Buy Your Opportunity: An Experiential Consciousness-raising Workshop Addressing Economic Inequality and Meritocracy

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Abstract

The purpose of this article is to present a consciousness-raising educational initiative intended to (a) raise critical consciousness of privilege/oppression, social dominance, and meritocracy myths as they all relate to economic inequality; and (b) provide participants with the opportunity to experiment with social change strategies. This 4-hour experiential workshop consists of one group cohesion-building activity, one empathy-building activity, and a simulation recreating a four-tiered social class society (e.g., upper class, middle class, working class, economically impoverished). Theories involved in the workshop's design (e.g., social justice, social dominance, critical pedagogy, experiential education, and social identity development) are briefly addressed, the workshop is described in detail so educators may utilize it, and previous preliminary evaluation research is reviewed. Process observations are also presented from one particular workshop involving sixteen university undergraduate students.

Keywords: economic inequality, social justice, privilege/oppression, meritocracy, simulation

A sociopolitical landscape of growing economic inequality both sets the context and increases the need for relevant consciousness-raising education. The concentration of income and wealth at the top of the social strata has been increasing steadily in many countries since roughly 1980 (Atkinson & Picketty, 2010; Picketty, 2014). In response, the recent Occupy Wall Street movement raised public awareness and changed the discourse of the many risks to democracy associated with increasing economic inequality and concentration of wealth (Appel, 2014). In addition, social epidemiologists have shown that increased economic inequality between economically wealthier countries (and between American states) is associated with many health and social problems including infant mortality, homicides, imprisonment, trust levels, obesity, mental health problems, drug and alcohol addiction, social mobility, math and literacy, and life expectancy (Wilkinson & Pickett, 2011). Increased economic inequality also makes salient the need for educational initiatives addressing meritocracy and related system-justifying beliefs (e.g., just world belief, and social dominance orientation). By attributing success and failure to individual merit, the *status quo* of social systems is maintained. These beliefs and ideologies actively silence critiques of social inequities and lead to victim-blaming (Cozzarelli, Wilkinson, & Tagler, 2001; Kluegel & Smith, 1986).

Students of higher education participating in discussions of social inequities often need extra support in understanding the macro-level sociopolitical and institutional forces maintaining social inequalities, and ultimately, the culturally hegemonic *status quo* (Goodman, 2011). This educational process has been described as consciousness-raising, and has a well-established legacy (Rosenthal, 1984). Popularized in the late 1960s by second wave feminism, consciousness-raising in educational settings continues to be an important tool for sociopolitical and activist development (e.g., Baumgardner & Richards, 2000; Hernández & Rehman, 2002). Yet, too few consciousness-raising initiatives addressing economic inequality exist which are experiential, theory-driven, and evidence-based. To this end, we present an innovative, experiential, and theory-driven consciousness-raising workshop addressing economic inequality in the context of privilege, oppression, and meritocracy.

To effectively engage students in exploring system-justifying beliefs that are often taboo or politically-charged topics, theoretically sound educational initiatives are needed to provide a transformative learning experience. We named the experiential workshop presented here *Buy Your Opportunity* to highlight the connection between a person's (a) economic resources and power and (b) opportunity to meet basic needs and pursue valued goals. The workshop was

designed to facilitate a transformative educational experience whereby participants would be encouraged to grapple with their thoughts and feelings regarding economic privilege and oppression. Buy Your Opportunity also goes beyond simply learning about social inequities in a classroom setting and adds a crucial component of solution-generation—experientially practicing and reflecting upon effective and ineffective systems-change strategies.

Theoretical Foundations

Before we describe the workshop, we will provide a brief review of the foundational concepts of social justice, social dominance, critical pedagogy, and experiential education.

Social Justice

Since institutionalization of oppressive attitudes and behaviors (e.g., classism, sexism, racism, ableism, and heterosexism) brings about inequity for subordinated groups in the United States, social justice needs to be at the heart of any form of activist or multicultural training. Many definitions and descriptions of social justice exist. We will mention a few core concepts. Rawls (1971) referred to two tenets of social justice: (a) the equitable distribution of resources, opportunities, and profits to those with the most need (distributive justice); and (b) maintaining equal rights and liberties (individual justice). Social justice has also been associated with the distribution of "advantages and disadvantages" in society (Miller, 1999, p. 11) and an "examination of institutional and social relations" (Speight & Vera, 2004, p. 111). Goodman et al. (2004) embraced a more active stance and identified social justice as action taken to modify beliefs, codes and policies in a society so that marginalized groups may gain access to resources of self-determination. We affirm the culmination of these definitions and consider consciousness-raising education to fit into the active sense of advancing social justice. Social justice is a guiding core concept and value to consciousness-raising education whereby individual problems are understood in larger sociopolitical forces. The next concept, social dominance, elucidates the connection between individuals and institutional processes.

