



Sociological perspectives on identity formation: the culture–identity link and identity capital

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This paper lays the groundwork for understanding identity formation in an interdisciplinary fashion by addressing the problem of how culture and identity are interrelated. I attempt to resolve this problem by framing the “culture–identity link” with concepts representing three social-structural periods at three levels of analysis (the macro, micro, and psychological). The concept of “identity capital” is derived from this framework, depicting how individuals can negotiate life passages in an increasingly individualistic, complex and chaotic world. These formulations place existing research in a broad perspective and suggest avenues for future work.

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Introduction

Recognition of the need to understand the social contexts governing human development has given rise to considerable recent research, as evidenced by this special issue. While progress has been made, there is still a need for an overarching framework that would guide these efforts and produce a coherent body of research. In particular, the question of the extent to which, and the ways in which, culture and identity are interrelated has not been answered in a systematic and empirically testable manner. As a sociologically-oriented social psychologist, I have addressed this problem by constructing a framework that links macro-sociological factors through micro-interactional ones to psychological factors. I refer to this framework as the “culture–identity link”. Below is a brief discussion of this framework (see Côté, 1996, for the original and more complete discussion).

The culture–identity link

The assumptions underlying this framework stem from the *social psychological* tradition in sociology called the “social structure and personality perspective” (House, 1977). In my view, this perspective is suitable to the task at hand because several interrelated levels of analysis are explicitly recognized as necessary for a theory of human social behaviour. These levels are: (1) social structure, which can include political and economic systems; (2) interaction, comprising patterns of behaviour that characterize day-to-day contacts among people in socializing institutions like the family and schools; and (3) personality, which encompasses terms like character, self and psyche, including subcomponents like ego identity.

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Table 1 presents the superordinate concepts of the framework, arranged at their respective levels of analysis and traced through three types of societies. Below, more specific derivative-concepts relevant to identity are specified, illustrating how cultures set the parameters of identity formation. My statements describing key relationships in this framework should be taken as propositions to be argued and tested.

It can be seen in Table 1 that three interrelated levels of analysis (vertically) are postulated to be associated with constructs representing three periods of social-structural stability/change (horizontally), producing a three-by-three typology. The three social-structural periods are meant to portray what has prevailed during the past several centuries among Western societies, and societies influenced by the West. The distinction between pre-modern and early modern corresponds with a widely accepted sociological distinction between folk and urban societies, a distinction that has been referred to in other terms such as agrarian vs. industrial societies, folk vs. urban, or *Gemeinschaft* vs. *Gesellschaft*. In Western societies, this transformation was largely completed during the 19th Century. The early-modern period is considered here to be an era of “modernism” in which production was a defining feature of social relations. Over this century, however, consumption increased in importance as a defining feature of social relations and identity, taking us into late-modern society, where production has declined in relative importance to consumption as technology has supplanted labour and created more surpluses (cf., Gergen, 1991; Giddens, 1991).

At the interactional level, three patterns corresponding to the above social-structural changes can be identified with regard to socializing institutions such as the family and school. These patterns were postulated by Margaret Mead (1970) to denote how social change affects the relationship between socializers and socializees, thereby influencing cultural continuity. Mead refers to these patterns as “figures” or models representing three kinds of culture (cf., Muuss, 1988). The three cultures are “*postfigurative*, in which children learn primarily from their forebears, *cofigurative*, in which both children and adults learn from their peers, and the *prefigurative*, in which adults learn also from their children” (Mead, 1970, p. 1). (Note that her prefixes tend to be counter-intuitive; she uses “post” to refer to the past, and “pre” to refer to the future; see Muuss, 1988, for a discussion of this formulation.)

