

## Everyday Metaphors

For thousands of years, games have been a vital means of escape from life's struggles. Whether in the form of a card game like Texas Hold 'Em, a board game like chess, or a video game like Missile Command for the Atari, entertainment was always readily available. During times of crisis, games had the most impact on people's lives. Even today, games of all types hold the power to unite people across the globe. For these reasons, "life is a game" is a commonly used phrase. "Widespread use of such metaphors not only blurs the distinction between reality and games and play but also provides a specific framework for responding to situations because a game has a narrative structure that can be read" (Ching).

Taking a closer look at the guidelines Lakoff provides, the phrase "life is a game" is in part related to the conceptual metaphor "Argument is War." Each of these metaphors implicates the overarching concepts of good and bad to mean "winning" and "losing." Successes, like graduation and marriage, are considered achievements and can be seen as "winning." On the other hand, failures such as prison and bankruptcy are considered "losing." Both "winning" and "losing" are such a prevalent part of society that times of hardship are seen as hopeless. When games became a distraction from this negativity, the line between them and life blurred. In essence, the phrase branches out into smaller, more common sayings and creates an underlying system with them that people use today. A metaphor is "an unconscious, automatic mechanism for using inference patterns and language from a source domain... to think and talk about another domain" (Lakoff). Therefore, this idea of a conceptual metaphorical system can be applied to multiple concepts.

While the phrase “life is a game” can relate to various games, it originated nearly 160 years ago. Back in 1860, a man named Milton Bradley invented his first board game; the Checkered Game of Life. The original design set the gameplay on a modified checkerboard with sixty-four red-and-ivory squares. As the name implies, the goal of the game was to reach the spot labeled “Happy Old Age” (Lepore). Of course, within this game were many familiar aspects of life. Tragedies would arise just as well as good fortune, be it wealth or even suicide. Due to the game’s design, it quickly became a best-seller. (Lepore). Most importantly, we are the players.

The Checkered Game of Life isn’t the only game that this metaphor applies to. Consider a game of poker: at the start of a round, players bet chips, representing money, on their skill at the game and the chance of “winning.” In comparison to real life, this kind of game has similar implications on how to win. “Skill” can be seen as experience; the more one has, the better the circumstances for victory. In poker, players also employ strategies that they may take in order to win. Oftentimes, these strategies involve a risk factor or some form of secrecy. This idea can be noted in the use of expressions such as “having a card up one’s sleeve,” “upping the ante,” or even the term “poker face,” used to describe a calm and collected appearance. In this “poker game of life,” people try to change their futures by taking risks for high rewards. All the while, the act of participating in such an engaging experience removes people further from outside distractions, thus blurring the line between game and reality.

Even in troubling times, games are a fun way to take one’s mind off of the struggles of the everyday. Be it card games, board games, video games, or role-playing games, each type has its own implications. In this great game we call life, it can be hard to keep going when it feels like we’ve “lost.” What people should remember is that while “winning at life” is important, it’s

not everything. The fellow players befriended along the way and the achievements we earn are all that make this game worth playing.

## Works Cited

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