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MIMICKING THE PSYCHOLOGICAL EFFECTS OF CAPITALISM IN THE CLASSROOM: USING *STARPOWER* TO DEMONSTRATE UNCONSCIOUS BIAS, PRIVILEGE, AND OPPRESSION

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Abstract

College students are reflective of a culturally diverse population and hold a wide range of cultural identities. As such, faculty and campus activities professionals alike, are constantly striving to meet the needs of an increasingly diverse student population. Socioeconomic status (SES) and social class are cultural variables that need more attention in higher education settings. Given that SES and social class are determinants of social power (APA, 2007), it is crucial to provide undergraduate students with focused learning experiences on these variables and how they influence identity development. Authors utilized Star Power, an educational game, to mimic three tiers of a capitalistic economy in the classroom. Qualitative data analyses suggested themes of dominance and striving for dominance across all groups. Implications for experiential learning in the classroom, multicultural education, diversity learning through campus outreach activities, and research are discussed.

As higher education becomes more accessible to students from all cultural backgrounds, college campuses are more reflective of a culturally diverse student body. To meet the needs of culturally diverse learners in higher education, colleges and universities increasingly require students to fulfill course requirements in diversity education as part of their general requirements for graduation. In psychology education in particular, the American Psychological Association (APA) and its members have called for more infusion of multicultural and diversity content within psychology curriculum at all educational levels (i.e., high school, undergraduate, and graduate; APA, 2007; Simoni et al., 1999; Trimble, Stevenson, & Worell, 2004). The appreciation for diversity learning, however, goes beyond the classroom. Across the nation, campus activities professionals in higher education engage students in cultural learning via diverse programs and outreach activities on college campuses (Boening & Miller, 2005).

DIVERSITY LEARNING IN HIGHER EDUCATION

In the Classroom

Diversity education has demonstrated efficacy in raising students' awareness, knowledge, and skills with respect to multiculturalism in their professional lives. For instance, diversity education initiatives have been shown as important for: shaping preservice teaching students' teaching practices and identities as social justice advocates

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for children and families (Miller Dyce & Owusu-Ansah, 2016), helping business and management students to learn to address discrimination and inequality in organizational leadership (Bell, et al., 2009), training medical students to contextualize their patients' concerns and value cultural humility in medical practice (Nazar et al., 2014), helping journalism students to understand and serve their multicultural communities (Biswas & Izard, 2009), and encouraging students in psychology courses toward positive attitudinal changes (reduction in racist and classist beliefs) in response to exposure to diversity-infused psychology curriculum.

Diversity education is relevant to the lives and experiences of all students, and concepts like privilege and oppression are important factors in 21st-century educational, social, and work environments. Privilege and oppression are social and institutional forces that serve to advantage one group (privilege) and disadvantage others (oppression; Johnson, 2018). The effects of privilege and oppression are not simply social in nature; these forces directly impact quality of life and access to critical resources like education, health care, and employment. For instance, men are still paid higher wages than women (Blau & Khan, 2016); People of Color are more likely to have encounters with police and be incarcerated (National Association for the Advancement of Colored People, 2021), and LGBTQ+ individuals have higher rates of suicidal ideation, suicide attempts, and homelessness (APA, 2017).

Within diversity curricula across disciplines, race and gender are often the focus of courses or entire disciplines of study. However, socioeconomic status (SES) and social class are important cultural variables that rarely receive focused, critical attention in the undergraduate psychology curriculum. Rubin and colleagues (2014) note that SES and social class are distinct constructs and describe social class as an individual's social background that is stable across generations. In contrast, SES is a person's current economic and social situation and is changeable. They further note that SES and social class are rooted in the interaction between an individual's economic, social, and cultural backgrounds and status. The intersectional nature of SES and social class with other aspects of cultural identity, like race and gender, make them a critical component for discussing how different identities are privileged or marginalized in the US (APA, 2007; Cole, 2009; Pratto & Stewart, 2012).

