

December 2018

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Recommended Citation

Garcia, Antonio (2018) "Introduction to Constellar Theory in Multicultural Education Pedagogy," *Journal of Multicultural Affairs*: Vol. 3 : Iss. 2 , Article 1.

Available at: <https://scholarworks.sfasu.edu/jma/vol3/iss2/1>

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Introduction to Constellar Theory in Multicultural Education Pedagogy

Antonio Garcia, Zizekian Institute for Research, Inquiry, and Pedagogy

Constellations do not exist; there only exist the stars that compose them.

—J.C. Milner (2016, p. 31)

When everything has become the center, there is no longer any valid center; when everything is transmitting, the allegedly central transmitter is lost in the tangle of messages.

—Peter Sloterdijk (2011, p. 71)

[T]here is no equality in nature; also there is no inequality in nature.

—G.K. Chesterton (2001, p. 105)

The Task of Constructing Theory

As a young child I remember having a tremendous fear that I would fall off the earth upwards and into the sky. I knew that nothing fell upwards (violating the laws of gravity)—or, at least in my short lifetime up to that point—but I always thought “nothing had fallen upwards into the sky and atmosphere *yet*.” I was too young to understand physics, but also too young to think about gravitational pull and propulsion, as well as understanding that the absence of gravity, for example, would not necessarily result in “falling” upwards. My hope in starting with this example from my childhood is to illustrate that sometimes we need to ask the right questions in lieu of desiring the right answers.

When we are born, we begin our entrance and cultivation in the world at large. All the senses are explored (e.g., sight, touch, sound, etc.) to survey the world and various terrains. Infants do not know the

codes of the world and their possible consequential cause and effect. An infant only knows that things happen. It would be highly questionable whether an infant processes an event using the scientific method and moves about with desirous motive to devise a theory of why something happened. Isaac Newton’s use of the “apple anecdote” (Fara, 2015, p. 49) to explain gravity was based on his observations of the apples falling from the trees in an orchard. It provoked Newton to question why things never fall up or to the side, but always downward toward the earth. This paper, which is the first to provide a fuller illumination and conceptualization on constellar theory is in the infant stages of development and asking questions. Every social scientist and theorist must start somewhere, so let this paper serve as my Newtonian “apple anecdote” beginning.

Across multiple disciplines theory is one of those complicated words that does not draw consensus of what it is nor is theory developed in a way that always satisfies the standards of the social and hard sciences equally (Abend, 2008; Ellis, 1995; Garver, 2008; Gorelick, 2011; Popper, 2004; Sutton & Staw, 1995; Tindall, 2000). We are always confronted with a particular warranted skepticism about any so-called proposed “theory.” I was taught as a young student in elementary school science class that a theory was something that had considerable dimension and gravitas in explaining something; however, a theory could still be proven false. Popper (2004) asserted, “those among us who are unwilling to expose their ideas to the hazard of refutation do not take part in the scientific game... the demand for scientific objectivity makes it inevitable that every scientific statement must remain tentative for ever” (p. 280). The same “tentative” state of a theory can also be applied to social theory. However, social theories are susceptible to

cultural ideology and political influence, especially as they apply to a particular time in history.

Glaser and Strauss (2017) point out that "[E]vidence and testing never destroy a theory (of any generality), they only modify it. A theory's only replacement is a better theory" (p. 28). For example, if we were plotting some diabolical crime or prank, we could create a very grounded schema, but it is not 100% guaranteed to work. We might hear someone say, "if X follows these steps, then, *in theory*, X should produce or encounter Y" to indicate the possibility and probability that the schema *should* or *could* work, but still carries the possibility that it may not. Why? Part of this is a matter of evidence, another part is epistemological limitations, and a third part we could call the limitations of the anthropocene and current technology. Quantum physicists and theorists, for example, are limitless in their imagination, but the imaginarium of cascading propositions tends to be restrained by the limits of technology (Feynman, 1998, 2017; Marburger, 2011; Vignale, 2011; Wallace 1991). When Einstein wrote his theory of general relativity and subsequent essays, he had theoretical propositions that could only be measured in abstraction. Now, with better technology advancements to monitor the cosmos, we are seeing some of Einstein's theories like gravitational waves become verified reality (Schilling, 2017).

What is Constellar Theory?

