

***n*-CULTURALS, THE NEXT CROSS-CULTURAL CHALLENGE:
INTRODUCING A MULTICULTURAL MENTORING MODEL PROGRAM**

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Abstract

This article advances current conceptualizations of multicultural identities by identifying constituent elements of multicultural identity as knowledge, identification, internalization and commitment. This new conceptualization is labeled *n-Culturalism*, and posits that there are individuals who operate at the intersection of multiple cultures by maintaining salience of their multiple cultural identities. We illustrate that *n*-Culturals are assets to organizations because they are creative synthesizers that are able to facilitate organizational goals, and can also serve as models for others who are struggling in a multicultural environment. This article provides some solutions to managing multicultural challenges in organizations, such as conflicting values and identities. It also offers solutions on how individuals and organizations can leverage their identities in relation to the multiculturalism continuum to achieve desired workplace outcomes. Further, we introduce the Multicultural Mentor Modeling Program for organizations, which, if implemented, can help struggling multiculturals to address challenges in their social cognition, and to develop appropriate and effective behaviors in and outside of the workplace.

Key Words:

Multicultural identity, n-Cultural, Metacognition, Multiculturalism continuum, Mentoring

***n*-Culturals, The Next Cross-Cultural Challenge: Introducing A Multicultural
Mentoring Model**

*[D]iversity is a fact of life; whether it is the “spice” or “irritant” to people is the
fundamental psychological, social, cultural and political issue of our times*

Berry 1997

Introduction

Multiculturalism¹ is a 21st century fact of life (Benet-Martinez, 2012; Berry, 1997; Hong et al., 2007; Verkuyten, 2007), yet organizations experience great difficulties in managing individuals' identities within an increasingly diverse and multicultural workforce (Bertone and Leahy, 2003; Cox and Blake, 1991). Thomas, Brannen and Garcia (2010) argued that individuals who are able to manage their multicultural identity effectively are interculturally astute boundary spanners. However, we suggest that there are also many individuals with multiple cultural identities who are *unable* to manage their cultural identities effectively. Therefore, these individuals may require assistance in developing intercultural competences and making sense of their experiences, particularly as how they think about themselves and others may precipitate values conflict (social cognition dilemma). Ward (2008) suggested that individuals who struggle to manage their identities are experiencing *ethno-cultural identity conflict* (Ward, 2008), which is symptomatic of 'acculturative stress' (Berry, 2006; Berry and Annis, 1974; Berry et al., 1987; Perez et al., 2002; Rudmin, 2009). Previously known as 'culture shock' (see Berry, 2006; Furnham and Bochner, 1986), acculturative stress is caused by having to deal with two or more cultures simultaneously. This type of stress also includes having to solve value conflicts in particular situations (acute cognitive stress). If this cognitive stress becomes chronic and unmitigated, it can lead to the inability to assess social situations accurately (social cognition impairment) and to behave appropriately (sociocultural debilitation). We explore this social cognition dilemma, and

address the question of how multinational enterprises (MNE) might mitigate against these challenges by managing and leveraging the identities of multiculturalists to achieve desired workplace outcomes.

Current research has suggested that having multiple cultural identities involves an identity creation process that is much more complex than previously believed (e.g. Arnett, 2002). Based on social identity theory, we argue that social cognition dilemmas in part arise when multicultural individuals experience value conflicts in how they think about themselves and others (Penn et al., 2008). We stress the degree to which multiculturalists are cognitively linked to their identities, and the role that organizations should play in creating a better understanding of self.

Reconceptualizing multiculturalism

In this article, we extend the understanding of multicultural identity beyond the idea that it delineates individuals who have been exposed to and internalized two or more cultures (e.g. Benet-Martínez and Haritatos, 2005; Hong et al., 2000). Building on current views of biculturalism (Berry and Sam, 1997) and multicultural identity (Benet-Martínez, 2012), we go beyond current conceptualizations and discuss the theory of *n-Culturalism*, which is named for the multicultural archetype, the *n-Cultural*. We explicitly map elements of knowledge, identification, internalization and commitment as required dimensions of multiculturalism. We propose that the *n-Cultural* orientation is sited at one extreme of the multiculturalism continuum, and that this orientation involves balancing identities by actively maintaining salience of multiple cultures. This conceptualization differs from current views that present multiculturalists as discrete identities, which limits understanding of how an individual might progress through his/her multiculturalism. As a stage-like process of developing multiculturalism, the *n-Cultural* conceptualization suggests that there are techniques and skills that individuals can acquire to progress through their multiculturalism.

Multicultural mentoring

We then demonstrate how organizations might leverage multiculturalism by helping individuals to progress through their multiculturalism. For instance, research has shown that acculturative learning experiences generally result in positive outcomes such as lower levels of anxiety (Landis et al., 1985). One of the fundamental methods of acculturative learning (see Rudmin, 2009) is a mentoring support-giving approach. The benefit of mentoring opposed to other methods (e.g. gathering information, instructions, imitations of second-culture behaviors, and cultural assimilations) is that it is based on one-to-one relationships that can generate speedier acculturation. Hence, we suggest that mentorship is a mechanism through which organizations can help to manage and leverage the multicultural identities inherent in their workforce.

The essence of mentorship, then, is a one-on-one relationship between a mentor and a mentee. In this relationship, the mentor is usually older and more experienced (Hunt and Michael, 1983; Kram, 1985) and embodies the role of guide, teacher, and role model (Burke and McKeen, 1997; Chandler and Kram, 2005); however, variations on this format do exist (Harvey et al., 2009). Specifically, a mentoring relationship between a mentor and a multicultural mentee is one in which the mentor helps to alleviate acculturative stresses by creating awareness of multiple boundaries in the *operating-environment* (i.e. the culture of the environment in which one currently works and/or lives). As such, the *n*-Cultural's operating-environment is an encompassing concept that includes not only the wider context, but also more specific situations as described by Ashmore et al. (2004).

Mentoring has many benefits, such as reducing cognitive stresses and emotional exhaustion (Thomas and Lankau, 2009), which results in greater productivity (Scandura, 1992), higher job satisfaction (Hunt and Michael, 1983; Kram, 1985), greater career satisfaction (Fagenson, 1989; Koberg et al., 1994), development of technical, interpersonal

and political skills (Hunt and Michael, 1983; Kram, 1983, 1985), lower turnover intentions (Scandura and Viator, 1994), and higher retention rates. Importantly, all of the above benefits can positively impact an organization's level of profitability (Nahorney, 1994).

