

# **The Token Game: Developing Awareness of Power in Social Systems**

Presented By:  
Gargi Roysircar  
And  
Clinical Psychology SERD Members

# The Token Game

- Incorporates several concepts related to the systemic bases of individual and group interactions
- Provides participants a chance to experience and observe pervasive forces in a safe, structured learning environment
- Creates a social microcosm focused on power and the experience of low access for those who do not have power
- Brings out dynamics of oppression
- Provides the appropriate level of safety for participants to make sense of experiences of power

# Main Objectives

- Increasing awareness of power and the choices that privileged people have
- Experiences related to obtaining or losing power
- Relating the Token Game to key concepts and real life examples

# Increasing Awareness

- Participants will take away insights into their own power-influenced thoughts and actions and become aware of:
  - Anxieties or fears related to holding power
  - Responsibility and guilt over holding power
  - Not realizing one holds power over others or taking actions to ensure continued power
  - Desires to be seen as “fair” or “just”
  - Fitting into the system to play the game

# Obtaining or Losing Power

- Participants will analyze strategies for obtaining power and express feelings related to not having power:
  - Conflicted feelings related to the challenge of preserving or giving up power
  - Feeling unheard, especially if among the group with less power
  - The instructor possesses power throughout the game
  - Token-holding group possesses the power of choice, whereas the non-token holding group does not have that privilege
  - Empathy towards others who have daily experiences of racism or oppression

# Relating the Game to Real Life

- The game will generate an understanding that the dynamics of power and privilege regularly occur in society instead of being isolated or circumstantial. Thus, participants will recognize:
  - Power is a form of oppression and control that can be arbitrarily given by an unfair systemic influence
  - Power held by a few individuals can impact many people through politics or education
  - Had the stakes been higher, more individualistic actions would have occurred, and there would have been less interest in “fairness” to others
  - How oppression influences self-concept (like pre-encounter/contact) and the desire to conform

# Debriefing and Processing

- It is important that participants are able to debrief and process their experiences
- Students may be surprised by their actions or the actions of others
- Processing the activity is a crucial component to understand power and bias and allows for a dialogue of how the activity can relate to real-world experiences

# Debriefing and Processing

- Processing this activity involves:
  - informing students that no score or penalty is attached to the quiz or to their performance during the game
  - asking students what concepts they think the game was intended to highlight
  - informing them the game centers around power and its influence on our behaviors, beliefs, and self-concept
  - conveying to participants that their actions in the game were not intended to judge the character of any one person but rather simulate a situation to recreate what actions can emerge from an oppressive system.
- An opportunity to address emotions and generate meaning around social interactions that are shaped by systemically-enforced power



# Conclusion

- This activity allows students to move from learning the “lesson” within a classroom to engaging in an experiential, future-focused process of increasing their awareness about power and social privilege
- It can also facilitate multicultural responsiveness and social justice advocacy toward reducing or eradicating racism and prejudice.