both “older than you” and “younger than you” treated for analytic purposes as characteristics of the out-group. In addition to examining the variables for discernable patterns between in-group and out-group characteristics, we reduced the data in several steps for further analysis. First, for each of the six domains we created one scale for the in-group characteristics and one scale for the out-group characteristics, resulting in 12 social identity variables. To account for the different number of characteristics between the in-group and out-group, the average proportion of characteristics selected was calculated instead of simply summing them. Rather than conduct 30 pairwise comparisons for the individual characteristics by domain, which would increase the experiment-wise error rate, only six such comparisons were conducted on these 12 variables that examined the social identity characteristics by domain.

Six scales, one for each domain, were then computed by subtracting the out-group from the in-group totals. These variables could range from -1 to +1 with positive scores indicating a perception of an in-group bias for that particular domain. With these variables, we could compare differences in perceptions regarding the domains as very effective interrogation methods vis-à-vis group identification.

Next, we reduced the six domain scales to just two representing all domains for both the in-group and out-group characteristics by similarly averaging the items within group identification across domains. We were justified in doing this, as the Cronbach’s alpha reliability for each was very strong for the individual items within group identification variables ($\alpha = .94$ for in-group; $\alpha = .95$ for out-group). These variables were used to create a single *Social Identity Scale* by subtracting the out-group score from the in-group score, again resulting in scores that could range from -1 to +1. Higher scores on this scale indicate a greater level of in-group bias; scores of zero on this scale indicate that participants selected an equal number of in-group characteristics for which interrogation methods are ‘very effective’ as they did for out-group characteristics. Approximately 20% of the sample had a balanced score of zero and an additional 15% was in the negative range of the scale.

Although the 54 original social identity characteristics variables are presented descriptively in the next section in addition to the pairwise comparisons of each in- and out-group domain scale, the six domain scales and the *Social Identity Scale* were subjected to further analyses. Zero-order correlations with the scales were examined for possible associations between them and a number of interrogator characteristics: gender, age, and whether the interrogator was considered military or law enforcement.

Finally, two other items relating to interrogating individuals from different cultures were included in the survey in the “Demographic and Background Experience” subsection. The questions asked directly about participants’ (i) perceived effectiveness and (ii) level of comfort communicating and interacting with individuals from cultures different than their own. These items were included in the survey due to the probability of participants having at least some measure of contact with out-group members, and the questions were an opportunity for self-assessment with respect to their professional experiences. Responses were given on a four-point scale ranging from 1 = ‘Not at all Effective/Comfortable’ to 4 = ‘Very Effective/Comfortable.’ In addition to the demographic variables above, these perceptions will be included in the correlational analyses presented in the next section.

Results

The results for the 54 social identity characteristics and the proportion of participants indicating that the six domains are 'very effective' with detainees in relation to themselves on the attributes are presented in Table 3, including t-test significance levels and Cohen's *d* effect sizes for the social identity scales for the six domains. For instance, 72% of interrogators reported that *rappport and relationship building* was very effective with detainees who were from a culture similar as themselves, but only 44% said this domain was very effective with those from a different culture. The social identity scales by domain represent an averaging of the four characteristics, and we found, for example, that 37% of interrogators stated that *confrontation/competition* was very effective with in-group detainees. The number of interrogators for this domain with out-group detainees, however, was only 25%, a difference that was statistically significant with a moderate effect size.

