n-Culturals: modeling the multicultural identity

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Received 25 June 2014
Revised 9 October 2014
Accepted 16 December 2014

Abstract

Purpose – The purpose of this paper is to extend current conceptualizations of multicultural individuals by mapping the underlying elements of knowledge, identification, commitment and internalization as components of multicultural identity. It aims to extend discussions of how multicultural individuals manage their multiculturality.

Design/methodology/approach – The paper draws primarily on extant works on multicultural individuals and identity. The paper reviews a number of concepts relevant to multicultural identity to introduce the existence of a population called *n*-Culturals who represent a complex type that exists on one extreme of a continuum of multicultural identity. The paper derives a theory of *n*-Culturalism which represents a more nuanced theory of the multicultural identity.

Findings – *n*-Culturals recognizes that elements of multicultural identity exist within individuals to a greater or lesser extent and that their combination results in a comprehensive understanding of the entire range of multicultural identities. *n*-Culturalism extends current views that multicultural individuals maintain multiple saliences of their identities rather than switching modes to manage their multiculturality.

Research limitations/implications – The conceptual nature of the paper implies that there are no existing empirical data apart from anecdotal examples; at the same time this fact provides ample opportunities to test the theory.

Practical implications – First, the findings provides an understanding of multiple cultural influences on acculturative stress and on performance across a range of domains as well as measuring multicultural identity. Second, by understanding the way in which *n*-Culturals develop the authors may gain valuable insights in modeling this process.

Originality/value – The paper develops a new theory of approaching the challenges faced by multicultural individuals, that is, how to manage their multiculturality. The theory goes beyond current views of switching modes or suppression, and suggests maintaining and balancing multiple identities.

Keywords Identity salience, Multicultural continuum, Multicultural identity, Multicultural phenomenon, *n*-Culturals

Paper type Conceptual paper

> The reality of the world is that you learn from diversity, but are comforted by commonality.
>
> Carlos Ghosn, CEO Renault-Nissan

Introduction

Although the influence of culture on organizations through trade, immigration and exchange of information and ideas has pervaded through the centuries, it is only in recent decades that the degree and intensity of cultural influence have spiked as a result of globalization (Sam and Berry, 2010). From a population perspective, globalization is

Cross Cultural & Strategic Management
Vol. 23 No. 1, 2016
pp. 101-127

2059-5794
DOI 10.1108/CCSM-06-2014-0063

largely the result of low birth rates among the established population in the industrialized world and the concomitant increase in the proportion of immigrants. In turn, globalization has produced multicultural work environments where a large percentage of a nation's workforce is drawn from a variety of cultural backgrounds (Healey, 2005; Okoro and Washington, 2012; MacKenzie and Forde, 2009). As a result, there has been increased interest in understanding the effects of multicultural individuals in organizational contexts. Given the changing patterns in the world's workforce, an increasing number of employees and managers have more than one cultural profile. These individuals function based on cognitive frameworks that are influenced to a greater or lesser extent by their exposure to more than one culture. Thus, a more nuanced and complex theory of cross-cultural management is needed to understand the impact that these individuals are having and can have on organizations (see Leung *et al.*, 2005). Hence, we need to have a clearer understanding of cultural diversity within individuals and its influence on outcomes in an organizational context. The question "who am I?" is of critical importance for cross-cultural international management research (Sackmann and Phillips, 2004). In addition, we also need to link this understanding of cultural diversity in individuals with maintaining the importance of diverse cultural values and identities within organizations (Nkomo and Hoobler, 2014).

Prominent exemplars for the positive effect of multicultural identities on the management of organizations are individuals such as Carlos Ghosn (Brazilian born, French-educated son of Lebanese parents and superstar CEO of the French-Japanese automaker Renault-Nissan), and US President Barak Hussein Obama (Kenyan-American, born in Hawaii who studied the Koran in his youth but was later baptized a Christian). However, past organizational research into the influence of culture has typically assumed that individuals have only one cultural identity, and been concerned with how cultural variations among individuals functioning in the same environment result in misunderstandings, as well as how these cultural clashes can best be managed (Brislin and Yoshida, 1994; Boyacigiller *et al.*, 2003; Cutler, 2005; Cushner and Brislin, 1996).

Research to date has adopted a variety of approaches to understand individuals with multiple cultural influences. These include acculturation (e.g. Berry, 2003), social identity (e.g. Tajfel, 1981) and social cognition (e.g. Hong *et al.*, 2000). We have learned a great deal about the ability of multicultural individuals to shift frames (Hong *et al.*, 2000) and the effect of integrating identities (Benet-Martínez and Haritatos, 2005). We also have evidence that multicultural experience has a positive effect on creativity (e.g. Leung *et al.*, 2008; Tadmor *et al.*, 2012), flexibility (e.g. Nguyen and Benet-Martínez, 2013), cognitive complexity (e.g. Lakshman, 2013, Tadmor and Tetlock, 2006) and intercultural effectiveness (e.g. Thomas *et al.*, 2010). Despite the construction of numerous typologies of multicultural individuals (LaFramboise *et al.*, 1993; Roccas and Brewer, 2002), no theory of such individuals exists that is robust enough to extend our understanding to the organizational context, where individuals may leverage their multiple cultural identities to benefit both themselves and their organizations.

The purpose of this paper is to extend current conceptualizations of multicultural identity, as well as to examine its management within an individual. Specifically, it aims to provide a clearer understanding of cultural diversity within individuals and its influence on outcomes in organizational contexts. We do this by mapping the underlying elements of knowledge, identification, internalization and commitment as components of multicultural identity. An integral component of this conceptualization is the understanding that multicultural identity is comprised of both cognitive and sociocultural dimensions of culture (Navas *et al.*, 2007; Ward and Kus, 2012) that are

maintained by actively balancing the salience of multiple cultures. For example, "balancing" is an acculturation strategy used by Muslim youth in New Zealand that involves the notion of negotiating identities that enables maintenance of their heritage culture (Ward, 2013). These ideas form the nucleus of a more nuanced theory of multicultural identity that we call *n*-Culturalism, which is based on a complex type of multicultural identity, the *n*-Cultural. We discuss this revised view of multicultural identity in relation to the behavioral outcomes and cognitive strategies involved in balancing the influence of multiple identities. Hence, this paper makes a second contribution to current literature by examining and understanding one of the outcomes of the multidimensional notion of multiculturalism, that is, the *n*-Cultural (Benet-Martínez, 2012; Nguyen and Benet-Martínez, 2010; also see Sparrow, 2000). This includes acknowledging how multicultural identities within the workplace may facilitate diversity management through recognizing and being open to the diversity of cultural values and identities within organizations (Alcázar *et al.*, 2013; Nkomo and Hoobler, 2014).

Our conceptualization is organized in four sections. First, we review existing literature in a number of areas linked to multiculturalism and multicultural identity, including those from psychology (cross-cultural, cognitive, general and social), acculturation, cultural intelligence (CQ), organization and management studies and sociology. Overall, they provide a snapshot of the current dimensions of multicultural identity. Second, we challenge the predominant existing view on managing multiple identities by presenting indirect evidence from existing research, and establishing that there are individuals who are capable of maintaining salience of multiple cultural identities simultaneously. Third and fourth, we present *n*-Culturalism as the epitome of multiculturalism, thus extending current perspectives of multicultural identity in the fields of human resources and diversity management.