Diversity in Campus Activities

Student affairs professionals are increasingly encouraged to provide diverse cultural programs and activities to support and engage diverse student populations (Murphy, 2021). There is a gap in the literature on the importance and the value of teaching students how to engage with the diversity that surrounds them on campus, a responsibility that student affairs professionals are frequently tasked to provide (Boeing & Miller, 2005; Murphy, 2021). Campus activities professionals support and guide student academic and personal growth through campus programming via learning outside the classroom, such as residence hall programming, new student orientations, campus events, etc. (Bowman, 2011). In fact, a national study suggests that orientation leaders best facilitate diversity promotion on campus by integrating diversity issues into their programs (Boening & Miller, 2005). Campus programs led by campus activities professionals must reflect the diverse mosaic of student needs, desires, and perspectives (Peck, Rosch, DeSawal, 2022). Often, campuses support diversity promotion through programs focusing on race, gender, or sexual orientation. In fact, most campuses have specific offices and/or identified campus activities administrators that focus on campus-wide programs and events to promote and celebrate diversity with regard to these cultural demographic variables (e.g., *Multicultural Center, LGBTQIA Office, Gender Inclusion Office,* etc.). One area in particular that lacks needed attention and focus for campus-wide programming and education is diversity programming with regard to social class and socioeconomic status.

CAPITALISM

Capitalism is defined as a system wherein all the means of production are privately owned and run by the capitalist class for profit, while the working-class work for pay, and continue to be in a position where they do not own the product (Zimbalist & Sherman, 2014). Individuals' social class and socioeconomic status determine their role in a capitalistic economy. Those with higher social class and SES are in a better position within a capitalistic economic system, and therefore have social and financial advantages such as access to better healthcare, education, and jobs (APA, 2007).

Social Class and Socioeconomic Status

Socioeconomic status and social class are critical determinants of social power (an individual's access to resources; APA, 2007), as well as individual issues such as lifespan development and physical and mental health. Growing inequities in US society, such as the rapid growth of wealth in the upper class (top 5%) of US families (APA, 2007; Pew Research Center, 2020), point to a growing divide between the dominant (wealthy) and subordinate (middle-lower income) groups. This inequitable distribution of resources leads to inequitable distribution of power with respect to access to food and shelter, healthcare, education, jobs, and more (APA, 2007). Clearly, such disparities lead to a host of inequitable practical, social, and psychological outcomes for people in poorer groups up to and including earlier death (APA, 2007).

SES and social class are controversial topics in much of American society, as they are antithetical to the American democratic notion of a free and *equal* society. Thus, it can be challenging to hold discussions with students through formal instruction in the classroom and informal learning activities outside of the classroom to illuminate the differential outcomes for people in different socioeconomic groups (APA, 2007; Bramesfeld, 2018). Even if these discussions are held, Westernized, capitalist ideals such as individualism and the myth of meritocracy (that all individuals can transcend class boundaries through sheer force of will and hard work; McNamee & Miller, 2004) persist in the minds of many. Further, a typical explanation for poverty and unequal access to resources for poorer groups is the general moral failing of the subordinate group's members rather than the unbalanced economic, social, and political systems that favor dominant groups over subordinates in American capitalist society. This moralization of poverty is connected to Lerner's (1980) concept of the belief in a just world; namely, that good things happen to good people, and bad things happen to bad people. Such a belief allows people to be goal-directed and plan for the future, hoping that hard work and "doing the right thing" will eventually move them toward success and away from frightful outcomes. Thus, while social class and SES are crucial determinants of people's lived experiences, most students struggle to deeply and critically interrogate these inequitable economic and social systems regardless of their own social class.

One way to frame students' difficulty with learning concepts related to cultural diversity with respect to privilege and oppression is the concept of "privilege half-blindness" (Pratto & Stewart, 2012). While this may more broadly apply to those students in privileged or dominant groups (White, male, straight, middle-upper class, and so on), it can also explain why students in oppressed or subordinate groups may identify somewhat with the normativeness of the privileged group and see the behavior of their own subordinated group as problematic. The research conducted by Pratto and Stewart (2012) provides evidence for the social "normalization" of privileged or dominant group ideas and behavior and how promoting one's own group power is a more successful strategy for dominant than subordinate groups.

