

# THE “CITY SLEEPS” GAME: EVERYDAY REPRESENTATIONS OF DRUGS



## Game tutorial

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What follows is a description of an educational game developed according to a collective health approach (Soares, 2007) to encourage a social critique of drug-related issues.

A step-by-step guide for the activity will be provided, in addition to its theoretical background and a description of an experience with the educational game “City Sleeps: everyday representations of drugs”. This tutorial is aimed at health workers, and goes along with the video of the game.

# City Sleeps: everyday representations of drugs

## TUTORIAL

### WHAT IS THE GAME?

The educational game “City Sleeps: everyday representations of drugs” was created by the research group “Fortalecimento e desgaste no trabalho e na vida: bases para intervenção em saúde coletiva”, registered in the CNPq and USP.

It consists of a variation of the popular game “City Sleeps”<sup>1</sup> with some features of a focus group technique used in previous studies (Yonekura, Soares, 2010). The strategy was selected due to its robust applicability to both data collection and to the task of questioning everyday misrepresentations and synthesizing creative thoughts, as it exposes the inherent variability across the different contexts surrounding drug use (Santos et al, 2012).

Some aspects of the traditional “City Sleeps” game were maintained, while others, such as the characters and goals of the game, were altered. The new version involves the following characters: *master*, *liar*, *detective* and *society*. The aim of the game is not to find the killers, but to find the *liars*.

In the traditional game, players must decide on who they think is the killer. In this version, they are asked to provide their opinion on a particular statement (a everyday representation), and identify who may be lying about their thoughts on the matter. Players in the “liar” role must always say the opposite of what they believe is true.

The game requires some ability for abstract reasoning, but is nearly universally accessible. Those who are illiterate or have low educational levels, for instance, can also take part. Players will improve with repetition, as occurs with many other games. The role of the liar is the most difficult, and may require a better comprehension of the game.

No specific materials are required to play, but some arrangements must be made with regards to the location where the activity takes place. Participants must be sitting in a half-circle to ensure full visibility of the other players. After all, they will have to pay close attention to the speech and body language of each player as they try to identify who is lying.

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<sup>1</sup> The popular game “City Sleeps” is one of many variations of the “Mafia” game, created in 1986 by Dima Davidoff, a young psychology student, in the process of developing new tools for his research (Wikipedia, 2016).

## HOW TO PLAY?

“City Sleeps: everyday representations of drugs” is an educational, interpretive and strategy game for groups of 6 to 20 players. The characters include 1 *master* (health worker), 1 or 2 *liars*, 1 or 2 *detectives* and *society*. The roles can be assigned by the *master*, or randomly distributed by drawing lots or cards, for instance. The aim of the game is to identify the *liars*. The educational goal is to overcome false everyday representations.

A simple set of instructions with which to initiate the game could consist of the following:

- The *master* says “City Sleeps” and all participants close their eyes;
- The *master* selects *liar(s)* and *detective(s)*;
- The *master* says “City Wakes” and all participants open their eyes;
- A statement is shown to participants, and each is asked to provide an opinion (totally agree, agree, disagree or totally disagree);
- After discussing the statement, *society* selects (by simple majority) someone they believe is lying and vote this person out;
- While the City Sleeps, the *detective(s)* can ask the *master* whether a particular player is a liar;
- The game continues until the *liar(s)* is voted out (*society* wins) or only *liar(s)* are left (*liars* win).

To ensure that rules are being followed, players should receive simple reminders throughout the game (“Remember: *Liars* must lie”; “*Society*, choose your suspects”; “*Detectives*, who do you think is the *liar*?”; “*Detectives* should help *society* to ensure that only *liars* are voted out”). These commands will remind players of the initial instructions.

There is no limit to the duration of the discussion regarding each statement. Discussions should be long enough to allow for the statements to be introduced and questioned. Players are expected and desired to change their opinions and beliefs several times throughout the game.

In our experience, players have remained engaged throughout the entire activity. However, to prevent it from becoming yet another boring activity, the game should not be played every day, and the representations (statements) discussed should be changed often.

The educator should be neither neutral nor authoritarian. In other words, he should not simply coordinate the discussion, but raise questions and engage in critical reflection during each round of discussions, while preserving the freedom of expression of each player.

Some examples of statements and responses in the form of questions raised by the health worker in the role of *master* are described below. Some themes should always be discussed, in order to encourage a critical approach to reality. These include difficulties looking to the future, insecurity toward social protection mechanisms, and the need for immediate pleasure.