Multiculturalism and multicultural identity

A number of definitions of multicultural individuals exist in the literature (e.g. Adler, 1977; Benet-Martínez, 2012; Nguyen and Benet-Martínez, 2010) that suggests that these individuals are by-products of multiculturalism or the condition of being exposed to multiple cultures. These individuals encompass those who are of mixed ethnicity, those who have lived in multiple countries (such as expatriates), international students, immigrants, other types of sojourners and children who have been raised in multicultural households (Benet-Martínez, 2012; also see Tadmor and Tetlock, 2006). Indicators of multicultural identity include behaviors such as language use, choice of friends, media preferences and self-categorization as belonging to more than one cultural group (Benet-Martínez, 2012), which may include having strong attachments with and loyalties to different cultures (Nguyen and Benet-Martínez, 2010). The psychology literature has generally settled on the idea that bicultural and multicultural individuals can be defined as having been exposed to and having internalized two or more cultures (Benet-Martínez, 2012; Hong *et al.*, 2000). This definition underlies much of the research on multicultural individuals to date in international management, psychology and sociology[1].

In summary, multicultural individuals have cultural identities that have multiplied the characteristics of cultural identity highlighted in Adler (1977, p. 27), that is, as a "symbol of one's essential experience of oneself as it incorporates the world view, value systems, attitudes, and beliefs of a group with whom such elements are shared." In the past three decades, much of our knowledge regarding the acquisition of people's

multiple cultural identities have been studied in relation to the acculturation process and based on the more inclusive bi-dimensional model of acculturation revolving around Berry's (1990) (Sam and Berry, 2010; Ward, 2008) works.

Acculturation

Early research on multicultural individuals was derived from the study of acculturation, which is the process by which an individual learns about and/or adapts to a new culture. Early work assumed that individuals had to either accept (assimilate) their new culture or reject it (Dill, 1979; Valentine, 1971). Consequently, multiculturals were described as occupying some point along a continuum between their heritage and the new (host) culture (see Trimble, 2003). This uni-dimensional approach was replaced with an influential bi-dimensional model of acculturation (Berry, 1990; Sam and Berry, 2010; Ward and Kus, 2012). This model assumes that acculturating individuals have to deal with the extent to which they retain identification with their culture of origin, and the extent to which they allow themselves (or are allowed to) to identify with the mainstream culture. This results in four distinct acculturation patterns: assimilation (identification with mainstream culture only); integration (identification with both cultures); separation (identification with culture of origin only); and marginalization (lack of identification with either culture).

Berry (1990) hypothesized that integration was the acculturation pattern that was most conducive to psychological well-being, although the evidence in support of this hypothesis is not conclusive (Rogler *et al.*, 1991; Rudmin, 2003; Snauwaert *et al.*, 2003; also see Constant and Zimmermann, 2008; Germain, 2004). The bi-dimensional model of acculturation is important because much research on multicultural individuals (bi-culturals) presents integration as the biculturalism ideal (e.g. Nguyen and Benet-Martínez, 2007; Tadmor and Tetlock, 2006). However, integration does not distinguish the processes of becoming a multicultural person from the way in which people might experience or manage their multiple identities. For example, Berry's (1990) fourfold typology includes so-called marginalized individuals who have a weak identification with both cultures. However, it has been argued that cultural contact leads to multicultural competence such that a person can choose to be multicultural, compared to those who are spontaneously uni-cultural. Glaser (1958) and Bochner (1981) suggested that marginalized individuals alternate between two cultures that are perceived as having salient but mutually incompatible norms. This is different from Bennett's (1993) later view of the "constructive marginal" person. Bennett (1993) moved away from viewing marginality as having identities at the margins of two or more cultures but central to none; rather, she acknowledged that the constructive marginal person could experience integration and value all their cultural identities.

In addition to the exclusion of marginalized individuals from the continuum of multiculturals in recent literature (i.e. since Bennett, 1993), the bi-dimensional model of acculturation implies equal acculturation across various domains (language use, social affiliation, communication style, knowledge, beliefs and values; see Zane and Mak, 2003), and that the intersection of two cultures (see Phinney and Devich-Navarro's, 1997 "blended bicultural") is an empty set in that a synergistic effect is not possible (Liao and Thomas, 2009; Rudmin, 2003). In summary, while body of research referred to above gives us a snapshot of the current dimensions of multicultural identity, it does not identify what elements are necessary for individuals to manage the acculturation process successfully. As discussed below, cultural identities may be uniquely represented within each multicultural individual as they are confronted with the task of defining themselves in terms of their culture.

Multicultural identity

Notwithstanding the relatively clear notion of who a multicultural person is, research to date has shed light on a number of key issues with regard to multicultural identity. For example, a common experience among many individuals with multiple identities is that they shift between their cultural orientations in different situations, a process called frame switching (Hong *et al.*, 2000; also see Sparrow, 2000). In demonstrating this effect, Hong *et al.* (2000) exposed Chinese-American individuals to pictures of either American or Chinese icons (e.g. the US Capitol Building vs the Great Wall) and found that this exposure activated different cultural orientations. This finding is important since it highlights that multicultural individuals have access to more than one cultural orientation that can be accessed in response to different situations. These orientations are cognitively accessible, and can be selectively employed based on contextual cues (Hong *et al.*, 2003). However, as discussed below, the ability to access multiple cultural schemas is only one component of a more complex and multidimensional conceptualization of multicultural identity. For example, we argue that some multicultural individuals are able to actively balance the salience of multiple cognitive structures and cultures, which enables them to capitalize on their multicultural experiences and the strengths of each culture.

Bicultural identity integration (BII). By attending to the cognitive factors that underpin multicultural identity, some research (Bennett, 1993; Birman, 1998; Bochner, 1981; Glaser, 1958; Hong *et al.*, 2007; Phinney and Devich-Navarro, 1997; Sparrow, 2000) has focussed on the extent to which individuals differ in the degree to which their identities are perceived as compatible and integrated, or are in opposition to each other and difficult to integrate (Benet-Martínez and Haritatos, 2005). Research on BII has extended our understanding of multicultural individuals to show how the degree of integration of their identities relates to behavioral, cognitive and other psychological variables. In general, individuals high on BII (High-BII) perceive their two identities as largely compatible and complimentary, while those low on BII (Low-BII) feel caught between their two cultural identities and as a result prefer to keep them separate. BII seems to moderate the cultural frame switching described previously, in that High-BII individuals typically respond to cultural cues in culturally congruent ways, whereas Low-BII individuals exhibit a reverse effect (Benet-Martínez *et al.*, 2002). For example, Mok and Morris (2010a, b) found that Low-BII individuals not to conform to cultural cues. They explained that this might be because Low-BII individuals do not want to exclude their other cultural identity, while High-BII individuals can conform to situational cues without leaving their other identities behind (also see Mok and Morris, 2012). As discussed below, we suggest that this indicates that some multicultural individuals have developed ways to actively balance the salience of multiple cultural identities.