The idea of "half-blindness to privilege" refers to "the acknowledgment of social inequality with the implicit assumption that dominance is normal. By taking dominance as normal, superior social positions and greater power do not seem to be privileges" (Pratto & Stewart, 2012, p. 29). This lens helps to illuminate how and why students struggle to see class privilege and an assumption of meritocracy in American capitalism as having problematic effects. If we all assume that dominance or privilege (in this case, economic advantage and wealth) is the desired outcome, then we remain focused on achieving dominance rather than considering the ways that entire groups of people and ideas are excluded from full participation in US society, leading longer, healthier lives, or the values that might be lost by this exclusive vision of power (collectivism, sharing, nurturing, well-being, and so forth). Relatedly, Pratto and Stewart (2012) found that group identity is more salient for subordinate groups. That is because subordinate groups are experienced as "different from the norm," the qualities of subordinate groups are focused on as descriptors for the "differences" between groups, resulting not only in furthering stereotypes (e.g., all poor people are lazy), but also in subordinates recognizing inequities as abnormal and seeing the other group's advantage as privilege (Pratto & Stewart, 2012).

EXPERIENTIAL LEARNING

In the classroom and through campus outreach activities, experiential learning activities can help facilitate a deeper understanding of the influence of cultural variables such as social class and socioeconomic status on psychological constructs (Warren, 2006). In addition, active learning in the form of student-centered in-class activities and subsequent group discussions promotes higher-level thinking (Hagan & Richmond, 2012). In order to effectively use experiential activities aimed at diversity education, facilitators (both course instructors and/or campus activities professionals) of these activities should be aware of themselves as cultural beings and able to reflect on and discuss their own biases to model the process for students (Bramesfeld, 2018). It is important to approach any diversity exercise with some forethought and caution to ensure that students in marginalized groups are not being "used" to educate others or that students' lived experiences are not minimized for the sake of helping more privileged students gain more awareness (Bramesfeld, 2018).

Star Power

The educational game *StarPower* (Shirts, 1969) provides an excellent way to simulate a capitalist economy within a small group environment where participants barter in a token economy for a desired reward (e.g., extra credit points for the students in the highest "earning" group). The goal of this simulation game is to exhibit the influence of social stratification and socioeconomic hierarchy on attributions, equity, engagement, and power. The creators of the game suggest that anyone who believes it is essential for students to experience and understand the concept of social power can benefit from engaging their students in the game. As such, business, sociology, psychology, political science, economics, and history instructors have used this game to facilitate the learning of power and privilege for their students. Through random assignment, students are selected to one of three levels of economic strata (e.g., squares, triangles, and circles). They are instructed to "trade" between groups to improve their game position. The squares hold the highest points of the group, followed by the triangles, and then the circles, with the lowest points of the group. The game does not rely on participants' actual social identities to teach about inequity because the game is rigged; after the first round of token trading, students are largely "stuck" in one of three socioeconomic categories: lower (circles), middle (triangles), or upper (squares), and experience the psychological consequences of entrenchment in these SES identities. This unique experiential activity offers a high-impact approach for students to learn about social stratification first-hand.

STUDY PURPOSE

Connecting psychological concepts like the belief in a just world (Lerner, 1980), privilege, oppression, locus of control (Rotter, 1966), or self-serving bias (Miller & Ross, 1975) to a specific cultural diversity domain like social class and socioeconomic status can be difficult because students' personal identities are under scrutiny, which can make them feel defensive. That is, students may feel the desire to defend themselves and thus take a worm's eye view of their own (or their families') socioeconomic position rather than taking the bird's eye view of how structural inequalities exist across the socioeconomic system.

We wanted to provide students with an experiential learning opportunity to raise their awareness of how structural inequalities exist across the socioeconomic system and to facilitate conversations around such inequalities in the classroom. Specifically, we wanted to see how students would make sense of the simulated classroom economy in the *StarPower* (1969) experiential exercise and whether or not the "half-blindness of privilege" would still prevail in the game environment, where students' own socioeconomic circumstances were divorced from the stratified groupings in the game (which were random). We facilitated the *StarPower* (1969) game with three different groups of students and assessed their reactions via a self-report survey.

METHOD

Game Play

Two faculty members who are social psychologists and one graduate student (who was trained by the faculty

members) facilitated the game, *StarPower* (1969). The games lasted an hour and a half each, followed by a half-hour discussion to process students' experiences. The faculty facilitators have facilitated the game approximately ten times during the past several years. The creators of *StarPower* created the game with the intention that anyone could easily facilitate it by following their instructions, which can be accessed here: https://www.sjsu.edu/people/carol.mukhopadhyay/race/Starpower-Activity-2014.pdf.

