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# "We are chameleons" : exploring identity capital in a multicultural workplace environment

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**“WE ARE CHAMELEONS”: EXPLORING IDENTITY CAPITAL IN A  
MULTICULTURAL WORKPLACE ENVIRONMENT**

by

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in the Program of  
Immigration and Settlement Studies

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# **“WE ARE CHAMELEONS”: EXPLORING IDENTITY CAPITAL IN A MULTICULTURAL WORKPLACE ENVIRONMENT**

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Master of Arts, 2009  
Immigration and Settlement Studies  
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## **ABSTRACT**

This exploratory research investigates James Côté’s concept of “identity capital” in a multicultural workplace environment. Guided by Pierre Bourdieu’s theoretical approach to capital, the focus is to examine the strategic deployment of identity capital between adults in a multicultural immigrant-serving agency in Mississauga, Ontario. After conducting fifteen interviews, the findings can be broadly summarized by the following: first, identity capital is deployed in social situations with the clients, colleagues and supervisor in the workplace; second, the deployment of identity capital, through greeting, body language, finding connecting pieces or the method of communication is done unconsciously; third, the strategic deployment of identity capital is individualized to the audience; and fourth, identity presentations has the potential to benefit the individual, the audience and the community. This paper concludes that identity capital is a useful concept that demonstrates the varied resources individuals have in negotiating and navigating the changing social environment.

Key words: Canada; identity capital; settlement organizations; Peel

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## INTRODUCTION

We are chameleons. Wherever we go, the situation requires this, we are that. The situation requires something else, we change... and by doing that, we change our identity...to suit the situation you are in. (I12)

International migration to Canada is a driving force of ethnic diversity and population growth (Statistics Canada, 2008). Based on the 2006 Canadian Census, immigrants represented one in five individuals of the population, which is the highest proportion in 75 years (Statistics Canada, 2006a). Most newcomers, seven out of every ten immigrant, are choosing to settle in three major census metropolitan areas: Toronto, Montréal and Vancouver respectively (Statistics Canada, 2006b). In Toronto, the foreign-born population growth occurred in the municipalities surrounding the City of Toronto, especially Mississauga (Statistics Canada, 2007).

This research explores how identities are presented in a diverse and changing environment. Identity is constantly changing. Following Jenkins (2004), this major research paper defines identity as a complex, flexible and fluid construction that emerges through human interactions and is based and dependent on the social context and interests of the individual (Jenkins, 2004, p.15, 17, 107, 178). In other words, identity formation involves interaction whereby “identification is a matter of ascription: *by* individuals of themselves, and *of* individuals by others” (Jenkins, 2004, p.107, original emphasis). More importantly, as Jenkins states, “interests and identification are intimately bound up with each other... my pursuit of particular interests may cause me to be identified in particular ways by myself and by others” (Jenkins, 2004, p.178). The pursuit of a goal uses and is also guided by the knowledge of an individual’s identity capital.



Identity capital is the varied resources an individual has that enable them to strategically present their identity. This term captures the tangible and intangible resources individuals have available when maneuvering, strategizing and framing their identity in specific social circumstances to maximize their benefit and in accordance to their goals. The individual's stock of identity capital allows them to creatively adapt, construct and present their identity depending on the changing social situation (Côté and Levine, 2002, p.123, 142).

Although the workplace environment is examined, it is acknowledged that identities are shaped by the compounding influence of multiscale places (Smith and Ley, 2008). Multicultural immigrant-serving organizations are particularly interesting because employees are interacting with immigrant clients and immigrant or non-immigrant colleagues daily.

This research paper documents and presents themes based on fifteen qualitative interviews exploring identity presentation in one settlement organization in the City of Mississauga, Ontario. Guided by Pierre Bourdieu's theoretical approach to capital, four areas were investigated:

1. In *what social situations* do individuals deploy identity capital?
2. In *which way* do individuals deploy identity capital in these situations?
3. *How* is identity capital strategically performed by individuals?
4. What *interests* do these performances serve?

The purpose of this empirical research was to provide a nuanced understanding of how individuals actively and strategically deploy their identity capital and to add to the growing body of literature regarding this issue.

This paper is divided into five sections. The first section begins with a review of Pierre Bourdieu's theoretical approach to capital focusing on his forms of capital and the vocabulary he uses. James Côté's conceptualization of identity capital will be then followed as a form of capital that is an added repertoire of capital an individual can possess. The methodology section begins with an overview on the recent developments in Peel regarding immigration and a description of the research design. Next, the findings are presented; namely i) how identity capital is deployed in social situations with the clients, colleagues and supervisor in the workplace; ii) the deployment of identity capital, through greeting, body language, finding connecting pieces or the method of communication is done unconsciously; iii) the strategic deployment of identity capital is individualized to the audience; and iv) identity presentations has the potential to benefit the individual, the audience and the community. This paper ends with a discussion of the limitations of the research, areas for future research and conclusion.

## **LITERATURE REVIEW**

This literature review will first give an overview of Bourdieu's forms of capital, vocabulary and theoretical framework. Côté's identity capital will then be introduced as a form of capital that is built and informed by Bourdieu's approach to capital. Lastly, based on the reviewed literature, the focus of the empirical investigation will be discussed.

## ***Bourdieu's Forms of Capital***

Pierre Bourdieu's prolific writing and research greatly influence, attract interest and generate scholarship across disciplines (Bourdieu and Wacquant, 1992, p.2; Sallaz and Zavisca, 2007, p.22). One of Bourdieu's key concepts is his notion and application of capital (Painter, 2002, p.243; Thompson, 1991, p.14). As conceptualized by Bourdieu:

Capital, which, in its objectified or embodied forms, takes time to accumulate and which, has potential capacity to produce profits and to reproduce itself in identical or expanded form, contains a tendency to persist in its being, is a force inscribed in the objectivity of things so that everything is not equally possible or impossible. And the structure of the distribution of the different types and subtypes of capital at a given moment in time represents the immanent structure of the social world, i.e., the set of constraints, inscribed in the very reality of that world, which govern its functioning in a durable way, determining the changes of success for practices (Bourdieu, 1986, p.241-242).

According to Bourdieu, different forms of capital exist. Economic capital, social capital and cultural capital are the "three fundamental species" (Bourdieu and Wacquant, 1992, p.119). Bourdieu extends his original framework of capital with the introduction of symbolic capital.

*Economic capital* refers to an individual's financial assets and wealth. Examples of economic capital include housing property and stocks. Bourdieu expands the notion of capital beyond the strict economic sphere because by focusing solely on the economic side ignores "immaterial forms" of capital and interest (Bourdieu, 1986, p.242-243). This understanding of capital has been significantly explored and interpreted in the literature (Painter, 2000, p.243; Thompson, 1991, p.14).

*Social capital* refers to an individual's membership in a "network of connections" that can potentially be activated when necessary. This relationship between individuals

depends on the network size of the group and the capital the individual is capable of mobilizing (Bourdieu, 1986, p.248-249). Mutual acquaintances, group membership, school alumni and family members are a few examples of social capital networks. Social capital can be activated by an individual when they are recognized as being a member of that social group.