Research has shown that High-BII can allow individuals to be more effective in appropriately employing their cultural knowledge in specific contexts (e.g. Benet-Martínez and Haritatos, 2005; Cheng *et al.*, 2008; Benet-Martínez *et al.*, 2002; also see Nguyen and Benet-Martínez, 2007). For example, Cheng *et al.* (2008) found that High-BII Asian-Americans came up with more innovative (creative fluency and originality) fusion restaurant dishes than did Low-BII Asian-Americans. Much of the above research on BII has found that individuals with low levels of conflict (High-BII) are more effective in a variety of domains. However, some research also indicates that Low-BII individuals (that is, those with more conflicted cultural identities) are more cognitively complex (e.g. Benet-Martínez *et al.*, 2006). Therefore, current knowledge

regarding BII suggests that conflicting cultural identities may result in or require the development of higher levels of cognitive complexity (e.g. Tadmor *et al.*, 2009). We argue that this development of higher order cognitive skills is relevant to the ability that some multicultural individuals have to synthesize their multiple cultural orientations and identities in creative ways. This will be discussed below.

Multicultural identity organization

As researchers have come to recognize that cultural identity is complex and multidimensional, a number of attempts have been made to explain the different ways in which multicultural identity might be negotiated and organized. For example, LaFramboise *et al.* (1993) distinguished between biculturals who switched their behaviors in response to situational demands (alternation) and those who identified with an emergent culture (fusion) distinct from their original cultures.

Birman (1998) described four types of blended identities:fusion (an emergent culture distinct from the ethnic culture; instrumental (behaviorally oriented to both cultures but identifying with neither); integrated (behaviorally oriented to both cultures but identifying only with their ethnic culture); and explorers (behaviorally oriented to the dominant culture but identifying only with their ethnic culture).

Phinney and Devich-Navarro (1997) identified six different patterns of bicultural identity. Anassimilated pattern has non-overlapping cultures, and the assimilated individual identifies with only one. A fused pattern has cultures that overlap completely. Blended and bicultural patterns both exhibit cultures that partially overlap, but the blended individual resides within the intersection of the two. In the alternating pattern, the individual resides in one culture or the other, depending on the context. Finally, both separated and marginal patterns feature non-overlapping cultures; however, the separated individual resides in only one culture (similar to an assimilated individual), while the marginal individual resides in neither. This research highlights that there are many ways to experience and manage cultural identity.

Studies by Ashforth and Johnson (2001), and Vora and Kostova (2007) addressed similar issues in the context of organizations. Both studies suggested a form of dual organization identification, which can range from distinct, to compound to nested. Vora and Kostova's (2007) conceptualization of identities are in effect a re-statement of Phinney and Devich-Navarro's (1997) patterns of bicultural identity, namely, separated, blended or alternating bicultural and fused.

Finally, Hong *et al.* (2007) identified three modes of identity negotiation that individuals might use over the course of their lives: integration, in which elements from multiple cultures fuse into a unitary (multicultural) identity; alternation, which involves switching among cultural identities according to context; and synergy, in which new identities emerge that cannot be reduced to the sum of their parts. However, while these modes are appealing, they fall short of providing ways to partition multicultural identity.

Descriptions of multicultural identity organization and behaviors are neither logically consistent nor collectively exhaustive. For instance, the same name has been given to different phenomena, and similar phenomena have been given different names. Also, types of multiculturalism have been confused with indicators of multiculturalism. For example, Birman (1998) described four types of identities: blended; integrated; explorer; and instrumental. The first three are identity concepts, while the latter refers to a behavior. Likewise, Phinney and Devich-Navarro (1997) described identities as assimilated, bicultural, blended, fused, marginal, separated and alternating. While the

first five may be identity concepts, the sixth, alternating, refers to the behavioral strategy of cultural frame switching (see Nguyen and Benet-Martínez, 2007, for a discussion). Further, the body of research referred to above still does not distinguish the processes that are involved in becoming a multicultural person, that is, the ways in which people might experience and manage their multiple identities. Thus, to our knowledge no classification framework exists to date that is robust enough to form the basis of theory development (see Hunt, 1983) of multicultural identity.

In the following sections, we develop a theoretical framework that shows how each individual constructs their unique cultural identity by combining the four elements of knowledge, identification, commitment and internalization. We begin by discussing how *n*-Cultural individuals manage their multicultural identities.

The *n*-cultural construct

Previous research provides a solid platform of empirical evidence on which to develop a more nuanced theory of multicultural identity. We label this theory *n*-Culturalism, named for the complex type that exists on one extreme of a continuum of multicultural identities, that is, the *n*-Cultural. A number of important factors about the nature of multicultural identity have been highlighted in existing literature. First, active cultural identity depends on knowledge of a new culture. However, acquiring knowledge of the new culture does not necessarily lead to identification with (Hong *et al.*, 2007) or commitment to that new culture. Further, the management of multiple cultural orientations can take a number of forms that vary in the extent to which the resultant cultural identities are integrated. We build on these ideas of "knowledge of" and "identification with" multiple cultures to stress the importance of the degree to which one is cognitively and emotionally linked to an identity, the degree of acceptance and actualization of goals and values associated with the identity (including its roles and expectations), plus the willingness to exert effort to maintain the identity. The crucial factor in creating a theory of multicultural identity is to recognize that these elements exist within individuals to a greater or lesser extent, and that their combination results in comprehensive understanding of the entire range of multicultural identities. This provides an improved basis on which to explain and predict the behavior of individuals in an organizational context. We begin with the ideal type – the *n*-Cultural – and show how combining the following elements: first,knowledge of multiple cultures; second, identification with two or more cultures; third, internalization of the values, attitudes, beliefs and behavioral assumptions of each of these cultures; and fourth,commitment to maintaining these identities, results in *n*-Culturals being creative synthesizers (e.g. Bochner, 1981). Thus, the term "*n*-Culturals" describes individuals who are on the extreme boundary of current descriptions of multicultural individuals. Figure 1 provides a graphic representation of the four constituent elements of the cultural influence ofknowledge, identification, internalization and commitment. Each element is an independent component of multicultural identity that only completely coalesces at the extreme of the continuum of cultural identities, that is, the *n*-Cultural. In the following, we discuss each of these elements in turn.

Cultural knowledge

As shown in Figure 1, knowledge of culture(s) is the underlying foundation of *n*-Culturalism. Knowledge is a pre-requisite of identification, internalization and commitment. In general, cultural knowledge consists of systems of values, attitudes,