If we were standing on Mars when Earth was experiencing a solar or lunar eclipse, would our view and experience on Mars appear the same as it does to those on earth? Have you ever sat in the "nose bleed" (cheap and far away) seats of a sports stadium? Both of these examples deal with the issue of perspective, which can vary significantly based on one's position and proximity to an

event. In addition, we have to take into consideration that each person has a subjectivity and life-world (Berger & Luckmann, 1967; Husserl, 1970; Schultz & Luckmann, 1973) that does not place any one person into a neat monolithic compartmentalization. Rather, people have a much more erratic *Koziejian* fluidity and "free will" to move about their own ontological inquiries and self-interrogations. What this means is that individuals cannot and should not be reduced to a singular variable, especially as this applies to a possible group identity. Referring to the need for understanding intersectionality, Crenshaw (1992) explains, "When feminism does not explicitly oppose racism, and when antiracism does not incorporate opposition to patriarchy, race and gender politics often end up being antagonistic to each other and both interests lose" (p. 242).

Intersectionality has a particular strength that obliges us to evaluate, reflect, and acknowledge the multiplicity of "characteristics", which are key descriptors in law, especially when the issue of "immutable characteristics" is being challenged in a case (e.g., *E.E.O.C. v. Catastrophe Mgmt. Solutions*, 2016). What we should consider is that the "center" cannot hold and it does not even exist. We should treat the idea of the center like the concept of time. Time is not a universal principal. Our measurement of time is calculated by the orbits around the sun, the earth's rotation, and so on to create what we know as 24 hours in a day, seven days in a week, etc. Our understanding of "telling time" is not necessarily how another civilization in another part of the universe would understand it.

Constellar theory can be considered as belonging to the sociological field of complexity theory, which has roots in systems and organizational theory. Marxist analysis uses the framing of the dialectic and

consequently a critique of hierarchical systems that are predicated and promulgated by capital (e.g., Apple, 2004; Bowles & Gintis, 1976; Giroux, 1983; McLaren, 2005; McLaren & Farahmandpur, 2005). In contrast, constellar theory obliges us to think in a non-linear spatiality. How we see constellations and dimension depends on our particular point of view and matrix of dis/connections that make up different groups, demands, and actions. History is not removed or devoid of any relation in constellar theory. In fact, history is taken into account along with a variety of other variables to see what patterns, themes, and predictions can possibly be evaluated.

My development of constellar theory began with several experiences that I will share. The first one was noticing that the game of poker represented the experimental economics of what we call, in general terms, communism and capitalism. There are two types of poker generally found in a casino: cash games and tournaments (see Table 1). Cash games represent the pure free market of risk/reward scenarios and individual interest with players attempting to accumulate as many chips as possible. Cash game players can buy-in to the game for any amount within the min/max limits. For example, a seat opens at a table that has been running for hours. Player A has \$2,500, B has \$400, C has 1,200, and so on. The limit entry for the game is minimum \$200 and max \$500. The new player entering the game buys in for the max of \$500; however, compared to the rest of the players, s/he is covered by player A five times over. S/he must play smart to gain more chips (or *capital*). Poker exemplifies constellar theory's tenets of equity and proximity. In poker the dealer position moves giving players different positions in relation to one another after each hand. The earlier the position, the more disadvantaged the player because s/he will be first to act on each

betting round. The opponent(s) in later positions will be able to manipulate (e.g., bluff) putting pressure on the earlier position. Playing poker prompted me to look at the intersectional terrain of the logic of capital, equity, and proximal positioning. Tournaments, on the other hand, have the same betting rules except that each player starts with the same amount and the player with all the chips at the end wins the top money. Equality is never an issue contested in poker.

Table 1

Cash Versus Tournament Poker Games

	Poker Cash Game	Poker Tournament
Philosophical Indictment	Ayn Rand Objectivism	Karl Marx Marxism
Starting Chips	Variable: \$200 min./\$500	Fixed: All players begin with the same amount in chips
Objective	Make money and leave the table at any time. Blinds/antes never change.	Usually only the top 10% in a tournament are paid out. Blinds/antes will increase, for example, every 15 minutes.
Results	Variable: *Players may add more money to their chip stacks if under the maximum amount allowed.	Equality of opportunity in the beginning with equal distribution of wealth amongst each player *Single elimination. Once the chips are lost then there is no returning the game(except where a "rebuy" rule is in place during early levels of blinds/antes.

As I began looking to discourses outside the contemporary and traditional literature in education, I found significant points of departure in my development of thoughts and pedagogy. The issue of *paradoxes* guided my investigations on the logic of social protests and identity politics. I was trying to understand if human nature existed as anything beyond biological predispositions. Living in the north I used to walk in the snow and look at the night sky, which made me think about the cosmos and molecular structures of organisms that represented proximal orientations, orbital patterns, and a balance of overlapping

similarities and divergent differences in nature. This inevitably led me to incorporate psychoanalysis, philosophy, biology, and quantum theory for more nuanced ideas. In addition, constellar theory complements tenets found in intersectionality (Crenshaw, 2014; Grzanka, 2014) and Big History (Brown, 2007; Christian, 2004; Spier, 1996).