*Cultural capital* refers to three forms: the embodied state, the objectified state, and the institutionalized state. The *embodied state* is the acquired and inherited characteristics that are embedded into a person, such as an individual's attributes, perceptions and accents (Bourdieu, 1986, p.245). The *objectified state* refers to the material artifacts and manifestations of cultural goods, such as art collections (Bourdieu, 1986, p.246). The *institutionalized state* is the objectification of cultural capital through credentials and qualifications in academia and other institutions (Bourdieu, 1986, p.247). The embodied, objectified and institutionalized states of cultural capital translate to an individual's embodiment, possession and institutionally recognized cultural capital, respectively. Bourdieu and Wacquant later term *cultural capital* as *information capital* to capture its overarching significance (Bourdieu and Wacquant, 1992, p.119).

*Symbolic capital* refers to the recognition of legitimate forms of economic, social and cultural capital (Bourdieu and Wacquant, 1992, p.119). Prestige and honour are examples of the forms of symbolic capital. For instance, language can be understood as a form of symbolic power because the dominant class in society can use language to systemically differentiate and order societal class relations (Bourdieu, 1991).

Bourdieu's forms of capital are closely interrelated and intertwined with each other. An important element of capital is that it can be exchanged with one another

(Bourdieu, 1986, p.243). An illustration of this capital conversion is when an individual uses their social capital when searching for job opportunities or housing property (Thompson, 1991, p.14). In this case, social capital is converted into economic capital. This basic differentiation of the forms of capital is important to understand how Bourdieu employs and frames capital.

### ***Bourdieu's Theoretical Framework***

When examining how Bourdieu's applies his theoretical framework to capital, several important themes emerge. It is Bourdieu's approach to capital that informs how identity capital will be investigated. Bourdieu's empirical research is based on the French stratified class society and this study will use and apply this framework to the Canadian context, specifically in the workplace, when exploring identity capital.

Instead of reading Bourdieu's works as a set of definitions, it should be understood as "a set of sociological disposition, a certain way of looking at the world" (Brubaker, 1993, p.217). Bourdieu's writings are historically specific and dependent on a particular field; it is his conceptualized "instruments" and "thinking tools" that equips the researcher to engage and explore in different fields and settings (Brubaker, 1993, p.217-219).

Capital is not distributed equally. Bourdieu often employs the analogy of individuals playing a game to illustrate his theoretical framework of how society is structured, transmitted and reproduced. Bourdieu uses a card game to illustrate the cards players are dealt to signify the difference in capital each person possesses when examining the marriage strategies in Béarn, Pyreness (Bourdieu, 1976, p.122). More

importantly, when building on the game analogy, the emphasis is on how an individual's stock of capital contributes and influences "her *relative force in the game*, her *position* in the space of play, and also her *strategic orientation toward the game*" (Bourdieu and Wacquant, 1992, p.99, original emphasis). The amount of capital an individual has greatly influence how the individual strategically plays the game because it defines their position and strength when compared to other players. Thus, an individual's agency is dependent on their repertoire of capital and of others.

According to Bourdieu, the acquisition of capital is strategic. Individuals engaging in the game must play with their investment strategies, both consciously and unconsciously, in their pursuit of capital in all its forms. This is because Bourdieu "assumes a fundamental link between actions and interests, between the practices of agents and the interests which they knowingly or unknowingly pursue" (Thompson, 1991, p.16). Furthermore, the very action of individuals engaging in the game "presupposes a total and unconditional investment, a practical and unquestioning belief, in the game and its stakes" (Thompson, 1991, p.14). It is through identity performances aiming to acquire capital that distinction and reproduction is achieved.

Bourdieu's game analogy also serves another purpose: to illustrate how the game itself sustains and reflects the social structure, class dynamics and politics in societies. The distribution of capital is connected with Bourdieu's notion of distinction and reproduction. Capital is distributed unequally because individuals have differential access to different forms of capital. This distribution is reflected in societal structures that aim to maintain and reproduce the status quo. Bourdieu demonstrates this framework through the education system because individuals endowed with certain

privileged capital are rewarded compared to those who are not. The transmission of capital in the education system is a reflection and validation of power and symbolic relationships between classes (Bourdieu, 1977, p.487-492).

However, the valorization of capital is not fixed. Capital can be discredited and devalued in the market in order to preferentially differentiate individuals (Bourdieu and Wacquant, 1992, p.99). This demonstrates how an individual's capital is dependent on a particular context. For example, Bourdieu introduces the concept of *linguistic capital* to describe how language is evaluated in the *linguistic market*. The distinction given to the individual possessing linguistic capital is contingent to the unequal distribution and possession of this form of capital in the market (Bourdieu, 1991, p.56). In this case, the value and worth given to linguistic capital would be diminished when all individuals have the ability and appropriate means to possess the capital. Exclusivity increases the valorization of capital.

Not only is capital dependent on the individual, it is also dependent on the field. By "acknowledging that capital can take a variety of forms is indispensable to explain the structure and dynamics of differentiated societies", Bourdieu and Wacquant value naming different forms of capital in order to gain a comprehensive understanding of the mechanism in each specific field (Bourdieu and Wacquant, 1992, p.119). In other words, to capture the strategic dynamics of distinction, it is important to *name the specific capital* and the *particular field* under investigation because different fields engage with different forms of capital and are valorized accordingly. The relative power of capital in one field does not guarantee its relative strength in another field. The naming of identity

capital as another form of capital allows for a more nuanced approach in examining individual's investment strategies.

Guided by Bourdieu's theoretical framework, this research investigates the Canadian context. Examples of Bourdieu's approach applied in the Canadian context includes the examination of institutionalized capital in devaluating immigrant labour (Bauder, 2003), immigrant's habitus in the labour market (Bauder, 2004), geographies of cultural capital (Waters, 2005; 2006; 2007), immigration and social, cultural and institutionalized distinction (Bauder, 2006), transnational habitus (Kelly and Lusi, 2006) and citizenship as capital (Bauder, 2008). This research follows the framework of applying and exploring this mechanism of differentiation in the Canadian context. In particular, the exploration will be focused on how identity capital is deployed in an immigrant-serving agency, especially on the identity presentation to newcomers in Canada.

### ***Identity Capital***

Canadian James Côté coined the term identity capital and further elaborated the concept in his writings (Côté, 1996; 1997; 2002; 2005; 2007; Côté and Levine, 2002; Côté and Schwartz, 2002). Côté proposes identity capital as a way to capture the resources available in the social-structural period of late modern society (Côté, 1996, p.424). Côté differentiates identity capital from human capital, social capital and cultural capital theoretically (Côté, 1996; 2005; 2007; Côté and Levine, 2002). His empirical research on identity capital focuses on youth (Côté, 1997).