Research has also generally indicated that positive results accrue to mentored versus non-mentored individuals (Chao, 1997). Overall, active management of cognitive acculturative stresses and/or ethno-cultural identity conflict may subsequently help to mitigate, reverse, or even prevent the influence of stress on a multicultural individual's performance.

This article is organized in four parts. First, we explore the importance of developing an understanding of multicultural identity and proffer the term *n*-Cultural to describe the multicultural type that exists on one boundary of a continuum of cultural identities, that is, Monocultural to Multicultural to *n*-Cultural. We then discuss the ways in which some individuals are cognitively linked to multiple identities, as well as specify how these individuals can become more involved in MNEs. Third, we propose the development of mentoring programs to assist multiculturals in acculturative and cognitive stress management, and introduce the Multicultural Mentor Modeling Program to encourage mentoring at personal, relational and professional levels. In closing, we offer suggestions for cultivating the mentoring process for individuals who seek a multicultural way of life.

***n*-Culturalism: Mapping the Boundaries of the Multicultural Phenomenon**

Previous research has highlighted important factors about the nature of multicultural identities. Active cultural identity depends on knowledge of the culture, even though it may not produce identification with that culture (Hong et al., 2007). The management of multiple cultural orientations can vary in how cultural identities are integrated. While findings are mixed in terms of integration being the most robust approach for multiculturals (as opposed

to assimilation) (Rudmin, 2003; Snauwaert et al., 2003), choosing an identity is associated with positive consequences (see Constant and Zimmerman, 2008; Germain, 2004). As opposed to the degree of integration alone, we stress the importance of the extent to which one is cognitively linked to an identity, the degree of acceptance² (see LaFromboise et al., 1993) of goals and values associated with the identity, and the willingness to exert consistent effort to maintain that identity (see Ashmore et al., 2004). Relative to the acceptance of goal and values towards identity, LaFromboise and colleagues (1993) have argued that individuals can gain competence in two cultures without losing their cultural identity or having to choose one culture over the other. Hence, the crucial factor in creating a theory of multicultural identity is recognizing that the elements described above already exist within individuals to a greater or lesser extent, and that their combination results in a continuum of multicultural individuals. The *n-Cultural* conceptualization suggests that individuals can acquire the techniques and skills necessary to progress through the multiculturalism continuum.

The *n-Cultural* is an extension of the conceptualization of a multicultural individual, which comprise the necessary interdependent elements of *knowledge* of and *identification* with multiple cultures, *internalization* of the values, attitudes, beliefs and behavioral assumptions of these cultures, *and commitment* to maintain these identities. This enables *n-Culturals* to be *creative synthesizers* and function effectively in an organizational environment. Figure 1 illustrates a model of the constituent elements of *n-Culturalism*.

***** Insert Figure 1 about Here *****

n-Culturals' Constituent Elements

Cultural knowledge. Knowledge of cultures is crucial for the *n*-Cultural, and is the element that links the other three elements. Thus, it is a pre-requisite to identification, internalization and commitment. Acquiring cultural knowledge is fundamental to the *n*-Cultural functioning appropriately and effectively within a culture, and can be developed through both active and passive means. Further, cultural knowledge expands individuals' frameworks to allow other interpretations to flourish within existing mental structures.

Identification. Individual identity has two components: personal identity (e.g. physical attributes, psychological traits, abilities and interests) and social identity (salient group classifications). Social identity is derived from knowledge of one's memberships in social groups along with the values associated with these memberships. To achieve identification, individuals engage in a process of self-categorization by relying on salient contextual cues that define membership for the in-group and out-group, such as age, gender, religious affiliation, organizations and culture. Social categorization, therefore, enables individuals to define others and perceive themselves positively in the operating-environment (Ashforth and Mael, 1989; Brewer, 1991).

Recent conceptualizations of identity have suggested that an individual's identity has both internal and external components that refer to "parts of a self [that are] composed of the meanings that persons attach to the multiple roles they typically play in highly differentiated contemporary societies" (Stryker and Burke, 2000: 284). The internal component is multifaceted and dynamic, while the external component is influenced by social structures and cultural norms that affect one's self-concept (if internalized, as discussed below) and behavior (Bochner, 1981; Ellemers et al., 2002; Stryker, 1980; Tadmor and Tetlock, 2006; Verkuyten, 2005; Verkuyten and Pouliasi, 2006). One's identity, therefore, requires processing *knowledge* about the self and the groups that one relates to in the operating-environment, which determines the degree of salience of a particular identity. The ability of

multiculturals to identify with more than one cultural group is therefore one of the central elements facilitating an individual's multicultural identity. However, multicultural identities neither imply similar levels of identification with all cultures that an individual identifies with, nor suggest that an individual has internalized multiple cultures to the extent that they guide cognition and behavior.

Internalization. Some scholars (Ashforth and Mael, 1989; Reichers, 1985; Wiener, 1982) have differentiated social identification from internalization, in that identification is a perceptual cognitive construct that involves being linked to a group without demonstrating the associated behaviors that contribute to group goals. Thus, an individual can identify with a group and experience group success or failures (e.g. being disappointed when a football team loses) without internalization. At a deeper level, "internalization refers to incorporation of values, attitudes, and so forth within the self as guiding principle" (Ashforth and Mael, 1989: 21). Individuals can have as many identities as networks of relationships in which they hold and value membership (Stryker and Burke, 2000). If internalized, these identities may act as cognitive schemas that help interpret events and guide actions by increasing receptivity to behavioral cues in a given situation (Lewin, 1935; Stryker and Burke, 2000). The research on frame shifting by Hong et al. (2000) has highlighted situational cues that make salient a particular internalized identity. However, 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.

Commitment. Commitment is the strength of an individual's belief in and acceptance of a group's goals and values, including affect (cognitive dimension), the degree of willingness to exert effort on behalf of the group, and the level of desire to maintain membership in the group (behavioral dimension). We suggest that commitment also includes *cognitive* and *sociocultural* dimensions, since it is possible to exhibit the behavioral component and not the

cognitive dimension of commitment (see Hutnik, 1991; Liebkind 2006; Snauwaert et al., 2003). Therefore, apart from encompassing both attitudinal and behavioral components, commitment involves *consistency of conscious effort* to realize the acquired values. This is an important distinction between internalization and commitment, as internalization includes attitudinal and behavioral components but implicitly lacks the consistency of conscious effort element.