One of the principle concerns of constellar theory is the formation of hierarchies. There are no benevolent hierarchies of oppression. For constellar theory the *logic of capital* is not simply a critique of the monetary economy but also a framework for examining the psychical—and extending to the libidinal economy of Lacanian psychoanalysis—in which the reproduction of hierarchies is maintained even in the “face” of change (Žižek, 2009, 2010). Reproduction is achieved through the logic of capital in the guise of affirmation for identity politics.

If the idea in Marxist analysis is to expose the hierarchy created via the logic of capital in which groups are always-already relegated to a subjugated position—whether one claims white supremacy here or a good Marxist position of the ruling class—then one cannot and should not, as Freire (2000) would suggest, create another hierarchy in its place. In place of hierarchy, constellar theory (re)negotiates spatial and psychical proximities of individual and group conflict. In the immediate observable and nano universe (e.g., Fibonacci sequence, subatomic image spiral patterns, etc.), we see constellations and patterns demonstrating proximity not hierarchies. G.K. Chesterton (2001) proposed, “there is no equality in nature; also there is no inequality in nature” (p. 105). To judge on such a rigid dialectical imposition of *either/or* runs the risk of limiting itself by its own implementation (Garcia, 2014). That is, *equality is not equal* itself and nor should we think it to be any more a subjective marker.

What is encountered here in terms of understanding Chesterton (2001) and constellar theory is that dialectical logic falls susceptible to the *sensu stricto* application of $A=A$, which is most notable in the work of Aristotle and Ayn Rand. With Rand (1964), for example, the exemption from legal, social, cultural, and other measures of society based on a special status with identity (Dworkin, 2002; Kymlicka, 1995, 1996;) or “social justice” is an irrational and irreprehensible act that is the true oppression of human freedom. If equality is not equal, then that means that the center cannot hold and we are confronted with the issue of the center does not exist. Of course, there is always the possibility of exceptions and debatable examples. One might argue that parasites, bacteria, and viruses instigate “feeding on the weak” and therefore validate dialectical impositions of master/slave, oppressed/oppressor, and eater/eaten.

Key Terms in Constellar Theory

We have in the great enterprise of inquiry and discovery a number of terms that are used across various disciplines; yet, the operational definitions of such terms and language may differ greatly. In this section, I attempt to define some of the key terms and concepts incorporated in the development of constellar theory: *infinence*, *parallax gap*, *proximity*, and *the universal exception*.

Infinence

The concept of infinence is one of the main conceptual tenets of constellar theory. The term comes from the combination of “infinite” and “influence” inspired by the moebius strip¹ of Lacan (1998). Infinence is

¹ In *Seminar XI: The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psychoanalysis*, Lacan (1998) explains, “The subject knows that not to want to desire has in itself

the dialectical relation between objects and spatial proximities that have no end without a significant rupture. However, it is also conceptualized as a “deadlock” and “begetting.” Under the logic of capital, infinnence refers to infinite reproduction where the “face” changes but the social, political, and ideological body does not change. (For example, China is capitalism with a socialist face.)

One example of cultural infinnence is:

(a) A Black man does not tip the waiter because the service was bad.

The waiter does not provide good service because he knows Black people do not tip.

In this example, both individuals are participating in the reproduction of stereotypes; however, cultural infinnence occurs because both individuals will not create a rupture. This a very general example, but the legacy of stereotypes and their impact can be conceptualized as a problem of infinnence where the logic of capital maintains this production of discontent and reproduces the self-fulfilling prophecy of stereotypes.

Another example based on the Mizzou protests discussed earlier is:

(b) Black students call for an end to “offensive” and “triggering” clothing. The administration responds to the Black student protests and implements a policy banning the wearing or displaying of all things confederate and hate-oriented. In reaction, the White students protest and force the administration to create an “equal” policy on their behalf that bans “offensive” and “triggering” clothing that includes the revolutionary fists,

something as irrefutable as the Moebius strip that has no underside, that is to say, the in following it, one will come back mathematically to the surface that is supposed to be its other side” (p. 235).

Malcolm X, Marcus Garvey, and more.

This is an example of infinnence as deadlock in which everyone essentially loses. Here is also a clear example of why “equality” is not always a good thing because consequences can be equally administered. In a case like this, infinnence is projected to be a kind unending back and forth cultural war. Leading to a third example in which the universal exception creates another issue of infinnence as deadlock.