At the crux, the concept of identity capital arose to address how human capital and cultural capital does not efficiently bridge the understanding of how individuals negotiate their lives in late modern institutions (Côté, 1996; 1997; 2002; 2005; 2007; Côté and Levine, 2002). Identity capital encompasses and interrelates with human capital, cultural capital and social capital (Côté and Levine, 2002, p.163). However, it is also distinct because it includes “a set of psychosocial skills” (Côté and Levine, 2002, p.157). Identity capital is a valuable mechanism in understanding individual negotiation in their identity presentation, it is “a set of strengths, not a bag of Machiavellian tricks”; individuals have to use their identity strategically (Côté and Levine, 2002, p.164).

Identity capital is derived from the synthesization of psychology and sociology perspectives on identity formation, agency and culture. Identity capital is defined as “the varied resources deployable on an individual basis that represents how people most effectively define themselves and have others define them, in various contexts” (Côté and Levine, 2002, p.142). Identity capital is comprised of two assets that are deployable: tangible and intangible resources.

*Tangible resources* are defined as such because these assets are “socially visible”. Examples include academic credentials and group membership which can act as “passports” into various social and institutional arenas. *Intangible resources* are defined as psychological abilities, such as the ability to critically reflect, negotiate and understand one’s character. These internal and external identity assets are important because both contribute to an individual’s ability to maneuver and strategize through various social environments (Côté, 1996, p.426; Côté, 2005, p.224-225; Côté and Levine, 2002, p.144-145, 157).

Identity capital is acquired through *identity exchanges*. These social interactions involve an individual engaging with another person where there is a common understanding of what constitutes an acceptable response for individuals. It is through these “mutual acceptances” that allows an individual to gain identity capital because the stock of “who they are” increases (Côté and Levine, 2002, p.143). The ability to be self-aware, or “identity performance”, highlights the potential agency individuals have in constructing their identity (Bucholtz, 2009, p.24). Identity exchanges may be further complicated by factors such as transnationalism because socialization does not only occur at one site, but at multiple sites simultaneously.

*Identity capital acquisition* refers to the stock of identity capital an individual has at a given time (Côté and Levine, 2002, p.143). The accumulation of successful identity exchanges increases an individual’s identity capital. With each successful identity exchange, the possibility of future identity capital dividends increases. Thus, identity capital is strengthened by use and exchanges.

Identity capital also encompasses an individual’s personality. This is important because an individual’s characteristics and sense of self “facilitates free movement among diverse groups and contexts... the mental wherewithal people can possess as part of an agentic personality; the ability to move, both concretely and abstractly, among groups and networks with diverse interests (a multiplexity); and the adaptive ability to combine diverse resources as the situation dictates” (Côté and Levine, 2002, p.158-159). By acquiring identity capital through social interactions, an individual’s adaptive ability to effectively maneuver various changing social conditions increases. Thus, these psychosocial assets and skills allow individuals to creatively adapt, construct, strategize

and present their identity depending on the social situation by recognizing and responding to social cues.

The ability to speak another language can be seen as an important component to identity capital because languages allow an individual to gain a second identity (Liang, 2006, p.145). It can be argued that “social identity and ethnicity are in large part established and maintained through language” (Gumperz and Cook-Gumperz, 1982, p.7). When engaging in conversation, what is important to achieve is *communicative flexibility*, the “ability to adapt strategies to the audience and to see the signs, both direct and indirect, so that the participants are able to monitor and understanding at least some of each other’s meaning” (Gumperz and Cook-Gumperz, 1982, p.14). This ability to read face-to-face communication describes an individual’s identity capital. Language can be seen as being a part of the tangible resource, the ability to communicate; and intangible resource, the way of thinking, to identity capital.

As a reflection of Canada’s immigration history, more individuals in Canada are fluent in languages other than the official languages (Statistics Canada, 2006c). Heritage language is a language other than English, French or non-Aboriginal language in Canada (Harrison, 2000, p.14). Heritage language cannot be assumed as being crucial to ethnic membership because it gives an impression of a “hierarchy of authenticity” and religious faith may be the central component to the ethnic group, such as the case of Jewish ethnicity (Myhill, 2003, p.81-82). Heritage language is an important component to ethnic culture but it is not the permanent marker for membership in an ethnic group.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> However, as Ghosh critically argues, components such as immigrant group and generation factor in judging the heritage language in the diaspora (Ghosh, Oral Review, August 25, 2009).

Language is further complicated by the degree of fluency and mastery as perceived by individuals and others. Mah (2005) demonstrates how some second-generation Chinese individuals retain their oral language ability rather than language literacy. Beynon et al (2003) found that teachers of Chinese and Punjabi ancestries market their language ability differently based on their identity exchanges, such as learning the grammatical rules and norms at schools or the communication aspects at home or in the community. Shi and Lu (2007) illustrate how second-generation adolescents and young adults embrace or reject Chinese in the context of identity exchanges framed by their perceived benefits and costs, which links identity as a form of capital. For the second-generation, the ability to be fluent in one's heritage language can be understood as an investment in an individual's identity capital because it can symbolically indicate to another person that the individual accepts their ethnic culture.

Overall, the communicative ability in various languages is an asset to an individual's identity capital. Language gives individuals additional resources to respond to the changing environment as well as presenting, or withholding, their identity in a certain manner. Thus, language is an important component of identity capital because it is an added guide for the individual to read the situation correctly. This enables individuals to have greater potential to strategically and purposefully negotiate their identities to maximize their goals.

### ***Bourdieu and Identity Capital***

Côté's conceptualization of identity capital is an extension of Bourdieu's theoretical framework to capital. Bourdieu's approach to capital is found in Côté's

identity capital: a resource the individual invests in and the accumulation of capital is intimately formed by the individual's social environment, whether developed consciously or unconsciously (Côté and Levine, 2002, p.145; Côté, 2005, p.2206). Identity capital, like other forms of capital, allows for the individual to strategically maneuver and negotiate in situations using a different set of resources available to them.

The key distinction of identity capital compared to Bourdieu's approach to capital is that identity capital is not limited to class. This is an important difference between identity capital and cultural capital because the latter is intertwined with class tastes and preferences. According to Côté, tastes and preferences are constantly changing. Meaning, even if one's cultural capital is an avenue to group membership, another form of 'capital' is needed to account for and to explain how individuals adjust and navigate in different social environments (Côté, 1996, p.424-425). To employ Bourdieu's game analogy, identity capital is the ability that facilitates individuals to fluidly play *different* games.

Identity capital can encompass cultural capital when the individual believes that status is beneficiary to that particular membership. However, identity capital also includes memberships that are not considered to be cultural capital, such as membership to gangs. What is important in belonging to various group memberships is personal identification and group validation (Côté, 1996, p.425; Côté and Levine, 2002, p.156-159). Identity capital may be better suited to the Canadian immigration context because it is important to move between different social environments. Thus, identity capital captures the resources that facilitate the ability to move in various contexts.

Immigrants may also bring in identity capital that reflects their place of migration. Identity capital is embedded into societal concepts of individualistic and collective societies with the former associated with “choice, innovation and self-investment” and the later with “duty, following norms, and investing in symbiotic relationships with others” (Côté and Levine, 2002, p.163). As Kelly and Lusi (2006) illustrate, economic, social and cultural capital are valorized in a transnationalized habitus. Thus, immigrants may also bring identity capital that is valued in their place of migration.