Stryker (1980) has suggested that the more connections (dense ties) an individual has with a group, the more committed the individual is to that identity. We propose a different view, suggesting that *strength* of ties may be just as important for commitment to a particular identity (see Rudmin, 2009; Tsui-Auch, 2005). For example, we argue that Stryker and Serpe's (1982) finding that salience of religious identities predicts the time an individual spends in religious activities reflects the strength of the ties developed as part of that individual's religious identity. That is, an individual can have a few very good friends linked to a particular identity, spend a lot of time in role relationships of this identity and be fulfilled, thus affirming and maintaining the salience of this cultural identity (cognitive dimension).

The *n*-Cultural

We propose that the defining characteristics of the *n*-Cultural consist of being *knowledgeable* about the multiple cultures that the individual *identifies* with, and that the individual has *internalized* as well as become *committed* to these cultural identities. Being *n*-Cultural is not simply a matter of having multiple identities, as this can occur without internalization and commitment (Snauwaert et al., 2003). However, because *n*-Culturals internalize then commit to multiple cultures, they consciously embrace their multiple identities simultaneously. This requires awareness of their multiple identities and actively

choosing to maintain salience of multiple cultures. This view differs from current views of multiculturalism.

Attempts have been made to explore the notion of salience for biculturals (Ellemers et al., 2002; Liebkind, 2006; McGuire et al., 1978; Ryder et al., 2000); however, we suggest that investigation into how multiple cultures might be salient simultaneously in multicultural individuals is under-explored. Specifically, to what extent can an individual maintain commitment to multiple identities that requires active cognitions and the reconciliation of potentially conflicting assumptions, values, attitudes, and beliefs about appropriate behavior? Reconciling conflicting identities may parallel outcomes from acculturation research, that is, some individuals may only maintain salience of a single identity, others may shift between identities depending on the situation (Alexander and Wiley, 1981; Farmer and Van Dyne, 2010; Hong et al., 2000; Tetlock and Mitchell, 2010), while still others may maintain multiple identities and salience of multiple cultures. Identifying and internalizing with and committing to multiple identities is possible for individuals, since research has suggested that identification with minority and majority groups may not conflict given that they are two separate continua (Hutnik, 1991; Phinney et al., 2001; Ryder et al., 2000; Snauwaert et al., 2003). Hence, these aforementioned works have suggested that individuals can internalize and simultaneously make salient both identities.

Interdependence of the *n*-Cultural's cognitive elements and maintaining salience of identities. In applying the *n*-Cultural idea to the MNE context, we raise the question of the existence of cognitive processes of *n*-Culturals and how these processes can be managed to facilitate organizational goals. In particular, we argue that *n*-Cultural orientation involves four interdependent elements that individually are insufficient to classify someone as multicultural.

Figure 1 shows the interdependencies of cultural knowledge with the processes of identification, internalization and commitment. The arrows indicate that the three elements are interrelated with cultural knowledge, and that none of these three elements can occur without this knowledge. Internalization and commitment are also linked to identification, as neither can occur without it. Acceptance of cultural norms (i.e. internalization) and behavioral efforts to maintain cultural values and norms (i.e. commitment) do not usually occur without a psychological link (i.e. identification) to the culture. Further, knowledge of culture(s) and psychological attachment heighten the degree to which empathy for cultural values and norms exists and, consequently, the extent to which cultures are internalized and maintained. Once internalized, the knowledge and values associated with each cultural identity become part of an individual's cultural metacognition.

In addition, we argue that *n*-Culturals can leverage their cross-border cultural experiences and/or cultural social categories by actively choosing to balance multiple cultural identities, frameworks and salience, because they recognize the value of each culture within themselves. In turn, this serves as the motivation to be an *n*-Cultural. This differs from existing views on how multiculturals approach their multicultural identities, that is, by automatic frame switching. We argue that *n*-Culturals are aware of their multiple identities, and then choose to maintain them by actively balancing salience of multiple cultures. This active conscious process retains the cognitive structures associated with their identities as a way to facilitate work in their operating-environment. Contrary to this approach, a 'switching' strategy may hinder an individual's ability to tap into the cognitive structures and capabilities associated with cross-cultural experiences. It is this capacity and ability to be aware of their multiple identities and actively balance salience of multiple cultures that differentiates *n*-Culturals from other multiculturals.

***n*-Culturals and Their Subsequent Identities**

Multicultural identity represents an intra-individual state that is influenced by the environment. We clarify this notion by addressing the internal (self) and social mechanisms influencing the extent to which *n*-Culturals manage multiple identities with potential conflict in values and sociocultural elements in situations. *n*-Culturals' complex cognitive schemas can be best understood by articulating the internal and social mechanisms affecting decision-making situations. *n*-Culturals cope by juggling their multiple identities, which can create challenges for them and for the organizations that seek to decipher and respond to their behaviors.

Maintaining and balancing salience of multiple cultures

Cultural metacognition. Burke (1991) argued that once an identity is activated, it triggers an internal process to monitor identity, the environment and subsequent behaviors (Burke, 1991: 837). This *identity-cognitive-control system* (ICCS) has four components: an *identity standard* (a culturally prescribed set of meanings and roles in a situation); a *situation* (context, including self-relevant meanings); an *evaluation* (related to an identity standard) of individual perception of meanings within a situation; and *behaviors* (goal-directed) to fit a situation and identity standard. The internal cognitive mechanism uses knowledge of social standards and self-meanings to verify discrepancies, allowing behavioral adjustments to repair discrepancies or change the situation (action).

The idea that individuals can change behaviors and situations to match the standard of a context and their own self-meaning (Tsushima and Burke, 1999) is similar to the concept of cultural intelligence (Thomas et al., 2008).³ Further, the cognitive control-system that is activated in relation to a particular identity (Burke, 1991) matches the cultural metacognition process of cultural intelligence (Thomas et al., 2008). Cultural metacognition therefore

contributes to the goal-directed behaviors of *n*-Culturals and allows them to maintain and manage salience of identities.

Maintaining salience of multiple cultures requires knowledge of what is acceptable and effective in a particular context and situation. A higher order cognitive process called *cultural metacognition* (Thomas, 2010; Thomas et al., 2012) plays a central role in *n*-Culturals' functioning. Flavell (1979: 907) described metacognition as the "active monitoring and consequent regulation and orchestration of these (cognitive) processes in relation to the cognitive objects or data on which they bear, usually in service of some concrete goal or objective". We propose that the *n*-Cultural's cultural metacognition uses knowledge of multiple cultures and combines it with the ability to attune to complementarities of values that are important to each of the *n*-Cultural's identities. Cultural metacognition further takes account of possible non-complementary values within the operating-environment. The cultural knowledge is then used to search for effective solutions that are acceptable in the cultures that the *n*-Cultural identifies with to produce appropriate behaviors within that context.