For this study, the facilitators conducted the game three times with three different groups of students. The groups were a convenience sample, as they were students in the courses taught by the faculty administrators. In each simulation, the facilitators took some time, in the beginning, to explain to the students how the game would be played. A set of tokens worth different point values was distributed to each student. Token colors identified the point value for each token. Several "trading rounds" took place wherein students engaged in bartering with other students to improve their own overall point value of tokens. Students were told that the top performers in the game would earn extra credit, so there was an incentive to do well. After the instructions, students were given their first hand of tokens and instructed to trade, if they so desired, with other students to increase the points they had in their hand.

After the first round of trading (and after each subsequent round), the students' point values were tallied, and the class was divided into three groups: triangles (the lowest point-value group), circles (the middle point-value group), and squares (the highest point-value group). Each participant was given a badge with the group's insignia and encouraged to sit with their group. After the first round (where tokens were randomly distributed), and unbeknownst to the players, the game is stacked in favor of those with the most points (the squares). Behind the scenes, game facilitators move the highest point value tokens into an enriched bag from which the squares draw, simulating a stratified capitalist economy where wealth is concentrated and recirculated among the wealthiest individuals.

In addition to the trading rounds, several other activities incorporated into the simulation often encourage interesting group phenomena. In "bonus" rounds, groups are given three tokens and must unanimously agree on how to distribute the tokens among group members. If they are unable to agree, no one claims the points. In "ostracization" rounds, groups can exile one member based on group consensus. And after three rounds of trading, the square group (the wealthiest group) was allowed to modify the trading rules in any way they chose. Often, the square group imposed draconian rules that were self-serving, e.g., "all Circles and Triangles must give their highest point value token to a Square."

At the end of the game, participants completed the measures, and we informed students about the rigged nature of the game and discussed their reactions. All students received the extra credit initially offered to the highest-scoring group.

Participants

Among the participants (n = 46), ages ranged from 19-45 (M = 25.43, SD = 7.27), and 50.0% were in their third year of undergraduate study (juniors). 50.0% of participants identified as African-American or Black, 32.6% as White, 8.7% as Asian or Asian-American, 4.3% as Latinx or Hispanic, 2.2% as Pacific Islander, and 2.2% as Other. Regarding gender, 39.1% of students identified as male, and 60.9% identified as female. When asked to describe their socioeconomic status growing up, a majority of participants (58.7%) said they came from "modest" means, 19.6% said they grew up with "plenty," 15.2% grew up "poor," while 6.5% grew up "wealthy."

Data Collection

StarPower was facilitated three times, and data for this study were collected from three different undergraduate classes at the University of Baltimore (Interpersonal Psychology, Introduction to Psychology, and Marketing). Each class had an average enrollment of 15 students. Before the game began, students in the class were given a brief explanation of the day's activities and were asked to sign an informed consent document (or they could decline to join the game with no penalty).

Based on the nature of our research question, we wanted to briefly understand how students viewed each of the

three groups in the game (which includes their own group affiliation). We constructed a paper survey that included demographic and brief open-ended questions designed to elicit honest responses about how each participant saw the three stratified groups. After the demographic questions, participants were asked, "What did you think of: The Squares? The Circles? The Triangles?" Participants took approximately 10-20 minutes to complete the measures at the end of the game.

Data Analysis Procedures

The CQR-M (Spangler et al., 2012) approach, in which researchers derive themes and categories from brief responses to open-ended questions, was appropriate for analyzing the responses collected for this study. In line with consensual qualitative research-modified (CQR-M) best practices and to support data trustworthiness (Morrow, 2005), team members met prior to coding in order to discuss, at length, their biases and expectations related to the current research. First, the researchers took stock of their own biases in self-reflective statements. All four researchers work at or attend the University of Baltimore, a majority-minority institution. Based on her experience with the student population, one researcher mentioned expecting students to see the unfairness of the game, but at the same time, hold internalized values like meritocracy, the importance of hard work, and the deservedness of resources. She expected few students to value cooperativeness or hold egalitarian values.

