

# Beat the Bourgeoisie: A Social Class Inequality and Mobility Simulation Game

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## Abstract

Simulation games can help overcome student resistance to thinking structurally about social class inequality, meritocracy, and mobility. Most inequality simulations focus solely on economic inequality and omit social and cultural capital, both of which contribute to social class reproduction. Using a pretest/posttest design, the current study evaluates a simulation game that incorporates economic, social, and cultural capital and is meant for introductory sociology classes containing between 15 and 70 students. Data come from a state research university and a liberal arts college. Results show that the simulation increased students' conceptual understanding of structural explanations for restricted mobility; cultural and social capital; and conceptual connections between stratification concepts. The simulation did not lead to changes in students' feelings about poor people. Results support the idea of using simulation games to overcome student resistance to the sociological perspective on stratification and suggest that some simulation games may be effective across institutional contexts.

## Keywords

active learning, simulation, social stratification, introduction to sociology, inequalities

Stratification is a topic central to introductory sociology classes (Persell 2010). Yet when teaching stratification to new sociology students, I, like many instructors, have struggled to overcome student resistance to the sociological perspective on stratification, inequality, and mobility. Student resistance is well documented (Brezina 1996; Davis 1992), but simulation games appear to reduce it (Davis 1992). I present a simulation game called *Beat the Bourgeoisie*, which helps reduce student resistance by incorporating the concepts of economic, social, and cultural capital in one simulation that helps students experience the many ways in which social structure affects mobility.

Student resistance is a common problem when teaching sociological perspectives on stratification (Brezina 1996; Davis 1992). Student beliefs about stratification are typically rooted in the limited personal experiences they bring from their own

(often middle-class) backgrounds (Brislen and Peoples 2005) as well as in the American Dream ideology (Brezina 1996), which posits that people can move up by using *effort* to overcome structural barriers. When these initial beliefs are challenged, students may feel threatened (Davis 1992) and confused and may experience a temporary dip in their self-esteem as they question how much of their own success is due to structural factors rather than their own abilities and efforts.

This game helps students in introductory sociology classes achieve two learning goals—"explain

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how structure and social status affect our experiences and life chances” and “apply abstract sociological concepts to concrete situations”—by requiring application of abstract concepts to a real-life context and allowing students to experience the frustrations and challenges that come from class disadvantage.

## OVERCOMING STUDENT RESISTANCE

Simulation games can be especially effective in overcoming student resistance (Davis 1992; Dorn 1989). They often successfully recreate the effects of social class membership (Davis 1992; Eells 1987; Wills, Brewster, and Fulkerson 2005) to help students gain a deep understanding of the role of structure in stratification and mobility.

Stratification simulations often focus on the link between economic capital and mobility. Students are typically placed into groups, each of which simulates a different starting point (i.e., social class), and begin the simulation with greater or fewer material resources (represented by Monopoly money, puzzle pieces, game chips, or time) (e.g., Coghlan and Huggins 2004; Dundes and Harlow 2005; Eells 1987; Simpson and Elias 2011; Wills et al. 2005). Students thereby experience the thoughts, behaviors, and emotions that may accompany advantaged versus disadvantaged group membership.

Some instructors incorporate agency (e.g., decision points, work pace) into their stratification simulations (Coghlan and Huggins 2004; Eells 1987; Simpson and Elias 2011; Wills et al. 2005); this may enhance these activities’ effectiveness (Brezina 1996). American Dream ideology emphasizes the importance of *effort* in overcoming structural barriers. Therefore, teaching strategies that neglect agency and focus only on structure may strengthen student resistance to the sociological perspective on inequality (Brezina 1996) because students can claim they had no chance to use effort to conquer the game’s structure. Incorporating agency into simulations may help students discover that effort does not usually overcome structural constraints.

Other instructors have emphasized the importance of using a reward that students highly

value—grades—to motivate them during the simulation and trigger realistic thoughts and emotions about equity and fairness (Brislen and Peoples 2005). When students believe their grades are at stake (even if they actually are not), the simulation may be more effective.