Cultural metacognition in action. The possibility of actively balancing multiple cultural identities and maintaining their salience is supported by the fact that not all values that the *n*-Cultural hold as salient are contradictory. It is likely that similarities exist among operating-environments, which are related to the identities that facilitate *n*-Cultural to manage multiculturalism in a particular environment (La Fromboise et al., 1993; Tadmor et al., 2009). It is also likely that *n*-Culturals will face situations where norms and values of these social microcosms are in conflict. In this situation, we argue that the *n*-Cultural is able to attune and balance the conflicting values to produce appropriate behaviors required for the situation.

Imagine an exchange between a male Chinese expatriate and a female Australian-Chinese working in Australia (see Thomas and Inkson, 2003, for common cultural clashes regarding face). The Chinese expatriate proposes an idea he has for presenting results of a report at an upcoming meeting; however, the Australian-Chinese colleague strongly dislikes the idea. To save face for her Chinese colleague, she responds with “*it’s an interesting idea*”, and relies on pragmatics such as vocal intonation and body language to convey the actual unfavorable opinion (*behavior* component of Burke’s (1991) ICCS).

In the Australian operating-environment, being direct is an accepted norm, and for many, *telling the truth* is not only a cultural and ethical norm but also a religious norm (*identity standard* component of ICCS). A religious individual will therefore feel pressure from their religious identity to maintain the norm of telling the truth. Therefore, if the Australian–Chinese is also religious and an *n*-Cultural, her cultural metacognition will process the situation and guide her to exhibit appropriate behaviors for the operating-environment despite the conflicting (i.e. religious) pressures she is experiencing (*situation* and *evaluation* components of ICCS). By definition, she will provide very clear pragmatics to ensure that her Chinese colleague interprets the statement “*it’s an interesting idea*” as a negative response, which is consistent with her view. Once again, the operating-environment presents the context that is pivotal to determining the behavioral responses of an *n*-Cultural (*behavior* component of ICCS).

The above example illustrates how an *n*-Cultural balances important values for Australian, Chinese, and religious identities and then provides an appropriate response (*evaluation* and *behavior* component of ICCS). If the individual had switched frames (e.g. see Benet-Martínez et al., 2002; Verkuyten and Pouliasi, 2006) and used only her Australian or religious identity, she might have offended her Chinese colleague even though the operating-environment is Australia (see Thomas and Inkson, 2003). However, by maintaining salience

and balancing all three cultural identity standards, she proceeds with the task dictated by the operating-environment and effectively *saves face* and *tells the truth* even though cultural norms may clash. The example demonstrates how cultural metacognition within a specific operating-environment manages salience of multiple identities and facilitates goal-directed behaviors.

***n*-Culturals' cultural metacognition.** The above example further illustrates that if the Australian-Chinese-Christian had viewed her three identities as discrete, she might not have resolved the situation effectively nor have developed as a multicultural individual. The significance of the *n*-Cultural conceptualization lies in the fact that it presents a continuum of multiculturalism, as opposed to the notion that multiculturalism constitutes discrete identities. Viewing forms of identities as discrete limits how an individual might progress through his/her multiculturalism. The conceptualization of *n*-Culturalism as a staged process of developing multiculturalism suggests that such individuals develop the techniques and skills to progress through their multiculturalism from Monocultural to Multicultural to *n*-Cultural. However, we acknowledge that there are multiculturals who struggle to progress through their multiculturalism.

According to Penn et al. (2008), reliance on metacognitive experience to form judgments is heightened under conditions of relatively limited cognitive resources, such as when one is distracted or facing a high cognitive load with working memory deficits. This is similar to undergoing acculturative stress or, most likely, chronic ethno-cultural identity conflict (Ward, 2008). For individuals who are struggling to cope with acculturative stress and/or ethno-cultural identity conflict, a higher than normal cognitive load can lead to dysfunctional outcomes in personal and work life (Bhugra et al., 2010; Horan et al., 2008). In the next section, we examine identity struggle and cognitive stress faced by multiculturals during the acculturation process, which for some may become chronic.

Identity struggle and cognitive stress in the acculturation process

Based on Berry's (2005) claim that acculturation continually occurs where culturally different groups interact, multiculturalists may experience on-going acculturation both cognitively and socially, especially in a multicultural operating-environment. Since *n*-Culturals have gone through this process and developed the ability to manage their multicultural identities effectively, they should have significantly lower (cognitive) stress levels. *n*-Culturals are also more skilled at managing multiple cultural identities, frameworks and salience that lead to effective and appropriate behaviors. However, not all multiculturalists manage this process effectively and may find the struggle to be debilitating. The major issue for multiculturalists in the process of acculturation is that it involves:

One kind of stress, that in which the stressors are identified as having their source in the process of acculturation; in addition, there is often a particular set of stress behaviors which occurs during acculturation, such as lowered mental health status (specifically confusion, anxiety, depression), feelings of marginality and alienation, heightened psychosomatic symptom level, and identity confusion (Berry et al., 1987: 492).

Berry et al.'s (1987) description of symptoms associated with acculturative stress is important since it resembles *social cognition impairment*, with symptoms that include making attributional errors, forming misperceptions (Horan et al., 2008), and being distracted (Penn et al., 2008). From a practical standpoint, however, social cognition impairment from acculturation may be a relatively short-term condition with positive outcomes. Meintel (1973) argued that cross-cultural experiences allow self-discovery, personal growth, and escape from social roles and culturally controlled perception. However, for those unable to manage the struggle associated with their multicultural identity, social cognition impairment can become chronic and lead to debilitating outcomes. Scholars have agreed that the ability to construct

representations of the relations between self and others, and to use these representations flexibly to guide social behavior, are crucial skills for understanding and interacting with others (Fiske and Taylor, 1991; Horan et al., 2008; Penn et al., 2008).

Another implication of *n*-Culturalism is that it provides an analytical map of who might be (and who might become) *n*-Culturals and who might not. Conversely, if we continue to view multiculturalism as constituting discrete identities, we will not advance our understanding of this phenomenon. Importantly, the conceptualization of *n*-Culturalism as a stage-like process enables us to understand how people can be helped to become an *n*-Cultural. The following sections introduce a means to mitigate acculturation and cognitive stresses via a mentoring framework that facilitates this progress towards *n*-Culturalism.