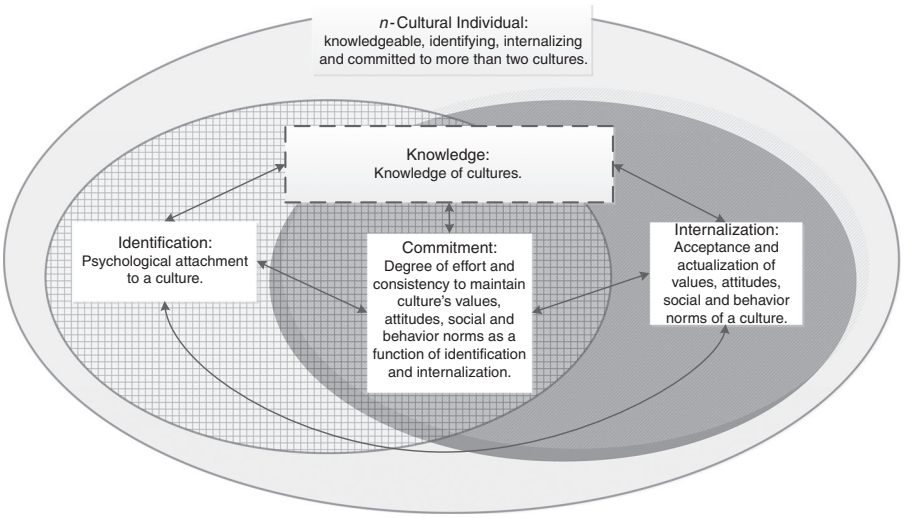

Figure 1.
Constituent elements of *n*-Culturalism

Note: The elements of knowledge, identification, internalization and commitment are all necessary but independently, insufficient components of multicultural identity

beliefs, and behavioral meanings shared by members of a social group (society) and learned from previous generations. This cultural knowledge may be gained through active and passive mechanisms. While culture itself is a group-level construct, it exists at the individual level within the knowledge systems of individuals. Culturally different individuals learn different sets of values (Erez and Earley, 1993), which develop into cognitive frameworks or schemas that are used to help organize and process information about various situations (Fiske and Taylor, 1991; also see Bennett, 1993). These knowledge systems are complex, and the specific elements that are brought to mind are related to the cognitions made salient by the task at hand (Fu *et al.*, 2007; Hong *et al.*, 2000; Oyserman and Lee, 2007). Individuals with mixed ethnicities or who have lived in more than one country, those reared in a multicultural environment, and those in multicultural relationships all have the opportunity to gain knowledge of more than one culture (Padilla, 2006). It is important to acknowledge here that cultural knowledge is not a random collection of facts but an organized set of beliefs that are related to each other and to the environmental context in which they were learned (Thomas *et al.*, 2008).

Research on frame shifting indicates that individuals who have knowledge of multiple cultures actively conform to differing cultural norms depending on which cultures are primed (e.g. Fu *et al.*, 2007), in part to fulfill the need for validation and/or need for closure. For example, American-Chinese individuals with a high need for closure were found to endorse the equity (vs equality) rule higher when American culture was primed (vs Chinese culture). These findings (Fu *et al.*, 2007) also corroborated Hong *et al.*'s (2000) work in which individuals who have knowledge of multiple cultures (i.e. American and Chinese) made causal attributions consistent with American culture (internal attributions) when American knowledge was primed, and consistent with Chinese culture (external attributions) when Chinese knowledge was primed. The crucial point in these two findings is that knowledge of each of the cultures must be present for the individuals to be able to switch to different cognitive processing patterns. This knowledge leads to some degree of affinity with the culture, which is a

pre-requisite for identification with it. In short, multicultural individuals have the opportunity of more than one option for identification, while truly parochial individuals may not be aware of other options.

Identification

An individual's identity has two components: personal identity (e.g. physical attributes, psychological traits, abilities and interests); and social identity (salient group classifications). The social part of our identity is derived from the groups to which we belong. Therefore, it is marked by "that part of an individual's self-concept that derives from his knowledge of his membership of a social group(s) together with the value and emotional significance attached to that membership" (Tajfel, 1981, p. 255). Identities can be either ascribed (involuntary possession) or achieved (voluntarily chosen). Ascribed identities are automatically attained, such as being born in a particular country or into a particular ethnic group. Achieved identity is a conscious state derived from active cognitive appraisal, and from self-awareness that is achieved either through collective experience with a membership group (e.g. profession or religion), or individually realized perceptions of social identity (Germain, 2004).

Humans tend to strive for positive distinctiveness through their membership in a particular social category (Tajfel, 1981), for example, age, gender, religious affiliation, organizational membership and culture. To achieve this objective, individuals engage in a process of self-categorization, relying on salient or contextually relevant cues that will define membership in the in-group and out-group. In sum, social categorization provides individuals with a way to define others as well as to position themselves positively in a social environment (Ashforth and Mael, 1989), including culture.

Recent conceptualizations of identity have suggested that an individual's identity is stable and multifaceted, driven by internal cognitive mechanism and external social structure that refer to "parts of a self, composed of the meanings that persons attach to the multiple roles they typically play in highly differentiated contemporary societies" (Stryker and Burke, 2000, p. 284). The first component of the mechanism refers to the internal dynamics of self-processes, while the second infers that social structures, which include cultural norms, influence a person's self-concept; in turn (if internalized, as discussed below), this self-categorization influences social behavior (Bochner, 1981; Ellemers *et al.*, 2002; Stryker, 1980; Tadmor and Tetlock, 2006; Verkuyten and Pouliasi, 2006).

Social identification requires processing of information or knowledge about the self and about the relevant group(s) in the situation, about the degree of affinity with the group(s), and about the degree of fit with the situation. This then determines the degree of salience of a particular identity. Thus, the ability of individuals to identify with more than one cultural group is central to the idea of multicultural identity.

The relevance of social identity for *n*-Culturalism lies in the fact that, like cultural knowledge, it is a necessary component for the integration process of multiple cultures. For example, in terms of Berry's (1990) four acculturation strategies, social identity is a crucial part of the underlying process: first, integration involves acceptance of the heritage and the new culture's identity; second, assimilation involves rejection and acceptance of the heritage and the new culture's identity, respectively; whilethird, separation; and fourth, marginalization involve a rejection of identities. In the absence of identification with the culture(s) to which a person had been exposed, integration cannot occur. However, it is important to note that we are not implying similar levels of identification with all cultures with which one has knowledge, nor are we suggesting that more than one culture is necessarily internalized to the extent that it guides cognition and behavior.

Internalization

Some scholars (Ashforth and Mael, 1989, Reichers, 1985; Wiener, 1982) have added an important element to the conceptualization of identity by differentiating between the concept of socialidentification and internalization. With reference to groups, identification means being cognitively linked to a group, but does not imply associated effort or behaviors that contribute to the group's goals. A person identifies (is psychologically linked) with a group to the extent that he/she personally experiences the successes and failures of the group (e.g. is disappointed when a soccer team loses). At a deeper level, "*internalization* refers to incorporation of values, attitudes, and so forth within the self as guiding principle" (Ashforth and Mael, 1989, p. 21; italics added). Internalization implies that one behaves according to values one believes in and plans behaviors according to these attitudinal beliefs (see Ajzen, 1991; Ajzen *et al.*, 2009, for a discussion on attitude, intention and commitment to perform behaviors). For example, someone who grew up in and internalized (in this case socialized) a polychronic culture (holistic view of time) but now lives in a monochronic culture (segmented view of time) can internalize the monochronic mode (punctuality norms). In behavioral terms, if in the past the individual has been prompt and punctual when relating to those with high status (a polychronic norm), now he/she is prompt in all of his/her activities regardless of the status of others. His/her behavior matches the view that promptness is a mark of respect that should be shown to all; thus, his/her actions are carefully planned to ensure that he/she is efficient and punctual. The example suggests that if an individual has integrated both the attitudinal and behavioral components of monochronism, there is a belief in the values associated with monochronism and conscious actions are taken in accordance with these values.