Finally, instructors should actively address challenges presented by students’ backgrounds and gear stratification simulations to specific institutional contexts. White, middle-class students may be especially resistant to accepting structural causes of inequality (Bohmer 1989). Institutional differences in resources, incentives (Hall and Kidman 2004), class size, length of class periods, and relative emphasis on teaching versus research (Olson and Einwohner 2001) may render simulations effective in one context but not another. For example, budget exercises may deepen research university students’ understanding of stratification but be ineffective with liberal arts college students (Garoutte and Bobbitt-Zeher 2010, 2011).

## ECONOMIC, CULTURAL, AND SOCIAL CAPITAL

Many teaching activities and simulations have been developed to teach students about economic capital and inequality. Although social (Demchenko 2011; Granovetter 1974; Li, Savage, and Ward 2008) and cultural (Jaeger 2011; Lareau 2003; Scherger and Savage 2010) capital plays substantial roles in life chances, most stratification teaching activities focus on economic capital. Social capital—the number (Li et al. 2008; Weaver and Habibov 2012), quality (powerful versus powerless) (Li et al. 2008), and/or strength (Granovetter 1973; Li et al. 2008) of social relationships or involvement in formal associations (Li et al. 2008)—can affect our life chances through avenues such as employment opportunities (Demchenko 2011; Granovetter 1974). Cultural capital, or the tastes and preferences that stem from (and vary by) one’s social class of origin (Bourdieu 1984 [1979]), can also advantage or disadvantage us. For example, knowledge of classical music will likely benefit a college applicant more so than experience with pop music. By displaying the “right” kind of cultural capital—that valued by the dominant culture (Bourdieu 1984 [1979])—one

may gain admission to certain social circles, activities, and opportunities (Calarco 2011; Lareau 2003), beyond the effects of education (Scherger and Savage 2010).

Social capital is prominent in stratification research (Demchenko 2011; Li et al. 2008) and has been the subject of a few teaching activities (e.g., Giuffre and Paxton 1997; Groves, Warren, and Witschger 1996; O'Brien and Foley 1999; Roberts, Mason, and Marler 1999) but is still underrepresented in the introductory classroom and in published teaching activities and simulations (Cook 2005). Although a few teaching activities focus on cultural capital (e.g., Isserles and Dalmage 2000; Wright and Ransom 2005), these appear to be especially rare. Additionally, these activities do not make connections to other types of capital or use grades as a reward. Building on existing simulations of economic stratification (e.g., Coghlan and Huggins 2004; Wills et al. 2005) by incorporating social and cultural capital could help illustrate how these factors function together to constrain upward mobility.

I propose that to maximize stratification teaching effectiveness, instructors should create simulations that incorporate agency, use grades as an (ostensible) reward, use three types (economic, social, and cultural) of capital, and work in the instructor's specific institutional context. *Beat the Bourgeoisie* does so. In this article, I evaluate its effectiveness across two institutional types—a large research university and a small liberal arts college. As recommended (Garoutte and Bobbitt-Zeher 2010; Paino et al. 2012), I conducted the study with the same instructor across institutions.

## BEAT THE BOURGEOISIE: HOW THE SIMULATION GAME IS PLAYED

*Beat the Bourgeoisie* is a simulation game designed for use with classes of 15 to 70 students. Because class sizes at larger schools are often larger than 70, if available, teaching assistants could conduct the game during smaller discussion sections of the class. The game itself lasts about 30 minutes but requires additional time to discuss its implications and student reactions. The game requires no materi-

als, but it is helpful to have some classroom space to move around, a few movable chairs, and a chalkboard visible to all. The game is played after students have completed readings, heard a lecture, engaged in classroom discussions about stratification, and learned Marx's (Marx 1977 [1867]; Marx and Engels 2000 [1848]) definition of the proletariat and bourgeoisie (i.e., a two-tiered system of bourgeoisie who own the means of production, need not work for pay, and have power to make rules that exploit the proletariat). Table 1 summarizes the main steps of the game and when they occur.