Mentoring Social Cognition of Multiculturals in Organizations

Recent work on acculturation (Rudmin, 2009) has suggested four methods of acculturative learning that include gathering information about the second-culture, instructions, imitation of second-culture behaviors, and mentoring by persons competent in the new culture and supportive of the acculturating person. Rudmin (2009) also advocated modeling and social support to help people undergoing acculturative stress. Further, we argue that *n*-Culturals can serve as models within organizations.

The argument for a mentoring program for multicultural individuals stems from the premise that these individuals may experience chronic acculturative and/or cognitive stresses, which in turn puts pressure on cognitive resources. While some degree of cognitive impairment will occur during acculturation, it may increase if multicultural individuals struggle with multiple decision-making platforms. Drawing on Roncone and colleagues (2007), we suggest that social cognitive interventions for multicultural individuals can help facilitate improvements in

functional outcomes, including more effective and satisfying social functioning (Horan et al., 2008). Thus, we propose the development of a mentoring framework for organizations to assist multiculturals to adjust to their current operating-environment.

The mentoring framework addresses social cognitive and behavioral issues caused by acculturation. Thus, we propose that mentors (including *n*-Culturals) can provide models and social support systems (Hu et al., 2011; Lee et al., 2004) for multicultural individuals during the acculturation process. To this end, we adapt intervention programs from psychology to develop metacognitive processes and assist in behavioral modification⁴ (Horan et al, 2008; Roncone et al., 2007).

Stages of Multicultural Mentoring and Implications

We propose that mentoring social cognition and metacognition of multicultural individuals in organizations can occur in four stages within the Multicultural Mentor Modeling Program:

Stage I) Developing an understanding of the self;

Stage II) Searching for and selecting means to improve understanding of the self;

Stage III) Implementing the means to improve understanding of the self; and

Stage IV) Revisiting initial understanding of the self.

These stages address three areas of mentoring that encompass *personal, relational and professional* dimensions, thus targeting *intrapersonal* and *interpersonal* aspects of cognition and behaviors in work and non-work settings (Harvey et al., 2010).

To develop an understanding of self at the *personal level*, mentors encourage mentees to engage in social cognition training through introspection of personal views, values, cognitions and behaviors (Horan et al., 2008). The mentors help their multicultural mentees to recognize their different identities and know where these fit within a certain context to enable them to cognitively manage their inner selves. In particular, at the personal level,

mentees try to understand themselves as multicultural persons in their own worlds. At the *relational level*, mentors help mentees to model and interact with new surroundings and with people from different backgrounds. Finally, to develop an understanding of self at the *professional level*, mentors help mentees to ask questions, such as how mentees see themselves as multicultural professionals, how they can use their diversity (exposure and visibility thereof) to contribute to organizational goals, and what roles they should have in their organizations.

Social cognition impairment is associated with the following deficits: self-objective awareness (i.e. difficulty in expressing feelings intentionally); own intention awareness (i.e. an individual's perception that his/her actions are brought about by external forces and not as a result of his/her own volition); and awareness of other people's intentions (i.e. leading to wrong inferences about these intentions (Horan et al., 2008; Penn et al., 2008; Roncone et al., 2007). Although we argue that these symptoms are milder in acculturative stress, the effects still emerge as difficulties in social perception and interaction, that is, at personal and relational levels (Horan et al. 2008; Roncone et al., 2007).

Acknowledging that social cognition impairment may exist in multicultural mentees, we adapted elements of Roncone et al.'s (2007) *Metacognitive Intervention Program* (also see Feuerstein, 1980) coupled with Manz and Neck's (1991) *Inner-Self-Leadership Processes* (also see Neck and Manz, 1996) for our mentoring program. The programs are complementary since both address cognitive and subsequent behavioral processes that are critical for multicultural individuals. The resultant Multicultural Mentor Modeling Program is presented in Figure 2.⁵ The framework contains a four-stage process divided into elements pertaining to the management of cognition (stages I and II) and behavior (stages III and IV).

***** **Insert Figure 2 about Here** *****

Stage I: Developing understanding of self

Stage I helps the multicultural person through an introspection process with the aim of improving behaviors in the workplace. Thus, introspection is viewed as necessary to help mentees understand personal values and help manage their inner selves cognitively (Feuerstein, 1980; Horan et al., 2008; Manz and Neck, 1991; Neck and Manz, 1996; Penn et al., 2008; Roncone et al., 2007). The social cognition literature has suggested that a major issue in acculturative stress is anxiety resulting from uncertainty in the new culture (both societal and organizational). This may show up in difficulties such as interpreting others or misunderstanding how to behave and express oneself in a new environment. At this point, the mentoring process occurs because the mentee realizes and/or the mentor observes that the mentee is struggling socially (Feuerstein, 1980; Roncone et al., 2007). For example, the mentee may be distracted, make attributional errors, misinterpret others' behaviors or experience high levels of stress, all of which may result in tension in and out of work. The mentee, mentor or both may have recognized such problems (Feuerstein, 1980; Roncone et al., 2007), and the Multicultural Mentor Modeling Program could help.

In practice, the mentor and mentee together analyze a recent critical incident that the mentee mishandled, such as a dysfunctional disagreement with a co-worker. In Step 2, the mentor and mentee subsequently analyze the mentee's perceptions during incidents and their effects on behavior. For example, a mentee may have been offended when a colleague provided constructive criticism in front of others (e.g. "*your idea can be improved in a number of ways...*"). The mentee may then have admonished the colleague aggressively (saying something like "*you are very rude*"); this, in turn, may have led the colleague and others to respond defensively, leading to a disagreement. In such instances, mentors may help the mentee understand that, in certain cultures, people provide direct feedback. Thus, the

mentee's reaction of being offended may have been inappropriate for the context, and the response of "*you are very rude*" created a negative effect in that context as well.

Stage II: Searching for and selecting means to improve understanding of the self

The goals of social cognition training in Stage II are to help the mentee understand and improve self within the *personal*, *relational* and *professional* dimensions. First, the mentor and mentee find realistic ways to improve awareness and perceptions by searching for values, cognitions and behaviors that are complementary in a particular operating-environment. Next, they find ways to work through and manage the values, cognitions and behaviors that are in conflict in a particular operating-environment.

