

# Teaching Sociology

## ARE YOU A WEREWOLF? TEACHING SYMBOLIC INTERACTION THEORY THROUGH GAME PLAY

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Abstract:	<p>In this paper, we report on the implementation of using the game Werewolf as a student-centered applied-learning activity to teach symbolic interaction theory and concepts. Engaging with symbolic interaction theory can be a powerful experience for students due to its potential to challenge taken-for-granted assumptions and analyze students' everyday life experiences. However, some students may have difficulty grasping the specific details and overall significance underlying the perspective. Moreover, research has shown that undergraduate students often have significant levels of anxiety when confronted with sociological theory at both introductory and upper division theory courses. We aim to address recommendations to incorporate more active learning approaches to social theory by outlining an applied-learning activity based on the role-playing game Werewolf. In the paper, we review Werewolf providing step-by-step guide on how to implement the activity in the classroom, followed by summarizing findings from student assessments and classroom evaluations.</p>

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## ARE YOU A WEREWOLF? TEACHING SYMBOLIC INTERACTION THEORY THROUGH GAME PLAY

Engaging with symbolic interaction theory can be a powerful experience for students due to its potential to challenge taken-for-granted assumptions and analyze students' everyday life experiences. However, some students may have difficulty grasping the significance of the underlying concepts contained within the perspective--such as pragmatism philosophy (Mead 1934) and phenomenology (Schutz 1970). Research has also shown that students have significant levels of anxiety dealing with sociological theory (Lowney 1998; Macheski et al. 2008; Eglitis 2010; Osnowitz and Jenkins 2014). This can be especially difficult in introductory-level courses that typically only provide a brief primer to interactionist concepts. While some instructors try to utilize students' experiences to demonstrate interactionist concepts, getting students to engage in critical analysis of their own lives can prove problematic due to fears of embarrassment or students' lack of experience doing sociological analysis (Davis 1992). In agreement with other scholars' recommendations (Holtzman 2005; Eglitis 2010; Kilburn, Nind, and Wiles 2014), we suggest using applied and experiential learning activities to help reduce anxiety related to learning theory and engage students in actively doing theory.

In this paper, we report on the implementation of using the game *Werewolf* as such a student-centered active learning experience to teach symbolic interactionist processes and concepts. *Werewolf* is a game of social deception, based on the much older public domain classic *Mafia* (Robertson 2010), in which players take on the role of either innocent villager or werewolf. The object of the game is for the villagers to try to figure out who the werewolf is before they are all killed during the night. The game relies upon players using social cues from in-game interaction to discern player identities. The activity has also been used in language

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3 courses to create interactions between students and provide relatively unscripted opportunities  
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5 for language practice (Norhaidi et al. 2019) and by mathematicians to demonstrate probabilities  
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7 (Migdal 2010).  
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10 We believe that *Werewolf* has many features that make it an ideal activity for teaching  
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12 symbolic interactionist concepts. The game rules provide a new shared framework allowing for  
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14 better understanding of how social situations are socially constructed making the activity an  
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16 excellent example of the social construction of reality (Berger and Luckmann 1967). The games  
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18 focus on interaction to find the werewolf coupled with rounds of gameplay allows instructors to  
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20 demonstrate in a limited time Herbert Blumer's (1969) premises of symbolic interaction.  
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22 Students must essentially use social interaction to attempt to construct a meaningful  
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24 understanding of the situation, act based on those meanings when they vote, and then reevaluate  
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26 those meanings through successive stages of social interaction in-game. Finally, the game's  
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28 focus on assigned roles (including the werewolf which represents a deviant role), secrecy, and  
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30 the need to form alliances makes the game ideal for representing Erving Goffman's (1959; 1963;  
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32 1967) dramaturgical concepts including impression management, role-taking, stigma, and  
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34 teamwork.  
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40 The interactionist concepts above often cause students to stumble especially when trying  
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42 to grasp the nuanced details within the approach. While students may seem to grasp the broad  
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44 examples of social constructions and symbolic meanings provided in textbooks, they often  
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46 stumble at recognizing the ongoing actions that makes the interpretive process a continuous  
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48 social accomplishment. *Werewolf* provides a microcosm by which students can both participate  
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50 in and evaluate the interpretive process. Instead of simply understanding what these concepts  
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3 represent, students literally experience how these concepts are accomplished through in-game  
4 social interactions.  
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## 10 SIMULATIONS AND GAMES IN THE CLASSROOM