Table 3. Proportion of Interrogators Stating the Domains are 'Very Effective' for Social Identity Characteristics and Pairwise t-tests and Cohen's d for In-Group and Out-Group Comparisons by Domain

	<i>Rappport & Relationship Building</i>	<i>Emotion Provocation</i>	<i>Context Manipulation</i>	<i>Confrontation/Competition</i>	<i>Collaboration</i>	<i>Presentation of Evidence</i>
	In / Out	In / Out	In / Out	In / Out	In / Out	In / Out
Culture	.72 / .44	.59 / .35	.41 / .35	.43 / .25	.51 / .34	.46 / .34
Gender	.54 / .41	.46 / .33	.31 / .29	.31 / .20	.43 / .33	.37 / .31
Language	.72 / .36	.59 / .25	.42 / .27	.43 / .18	.53 / .28	.43 / .35
Age ^a	.60 / .44 / .51	.42 / .33 / .50	.34 / .27 / .37	.33 / .21 / .39	.43 / .35 / .39	.37 / .36 / .44
Social Identity ^b	.65 / .43	.52 / .35	.37 / .31	.37 / .25	.47 / .34	.41 / .35
Pairwise <i>t</i> and (<i>d</i>)	8.947** (.523)	6.915** (.398)	2.620 (.145)	5.630** (.329)	6.457** (.318)	2.817* (.129)

a. The figures presented for age of the detainee are same, older, and younger (in/out/out), respectively, and the pairwise comparisons are same age versus older and younger together as the out-group.

b. The pairwise *t* and Cohen's *d* are based on the figures for the social identity scales for each of the six domains.

Note: ** $p < .001$, * $p = .005$

With a few exceptions for age and for the *context manipulation* domain, the interrogators in this sample were consistently more likely to rate the domains as very effective for those detainees who are similar to themselves with regard to culture, gender, and language. Notably, the only instance where a domain was perceived as more effective with an out-group member was with younger detainees. This was true for the *emotion provocation*, *context manipulation*, *confrontation/competition*, and *presentation of evidence* domains. We conducted post hoc tests with Bonferroni corrections to reduce the likelihood of type I errors. With the adjusted significance levels, the results showed that five of the six social identity variable comparisons revealed significant differences between in- and out-group measures for each domain. Also, as evidenced by the relatively small effect sizes, *context manipulation* and *presentation of evidence* were the least sensitive to the detainee's group affiliation (though still significant).

Table 4 presents the descriptive statistics for the seven scales created from the social identity characteristics that represent a continuum of perceptions on the effectiveness of interrogation methods with respect to in-group and out-group membership. Although the utility of these scales is to identify which interrogator characteristics are associated with in-group bias, the figures in Table 4 are instructive in their own right. For instance, with mean scores at .058 and .056, we can state that *context manipulation* and *presentation of evidence*, respectively, are perceived to be 'very effective' at roughly equal rates for in-group and out-group detainees. This is because a score of zero indicates a balance between methods perceived to be effective with in-group and out-group detainees. Alternatively, the mean for *rapport and relationship building* (.213) is the largest among the six domain scales. What this figure indicates is that among the six domains, *rapport and relationship building* is more often perceived to be very effective with in-group detainees than out-group ones. Similarly, the *Social Identity Scale* indicates, on balance, that interrogators seem to have an in-group bias with respect to the totality of methods they have at their disposal. Overall, however, because the scores on these variables could range from -1 to +1, we note that, on average, this sample does not demonstrate a very strong proclivity toward an in-group bias.

Table 4. In-Group Bias Ratings for the Six Domain Scales and Social Identity Scale

	Mean	SD	N ^a
<i>Rapport & Relationship Building</i>	.213	.357	225
<i>Emotion Provocation</i>	.163	.347	217
<i>Context Manipulation</i>	.058	.319	211
<i>Confrontation/ Competition</i>	.125	.323	211
<i>Collaboration</i>	.136	.305	209
<i>Presentation of Evidence</i>	.056	.283	206
<i>Social Identity Scale</i>	.126	.225	225

a. The figures vary by domain due to missing data.

The results of the final analysis are presented in Table 5. Among the interrogator characteristics examined, several had little to no association with the six domain scales. For instance, only males were marginally more likely to demonstrate an in-group bias with respect to *rapport and relationship building*; indeed, there was no discernable trend between gender and the in-group bias scales. Likewise, criminal law enforcement interrogators were somewhat more likely to demonstrate an in-group bias as opposed to military interrogators. Moreover, older interrogators were more likely to demonstrate an in-group bias with regard to *context manipulation* and *presentation of evidence*. (Although not shown in the results due to its strong

correlation with age, the results for more experienced interrogators were very similar to the results for older ones.)

