Title: Games of Social Deduction for Players in the Autistic Spectrum
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Abstract: Ethan Ham’s Game Workshop class will research social deduction board games. The main goal of the class will be the creation of social deduction games that help teach social skills to players who are on the Autistic spectrum.

Social deduction games involve players being assigned secret roles. Players try to deduce the identities of others and/or hide their own. This requires strategic thought, team play, social skills, misdirection, bluffing, and role-play. As such, social deduction games are particularly well-suited to enhancing the players’ ability to analyze actions, facial expressions, and intonation in order to interpret the motivations of others while at the same time communicating (or concealing) their own.

Dmitry Davidoff, a psychology student at Moscow State University, created the first social deduction game in 1986. Davidoff wanted a game that would explore the dynamic between “the uninformed majority versus the informed minority.” The result was Mafia, a game in which the players try to determine who among them are secretly mobsters, while the mobsters try to eliminate all the “innocent” players before being discovered. Since its creation, Mafia has inspired a large number of other games, including Werewolf, The Resistance, Love Letter, Coup, Two Rooms and a Boom, Speakeasy, Citadels, Masquerade, Bang!, etc.

Ethan Ham became interested in social deduction games through his volunteer work at a youth center. During game nights at the center, he found that while the high school students were reluctant to play most board games, they were enthusiastic about social deduction games. They like that the games have simple, easy to learn rules (the games’ complexity comes from the social dynamics rather than intricate game mechanics). It is also likely that the issues these games tend to explore (identity, trust, inclusion/exclusion, and deception) were of particular interest to the teenagers.