Social Dominance

Social hierarchies exist within a community and result in the formation of subordinate and dominant social groups (Sidanius & Pratto, 1999). According to Pratto and Stewart (2012), almost all stable societies consist of hierarchies in

which a dominant group, based on gender, religion, ethnicity, race, or socio-economic status enjoys power and privilege. Discrimination at an individual and institutional level is responsible for the creation of subordinate and dominant groups (Pratto, Sidanius, & Levin, 2006). The social dominance theory formulated by Sidanius and Pratto (1999) posits that members of dominant social groups have access to and enjoy a disproportionate amount of *positive social value* through access to education, wealth, power, food, housing, and medical services (Pratto et al., 2006). Subordinate groups experience *negative social value* through lack of access to health care, inferior housing and education, underemployment, unemployment, vituperation, and condemnation (Pratto et al., 2006). The social dominance theory states that group-based social hierarchy is formed and cultivated by group stereotypes, ideologies, values, and beliefs referred to as *legitimizing myths* that are consensually embraced by a society (Sidanius & Pratto, 1999). Legitimizing myths affect the behaviors of individuals, the operations of institutions, and the development of social practices and policies. *Hierarchy-enhancing legitimizing myths* (e.g., just world beliefs, internal attributions for poverty and racism) justify group-based dominance and are endorsed more often by dominant group members, whereas *hierarchy-attenuating legitimizing myths* (e.g., social democracy, religious doctrines such as the preferential option for the poor, humanist doctrines such as human rights and feminism) counter the oppression and are endorsed more often by subordinated group members (Pratto & Sidanius,1999). Understanding and addressing the existence of social dominance is a crucial means to raise critical consciousness of privilege and oppression as it relates to economic inequality.

Intersection of Experiential and Critical Pedagogies

Experiential and critical pedagogies complement one another in social justice education (Breunig, 2005). The interaction of the two forms the pedagogical basis of this workshop. Experiential learning has shown to be effective in various formats with adult learners (e.g., Cantor, 1997; Shields, Zawadzki, & Johnson, 2011; Springer, Stanne, & Donovan, 1997). Experiential education is student-centered; it is based on the assumptions that, above all, the subjective experiences of the learners should be valued, and that learners are to be active in creating the learning process (Dewey, 1963). Further, inherent to experiential education is not only a structured participatory experience but also a processing or debriefing time focused on reactions to the structured experience (Joplin, 1995). This action-reflection cycle provides a reflective analysis on a challenging experience. Joplin (1995) says, "Experience alone is insufficient to be called experiential education, and it is the reflection process that turns experience into experiential education" (p.

15). Kolb's experiential learning model (1984) presents a more nuanced learning cycle which consists of (a) concrete experience, (b) reflective observation, (c) abstract conceptualizations, and (d) active experimentation. The model contains two dialectically related modes of grasping experience (i.e., concrete experience and abstract conceptualization) and two dialectically related modes of transforming experience (i.e., reflective observation and active experimentation; Kolb, Boyatzis, & Mainemelis, 2001). The workshop presented here was designed to incorporate all four of these modes in order to facilitate a holistic learning process.

Critical pedagogy views most education as upholding the *status quo* of systems of privilege and domination (Shor, 1993). Paulo Freire (2000) describes his vision of education as an opportunity for individuals to develop a critical awareness of their role in the world while also recognizing the dynamic nature of reality and potential for transformation. A key Freirean concept in critical pedagogy is *problem-posing* as opposed to a banking system of educators depositing information into learners. Problem-posing entails asking provoking questions and inviting students to question commonly accepted answers (Shor, 1993).

The pairing of experiential education with critical pedagogy represents an excellent fit for consciousness-raising education because of the holistic nature in engaging the cognitive, affective, and behavioral self in pursuit of emancipation from social domination and toward a more socially just world (Itin, 1999).

The current workshop was designed as a problem-posing approach and invites students to critically reflect rather than be instructed on what to learn. Critical pedagogy is essential to the educational process in a consciousness-raising workshop examining macro-level concepts of cultural hegemony, privilege, and oppression as they are experienced in the individual lives of participants.

Developmental Considerations

This workshop was designed with the consideration that participants would be at different levels or degrees of awareness of their social identities (e.g., gender, ethnicity, class). We utilized Worell and Remer's (2003) Personal/Social Identity Model with its four dimensions of social identity awareness graded from low to high. The four dimensions from low to high are (a) *pre-awareness* (no awareness of how social identities are related to privilege and oppression), (b) *encounter* (becomes aware of privilege and oppression), (c) *immersion* (rejects the oppressive dominant culture), and (d) *integration and activism* (appreciates the strengths of

both subordinate and dominant groups and begins to work for social change). Each dimension is divided into descriptive sub-sections of Privilege/Advantage and Oppression/Disadvantage but is too detailed to expound upon here.

The Personal/Social Identity Model is a helpful model in conceptualizing where individuals may be in their development of awareness of privilege and oppression and their readiness to be challenged through exercises and discussions. This development of awareness is a key tenet in social justice education. When unconscious or unexamined assumptions and prejudices are addressed, personal awareness of one's own socialization, social identities, and differential treatment can be developed (Adams, Bell, & Griffin, 2007). Worell and Remer assume an interdependency of identities (gender, ethnicity, class, religion, etc.) and stress that a person may identify with components from more than one dimension at any given time (e.g., pre-encounter and immersion). In addressing people from privileged groups, Goodman (2011) posits that privileged individuals "who also have a salient subordinated identity often need to express their experience with that oppression and have it validated before they can allow other oppressed groups to be the focus of discussion" (p. 72). The current workshop was designed to facilitate this process.