With respect to the *Social Identity Scale* in its entirety, older interrogators and criminal law enforcement interrogators were significantly more likely to demonstrate an in-group bias. Alternatively, the items relating to the participants' self-ratings of effectiveness with and comfort in interacting with detainees from other cultures were both significantly related to lower levels of in-group bias. This was true for both the *Social Identity Scale* in general and the *rappart and relationship building* one in particular. These items were the only ones examined that were significantly related to lower levels of in-group bias.

Lastly, due to the multinational nature of the sample, an examination of in-group bias along these lines is warranted. What we found, however, is that for all seven variables in one-way analysis of variance tests (and confirmed using generalized linear models that control for multiple comparisons), there were no significant differences in the sample when the three comparison groups were American, Canadian, and Other (results not shown). Although certainly not definitive, as the third category consisted of only 41 interrogators from eight countries, additional research is needed to detect differences should they exist between interrogators from different countries on these measures.

Table 5. Correlations between Domain and Social Identity Scales and Interrogator Attributes

	Male	Age	Law Enforcement ^a	Effective	Comfortable
<i>Rappart & Relationship Building</i>	.132†	.033	.107	-.289***	-.251**
<i>Emotion Provocation</i>	-.123	.068	.101	-.098	-.095
<i>Context Manipulation</i>	-.023	.160*	.088	-.079	-.129
<i>Confrontation/ Competition</i>	-.027	.107	.144†	-.051	-.051
<i>Collaboration</i>	.034	.137†	.069	-.177*	-.045
<i>Presentation of Evidence</i>	.120	.180*	.013	-.173*	-.106
<i>Social Identity</i>	.020	.156*	.188**	-.223***	-.162*

a. The comparison group is military interrogators.

Note: *** $p < .001$, ** $p < .01$, * $p < .05$, † $p < .10$

Discussion

The foregoing study of an international sample of interrogators and investigative interviewers represents one of the first examinations into the effect social and cultural characteristics of interrogators and detainees can have on perceptions of interrogation method effectiveness. Whereas much of the academic work on interrogation and intelligence interviewing has focused on obtaining confessions and in detecting deception, we sought to describe and explain interrogator perceptions of effective methods when detainees are similar to them on several attributes and when they are different from one another. To do this, we employed the language of a well-established theory of intergroup relationships, Social Identity Theory (SIT), and a new taxonomic framework describing interrogation, notably the six meso-level domains (Kelly et al., 2013).

With the increasingly diverse populations within many of the countries in our sample and the transnational nature of HUMINT and counterterrorism efforts, cross-cultural interrogations are a matter of critical import. There is a relative dearth, however, of research surrounding these issues in the literature. As such, we sought to contribute to the knowledge base on the perceptions of effective interrogation when detainees are similar to or different than the

interrogator. We found support for our primary hypothesis that interrogators in our sample were more likely to perceive interrogation methods as 'very effective' with in-group detainees as opposed to out-group detainees (see differences in Table 3). Here, we discuss this and the other findings in greater detail, including the research's limitations and implications.

In this study, four social and cultural characteristics (culture, gender, language, and age) were used to investigate the perceived effectiveness of interrogation methods when detainees were similar and dissimilar to the interrogators. Although the survey and the present study were not designed to be a test of SIT, the findings presented are in line with the theory's central premise that individuals view and treat others differently depending upon what group the other person is affiliated with. Specifically, the differences presented in Table 3 for the four characteristics by the six domains and the scale means of Table 4 offer support to the notion that an in-group bias exists among this sample of interrogators.