One researcher mentioned considerable experience facilitating the StarPower exercise and that she expected students to act in ways that she had observed before. Namely, she expected the squares to create rules that perpetuated their status and triangles to disengage, potentially lie, or disobey the rules.

All four researchers come from academic backgrounds in psychology (counseling and social) and mentioned being predisposed to see "systems" rather than individuals. In one way or another, as a result of their background bias, they all expected to view the square group (the highest point-value group) negatively. Two researchers came from a predominantly quantitative background and were somewhat skeptical of the qualitative research process.

After reflecting and taking stock of potential biases, the researchers paired into two teams of two to develop and form a consensus on initial domains and categories. Then, all four researchers met to establish a consensus on domains and categories. Collaboratively and iteratively, they coded individual participants' responses into the relevant category, combining or differentiating categories and creating new categories from variant data when appropriate. To be consistent with the CQR-M approach, the research team discussed inconsistencies in coding until reaching consensus, and then placed all events into domains and categories. Finally, the lead researcher audited the coding to ensure clarity and reasoning for assigned categories and domains. The audit resulted in renaming some domains to better encompass a broader theme with 100% consensus from all team members. See Tables 1, 2, and 3 for the final domains and categories.

RESULTS

Results are reported following the American Psychological Association Journal Article Reporting Standards for Qualitative Design (JARS-Qual). Three overarching domains reflect the experiences of the research participants while engaged in the Star Power game: squares, circles, and triangles. The squares domain represents the thoughts and reactions of the participants in all three groups toward the squares (i.e., the highest point value group) and is included in Table 1. The circles' domain represents the thoughts and reactions of the participants in all three groups toward the circles (see Table 2). Lastly, the triangles domain represents the thoughts and reactions of the participants in all three groups toward the triangles (see Table 3). Results will be broken down by domain, and a discussion of the results will primarily focus on the most frequently endorsed categories within each of the three domains listed above.

Squares

The squares domain revealed twelve categories (see Table 1). When asked about their thoughts about the squares, the most commonly cited statements were associated with the *status* of the squares (N = 13). For example, one

participant stated that the squares behaved as though they "were the elitists," while another reported that the squares "were the top-rated people, like the top 1%." One participant noted that the squares "represented the upper class and focused on maintaining their status."

The second most frequently discussed categories in the squares' domain were *self-serving/selfish* (N = 10) and *strategic/positive* (N = 10). With regard to the *self-serving/selfish* category, the triangles and circles noted that the squares were "very selfish after making rules about how the trading should go." Another participant noted that the squares "threw other players under the bus for self-satisfaction." Another participant noted that the squares "did what they thought would benefit them."

In the *strategic/positive* category, one participant noted that the squares "were good at strategy and understanding the objective." Another participant commented that the squares "were really good at playing the game" and "knew how to play the game well." Another participant noted that the squares "understood how to play." For a complete list of categories in this domain, please refer to Table 1.

Table 1.
Participant reaction to squares.

Domain	Definition	Categories	Frequency	Examples
Squares	Discussion of thought about the squares (the highest point value group) and their behaviors	Status	13	"we were the elitists"
		Self-serving/Selfish	10	"I felt the squares were very selfish after making rules about how the trading should go"
		Strategic/Positive	10	"good at strategy and understanding the objective"
		Lucky	7	"lucky"
		Points/Scores	5	"had the best scores"
		Strategic/Negative	5	"they chose rules that would put the (other)groups at less of an advantage"
		Unfair	4	"unfair"
		Positive Attributes	4	"smart"
		Powerful	4	"most powerful group"
		Pride in Self	3	"felt good about themselves"
		Uncollaborative	3	"they kept the hand they were dealt with and didn't even accept trades"
		Other/Variant	14	"mean"

Circles

The circles domain resulted in twelve categories (see Table 2). When asked about their thoughts about the circles, the most commonly cited statements were associated with the category of *tried/wanted to be a square* (*N* = 11). For example, one participant noted that the circles "tried to move [to] the squares." Another participant reported that the circles "were constantly trying to get more (higher) chips and stay in their spot/move up." A participant noted that the circles "tried their hardest to become a square."