Resistance

Addressing social identity developmental levels based on privileged and subordinate group membership is also crucial to reduce the occurrence of resistance. Consciousness-raising education addresses topics where participants often will disagree about deeply held values and assumptions. Resistance inhibits people from engaging in the learning process. Based on the principles of social dominance theory, participants with the most dominant or privileged social identities will likely have their worldviews challenged the most and often experience fear, discomfort, anxiety, cognitive dissonance, or some other uncomfortable feeling (Goodman, 2011). In line with experiential and critical pedagogies, educators can address resistance pro-actively by helping create a learning environment where empathy is encouraged (Goodman, 2011). An empathic response involves identifying with the situation, feelings, and suffering of another human being. As research suggests, empathy is a naturally occurring human inclination (Kohn, 1990). Strengthening this natural empathy during consciousness-raising education is intended to bring several benefits: (a) helping people care for others who are different from themselves, (b) reducing the tendency to vilify or blame victims for their circumstances, (c) encouraging the pro-social action to remove injustice, and (d) countering a desire to maintain

relative advantage and avoid personal costs (Goodman, 2011). Thus, evoking participants' natural empathy is a strategic method to avoid a rebound effect commonly associated with resistance.

The Workshop

The present consciousness-raising workshop was developed to elevate self-awareness and critical consciousness of privilege and oppression on a personal and systemic level. The workshop was designed especially with developmental considerations in mind for (a) individuals from advantaged/dominant social locations and (b) individuals reflecting pre-encounter and encounter levels of personal/social identity development (Worrell & Remer, 2003). The goals of the workshop are to increase empathy, raise critical consciousness of privilege and oppression and social dominance, and expose the myth of meritocracy. Additionally, the intended affective outcome is for participants to identify and process difficult emotions (e.g., guilt, anxiety, envy, anger) about their experiences in the simulation. Participants are given the opportunity to process difficult emotions and perspectives associated with privileged and subordinated stations in life, and potentially learn how inequity is harmful to everyone involved. Participants are also encouraged to discuss how their feelings and insights generated from the workshop simulation are similar or different to their real lives.

Evidence for Effectiveness

Kodet et al (2016) reported preliminary results for the Buy Your Opportunity workshop for two workshop samples. In order to minimize social desirability in reporting, participants in both workshops completed pre-posttests anonymously using a unique identifier code to match pre- and post-test surveys. Pre-post mean score outcomes were analyzed for a sample of 16 undergraduate students participating in the workshop as part of a Human Development class at a large public university in the southeastern United States (further description of participants are in the process observations section of this paper). First, the mean decrease in meritocracy beliefs was significant and showed a medium-to-large effect size estimate ($d = 0.74$) as measured on a 4-item Protestant work ethic scale (Ho et al., 2012). Second, mean pre-post change of social dominance orientation was significant and produced a very large effect size estimate decrease ($d = 1.46$) as measured on the 16-item Social Dominance Orientation scale (SDO, Pratto, Sidanius, Stallworth, & Malle, 1994). Third, mean pre-post change showed a medium-to-large effect size increase in openness to diversity and challenge ($d = 0.71$) as measured on the Openness to Diversity and Challenge Scale (ODCS,

Pascarella et al., 1996). Mean change was not significant for the other pre-post measures: empathic concern and perspective-taking subscales from the Interpersonal Reactivity Index (Davis, 1980). Importantly, no mean change resulted in a significant negative result (i.e., rebound effect), and gender was not significantly associated with any change in scores.

Kodet et al (2016) also analyzed the same pre-post mean score outcomes for a sample of 23 ethnically diverse undergraduate and graduate students participating in the workshop as part of a university-sponsored hunger and homelessness awareness event at a large public university in the southeastern United States (15 women, eight men, M_{age} = 20.61, age range: 18-24, 48% African American/Black, 43% European American/White, 9% other/missing). In contrast to the previous sample of students participating in the workshop as a class requirement, these students were self-selecting into the hunger and homelessness awareness event with no university-related requirements to attend. Also, on average, the workshop 2 students had lower pretest scores of social dominance orientation, meritocracy beliefs, and higher scores of openness to diversity and challenge. Pretest scores of empathic concern, and perspective-taking were roughly the same between workshops. Hence, we did not anticipate mean scores significantly changing. Yet, change in meritocracy beliefs was significant and showed a medium-to-large effect size estimate decrease at workshop end (d = 0.62). Also, change in perspective-taking were significant and showed a roughly small effect size increase (d = 0.27). Change was not significant for the other pre-post measures. Importantly, like the previous sample, no change indicated a significant negative result (i.e., rebound effect), and neither racial/ethnic identity nor gender were significantly associated with significant change on any of the measures.

These data provide evidence that the workshop was effective in reducing endorsement of meritocracy beliefs for both samples and social dominance orientation for the sample consisting of participants with higher initial scores on average (workshop 2). It was also effective in increasing openness to diversity and challenge for the workshop 1 participants who completed the workshop as a part of class requirements and had lower pretest scores than workshop 2 participants. The goal of increasing empathy was not met, but we were encouraged that no rebound effect was found (i.e., empathy levels did not decrease). Given the politically controversial nature of the topic, the deeply ingrained nature of the constructs measured, and the short duration of the intervention, we think that these results warrant utilization of this workshop with similar populations and further evaluation research. Next, we describe the workshop in detail.

Workshop Description

Three activities make up the Buy Your Opportunity workshop. The first two activities are in preparation for the climactic simulation and debrief. We will first briefly describe these two activities.