Associated with pre-modern societies are postfigurative cultures in which the relations between parents and their offspring are governed by traditional norms that are beyond questioning by either parent or child. The postfigurative culture is stabilized by the

Table 1 A framework for the culture–identity link: superordinate concepts

| Level of analysis | Social-structural period | | |
|-------------------|--------------------------|-----------------|----------------|
| Social structure: | Pre-modern→ | Early-modern→ | Late-modern |
| ↑ ↓ | | | |
| Interaction: | Postfigurative→ | Cofigurative→ | Prefigurative |
| ↑ ↓ | | | |
| Personality: | Tradition-directed→ | Inner-directed→ | Other-directed |

coresidence of three generations and the ascription of adult roles as each generation comes of age.

The cofigurative culture is one in which the intergenerational linkage becomes tenuous and offspring look to non-traditional sources for components of their adult identities (e.g. among their contemporaries). Thus, there is a fundamental change in the relation between parent and child, where the authority of the parent can be questioned and where the child can actually give direction to the parent. Consequently, the eventual adult identity of offspring is no longer taken for granted by either parent or child.

Lastly, in the prefigurative culture there is less conception of what the future holds for offspring, and the life-experiences of parents are of less use to offspring, so their guidance is less highly regarded. In fact, in this type of culture, the young can teach and guide their parents to the point of their parents becoming subservient to them in various ways. Hence, the gap between parents and offspring that opened in the cofigurative culture is widened in the prefigurative one. In more contemporary sociological language, this can leave those coming of age with the task of becoming the primary architects of their own identities (cf., Giddens, 1991).

In addition, this framework suggests that through the socializing influence of institutions, cultures nurture certain personality characteristics and thereby encourage the development of certain character-types. Anthropologists like Mead and Ruth Benedict favored this view (e.g. Benedict, 1938; Mead, 1960), but little work has been done since the 1950s. However, the implication is that broad “character-types” should be found that are manifestations of cultural pressures interacting with human temperaments. Accordingly, individual differences in character should be distributed around predominant or modal cultural character-types (cf., Côté, 1993). A relevant formulation that has been very influential in sociology comes from David Riesman (1950).

Riesman argues for three character-types that coincidentally fit with the social-structural and institutional patterns identified above. He argues that a *tradition-directed* character-type characterizes pre-modern type societies, wherein the “important relationships of life [are] . . . controlled by careful and rigid etiquette, learned by the young during the years of intensive socialization that end with initiation into full adult membership” (p. 11). This character-type is heteronomous and “the range of choice . . . is minimal, [so] the apparent social need for an individuated type of character is minimal” (p. 12).

In what correspond to early-modern societies, *inner-directed* character-types emerge as “the principal mode of securing conformity” (p. 14). To counteract the disruptive influences of early industrialization (associated with geographical mobility, urbanization, capital-accumulation, and mass production), individuals are socialized with a metaphorical “gyroscope” which “is implanted early in life by the elders and directed toward generalized but nonetheless inescapably destined goals” (p. 15). Therefore, parents come to see their offspring as “individuals with careers to make” (p. 17), and inner-directed persons exercise choice and initiative, but the general heading and pattern of acceptable behaviour is set before they embark on their careers. The resulting individuality is not a threat to social and economic order because the person is self-governing, being equipped with this gyroscope.

The third character-type arises under conditions that resemble late-modern society, which was emerging when Riesman wrote in the mid-century. As the means of mass production become mastered, and abundance becomes more taken-for-granted, the “scarcity psychology” of the inner-directed is supplanted by an “abundance psychology” that gives rise to what he called the *other-directed* character-type. Accordingly, in the late-

modern society, the over-production that results from technological advances is met with heightened consumerism. In other words, with production problems mastered, a late-modern society needs consumption on a large scale, otherwise capital-accumulation suffers.