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12 While a variety of simulation strategy games have been developed by teacher-scholars in  
13 the classroom setting (see Holtzman 2005; Fisher 2008; Pence 2009; Norris 2013; Bramsesfeld  
14 and Good 2015; Smith 2016; Gillis and Taylor 2019), simulations and games are not without  
15 limitations. Amanda Rosen (2015) identifies several barriers for instructors interested in using  
16 simulations and games including concerns over their appropriateness for the college classroom,  
17 financial barriers, and the potential risk of having the games flop in the classroom. As a result,  
18 Rosen recommends instructors interested in simulations and games start small, ensure the  
19 activity fits the course learning goals, and include debriefing sessions to reinforce learning.  
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31 *Werewolf* has a variety of strengths that make it a perfect option for instructors interested  
32 in trying out a simulation game. The game has very few rules, making it less complex than other  
33 classroom activities, and requires little preparation time. The game fits nicely into a typical 75-  
34 minute class meeting. It can be used without requiring special boards or other costly materials.  
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40 Finally, the game is easily scalable for small sized classes of 10 students up to larger classes of  
41 40 students. While it is likely more difficult to administer in classes larger than 40, with multiple  
42 referees, students could be divided into smaller groups to have multiple games played  
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48 simultaneously that are followed by a larger class discussion after gameplay is finished.

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50 *Werewolf* is also different from many in-class simulation activities due to its emphasis on the  
51 dimensions of social interaction over scenario simulation (see Sharp and Kordsmeier 2005;  
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60 Simpson and Elias 2011; Larson 2012; Messinger 2015; McCoy 2017 for other exceptions). By

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3 emphasizing the elements of interaction, *Werewolf* is a powerful tool for demonstrating  
4 interactionist concepts. Through debriefing sessions, it is also useful for developing classroom  
5 conversation, and fostering student-to-student connections.  
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10 Numerous researchers have evaluated the use of games and simulation in college  
11 learning. Despite barriers to the use of simulations and games in the college classroom (Rosen  
12 2018), they have also demonstrated that when used successfully they can provide powerful  
13 learning experiences for students. These studies show that simulations and games help students  
14 connect classroom learning to real life situations (Giraud-Carrier and Schmidt 2015). Scholars  
15 have also shown that the memorable experiences of simulations and games improve student  
16 information retention and understanding (Chow, Woodford, and Maes 2011; McCarthy 2014;  
17 Prince, Kozimor-King, Steele 2015). Simulations and games have also been shown to provide  
18 students with a common experience they can use to connect theory and practice (Asal 2005).  
19 Finally, simulations and games motivate and engage students increasing their enjoyment of  
20 learning which can result in increased class attendance, confidence, participation, and an  
21 improved sense of class community (McCarthy 2014; Prince, Kozimor-King, Steele 2015).  
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37 The werewolf activity, when implemented well, effectively demonstrates complicated  
38 symbolic interactionist theories and concepts through an engaging and active learning classroom  
39 experience (Atkinson and Hunt 2007; Bowen et al. 2011) and answers calls to incorporate more  
40 applied learning approaches to social theory (Holtzman 2005; Eglitis 2010). The active learning  
41 approach focuses on providing students with opportunities to experience course material as  
42 opposed to just thinking about it (Wills, Brewster, and Fulkerson 2005). Simulations like  
43 *Werewolf* provide an active learning experience where students exert increased agency in  
44 learning as they interact and role-play to accomplish tasks. As students evaluate, strategize, and  
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3 compare their choices, they experience course's theories and concepts (King and Cazessus). The  
4 literature on the effectiveness of active learning experiences has demonstrated its ability for  
5 helping students overcoming intimidating concepts (Coghlan and Huggins 2004; Pederson 2010)  
6 and decreasing stress related to understanding and discussing theory (Scarboro 2004; Holtzman  
7 2005; Eglitis 2010).  
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### 17 TEACHING WITH *WEREWOLF*