Concentric Circles. The first activity is a common "ice-breaker" activity, commonly known as *Concentric Circles*. While standing and facing each other in two concentric circles, participants take turns quickly meeting each other and answering questions asked by workshop facilitators (see Table 1). The intention of this activity is to rapidly build group cohesion and help participants connect to their values.

Table 1: Concentric Circles Topics of Discussion

If tonight was your last meal to enjoy, what would you choose?
My dream holiday destination and why
A person I really respect, and why
A way that I take care of myself or am good to myself when I need taking care of
Something I've learned in my life that has been important to me
A time I did the right thing even though I felt some fear
A goal I have and some things I'm doing to accomplish it

Empathy Exchange. The second activity, we call *Empathy Exchange,* was adapted from an experiential exercise developed by critical educator Paulo Freire (Mattingly, 2009). Participants are divided into small groups of four or five and asked to "write about one way you have been treated unfairly in your life." Response cards are shuffled anonymously and distributed so no one receives his or her own response card. The facilitators participate and speak first, modeling personal sharing. Participants read the descriptions, express how they would have felt being "in their shoes," and talk about what else they would want to know about the situation. A debriefing session immediately follows the activity whereby participants are encouraged to discuss their reactions to the experience of entering someone else's life and struggles. The intended outcomes of this activity are to (a) enlarge understanding of others' problems, (b) experience giving and receiving empathic responses to real stories of mistreatment or injustice, and (c) become aware of common threads in diverse experiences of mistreatment.

Buy Your Opportunity simulation. The third activity, *Buy Your Opportunity,* is the main simulation and was adapted from a critical race theory-based simulation entitled *Other People's Power* (McKinney, 2012) also combines experiential and critical pedagogies. We designed the Buy Your Opportunity simulation to create a microcosm of socio-economic inequality combined with the American culturally hegemonic messages of equal opportunity and individual merit. Finding themselves with power (privileged) or without power (oppressed) to better their lives or fulfill their needs, participants are challenged cognitively and emotionally as they assume their designated social identities. Since this simulation is the main activity with several components, we will explain it in detail.

Simulation preparation. After the first two workshop activities, participants are given a break outside of the room while the simulation is set up.

Room preparation. Four areas in the room are created to represent housing options (see Figure 1). A "mansion" group area can be created with the most comfortable seating in the room, decorative blankets and pillows, highest quality snacks and drinks. A "three-bedroom houses" group area can be represented with metal chairs grouped together, limited drinks and snacks to share. The "apartment housing" group area can be represented by a small taped off area of floor only big enough for group members to sit close together. Finally, a piece of tape can be placed on the floor where participants in the homeless group are asked to remain standing. Commodities (see Table 2) for purchase during the simulation are printed on slips of paper and spread out on one table representing the general marketplace and a smaller table positioned closer to the mansion as an exclusive table for participants in the mansion.

Life scripts. Facilitators also print and randomly assign participants individual life scripts (see Table 3), dividing participants into different social class statuses ranging from 1 (reflecting economic impoverishment) to 4 (reflecting upper-class). Life scripts are divided among workshop participants with the majority receiving 2s and 3s, representing working class and middle class respectively and reflecting the estimated resource distribution in the United States.
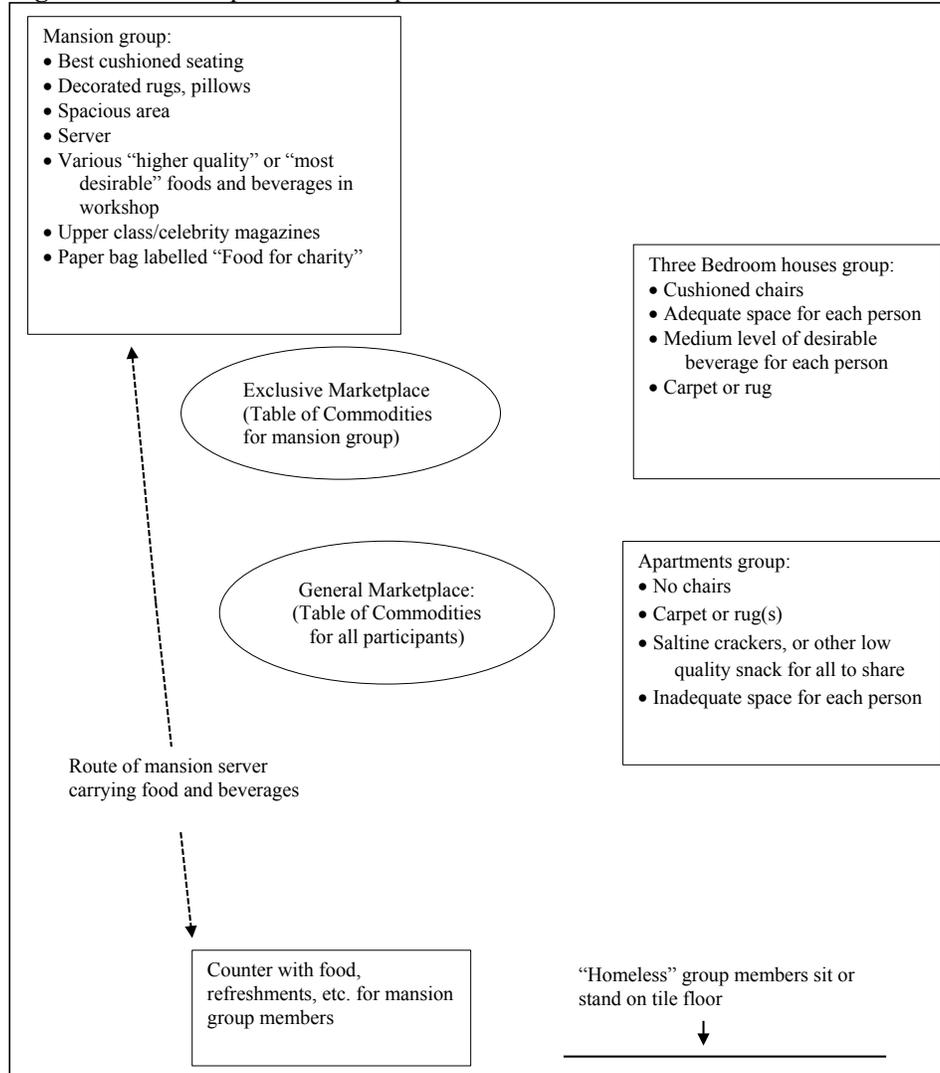
Figure 1: Workshop Room Set-Up