Individuals may have as many identities as they have distinct networks of relationships in which they occupy positions and take on the associated roles. In acquiring these identities, individuals may internalize the roles and expectations that are then organized and activated according to the situation. Internalized identities can be viewed as cognitive schemas that contain relevant associated information and meanings, which then serve to interpret events and guide actions by increasing sensitivity and receptivity to certain cues for behavior in a given situation (Lewin, 1935; Stryker and Burke, 2000). The research on frame shifting is an example of situational cues making salient a particular cultural identity that has been internalized. While an individual might identify with a particular group, this cultural identification only becomes a guide to cognition and behavior if it has been internalized and is subsequently made salient. Findings from frame-shifting research (Fu *et al.*, 2007; Hong *et al.*, 2000) have suggested that individuals automatically frame-shift when they have internalized a particular culture and that culture is made salient through priming. Ahead, we suggest that it is possible to consciously maintain one's multicultural identity by actively balancing the salience of multiple cultures.

Commitment

The fourth element of a multicultural orientation is the extent to which individuals are committed to their various identities. Commitment is the relative strength with which one accepts and behaves according to the values and attitudes of a particular group. Reichers (1985) and Wiener (1982) have described how commitment is related to the concept of group identification. In their view, commitment is characterized by the strength of a person's belief in and acceptance of the groups' goals and values, their degree of willingness to exert effort on behalf of the group, and their level of desire to maintain

membership in the group. Therefore, apart from encompassing both attitudinal and behavioral components, commitment involves consistency of conscious effort.

According to Stryker (1980), one aspect of commitment is reflected in the number of people to whom one is connected in relation to a particular identity; thus, the larger the number of connections (dense ties) the more committed one is to that identity. We suggest that it is also the strength of ties that is important to commitment to a particular identity (see Tsui-Auch, 2005). For example, Stryker and Serpe's (1982) conclusion that salience of religious identities predicted the amount of time spent in religious activities also reflects the strength of the ties developed as part of one's religious identity. Thus, the quality of relationships may be as important as the number in determining the amount of time and effort one invests in relation to a particular identity.

Commitment to a particular identity can also be defined as "the costs of losing meaningful relations to others, should the identity be forgone" (Stryker and Burke, 2000, p. 286). Thus, there is some degree of evaluation (e.g. symbolic interaction) between how committed one is to a particular identity and how others in the social situation respond to the identity (Stryker, 1980; also see Ward and Leong, 2006). If others in a social situation respond positively to a particular identity, then that identity is affirmed and salience is maintained (Burke and Stets, 1999). However, if others do not respond positively, then the salience of the identity may diminish in an attempt to maintain the relationship. Commitment is important because the degree of salience of an identity is dependent in part on how committed one is to that cultural identity.

From a bi-dimensional acculturation strategy perspective (Berry, 1990) and recent work on its measurement (Navas *et al.*, 2007; Ward and Kus, 2012), the concepts of internalization and commitment to the acculturation model's internalization may be akin to cultural integration according to attitudinal preferences, while commitment is cultural integration according to behaviors. Although internalization also involves behavioral components, we emphasize that commitment involves a behavioral consistency element involving psychological, sociocultural and interpersonal processes (Ryder *et al.*, 2013), which illustrates a stronger link between attitudes and behaviors (Ajzen, 1991; Ajzen *et al.*, 2009).

Based on the previous discussion, we suggest that a multicultural identity involves knowledge of, identification with, internalization and commitment to two or more cultures. The extent to which these elements exist within individuals indicates their particular orientation to their multicultural existence. While these elements operate in concert, disaggregating them allows the construction of a model of multicultural individuals, which highlights the influence of the underlying mechanisms.

Continuum of multicultural identities

Previous classifications of multiculturals have relied on establishing multicultural types based on the presence or absence of some characteristic or along a set of dimensions. However, while these typologies call attention to the idea that there are many ways to experience multiculturalism, they are conceptually flawed in that they often confuse types of multiculturalism with indicators of multiculturalism (see Benet-Martínez, 2012), or they exclude some individuals with multiple cultural identities from the classification as well as fail to consider the interaction of two cultures (see Liao and Thomas, 2009: Rudmin, 2003). We label the following classification a "continuum" because each multicultural identity exists at a point on the range of multicultural identities based on the extent to which subordinate elements are present. However, each is not a discreet type but an example based on an inflexion point on the range of mono- to *n*-Cultural.

Monoculturals

In today's world, it seems almost impossible that truly parochial people without any knowledge of other cultures exist. Most certainly, however, there are large numbers of individuals with little or superficial (stereotypic) knowledge of other cultures. And, if we add those individuals who have had exposure to and learned about other cultures but do not identify with, internalize and/or are committed to another culture, as discussed below, this category potentially becomes quite large. Monocultural behaviors are guided by a single cultural knowledge structure and as such they do not have any psychological attachment to other cultures.

Pseudo-Cosmopolitans

Some individuals may have acquired large amounts of multicultural experience as well as very sophisticated understanding of other cultures. However, despite having deep knowledge of another culture, these individuals maintain cultural independence by identifying with and internalizing only one culture (Gillespie *et al.*, 2010; van Oudenhoven, 2006), or without pledging allegiance to any other culture (McEwan and Sobre-Denton, 2011). We call these individuals Pseudo-Cosmopolitans because of their somewhat superficial cultural identification combined with broad cultural knowledge. Similar to monoculturals, Pseudo-Cosmopolitans' behaviors are guided by a single cultural knowledge structure and they have no psychological attachment to other cultures despite their wide range of knowledge of other cultures.

Sympathizers

Based on the previous discussion, we argue that it is possible for an individual to identify with a culture but not to internalize it. Further, it is also possible for a person to identify with a culture and not be committed to the culture's values, attitudes and sociocultural norms. For example, Snauwaert *et al.* (2003) found that one can exhibit appropriate social behavior and yet neither identify nor internalize an identity. Under the current empirical operationalization of a multicultural identity (e.g. Benet-Martínez and Haritatos, 2005; Benet-Martínez *et al.*, 2006), those who can only exhibit appropriate social behavior are not classified as multicultural individuals if they do not identify with and internalize the two cultures. We argue that these individuals only sympathize with other cultures, since they do not necessarily internalize more than one culture. Unlike monoculturals and Pseudo-Cosmopolitans, sympathizers may have psychological attachments to multiple cultures, but their behaviors are effectively still guided by one set of cultural knowledge structures.

Chameleons

Individuals with knowledge of other cultures and the ability to mimic the associated behavior might be most accurately called cultural Chameleons. That is, the ability to exhibit behavior associated with more than one culture indicates neither internalization nor commitment to more than one culture, and may not even require identification with it. For example, being able to speak a foreign language does not necessarily imply acceptance of or behaving according to the values and attitudes of another culture. However, we recognize that being able to speak another culture's language may reflect some commitment, and language usage may facilitate the salience of an identity that in turn serves as a cue for thoughts and actions (Liebkind, 2006; Verkuyten and Pouliasi, 2006). Effort exhibited in speaking the language of a culture is not sufficient to infer the

internalization of that culture. Similar to sympathizers, Chameleons may have psychological attachments to multiple cultures, and display behaviors that are appropriate in different cultural context including commitment; however, they have not accepted the values, attitudes and behavioral intentions of another culture.