Complementary to mass consumption are mass insecurities regarding whether the “right” things are done and said. Now, “other people are the problem, not the material environment” (Riesman, 1950, p. 18), and consumption emerges as a way of identifying one’s loyalties and relationships. Consequently, the other-directed character is sensitive to others—to their opinions and their approval. Riesman uses the metaphor of “radar” to characterize this orientation, whereby individuals are taught early in life to constantly monitor the social environment to ensure that their consumption patterns (especially in appearance and behaviour) conform to whatever are the accepted standards of the time and place. The other-directed person strives to meet goals, but those goals shift, so it is staying in tune with the shifts that is of paramount importance to this character-type. We can also see how the prefigurative socialization mechanisms Mead postulated can contribute to other-directedness. That is, with parents providing less guidance and having less influence over their children’s identity formation, children will turn to others for direction. To the extent that this is culturally conditioned, it should become part of the individual’s character (see Ewen, 1976, for a discussion of the rise of the advertising industry in the twentieth century, and its cultivation of insecurities and anxieties to create a sense of need to consume in order to alleviate the manufactured dissonance).

Identity formation patterns

The levels of analysis and social-structural periods identified by the culture–identity framework can help us to organize a number of the identity concepts that have been generated over the past several decades. For example, the term “identity” has been used in many ways to emphasize different facets of human self-definition (cf., Gecas and Burke, 1995). However, the social structure and personality perspective suggests the following taxonomy: (1) that the term *social identity* designate the individual’s position(s) in a social structure; (2) that the concept of *personal identity* denote the more concrete aspects of individual experience rooted in interactions (and institutions); and (3) that the notion of *ego identity* refer to the more fundamental subjective sense of continuity which is characteristic of the personality. Thus, these terms need not be in competition with each other. Rather, they can be seen as attempts to map out different facets of the interdisciplinary terrain.

This taxonomy is presented in Table 2 as a more specific reproduction of the conceptual crosstabulation of Table 1. In other words, vertically, the representations of identity formation patterns depicted in Table 2 are logically linked with the cultural and character patterns discussed above. Horizontally, these identity concepts are meant to depict the cultural prototype that is imitated at each social-structural period.

Social-identity formation is postulated to differ in each type of society, such that according to the particular cultural prototype it tends to be *ascribed* in pre-modern societies, *achieved* in early-modern societies, and *managed* in late-modern ones. These terms can be defined as follows: “ascribed” means assigned on the basis of some inherited status; “achieved” is used in the sociological sense by which social position is to be accomplished

on one's own; and "managed" means reflexively and strategically fitting oneself into a community of "strangers" by meeting their approval through the creation of the right impressions (cf., Gecas and Burke, 1995). In other words, in the pre-modern society, social identity is largely determined by one's characteristics or attributes (like race, sex, parent's social status); in the early-modern, it is increasingly based on personal accomplishment and material attainment (both of which are ostensibly based on appraisals of merit); while in the late-modern society, it becomes a matter of impression management (that is, in certain social encounters, situational appraisals can become more important than one's social background or accomplishments).

At the level of interaction (i.e. the interpersonal world where culture and individual meet), personal identity is largely *heteronomous*, then *individuated*, and then *image-oriented* as we move through the three types of societies. The heteronomous identity is based on an uncritical acceptance of others' appraisals and expectations which produces a conformist and mechanical blending into a community; the individuated identity is one which is based on the production of a distinctive personal style and role repertoire by which the person's biography leads to an organic integration into a community; and the image-oriented identity is based on a projection of images that meet the approval of a community, gaining one access so long as the images remain acceptable. Personal identity refers here to interpersonal styles that have been shaped by the actual life experiences of individuals. In a sense, it expresses the culmination of an individual's biography at a given point in time.