Mansion group:
- Best cushioned seating
- Decorated rugs, pillows
- Spacious area
- Server
- Various "higher quality" or "most desirable" foods and beverages in workshop
- Upper class/celebrity magazines
- Paper bag labelled "Food for charity"

Exclusive Marketplace
(Table of Commodities
for mansion group)

Three Bedroom houses group:
- Cushioned chairs
- Adequate space for each person
- Medium level of desirable beverage for each person
- Carpet or rug

General Marketplace:
(Table of Commodities
for all participants)

Apartments group:
- No chairs
- Carpet or rug(s)
- Saltine crackers, or other low quality snack for all to share
- Inadequate space for each person

Route of mansion server
carrying food and beverages

Counter with food,
refreshments, etc. for mansion
group members

"Homeless" group members sit or
stand on tile floor

Table 2: Costs of Commodities (per year)

$110,000	Mansion	$5,000	Vacation to all-inclusive resort
$15,000	Large 3 bedroom house	$5,000	Weekly massages
$6,000	Small 2 bedroom apartment	$1,000	Health club membership
$8,000	Transportation-new sports car	$3,000	Maid
$5,000	Transportation-new pickup truck	$5,000	Cook
$2,000	Low quality food/year (per person)	$2,000	Tutor
$3,000	High quality food/year (per person)	$2,000	Executive coach
$8,000	Childcare (per child)	$25,000	Downtown penthouse condo
$1,500	Transportation-bicycle/bus pass	$40,000	Game Influence card
$3,000	Transportation-1990 van	$120,000	Game Changer card
$4,000	Health insurance		

The purpose of the life scripts is for individuals to connect with a particular social class identity during the simulation. We did not include race, gender, sexual orientation, or other social identities into the life script descriptions for two reasons: (a) Social class is the primary social identity of interest and examination, and (b) We did not want any potentially discriminatory attitudes about race, gender, etc. to interfere with a participant's ability to consider the concept of economic privilege and oppression at the systemic level. Nevertheless, we will discuss in the process observations section how race and gender were introduced in one example workshop through a Black woman facilitator acting as a *mansion server* and a White woman facilitator acting as the *rule enforcer*. We explain these important facilitator roles next.

Game Influence and Game Changer cards. Game changer and game influence cards are power cards that can be purchased at a particular price by participants. The purpose of the Game Changer and Game Influence cards is to provide individuals the opportunity to experiment with implementation of social change and later reflect on the consequences of their choices in dialogue with all the other participants. This use of these cards makes up the middle part of the simulation, as we describe in detail later.

Mansion server. As a means to accentuate privilege and oppression even more, we recommend having a mansion server and a rule enforcer. The mansion server provides a continual reminder of privilege by checking in with the upper-class participants frequently, offering food, beverages, and entertainment (e.g., celebrity magazines). The server can even offer to carry donations to the other groups on behalf of the mansion group participants (if they initiate a donation).

Table 3: Life Scripts with Corresponding Numbers

(1) You worked hard for many years, but were laid off. You developed lung cancer and without health insurance had to claim bankruptcy from medical bills. You are homeless with zero money.

(2a) Although you have worked hard to be the first in your family to get a college degree, as a new teacher, you were first to be laid off in an urban elementary school. You now work at a grocery store and make $25,000 per year. You support 3 children (ages 10 months, 3 years, 6 years), with one child with disabilities.

(2b) Although none of your friends got desirable employment after graduation, your friend's dad who has clout in your town wrote you a stellar letter of reference and helped you land a job. You make $40,000 per year.

(3) You have always been financially comfortable and grew up with personal tutors, summer enhancement camps, private Ivy League schools. Now, you work for your parent's best friend's financial firm. You make $100,000 per year.

(4a) Your family connections finally paid off! You inherited ownership in a Texan oil company that pays you $500,000 per year, but to meet family expectations, you must live in housing with more than 4 bedrooms.

(4b) You work tirelessly as a banker and make $600,000/yr. Also, your family connections just paid off! The Montana land that has been in your family since the Homestead Act of 1862 will now pay you $200,000/yr for mineral rights, but to meet family expectations and house your family of 6 (4 children, ages 2,3,5,7), you need housing with more than 4 bedrooms.