### Setting Up the Game

First, I tell students that we will devote our class to an open-book, open-note stratification trivia game and that all members of the winning team will get extra credit points. (I also mention this in the previous class so students can prepare.) I then separate the class into two groups—a small group of four or five students and a larger group composed of the rest of the class. For later simulation of cultural capital, I ensure that I select a student for the bourgeoisie group who is wearing an "upper middle class" piece of clothing (e.g., polo shirt). (I have never noticed any effect of student personality [shy versus outspoken] on the way the game plays out, so I do not choose specific types of students for each group.) I ask the small group to move to a group of seats located in a circle close to me and physically separated from the rest of the class. I then tell the class that the small group is the bourgeoisie and the large group is the proletariat, and I inform them (accurately) that anyone from either team who correctly answers a question will earn one point for their team.

Second, I approach the bourgeoisie, who are now at a distance from the proletariat. I whisper to them (so the proletariat cannot overhear; for maximum emotional impact) that if they do not know the answer to a question, they can (just once) get one free point anyway by simply raising a hand and telling me, "My good friend, President [their college president's name], says the answer is Durkheim." This is to simulate the advantage provided by prestigious and powerful social capital connections.

Third, I announce the rules of the game to the whole class. I remind them that only one team—the

**Table 1.** Summary of Major Events in Simulation Game and When to Implement Them.

Timing within Game	Events
At setup: before game begins	Create bourgeoisie and proletariat groups. Explain “social capital free pass” to bourgeoisie. Explain game rules to entire class. Tell proletariat to stand for the entire game. Distribute unequal “starting points” from “parents.”
At beginning of game	Ask trivia questions (continue throughout game).
One-third through game	Collect “annual taxes.”
One-third through game	Allow bourgeoisie to use “social capital free pass.”
Halfway through game	Distribute “stock market gains.” Grant point to bourgeoisie because of clothing, etc.
Three-fourths through game	Instruct bourgeoisie to implement “layoffs.”
Throughout game	Give bourgeoisie group second chances to answer. Tell bourgeoisie that because you know them, an incorrect answer just denotes having an “off day.” Tell bourgeoisie that the proletariat often complain about their position. Simulate disgust for how few points are gained by the proletariat group. Tell proletariat group they need to try harder.
After game is over	Discuss responses to game and connect it to real life.

one that earns the most game points—will win the extra credit points and that the extra credit points will be given to everyone on their team. I inform them that they (1) may use books and notes; (2) may consult with others on their own team; and (3) must raise their hands and be called upon by me before giving an answer.

Fourth, roughly to simulate the physical experience of work by social class, I instruct the proletariat group to stand for the entire game to represent the more physical nature of their jobs. I tell the bourgeoisie that they may sit for the entire game because their “work” is more knowledge-based and sedentary.

Finally, before officially starting the game, I simulate the benefits of unequal economic capital by telling the bourgeoisie that their parents have donated three game points to them so they can get a good start in life. I tell the proletariat that their parents also wish to help them but have few resources; they start with one-and-a-half points.

I then officially begin the game by asking stratification trivia questions. This allows students to use agency and to experience how it relates to the structural barriers or advantages provided by their group membership and how these affect success.

### *Playing the Game*

The heart of the game takes place as I ask about 15 predetermined stratification trivia questions based on information students have learned in the course (e.g., “Approximately what percentage of U.S. households earn at least \$200,000 per year?”). Throughout the game, I grant a point to any group who answers correctly, but I routinely turn my back on the proletariat and call on the bourgeoisie group more often.

Throughout the game I simulate social capital’s effect on second chances by giving the bourgeoisie second chances to answer questions (e.g., “I know you. You’re probably just having an off day. Try again.”). In contrast, I simulate contempt for the proletariat and tell them they are losing because of lack of effort (e.g., “You need to try harder!”). I periodically encourage the proletariat but do not express sympathy for them. If they direct frustration at me for managing the game, I maintain intergroup conflict by joking with the bourgeoisie, saying, “The proletariat complains instead of working.”