Identity capital being separated from class may be an oversimplification. As the interactionality perspective demonstrates, identity intersects and is constructed through multiple social locations and differences, such as gender, race and ethnicity, sexual orientation, socioeconomic status, life stage, nationality, ability, religious affiliation, etc. Furthermore, these divisions do not “add up” together; rather, they are “constituting each other” (Yuval-Davis, 2006, p.200). The class element in identity capital cannot be ignored because how identity capital emerges directly reflects the individual’s social environment and context. Identity intersecting at multiple points shows that “no group is homogenous, as there are many differences between its individual members” (Ludvig, 2006, p.246). Employees in a workplace share one common plane, but their identity capital encompasses various intersections.

Bourdieu’s theoretical approach to capital is found in the conceptualization of identity capital. The Canadian immigration context with its unfolding ‘mosaic’ translates to individuals needing the ability to move fluidly and flexibly in different social contexts. In this case, identity capital is applicable and important for individuals to strategically

navigate and negotiate successfully in the changing environment. Thus, identity capital can be understood as an additional repertoire to an individual's capital.

### ***Research Questions***

In terms of empirical research, identity capital has been explored quantitatively (Côté, 1997; 2002; Côté and Schwartz, 2002) and qualitatively (Sundar, 2008). Sundar's (2008) research is particularly interesting because this study demonstrates how a person's ethnicity can be deliberately framed and advantageously used as a resource. Through interviews, Sundar (2008) discovers how second-generation South-Asian Canadian youths, between the ages of 18-25, purposefully and strategically used their identity capital to "Brown it up" and "bring down the Brown" to maximize their goals. Building on this research, this study aims to explore how identity capital can be used to navigate and negotiate in a multicultural workplace environment.

Recalling Bourdieu, the worth and value of capital is dependent on the field because different fields will have their own valorization of capital. The field chosen in this research is a multicultural immigrant-serving agency. This workplace environment is particularly interesting because employees can apply their migration experiences and ethnic identities when they interact with their immigrant clients and immigrant or non-immigrant colleagues.

Besides exploring identity capital in the context of the workplace environment, adult's identity capital has not been investigated. Previous research examined identity capital with American or Canadian youths (Côté, 1997; 2002; Côté and Schwartz, 2002; Sundar, 2008). Guided by Bourdieu's theoretical approach to capital, this empirical

research aims to explore and document how settlement workers in a multicultural settlement organization present and deploy their identity capital. The interviews conducted were based on these specific research questions:

1. In *what social situations* do individuals deploy identity capital?
2. In *which way* do individuals deploy identity capital in these situations?
3. *How* is identity capital strategically performed by individuals?
4. What *interests* do these performances serve?

## **METHODOLOGY**

This research examines how identity capital is presented at Newcomer Centre of Peel (NCP), a multicultural immigrant-serving settlement organization. A discussion on the recent developments in Peel regarding immigration will be first presented along with a brief introduction to Newcomer Centre of Peel. This is followed by the research design, data collection and analysis.

### ***The Region of Peel***

The Region of Peel is located west of the City of Toronto, encompassing the cities of Brampton and Mississauga, and the Town of Caledon. The population growth of Peel at 17.2 percent from 988,958 in 2001 to 1,159,405 in 2006 designates Peel as one of the fastest growing regions in Canada (Mohanty and DeCoito, 2009, p.iv). As a result, Peel is the seventh largest growth area in Canada and the second greatest in Ontario. This population growth is attributed mostly to immigration, as the primary choice for



newcomers and as a region for secondary migration of newcomers from the City of Toronto (Agrawal, 2009). In 2006, Peel had the second highest percentage of immigrants in the Greater Toronto Area at 43.1 percent; this figure puts Peel behind Toronto, at 44.4 percent and ahead of York at 39.1 percent. Most of the immigrant residents in Peel are recent immigrants<sup>2</sup>: 1 in 10 of Peel's immigrant population arrived between 2001 and 2006. In 1991, the immigrant population was at 36.1 percent of the population compared to 43.1 percent in 2001, which means over a ten-year period, there was a substantial increase of 60.8 percent (Wu, 2008, p.6).

Within Peel, there are differences between Brampton, Mississauga and Caledon. From 2001 to 2006, Brampton grew the fastest at 33.3 percent, followed by Caledon at 12.7 percent and Mississauga at 9.1 percent. In 2006, Mississauga had the highest proportion of immigrants at 51.6 percent, with Brampton at 47.8 percent and Caledon at 20.8 percent. South Asians<sup>3</sup> account for the single largest immigrant group in Peel at 30.1 percent (Mohanty and DeCoito, 2009, p.iv). More than half of Peel's immigrants are born in Asia and the Middle East, and 27 percent from European countries. India accounts for 20 percent of the immigrant population: Mississauga having the largest proportion with 52 percent, Brampton with 48 percent and Caldeon with 21 percent. The differences within Peel are also apparent when examining the immigrant composition.

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<sup>2</sup> Recent immigrants are individuals who immigrated to Canada in the last five years, as defined by the 2006 Statistics Canada Census. Thus, recent immigrants are those who immigrated to Canada between the timeframe of January 1, 2001 and May 16, 2006 (Wu, 2008, p. 9).

<sup>3</sup> The 'South Asian' rubric accounts for the geographic South Asian subcontinent, including India, Pakistan, Sri Lanka, Bangladesh and Nepal. As Van der Veer observes, "those who do not think of themselves as Indians before migration become Indians in the diaspora" (Van der Veer as cited by Patel, 2006, p.151). This term collapses a diverse group of individual which differs, and not limited to factors such as geographically, linguistically, ethnically and culturally. For instance, Ghosh (2007) separates the Indian Bengalis and the Bangladeshis to demonstrate transnational social ties distinctly affect and shape individual's settlement experiences instead of there being a singular South Asian housing experience.

For instance, 52 percent of the immigrants in Brampton and Mississauga were born in Asia compared to in Caledon, where 73 percent were born in Europe (Wu, 2008, p.4-5).

In 2006, 50 percent of Peel's residents self-identified as 'visible minority'<sup>4</sup>, and the growth of the 'visible minority' population in Peel between 2001 and 2006 was 52.1 percent, which is significantly higher than the national average, at 27.2 percent, and Ontario, at 27.5 percent (Mohanty and DeCoito, 2009, p.iv). In Peel, South Asians were the largest number of visible minority at 272, 760, followed by Blacks at 95, 570 and Chinese at 54, 285. For the South Asian category in 2006, 1 in 4 Peel residents self-identified themselves as South Asians: 1 in 3 Brampton residents, 1 in 5 Mississauga residents and 1 in 50 Caledon residents (Wu, 2008, p.4-5).

Linguistic diversity has increased because of immigration in Peel. Sixty-eight percent of Peel residents spoke only English at home, and within Peel, 66 percent of Mississauga and Brampton residents spoke English only compared to 92 percent of Caledon residents. Twenty-seven percent of Peel residents are said to speak only a non-official language at home. In Peel, Punjabi is reported as the most common non-official language spoken at home. For instance, 1 in 8 Brampton residents spoke only Punjabi at home. In Caledon, Italian was the most commonly spoken non-official language (Wu, 2008, p.4-5).