The consistent and significant differences between the in-group and out-group detainees indicate that the participants in this study are much more likely to see interrogation methods as 'very effective' with detainees who are similar to them as compared to those who are not. For the culture, gender, language, and age characteristics, interrogators were consistently more likely to favor or prefer the interrogation domains for in-group detainees, with the notable exception of age. In this instance, for four of the domains – *emotion provocation*, *context manipulation*, *confrontation/competition*, and *presentation of evidence* – the interrogators were significantly more likely to see these methods as more effective with younger detainees (an out-group indicator) than with those who are of a similar age or older.

A reversal of the overall trend for younger detainees is possibly indicative of the fact that age is the one true measure of interpersonal power dynamics we have in this study. The *emotion provocation*, *confrontation/competition*, and *presentation of evidence* domains where the trend reverses could be considered among the most manipulative of the six domains and therefore considered more appropriate for younger detainees due to a perceived susceptibility to these methods. This argument is bolstered by the finding that *rappport and relationship building*, arguably the least manipulative domain, is significantly more often viewed as very effective with in-group (similar aged) detainees than with younger ones. Lastly, it could be argued that gender could display similar power differentials, especially considering the fact that nearly 90% of the sample was male, but the findings do not support this conclusion.

When the social characteristics of detainees are scaled by domain and then into the overarching *Social Identity Scale*, we can observe additional evidence supporting our hypothesis of an in-group bias. Scores on these scales ranged from -1 to +1, with higher positive scores indicating a greater in-group bias and scores of 0 representing a balanced view that interrogation methods are equally effective regardless of the group membership of the detainee. To varying degrees, all six domain scales were in the positive range, with *rappport and relationship building* demonstrating the greatest degree of in-group bias and *presentation of evidence* the least. A product of this trend, the *Social Identity Scale*, representing all interrogation methods and all four social characteristics, is also in the positive range.

The meaning of these findings of in-group bias among interrogators and investigative interviewers can (and should) be debated and subjected to additional research (particularly research on actual interrogations), but we offer one possible explanation here: interrogators prefer to interrogate detainees who are like them. Although we did not ask questions about preferences directly, the consistent finding that interrogators reported the domains to be 'very effective' with detainees who are similar as themselves indicates a preference for, likely based on a level of intimacy and knowledgeability of, the in-group detainee.

The two related variables presented in Table 5 regarding the interrogators' self-reported levels of effectiveness and comfort with detainees from other cultures can shed additional light on the claim that interrogators simply prefer to interrogate people who are like them. For each domain scale and the *Social Identity Scale*, the coefficients are negative, unlike in nearly all of the other figures in Table 5, and significantly so for *rappport and relationship building* and the *Social Identity Scale*. These findings indicate that interrogators who think of themselves as more adept in communicating with people who are not like them were less likely to demonstrate in-group bias. Put differently, those who rated themselves as being relatively less effective and/or comfortable with detainees from different cultures were more likely to report an in-group bias.

Likewise, the finding presented in Table 5 that military interrogators were less likely to demonstrate an in-group bias as compared to law enforcement officers lends additional support to the argument advanced here. Unlike law enforcement interrogators who police and interact with citizens who share many social and cultural characteristics based on geography alone, we could expect military interrogators to have a greater degree of experience with detainees who are not like them; therefore, they would be more knowledgeable of out-group detainees and perhaps more likely to view interrogation methods as effective with them.

This is precisely what SIT would predict, though other lenses could be used to support these findings. For instance, assortative mating is a biological phenomenon based on humans' (and other animals) preference to mate with those who are similar on a variety of traits (Thiessen & Gregg, 1980). In more strictly sociological terms, homophily is the concept that an individual's social network consists mostly of people who are like one another (McPherson, Smith-Lovin, & Cook, 2001). The "homophily principle" has been demonstrated to be present in all manners of relationships due to a shared understanding of similarly-situated people, and these concepts could be applied in support of our findings and conclusions as well.