Roncone et al.'s (2007) metacognition intervention has suggested that individuals can benefit from understanding the nature and usefulness of cognitive processes involved in social interactions. Manz and Neck (1991: 88) pointed out that "people spend much of their lives reacting to situation after situation with little considered attention given to why they perceive and mentally process information the way they do" and, according to these authors, this equates to mindlessness. Therefore, it is crucial for mentors to help mentees see the link between cultural values and behaviors. As a solution, Manz and Neck (1991: 88) claimed that, "behavioral choices and experience of life largely reside in the mind, suggesting that perhaps the effective self-leadership of thought processes is the most important aspect of management". In short, they argued that thoughts can be self-controlled, and suggested that for personal, relational and professional behavior to change the mentee must *challenge destructive thinking*, especially those related to cultural factors and acculturative stress, and then improve cognition and behavior in both work and non-work settings.

One intervention to facilitate understanding of the self is attribution training (Horan et al., 2008; Moritz and Woodward, 2007; Penn et al., 2008), which seeks to develop the accuracy of a mentee's beliefs to highlight constructive and dysfunctional perceptions and

identify more positive perceptions. Social and metacognition training literature (Horan et al., 2008; Moritz and Woodward, 2007; Penn et al., 2008) has suggested that attribution helps develop metacognitive skills and behavioral modification. Moreover, cross-cultural training literature (Brislin et al., 1983; Brislin and Yoshida, 1994; Cutler, 2005; Cushner and Brislin, 1996; Ko and Yang, 2011; Selmer and Luring, 2009) has corroborated the value of attribution training (e.g. from cultural assimilators) for individuals standing at the intersection of two or more cultures.

The Multicultural Mentor Modeling Program is more in-depth than existing cross-cultural training because it provides practical help to mentees to improve both cognitively and behaviorally (Moritz and Woodward, 2007). Thus, in the Multicultural Mentor Modeling Program, mentors coach mentees by explaining possible cognitive biases such as misattribution and/or jumping to conclusions, discussing and/or demonstrating possible negative consequences of cognitive biases, and training to practice metacognitive processes such as considering alternatives, withholding judgments, accepting disconfirming evidence, and re-evaluating initial perceptions (Moritz and Woodward, 2007).

For example, different causes of positive and negative events may provide different perspectives. In the case where a mentee is offended by public constructive criticism, several explanations can emerge. First, a dominant interpretation may be that the mentee is unable to take on constructive criticism and blames others for his/her response to the situation. Alternative interpretations may be that the mentee has a poor idea and blames himself/herself for the reaction, or that a colleague is jealous of the mentee's idea (credit self – self-serving positive and negative attributions), or the colleague is actually interested in improving the mentee's idea (circumstances – positive attribution). In short, mentors help mentees consider various causes (Moritz and Woodward, 2007), and understand how cultural factors may influence perceptions.

Stage II further involves mentor and mentee developing and identifying constructive perceptions, and analyzing how these perceptions may have changed mentee's actions. At this point, the mentor's role becomes *coach-like*, informing the mentee of boundaries in the operating-environment, highlighting mentee misperceptions, and helping a mentee see complementarities in the values, cognitions and behaviors within the operating-environment. Further, mentors can also function as a social support mechanism (Hu et al., 2011; Lee et al., 2004).

An example of such a mechanism is that mentors can suggest that mentees observe the behavior of others and analyze it. Mentors may suggest that the mentee has to learn to accept those perceived inappropriate behaviors but not mimic them when giving feedback to others, thus staying true to one's self and modeling an alternative way to provide feedback (e.g. an indirect mode that is used by collectivistic and high-context individuals). Apart from identifying alternative and constructive perceptions, mentors can also help mentees develop empathy skills (Horan et al., 2008). Thus, in combination with attribution training, mentors and mentees can discuss how others might feel about and perceive a mentee's behavior in a particular situation.

To reiterate the process, mentors can help mentees to understand how the skills and attributes they develop as multicultural professionals can contribute to their organizations, including which roles they can take on in the organizations, and when (Gotsi et al., 2010). For example, the multicultural individual can be a *bridge* between two culturally different groups, or use his/her creative synergizing skills to suggest alternative solutions. Thus, an *n*-Cultural can model being a boundary spanner, and/or the skill of presenting alternative solutions.

Stage III: Implementation to improve the self in an operating-environment

A critical stage of the multicultural individual adjustment process occurs in Stage III, in which mentors help mentees to improve in all dimensions (personal, relational and

professional). Mentors and mentees work together to develop ways for mentees to improve, to incorporate flexibility in their personal (multicultural) views, and to absorb what mentors offer.

While the operating-environment will provide the boundaries, mentors and mentees can develop the means that will enable mentees to improve in the operating-environment, again taking account of complementarities among the values, cognitions, and behaviors between the operating-environment and the mentees' multicultural background. Research in positive psychology and management has advanced the notion of developing 'possible selves' in multicultural individuals (see Horan et al., 2008; Kohonen, 2005; Sheldon and Lyubomirski, 2006), in particular, considering best or ideal possible selves as an approach to improve behaviors. For example, the *thought self-leadership* (TSL; Manz and Neck, 1991; Neck and Manz, 1996) approach involves *imagining* a positive scenario where one *talks oneself* towards achieving it. This is also called the process of *imagery and self-talk*. In short, with the aid of mentors, mentees form new habits in social competency behavior for different operating-environments (Manz and Neck, 1991; Roncone et al., 2007), while taking account of complementarities that exist in the values, cognitions and behaviors between the operating-environment and mentees' multicultural backgrounds. For example, a mentee may visualize his/her future actions in the operating-environment in which she receives direct feedback from other colleagues and openly accepts the constructive criticism. The mentee can encourage himself/herself by accepting that the constructive criticism can only improve his/her future performance.

According to the TSL approach, developing new habits centers on developing and maintaining constructive desirable thought patterns. The argument claims that just as we develop behavioral habits that are both functional and dysfunctional, we develop patterns in

our thinking that influence perceptions. As such, mentors can train mentees to process information in an accurate manner that enables them to develop their best possible selves.

For instance, a mentee can imagine a scenario in which he/she perceives absence of malice in constructive feedback during an interaction with a colleague, and then visualizes the interaction in a constructive manner. The mentee can conduct an internal dialogue where positive perceptions from a colleague develop constructive and productive outcomes. In this process, the mentee then visualizes positive expressions, thus linking positive perceptions with his/her own positive and constructive actions. Earlier work (Gioia and Manz, 1985) has also suggested that people are able to learn behaviors through vicarious learning. As such, mentors (who may be *n*-Culturals) can share their unsuccessful and successful experiences so mentees can learn from these experiences in the organization. In turn, mentees can develop them as general scripts to use in future similar situations in both work and non-work settings.