The Region of Peel, especially in the context of a multicultural immigrant-serving settlement organization, provides an interesting context to study identity capital because ethnic diversity is rapidly changing in a short period of time. Studies specifically examining immigration and the impact in the Peel Region are emerging. One in

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<sup>4</sup> The 'visible minority' banner includes 'person, other than Aboriginal peoples, who are non-Caucasian in race or non-white in colour' as defined by the Employment Equity Act (Wu, 2008, 10).

particular is the “Peel Immigration Project” which was commissioned by the Regional Municipality of Peel in a series of five discussion papers that examined successful integration strategies for immigrants in Peel in areas such as human services needs with a focus on geographic and neighbourhood considerations (Wayland, 2009); community social capital and networks (Galabuzi and Teelucksingh, 2009); and human capital of newcomer families and their children (Wayland and Goldberg, 2009).

### *Newcomer Centre of Peel*

Newcomer Centre of Peel (NCP) is located at 165 Dundas St. West, Mississauga. This multicultural immigrant-serving organization works with individuals from the Region of Peel in English and 30 other languages. Established in 1992, Newcomer Centre of Peel was formerly known as the Peel Adult Learning Centre (PALC) until the name officially changed on January 1, 2009. NCP’s commitment and philosophy aim to empower its clients in a respectful and welcoming manner. By offering a wide range of settlement services and programs for youth, adults and the elderly, NCP is a family oriented agency that is a ‘one-stop shopping centre’ for newcomers. Examples of services and programs include, but are not limited to: Global Business Centre (GBC), where newcomers receive assistance in establishing a new business; Immigrant Settlement Adaptation Program (ISAP), where newcomers receive guidance in their settlement needs; Language Instruction for Newcomers to Canada (LINC), where newcomers receive lessons in improving their reading, writing, listening and conversation skills in English; Multicultural Settlement Education Partnership (MSEP), where newcomer families receive information and are being connected to available services in the school

and community; and the Resource Centre (RC), where newcomer youths receive support in job searches, homework and university application (NCP).

### ***Research Design***

Participants were recruited at NCP if they worked at GBC, ISAP and MSEP because the focus was on services that directly serve adults. Data was collected through the use of in-depth, semi-structured individual interviews. An Interview Guide Approach was developed to allow for specific topics to explore and enable the interviewer to build a conversation with the participants (Paton, 2002, p.343). Using the Interview Guide Approach allowed for a degree of flexibility which facilitates an elaboration of participants' own experiences and interpretations (Paton, 2002, p.349).

This qualitative research involved fifteen in-depth interviews, consisting of 5 males and 10 females. For confidentiality reason, the ethnic background of the participants will not be named. The participants represented a wide range of ethnic and linguistic diversity, including immigrants and Canadian-born individuals. A numbering system will be used in the text below to protect the anonymity of the participants and all ethnic identifiers and job titles have been removed. The numbering system was done randomly and does not reflect the order of interviews. The interviews conducted ranged from 21 minutes to over 60 minutes. Fourteen interviews were audiotaped and one was not at the participant's request, notes were taken by the interviewer instead. Interviews were later transcribed verbatim by the researcher.

Data collection, transcription and analysis occurred simultaneously in order to fill the gaps from the previous interviews and explore new questions that emerged. Interview

transcriptions were first analyzed individually and later collectively by the researcher in search for themes and patterns using open coding (Neuman, 2006, p.460-464). The thematic grouping of responses was informed by the proposed research questions.

The main challenge during data analysis was the range of participants' responses; based on the interviews, the deployment of identity capital is largely an unconscious decision which meant the researcher had to interpret the participants' words and experiences. The researcher's own identity and experiences, as a foreign-born female who is a 'visible minority', may have influenced not only the interpretation of the research findings but also the manner which the data was collected in the interviewing process.

## RESULTS

The research questions of exploring in what *social situations* identity capital is deployed; in *which way* do individuals deploy identity capital; how is identity capital strategically performed; and what interests do these performances serve informed the findings of this empirical investigation. The findings can be broadly summarized by the following: first, identity capital is deployed in social situations with the clients, colleagues and supervisor in the workplace; second, the deployment of identity capital, through greeting, body language, finding connecting pieces or the method of communication is done unconsciously; third, the strategic deployment of identity capital is individualized to the audience; and fourth, identity presentations has the potential to benefit the individual, the audience and the community. The contents of these results

varied for each participant. In presenting the results, selected quotations are used to illustrate the participants' viewpoints and experiences.

### ***Identity Capital and Social Situations: "Different Approach but Same Message"***

The purpose of the research was to examine identity in the workplace, but as the participants revealed, identity cannot be confined in one social location. Factors outside the workplace greatly influence the meaning of identity. When participants described their identity, various identifiers were used, such as personality characteristics, gender, values, educational background, marital status and immigration history. How participants defined and understood "who they are" is their stock of identity capital because knowing "who you are" allows participants to present, withhold or increase characteristics based on their strategic readings of given situations. As demonstrated by the participants, identity encompasses and intersects with a number of factors. Participants further articulated that the term identity itself is complex and elusive because identity is seen as constantly evolving. Thus, identity capital cannot be fixed as it is a process of becoming.

For participants, even though their role in the workplace varies at home and community, as a mother, father, daughter or son, there is a sense that certain personality characteristic does not change. Features such as being resourceful, helpful, patient and reflective are understood as "constant" (I01) and not as a "work-hat I just take off and it hangs, it is with me all the time" (I03).

In the settlement serving agency, it is important to establish trust and comfort with the client<sup>5</sup>. Participants talked about the importance of first impression in building rapport with clients. Individuals deploy their identity capital in the initial meeting through greetings and doing a quick visual scan of the client's body language. Identity capital continues to be deployed in future meetings but what changes is participants' having a better understanding of the client because of their past identity exchanges in knowing the style of the client.

The deployment of identity capital is not limited to the client. Relationships with colleagues and with their supervisors have elements of individuals deploying identity capital. Like the relationship with the clients, individuals talked about how past identity exchanges allowed them to know the style, differences and similarities between the colleagues. Examples given include knowing how to give constructive criticism and knowing each other's sensitive areas, or "soft spots" (I06). One important difference individuals described is the difference between their relationships with clients compared with colleagues is that the clients want something from you whereas you may want some information from your colleague.

Participants described their identity presentation with their supervisors and with the colleagues, as being cordial, professional and being part of a team. However, one interesting element presented was that some participants noted how *their own ethnicity* or *culture* affected their relationship with their supervisor. Individual's coming from both individualistic and collectivist societies described their identity capital when interacting with their supervisor as "obeying" (I11) or adhering to "a peer system" (I06). Even if

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<sup>5</sup> The word client refers to newcomers who are assessing services at NCP. The word 'client' is misleading because the relationship can be described as a partnership between both parties.

participants did not mention their own ethnicity or culture being part of their identity capital in the identity exchanges with their supervisor, participants often mentioned how identity capital resources were involved when interacting with their supervisor, such as having the supervisor set the tone of the interaction.