EVERYDAY REPRESENTATIONS	CRITICAL RESPONSE
“Real athletes don’t dope”	It is hypocritical to analyze the individual behavior of an athlete without considering the competitive environment generated by pressure from sponsors and public financing agencies, which demand that athletes be continually victorious.
“Drug users don’t have their own opinions”	Drug users make choices based on their needs, acquisition opportunities, and several other individual and social features determined by their social class.
“Drug dealers are bad people”	In a capitalist system, large-scale dealers worry about profit and small-scale dealers worry about generating enough income to purchase consumer goods. As long as good jobs and salaries continue to be scarce, illegal activities will continue to employ a large number of young people.
“Sadness is never good”	In modern society, it is wrong to be sad. We do not have the time or the right to be sad, mourn, etc. All value rests in an imaginary ideal, which associates the consumption of goods with the attainment of happiness.
“An idle brain is the devil’s workshop”	Free time does not lead to social conflict, and its elimination does not result in abstinence from drug use. However, free time is denied to those who must work for a living. This resulted in the creation of an ideology that internalizes the social role of the poor, black and marginalized.
“There should be more informative campaigns about alcohol”	Information is important, but currently, most campaigns actually encourage the consumption of these substances. The <i>Brazilian carnival</i> , for instance, is always sponsored by a brewery.
“Drugs destroyed the favelas and communities”	The favelas are not the result of drug use. Poor communities have existed since long before crack cocaine. Favelas are the result of inequality and the war on drugs. The criminalization of drugs is actually the criminalization of poverty.
“Anyone who uses a ‘light’ drug will go on to use a ‘heavy’ drug”	The concept of ‘gateway drugs’ suggests that any kind of drug use will lead to an irreversible process of substance dependence. However, this is not supported by scientific research.

The statements presented should suffice for one to two games, with no repetition. It is important to note that the gameplay is only part of an intervention which does not begin and end with the game itself. The activity should be seen as a part of the educational process. New statements, or even new characters, can be suggested in group discussions prior to the game, and the representations should continue to be questioned long after the game has ended.

## WHAT IS THE GAME BASED ON?

Several educational games address the issue of drugs with different objectives and strategies. These have been found to be useful educational tools for the young, since they are fun and accessible in terms of their language.

However, according to Pasquim, Soares, Santoro (2016), the majority of educational games for the young portrays abstinence as the only alternative to drug use, and rarely allow for other possibilities or creative answers, ignoring the diverse nature of substance use across different social groups and the conditions under which drugs are produced, sold and consumed. These techniques are therefore in line with the idea of a war on drugs, or prohibition (Pasquim, Soares, 2015).

For the perspective of collective health, a harm reduction approach can be adopted (Pasquim, Soares, 2015), in which the meaning of the emancipation of the social being is found through “human education” (Saviani & Duarte, 2010). Social beings are thought to exist in a nonrandom reality, but tied to a totalizing structure (Mészáros, 2002). For Tonet (2008), educational strategies which emphasize individual strengthening should not be silent when reality clearly denies these individuals any possibility of emancipation. In a similar sense, health care should provide the opportunity for the “de-internalization” (Mészáros, 2005) of the values and goals determined by the capitalist system.

After all, men and women are not born human, but become human through the appropriation of the human legacy. Nevertheless, an alienated ideology which treats humans as objects, as in the case of drug use, still persists, and insists on describing drug users as victims of a substance produced by humans themselves (Santos, Soares, 2013).

From a collective health perspective, another kind of education could and should be available. There is a need for an emancipating education (Soares, 2007), which gives rise to free individuals who can fully develop the characteristic competencies of their time. This approach must promote the comprehension of reality and its construction. In the context of drug-related issues, education can help individuals understand how these substances relate to the capitalist structure and social dynamics, overcoming psychiatric explanations, which attribute the problems associated with harmful drug use to biological factors, as well as pharmacological explanations, which focus on the power and effects of drugs on the central nervous system. Emancipating education also emphasizes the political aspects of drug use, contributing to the comprehension of the class interests underlying hegemonic practices (Santos, Soares, 2013).

To address this issue, the game drew on the theory of everyday representations (Viana, 2015), whose philosophy, theory and methodology are in line with the field of collective health (Soares et al., 2011). This perspective uses everyday representations, including manifestations of folk knowledge and popular culture (Viana, 2008), to discuss current thinking patterns. According to Viana (2013), the assimilation and synthesis of new representations is no easy task, and can lead to mixed representations. These are contradictory in nature and may or may not be in line with capitalist thought.

Lastly, it is important to remember that most games have the dual goal of promoting both education and discipline, and encourage programmed responses, which have been automated and memorized. Unfortunately, these often neglect to encourage reflection and creativity. In addition to fun, these games promote a different world view.

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As a result, the educational game “City Sleeps: everyday representations of drugs”, set in the context of the diverse, contradicting and complex experience of each participant, differs sharply from games with purposes other than emancipation.

The aim of this activity is not to treat or prevent drug use, but to contribute to the strengthening of individuals and social groups by providing a critical education, which addresses the need for additional tools with which to fight the social malaise, which have led to significant misunderstandings, frustration and stress. Exposure to these conflicts can strengthen the individual by encouraging the denaturalization of the contradictions of daily life, revealing players’ thoughts on the status quo and other elements at play.

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