Multiculturals (True-Cosmopolitans)

Multicultural individuals have knowledge of, identify with, have internalized, and are committed to more than one culture. The existence of all four elements, while previously not identified as constituent elements of the multicultural individual, is consistent with current definitions of individuals with multiple cultural identities (Benet-Martínez, 2012; Brannen and Thomas, 2010). Previous research (Fitzsimmons, 2013) has suggested that these individuals manage their potentially conflicting identities in one of four ways either by prioritizing, compartmentalizing, aggregating or hybridizing these identities, depending on the extent to which one identity is dominant and the extent to which the identities are integrated. In this framework, individuals who have integrated aspects of many cultures into their identity (so-called hybrids) are similar to contemporary views of True-Cosmopolitans (McEwan and Sobre-Denton, 2011; van Oudenhoven, 2006; Schiller *et al.*, 2011). This perspective is consistent with findings that some individuals with multiple identities shift frames (Cheng *et al.*, 2008), that is, take on the characteristics of one or other of their identities in response to situational cues, while others are guided primarily by one set of cultural knowledge structures even though they have internalized multiple cultural identities (Roccas and Brewer, 2002). As discussed below, this conceptualization of multicultural identity explains outcomes associated with culture-specific aspects of multiple identities, but not with more general aspects of cognition and behavior.

n-Culturals

Like multiculturals, *n*-Culturals possess knowledge of, identify with, have internalized and are committed to more than one culture. The term "*n*-Cultural" can indicate any number of cultures. An important additional element is the extent to which these multicultural individuals have developed the metacognitive ability to simultaneously maintain the salience of multiple cultures. This conscious salience is in part a byproduct of the combination of the four constituent elements, where activities associated with each element continually activate and maintain the salience of these multiple cultures beyond simple informational access. The ability for multiple cultures to be salient simultaneously is an under-explored dimension of multicultural identity. That is, to what extent can an individual maintain commitment to multiple sources of identity? The process of maintaining commitment to multiple cultural identities involves active cognitive effort. This effort involves reconciling the potentially conflicting values, attitudes, beliefs and assumptions about appropriate behavior associated with different identities. This cognitive activity results in higher cognitive complexity (see Tadmor *et al.*, 2009; and Lakshman, 2013) consistent with what has been called cultural metacognition (Thomas *et al.*, 2012). In this way *n*-Culturals (the "Carlos Ghosns" among us) may be better able to harness their multiple selves by creatively integrating their identities to influence their behavior. This ability to actively and consciously manage their multiple identities is the distinctive feature of *n*-Culturals. It is the ability to access and harness internalized knowledge and cultural skills, and manifest appropriate behaviors for a given situation that differentiate

n-Culturals from other types of multicultural individuals. From a bi-dimensional acculturation strategy perspective (Berry, 1990), the *n*-Cultural uses an integrated strategy in the sense that he/she values both his/her heritage and the new culture(s). However, the *n*-Cultural has developed the ability to consider different options and degrees of cultural values and behaviors that can be preferred and adopted at the same time, depending on the situation (Navas *et al.*, 2007).

Managing multiple identities

A major issue for individuals who live under the influence of two or more cultures is conflict of identity (Gong, 2007; Hong *et al.*, 2000; Tadmor and Tetlock, 2006; Ward, 2008). Identity conflict or dissonance occurs only when individuals feel equally accountable to more than one cultural group (Tadmor and Tetlock, 2006). The relevant question to the present work is how do *n*-Culturals manage their potentially conflicting identities effectively? The basis of an *n*-Cultural's ability to manage multiple identities is grounded in the idea of developing higher order cognitive processes called integrative complexity (Tadmor and Tetlock, 2006). Integrative complexity is based on the idea that individuals have the capacity to acknowledge the legitimacy of competing perspectives (differentiation) on the same issue and to forge conceptual links (integration) among these perspectives. Integrative complexity is conceptually similar to the metacognitive element of CQ, that is, cultural metacognition (Earley and Ang, 2003; Thomas and Inkson, 2003). Cultural metacognition is a unique cognitive construct as it emerges from the interaction of its constituent elements, thus involving a higher level cognitive strategy, and is central to monitoring and regulating cognitive activity by taking account of cognitive resources and specific knowledge (Thomas, 2010). Thus, cultural metacognition works as a self-controlled and goal-directed process that aids individuals to cognitively and behaviorally adjust to the situational demands that are placed on their identity. It is this active and conscious aspect of the process that differentiates the *n*-Cultural from other individuals with multiple cultural influences on their identity.

The underlying factors that cause identity conflict are the competing values, attitudes, beliefs and assumptions that multicultural individuals face in terms of appropriate behavior associated with their various identities. The current body of knowledge suggests that it is the perceived fit between one's salient identity and the situation that determines if an identity is activated (Burke and Reitzes, 1981; Burke, 1991). Once an identity is activated, an internal cognitive process is also activated that serves to monitor one's identity, the environment and subsequent behaviors. That is, "the system works by modifying output (behavior) to the social situation in attempts to change the input (reflected appraisals) to match the internal standard" (Burke, 1991, p. 837). At the same time, a participant's response to an activated identity determine if an identity remains activated and whether it is likely to be activated again in similar situations (Burke and Reitzes, 1981; Burke, 1991; Hogg and Terry, 2000; Lewin, 1935; Stryker and Burke, 2000; Ward and Leong, 2006).

It is the activation of multiple identities that tends to create dissonance in individuals when their identities are in conflict because they feel accountable to more than one cultural group. In order to manage this dissonance, some people will suppress one or more of their identities when they are in conflict with each other and/or when one is more salient than another (Hong *et al.*, 2000; Kosic, 2006; Stryker and Burke, 2000; Tadmor and Tetlock, 2006). Others will engage in shifting their cognitive cultural frames (Hong *et al.*, 2000) so that the two cultural networks, even if contradictory,

do not create dissonance because at any given time only one network is active (Kosic, 2006; Tadmor and Tetlock, 2006). Suppression and alternating or switching strategy are coping mechanisms to deal with the dissonance created by *ethno-cultural identity conflict* (Ward, 2008). However, because *n*-Culturals have developed more complex cognitive linkages among their various identities, these individuals are able to maintain the salience of these identities and manage dissonance. They are able to do this because they can balance more complex multiple options that are adopted and preferred at the same time (Navas *et al.*, 2007) as well as adopt simpler ways of reasoning depending on what is more appropriate for a given situation (Tadmor *et al.*, 2012; Tadmor and Tetlock, 2006; Wiley and Jarosz, 2012). While accountability pressures influence their behavior, they are cognizant of what is important in the situation and are equally accountable to more than one cultural group (i.e. to a mixed audience; Tadmor and Tetlock, 2006). In contrast, when a person does not appreciate the significance of each perspective, he/she will experience the dissonance that is inherent in attempting to manage accountability pressures. *n*-Culturals' higher level cognitive abilities allow them to resolve dissonance and maintain salience of multiple sets of values (e.g. "dual ethnics," Sang and Ward, 2006; also see Ashforth and Johnson, 2001; Bochner, 1981; Phinney *et al.*, 2001). Further, Adler (1977, p. 25) claimed that the multicultural person is one "whose essential identity is inclusive of life patterns different from his own and who has psychologically and socially come to grips with a multiplicity of realities."