The final product will be the same, it is just how we say it ...I treat them all the same, I probably will say the same thing to my client as to my boss, but it just the way you say it is different... it is just a different approach, the message is the same... (I12)

This demonstrates how individual *wants* or *goals* for certain things dictate the style and identity capital activated. Achieving the end goal is what leads to certain strategic pathways and the deployment of identity capital is not based on *who* the audience is.

Overall, identity capital is deployed in social situations with the participant's clients, colleagues and supervisor in the workplace. The practice and activation of identity capital occurs right from the beginning of interactions and through the continuation of identity exchanges, the reading of that particular individual increases based on identity capital acquisition.

### ***Deploying Identity Capital: "Your Body Automatically Adjusts and Reacts"***

Identity capital deployment by the participant is especially stressed in the initial meeting with the client in making the environment safe and comfortable. Building rapport is important in the settlement sector because it facilitates clients' openness which is key for participants to better understand what needs and services are appropriate. One participant referred to these as small and minor "little strategies" (I14) in the beginning of



the first meeting as being important because it matters in the process of establishing trust. Greeting, body language, finding connecting pieces and the method of communication are all examples of individuals deploying identity capital.

Some participants mentioned greetings as strategies whereas other did not. The greeting can be looked upon as strategic because individuals are using their identity capital when presenting themselves to the client. This is an illustration of how identity capital may be consciously or unconsciously activated, and in considering Bourdieu's approach- always strategic. Even individuals who do not share the same cultural background quickly acquired this form of identity capital through past identity exchanges. Furthermore, it is by this identity capital acquisition that individuals know when to present what others may view as "basic" greetings, such as whether or not to shake the client's hand. By performing such an action and not shying away from these forms of contact, it conveys signs of respect and understanding of cultural sensitivity to the client. This highlights two important points: first, knowing which clients to deploy identity capital; and second, knowing which identity capital to deploy in a given situation. Thus, it is through identity capital acquisitions individuals accumulate identity capital in recognizing the contextual cues and cultural codes in the greeting of clients.

For participants who spoke in the same non-official language as the client, cultural codes are embedded within language that activates the presentation of identity capital. This is revealed in subtle ways:

My cultural clients, personally, from my experience, do not like [job title] to be too professional. They like to be able to have that comfort level, to be able to talk to us. (I09)

There are certain mannerisms, certain customs in [culture] you do not do in English. (I02)

Individuals interacting with their cultural clients are not just “speaking the common language” but are also strategically deploying the communication style that is appropriate. This may be done unconsciously, such as using the style that demonstrates an understanding of how conversation should “flow”, whether formally or informally. It has to be stressed that individuals treat all clients the same, such as being respectful and giving the correct information. However, participants also discussed perceiving their cultural clients feeling that there is no judgment involved and not having to explain the client’s culture and mentality as being important to them. By speaking the same language and engaging in the embedded cultural rules, individuals strategically present to the client a certain aspect of themselves, whether consciously or unconsciously. This deployment of identity capital illustrates the participant’s understanding of that particular culture to the client which is understood as being important to the client.

This strategic deployment of identity capital in the form of conversational style is not limited to individuals sharing the same culture. Individuals who do not share the same cultural background can acquire this particular identity capital through identity exchanges. Even though individuals speak different languages one can participate in the facial expressions and mannerism style.

What I mean by linguistic behaviour, everybody talks differently, everybody has different concepts in their head... I speak [ethnicity] which is more that [same ethnicity] as compared to [another ethnicity]. (I12)

I don't plan it, but my body actually, my way of attitude, the way of approaching them, is definitely adjusted to base on my experiences... And your body is already aware of it. (I07)

This deployment of identity capital as demonstrated by the participants may be done consciously or unconsciously, but the presentation is always strategic. This particular finding is important because unlike Sundar (2008) illustration of individuals deploying identity capital between individuals of the *same* cultural background, this example is of individuals with *different* cultural background. In other words, body language, inflection of the voice, styles of presentation, and gestures can become intangible resources for individuals of different cultural backgrounds through identity exchanges. This conceptualization expands an individual's identity capital as being only involving their *own* cultural background to *various* cultural backgrounds. The acquisition of identity capital captures how identity capital facilitates the strategic and fluid movement of individuals in different social environments. Thus, an individual's identity capital has the potential to not only include their own cultural background, but also to expand to include other cultures.

### ***Strategic Performances of Identity Capital: "Every Person is Different"***

Participants revealed two mechanisms in building rapport with clients using identity capital. These avenues in creating a "background of commonness" include relating to age and immigration history.

Age was a factor that participants mentioned, some in the way they viewed themselves, but for others, the way they perceived how others viewed them. Both of

these are important to identity capital because participants described not only how age was used but also how it was negotiated. For individuals who considered themselves older, there was a sense that their experiences gave them an insight into the client's needs. For individuals who considered themselves younger, there was a sense that the label of being 'young' placed upon them by some of the clients and colleagues. From these different ends of the spectrum, individuals used that image, whether understood as positive or negative. For those who were seen as 'older' and 'more experienced', it was helpful because it was perceived that the clients felt that the participant understood, experienced and had knowledge about the challenges that they are currently facing.

For those who were seen as 'younger', there was a sense that the clients may have a harder time taking their advice, yet at the same time, it has the potential to create a sense of bonding with the client when relating about their experiences. For instance, participants talked about how clients express a sense of relief when they find out that the individual speaks the non-official language, whether they immigrated here as a child or were born here, because that gives the client hope for their children and that their culture will be maintained. Thus, age can be seen as an aspect of identity capital because an individual can use it for a desired outcome.

Just as how language can create a "similarity piece", it can also be used to differentiate individuals. Participants discussed the intricacies in languages because of local dialects, sayings and speed of communication. This is important because just as there is no monolithic culture and customs for people who speak the language, how someone practices and uses language is a reflection of their environment. For instance, some participants talked about learning the language in an educational setting and

sometimes mixing words with English. Participants mentioned how clients were able to quickly pick up these phrases or words used in the same language but not commonly used in another particular region. Two responses were given and both reflect identity capital.

First, few participants discussed how this “mixing of language” creates another bond with the client. Individuals who spoke two languages or more talked about sometimes thinking in one language and having difficulties in translating certain words or phrases right off the top of their head. These experiences are expressed to the client and it is perceived that another common bond is formed. By sharing and relating the experience, another connection piece emerges.

Second, as language is judged by the client, the participant can deploy the specific identity capital based on their listening to the client. This deployment of identity capital reflects how through identity exchanges participants have with various clients increases their current identity capital acquisition. For instance, a participant reveals how in the past, some clients used language to identify the participant because the language spoken at times reflect the participant’s background of learning the heritage language in Canada because there are words that mix the heritage language and English. Through identity exchanges, the participant acquired the ability to pick up the specific dialect the client uses and is able to respond in that dialect.