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19 We have used *Werewolf* in a variety of courses including Introduction to Sociology (3  
20 times), Social Theory (1 time), Criminology (4 times), and Deviance (3 times) courses since the  
21 Fall of 2015. Class sizes have varied between 15 and 45 students. We have implemented this  
22 activity at three different institutions including two Midwest universities (one private and one a  
23 regional state university) and a large research university in the southwest. While the specific  
24 interactionist concepts being focused on for each class did vary, all applications of the activity  
25 aimed to demonstrate an interactionist approach that focused on analyzing the way people  
26 construct and use meaning in the context of face-to-face interactions. In the Introduction to  
27 Sociology and Social Theory courses we used the activity to demonstrate social construction of  
28 reality and Erving Goffman's presentation of self (including impression management, front/back  
29 stage, and team performances) (Goffman 1959; 1963; 1967). In Criminology and Deviance  
30 courses emphasis was placed on stigma (Goffman 1963) and labeling theory (see Becker 1963:  
31 177). Throughout the remaining paper we focus on how to use the activity in an Introduction to  
32 Sociology course.  
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51 While placement of the activity can vary between courses, we find that it fits well in an  
52 Introduction to Sociology course when symbolic interactionist concepts such as presentation of  
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3 self, identity, and social construction of reality are addressed. Since this is typically within the  
4 first 3 to 4 weeks, this activity makes for a good ice breaker between students by encouraging  
5 student-to-student interactions and helping students feel more comfortable. It is important that  
6 foundational material related to the concepts being highlighted in the activity are introduced to  
7 students before asking them to apply these concepts to the activity. This can be accomplished  
8 through an assigned reading<sup>1</sup> and/or discussion in a previous class meeting.  
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11 Before beginning the activity, we took a few minutes to provide a review of the general  
12 arguments of symbolic interaction being focused on with the activity. This review helped  
13 students get into the mindset of looking for symbolic interactionist examples, and helped them  
14 better evaluate the gameplay in relationship to the concepts. During this review, emphasis was  
15 placed on specific concepts such as social construction of reality, the three premises of symbolic  
16 interaction, presentation of self, impression management, front/back stage, stigma, and team  
17 performances intended to be covered in the specific class. Students were then introduced to  
18 *Werewolf* and instructed to pay close attention to the social interactions between players during  
19 play.  
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### 22 *The Activity*

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24 In *Werewolf*, players use a deck of cards to assign and take on randomly chosen roles.  
25 Students play as either the “innocent villager” or “werewolf.” Instructors may wish to purchase  
26 cards specifically designed for the game; however, the activity could also be done using a normal  
27 deck of playing cards with ace cards being used to designate the role of werewolf. The number of  
28 werewolves should increase with the number of players (see Appendix I for specific  
29 recommendations). A moderator is also needed to progress the game through its three different  
30 phases. The game begins by the moderator giving an overview and explanation of the rules and  
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3 objective (See Appendix I). Each round of play consists of three phases: the night, the day, and  
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5 the trial. Rounds continue until the villagers successfully identify all the werewolves or the  
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7 number of werewolves outnumber the number of remaining villagers.  
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### 10 *Phase 1: Night*

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12 After the students have all been assigned a role (werewolf or villager), all students are  
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14 instructed to close their eyes. Then the moderator instructs the werewolves to open their eyes and  
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16 collectively identify one “victim” from among the villagers (See instructions in Appendix I).  
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18 Next, the moderator instructs the werewolves to close their eyes, and then instructs all players to  
19  
20 open their eyes. During the night phase, it is important that villagers keep their eyes shut so as  
21  
22 not to “cheat.” We found that most students do not intentionally cheat though accidents do  
23  
24 happen. For example, a student may have their face down on the desk but eyes opened allowing  
25  
26 for them to notice a werewolf’s shoes. Furthermore, how werewolves identify victims is  
27  
28 important. We had werewolf students identify victims by pointing at them as movement in the  
29  
30 classroom could be a “tell.” However, this can also lead to interesting developments as werewolf  
31  
32 teams may try to control their noises or provide false leads for “sleeping villagers.” Another  
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34 option would be to play soft music or have villagers snap their fingers during the night phase to  
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36 drown out sounds to make movement around the class less obvious.  
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### 42 *Phase 2: Day*

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44 After all students are instructed to open their eyes, the moderator announces who was  
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46 killed during the night portion of the game. The victims reveal their allegiance (werewolf or  
47  
48 innocent villager) and then act as a silent observer for the remainder of the game. At the  
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50 beginning of the day phase, all students are instructed by the moderator to open their eyes and  
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52 play continues. During the day phase any player may accuse another player of being a werewolf.  
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3 Players should be encouraged to offer some sort of reasoning for their selection, and the entire  
4 group of players should discuss this option. The moderator should help facilitate this by  
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6 requesting accusers to explain their logic to the other players, or during moments when no one is  
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8 offered up, suggest a person randomly to be considered. Since players have limited information  
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10 on who is a werewolf, players must often rely on other factors to determine guilt or innocence  
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12 including facial expressions, responses to accusations, or even who other participants accuse  
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14 during the day phase. Due to the limited amount of information, the more villagers interact the  
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16 more information they obtain, therefore it is in their best interest to interact and communicate  
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18 during the day phase.  
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### 23 *Phase 3: Trial*