Multiple salience of cultural identities

As far as we know no study to date has directly measured whether individuals have equally high levels of salience to all of the cultural identities that they have internalized. However, over the last decade there has been indirect empirical evidence suggesting that some individuals are able to balance and maintain salience of multiple cultures. For example, Ward's (2013) multi-method empirical work documented the phenomenon of integration as "reaching a balance." Her findings suggest that the notion of balancing cultures encompasses the following:

> […] managing roles, relationships and responsibilities […] negotiating identity, religion and societal demands in a way that permits the retention of traditional values […] balance out the two cultures, mine and theirs (Ward, 2013, p. 394).

In a series of studies testing BII, Haritatos and Benet-Martínez's (2002) empirical work documented that High-BII individuals perceive their dual (or multiple) cultural identities as compatible. We argue that High-BII individuals are also those who perceive relative salience of both cultural identities. Benet-Martínez and Haritatos (2005) later empirically documented a significant positive correlation ($r = 0.30$, $p < 0.05$) between BBI and bicultural competence, that is, the notion that individuals are strongly and equally involved with and comfortable in both cultures they identify and internalize. In a similar vein, Mok and Morris (2012) empirically demonstrated a causal link between the ability to process information at a global level (i.e. attending to information as the entire gestalt) with increases in BII [$F(1, 48) = 4.07$, $p < 0.05$]. The relevance of these studies is that High-BII individuals are able to perceive their dual (or multiple) cultural identities as compatible; as such, it is possible that High-BII individuals are also those who perceive relative salience of their multiple cultural identities.

Finally, Downey *et al.* (2006) empirically documented in their suite of studies that it is possible for multiculturals to value all of their cultural identities. Using a Culture-Chameleon scale, they showed that those with higher scores on the scale (Chameleon-like)

used alternating strategy or altering behaviors vs those with lower scores (integrated multicultural identity) who used an integrated strategy, negatively correlated with public collective self-esteem ($r = -0.30$, $p < 0.02$). In sum, their results showed that those who were Chameleon-like (high culture-Chameleon score) perceived their heritage culture as not being valued by others; thus, this may have reduced the salience of their heritage culture. In contrast, those who had an integrated multicultural identity (low culture-Chameleon score) perceived their heritage culture as positively regarded. This indirectly suggests that there are people who use an alternating strategy vs a more integrated strategy. In particular, the integrated multicultural person perceives their two cultural identities as positive and compatible; thus, they tend to value or are more likely to maintain salience of both cultural identities in different situations. Likewise, Downey *et al.* (2004) used a sample of tricultural individuals and found that their multicultural identity integration (low culture-Chameleon score) was positively related to well-being ($\beta = 0.33$). In this particular study, it was suggested that these individuals perceived all their three cultures as being positively regarded, and that they were most likely to value all of the cultural identities.

In summary, all of the above empirical studies suggest and corroborate Ashforth and Johnson's (2001) claim that there are situations where multiple salience of identities is required, and that there is the possibility that individuals can maintain "simultaneity" of this cultural salience. In this current study, we propose that *n*-Culturals are individuals who have developed the capability to maintain simultaneity of salience of all their cultural identities.

Implications and future research

There are numerous implications for modeling multicultural identity by recognizing the four underlying dimensions of knowledge, identification, internalization and commitment. These include clarifying and contributing to the array of multicultural identity organization typologies, and identifying the processes of becoming a multicultural person through the ways that people might experience and manage their multiple identities. Therefore, by understanding the ways in which *n*-Culturals develop, we will gain valuable insights into modeling this process. First, we present *n*-Culturals to be the epitome of multiculturalism. The *n*-Cultural construct delineates four constituent elements that form a stage-like process of developing multiculturality that exists at the extreme end of the multiculturalism continuum. We then propose *n*-Culturals to have developed higher order cognitive processes than enable them to maintain simultaneity of salience of all their cultural identities. Finally, we propose that *n*-Culturals have developed skills (e.g. manage and balance cultural conflict) that enable them to perform particular tasks that benefit the organizations that employ them. We now discuss these implications and themes for future research in greater detail.

n-Culturals as the epitome of multiculturalism

n-Culturals advances multicultural identity. The model of multiculturalism presented here contains four elements: cultural knowledge; identification; internalization; and commitment, which are presented in a stage-like process of developing multiculturality. This *n*-Cultural construct extends current perspectives beyond identification and internalization to augment the view that the *n*-Cultural lives out his/her multiculturality with a high degree of effort and consistency. Therefore, one has to be involved and regularly active in the cultural domains one claims to identify with and have

knowledge of to be *n*-Cultural. The *n*-Cultural, therefore, exists on one extreme of a continuum of multicultural identities. This perspective is valuable since current views concerning multiculturals present them as discrete identities, which limits how individuals might progress through their multiculturality. The *n*-Cultural conceptualization, however, suggests that there are techniques and skills that individuals can acquire to progress through the multiculturality continuum.

Capability to maintain salience of all cultural identities. We have also proposed that *n*-Culturals have developed higher order cognitive processes. These higher order processes are the capability to attune to complex cognitive linkages between their various identities and manage dissonances, including the ability to maintain the salience of all their cultural identities. These high order capabilities in turn enable *n*-Culturals to handle particular tasks that benefit organizations they work for, and these include boundary spanning activities.

n-Culturals as boundary spanners. It has been argued that some multicultural individuals possess knowledge and unique skills not available to others that can be leveraged to the benefit of organizations (Brannen and Thomas, 2010), such as boundary spanning (Aldrich and Herker, 1977; Barner-Rasmussen *et al.*, 2014; Thomas, 1994). By understanding the constituent elements of *n*-Culturalism, we may be able to better explain and predict which personal, social or task outcomes are likely to be influenced by multiculturalism and multicultural identities (see Fitzsimmons, 2013). For example, Bochner (1981) suggested that, as a function of their multiculturality, multicultural individuals are creative synthesizers who are likely to function better than monoculturals in a wider variety of intercultural situations, and that this quality allows them to better deal with the demands of today's dynamic complex environment. The more complex cognitive processes (see Tadmor *et al.*, 2009; Lakshman, 2013) that *n*-Culturals have developed seem to be influential across domains, and they are able to creatively transfer these processes to other areas of their lives (Tadmor *et al.*, 2009) and in different contexts (Brannen, 2004). This includes re-contextualizing equivalent concepts from the individual's heritage to the current host culture, and adapting meanings and understanding so that he/she is functionally effective in the host culture. Thomas's (1994) work on boundary spanners has suggested that *n*-Culturals can be effective communicators in team contexts given their skills in information gathering and sensitivity to social cues in such group situations (Hong, 2010).

It is also possible that the higher order cognitive complexity that *n*-Culturals have developed in the process of becoming multicultural may also serve them in solving acculturation challenges at different organizational levels (group, department and organization) and in different cultural contexts. In turn, *n*-Culturals' abilities to deal with these challenges may have implications for organizations that employ them in the areas of human resources and diversity management.

Implications of n-Culturals in human resource and diversity management. In the same way that having been exposed to multiple cultures does not necessarily ensure that an individual internalizes multiple cultures or become an *n*-Cultural, the mere presence of cultural plurality does not make an organization a multiculturalist organization (Canen and Canen, 2008). Rather, an organization has to ensure openness to cultural plurality and associated identities to be so deemed (Canen and Canen, 2001, 2008).

