

Introduction:

BARNGA is a simulation game originally created by Sivasailam “Thiagi” Thiagarajan. It is a card game that participants must play silently, all the while being unaware that they are using different rules. The goal of the game is to help participants interrogate their understanding of communication and group norms and how norms may differ across cultural contexts.

This activity is an adaptation of the original game that includes some changes to the rules and gameplay. Namely, participants are asked to switch groups after the first round and, in the second round, a majority of participants will have one set of instructions while a minority of participants will have another set. The goal is to help participants better understand the minority experience, especially the silencing of minority voices. It also “stretches” resources by dividing card decks strategically, so you don’t need one deck of cards per four people.

Materials:

Cards, rules sheets (all on one color of paper).

Note: You can make your card decks go twice as far one (one deck for each 8 learners) by dividing them - one “deck” includes 2 Aces and all cards 2-7 with other cards removed; another “deck” can include the remaining Aces and all other cards including face cards Jack, Queen and King.

Facilitator Instructions:

1. Divide participants into groups. Groups should not be large (i.e., no more than 6-8 people per group). Because one group will play by a different set of rules in the first round, it works well to make the size of groups in the first round the same as the number of groups you will have in the second round. Example: with 30 people, you could have 5 groups of 6 people in the first round, which would give you 6 groups of 5 in the second round.
2. Before handing out any materials, tell participants that they are about to play a game to practice nonverbal communication. Warn them that they need to get really comfortable with the rules of the game in the first round because after that they will be “going silent.”
3. Provide each group a deck of cards and each participant a rule sheet. For this round, everyone in a group should have the same set of instructions. All groups should have the same rules except for one group – plan ahead and make your copies of instructions accordingly. Note: Do not give any indication to learners that the rules are different from group to group.
4. Participants will get a few minutes to learn the rules and play a practice round with their group members. Then, the facilitator should collect their rule sheets, and they will play the first official round of the game. The round is over when one group member loses all their cards. When each group declares a winner, reward them in some way (food, extra credit, stand and applaud, etc.).
5. After all groups have finished the first round, the facilitator should then switch up the groups. This time, it is important that each group have at least four members, with four or five per group being the ideal number. If there is an unbalanced number of participants, then several groups will have one extra person (for example, if there are 22 participants, three groups will have four members and two groups will have five). Alternatively, you

could have “left-over” players after you form groups of four be observers placed around the room. The facilitator should also ensure that a majority of players in each group has one set of rules while a minority of players (for instance one in a group of four) has another set. An easy way to do this is to have participants “number off” in each group – counting 1-4 or 5. Then all 1s will get together, all 2s, etc. forming new groups comprised of one member each from previous groups.

6. Hand out Round 2 rules and remind participants that there should still be no written or spoken communication of any kind. They can only use gestures to make declarations, ask or answer questions, and negotiate conflict.
7. Participants should then play another round with their new group members. The facilitator should expect some frustration and conflict as they play, and again at the end of the round when each group needs to declare a winner for their reward.
8. After each group has finished their round, allow them some time to calm down and then begin a debriefing/discussion on what they just experienced. The facilitator should ask the following questions:
 - How did you feel at different points in the game (e.g., when the rules were first explained, when the rule sheets were taken away, in your first group, in your second group)? Did your feelings change throughout the different stages?
 - What were some successes and, conversely, some frustrations/problems that occurred as you were playing?
 - Why do you think those frustrations/problems occurred while you were playing? What were the underlying causes?
9. At this point, the facilitator should reveal—if the participants have not already figured it out—that a majority of members in each group had one set of instructions while a minority of members had a different set. The facilitator should then introduce the Elisabeth Noelle-Neumann’s (1993) Spiral of Silence theory, which demonstrates how minority viewpoints get suppressed by majority/popular opinion.