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26 After the participants have some time to discuss, then the moderator announces the trial  
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28 phase. In this phase participants can accuse any other participant of being a werewolf. If that  
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30 accusation is seconded by another participant, then the accused is given the opportunity to  
31  
32 defend their innocence before the entire group votes to convict or acquit them. Players often  
33  
34 utilize a variety of strategies ranging from how a player looks, who a player voted for, arguments  
35  
36 they have made, and previous interactions they have had with the player. Only if the accused is  
37  
38 convicted, and thus considered out for the rest of the game, may they show other players their  
39  
40 card. Convicted villagers may only quietly observe the rest of the game. Any number of players  
41  
42 can be accused in the trial phase though villagers should be reminded that if their number ever  
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44 drops below the werewolves they lose. After all trials have been resolved, play resumes by  
45  
46 restarting with the night phase.  
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51 The game's dynamics encourages strategies that demonstrate Goffman's notion of  
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53 teamwork (Goffman 1959). For example, after the game has progressed a round or two, the  
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3 werewolves must be careful in choosing a target during the night phase. If they select a villager  
4 that accused them during the day phase, they risk raising suspicion from the villagers. Some  
5 werewolf players may even accuse their fellow werewolf teammates to avoid accusations that  
6 they are a team. Since these players must communicate in secret during the day phase, they must  
7 engage in a communicative strategy that is non-verbal.  
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11 Unless students have prior experience playing the game, the first round of a typical game  
12 of *Werewolf* can begin with a bit of confusion. This is largely due to the lack of information that  
13 players have. Instructors using this activity should remind their students that the only way they  
14 will be able to find out who the werewolves are is by interacting with others. One way to reduce  
15 student confusion is to have them watch a video of gameplay prior to playing (a sample video  
16 can be found at looneylabs.com [<https://www.looneylabs.com/games/werewolf>]).  
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20 Depending on the number of participants and level of interaction during the day phase  
21 rounds may vary in length. On average we found that a round takes about eight to 12 minutes.  
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23 This allows for 4 to 6 rounds in an average 75-minute class meeting with some time at the  
24 beginning for instructions and at the end for discussion. The time length for a round can be  
25 controlled by using a timer for the phases. This is particularly important for the day phase which  
26 we recommend limiting to five minutes. We also recommend that werewolf victims and trial  
27 convicts be assigned the roles of research observer after they have been removed from the game.  
28  
29 We encourage these students to take notes on the interactions they observe during all three  
30 phases. In later uses of the activity we handed out a worksheet specific to the concept being  
31 focused on to help guide these students' observations. This not only gives the students an activity  
32 to complete during the remaining game play but also helps prepare them for the discussion to  
33 follow.  
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### *Analyzing the Game with the Class*

In all classes the activity was followed by class discussion to breakdown the games interactions and apply sociological concepts. Depending on length of class and number of rounds of the game played this either happened immediately after or at the following class meeting. The authors did not follow a uniform script to guide the discussion since the activity was being used in multiple courses to demonstrate somewhat distinct sociological concepts. Despite these variations we have attempted to identify common themes and their connection to specific symbolic interactionist concepts.

In the large majority of the class discussions included critiquing how the game rules and interactions social construct reality. The focus was often placed on how the rules provide a social agreement that once accepted by players outlines the norms of behavior, interaction expectations, and even the social roles embodied by the players. To build further on this we encouraged players to consider how their behavior and interactions changed through subsequent rounds highlighting some ways the games social construction developed over time. Norms related to how the students organized and decided to hold trials are good examples since often students get better at cooperating in later rounds.

