C’est La Vie: The Game of Social Life

C’est La Vie: The Game of Social Life is a role playing activity that allows students the opportunity to experience aspects of privilege and oppression in a safe environment, prior to exploring these concepts in their own lives.

THE GAME OF SOCIAL LIFE

C’est La Vie: The Game of Social Life includes:

- Character profiles – Demographic description of a character (e.g., race/ethnicity, gender, sexual orientation, ability, and social class) and initial money and “bonus” (i.e., privilege) credits.
- Strategy game – Participants use their characters’ money and bonus credits in order to navigate decisions regarding housing, schooling, health care, education, and occupational attainment.
- Directed discussion – Discussion is used to help participants tie game elements with real life inequality, privilege and oppression.

INTRODUCTION

- Individuals need the opportunity to engage in difficult dialogues in order to unlearn attitudes, cognitions, and behaviors that contribute to inequality (Platt, 2013; Watt, 2007).
- Simulation activities provide a tool for engaging individuals in these discussions (Dorn, 1989).
- Opportunities to externalize discussions of privilege and oppression can help people internalize these concepts and apply them to their own lives (Patrick and Connolly, 2013; Simpson and Elias, 2011).

STUDY 1 DESIGN

Participants: 25 students at a liberal arts university in a St. Louis, MO suburb (80% female, 85% White).

Game format: small groups, board game

Design: thematic analysis of students’ written impressions of the activity.

STUDY 1 RESULTS

Thematic analysis of essays revealed:

76% expressed that the game was engaging.

“An utterly fascinating experiment that evoked significant emotional response from both as well as stimulated reflection on real life circumstances.”

80% noted that the game was realistic.

“I was floored by the reality in which the game was grounded.”

88% adopted a new empathetic perspective.

“This game was able to let me step into their shoes and understand how these individuals feel on a day-to-day basis”

44% reflected on structural factors for inequality.

“This game goes to prove that the rich have almost endless opportunity, while the poor are virtually stuck in the same status quo and even if they wanted to progress, they would face a plethora of obstacles in their way”

48% reflected on their own lives/privilege.

“After the discussion, I realized that there are certain advantages you cannot deny. For example, being born into a wealthy or even middle class family. Also, good health, talent, or race can have a big impact on your future successes. There are always exceptions, but for the most point, it is harder to move up when you start at the bottom.”

60% considered solutions to social inequality.

“What’s important is that I acknowledge the tremendous advantage that I have, and that I make efforts toward giving back, toward reducing the imbalance distribution of wealth and educational resources, toward leveling the playing field for all”

STUDY 2 DESIGN

Participants: 55 students at a public university in urban Toronto, Ont. (78% female, 62% White).

Game format: lecture hall, directed activity via PPT

Design: pre-test / post-test analysis of content coded short answer response and rating scale items.

STUDY 2 RESULTS

Privilege acknowledgement*:

“Please describe any circumstances of yours that have been present from birth (or for which you have had no control) that may have given you an advantage in life, relative to others.” (Kappa = .95).

Privilege Identity Exploration (PIE) Model in student affairs practices.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Acknowledge Privilege</th>
<th>Total N</th>
<th>PreTest</th>
<th>PostTest</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>White</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>5.12</td>
<td>5.18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Black</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>4.75</td>
<td>4.81</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hispanic</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>4.86</td>
<td>4.92</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Asian</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>5.08</td>
<td>5.17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>'Other'</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>5.12</td>
<td>5.16</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*p < .05 for overall pre-test/post-test difference

Causal attributions*

Rated 14 items on a 1 to 7 scale across 6 attribution domains.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Questions</th>
<th>PreTest</th>
<th>PostTest</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Internal advantage relative to others</td>
<td>3.45 (1.51)</td>
<td>3.55 (1.29)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Internal disadvantage relative to others</td>
<td>3.78 (1.45)</td>
<td>3.74 (1.48)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Internal attributions of own success</td>
<td>3.30 (0.57)</td>
<td>4.81 (0.74)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>External attributions of own success</td>
<td>4.65 (1.93)</td>
<td>4.04 (0.98)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Internal attributions of social problems</td>
<td>2.71 (0.98)</td>
<td>2.64 (0.98)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>External attributions of social problems</td>
<td>4.86 (1.06)</td>
<td>5.13 (0.97)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*p < .05; students’ own demographics did not moderate effects

Engagement

The participants found the task to be:

- Engaging (M = 4.22, s = 0.75; midpoint = 3)*
- Effective (M = 5.08, s = 0.74; midpoint = 3.5)*
- Realistic (M = 4.63, s = 1.07; midpoint = 3.5)*

*p < .001 (relative to the midpoint).

REFERENCES AND ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS


Platt, L. F. (2013). Blurring the lines: Teaching the privileged about privilege (pp. 207-221) in K. A. Case (Ed.). Dissecting Privilege: Teaching and Learning as Allies in the Classroom, NY: Routledge


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