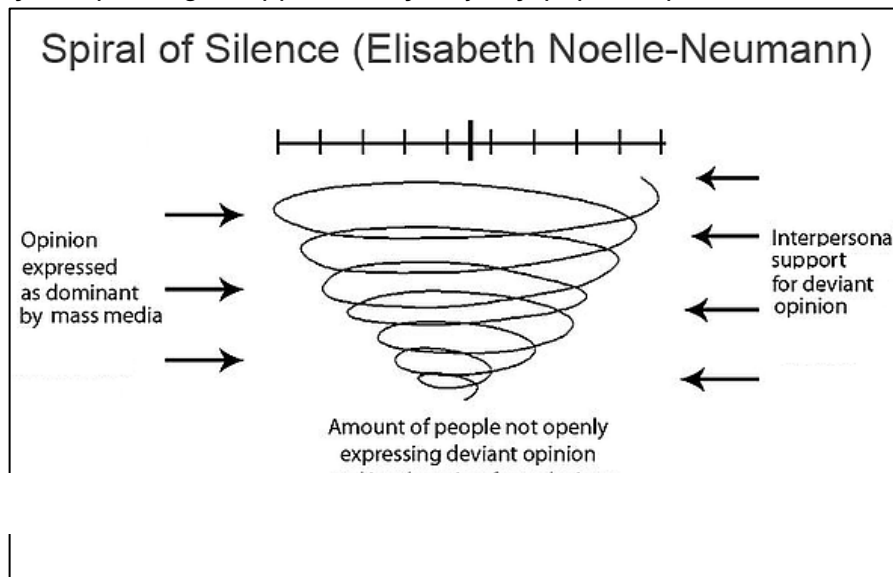


Image found at <https://iratisaenz.wixsite.com/makesomenoise/single-post/2015/02/09/The-Spiral-of-Silence>

Activity adapted by Dr. Kris Acheson-Clair, CILMAR, based on the following:

Thiagarajan, S. & Thiagarajan, R. (2006). *Barnga: A simulation game on cultural clashes*. Intercultural Press.

Activity also found at: LSA Inclusive Teaching Initiative, University of Michigan: <https://sites.lsa.umich.edu/inclusive-teaching/2017/07/10/barnga/>

10. The facilitator should then ask participants the following questions:

- If you were a member of the majority in your group, how did you feel? How did you handle conflict?
- If you were a member of the minority in your group, how did you feel? How did you handle conflict?
- How does this activity translate to “real life” situations?
- Have you ever been in a “real life” situation where there was a majority/minority conflict? What was it like?
- What did you learn about communication and conflict after playing this game?
- What did you learn about the minority experience after playing this game?

Participant Instructions:

Note: Print, cut and collate as many copies of the following pages as you need. You’ll notice that one set of Round 1 Rules is slightly different. After printing out these instructions, cut them into slips. Ensure that there are enough slips for each participant, and that all learners in the same group get the same rules. There should be at least one group in Round 1 playing by a different set of rules, and those group members should be distributed throughout different groups in Round 2 so that they are a minority in their new groups. Do not use different colors of paper to distinguish different sets of rules. The easiest way to handle the different rules is to together like with like with paper clips.

BARNGA Round 1 Rules:

- Pass out all cards evenly.
- One at a time, each player turns over one card in the center. Whoever has the highest card wins that hand. The winning player gives away all the cards from the center to another player.
- Play until someone is out of cards. Whoever gets rid of all their cards first wins.
- The Ace is the highest card in this game and the 2 is the lowest. Black cards are higher than red ones.

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BARNGA Round 1 Rules:

- Pass out all cards evenly.
- All at the same time, each player turns over one card in the center. Whoever has the highest card wins that hand. The winning player takes all the cards from the center.
- Play until someone runs out of cards. The winner of the game is the one with the most cards when play stops.
- The King is the highest card in this game and the Ace is the lowest. Red cards are higher than black ones.

BARNGA Round 2 Rules:

- Absolutely NO talking. No written or spoken communication of any kind. You may only use gestures to make declarations, ask or answer questions, and negotiate conflict.

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