Finally, at the level of character, two components of ego identity can be classified: "structure" and "process." Ego identity structure generally refers to "how experience is handled as well as . . . what experiences are considered important" by an individual (Marcia, 1993a, p. 3), while ego identity process refers to the manner by which the *ego* forms its identity as a distinct entity in relation to its object world. In terms of the types of identity structure studied by identity status researchers, identity *foreclosure* (*qua* commitments determined by others) predominates in pre-modern societies, identity *achievement* (*qua* self-chosen commitments) is the prototypical structure in modern societies, and identity *diffusion* (*qua* a lack of stable, long-term commitments) appears to be emerging as the predominant one in late-modern societies, if we follow the framework outlined above. In terms of the processes by which identity is formed, the pre-modern society requires its members to *adopt* their identities early in life; in the early-modern society people are expected to *construct* their identities as they come of age; and in the late-

Table 2 *Cultural prototypes of identity formation patterns constituting the culture–identity link*

| Level of analysis | Social-structural period | | |
|--|--------------------------|---------------|----------------|
| | Pre-modern→ | Early-modern→ | Late-modern |
| Social identity: (Social structure) | Ascribed→ | Achieved→ | Managed |
| Personal identity: (Interaction) | Heteronomous→ | Individuated→ | Image-oriented |
| Ego identity: (Personality) | | | |
| a. Structure | Foreclosed→ | Achieved→ | Diffused |
| b. Process | Adopted→ | Constructed→ | Discovered |

modern society individuals are encouraged to (continually) *discover* their identities through consumption and pleasing others (cf., Gergen, 1991).

Applications to existing research

This framework promises to give identity researchers a common reference point from which to anchor concepts and hypotheses in a cross-cultural and trans-historical manner. In so doing it suggests several things about the cultural context of the identity status paradigm (cf., Marcia, 1993b).

For example, according to the framework, North American and European researchers are studying identity in a society that is increasingly late-modern, prefigurative, and other-oriented. As noted above, this suggests that identity diffusion is being increasingly conditioned and nurtured as a stance toward identity formation (cf., Marcia, 1989). This proposition can be tested using large-scale, random samples of successive cohorts passing through adolescence, or on the basis of meta-analyses of existing studies.

If identity diffusion is increasing, the “achieved” ego identity structure may be undergoing a decline with each new cohort (this can also be empirically tested). In fact, the identification of “MAMA cycles” may be symptomatic of the difficulties of sustaining commitments in late-modern society. (In these cycles, individuals re-evaluate their commitments during their adulthood, as evidenced by their oscillation between moratorium [questioning] and achievement [commitment]; Marcia, 1993a). The decline in the sustained-commitment characteristic of the achievement status may be of some concern given the designation of that identity status as a preferred outcome of identity formation and its association with psychological health (see selections in Archer, 1994, especially Josselson, 1994). Moreover, the disruptions that oscillations in commitments can cause families and communities should be a concern in terms of a loss of civil society and a lack of guiding structure for those attempting to come of age.

The postulated increase of diffusion and decrease in achievement as styles of identity formation is accounted for within the framework in the following way: late-modern socialization pressures encourage other-directedness, enhanced impression management, and a desire to discover one’s identity through “image consumption” (cf., Côté and Allaha, 1994). Image consumption has been introduced to successive cohorts throughout this century (especially since mid-century) by various profit-oriented industries via youth cultures and peer cultures. The heightened need to conform during the adolescent period has made it relatively easy for a pattern of image consumption to be introduced that involves an immediate-gratification orientation to enhancing one’s physical- and experiential-self as deemed appropriate by others. Accordingly, it is now commonplace to adorn the body with various fashions, jewellery, and cosmetics in order to project particular images that please others while gratifying narcissistic desires; and it is customary to spend great amounts of time in experiences that similarly project images while gaining validation from others, through the consumption of music, mass media, computers and assorted games, and drugs. These all involve image consumption in the sense that illusions are used as a basis for key interactions with others. The consequence of this as a mass phenomenon is the nurturance of a mass of consumers who have little concern regarding what the future holds and who are receptive to shifting trends and values. Those who reject their culture of primary socialization may be particularly prone to this, given that they are not guided by, or

act in opposition to, the “gyroscope” discussed by Riesman, thereby losing a basis for inner-directedness. In psychoanalytic terms this signals an increasing id orientation and a decreasing superego orientation of the personality (cf., Cote, 1993).