Another major theme that was particularly common in the introduction to sociology and social theory courses was the application of the activity to Herbert Blumer's (1969) three premises of symbolic interaction. We encouraged students to consider the way that players in-game interactions resulted in constructed meanings about specific players roles and how those meanings were altered through subsequent interactions. Particularly good examples where moments in the activity were students falsely identified another student's game role, either a villager as a werewof or vice versa. By working through players initial assumptions about the

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3 student's role, the interactions that resulted in the false identification, and then the interactions  
4 that revealed the "truth" about a player's game role, students are able to identify the ways that  
5 people's social interactions construct and reconstruct meanings, that people act based on these  
6 meanings, and that these meanings are not static but instead continue to develop over time.  
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8 Furthermore, game trials can be used to demonstrate how social meanings can be shared and  
9 therefore result in collective social action. The students can essentially be walked through the  
10 interpretive process through which they had personally experienced in the game.  
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19 The last theme represents the application of Goffman's (1959) dramaturgical approach.  
20 While this was a common point of discussion for most classes using the activity, the specific  
21 concepts highlighted varied significantly. Initially, the instructor would push the students to  
22 recognize the performative nature of the game's interactions including the fact that participants  
23 had roles that they were enacting and that these roles provided scripts to guide their behavior.  
24 This almost always included a discussion of some of the impression management tactics that  
25 players used in order to manipulate their performances. We found that werewolf players sharing  
26 their tactics for trying to "act like a village" were especially powerful in demonstrating  
27 impression management. The day and night phases in the game provide an easy example of front  
28 and back stage. Additionally, the concept of team performances could be highlighted either  
29 through discussions of how groups of villagers worked together to try and identify a werewolf or,  
30 in games with multiple werewolves, the werewolves' interactions during both the night and day  
31 phases could be used.  
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49 In deviance and criminology classes, the focus was usually placed on concepts of  
50 deviance, stigma, and labeling theory. In these classes we focused on the process by which  
51 students determined who a werewolf was. By getting students to consider the ways they read into  
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3 players actions in order to attempt to label them as werewolves and the way they acted toward  
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5 these players while they were under suspicion the students were able to evaluate the labeling  
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7 process in-depth. To demonstrate stigma werewolf players and those players that were accused  
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9 of being werewolves were encouraged to share how they felt throughout the labeling and trial  
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11 experience. We felt this helped students recognize the process through which people are  
12  
13 stigmatized and empathize with those who are stigmatized. Similarly, werewolves who shared  
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15 their experiences often mentioned feelings of being an outsider and fear of being caught. These  
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17 experiences made for wonderful discussions of deviance both in terms of how social groups  
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19 determine what is deviant behavior but also connecting deviance with the concept of stigma and  
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21 group membership.  
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26 The above themes demonstrate the versatility of the activity for demonstrating symbolic  
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28 interactionist theories and concepts. We would encourage instructors using the activity to  
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30 consider the specific concepts they wish to demonstrate ahead of time. Early attempts at the  
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32 activity often resulted in a mixed discussion of many concepts that ran over the allotted time. In  
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34 later uses of the activity we utilized worksheets with questions directed at specific concepts and  
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36 parts of the activity. In conjunction with instructor guidance, we found later discussions allowed  
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38 for more focused conversations with students. Often it was just a matter of asking about the  
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40 aspects of the activity that corresponded best to the concept. If you are interested in Blumer's  
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42 description of symbolic interaction then asking students about the process they used to determine  
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44 who a werewolf was will help highlight the meaning making process. If you are interested in  
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46 deviance and stigma then ask werewolves to share their feelings as outsiders and targets in the  
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48 game. In all classes we found the students extremely talkative after the activity and with a little  
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50 direction would quickly seize on examples of the symbolic interactionist concepts.  
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## ASSESSMENTS AND LEARNING OUTCOMES

We employed two forms of assessment to evaluate the activity. First, we used a student reflection assignment following the activity to gather qualitative data of student impressions. These student reports focused on student demonstrations of learning outcomes and reflections on the activity experience. Analysis of these qualitative student reports found that the majority of students found the activity enjoyable, claimed that it increased their understanding of the material, and could successfully relate the activity to a symbolic interactionist concept in class. Second, we compared test scores from course sections the activity was used in with previous courses sections of the same classes that the activity had not been used in. Results from this comparison indicated a small quantitative increase in test scores in course sections that used the activity.

### *Teaching Symbolic Interactionist Concepts*

We assessed student learning outcomes for the activity using a student reflections assignment in which students evaluated their learning in relationship to the activity. We asked students to explain in their own words what course concepts were demonstrated by the activity and how the activity's interactions mirrored other interactions in their everyday lives. The majority of students (over 98 percent) were able to successfully connect the activity's interactions with symbolic interactionist concepts. In a small number of the student reflection assignments (about 2 percent overall) students were able to identify a symbolic interactionist concept but were unable to correctly explain the concept in relationship to the activity. The specific concepts identified by students varied depending on the course the activity was being used in.