About one-third of the way through the game, I simulate economic capital again by roughly estimating federal tax rates at 15 percent (proletariat) and

33 percent (bourgeoisie) and collecting “taxes.” This gives the impression of fairness and illustrates real income tax rate differences. I then ask the bourgeoisie group how many of their points represent capital gains and return some points because capital gains are only taxed at 15 percent. I have found that I can succinctly explain these economic concepts during the game as they arise.

When members of the bourgeoisie use their “social capital free pass,” I initially react as though they are crazy (e.g., “You think ‘Durkheim’ is the answer to [question]? I don’t think so!”) because they have given an answer that makes no sense in the context of the question. I then quickly say, “President [name of college president] is wrong about that answer, but he’s/she’s a good friend of mine, and any friend of his/hers is a friend of mine. I’ll give you a point.”

About halfway through the game, I continue to simulate economic capital by telling students that I hear the stock bell signifying the closing of stocks at the end of a trading day. To simulate the extremely high proportion of stocks owned by the upper class, I tell the bourgeoisie group that their points have doubled. I tell the proletariat group that they too own stocks but only a handful of shares; I grant them half a point.

Also about halfway through the game, I simulate cultural capital by granting one point to the bourgeoisie group after they have *incorrectly* answered a question. I justify this by telling them that I see that their “tastes and preferences” are similar to mine, as demonstrated by a particular piece of clothing worn by a group member. I grant them a point, telling them that they “clearly show discerning taste and should be rewarded for that.” By this point, members of the bourgeoisie group generally seem comfortable and happy with me, know that I am “on their side,” and begin to occasionally joke or chat with me.

I also simulate the way the bourgeoisie creates and enforces rules to maintain power. About three-quarters of the way through the game I allow the proletariat’s points to approach those of the bourgeoisie, tell the bourgeoisie that the proletariat is threatening their power, and ask them to protect it by laying off five proletariat group members (especially those who are the biggest threat to them, such as students who have answered many ques-

tions). Those selected for layoff may sit down but can no longer answer questions or contribute to their group in any way. I then complete the game by asking a few more trivia questions, and the bourgeoisie easily wins the game.

As the game proceeds, students often suggest new rules based on aspects of class that could help their own group, which I incorporate into the game. Instructors must balance many things during the game (e.g., maintaining rapport, tracking points). Instructors using this game for the first time should proceed slowly, limit the number of “events” (see Table 1), and add “events” as their facility with the game increases.

### *Discussing the Game as a Class*

After completing the trivia questions portion of the simulation game, we discuss the activity. I first ask students for their initial thoughts, emotions, and reactions to the game. I then ask them what they learned about social class and meritocracy. I explore as many initial responses as possible until students appear to have exhausted the connections they can make on their own. Usually, students will build on and/or challenge one another’s comments, creating a dialogue that explores the complexities of social class, stratification, unequal opportunities, and meritocracy. I then explore any relevant issues that have not emerged, such as specific examples of how economic, cultural, and social capital advantaged or disadvantaged their group; how social class membership affected motivation; connections to course material; how equal opportunity relates to mobility; whether intervention to ensure equal opportunity is necessary; solutions we can use to ensure equal opportunity; and where these solutions should come from (e.g., private enterprise versus state). Finally, I inform the students that everyone present will receive an equal amount of extra credit points for participating.

## ACTIVITY ASSESSMENT: DATA AND METHOD

### *Sample*

Data are drawn from 83 questionnaires administered to students enrolled in one instructor’s

introductory sociology classes at a large state research university ( $n = 52$ ) and a small public liberal arts college ( $n = 31$ ) in the mid-Atlantic region during the spring 2010 (university), fall 2011 (liberal arts), and spring 2012 (liberal arts) academic semesters. Response rates for each sample were 84 percent, 100 percent, and 82 percent, and enrollment was 62, 17, and 17 students, respectively. At both schools, this course fulfills a general education requirement and serves as a gateway course into the major. The vast majority of participants were not sociology majors.