At this stage, the role of mentors also becomes more complex, as they become part of their mentees' professional social networks (Yeh et al., 2007). Thus, mentors can help mentees to be comfortable in and/or create an environment where multicultural individuals are welcome in the organization. For example, it is possible that mentors can create a *meta-identity* for the workgroup that is based on their multicultural identities (Pratt and Foreman, 2000). In conjunction with creating a meta-identity for groups, mentors can support mentees to develop as *n*-Culturals by affirming who they are as multicultural individuals and possibly through developing a supportive multicultural milieu. The idea is to develop an 'optimal distinctiveness' perspective for the mentee, so that he/she feels both accepted as a multicultural individual and as unique at the same time.

Brewer's (1991) work on Optimal Distinctiveness Theory (ODT) has suggested that social identifications are guided by two core human motives: the need to be unique and the need to belong. Therefore, we are motivated to identify with social groups with which we feel

kinship and distinctiveness to maintain a degree of self-identity. Having a social identity (e.g. national, ethnic, religious, professional or additional cultural social category) can satisfy individuals' simultaneous needs for inclusion and differentiation. This implies that mentors can be a social support system (Hu et al., 2011; Lee et al., 2004; Rudmin, 2009) within the organization that accepts mentees as they are, and affirms their individual multiculturalism as a set characteristic that makes them unique.

The TSL approach essentially provides a platform for multiculturalists to be in control of their destiny. As multiculturalists form new habits across different contexts that reflect their TSL, mentors assist in providing constructive criticism as they see fit to develop them as *n*-Culturals. The mentees begin to see how they can maintain salience of multiple cultural identities simultaneously (see Stage-IV discussion) and progress towards *n*-Culturalism. The mastery of balancing salience and thus determining appropriate reactions to situations is accomplished when multiculturalists recognize their *best possible self* that contains the balance of feeling included yet different from other cultural groups. By that, we mean that *n*-Culturals have developed an honest, untainted, and self-aware impression of themselves, their cognitions and subsequent behaviors, and are thus able to consciously select action paths.

Stage IV: Revisiting initial understanding of the self

This stage highlights the importance of going through the process of understanding the self along the three dimensions. Mentors encourage mentees to reflect on initial versus current understandings by asking several questions: (a) Who am I? (b) What are my assumptions about this situation? and (c) Are my self-statements helpful and constructive for me or are they destructive? The goal here is for the mentee to develop a habit of forming accurate and constructive thought patterns (Manz and Neck, 1991; Neck and Manz, 1996) to ensure that the multicultural individual can manage his/her beliefs and assumptions.

We suggest that these accurate metacognitive patterns may enable multicultural individuals to maintain the salience of their multiple cultures, be objective about themselves and others, and finally to express feelings intentionally. It may also enable a mentee to accurately assess the factors within his/her control in the new operating-environment. In turn, constructive perceptions may lead others to modify their views as well. We suggest that mentors can be a social support system both personally and professionally (Hu et al., 2011; Lee et al., 2004; Rudmin, 2009), and help mentees to maintain optimal distinctiveness. Recent studies into cognitive training have suggested significant improvements in general social cognition and behavioral performance that are transferable to other tasks and promote motivation to improve one's quality of life (Roncone et al., 2007) and general positive outlook (Moritz and Woodward, 2007; Sheldon and Lyubomirsky, 2006). Further, individuals with prior experience in mentoring relationships (i.e. as a mentee or mentor) may be more willing to follow through with a mentoring program (Ragins and Cotton, 1993).

Summary and Conclusions

In this article we argue that the influence of culture on behavior at work may have a more significant impact than previously thought (Arnett, 2002; Berry, 2003; Ward, 2008). We explore a phenomenon labeled *n*-Culturalism through which we re-conceptualize the notion of multicultural identity, building on the work of Benet-Martínez and her colleagues (Benet-Martínez, 2012; Benet-Martínez et al., 2002; Benet-Martínez et al., 2006). We highlight the notion that, beyond being multicultural, *n*-Culturals have multiple significant cross-border cultural experiences. *n*-Culturals ascribe to these significant cultural social categories, and are committed to and maintain multiple cultural identities by actively balancing their multiple cultural identities, which leads to effective and appropriate behaviors in work and non-work environments. This is a departure from the prior conceptualization of multiculturalism as discrete identities. This conceptualization appears to neglect the

importance of how multiculturals are cognitively attached to their identities, as well as their degree of acceptance of and commitment to cultures (see LaFromboise et al., 1993), which includes how they manage multiple identities. The significance of *n*-Culturalism as a stage-like process enables us to understand how people can be helped as they progress towards becoming *n*-Culturals. However, if we continue to view multiculturalism as discrete identities, we cannot progress beyond these current multiculturalism categories.

We argue that the *n*-Cultural conceptualization enables multiculturals to progress through their multiculturalism and develop multicultural identities by learning to actively balancing salience of multiple cultures. We acknowledge that multiple identities create complex cognitions that may result in value conflict in relation to the multiculturals' multifaceted persona, especially during acculturation.

A multicultural individual's inability to manage the acculturation process may result in chronic and/or greater cognitive stress (see Berry, 2006), and require the multicultural individual to tap into metacognitive processes. We suggest that metacognitive efforts, which are successfully utilized by some multiculturals such as *n*-Culturals, can be hindered in others due to their level of development. These individuals may then struggle to manage their identities and be faced with debilitating outcomes. Because managing mentoring relationships is an important issue for organizations (Young and Perrewe, 2000), we introduce the Multicultural Mentor Modeling Program consisting of personal, relational, and professional dimensions that benefit both the individual and the organization. The proposed four-stage Multicultural Mentor Modeling Program helps multicultural individuals to actively balance frameworks and salience of multiple cultures by influencing their cognitive processes and subsequent behavioral choices. In turn, such psychological and sociocultural adjustments provide individuals with the capacity to contribute to organizational performance. Only then

are organizations able to leverage the benefits to be gained from employing a culturally diverse workforce.