The second most frequently discussed category with respect to the circles was *middle points/scores* (*N* = 7). When asked to reflect on their experience with the circles, the squares and triangles noted that the circles "were the middle group." One participant noted that the circles were "out of the poverty zones, but not that rich at all." Another participant reported that the circles "got average chips to trade with."

There was a tie between three categories for the next most frequently discussed topic with respect to the circles: *middle class* (*N* = 5), *neutral* (*N* = 5), and *hardworking* (*N* = 5). With regard to the category of *middle class,* one participant noted that the circles "were second place, so basically they were middle class." Another participant noted that the circles, "were average; middle class." The *neutral* category reflected responses like, "I do not have an opinion" or "no real feelings either way" with respect to the circles. Lastly, the *hardworking* category included responses from participants such as the circles were "hard working," they "worked hard," or "they were trying." For a complete list of categories in this domain, please refer to Table 2.

Table 2.
Participant reactions to circles.

Domain	Definition	Categories	Frequency	Examples
Circles	Discussion of thoughts about the circles (the middle point value group) and their behaviors	Tried/Wanted to be a square	11	"they tried to move to the squares"; "the circles were looking to climb to succeed"
		Middle Points/ Scores	7	"middle group, dealt an ok hand"
		Middle Class	5	"I think the circles were second place so they were basically middle class"
		Neutral	5	"I do not have an opinion"
		Hardworking	5	"the circles was hard working"
		Content/even-keeled	4	"well balanced"
		Collaborative	4	"helped each other out and what was best for everyone"
		Less motivated	4	"did not participate as much"
		Stability	4	"moved up or down depending on decisions made"
		Played well	3	"the circles performed well"
		Self-serving/ Strategic	3	"just as selfish; exiled the most successful person to benefit themselves"
		Other/Variant	7	"they understood it"

Triangles

The triangles domain resulted in thirteen categories. When asked about their thoughts about the triangles, the most frequently reported statements related to triangles being low *class/poor* (*N* = 9). For example, one participant noted that the triangles were the "dregs of society." Another participant shared that the triangles "were the poor ones, in poverty." A participant noted that the triangles were "the poorest group."

The second most frequently discussed category with respect to the triangles was that they were *unmotivated* (*N* = 7). For example, a research participant stated that the triangles were "less engaging" and "kept their arms folded." Another participant reported that the triangles "didn't seem to care about the game." Relatedly, a participant noted that the triangles were "lacking motivation."

The following categories were the next most frequently cited for the *triangles*' domain: *unlucky* (*N* = 6), *trying to move up* (*N* = 6), and *more group-oriented behavio*r (*N* = 6). Regarding being unlucky, one participant noted that the triangles "had no luck at all," while another noted that they "were feeling burdened by chance and misfortune." In the *trying to move up* category, one participant reported that they "wanted to move up the most," while another shared that they "were trying to advance as circles or squares." Lastly, in the *more group-oriented behavior* category, one participant noted that the triangles "did what was in the interest of [the] entire group,"

while another participant noted that the triangles "were more likely to stick together and not exile a member of their group." For a complete list of categories in this domain, please refer to Table 3.

Table 3.
Participant reactions to triangles.

Domain	Definition	Categories	Frequency	Examples
Triangles	Discussion of thoughts about the triangles (the lowest point value group) and their behaviors	Low class/Poor	9	"dregs of society"
		Unmotivated	7	"the triangles were less engaging, many of them kept their arms folded"
		Unlucky	6	"they had no luck at all"
		Trying to move up	6	"they wanted to move up the most"
		More group-oriented behavior	6	"did what was in interest of entire group"
		Negative evaluations	4	"being in the triangles made me feel like a loser"
		Positive evaluations	4	"we played well; and decided accordingly based on the rules"
		Stuck	4	"they were stuck there for most of the game"
		Unskilled	3	"more confused about the rules of the game"
		Value fairness	3	"the triangles played fair; and even came up with a rule that would benefit everyone"
		Risk-averse	3	"didn't want to take risks"
		Points	3	"the triangles had really low chips to play with"
		Other/Variant	8	"annoyed by the superiority of the squares"

DISCUSSION

As shown in the analysis of participant responses, student opinions about the different groups reflect several themes. First, the recognition of dominance and striving for domination, as discussed by Pratto and Stewart (2012), is evident in the top two categories for each group. The Squares were most frequently described according to their dominant "status" and were seen as "self-serving" or "selfish." Next, the Circles were most frequently described as "Want[ing] to be a Square" and as the "Middle" group. Finally, the Triangles were most frequently described as "low class/poor" and "unmotivated." Recall that the game was rigged such that once participants landed in one group, they rarely moved in one direction or another. These results suggest, then, that the normality of dominance (or striving for it) and the morality myth of poverty (they were "unmotivated" and thus deserved or earned their poverty) were evident in the participants' minds.