This last example of infinnence comes from the Halloween costume controversy at Yale University. Erika Christakis, an administrator, sent out the following email to students:

American universities were once a safe space not only for maturation but also for a certain regressive, or even transgressive, experience; increasingly, it seems, they have become places of censure and prohibition. And the censure and prohibition come from above, not from yourselves! Are we all okay with this transfer of power? Have we lost faith in young people's capacity - - in your capacity -- to exercise self-censure, through social norming, and also in your capacity to ignore or reject things that trouble you? (Jaschik, 2015)

“Minority” students were outraged and called for the resignation of Christakis. What Christakis is offering here is not a free-for-all Halloween with disregard to offending people; rather, she is pointing out the authoritarianism of multiculturalism—Big Br/other over individual critical consciousness and discretion—where no one can be offended, triggered, etc. The issue of infinnence here involves the quiet or unconscious infinite demand of the universal

exception. So we can propose the absurd as appropriate here:

Example 1. Superhero costumes are not allowed because they offend Christians who believe only God should have such powers.

Example 2. Girls in sexy costumes or young girls as any female character are not allowed because the sex addict and pedophilia community find these to be triggering. In addition, a religious group also feels that girls should not be “whored” around.

Example 3. Any paranormal costumes (witches, ghosts, etc.) are not allowed because pagan communities feel this is a misrepresentation. Also, ghosts have voiced their complaint that they do not wear sheets and are often lumped in with demons and poltergeists.

Example 4. Pirate costumes are not allowed because Somali pirates feel that these old stereotypes romanticize the pirate life instead of the cruel reality of plundering and blatant disregard for life.

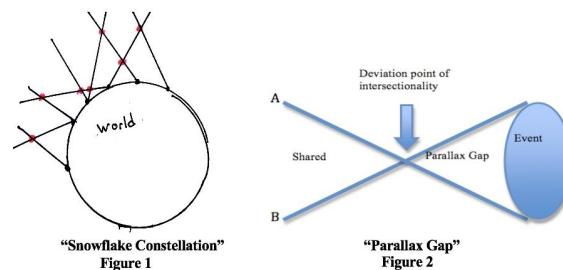
We can see here that inflexibility of the universal exception relegates all groups to essentially no appropriate costume. However, one might consider that this could be the reason that futuristic sci-fi movies often depict societies with one-dimensional fashion.

Parallax Gap

When we observe an event (e.g., a fight in a bar) each person engages a different perspective and subjectivity with the objective situation. Each witness has a slightly different story of who started it and what happened. How do we know which one is the right story? The answer is we do not. What we have is a collection of subjectivities in relation to an objective occurrence. When multiple observers negotiate their subjectivity in relation to the event. Each creates a kind of “line of sight”

and the result is a “snowflake constellation” (see Figure 1) and parallax view/gap (see Figure 2).

Figures 1 and 2



In multiculturalism and identity politics, constellar theory examines these constellations and parallax gaps to explain the subjective positions of particular groups and individuals. Žižek (2006c) explains the parallax gap as “the confrontation of two closely linked perspectives between which no neutral common ground is possible” (p. 4). These types of constellations are best used when examining a marginalizing event. Where the parallax gap occurs is the most concerning because it indicates the point where shared intersubjectivity deviates after the divergence point from one another occurs. Students should be able to see the intersectionality of shared perspectives (e.g., convergent points) and the parallax gap (e.g., divergence points).

Proximity

For a lot of my students, it seems proximity is often an antagonistic theme in multicultural education. For example, why is the lunchroom segregated into sub/cultural groups (e.g., Tatum, 1997)? Multicultural education often appears to want groups to be together when they have differing or conflicting positions. There are three types of proximity I will discuss here; however,

we should keep in mind that the general area of proximity and further developments may result in more conceptual applications and differing types of proximity.

Psychical proximity is in one aspect the conscious knowing and open acknowledgment of strengths and limitations. Another aspect of psychical proximity relates with explicit intent to the mental and emotional connections and engagement between individuals, community, and the state.

Physical proximity is the actual physical distance and separation between individuals. Redlining, gerrymandering, and gentrification are just a few examples of how physical proximity plays a considerable part in our lives, especially on the political level.

Historical proximity is the historical relationship that a group feels or that is imposed on them. This may be interpreted in different ways depending on what aspect or variable is being examined between one specific group and another group(s). For example, we could think about tensions and fighting that have gone on for decades, if not centuries because of a transgression or ideological belief (e.g., Jews and Palestinians). The historical proximity is an essential component in any analysis and it will exhibit different constellation configurations depending on how one establishes or understands one's parallax gap(s).