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3 The assessment demonstrated that the activity is a wonderful way to demonstrate the  
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5 interpretive process through which social interaction constructs social meaning. Students in the  
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7 introductory of sociology and social theory courses were able to use the activity to explain  
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9 concepts like the social construction of reality and Blumer's three premises of symbolic  
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11 interaction.  
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15 The activity helped me better understand Herbert Blumer's symbolic interaction points.  
16 He [Blumer] says that people make up meanings and use them to take actions. In  
17 *Werewolf* we had to talk with each other to figure out who the werewolves are. We would  
18 decide who we thought they were and then hold a trial. This is how we gave them a  
19 meaning and took action. This is just like what he [Blumer] said... We weren't always  
20 right. If people thought someone was acting funny, we would put them on trial. When we  
21 were wrong, we had to start over and try to figure out what villager was really a  
22 werewolf. The meanings we had for each other changed over the game. (Male Student,  
23 23, Social Theory)  
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26 The students quote above demonstrates the ability for students to recognize the meaning making  
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28 process that Blumer talks about including how meanings are created and recreated. The rounds  
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30 of gameplay speed up the interpretive process and allow students to experience it in a short  
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32 period of time.  
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35 Many students also applied the activity to the Goffman's dramaturgical perspective,  
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37 particularly the concept of impression management. Since the game uses elements of secrecy as  
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39 "werewolves" are placed among "innocent" players in an environment where they must interact  
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41 with each other, werewolf players must manage their impressions so they are not suspected by  
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43 others players (Goffman 1959). Many students were able to use this dimension of the game to  
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45 explain the differences between front stage and back stage and how people manage impressions  
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47 between the two. As one introduction to sociology student recalled,  
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51 The sociological concept of dramaturgy stood out in this exercise. This is because we put  
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53 on a role. All of us, even the werewolves put on a front stage performance of being a  
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55 villager. As long as we could maintain this frontstage performance we usually were not  
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57 detected. However, when we showed a glimpse of our backstage selves (the werewolf)  
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3 the other people in our group were able to detect us, and lynched us (Female Student,  
4 Introduction to Sociology).  
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6 She went on to further connect the exercise to her own lived experience,  
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8  
9 These concepts remind me of the experiences I had giving interviews for nurse midwifery  
10 graduate programs. During the interviews, I presented my front stage self of a good  
11 student who is dedicated to the health of pregnant mothers. I present that I am  
12 experienced and that I am always a hard worker. I tried very hard to conceal my  
13 backstage self, which sometimes likes to hang out in its sweatpants, and be super lazy. If  
14 I let my backstage self become visible, it would have been harder for me to maintain the  
15 role of my front stage self, and I would not have been admitted to the graduate programs  
16 (Female Student, 22, Introduction to Sociology).  
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19  
20 The student was able to apply here experience in the activity to Goffman's perspective as well as  
21 make a comparison between the activity to her past experiences. In this way the activity acted as  
22 a bridge between the class concepts and the students personal experiences.  
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26 Student's in deviance and criminology courses often connected the experience to the idea  
27 of deviance and Goffman's stigma. These students were able to not only recognize the  
28 werewolves as "deviants" but also discuss in detail the process by which the group labeled and  
29 stigmatized players as werewolves.  
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37 The game was a good example of stigma. Stigma is when some is labeled and treated  
38 differently. I was a villager but I was accused and put on trial. Other students thought  
39 they heard me move during the werewolf time [night phase]. The class then labeled me as  
40 a werewolf and treated me as a deviant. They wouldn't believe anything I said. I tried to  
41 tell them it was the student behind me but they just didn't listen. They didn't trust me. It  
42 made me feel like I was all alone...It didn't matter that I wasn't a werewolf. I was treated  
43 like a deviant anyway. (Female Student, 20, Deviance)  
44  
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46 As revealed in the quote above the activity's trials allowed students to experience how people  
47 are labeled and stigmatized as well as better understand the feelings connected with that  
48 experience. Students that are put on trial get to experience first hand the stigmatization process  
49 and by sharing this with other students reveals the social and emotional consequences that take  
50 place.  
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### *Student Impressions of the Activity*

The activity assessment tool also used qualitative questions to measure student impressions of the activity. Based on analysis of these responses two themes emerged. First, the most common theme was that students reported having fun and overall enjoying the activity. Many students expressed enjoying the interactive and experiential aspects of the activity. For example, one student said,

I liked how this exercise was very interactive. It was a different approach of teaching the theories of deviance. I liked how we were put in positions where acts of deviance were taking place (Male Student, 21, Deviance Course).