Rule enforcer. In contrast to the server, the rule enforcer is responsible for ensuring that the homeless group and the apartment group stay in their designated territories. The rule enforcer should convey messages propagating meritocracy when communicating with the homeless and apartment groups. The stark contrast in the rule enforcer's treatment of the mansion group in comparison to the apartment and homeless group should be evident.

Simulation beginning. The simulation begins as participants re-enter the room. Participants are handed numbers with life scripts and told, "Pretend you are starting a life from scratch. We will have a sale at the marketplace for life's necessities and luxuries." Once all participants with money purchase items, they are asked to occupy and "enjoy your choice of housing areas". The use of the term "choice" is intentional to communicate messages of individual choice and meritocracy, despite the lack of self-determination options for those with impoverished and working class life scripts. After participants with drinks and snacks have a chance to consume their edibles, all participants are given the opportunity to go back to the marketplace to change purchases, make more purchases, and do business with others to better their lives. If no one purchases Game Influence or Game Changer cards (see Table 2), at least three Game Changer cards should be gifted to a participant in the mansion with the message, "Someone with power likes you."

Simulation middle: Implementing Game Influence cards and Game Changer cards. Once the marketplace activity ends, participants are asked "Would anyone with a Game Influence card like to change the rules." The participants are informed that in order to implement change at least three people together should possess five Game Influence cards in total and agree on the same idea at the end of 30 seconds. Participants are not provided any direction regarding implementation of change by the facilitators, the only caveat being that the change they choose to implement cannot cause any harm. If three participants cannot form a quorum and agree on a change within 30 seconds, they are told that "due to a lack of agreement or critical mass, no action can ensue." Participants are once again given time to "better their lives" at the marketplace. Once participants seem to be done with any activity, a workshop facilitator asks everyone to give their attention to the holder(s) of Game Changer cards, emphasizing to everyone that they are about to hear from the "best and brightest in the room." Holders of Game Changer cards are then asked "what changes would you like to make to the game?" (once again with the caveat that it cannot cause harm). In contrast to the Game Influence card process, workshop facilitators communicate that "holders of the Game Changer card can have as much time as they need to make decisions."

Simulation end. Once all Game Changer cards are implemented—and if time allows—participants with the means to purchase more Game Influence/Changer cards can be given one last chance to do so. Once no other Game Influence/Changer cards are purchased and implemented, the simulation concludes and a debriefing session begins.

Simulation debrief. Facilitators should begin the debriefing by verbalizing that they are no longer assuming their simulation roles—this is especially important for the rule enforcer. Participants are then asked to introduce themselves by referring to their assigned life scripts (this is the first occasion participants will officially hear the life-scripts of others) and share the most potent feeling(s) they experienced during the simulation. Open-ended questions (see Table 4) are then asked which slowly transition from sharing feelings, thoughts, and experiences during the simulation (i.e., concrete experiences) to discussing real-world parallels (i.e., abstract conceptualizations).

Table 4: Sample Debrief Questions

What was your strongest feeling?
What was it like to live as a four? (repeat this for each number/category of life script)
What discomfort or struggles did you experience?
Who had power? How did they use it?
Discuss the inequality of life script distribution at the beginning. Real life parallels?
How much did success depend on hard work or on luck of position? Parallels?
Discuss who was privileged and who was oppressed.
Discuss what oppression and privilege feel like?

Process Observations From One Particular Workshop

In this section we will share our observations from a workshop we facilitated to provide an example of how the simulation proceeded with one group of university students. On this particular occasion, the workshop was facilitated at a large public university in the Southeastern United States who were enrolled in a human development class. Students attended the standard 4-hour workshop as part of class requirements.

Participants were 16 undergraduate students (12 women, four men, M_{age} = 20.56, age range: 18-29) enrolled in a human development class. All participants identified as White. Participants reported their socioeconomic status (SES) background by responding to the following pretest question: To what extent was money a concern in your home while growing up? Six individuals reported that money was never a concern, seven individuals reported that money was sometimes a concern, and three individuals reported that money was always a concern.

Four facilitators were present—all were counseling psychology doctoral students. Three facilitators were women (Multiracial Indian, African American, White European American) and one facilitator was a White European American man. The Multiracial Indian woman and White European American man were lead facilitators who provided overall directions and facilitated transitions during the simulation. The African American facilitator volunteered to be the mansion server, thus providing the racial dynamic of a Black woman serving White participants. Also, the White European American woman volunteered to be the rule enforcer. Apart from the brief statements included in the description earlier, the facilitators did not provide any guidance or help with decision-making during the simulation. Throughout the simulation activity, lead facilitators provided instructions, facilitated Game Changer and Game Influence card decisions, and answered questions (i.e., "Yes, if you have the money, you can buy more than one Game Changer or Game Influence card." Facilitators watched for participant reactions, decision-making, implementation of change, and interactions between the different groups.

Based on their randomly assigned life scripts, workshop participants were directed to the general table of commodities. Facilitators invited mansion group members to use the exclusive commodities table located closer to the mansion location and further away from homeless area. The rule enforcer redirected non-mansion group members away from the exclusive commodities table and thoroughly checked commodity purchases of the working class participants but not the upper class mansion group members. While buying commodities, five individuals (both mansion members and three 3-bedroom housing members) purchased Game Influence cards.