Implications of the framework

The problematic nature of late-modern society

One obvious implication of the framework for the culture–identity link is that social life in late-modern society is becoming increasingly problematic for the individual in terms of establishing a stable and viable identity based on commitments embedded in a community of others. Perhaps this interpretation reflects my own pessimism, but I believe it deserves careful examination. In this section, I will elaborate upon the problematic nature of present and future society, and balance it with a formulation that suggests how certain individuals seem to be coping with these deleterious social structural and cultural influences.

Pre-modern and modern institutions tend to be supportive of individual identities and intergenerational continuity, whereby new members are more-or-less willing recruits of the culture. To the extent that these institutions are failing, or have failed, it follows that both individual identity formation and cultural reproduction are in jeopardy. Moreover, to the extent that these institutions are being replaced with exploitive consumption-oriented patterns, it also follows that Western cultural development is proceeding more like a rudderless ship than as a vessel that will transport its occupants safely to their desired destinations (cf., Giddens, 1991). Thus, while it is easy to romanticize the past in this context, there is reason to be concerned that the young are not receiving a benign guidance in their identity formation, and that there is little “foresight” in ongoing cultural change. (It is also true that some observers welcome a break in cultural continuity based on conclusions that Western culture has been patriarchal, racist, classist, etc., but such a break is tied to the increasing anomie of social structure and is not without significant casualties when it comes to matters of individual identity.)

The scenario outlined above suggests two general courses individuals may take when confronted with late-modern life. One is to simply go along for the ride, and drift in the currents and eddies of changes orchestrated by the captains of the consumer industries who profit from manipulating identities, especially among the young (Côté and Allahar, 1994). The above discussion of the culture–identity link constitutes a *descriptive* account of this. In a more *prescriptive* vein, we can discuss another course; namely, for individuals to take an active role in their own development by becoming pilots of their own destinies, to the extent that this is realistically possible. (Some sociologists refer to this as being an architect of one’s biography; e.g. Giddens, 1991.) In other words, without institutional support and guidance in making developmental transitions, individuals are left largely to their own internal resources more so than in the past. The passive response to this is to drift from image to image, as discussed above, rather than to undertake more difficult developmental tasks, like actively exploring, challenging, and developing one’s beliefs and potentials. In contrast, the active, agentic response is to develop strategies for dealing with these influences in terms of sustaining some sense of direction and meaning, and taking initiative in one’s own personal development.

I believe that a certain segment of the population already engages in the active response and that we can learn much by studying their strategies and comparing them to those who

engage in the passive response. We should keep in mind, though, that with most investments, a dividend is not guaranteed, so there is a certain risk to this strategy, as there is in any capital venture.

Identity capital

It is reasonable to assume that a certain proportion of individuals in most societies actively strategize to maximize their life-course outcomes. Sociologists and economists have studied various strategies people use in actively investing in themselves and their progeny. One strategy is represented by the concept of “human capital” (Becker, 1964, 1975). Human capital theory has had a strong impact on educational policies around the world, and is based on the assumption that the inculcation of skill-oriented knowledge generates economic activity. A related notion, “cultural capital”, grew out of more recent sociological theories of social-class reproduction (Bourdieu and Passeron, 1977), and is based on the assumption that knowledge of high culture (aesthetics, speech patterns, etiquette, etc.) gains one access to the reward structures of the upper classes. Despite their differing assumptions and origins, both of these concepts were developed to account for how social background, educational experiences, and other “investments,” eventually pay off for individuals.

Table 3 represents these concepts and places them as precursors of the concept that I believe applies more aptly to the conditions of late-modern society, namely, “identity capital”.