Reflecting back to Chesterton's (2001) statement on equality in nature, each animal and organism has a certain proximity to the other, as well as times where multiple groups co-exist in one spatial area. On standardized tests we have questions of spatial organization with, for example, "John cannot sit by Alex and Alex has to sit with Melissa and Melissa has to sit near the door to go to the bathroom," what is the proper seating arrangement? Proximity

becomes an issue to analyze when it is enacted as a un/conscious proximity away from the *Other* (e.g., White flight). However, the proximity that each group claims to another for their own communal interests that do not interfere or impose on another are not necessarily bad. For Žižek (2008), "Perhaps the lesson to be learned is that sometimes a dose of alienation is indispensable for peaceful coexistence" (p. 59).

The Universal Exception

Multicultural education discourses often advocate the ideal of an all-inclusive society; however, there is a certain danger in not vetting how inclusivity has a dialectical relation with exclusivity. Garcia (2014) explains,

[E]very act of inclusion is a simultaneous act of exclusion. In order to understand the proponents and opponents of multiculturalism, we should maintain that every act of progress, justice, and empowerment for an individual or group is a simultaneous act of regression, injustice, and disempowerment for another. Therefore, the multiculturalist disavows the necessary obligation of universality to identify the aberrant other – the one who will lose. (p. 125)

To be all-inclusive in the true liberal sense would obligate multicultural educators to consider groups like the Klu Klux Klan, Neo-Nazis, and the Westboro Baptist Church as equally important. This is not to assert a type of relativism where these groups deserve equal humanistic respect; rather, it exposes the paradoxical position of being all inclusive while requiring the excluded groups from whom the inclusive group seeks safety. Žižek (2008) says, "An enemy is someone whose story you have not heard" (p. 46). *To Kill a Mocking Bird* (Lee,

2006) illustrates this “unknown or misunderstood thing as enemy” with Jem and Scout’s wild imagination of what (or who) Arthur “Boo” Radley is. Boo represents the *enemy-as-unknown*. There is a fear among multicultural educators to draw the line of who gets included and why. By the very nature of multiculturalism being both an issue of pedagogy and the political, it is expected and assumed that this subject cannot be taught as neutral or objective because people are neither neutral nor objective. In addition, if the proponents of equality want equality as a social construction of all-inclusiveness then they will have to submit that “all are equal” in manners concerning (a) the ontological, (b) the occupation of being spatially in a place, and (c) that all concerns of the socio-political apparatuses devote and operate equally among all individuals, which, to reiterate, would dissolve arguments for special rights or rights of minority groups (e.g., Kymlicka, 1995, 1996).

Critique of Multicultural Education

To reiterate, the center cannot hold and the center does not exist. Before we can even begin to think of transforming a system or completely redoing it, we must confront some critical issues of multiculturalism. For one, Žižek (2006b) believes that “multiculturalism is a disavowed, inverted, self-referential form of racism, a ‘racism with a distance’” (p. 170). The multiculturalist situates him or herself as a center, a privileged nucleus, in which the *universal exception* is exemplified as a dialectical relation of knowing/not knowing. This psychical proximity to the *Other* is paradoxical (e.g., “We are equal, but one day you will be able to stand up here with me”). “The paradox,” as Shaw (1988) explains, “is that multiculturalism is a thoroughly Westernized outlook that

condemns its own viewpoint as ethnocentric” (p. 256). When a center is allowed and imposed, we run the risk of multiculturalism “[meaning] everything and at the same time nothing . . . [which requires an explanation of] what he or she means and does not mean” (Kincheloe & Steinberg, 1997, p. 1). Bradley (2013) reminds us, “Even at the general level of theoretical variances, it should be stated at the outset that there is no single multiculturalism, but instead multiple strands, levels, and circumscriptions (as in, this is multiculturalism, but that is not)” (p. 1). Even more of an arduous task is to introduce a new theoretical work to inform pedagogy that may threaten or absorb previous paradigmatic theses (Cusset, 2008; Kuhn, 2012). The exploration of constellar theory in multicultural education pedagogy is an attempt to continue advancing the conversation and providing more points of entry and departure.

Equality and Equity

Constellar theory removes the subject-oriented centrality that prevents anyone or group to necessarily occupy a center around which all else is marginalized or residing in the periphery. Instead, the center becomes object-oriented around which subjectivities revolve and establish “proximity” to the object/demand. In doing so, for example, the discourse of equality is replaced with equity and proximity. The difference according to constellar theory is that equality is predicated on a material idealism associated with “redistribution” of both wealth and talent. The most illustrative example I use with my students about equality is the story of *Harrison Bergeron* (Vonnegut, 2010). *Harrison Bergeron* takes place in a future society in which everyone has been equalized by placing weights on those who run too fast, masks on those who are too