Although I did not collect demographic information systematically, students in both settings (and all samples) were overwhelmingly white, middle class, and between the ages of 18 and 22. The students at the state research university were more racially and ethnically diverse than were the students at the liberal arts college.

## Design

I used a pretest/posttest design for this study. The first questionnaire (pretest) was completed after lecture, assigned readings, and discussion were complete but just before the activity. The second questionnaire (posttest) was administered just after the activity and its debriefing and was identical to the first questionnaire with the exception of two additional questions. In essence, the pretest measured the students' understanding and beliefs about stratification after a traditional classroom pedagogical unit, and the posttest measured changes in understanding and beliefs due to the activity. The activity was part of the mandatory course curriculum, but participation in the study was voluntary. I administered informed consent before the activity and left the room as students completed the questionnaires. No names were used on the forms.

## Measures

Questionnaires contained Likert scale response options ranging from *strongly disagree* (1) to *strongly agree* (5). Questions measured the extent of belief in specific types of explanations for success (i.e., individualistic [Questions 1 and 6] and structural [Questions 4 and 5]); conceptual understanding of social and cultural capital (Questions 2

and 3); and conceptual connections between stratification concepts (Questions 7 and 8). (Sample questions include "I understand the concept of social capital" and "One's success in life is determined almost completely by one's effort." Questionnaires are available from the author upon request.) I reverse coded Questions 1 and 6 so that higher scores represented a stronger sociological understanding of stratification concepts. In addition to the first eight questions, the posttest questionnaire also measured the reported change in feelings about the poor after the activity (Question 9) and a reported greater appreciation for barriers faced by working- and lower-class people (Question 10). The posttest questionnaire also included three open-ended questions about what students learned, what they liked and/or disliked about the activity, and general comments.

## Analysis

Using a two-way mixed-factors ANOVA, I examined changes in responses to each question between the pretest and posttest (within subjects variable) for the full sample and tested for the main effect of institutional type, as well as an interaction between institutional type (between subjects variable) and changes in responses to each question. I examined the mean difference in scores that reflected students' self-reported understandings and beliefs about stratification after a traditional classroom pedagogical unit and then again after the Beat the Bourgeoisie activity. I defined significance as  $p < .05$ . Because there was a significant interaction between Question 2 and institutional type, I used paired-sample  $t$  tests to check for significant differences between pre- and posttests separately for each institutional type.

For the two questions that were only measured at the posttest (Questions 9 and 10), I used one-sample  $t$  tests to examine the distance between participants' responses and a value of 3 (neither agree nor disagree) for the full sample. For these same two questions, I also conducted independent-measures  $t$  tests to check for significant differences in responses between the liberal arts college and the research university.

Finally, I qualitatively analyzed responses to the open-ended questions, coding for emergent themes for the full sample, as well as by institutional type.



**Table 2.** Pre- and Posttest Score Changes for Full Sample.

	Pretest Mean (SD)	Posttest Mean (SD)	FValue	pValue of Score Change
<i>Individualistic/meritocratic vs. structural explanations for restricted mobility</i>				
Question 1: Success as it relates to effort	3.08 (0.97)	3.73 (0.84)	31.30	.000 <sup>a</sup>
Question 4: Class affects life chances	4.36 (0.51)	4.54 (0.53)	9.49	.003 <sup>b</sup>
Question 5: Three types of capital and advantage/disadvantage	4.39 (0.51)	4.54 (0.65)	3.11	.082
Question 6: Work as it relates to wealth	3.45 (0.95)	3.70 (0.91)	4.25	.042 <sup>c</sup>
<i>Conceptual understanding of social and cultural capital</i>				
Question 2: Social capital	4.02 (0.79)	4.51 (0.53)	32.39	.000 <sup>a</sup>
Question 3: Cultural capital	4.19 (0.59)	4.51 (0.53)	24.01	.000 <sup>a</sup>
<i>Conceptual connections between stratification concepts</i>				
Question 7: Equal opportunity required for meritocracy	3.90 (0.77)	4.17 (0.71)	9.01	.004 <sup>b</sup>
Question 8: Small group maintains power	4.19 (0.71)	4.58 (0.54)	18.68	.000 <sup>a</sup>

Note:  $N = 83$ . All  $F$  values based on (1, 81) degrees of freedom. Higher values reflect a stronger sociological understanding of the issues. Questions 1 and 6 were reverse-coded to achieve this.