Relatedly, a comparison of the descriptors for the top two groups versus the bottom group yields an interesting, but not surprising, pattern given the discussion of half-blindness of privilege above. In general, the top two groups (Squares and Circles) were described much more frequently with positively valenced attributes, such as "status, strategic, lucky, positive, pride, powerful" and "middle-class, neutral, hardworking, content/even-keeled, collaborative, stability, played well," respectively. Alternatively, the Triangles were described more frequently with negatively valenced words such as "low-class, unmotivated, unlucky, negative evaluations, stuck, unskilled." These descriptions suggest that Pratto and Stewart (2012) were correct. Privilege half-blindness allows for the

dominant group to be perceived as "normal" and the ideal for which to strive. The myth of meritocracy undergirds the belief that those in the top group(s) got there by their own efforts alone. Faculty and campus activities professionals should emphasize this point with students when conducting the discussion portion of *StarPower* as an intervention to disrupt the half-blindness and generate new patterns of thinking and perceiving cultural factors such as SES and social class.

As a majority-minority institution, it is not entirely surprising that the sample identified as more than half Persons of Color (67.4%), female (60.9%), and from poor or modest means (73.9%). Knowing this, one might assume that these participants would be perceptive to the point of the game and perhaps resist the subordination of other groups in some way. What is interesting here is how pervasive the social dominance narrative was for these participants when they were divorced from their own identities and instead placed in the artificial game environment. The half-blindness of privilege, the myth of meritocracy, and the moral myth of poverty are all quite evident in the themes emerging from the data. Consistent with theories of social dominance orientation (SDO; Pratto, Sidanius, Stallworth, & Malle, 1994) and half-blindness of privilege, dominant groups tend to accept their group's dominance as inevitable and passively accept the normality of their privilege.

Facilitating *StarPower* with students, faculty, and campus activities professionals can help raise student awareness around how these factors operate, not just within the game, but within the structure of a capitalistic society overall. Such awareness can help students create connections between the contrived experience of *StarPower* and their everyday experiences in society. Conversely, and supporting the salience of subordinate group identity to subordinate group members (Pratto & Stewart, 2012), we can see that the Triangle group (and to some extent the Circles) had themes emerge with regard to "more group-oriented behavior," "valu[ing] fairness," and for the Circles, "collaborative," suggesting that in-group affiliation was more evident for the less affluent groups. Because all participants were rating perceptions of each group, the lower endorsement of these subordinate in-group affiliative statements makes sense: only the Triangle (and perhaps some Circle) group members would be primed to feel this affiliation as members of the subordinate group. This point will be particularly helpful in developing diversity awareness on campus, both in the classroom and through campus activities, by promoting a greater understanding of additional cultural differences that can potentially emerge via an affiliation with a specific SES or social class.

Strengths and Limitations

There are some limitations to this research. The authors acknowledge a limitation in the present study regarding external validity, i.e., generalizability, based on the qualitative approach. It would be helpful to replicate the findings with a larger sample and, if possible, quantitative measures, especially given that different groups of students may respond differently to the exercise based on group dynamics. That is, students' experiences and reflections may be based on idiosyncratic events associated with the exercise. In one administration of the exercise, a "square" student ostracized herself from her own group to divorce herself from the draconian rules the group created.

Another limitation is that data from this study are from students attending a public university in an urban setting, and results may not reflect all college students across the nation. For example, how might the results have differed if data were collected from a variety of institutions across the nation, including both private and public universities, as well as urban and suburban institutions? To bridge this knowledge gap, future research should assess any differences that may emerge when *StarPower* is conducted on diverse college campuses across the nation.

