

SIMSIM: A SIMPLE SIMULATION OF  
FUNDAMENTAL SOCIAL PROCESSES

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Sociologists have been developing and using games in the classroom with increasing frequency since the early 1960's, when the initial versions of SIMSOC were introduced (Gamson 1972). Happily, there are now classroom simulations of many social situations, including marriage (Greenblat et al 1974). Most commercial games share three drawbacks. They must be ordered long in advance. They add to course costs. And they require significant time to learn and play. Such problems are not serious, and the sophistication of many of the commercial games fully repays the extra effort and cost. But there are many occasions when an instantly available and quickly learned game could be useful. These considerations led to the development of SIMSIM, a simulation of essential social processes which can be set up on the spot, using readily available materials, and taking as little as a half hour to play. The reader is invited to try it, modify it, improve on it, and use it in any way desired.

## SETTING UP AND PLAYING SIMSIM

**Materials:** The only equipment needed is a supply of tokens, such as paper chits, equal to about ten times the number of players, and a task of moderate difficulty, such as throwing a wad of paper into a wastebasket.

**Object:** Each player's goal is to stay in the game as long as possible, and to maximize the number of tokens in his or her possession at the game's end.

**Rules:** A game manager is appointed. The manager is not a player, and the manager's decisions are final. The game is divided into 3-minute rounds, and the manager announces the start and finish of each round. Before the

game, the manager gives each player 3 tokens. Only tokens issued by the manager may be used in the game. Physical possession of tokens is taken as proof of ownership. When asked by anyone, a player must accurately state the number of tokens then owned.

At the start of each round, including the first, each player must hand the manager 1 token, or leave the game permanently. During each round, each player receives the transferrable right to stand in line to get 1 turn at the task. Each turn costs 1 token, handed in advance to the manager, and those successfully completing the task receive 5 tokens. Players with more tokens in their possession have the right to precede those in the task line with fewer tokens.

Players may negotiate any arrangement among themselves, in the form of loans, associations, and teams, and enforcement of their own rules is up to them. No physical force may be used. A player with at least 5 times many tokens as another can require the latter to hand over any or all tokens, or otherwise use this advantage to negotiate. A player has until the end of the round in which such a demand is made to seek the aid of others, or otherwise alter his situation before complying. The game ends when called by the manager, who may announce the number of rounds to be played before the game begins. A player receives one point for each round he remains in the game, and 1 point for each token held at the game's end.

**DISCUSSION** The game is designed so that most players will find the intent of the rules transparent. They will typically interpret payment of tokens to stay in the game as eating, being forced to leave the game as dying, and performing the task as working. Players quickly learn their "life-chances" since those initially ac-

FIGURE 1 A DYNAMIC DEMONSTRATION MODEL OF SIMSIM SOCIAL PHENOMENA

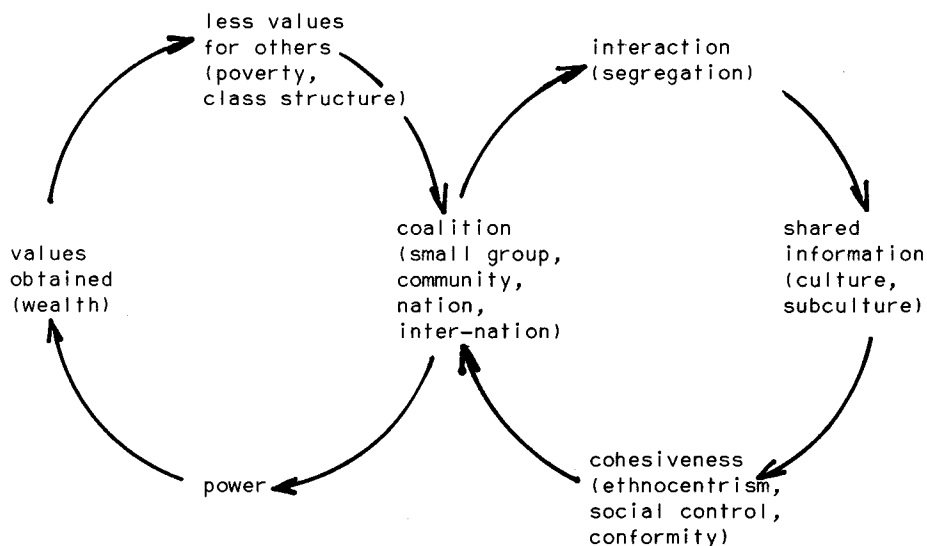


FIGURE 2 A SAMPLE AXIOMATIC THEORY FROM SIMSIM PHENOMENA

#### Axioms

- A1 The more powerful a system, the more values it will obtain.
- A2 The more values obtained by a system, the less values obtained by other systems.
- A3 The less values obtained by a system, the more likely it will join a coalition.
- A4 The more systems act as a coalition, the more powerful the coalition system.
- A5 The more systems act as a coalition, the more they will interact.
- A6 The more systems interact, the more they will share information.
- A7 The more systems share information, the more they will be cohesive.
- A8 The more systems are cohesive, the more they will act as a coalition.

#### Theorems

- T1 The more powerful a system, the less values obtained by other systems.
- T2 The more powerful a system, the less likely it will join a coalition.
- T3 The more powerful a system, the more likely other systems will join a coalition.
- T4 The more powerful a system, the more powerful any coalition formed by others.
- T5 The more powerful a system, the less likely it will interact with others.

(About 100 theorems can be generated.)

accumulating relative power, as represented by tokens, tend to use power to dominate the task situation and coerce tokens from other players. As the less powerful perceive this threat, they tend to develop social arrangements to protect themselves, usually by pooling their tokens and placing them in the hands of a single representative who then wields power far beyond that of the individuals he or she has contracted to represent. This process demonstrates not only coalition formation and maintenance, by primary and secondary groups, as a practical means of competing and surviving, but the tendency for such social systems to have a division of labor, with positions and roles, using an implicit or explicit ranking which reflects esteem, or prestige, and the mechanisms of social control, such as norms, rules, and sanctions. To the extent that a newly formed coalition is successful, it becomes a threat to others, tending to force further coalition formation, simulating monopolies and arms races. Play of the game, and subsequent discussion can be used to demonstrate and identify many of the fundamental processes involved in social behavior. These can be used to illustrate theory construction, using dynamic models, like Figure 1, or propositional format, like Figure 2. Finally, it should be noted that SIMSIM, compared to more elaborate prepackaged games, tends to challenge students to develop more sophisticated simulations, which in effect, stimulates them to participate in theory building, which is one of the central roles of the sociologist as a scientist.

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men with children, who are aware that they have been or are now the victim of sex discrimination at work, and who believe they have strong marriages, will disproportionately respond as rebels. 10) Married men who value family life over high occupational status, and who believe they have strong marriages, will disproportionately respond as rebels.

**CONCLUSION** Identification of deviant behaviors among various populations should provide an empirical foundation for feminists desiring to develop and implement a practical strategy for social change. If populations responding as ritualists were identified by a researcher, then it may be wise to have respected feminist clergy or liberal male clergy approach these populations as social change agents. For each population identified by type of adaptation, a particular type of social change agent is required.

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