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Notes

¹. We recognize that the term ‘multiculturalism’ can host multiple meanings. We use the term to mean the experience of having been exposed to and having internalized two or more cultures (Hong et al., 2000; Nguyen and Benet-Martínez, 2007) as opposed to the *ideological* sense and associated *policies of maintaining a diversity of ethnic cultures within a community*. Recently, Benet-Martínez (2012: 628) opted to use ‘multiculturalism’ over ‘bicultural’ to refer to “individuals and societies who position themselves between two (or more) cultures and incorporate this experience (i.e. values, knowledge, and feelings associated with each of these identities and their intersection) into their sense of who they are”. The terms ‘multicultural identity’ and ‘multiculturals’ put forth in this article include individuals with ethnically plural conceptions (e.g. Chinese-Americans).

². To be culturally competent, one needs to: (a) possess a strong personal identity; (b) have knowledge of and facility with the beliefs and values of the culture; (c) display sensitivity to the affective processes of the culture; (d) communicate clearly in the language of the given cultural group; (e) perform socially sanctioned behavior; (f) maintain active social relations within the cultural group; and (g) negotiate the institutional structures of that culture.

³. Thomas et al. (2008) conceptualized the culturally intelligent person as one who is able to change the situation to ensure fit between one’s behavior and the situation.

⁴. Although we are borrowing training and intervention techniques, we are not diagnosing pathologies that need to be corrected within the individual. However, we are asserting that some symptoms are mild representations of conditions associated with social cognition deficit; thus, they can be addressed by using existing treatments for improving social cognition.

⁵. The Multicultural Mentor Modeling Program warrants several assumptions and boundary conditions: (A) Multiculturals are receptive of mentoring efforts. No one wants to appear vulnerable and inexperienced, much less actively seek help, particularly not someone who has been placed in an important managerial role; (B) It may be undertaken formally or informally; (C) Mentoring arrangements for multiculturals are likely to include multiple mentors across different continents who support the multicultural in the personal, relational-social, and professional domain; (D) Stages in the Multicultural Mentor Modeling Program may occur simultaneously. Thus, while one mentor may help to improve the mentee's understanding of self from a personal perspective, another mentor may help the mentee to understand the self from a professional perspective; (E) Mentors within the personal, social, professional dimensions of mentoring are unlikely to change across the different stages. For example, a mentor who engages in personal mentoring efforts will be likely to manage the personal mentoring process through stages I-IV; (F) The stages are considered ongoing and parallel to the acculturation process; (G) It is difficult to identify the 'right' mentor for the 'right' person at the 'right' time for the 'right' category of mentoring at the 'right' stage of one's life and/or career, since the selection pool of mentors is likely to span across organizations or nations.

Figure 1. Constituent elements of *n*-Culturalism

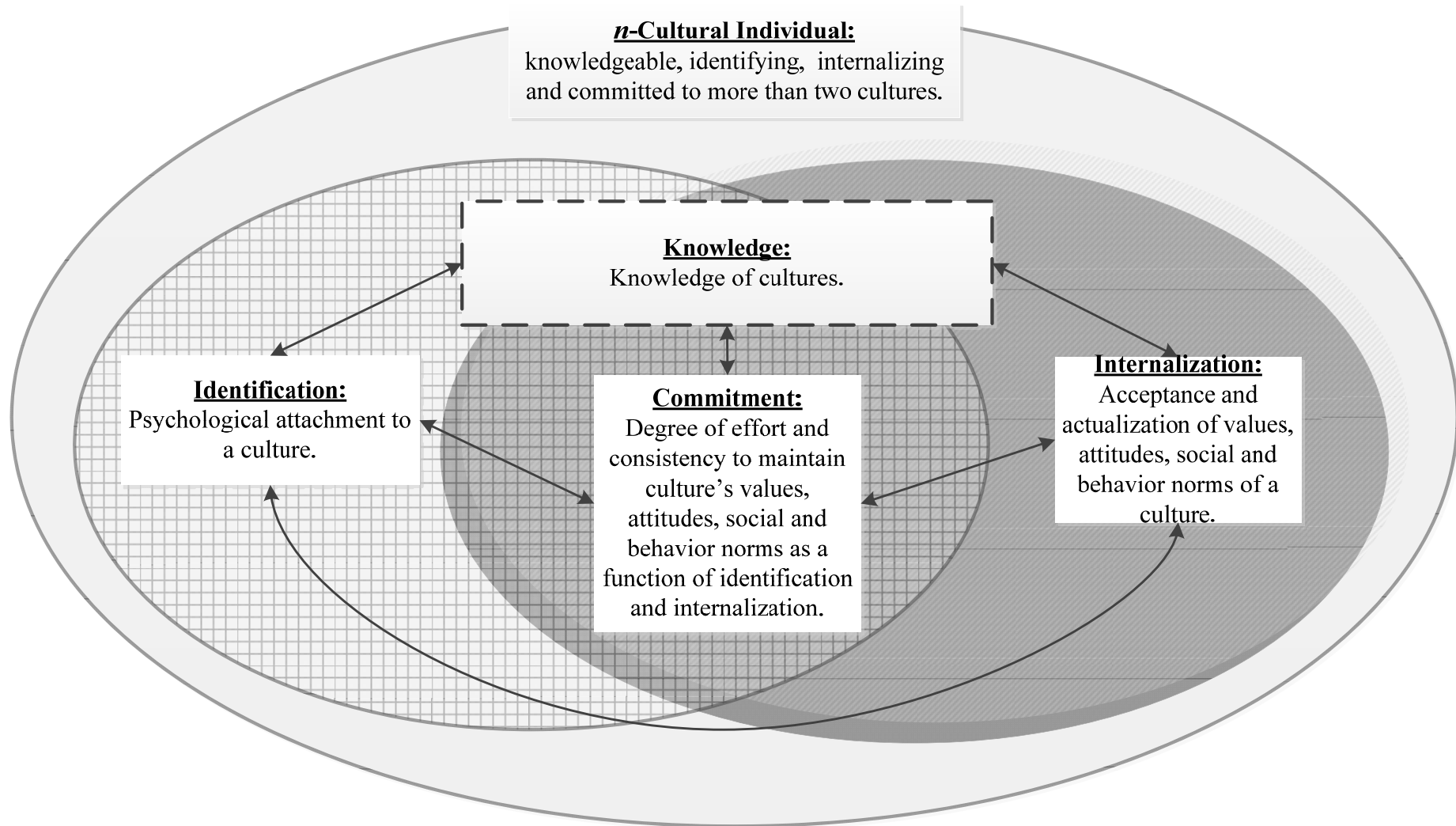


Figure 2. Multicultural Mentor Modeling Program

(Adapted from Roncone et al.'s (2007) *Metacognitive Intervention Program* and Manz and Neck's (1991) *4-Step Thought Self-Leadership approach*.)