After participants selected their life commodities, they divided into the different housing options in the following numbers: Two individuals occupied the mansion, four individuals occupied the three-bedroom housing area, seven individuals occupied the apartment housing area, and three individuals occupied the homelessness area. The participants in the mansion and three-bedroom homes

began eating the real food provided. The mansion server began offering to pour drinks and bring snacks from across the room to the mansion group members. At this point, facilitators presented holders of Game Influence cards the opportunity to make any change they desired within 30 seconds. They decided to have the mansion server offer some of the mansion snacks and refreshments to individuals in the homeless group.

The two mansion group members also purchased three Game Changer cards and were given the opportunity and as much time as they needed to make any change to the simulation. After discussing each choice between themselves, the first change they implemented was to have workshop facilitators "give chairs to the homeless." The second Game Changer card was used to have the homeless members move into the apartment group area—all apartment group members also received chairs. In the third change, mansion members inquired about the life scripts of apartment members and expressed a desire to give food to apartment members with children. Informed of the option of low quality and high quality food, mansion members decided to give all apartment members with children paper slips from the commodity table representing low quality food. Real food present in the mansion was not offered.

Participants responded in various ways during the simulation and elaborated on their reactions when the workshop was debriefed. In order to promote a safe and inclusive space for participants to express their authentic feelings and thoughts, facilitators directly communicated that they were not going to criticize participants for their choices during the simulation and that the debriefing allows everyone to reflect on their experiences and gain a deeper understanding of human behavior. The most prevalent theme during the debriefing was a reaction to the unequal conditions of different social classes. Participants shared strong emotional reactions—most frequently anger—as they spoke of the contrasting "special treatment" of the mansion group members and "discrimination" of the homeless group members. Several reactions were related to their randomly assigned social class identity in the simulation and are discussed next.

Homeless group. During the simulation homeless group members expressed being "confused," "left out," and "disconnected" about being on the outskirts of the simulation while individuals belonging to the other social classes were involved in buying their opportunities and establishing their residences. During the simulation and debrief, homeless group members shared their anger in response to the authoritarian role and victim-blaming messages communicated by the rule enforcer. While debriefing, individuals in the homeless group reported that even

though they did not like "the charity" from the mansion group members, they felt that they needed it. They also shared that they were beginning to "plan rebellion" against the rule enforcer during the simulation. Homeless group members adamantly vocalized that the special treatment given to mansion members was unfair and expressed feeling angry that, as homeless members, they were powerless to improve their situation.

Apartment group. The apartment group members stayed in the apartment group area for most of the simulation. Some members commented on not having resources to participate in influencing the rules of the game like those in the home and mansion groups. Others commented on the unfairness of the services being provided to the mansion group members and did not like being monitored and "told what to do" by the rule enforcer. During the debriefing, apartment group members did not volunteer to talk about their own experiences as much as the homeless and mansion group members, but seemed very much engaged throughout the discussion.

House group. Some individuals in the home group reported experiencing only slight pressure to help the apartment and homeless groups. Other members stated that they did not experience guilt associated with their socioeconomic status, but felt gratitude—identifying their group as the "ideal" place to be. Some individuals reported feeling that even if they wanted to help they did not have enough money or power to help the apartment group or the homeless group. Also, during the debriefing, some of the members of the home group reported feeling "ignored" because most of the helping activity focused on the homeless group. In retrospect, it may be helpful if members of different groups were encouraged to ask each other why certain actions took place during the debrief. For example, members of the house group who felt ignored could turn to whichever group they felt ignored by and ask why they were given less attention and consideration. In contrast, members of the homeless and working class groups could be encouraged to ask the house group members why they chose to use their money on bigger houses instead of using that money to jointly buy a Game Changer card.

Mansion group. Mansion group members expressed feeling "guilty" and "grateful" about their extreme wealth. During the debrief, group members also expressed that the action of giving to the homeless group individuals helped them feel better about their luxuries. The mansion group members used the unilateral power of Game Changer cards to help the homeless group members and apartment group members with children and paid less attention to the other groups. It may be helpful to ask the mansion group members to talk about their experience of being

holders of the most power and elaborate on their thought-processes for implementing change.

Discussion

The workshop was designed to help individuals experientially explore concepts of privilege and oppression related to economic inequalities in a supportive yet challenging educational environment. We designed it with special consideration for individuals with multiple intersecting dominant social identities and pre-encounter and encounter levels of personal/social identity development (Worrell & Remer, 2003). However, based on evidence from pilot data (Kodet et al, 2016), the workshop may be effective in exposing the myth of meritocracy with ethnically diverse participants at immersion and integration/activism stages as well.

The goals of the workshop were to increase empathy, raise critical consciousness of privilege and oppression amidst economic inequality, expose the myth of meritocracy, and provide participants with an opportunity to experiment with systemic change strategies. The experiential nature of the workshop was intended to facilitate a holistic learning experience whereby concrete experience and abstract conceptualization were paired with reflective observation and active experimentation (Kolb, 1984). We wanted participants to draw from their immediate experience and participate in a discovery-oriented learning process.

During the simulation debrief, individuals were engaged cognitively and affectively in discussing how their concrete experiences intersected with abstract concepts of privilege, oppression, and messages of meritocracy. For example, individuals in the homeless group talked openly about feeling discriminated against and powerless to do anything about it.