We can also make observations more generally regarding the perceived effectiveness of the domains themselves. In line with previous research (Redlich et al., 2014; Russano, Narchet, Kleinman, & Meissner, 2014), participants indicated that *rappport and relationship building* was the most effective domain regardless of comparing in-group or out-group status across domains. In several instances, in fact, the out-group perception of *rappport and relationship building* being 'very effective' is equal to or somewhat greater than some in-group perceptions among the other domains.

One such domain that demonstrated this pattern was *confrontation/competition* that was also among the least favored overall, particularly with out-group detainees. It is worth noting here that some of the research on the effects of social identity and in-group bias could have warranted a prediction that, of the six domains of the interrogation taxonomy (Kelly et al., 2013), *confrontation/competition* would demonstrate higher rates of perceived effectiveness for out-group detainees as opposed to in-group detainees. Of the domains, this one could be considered the most coercive, harsh, or accusatorial, and given the inherent power differential between interrogator and detainee, it might not have been surprising if the results had come up in opposition to the other domains. This did not occur, of course, and one possible reason was that the sample consisted of fairly older and very experienced interrogators. What we know of accusatorial methods' relative ineffectiveness at generating good information (Meissner et al., 2014; see also Wheatcroft & Ellison, 2012, for analogous findings in the cross-examination of witnesses in court), older and more experienced interrogators may better embody this ethos than would a sample of younger and less experienced interrogators.

Finally, the *context manipulation* and *presentation of evidence* domains warrant a brief discussion as well. The differences between in-group and out-group perceptions of domain effectiveness (Table 3), and the relatively weaker in-group bias means for these domains (Table 4),

indicate that these two may be viewed differently than the other four when it pertains to social identity. Whereas *rappport and relationship building*, *emotion manipulation*, *confrontation/competition*, and *collaboration* each possess interpersonal, interactional qualities that are heavily dependent upon verbal communication and the personalities of both the interrogator and detainee, *context manipulation* and *presentation of evidence* can be considered more demonstrative than the others. There is perhaps a level of objectivity or universality to, for instance, the actions of physically altering the interrogation room or actually showing a piece of evidence to the detainee that cuts across group differences in ways that the other domains do not. Future research into the domains or interrogation methods more broadly ought to consider the differences between the interactive and demonstrative qualities of the domains.

Implications for Practice

Although the present study was based on self-reported survey data of interrogators' perceptions of effective interrogation methods with in- and out-group members, and not an observational study in which actual practices were analyzed, the findings nevertheless have several potential implications for practitioners. First, the consistent findings of an in-group bias among our sample augurs for the need for diversity among interrogators. As Western European and North American countries become increasingly diverse, the ranks of interrogators should reflect the population, and it begins with the recruitment of new interrogators. Furthermore, military interrogators will likely be questioning detainees who are from countries and cultures that are different than their own, and the diversity among these interrogators is especially critical.

Diversity alone in the ranks of interrogators will not inherently lead to better outcomes with respect to cross-cultural interrogations, however. Related to recruitment is the training of interrogators – new and veteran alike – in the potential effects of the social and cultural differences of the detainee. The present research is unable to address which methods are most actually effective with in- and out-group members, but at the very least, the survey results show that what interrogators perceive to be effective varies depending upon the social identity of the detainee. How this translates into practice is an open question, though interrogators could be sensitized to the likelihood that they themselves may be doing something differently, subconsciously or otherwise, when the detainee is an out-group member. Further, it stands to reason that techniques perceived to be very effective would be more likely to be employed.

Finally, our data do not lead us to any firm conclusions regarding whether or not intimate knowledge of the social and cultural characteristics of out-group detainees would result in perceiving interrogation methods as equally effective as with in-group detainees. Although somewhat different than knowledge of out-groups, the significant association between self-reported effectiveness and comfort with those from different cultures measures and lower levels of in-group bias would seem to indicate that such a relationship exists. As above, the current research does not address whether or not the same interrogation methods are effective in- and out-group members, only that there is a perception that they are very effective with in-group members more so than with out-group members. We do know, however, that careful planning and preparation by interrogators (and analysts) results in better outcomes (Kleinman, 2011; Toliver, 1997).

