

## The Game of Social Life (Kosha Bramesfeld)

The Game of Social Life is a poverty simulation board game designed to motivate individuals to reflect on and discuss concepts of social stratification, based on multiple dimensions of poverty. It is intended for use in small or large enrollment courses (20 to 200 students). I have used the board game with a group of 62 students (as part of a Community Psychology course) and with a group of 115 students (as part of a Social Psychology course). The activity can be used in any course that contains a unit or emphasis on multicultural psychology or diversity. The activity can also be used in a wide range of courses to generate discussion about structural factors that influence psychological adjustment and mental health outcomes. For example, the activity could be introduced as part of a community, health, or clinical psychology course in order to highlight a social justice and multicultural framework for understanding psychological practice. Or, the activity could be used at the end of a social psychology course in order to summarize how issues of social perception, attitudes, conformity, and mixed motive dilemmas interact with stereotypes, prejudice, and discrimination in order to influence individual achievement and mental and physical health. For an empirical assessment of the activity, see Bramesfeld and Good (2015).

The activity includes (a) character profiles, (b) a strategy game, and (c) a directed discussion. Setup for the activity takes approximately 15 to 30 min to distribute character profiles and to explain the rules and structure of the game. The strategy game takes approximately 60 to 90 min to complete. Instructors with classes that meet for less than 60 min can divide the strategy game over two class periods, or they can shorten the strategy game by removing some of the decision scenarios. I recommend devoting at least 45 min to the discussion of the activity to ensure that students understand how the activity relates to real life inequality and to relevant course concepts.

### RECOMMENDATIONS FOR IMPLEMENTING THE GAME

**Number of participants.** The board game is designed for small group interactions. It is ideal for sessions of fewer than 30 players. Facilitators wishing to use the game in larger settings should ensure that there is space to set up one board game for every 5 to 6 players. Additional facilitators are recommended for groups of more than 30 players, as facilitators will be needed to explain elements of the game, set-up up materials, distribute resources, and answer questions.

**Timing of the activity.** The activity takes approximately 3 hours of participant engagement to choose a profile, complete the budget activity, play both sides of the board game, and discuss the activity. Several timing options are discussed below:

- **One session.** Facilitators administering the activity in one session (150 to 210 minutes) are advised to include a short break between the completion of the budget exercise, and the start of the board game. This will provide facilitators time to compile player resources.
- **Two sessions.** Facilitators administering the activity in two sessions (75 to 90 minutes each) are advised to complete the budget exercise and Side A of the board game in the first session and Side B of the board game and the guided discussion in the second session. Facilitators are advised to include a short break between the completion of the budget exercise and the start of the board game to provide time to compile player resources.
- **Three sessions.** Facilitators administering the game in three sessions (50 to 75 minutes each) are advised to complete the creation of the profiles and the budget exercise in the first session. (The

facilitator can compile player resources for the board game in between sessions one and two). The second session can be used to play Side A and Side B of the board game. The third session can then be used to engage in the guided discussion of the activity.

- **Four sessions.** Facilitators administering the game in four sessions (30 to 50 minutes each) are advised to complete the creation of the profiles and the budget exercise in the first session. (The facilitator can compile player resources for the board game in between sessions one and two). The second session can be used to play Side A of the board game. The third session can be used to play Side B of the board game. The fourth session can then be used to engage in a guided discussion of the activity.

The full exercise with instructions and game board materials is available online at the TRAILS website.

#### References:

- Bramesfeld, K.D. & Good, A. (2015). The game of social life: An assessment of multidimensional poverty simulation. *Teaching Sociology*, 43(2), 92-103.
- Bramesfeld, K.D. (2015). The game of social life: A multidimensional poverty simulation. Teaching Resources and Innovations Library in Sociology (TRAILS). Retrieved from <http://trails.asanet.org/Pages/Resource.aspx?ResourceID=12868>.