Similarly, another student highlighted how it fit his particular learning style.

What I liked most about this assignment was the chance to interact with my fellow students. We sit in class listening to lectures all day, so it was wonderful and refreshing to be able to learn in a different way. I learn best with kinesthetic learning, and this assignment played perfectly into this learning style by have us actually experience the principles we learned (Male Student, 21, Introduction to Sociology).

Several students also indicated that the game was an appreciated break from the traditional lecture of many courses and others expressed interest in having more such activities in the course.

These student reflections match both authors instructor observations of the activities. We observed that the activity provided an interactive experience for students that stressed student-to-student engagement forging strong connections between student participants. The activity acted as an ice breaker with students becoming more vocal and engaged with course content in the remaining weeks of class. Once game play had begun students seemed to really engage with the game and get excited about the experience. The experience also seemed to have lasting impact as, throughout the remainder of the class, students regularly referenced the activity to each other and during class discussions.

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3 Another common theme among the student's reports was that the activity increased  
4 understanding of the material. One introduction to sociology student who was a villager in the  
5 game wrote, "Playing the game has really made the theories unforgettable. It was such a great  
6 example and so much fun." Another introductory student discussed how better they understood  
7 the course reading after the activity, "The reading was confusing and hard to understand. I don't  
8 think I truly understood impression management until we played the game. Seeing everyone play  
9 their part in the game and then discuss it after made it all just click." Comments like these seem  
10 to indicate that students not only found the activity fun but they also help students connect with  
11 the course concepts as well as create memorable examples to aid in their understanding.  
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24 In addition to the qualitative student reports, we also assessed the activity by comparing  
25 exam scores. We compared exam scores of course sections that used the activity with course  
26 sections in a previous semester that had not used the activity. Findings from such a comparison is  
27 limited as other characteristics of the course (topics covered, examples used, quality of  
28 instructor's lectures, etc.) may have changed resulting in potential impacts to exam scores  
29 (Janisch, Liu, and Akrofi 2007). Ideally an experiment and control group would have been  
30 utilized, however, teaching schedules and lack of multiple simultaneous sections in a semester  
31 for some course made this too difficult. Despite these limitations, when comparing the exams,  
32 we found that course sections that included the activity all showed an increase in average overall  
33 test scores. This increase was 9.4 percent across all courses but varied among different courses  
34 (Social Theory 13.1 percent, Introduction to Sociology 11.8 percent, Deviance 9.7 percent, and  
35 Criminology 6.5 percent). We attribute this to a variety of factors including the ability to utilize a  
36 shared reference point, an activity which was memorable and engaging, and because of  
37 additional discussion that resulted from the game itself. Moreover, as instructors we had to more  
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3 adequately define and describe concepts which we may have typically spent less time on without  
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5 the activity.  
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## 10 DISCUSSION

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12 The werewolf activity provides instructors with a way to illuminate symbolic  
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14 interactionist theory and concepts through an active learning and student-centered approach. The  
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16 activity immerses students in the theoretical approach by allowing students to *do* theory as  
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18 opposed to passively engaging with it (Pedersen 2010). *Werewolf* gives students a common  
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20 frame of reference that is relatively politically neutral, and thus not a threat to students' overall  
21  
22 identity for which to apply interpretive theory. Furthermore, a critical discussion of the activity  
23  
24 allows students to not only apply but also evaluate theoretical concepts. As a result, students  
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26 become the tool for *doing* social theory which decreases the overall abstraction and provides a  
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28 concrete student-centered experience embedded in the students' everyday lives.  
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33 Transforming the classroom into sites of active learning (Atkinson and Hunt 2007;  
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35 Bowen et al. 2011) helps provide for variation in teaching pedagogy in the classroom, making  
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37 course content more accessible to diverse student learning styles. This is especially important for  
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39 teaching social theory which can be stressful material to many students and is often presented in  
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41 abstraction. This paper seeks to provide an alternative pedagogical tool for teaching interactionist  
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43 theory and concepts. We argue that teaching interactionist theory, and theory in general would  
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45 benefit significantly from focusing on active learning and student-centered pedagogical  
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47 techniques that foster students *doing* social theory. Based on the activity's assessment, students  
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49 who participated in the activity demonstrated heightened understanding of symbolic  
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51 interactionist concepts. They were able to not only apply them to the activity itself, but were also  
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3 better able to apply those concepts to their everyday lives through comparison with the game  
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5 experience. Moreover, student evaluations indicate that they found the activity engaging and fun.  
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7 In conclusion, by utilizing the werewolf activity instructors are able to go beyond the traditional  
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9 lecture and discussion and empower students in actively doing social theory.  
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For Peer Review