pretty, and so on. The application of equality is strictly governed by the application of constitutional rights outlined by a nation-state (see Dworkin, 2002). Absolute equality, which is what constellar theory avoids, would result in losses for marginalized groups who currently have particular advantages and minority rights (Kymlicka, 1996). Equity, on the other hand, is established through capital accumulation. Equity is judged as a proximal relation to the object-demand. Equity, much like a shareholder in a company, aggregates as well as dissipates. If capital is spread thin across numerous object-demands then the orbital proximity around the demand is compromised. In simple terms, the more demands that an individual or group take on, the more capital is spent, so the equity needed to create “really existing change” with one demand becomes weakened. Proximity with equity is negotiated with the individual or across a group. In understanding the constellations of investment with various demands we can begin to understand the dynamic of power that is produced or lacking to execute change.

Privileging Oppressions

From my membership in all of these groups I have learned that oppression and the intolerance of difference come in all shapes and sizes and colors and sexualities; and that among those of us who share the goals of liberation and a workable future for our children, there can be no hierarchies of oppression.
—Audre Lorde (1983, p. 9)

One of the main goals of constellar theory is to avoid, as Lorde (1983) points out, “hierarchies of oppression.” We have generally accepted and explained that social hierarchies exist as a causal relation of

dominance (Sidanius & Pratto, 1999), mostly predicated on socio-economic conditions (Marx, 1992) that create “oppressed” and “marginalized” groups. When using a Marxist critique—establishing and understanding the exchange value and commodification of material objects and ontologies—we have to go beyond, for example, the simplicity of understanding a “lower” class versus a “higher” ruling class in society and schooling (e.g., Anyon, 1980; Bowles & Gintis, 1976), the dialectic of master/slave (Hegel, 1977), or oppressor/oppressed (Freire, 2000). However, this is a crucial starting point for the purpose of understanding the development of constellar theory.

Gorski and Goodman (2011) examined the possibility of “hierarchies of oppression”—privileging certain identities, groups, and oppressive conditions over others—in multicultural teacher education coursework. They found that there was emphasis on certain identities and groups over others. The reason this concerns us in teacher education is that “for many educators, a single MTE course represents the lone opportunity to examine equity and social justice concerns during formal teacher preparation processes” (p. 472). In the same vein of Gorski and Goodman’s examination, I noticed in my own teaching of multicultural education courses that the very design of both my syllabi and popular multicultural education textbooks created an inferred hierarchy of oppression by starting with race and often ending with issues concerning ageism and disabilities. Examples of this can be found, for example, in *Rethinking Multicultural Education: Teaching for Racial and Cultural Justice* (Au, 2009), *Diversity and Education: A Critical Multicultural Approach* (Vavrus, 2015), *Comprehensive Multicultural Education: Theory and Practice* (Bennett, 2007). Beyond the textbooks and teacher

education courses discussed here, what is it that is creating this implied hierarchy of oppression?

Post-political Identity Politics

In the post-political era (see Žižek, 2006a) we see cultural identities and groups competing for recognition (Fraser, 2005; Taylor, 1994). There is no longer a common ground of disenfranchisement and struggle; rather, groups have succumb to disenchantment and ideological fantasy (Žižek, 1989) believing that identity politics will serve them in having their struggle noted and considered over others. For Parker (2005),

All politics is identity politics. Political activity is—and, at its best, is—animated by efforts to define and defend who I am, or we are, or you are, or hope to be, or hope to be seen to be. By extension, it is motivated by our imagination of what is or ought to be mine or ours or yours. (p. 53)

Politics is always-already a practice of preservation for the interest of an individual or collective commons. Thus, it is easy to see why certain groups are engaging identity politics out of a fear of being erased from the political landscape. No group wants to be reduced to irrelevance or insignificance, so the struggle among groups continues under these terms. The consequence is that while “marginalized,” “oppressed,” or groups considered on the periphery of society battle for recognition they are only participating in a “divide and conquer” schema instituted by the logic of capital. There are a number of examples that we can show students to express this concern; however, I will provide one example here using the current popular movement Black Lives Matter (BLM).