Diversity management involves building skills and creating policies that promote the best in each culture represented in an organization (Canen and Canen, 2001). These authors highlighted that demonstrating cultural sensitivity is imperative for diversity

management, as it encourages members of an organization to value the cultures that are present. However, to develop skills and create policies designed to reveal the best of each culture might involve intercultural training (Alcázar *et al.*, 2013; D'Netto *et al.*, 2014). For example, this might involve identifying *n*-Culturals within the organization, and utilizing techniques such as modeling from *n*-Culturals (Ramiah and Hewstone, 2013). Diversity management could start with individuals being open to different types of diversity (age, gender, ethnicity and culture), and learning through interaction with *n*-Culturals in the organization. The presence of *n*-Culturals themselves within an organization may facilitate others to accept individuals who are different, and/or may embody a diverse range of cultural identities. In short, the presence of individuals who are able to maintain salience and are confident in sharing all of their cultural identities may also expose others to different cultures.

Future research

Operationalizing the n-Culturals. A difficult issue that continues to plague the field of multicultural identity is how to measure identity and/or acculturation processes accurately and effectively (Arends-Tóth and van de Vijver, 2006; Ward and Kus, 2012). This includes how to measure multiculturality. The ability to identify who holds multiple cultural identities has suffered from a lack of precision, with the identification of multicultural individuals ranging from self-reports of identity to surface characteristics such as ethnicity to reports of personal history (Benet-Martínez, 2012; Tadmor and Tetlock, 2006). By modeling multicultural identity in terms of its constituent elements, we provide a basis for measurement that identifies a continuum of multicultural identities that ranges from monocultural to *n*-Culturals. Thus, as opposed to rigid and discrete multicultural types, we present multicultural identity in a stage-like form. The *n*-Cultural construct can be measured by assessing the extent to which individuals have knowledge of, identify with, have internalized, are committed to, and finally, able to maintain the salience of two or more cultural identities, and then how they are placed on this continuum.

Although some aspects of multicultural identity may lend themselves to observable behavioral or trace measures, the concept of identity is in large part cognitive. And since we know that the human mind is a complex entity, we also know that an effective assessment of cognitive activity is fraught with problems (Nisbett and Wilson, 1977). An overall assessment of multicultural identity will therefore require multiple methods to assess the different levels of knowledge, identification, commitment and internalization of culture. Based on this conceptualization, we might consider the relative strength of identities as well as both attitudinal and behavioral indicators of multiculturalism (Navas *et al.*, 2007; Ryder *et al.*, 2013; Stoessel *et al.*, 2012; Sam and Berry, 2010; Tartakovsky, 2012; Ward and Kus, 2012). For example, Downey *et al.* (2004, 2006) relied on the degree that individuals perceive compatibility between multiple cultures (multicultural identity integrations or culture-Chameleonism) to assess how individuals manage cultural conflict. Similar to Benet-Martínez *et al.* (2002) instrument, Downey *et al.*'s (2004, 2006) study assessed individuals' perceptions of cultural coexistence and disparity as well as their cultural identity management strategy (i.e. separately or simultaneously). In short, a self-report measure can assess whether one has multiple cultural identities, including acculturation strategies (see Benet-Martínez, 2012) and multicultural personality (van der Zee and van Oudenhoven, 2000). Further, as a form of convergence test,

we can use existing CQ measures (Thomas *et al.*, 2012; Earley and Ang, 2003) to assess the degree of CQ that *n*-Culturals have compared to monoculturals and other multiculturals.

We assert that explicitly stating what is included in each constituent element of multicultural identity provides an important foundation for constructing effective measures to assess *n*-Culturals. Thus, by carefully examining each of the elements, we are able to identify a number of possible assessment options. For example, existing literature (Stryker, 1980; Tsui-Auch, 2005) has suggested that the density of ties (number of contacts) reflects one's commitment to a particular group and may indicate the salience of these cultural groups. The quality of relationships may also be as important as the number of relationship in determining a person's commitment to a particular group and/or culture. Here, we may qualitatively (e.g. Moore and Barker, 2012; Sparrow, 2000) and quantitatively assess the value or strength of relationship(s) (e.g. Tsui-Auch, 2005) that an individual has with members of various cultural groups with which he/she is affiliated. To further assess the degree of commitment to various cultural identities, we can also measure other behavioral components, such as time and resources spent, as well as effort an individual exerts in activities that are linked to their identities. Measuring these variables and qualitatively documenting how decisions are made may provide information concerning the degree to which a person has internalized and is committed to particular cultural identities.

Well-being and performance. Another area of future research related to the *n*-Cultural construct is to understand the influence of multiple cultural experiences on well-being, such as in the area of acculturative stress and performance across a range of domains. Landis *et al.* (1985) suggested that the ability to manage and balance values, norms and situations when they are potentially in conflict results in lower levels of anxiety (i.e. by reducing cognitive dissonance) and potential acculturative stress. Evidence indicates that many individuals who live at the intersection of multiple cultures struggle to manage their identities (Berry, 2006; Berry and Annis, 1974; Berry *et al.*, 1987; Furnham and Bochner, 1986; Perez *et al.*, 2002; Rudmin, 2009), and that the inability to manage this process results in chronic and debilitating acculturative stresses (see Berry, 2006). Future research may address this well-being dimension to answer the question of whether *n*-Culturals, because of their higher order cognitive abilities, are able achieve balance and maintain their multiple identities, thus lowering their anxiety.

Another future area of research that can be developed with regard to the *n*-Cultural construct is related to performance constructs that are likely to be used for measuring diversity management. Alcázar *et al.* (2013) suggested that to measure and fully understand the effects of diversity within organizations, it is necessary to define new performance constructs. We may develop constructs that are quantifiable and account for the interests of diverse groups of internal and external stakeholders, which in turn can be used as performance goals for employees. For example, some of the skills associated with *n*-Culturals are their sensitivity to cultural cues and ability to gather information, with both of these skills applicable to intercultural communication. Key elements of these skills can be abstracted then constructed into goal setting and policies for performance goals.

Conclusion

In this paper we modeled the construct of multicultural identity in a manner that overcomes some of the deficiencies in previous categorizations of individuals who are

influenced by more than one cultural identity. In so doing, we identify four dimensions of multicultural identity: knowledge; identification; internalization; and commitment. With this approach we recognize that cultural identities may be uniquely represented within each individual as they confront the task of defining themselves in terms of their culture. The critical feature in creating a theory of multicultural identity is the recognition that these elements exist within individuals to a greater or lesser extent. By examining the various combinations of elements, a continuum of multicultural identity could be created that is anchored in *n*-Culturals. These individuals are capable of creatively synthesizing all facets of their multiple identities, with this synthesis achieved through metacognitive ability that is developed by acknowledging the legitimacy of their various identities and forging conceptual links among them. Modeling multicultural identity in this way would provide a basis for better understanding the role that multicultural identity plays in influencing behavior.

Note

1. It is our view that multicultural individuals, as described by previous works as well as our new conceptualization (*n*-Culturals), are different from Third Culture Individuals (TCI) who have been likened to multiculturals (Moore and Barker, 2012). According to Moore and Barker's (2012) descriptions, TCIs are individuals who do not lose but at the same time have not fully developed their heritage culture identity, and that these individuals then integrate their heritage and new culture to form a new cultural identity.

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