I actually have catered my [language] to meet their needs. So, I would use, for example, [certain] dialect, or forms of words [when speaking to clients from one area]... and I have picked out words that they have used and I would use it to replace the ones I have so that they understand it better, so I modified it in that sense... it is automatic now. (I15)

The presentation of identity capital may be done unconsciously, but the ability to automatically judge and deploy the proper dialect reflects individuals having the resources to present themselves differently based on the audience. By changing how the client defines them, identity capital has been strategically deployed. This demonstrates individuals making strategic identity choices to allow for a common ground to be established with the client. This finding illustrates individuals are judged by their identity presentation.

The ability to connect is demonstrated in different ways reflect a person's identity capital. Some participants discussed adjusting their body language and style of presentation based on the client. The method of communication may change but the end result is the same. The goal is to have the client open up and it is not limited to culture, for instance, it can be about politics or experiences. What is strategic is that it depends on what the individual knows best and judges that commonality is of interest to the audience (I12). During identity exchanges, different forms of identity capital are being strategically deployed by changing the style of communication:

I will say those who are a lot outgoing, I think I will have to be a little reserved in terms of opposite... but when a person is more reserved , then I guess I got to be more out there, friendly, so that they can actually open up to me and tell me their problems. (I09)

If a person is not wanting to be verbal, then I would start talking a lot more of the services we offer. (I04)

Every person is different... I try to do like a visual assessment, very superficial, to see if they are a little bit closed off in terms of body language, if they are a little more open than I know that I can sit closer to them...so I know how close I can get to them... so there are different techniques depending on the person that walks in the door. (I08)

The deployment of identity capital illustrated is all based on the reading of the client. These techniques used during identity exchanges are important because it builds trust and demonstrates to the client that the participant is listening and responding to the needs and concerns of the client.

The reading of the client includes the culture and the personality of the individual. For the personality of the individual, participants discussed looking at when the client comes to them and what mood the client is exhibiting. For instance, using humour is dependent on the client, as to when it is appropriate, but also on the individual knowing the kind of humour that the client understands. Using humour is risky because the other person may take offence. One participant talked about making jokes that are “isolated” and outside from the other person.

[Jokes are the same, but] it is how you say them, do you mean it. If you say it sincerely, and mean it, people would know. People would know what is real and what is fake. They would know it comes from you, or is it just a show to put on.  
(I12)

Another step to making jokes is not is what is being said, but rather the delivery of the joke. The *way* the joke is said is an aspect of the person’s identity capital. The intangible resources of body language and tone are judged by the audience as well as what the joke is. These intangible presentations may be even more important because that is where the audience reads the meaning behind the joke.

The example of the joke is an example of how practices of identity capital can only be considered strategic when the identity presentation is judged to be genuine and real by the audience. For instance, the attempt of humour will not work if the right

identity capital resources are not deployed. If the identity presentation is perceived to be “forced” or “fake”, then the identity capital has not been deployed successfully.

Identity capital is also illustrated in the presentation of material. Some participants emphasized engaging with the clients without looking at the “national” commonalities because there are more determinants. Other participants discussed how the “national” features are helpful because it gave an added insight on the style presentation that should be used. Both of these styles reflect identity capital being activated because the individual changes their presentation based on the reading of the other person. For the participants that discussed not using culture as a guide to present the material, examples of reading and responding to the client was based on their body language or personality traits.

Using culture as a guide to how to present information is a resource of identity capital. Adapting the linguistic style of others discussed earlier is also based on culture. The examples illustrate using culture as a guide may have been exercised unconsciously. One participant discussed past identity exchanges informing present identity exchanges is to how to “deliver” the material to the clients based on the client’s culture. By knowing the styles of the different clients based on their culture, the participant deploys the respective identity capital accordingly. By strategically going through the “culture-to-culture” step, the participant avoids “hiccups”, where individuals may misunderstand why the material is presented in such a manner. For instance, one method of presenting may cause individuals to be angry but that exact method is needed for others. The participant was clear that there was no “toolbox” – which tools to use for which client, but it is something that comes automatically.



Taming each other. Taming, it is like animal <laughs> it understanding each other. There are some stages...but you know, certain point onwards, it is more like human-human interactions, not culture-to-culture relationships. (I07)

The more identity exchanges that occur during the passage of time allows for the strategic adaptation of one's identity capital. For the participant, "culture-to-culture" relationships occur first but at a certain point onwards, the "human-to-human" relationship can begin. It is by going through the "culture-to-culture" step that the participant can go to the "human-to-human" relationship "faster, easier and safer". If one is stuck on playing the "culture-to-culture" relationship, they will go "crazy" (I07). The goal is to get to the "human-to-human" relationship but it is the steps involved based on the client that the individual can strategically and safely achieve it.

The difference in approach is interesting because for participants who talked about reading the personality traits it seems that this "culture-to-culture" step has been jumped. Alternatively, this "step" may be automatic. Both "steps" end up at the "human-to-human" relationship.

Identity capital can also be seen when individuals relate to their immigration history. Whether the participants themselves came to Canada at a young age (1.5 generation), older (first generation) or were born in Canada (second, third or fourth generation, etc.), there was a sense of knowing the struggles, the hardship it takes on the family and the resilience newcomers have. Individuals also mentioned traveling and living in another country giving them an understanding of experiencing a new country, encountering culture shock and learning about other cultures. The identity of being an immigrant is useful because it gives participants a connection piece with the client and

can be considered an identity capital because it gives individuals intangible resources to how to relate to the client.

Being a 'visible minority' is also useful in the settlement sector. Having a multi-facilitated background allowed individuals to talk about facing the Canadian culture and discrimination. Even if the individual was not a visible minority, the differences between the immigrant culture and the Canadian culture can be discussed.

If they are not white... [example of a client disclosing discriminatory practices], I would relate that as well so that is another shared experience. I try not so much to emphasize cultural, nationalism or religion because for myself, they are not set, static identifiers, they are so flexible and fluid. (I02)

This example also relates to how sharing common languages can be used as a connecting piece to clients. Individuals described themselves as "eclectic" and "cosmopolitan" but in specific instances they would draw on experiences of being discriminated. The above situation demonstrates which identity may be important to highlight, if the client is experiencing issues of discrimination, or the example before of mixing languages, then which similarity, or identity capital, is drawn. These examples are strategic because the individual know *when* to discuss these experiences and that these discussion will allow clients to build trust and rapport.

Overall, individuals are able to strategically adapting their identity capital as more identity exchanges occur. This passage of time allows individuals to read and know which manner to present information. The deployment of identity capital is catered to the person one is having the conversation within a particular social environment. Thus, an individual's identity capital changes constantly as the situation changes.

### ***Benefits to Identity Presentation: “You Can Only Benefit From Being with Other Cultures”***

In the settlement sector, the participant’s identity performances have the potential to benefit the individual, the audience and the community. Unlike Sundar’s (2008) study that discovered the benefits to the *individual* when identity capital is deployed, this research demonstrates how identity capital can be beneficial to the other person who is involved in the identity exchange.