All three concepts represent what are likely the most advantageous resources to secure social-class mobility, or to reproduce one’s class position, in each type of society discussed above. In my view, the concepts of human capital and cultural capital are useful but neither comprehensively describes what seems to be necessary for individuals to successfully negotiate the vagaries of life passages in late-modern society. Late-modern society appears to be producing an altered life-course for several reasons. For example, social institutions like education, the workplace and the family are often poorly regulated, inadequately linked, or are actually failing, so tradition-based contingency patterns cannot be relied upon uncritically. Furthermore, strong status or “tribal” differentiations have emerged that are based on class, race, gender, and age. Each of these status differentials introduces an arena where “identity politics” are now being played out at both the macro- and micro-political levels. Consequently, individuals seem to require more personal resources and a heightened awareness to make their way through this uncharted and often hostile territory. I see these attributes as constituting more general forms of “capital” than either human capital or cultural capital, and as key components of contemporary self-definition. Hence, the term “identity capital” seems appropriate to describe the wherewithal individuals use when engaging in transactions as they attempt to negotiate the tricky passages created by the obstacles of late-modern society.

Table 3 *Most advantageous social-class mobility/reproduction resources*

| | Social-structural period | | |
|----------------------------|--------------------------|-------------------|------------------|
| | Pre-modern→ | Early-modern→ | Late modern |
| Type of resource acquired: | Human capital→ | Cultural capital→ | Identity capital |

In addition, the concepts of human capital and cultural capital do not seem sufficiently sensitive to the unique opportunities available in late-modern, prefigurative and other-directed societies. In these societies, the inculcation of human capital in the form of instrumental skills can gain membership in the technocracy, but it may do very little for short- or long-term personal development or fulfillment, not to mention the fact that instrumental skills regularly become obsolete. Cultural capital can be useful in gaining or sustaining membership in high status culture, and may be a source of personal development and fulfillment, but cultural/aesthetic skills are often not well rewarded in the technocracy, and "old class" advantage dwindles as it is transferred through successive generations. Consequently, in late-modern society both are liable to be of limited value on their own in the long-term in a highly changeable and personally-politicized society where skills, tastes and rules are constantly shifting.

I am proposing that both human capital and cultural capital are useful resources to develop and exchange, but without other attributes their net worth is apt to decline in the long-run. As such, on their own they may not be the most astute investments in terms of seeing one through one's total life-course. Indeed, a more "diversified portfolio" that includes psychosocial skills may be necessary if an "intelligent strategist" is to be at the helm of behaviour (cf., Giddens, 1994, p. 7). The key is for the individual to form and sustain an identity pragmatically situated in a social/occupational matrix. Accordingly, the individual invests in a certain identity (or identities) and engages in a series of exchanges at the level of identity with other actors. To do this in a complex, shifting social milieu requires certain cognitive skills and personality attributes that are not imparted by human or cultural capital, and are certainly not imparted by mass/public educational systems. With this portfolio, an individual should be in a much better position to move at will through the dimensions of place and space in the late-modern world (cf., Giddens, 1991), and may do so by engaging in tactics like self-monitoring (Snyder, 1974) and using situated identities (i.e. adjusting one's behaviours to suit those of others in particular situations; cf., Gecas and Burke, 1995). This stands in contrast to the restrictions of place and space imposed on individuals of earlier societies where identities are more restricted in repertoire and flexibility.

With this background, we can now define identity capital more specifically. However, it must be stressed that this is generally an abstract, over-arching concept intended to guide empirical research, rather than to be directly operationalized as one discrete construct. Thus, its value can be assessed in terms of how well it generates research questions regarding its various empirical manifestations (discussed below) and how much it helps interpret results (including meta-analyses), rather than being the object of singular, direct measurement. Its status is therefore much the same as Erikson's general concept of ego identity, which seems to emphasize a psychological dimension of coping, while identity capital emphasizes more of a social-psychological one.

