

# ‘Temperament is everything’ Bridge partnerships, identities and emotions

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## Researching the sociology of bridge

- Bridge is a serious leisure pursuit
- Interviews conducted with 52 elite players spanning US, UK and Europe
  - *What motivates players of bridge?*
  - *What are the qualities of a good player or partner?*
  - *How do players cope with emotions during competitive bridge?*










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## Sociological Literature

The diagram consists of a large light blue oval containing a dark blue circle labeled 'Identity' and a light blue circle labeled 'Emotions'. The intersection of these two circles is labeled 'The Self'. To the left of the 'Identity' circle is the text 'Symbolic interactionism'.




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## Identity

**(Jenkins 2008):** a process of identification in which individuals are distinguished in relations with others.

**Goffman (1959):** presentation of self, impression management, front stage and backstage



**Individuals continually negotiate their identities within the interaction order and through performance of roles**

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## Emotions




- The sociology of emotion
- The social construction of emotion draws attention to the *contexts* in which emotions take place.
- Emotion management as impression management and the performative nature of emotion (Feinstein and Switat 2019)
- Emotions as reflexive, cultural and communicative


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## The Self

- experiences the feelings and attributes value and meanings to them in any given context or interaction (Saarni 1999)
- Mead (1934): the social self, taking the role of others, a social construction, developing through interactions with others over time, not innate, fixed or intrinsic
- The individualised self
- Self-development







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Table 1: Emotions experienced by players.

Emotion	Male (u35/o35)	Female (u35/o35)	Totals
Total sample	(12/20)	(8/12)	52
Upset	4/-	5/1	10
Excited	4/1	3/1	9
Annoyed/Irritated	-/2	2/5	9
Angry/Mad	3/3	2/-	8
Disappointed	1/1	4/1	7
Frustration	1/4	1/1	7
Happy	1/1	2/2	6
Humiliation/embarrassed	1/-	1/1	3
Totals	27	32	59

\*number of responses exceeds number of players due to recording multiple emotions from single players

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### Emotions as detrimental to bridge

I try not to let emotions appear when I'm playing bridge. (Yvonne Wiseman, under 35, UK)

Concentration is more difficult if you allow yourself to get emotional. (Brian Senior, over 35, UK)

If you're letting emotional thoughts distract you... it's just diverting your energy from the task at hand. (Susanna Gross, over 35, UK)

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### Temperament is Everything



Temperament is everything. You really just have to be encouraging and keep a positive attitude. You can't get too emotional. You've got to be supportive of your partner. (Jeff Meckstroth, over 35, US)




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### Impression Management and the Ideal Partner

- Goffman (1959) performances are designed to create impressions for others about who we are based on an idealised self that fits appropriately into the requirements of the context (Metts and Cupach 2008).
- One version of the idealised self: the 'good' partner




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### No one ideal partner

*Some partners need space, some partners need some nice words and some partners need bollocking, being nasty. This is a human relationship. A good partner should know what his partner needs and see it.* (Artur Malinowski, over 35, UK)





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### Performing roles: front and back stage

- Players expose their emotions in what could be deemed to be more private and personal settings
- cultivating one's identity as a professional engaged in bridge as serious leisure




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### Expectations and cultural context

- Emotional responses shaped by perceptions of expectations and ability
- Expectations of how to behave, and the performance of bridge roles, are shaped by cultural context and socialisation

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### Reflexivity and Self-Development

*Reflection goes beyond intellectual endeavour (Dewey 1933), 'a complex process involving the whole person, including their emotions' (Anderson et al 2004: 189).*

- Elite players engage in reflexivity and self-development to improve technical skills, emotional and interactional competence
- Bridge players perform different modes of reflexivity

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### Partnership Interactions

- How different partnerships form, end and develop over time
- Bridge partnerships analogous to marriage
- Some partnerships come to an end quicker than others

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### How easy is it to be a good partner in practice?

In the heat of the battle I certainly sometimes fall from grace. I think that away from the table I'm pretty good in that I'm not at all a black and white person and I can usually see that there were reasons for a losing decision even if it wasn't the one I would have made. But certainly, that's one of the areas where I am still working at improving... if something goes wrong I certainly, at times, will say critical things that I would wish I hadn't. (Chip Martel, over 35, US)

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### Conclusion

- Emotions as private, negative, feminine, irrational and a sign of mental weakness; persuading individuals to avoid the expression of emotions deemed inappropriate in their sporting context (Lee Sinden 2010, 2012).
- Contribute to understanding of emotionally charged contexts (Ng and Kidder 2010)

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### Conclusion

- Symbolic interactionism is a fruitful theoretical perspective for understanding the emotions, identities and interactions of elite bridge players
- New knowledge through the study of bridge as a serious leisure pursuit and the performative nature of emotions and identities

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## Thank you

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### What's so great about bridge?

It's just an amazing game really. It's the fusion of the competition, playing against these two opponents, and especially the co-operation – the partnership aspect of the game that makes it so amazing.



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