Alternatively, there are some strengths to this research approach. The qualitative method allowed us to explore the richness in experience brought about by the exercise and explore nuances in the data that a quantitative approach would obscure. Additionally, results from this study suggest that this game can facilitate conversations around class, SES, and capitalism on campus and provide further support for continuing these conversations in different spaces on campus with campus activities professionals. Relatedly, compared to faculty, campus activities professionals may have non-evaluative relationships with students, which may help create more open and vulnerable cultural conversations and learning that evolves from engaging in activities such as *StarPower*. Limitations aside, there is great value in the rich data that emerge from a qualitative approach. The data in the present study was relatively unaffected by researcher expectations.

Future Directions

The present study explored individuals' qualitative perceptions of others based on the others' apparent socioeconomic status. One next step would be to explore how the qualitative findings in the present study map onto a quantitative assessment. The global approach in the present study did not consider the impact of each individual's appointed status within the game. In other words, how did being labeled a triangle influence perceptions of the other groups? Did being a square make those members feel more entitled than the members of the other groups? Future research should include questions of this nature. More generally speaking, research into perceptions of self and others around SES and class is lacking, and warrants continued exploration in the spirit of a renewed urgency in multicultural research.

Because the *StarPower* game is rigged from the beginning, it effectively educates students from all identity categories about differences in social class statuses. For this same reason, it also does not rely on students with minoritized identities to bear the emotional and educational burden of teaching about inequity (Bramesfled, 2018). Ending up in one of the three social class statuses is completely random. So, students' actual, lived identities are not called upon to teach or communicate any portions of the diversity exercise. In diversity education, it is critical not to burden already minoritized students with the extra weight of educating students from higher social classes about the fundamental inequities and psychological tradeoffs of living in poverty. By extension, students who identify in a lower social class may be given words for their experience and a more nuanced understanding of how power hierarchies are created and maintained. When implementing this type of activity in an academic setting, it is critical for the facilitators (e.g., faculty and/or campus activities professionals) to emphasize these points to deepen the diversity educational experience.

We believe that higher education professionals, such as faculty and campus activities professionals, could find this game helpful in teaching about different social and psychological constructs with respect to privilege and oppression. Additionally, faculty and facilitators from student affairs and/or student life offices could engage college students in this game as part of the university outreach or new student orientation activities to help raise student awareness with respect to concepts such as social class, SES, social power, and oppression. Once students are let in on the secret that the game is rigged, excellent discussions about perceptions of personal hard work and merit versus systemic advantages can occur. In addition, discussions about concepts like belief in a just world and self-serving bias can be more productive because students can refer back to their recent thoughts and feelings in the game. It is particularly helpful when students in more dominant groups find themselves in lower-status groups, as this will illuminate the real structural barriers that lead to feelings of hopelessness or phenomena such as learned helplessness.

Helping students in higher education institutions with perspective-taking is often tricky. Students can easily become defensive on behalf of themselves, their families, or other social groups when discussions of inequality, privilege, and oppression are broached. The game *StarPower* provides an excellent lesson on many psychological concepts and creates an environment in which students can generate empathy for the social positionality of their peers. It also allows them to experience systemic inequity divorced from their own deeply held beliefs and social identities. Higher education institutions have a responsibility to teach diversity and assure some level of social justice on campus (Boening & Miller, 2005; Miller & Owusu-Ansah, 2016). Through games like *StarPower*, campus activities professionals and faculty can help increase cultural awareness and humility around these cultural variables for their students to help create a more inclusive campus environment, as well as prepare students to engage in social justice work. For students who now comprise an increasingly diverse and global workforce, thoughtful lessons on how social forces and culture shape our access to resources and lived experiences are essential.

CONCLUSION

Higher education institutions consist of faculty and campus activities professionals tasked with creating a vibrant learning environment for students of all cultural backgrounds. This important work entails creating both didactic instruction in the classroom and campus-wide programs that focus on increasing awareness of cultural

variables, including but not limited to race, gender, social class, and socioeconomic status. Diversity efforts on campus tend to focus more on race and gender and less on other cultural variables such as social class and socioeconomic status. Experiential learning activities, such as having students engage in games, can help facilitate learning and discussions of these important cultural variables. *StarPower* is a game that both faculty and campus activities professionals can facilitate with students to help engage them in learning about cultural variables such as social class, socioeconomic status, power, and privilege in a capitalist economy.

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