One clear example of how identity capital benefits the participants will be how new clients are being referred to them through word-of-mouth. This referral means that clients felt the participants’ demonstrated cultural sensitivity and competence that was beyond satisfactory in the presentation and the service that was given to them.

For the client, identity presentation helps with the understanding that the participant cares and lessens miscommunication. Participants noted that clients are extremely grateful and appreciative for the extra attention give to them, such as taking the time to listen, to respond and to engage with the clients and return because of their presentation.

Identity performance benefiting the client, participant and community goes back to the definition of being Canadian given by the participants. Participants described presenting the Canadian identity but there is not one identifier; rather, most discussed being multicultural. The idea of Canada having an “ever changing mosaic” allows for new cultures to be part of the Canadian identity, and in turn, part of the individual’s identity.

The Canadian identity, even though people say there is no Canadian identity, I think there is a Canadian identity in being there is no identity. That is the biggest identity you know. (I12)

By treating clients as soon to be Canadians and for clients to feel accepted allows for the client and their culture to be part of the puzzle that is Canada. By exercising identity capital, individuals are defining the other person. The ability and acceptance to the definition of who is Canadian through the practice of strategic performances means the participants and client learn new cultures which in turn become part of their new culture. This entanglement benefits not only at the individual level, but also at the community.

Identity presentation also enriches the Canadian culture and community because the human factor from identity capital presentations has the potential to increase other forms of capital. Identity capital can be seen as dynamically circulating between individuals. For instance, identity exchanges with an individual may bridge to other individuals that opens social networks and communication. Thus, in line with Bourdieu's vision of capital, identity capital can be strategically deployed, whether deliberately or not, to gain new forms of capital.

## **LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY**

This exploratory research interpreted individual cases of identity capital deployment and future research can verify whether these findings are representative. There are two important limitations in this study.

First, only one multicultural immigrant-serving organization was examined. Researching another settlement organization or one that is not multicultural would elaborate on identity capital in the workplace and whether the resources accumulated are similar or different. Additionally, identity capital was explored through the settlement workers' perspective. It would be interesting to examine the client's perspective as to how identity exchanges occur, especially about the judgment of identity presentation and which attributes are considered to be valorized. Moreover, participants discussed being open to other cultures and genuine. Examining what the client describes and sees as identity presentations as genuine and real would illustrate whether identity capital deployment is strategically used.

Another possibility will be changing the workplace environment. For instance, a participant discussed how working in a multicultural environment allowed the individual to be themselves. The ability to present their identity in another way may reflect the identity capital that they possess is valued in this particular workplace environment but not in another environment. Using Bourdieu's game analogy, their identity capital can be played and valued in one game but not in another. Thus, by being able to deploy their identity capital in a multicultural workplace but not in another workplace is in line with Bourdieu's approach of capital being valorized in different fields.

The second limitation of this study is that characteristics such as time and age of immigration, ethnicity and gender were looked upon homogenously. Glimpses of how identity capital is accumulated and activated varying are illustrated by the finding of how language spoken is valued differently based on the participant's age or how a number of women expressed "nurturing" qualities. Future research could examine the intersections

as to how identity capital is acquired and exercised and how the performance is judged by the audience.

As demonstrated in this research, identity capital is acquired and strengthened by the passing of time and yield unconsciously. Future research examining identity capital may approach the examination of identity capital using a different methodology. For instance, employing longitudinal studies and participatory observation to capture how identity capital is accumulated and the unconscious deployment of individuals in different social environments may uncover how identity capital changes with the environment. Alternatively, using focus groups may demonstrate which identity capital is valued by the participants.

## CONCLUSION

The purpose of this empirical research was to provide a nuanced understanding of how individuals actively and strategically deploy their identity capital and add to the growing body of knowledge regarding this issue. Guided by Bourdieu's theoretical approach to capital, this research explored and documented how settlement workers in a multicultural immigrant-serving agency present and deploy their identity capital. In particular, the investigation focused on:

1. In *what social situations* do individuals deploy identity capital?
2. In *which way* do individuals deploy identity capital in these situations?
3. *How* is identity capital strategically performed by individuals?
4. What *interests* do these performances serve?

Based on these questions, the findings revealed that: i) identity capital is deployed in social situations with the clients, colleagues and supervisor in the workplace; ii) the deployment of identity capital, through greeting, body language, finding connecting pieces or the method of communication is done unconsciously; iii) the strategic deployment of identity capital is individualized to the audience; and iv) identity presentations has the potential to benefit the individual, the audience and the community.

The social environment influences the identity capital being deployed. In the work environment, a participant said that playing a cultural aspect is unprofessional and inappropriate. This may be accounted by the difference of age, for this research explored adults executing identity capital and not youths (as compared to Sundar, 2008). However, the social environment may be the key factor. The participant described another social instance where it was seen as appropriate to play the cultural aspect, their identity capital, whereas in the workplace, it would be a disservice to the client.

One area where the notion of identity capital has been advanced is informed by Bourdieu's vision of capital. As an added repertoire of capital, identity capital can also be seen as potentially increasing other forms of capital. This research clearly illustrated how individuals have different forms of identity capital and the deployment is highly dependent on the social environment and audience.

Participants discussed how being open to new cultures being extremely important in the settlement sector. In this workplace, having experiences of discrimination being a form of identity capital when interacting with the clients unfortunately reflects newcomers feeling social exclusion in Canada and perhaps even Canadians are still facing perceived forms of discrimination.

Overall, identity capital is a useful tool to understand the wide number and range of resources available for individuals to strategically maneuver in various social contexts. In short, we are all chameleons that use different colours to strategically play in our different social environments.



## APPENDIX

### *Interview Guide Approach*

#### Background Information

1. Male ☐ Female ☐

2. Are you born in Canada? Yes ☐ No ☐

If not, what country? \_\_\_\_\_

How long have you been in Canada? \_\_\_\_\_

What is your role? ISAP ☐ MSEP ☐ GBC ☐

How long have you been employed in your current position? \_\_\_\_\_

Have you worked elsewhere before then? \_\_\_\_\_

Where, in what capacity? \_\_\_\_\_

#### Semi Structured Interview Guide

1. What kind of identity would you ascribe to yourself?

Prompts: Gender; Ethnicity; Origin, Occupation, etc.

2. Is your identity important in the way you do your job? Could you tell me how? In which settings?

Prompts: Could you present an example of how you perform your identity

- With clients?
- Supervisors?
- Colleagues?

3. Do you present your identity differently in different situations? Could you explain?

Prompts: Could you present an example of how you perform your identity

- Interviewing process/resume?
- Interaction with colleagues/supervisor/clients?
- Situations with clients? Supervisors? Colleagues?
- How do you know when to present your identity differently?

4. Please tell me about your clients

Probe: Ethnicity; Origin; Background, etc.

5. In the way you present your identity, please tell me what you are trying to achieve.

- Are you trying to meet the expectations of other people? Your employer?
- Is it a conscious decision?
- Who receives any benefits from such presentations?

Additional questions:

1. Is there anything you want to further elaborate on that hasn't been discussed?

Thank you for your time.

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