In 2015 emotions erupted across campuses following the intense aggregation

of discontent by the Black community over the “excessive force” and reported “unarmed” fatal shootings of Black individuals in Ferguson, Missouri and Baltimore, Maryland. Despite the riots in Ferguson (November 24, 2014) and Baltimore (April 27, 2015), it seemed that it was not until the University of Missouri football players refused to practice or play games (November 6, 2015) that attracted major attention (Seltzer, 2018; Tracy & Southall, 2015). The “Mizzou Protest” led by Jonathon Butler was started in response to the belief that the president, Tim Wolfe, and his administration had not acted quickly or satisfactorily to several incidences that were reported on campus. (The incidences noted were some individuals yelling racial slurs and a swastika made of fecal matter.) Butler went on a hunger strike and the protest worked resulting in Tim Wolfe resigning as university president. However, there are fundamental issues to address with the results. First, does the resignation and replacement of Wolfe mean that racism is over on campus? Second, how does the Mizzou protest engage and advocate on an intersectional and constellar level with incidences faced by all the other identity groupings (e.g., sexism, LGBT issues, ableism, ageism, religious discrimination, etc.)? Third, how does the selection of Chuck Henson (black and male), associate dean in the school of law, as interim Vice Chancellor for Inclusion, Diversity and Equity at The University of Missouri serve to “dismantle” the hierarchy of identity politics? Lastly, So who really wins in the outcome of the Mizzou Protest (see Trachtenberg, in press)?

Human Nature

[I]n creating the man that we want to be, there is not a single one of our acts which does not at the same time create

an image of man as we think he ought to be.

—Jean-Paul Sartre (1985, p. 17)

Multicultural education rarely addresses the matter of human nature. Instead, multicultural education presupposes that the nature of mankind is meant to be a collective co-existence and that through multicultural education man can achieve or come closer to the goal of collective realization. Constellar theory examines the world *as is* predicated on a kind psychoanalytic existentialism. That is, psychoanalysis does not give credence to human nature beyond that which is biologically passed down or embedded in the primal instincts (*Trieben*). Sartre (1993) explains the existential dimension: “Man is condemned to be free. Condemned, because he did not create himself, yet, in other respects is free; because, once thrown into the world he is responsible for everything he does” (p. 41). The questions of human nature on a historical, present day, and future outlook must be addressed with students. Are people innately good or bad (e.g., Machiavelli, 1992)? Can an individual born into an environment of dereliction and intellectual poverty escape the Symbolic drapery (e.g., Frankl, 2006; Freud, 1989; Lacan, 1992; Sartre, 1993)? Is the individual rational in a time of [mass] group settings (Freud, 1959; Fromm, 1955; Le Bon, 2002; Reich, 1980)? Are we to accept that authority supersedes the conscience of an individual (e.g., Milgram, 2009; Zimbardo, 2008)? Is not history full of war, subjugation, and ever complicated by the human emotional factor that devours rationality (e.g., Diamond, 1999; Fry, 2013; Marcuse, 1964, 1966; Russell, 2009)?

The *Lord of the Flies* (Golding, 1954), a common book read in schools, exemplifies Freud’s (1989) view that civilized individuals can return to a primal instinctual state given the conditions where law and

governing authority are absent? In the apocalyptic motifs like *The Road* (McCarthy, 2006), *Blindness* (Saramago, 1998) and *The Walking Dead* (Kirkman, 2009) human nature is complicated and reduced to pure instinctual survivalism over any idealism of humanity or metaphysical hope. Even in dystopian motifs, societies are divided into groups exercising power over another: *Brave New World* (Huxley, 2004), *1984* (Orwell, 1977), *The Hunger Games* (Collins, 2008), and *Divergent* (Roth, 2011). The answer is not to reject the apocalyptic and dystopian in place of the utopian; rather, what are the consequences versus the possibilities of the day after tomorrow?

In *Human Nature and Conduct*, Dewey (1957) says, “In varied ways men come to live in two worlds, one actual, the other ideal. Some are tortured by the sense of their irreconcilability” (p. 9). Garcia (2014) reiterates this dichotomy of reality and idealism and says, “Multicultural education—though it gives little attention to discussions of human nature—operates in the realm of a utopian and romanticized *ought*” (p. 117). Though the criticism seems harsh, it elucidates a necessary tenet of multicultural education (and specifically constellar theory) that seeks to emulate the intersectionality and structuralism of the biological world—from the molecular structure to the *proximities* and relations among organisms (see also Brown, 2007; Christian, 2004; Spier, 1996)—versus the world of mankind, which is largely operated under the logic of capital and exalts the individual (e.g., Rand, 1964) over social collective interests (i.e., altruism) (Marcuse, 1964; McLaren & Farahmandpur, 2005; Rand, 1986; Robinson, 2004). For many of my students at both the university and K12 levels, their ideas of human nature are largely informed by moral (e.g., religious principles), political (e.g., libertarian, anarchist, democratic socialist), and cultural

(e.g., ethnocentric, classist, relativist) precepts.