Similarly, individuals from other groups shared their struggles based on their temporary social class position and access, or lack thereof, to power and resources. We also supported participants in processing difficult emotions (e.g., guilt, envy, anger, powerlessness) related to their experiences from the simulation and attempted to provide a safe setting where all perspectives were welcomed. For example, during the debriefing we encouraged members of the different groups to air their grievances. We provided reflective statements such as "It sounds like you were very uncomfortable", "I can sense your anger about the special treatment given to those in the mansion, and your lack of power to change anything." As

facilitators, we also asked, "How was the rule enforcer making you feel?" and "What parallels do you see between this simulation and real life?"

Upon our own reflection of these preliminary results, we acknowledge the following limitations. First, the relatively short duration of the workshop raises the question of whether gains persist afterward. It is likely that gains would be enhanced and deepened with on-going opportunities to discuss and integrate concrete experiences and abstract conceptualizations. Second, since we evaluated the workshop using mean score changes, we do not know if the role each participant played in the simulation led to any adverse consequences (e.g., decrease of empathy by those individuals in the mansion). Some empirical research on social class and attitudes has shown that when individuals are made to feel like they are in higher social class rank, they display less prosocial behaviors (i.e., less generous, less helpful, less trusting (Piff, Kraus, Côté, Cheng, & Keltner, 2010).

Third, the social change experimentation component of the workshop could be strengthened by adding a second round simulation and having participants switch roles (e.g., those who had been homeless could be in the mansion). This second round would be shorter in duration and be followed up by another debriefing session.

We provide the following suggestions for instructors interested in implementing this workshop. First, the workshop was theoretically designed with all three activities to mitigate the potential effect of resistance and rebound effect whereby individuals become more endorsing of meritocracy and related system-justifying beliefs. For this reason, we recommend including all three activities for groups with individuals at pre-awareness or encounter levels of social identity development. If all workshop participants (a) are at immersion and integration-activism stages of social identity development and (b) already know each other well, then we believe the first activity may be excluded in order to prioritize time for the main simulation and debriefing session afterward. If all participants (a) are at integration-activism stage and (b) already know each other well, then we believe the second activity, Empathy Exchange, can also be excluded for the sake of time. We make these suggestions with caution and remind educators that any modifications be based on developmental needs of the participants.

Second, we recommend conducting the workshop with a minimum of 8 and a maximum of 20 participants. The rationale for an 8-person minimum is for two individuals to be in each group and have a shared experience. The maximum of 20 is also a theoretical guideline based on our experience facilitating debrief sessions

with large groups. Once groups get too large, participants do not get enough time to express themselves and get help processing any unresolved feelings and thoughts about their experience in the simulation. Yet, given that outcomes from our workshop with 23 students from diverse ethnic backgrounds showed favorable results and no rebound effects, facilitating the workshop with larger numbers is empirically justified, albeit with minimal data.

Third, we suggest that lead facilitators are intentional in experiential pedagogy during the simulation debrief time. Facilitators leading the debriefing times should have experience in facilitating group process using open-ended questions, drawing connections between comments, handling diversity issues including micro-aggressions. Also, rather than facilitators quickly making connections between the simulation and real life, asking open-ended questions and giving more than one perspective on a discussion topic will help minimize potential resistance. When participants make these real world parallels, facilitators should not jump in to give their own perspective but instead ask for further elaboration of these parallels from the speaker or other participants. Additionally, in the sample workshop described previously, apartment group members were quieter during the debriefing session. We suggest that facilitators watch for this possibility in future workshops and explicitly ask apartment group members for their reflections or to express why it may be difficult to share their experiences with the group. Finally, although we did not include a reflective writing activity in the workshop, it may be helpful to ask participants to briefly write their reflections in order to help facilitate expression and processing of any unresolved feelings and thoughts either before or after the simulation debriefing. These written reflections could then be turned in anonymously to the facilitators and provide helpful qualitative feedback.

Conclusion

The Buy Your Opportunity workshop provides participants with a brief educational experience of privilege and oppression in the context of economic inequality. The workshop's use of critical and experiential pedagogies seems promising for exploration of topics that may challenge previously unexamined and/or deeply held assumptions about life (e.g., messages of meritocracy ingrained through socialization and cultural hegemony). The workshop provides an innovative approach to (a) experientially examine social and structural processes that maintain privilege and oppression and (b) allow learners to co-create the process and outcome of the simulation by experimenting with strategies to interrupt sociopolitical forces that exacerbate economic inequality. In the example

workshop discussed, the simulation produced an engaging debriefing session where participants' expressed strong feelings related to privilege and oppression and new awareness of institutional and structural barriers to opportunity. Preliminary results showed evidence that the Buy Your Opportunity workshop helped to expose the myth of meritocracy, decrease social dominance orientation, and increase participant's openness to diversity and challenge. Despite these promising initial results, further evaluation research is needed.

The design of experiential workshops addressing privilege and oppression is but one activist strategy among many needed to address the harmful effects of growing economic inequality. We encourage educators to utilize this workshop and modify it to meet the developmental needs of their students. We also encourage the development and assessment of other consciousness-raising educational initiatives related to economic inequality which utilize experiential pedagogy, critical pedagogy and social identity development theory.

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