## NOTES

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1. Assigned readings varied between classes. In introductory courses in some cases only an introductory textbook was used. However, one author also utilized an excerpt from Joel Charon's (2009) *Symbolic Interactionism 10<sup>th</sup> edition* which worked well as a way to expand on the symbolic interactionist approach in a way that was easily understandable by even first year undergraduate students. In social theory excerpts from Herbert Blumer's (1969) *Symbolic Interactionism*, Goffman's (1959) *Presentation of Self*, and Berger and Luckmann (1967) *Social Construction of Reality* were used to cover the symbolic interactions main three premises, dramaturgy, and the social construction of reality. Werewolf was used as a culminating activity to discuss the three in conjunction to one another. In the deviance and criminology courses used Howard Becker's (1967) article "Whose Side Are We On?", *Outsiders* (1963), and later Eric Sprankle, Katie Bloomquist, Cody Butcher, Neil Gleason, and Zoe Schaefer's (2018) article about stigma among sex workers.

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## APPENDIX I: MODERATOR INSTRUCTIONS

**Are You A Werewolf?**  
*Rules of Play*

Adapted from:

<http://www.wunderland.com/LooneyLabs/Werewolf/>

**Materials:** If you don't have a set of our [Werewolf cards](#), you can use plain playing cards. Aces will represent "werewolves" and all other cards represent "Villager."

**Instructions:** Assemble a village of 8-40 people. Most players will be ordinary villagers, but some will secretly be hungry werewolves. We recommend the following number of werewolves to players: 8-11 players - 2 werewolves, 12-17 players - 3 werewolves, 18-40 players - 4 werewolves. Lastly, a moderator is needed.

**Setup:** Shuffle together both werewolf cards, and enough villager cards so that there is one card for everybody. If no one takes the moderator card voluntarily, shuffle it in as well. Deal a card to each player, face down. Everyone secretly looks at their card, and may not reveal it until they are killed.

**Night:** During the night, the werewolves will maul someone, and the moderator must lead the villagers through the events of the night by following the Moderator's Script.

**Day:** Players gather in the village and discuss who to lynch. The mob wants bloody justice. Once a majority agrees to lynch someone, the lynched player shows his or her card and says nothing for the rest of the game.

**Game Over:** Repeat night and day until the werewolves are dead, or the number of werewolves and villagers is equal, in which case the werewolves overrun the villagers, killing them off openly. All players still alive at the end of the game are the winners.

**Night-Noise:** When everyone closes their eyes at night, it is best for people to also start humming, tapping the table, patting a knee, or making some noise. This will cover up any sounds made accidentally by the werewolves, or the moderator.



**Moderator's Script**

**It is night. The moon is full.  
Everyone, close your eyes.  
Werewolves, open your eyes.  
Werewolves, choose a victim.**

*The werewolves silently agree on and gesture towards the player they wish to kill. The moderator silently confirms them.*

**Werewolves, close your eyes.**

**The sun is rising. The night is over.**

**Everyone, open your eyes and**

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3 **Role-Playing:** When the Wunderland Toast Society plays  
4 this game, there is always *plenty* of role playing (sometimes  
5 to the detriment of the village). Jake becomes the  
6 Interrogator, Andy attempts to control debates and town  
7 decisions by getting elected Mayor, and John is always the  
8 High Priest of the Mystical Oracle, who gets to ask the  
9 Magic 8-ball a question once per day. And while we're alive  
10 we're winning, so we try to make our roles as acceptable and  
11 entertaining to the other villagers as we can. Try it!  
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**see that this person has been  
torn apart by werewolves.**

*The moderator points at the  
victim, who reveals his or her  
card and says nothing for the rest  
of the game.*

For Peer Review