<sup>a</sup> $p < .001$ . <sup>b</sup> $p < .01$ . <sup>c</sup> $p < .05$  (two-tailed tests).

## FINDINGS

First, I discuss findings from the pretest/posttest comparison questions (Questions 1-8) (see Table 2). I then discuss findings from the posttest-only questions (Questions 9-10) (see Table 3).

For the pretest/posttest questions, I present my findings for the full sample, clustered by the themes measured (see Table 2). Table 2 shows the main effect of changes between pretest and posttest scores for the full sample. There was no main effect of institutional type for any of the questions, and only one interaction between change in scores and institutional type (Question 2) was significant. In other words, overall the activity was successful at both institutions in achieving its objectives. Table 2 presents pretest and posttest means, standard deviations,  $F$  values, and significance levels for each question for the full sample.

### Pretest/Posttest Comparison Questions

As shown in Table 2, when taken together, students at the two schools made statistically significant gains in moving toward a structural explanation of mobility; conceptual understanding of cultural and

social capital; and making conceptual connections between stratification concepts (equal opportunity, meritocracy, mobility, and class oppression). There was no main effect of institutional type for any question.

*Individualistic Versus Structural Explanations for Mobility.* Students' beliefs in individualistic explanations for success decreased after the activity. Before the activity, they were neutral (neither agreed nor disagreed) about whether success is mostly determined by effort (Question 1). After the activity, they moved toward disagreement ( $p < .001$ ). Students' belief that hard work and high-quality work lead to economic success (Question 6) moved from midway between neutrality and disagreement toward disagreement ( $p < .05$ ).

For the full sample, students' beliefs in structural explanations for success increased on one of the two measures. Students' understanding that life chances are affected by class of origin (Question 4) moved from midway between agreement and strong agreement toward even more strong agreement ( $p < .01$ ). However, students' understanding of how economic, social, and cultural capital could

**Table 3.** Posttest Only Scores—Full Sample.

	Mean (SD)	t Test Value	p Value
<i>Change in feelings about poor people</i>			
Question 9: Feel differently about poor people	3.18 (1.01)	1.62	.108
<i>Greater appreciation of barriers for members of working and lower classes</i>			
Question 10: Insight into barriers	3.87 (0.88)	8.98	.000 <sup>a</sup>

Note:  $N = 83$ . All  $t$  values based on (82) degrees of freedom. Higher values reflect a stronger sociological understanding of the issues. Means are compared against a score of 3 ("neither agree nor disagree").

<sup>a</sup> $p < .001$  (two-tailed tests).

serve as an advantage or disadvantage (Question 5) did not significantly change after the activity. Although students were midway between agreement and strong agreement and moved toward stronger agreement, this change did not reach statistical significance ( $p = .082$ ). There were no interactions between Questions 1, 4, 5, or 6 and institutional type.

*Conceptual Understanding of Social and Cultural Capital.* Students' conceptual understanding of social and cultural capital also improved after the activity. Before the activity, students reported agreeing that they understood social capital (Question 2); after the activity they reported stronger agreement that they understood it ( $p < .001$ ). An interaction between the change score for Question 2 and institutional type was significant ( $p < .05$ ). The significance level for the pretest/posttest change in scores for Question 2 was higher at the state research university ( $p < .001$ ) than it was at the liberal arts college ( $p < .01$ ). The main effect of institutional type was not significant ( $p = .73$ ). Students reported agreeing that they understood cultural capital (Question 3) prior to the activity, but after the activity they more strongly agreed that they understood it ( $p < .001$ ). There was no interaction between Question 3 and institutional type.