Most generally, the term "identity capital" denotes what individuals "invest" in "who they are". These investments potentially reap future dividends in the "identity markets" of late-modern communities. To be a player in these markets, one must first establish a stable sense of self which is bolstered by the following: social and technical skills in a variety of areas; effective behavioural repertoires; psychosocial development to more advanced levels; and associations in key social and occupational networks. At the very least, given the apparent chaos of late-modern society, key resources for bargaining and exchanging with others in the late-modern communities are apt to involve skills in negotiating life-passages with

others, such as securing validation in communities of strangers, and attaining membership in the circles and groups to which one aspires. The most successful investors in the identity markets presumably have portfolios comprising two types of assets, one more sociological and the other more psychological.

On the one hand, these assets can be *tangible* in the sense that they are “socially visible”. These more sociological features comprise such things as educational credentials, fraternity/sorority and club/association memberships, and personal deportment (e.g. manner of dress, physical attractiveness and speech patterns). As such, tangible resources should be effective as “passports” into other social and institutional spheres, inasmuch as they are vital in terms of getting by the “gatekeepers” of various groups with whom one wants to be a member, as well as being accepted by established members. These groups vary in their concreteness (from specific memberships to abstract reference groups), making these tangible resources important in the micro-politics involved in identity negotiations. Being thus involved in day-to-day interactions over a period of time, these resources should also increase one’s identity capital through the accruing of negotiable self-concepts and self-presentations (see Lerner *et al.*’s, 1990, goodness-of-fit model for a similar conception of how personality strengths can be nurtured).

In addition, identity capital resources are also *intangible*. These more psychological factors probably include the exploration of commitments, ego strength, self-efficacy, cognitive flexibility and complexity, self-monitoring, critical thinking abilities, moral reasoning abilities, and other character attributes that can give individuals certain vitalities and capacities with which to *understand* and *negotiate* the various social, occupational and personal obstacles and opportunities they are likely to encounter throughout late-modern life. Hence, in addition to the more tangible social components, there seems to be an internal subjective/experiential component to identity capital which can be relevant in terms of the external demands of micro-politics and impression management. In Eriksonian terms, these various attributes are tied to well-developed ego synthetic and ego executive abilities (cf., Cote, 1993).

In this context, the exploration and commitment aspects of identity formation studied by identity status researchers become relevant. This is so to the extent that the reflexivity involved in developing a life-plan and setting goals is an important preparation for, and antidote to, the exigencies of late-modern society discussed above. The awareness and strengths associated with exploring alternatives and setting goals (even if those goals change) can become the basis for the type of agency that is necessary to cope with these conditions. Research should reveal that those in the “low” identity statuses (diffusion and foreclosure) have fewer of the intangible resources when compared with the “high” statuses (moratorium and achievement). As such, I would predict that any advantages their tangible resources might have given them (e.g. derived from a higher social-class background) will be reduced in the long-run over their life-course.

Empirical assessment of the identity capital concept can proceed with the assessment of which of the above-mentioned factors best predict the most successful negotiations in the late-modern community—in addition to the advantages associated with human capital and cultural capital, and controlling for social-class advantage. A prime testing ground for this is the university, where opportunities abound for developing the tangible and intangible resources mentioned above. Based on the assumption that personal development is stimulated in a felicitous environment, while higher social class background may give one an advantage in acquiring identity capital, for those who make it to university, social-class

may not be as important as the particular university environment to which an individual is exposed. In other words, notwithstanding discrimination, any individual should be able to acquire identity capital in such a context, despite social-class background. One important implication of these formulations is that to the extent to which educational policies are based solely on human-capital assumptions, institutions governed by those policies will not adequately prepare their wards for life in late-modern society. Consequently, these institutions are not fostering optimal identity formation for that context.

These are the types of issues that can be empirically addressed with research informed by the concept of identity capital. As mentioned above, because of its abstractness and multidimensionality, the concept will likely remain more theoretical than operational, but I believe it will be helpful in guiding empirical efforts and making sense of results, as well as helping us to better link sociological and psychological approaches to identity.

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