If we have no starting conception of human nature then, by default, all acts will or can be considered human nature. There are frequencies of actions that result in the elevation of humanity and there are also those actions that are not just horribly evil and devastating but also alien to reason (e.g., Nazism). Henry Rollins (2009) deplores that fact that “humans paint every available surface with so much fucking death and misery, it’s amazing that humans survive humanity” (p. 60). When looking at current and historical events of the twentieth century, particularly in the United States, my students see that the U.S. has been an advocate for global human rights, democracy, and freedom while also violating these within their own country. The normalization of particular paradoxes (e.g., we will spread peace with our armies), parapraxis (Freud, 1966), doublespeak/doublethink (Orwell, 1970, 1977), and euphemisms (see Carlin, 2011) obfuscates the reality of socio-political everyday life (Lefebvre, 2014) in place of pleasure with popular culture (Adorno, 2001; Žižek, 1992). Marcuse (1966) laments the contradictory nature of western capitalist society in that “The destruction of life (human and animal) has progressed with the progress of civilization, that cruelty and hatred and the scientific extermination of men have increased in relation to the real possibility of the elimination of oppression” (p. 87). Supporting the lamentation of Marcuse, Badiou (2001) writes that man “has shown himself to be the most wily of animals, the most patient, the most obstinately dedicated to the cruel desires of his own power” (p. 59). Thus what concerns us in multicultural education as a starting point for considering human nature is that, “Man is the only animal for whom his own existence is a problem which he has to solve

and from which he cannot escape” (Fromm, 1990, p. 40).

Conclusion

Students in multicultural education courses are not always teacher candidates. Some universities require students to complete a multicultural competency course that can be filled across a variety of courses on campus. Constellar theory makes an appeal to objective logic as the prerequisite for a pedagogical engagement of evaluation first and then a concluding endorsement in favor of or against. Unlike a lot of multicultural education discourses and mainstream social justice warrior discourses, constellar theory does not begin with the presupposition of blame, victimization, hierarchy of identities, or privileging of oppression. This does not negate or neutralize historical circumstances (e.g., historical proximity).

At this point, there are a lot of concepts and ideas that are still coming into fuller development. I am still observing the world and navigating through literature and research that is mostly outside of the contemporary field and domain of education. This paper serves as the first published and early introductory scope of constellar theory that has undoubtedly taken on a much more mature life since the original ideas began several years ago. From here, the next step is to develop materials and lessons that can be facilitated in classrooms to determine if there is traction and palatability with constellar theory as a mode of analysis and inquiry.

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Appendix A

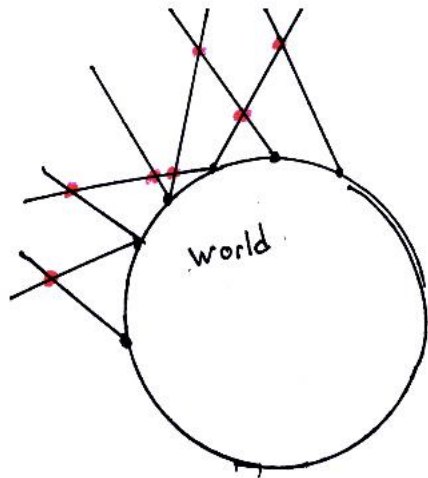
Table 1

Overview of Cash Versus Tournament Poker Games

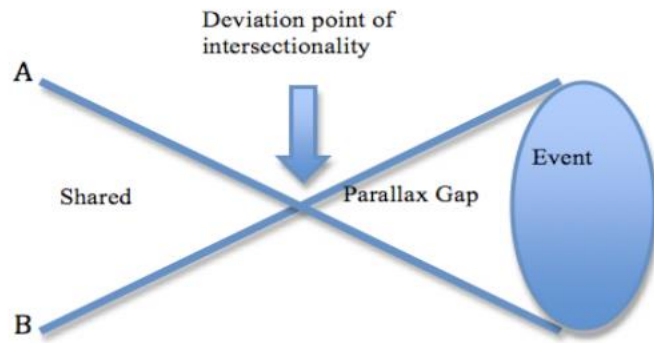
	Poker Cash Game	Poker Tournament
Philosophical Indictment	Ayn Rand Objectivism	Karl Marx Marxism
Starting Chips	Variable: \$200 min./\$500	Fixed: All players begin with the same amount in chips
Objective	Make money and leave the table at any time. Blinds/antes never change.	Usually only the top 10% in a tournament are paid out. Blinds/antes will increase, for example, every 15 minutes.
Results	Variable: *Players may add more money to their chip stacks if under the maximum amount allowed.	Equality of opportunity in the beginning with equal distribution of wealth amongst each player *Single elimination. Once the chips are lost then there is no returning the game(except where a "rebuy" rule is in place during early levels of blinds/antes.

Appendix B

Figures 1 and 2



"Snowflake Constellation"
Figure 1



"Parallax Gap"
Figure 2