*Conceptual Connections between Stratification Concepts.* Beat the Bourgeoisie helped students understand how stratification concepts—equal opportunity, meritocracy, class oppression, and mobility—are interconnected. Before the activity, students reported being close to agreement that equal opportunity is essential for the existence of meritocracy (Question 7); after the activity, they reported agreeing with that

idea ( $p < .01$ ). Prior to the activity, students reported agreeing that they understood how a small advantaged group could maintain power over a larger disadvantaged group (Question 8); after the activity, they more strongly agreed that they understood this ( $p < .001$ ). There were no interactions between Questions 7 or 8 and institutional type.

### Posttest-only Questions

As shown in Table 3, results from the posttest only questions (Questions 9 and 10) show that overall, students at both institutions gained insight into barriers to mobility for members of the working and lower classes (Question 10) ( $p < .001$ ). However, they reported that the activity did not lead them to feel differently about poor people (Question 9) ( $p = .108$ ). Independent-sample  $t$  tests showed no significant difference between student responses from the liberal arts college and the research university regarding Question 10 ( $p = .590$ ) or Question 9 ( $p = .229$ ).

### Responses to Open-Ended Questions

Most students reported enjoying the activity and gaining a deep understanding of structural explanations for inequality. Some students in the bourgeoisie reported guilt or discomfort (but never tried to leave the group or help the proletariat). Liberal arts college students were especially likely to elaborate on social class nuances and note the necessity of equal opportunity for a true meritocracy. Some students (all from the university) reported that they did not learn anything new from the simulation or found it silly or unnecessary. Despite these claims, quantitative data from both



schools showed significant increases in students' sociological understanding of inequality.

## DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

I developed Beat the Bourgeoisie because traditional stratification teaching methods seemed to leave students with a sterile, abstract view of social class stratification and did not help them understand the experience of trying to overcome structural constraints (including the abstract concepts of social and cultural capital). Students admitted that challenges existed but they still believed that with enough effort, one could surmount those challenges and get ahead. This resistance is common (Brezina 1996; Davis 1992), perhaps because most college students come from middle-class backgrounds, lack personal experience with poor people (Brislen and Peoples 2005), and believe strongly in the American Dream (Brezina 1996).

Results suggest that Beat the Bourgeoisie helps students in introductory sociology classes achieve two of the field's top five goals for introductory sociology students—(1) to see the “reality of structural factors in social life” and (2) “identify and offer explanations for social inequality” (Persell 2010:330). Students reported that like other simulations that challenge belief in U.S. meritocracy (e.g., Dundes and Harlow 2005; Fisher 2008; Garoutte and Bobbitt-Zeher 2011; Wills et al. 2005), my game helped them better understand structural barriers to mobility. It also reduced resistance by allowing them to temporarily experience the emotions and thoughts that accompany frustrated mobility attempts, and it expanded on existing simulations by adding social and cultural capital into an economic simulation. Beat the Bourgeoisie may be especially effective because it is situated within a context relevant to students (i.e., the classroom), involves competition for highly valued resources (i.e., grades) (as suggested by Brislen and Peoples 2005), and incorporates agency (as suggested by Brezina 1996). Agency is part of American Dream ideology (Brezina 1996), and students may believe it will ultimately help them win the game. When it does not, they must face the role of structure head-on. My students have never complained that they would have had more agency in real life.

Results suggest that Beat the Bourgeoisie may be effective in research university and liberal arts college settings. Students in both settings made statistically significant gains in their agreement with structural (versus individual) explanations for success and in their conceptual understanding of cultural and social capital. My study suggests that university students may make more highly significant gains than liberal arts college students in their understanding of social capital, perhaps simply because the latter may better understand the concept before the activity. Several liberal arts college students mentioned social connections to upper administration that helped them get into the college, so they may have already understood social capital very personally.