Limitations & Future Directions

As stated above, neither the survey from which the data for the current study came nor the analyses presented above was intended to be direct tests of SIT. There are surely additional indicators of in- and out-group membership beyond culture, gender, language, and age that should be examined such as race/ethnicity, religion, national or regional origin, and others. These additional indicators could have portrayed a more accurate representation of social identity which could have had an impact on the results. However, the four indicators of social identity that we did measure were largely consistent, lending some degree of reliability to our findings and conclusions.

Next, the generalizability of these findings is difficult to assess. Although we had over 200 interrogators and investigative interviewers from 10 different countries participate in the study, the participants were not randomly selected from the entire population of interrogators. Despite the unique nature of the sample and the difficulty in accessing interrogators, a non-representative sample such as this one clearly warrants caution when interpreting and applying the results. With more than three-quarters of the sample was from either the United States or Canada, an argument could be made for these results applying more to a North American context than to a global one. Further, as the survey was written and the results reported here, the word “detainee” implies that the individual subjected to interrogation is somehow in the custody of the authorities. As such, how well our results apply to sources of information or intelligence who are not detained is still an open question.

Like all survey research, the self-reported nature of the data and all attendant limitations therein must be acknowledged. There is always the possibility of social desirability when anonymously reporting on behaviors, especially those as potentially sensitive as interrogation methods. Further, we do not maintain the position that the interrogators who participated in this survey are in any way prejudiced against out-group detainees; instead, through unconscious forces as described by social identity theory, the participants demonstrated a tendency to perceive a variety of methods as more effective with detainees who were similar to themselves.

Related to social desirability, there is also the matter of equating the self-reported perceptions of what is effective with the actual use of the methods that is potentially problematic in this study, including with survey items such as “build a bond” (*rappport and relationship building*) that may be problematic to operationalize in any such analysis of actual interrogations. Although we do not know for sure if these respondents would employ the methods they reported to be effective, we can look to other literatures for clues to this relationship. For instance, teens who thought condom use was effective at preventing HIV transmission were also more likely to use condoms (Hingson, Strunin, Berlin, & Heeren, 1990) and teachers with higher self-efficacy perceptions regarding a cognitive-behavioral intervention were more likely to employ those strategies (Boulton, 2014). Also, in a survey of large police departments, Koper, Woods, and Kubu (2012) reported a convergence in perceived effectiveness of gun violence prevention programs with actual use of those programs. And, of particular relevance, Kelly, Redlich, and Miller (2015) demonstrated similarities between survey data of reported use of interrogation methods and actual use of the same methods in a content analysis of a sample of recorded interrogations.

Lastly, we note that just because any of the interrogation domains for any of the social identity characteristics were not selected to be ‘very effective’ does not necessarily indicate that the method vis-à-vis the characteristic would be *ineffective*. Moreover, with the majority of the 54 indicators in Table 3 failing to garner much more than 50% of interrogators reporting the domain as ‘very effective,’ our dichotomous response options leave open the interpretability of the

results. Future research should be more refined in the emphasis of how effective methods are, but for present purposes, it simply is a condition of something less than very effective.

The consistent finding of an in-group bias, however, leaves us with the unanswered question that is critical for future work in the area of intelligence interviewing and interrogation: what are the methods that are considered most effective with detainees from different social and cultural backgrounds? From training to the practice of interrogation and the supervising of interrogators and the research conducted on all of the above, all involved in the enterprise of eliciting information from detainees (as well as victims and witnesses) ought to be sensitive to the social and cultural factors in play. Humans are social animals who are sorted through biological and sociological forces largely beyond our control, and the effects of this grouping process can have important implications for the actual and perceived effectiveness of interrogation methods. This study represents an attempt to document these effects so that future research can be designed specifically for the study of them.

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