Results for Questions 5 and 9 were not significant. Regarding Question 5, this may be due to wording (i.e., understanding “advantages or disadvantages” of capital) that could have confused students, most of whom were in the proletariat group and experienced only disadvantage. The nonsignificant responses to Question 9 may be due to several factors. First, it may be that the students already felt somewhat compassionate toward poor people and so the activity produced no change. Second, the activity did not directly address poverty per se, so it may have been ineffective in changing students' opinions about poor people. Third, using two classes without specifying the proletariat as poor may have led my mostly middle-class students, who may have had little exposure to poor people (Brislen and Peoples 2005), to think of the proletariat as working- or middle-class, not poor. If so, one would not expect their attitudes about poor people to change.

I chose to use just two economic classes because I believe this best combats student resistance to a structural understanding of inequality. Using three or more classes deemphasizes conflict and highlights the “functions” of each class (Ossowski 1963) (e.g., one is upper class because one has “offered more to the system”); this could potentially *strengthen* belief in meritocracy. Using a two-class system generates the strong class antagonism and division (Ossowski 1963) necessary to make structural challenges to mobility clear to students.

The slight differences between schools in open-ended responses toward the game may reflect

resistance, (potential) slight social class differences by institution, or differences in institutional culture. Students may feel defensive after the game and express this by claiming that the game was redundant or silly. Perhaps there is a slightly higher proportion of working-class students at the university. Working-class students live daily with structural constraints and may find it redundant to simulate them in class. The slight institutional difference in open-ended responses may also reflect differences in institutional culture. Liberal arts college students expect experiential learning; university students expect lectures, not activities.

Most of my students were white and middle-class, making them likely to strongly resist the idea of structural inequality (Bohmer 1989). But I believe working-class students are also likely to be resistant. Although they have more direct experience with structural constraints, trying to earn a college degree may require belief in upward mobility so one's efforts are not seen as a waste. For this reason, I believe I would see similar results if conducting this study with working-class students. If the research university does have a slightly higher proportion of working-class students, my data (which show that the study was effective at both schools) support this idea.

As in real life, most interactions during the game occur *within* social class groups. Most questions are relatively simple; others are more complex and require teamwork. Students typically work together creatively to divide tasks, discuss potential answers, and strategize based on real-life class advantages and disadvantages in ways that may benefit their own group (e.g., trying to initiate "Occupy the Blackboard").

This game worked well in classes of 15 to 70 students but might be less successful in larger classes, as a smaller percentage of students would get to answer questions (i.e., use agency), allowing them to argue "If only *I* had been able to answer questions, we would have won" and downplay structural reasons for their loss.

Instructors of upper-level courses may wish to add complexity to the game. For example, a Social Stratification instructor could extend the game throughout the semester and ask students to create ideas for the game based on various dimensions of advantage (e.g., health care access). Instructors

could also select a proletariat member to "win the lottery" and "become bourgeoisie," frame their success as being due to their "can-do" attitude, and then criticize the proletariat group for not "bootstrapping." In a Social Theory course, instructors could first use two classes and then switch to three to illustrate changes in the social class dynamic or could create classes based on Weber's, then Marx's, definitions of class to help students compare and contrast theorists.

My study and the simulation itself have several limitations. First, social and cultural capital are only simulated in a basic, oversimplified manner. Upper-level stratification instructors should add nuance to the simulation as needed. Second, institutional type and class size are confounded and only small convenience samples were used, so it is unclear whether institutional differences in the social capital results were due to class size, student body composition, or institutional culture. One should use caution in generalizing these findings to other institutions. Finally, I did not measure long-term gains in this study. It is unclear how long students retain the new perspectives and attitudes they gain from the simulation.

Beat the Bourgeoisie helps students move toward a deeper understanding of structural disadvantage as well as social and cultural capital. Future research might productively focus on the long-term benefits of simulations, the effects of the number of social class groups used in simulations, and ways to build on this introductory-level activity to create a more nuanced game for upper-level courses.

## NOTE

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