

Bridge Research Abstracts

Session 1A

Characteristics of bridge players in Israel: The role of motivation and use of cognitive strategies

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Background: Bridge is one of the most commonly played games in the world. Currently there are approximately 8,500 bridge players in Israel, who are members of the Israel Bridge Federation (IBF) and about 100,000 players non-federation members.

Previous research showed that older adults play games for five main reasons: mental and physical fitness, continuity, competition, temporal structure, and belonging. No previous research has been conducted among bridge players in Israel.

Aims: The research aims were to: 1. Describe the demographic characteristics of a sample of bridge players in Israel; 2. Explore their motivation for playing bridge; 3. Explore the cognitive strategies used before, during, and after the game. 4. Describe the relationships between player characteristics, motivations, cognitive strategies, and player records.

Methods: Participants in the online survey were 462 adults (315 males, 64.5%) aged 19-91 years ($M = 68.7$, $SD = 9.28$). Participants completed a demographic questionnaire, Bridge Motivational Factors Checklist (BMFC) and the Bridge Cognitive Strategies Questionnaire (BCSQ). Descriptive statistics were performed, exploratory factor analysis with principal factor extraction and varimax rotation was used and T-tests and one-way ANOVA were used to examine differences between factors. Pearson correlations were performed to assess relationships between variables.

Results: Among the participants, the most common factor (97.5%) was the feeling that playing bridge enhances their mood and 64% felt that bridge reduces stress in their daily lives. Overall, motivation and strategies were positively related, and strategy use during the game correlated with the player's record.

Conclusion: The results emphasized important aspects of leisure time, well-being, and social participation reported by the participants. The two new questionnaires provided important insight into the specific motivation to play the game and which specific strategies are used during the game. Additional cross-cultural studies are recommended to compare various populations for further understanding and generalizing the results.

The Professional Bridge Player and Devotee Work

Ian McIntosh, Sociology, University of Stirling; Zoe Russell; Professor Samantha Punch, Faculty of Social Sciences, University of Stirling

This paper contributes to the sociology of mind-sport and leisure by focusing on 'devotee work' via an exploration of professional bridge. As a partnership card game, bridge has been

increasingly professionalising over recent decades, including part-time and full-time players. We investigate the lived experience of the professional bridge player and how they understand the, often ongoing, transition from playing bridge as a hobby to playing bridge for a job. In so doing we bring to light the tensions and ambiguities that can be involved in this process. Playing bridge professionally is often experienced as being hugely positive, because of being paid to do something one is devoted to, but there are important ambivalences and anxieties involved. Being a professional bridge player also entails the blurring of distinctions between work and leisure and raises issues about moral evaluations of work, a work ethic and concerns over what a 'proper job' is. The paper draws on data from 52 semi-structured interviews with elite players from the US and Europe. It also considers the journey of one of the research team who decided to combine work and leisure by researching her passion for the mind-sport of bridge. Researching one's leisure activity is a rewarding privilege, but also involves tensions, constraints and contradictions. Thus, this paper explores the perceived gains and losses of the blurred boundaries of work and leisure at elite level of tournament bridge both for the international players and for the researcher.

Playing with Emotions: The Management and Complexity of Emotion in an Elite Mind-Sport

Zoe Russell; Professor Samantha Punch, Faculty of Social Sciences, University of Stirling

This paper contributes to a more nuanced understanding of the complexity of emotional experience, exploring how social interaction and reflexivity shape emotion management for players of elite bridge. Elite tournament bridge is an emotionally charged setting, in which we examine the performance and management of emotions across frontstage and backstage contexts. This interactionist, dramaturgical framing illustrates the dynamics of emotional performance and management in a tense, time-pressured environment, at the bridge table and in more private spaces beyond this, where there is the possibility to process emotion over time and in dialogue with others. Emotional complexity characterises the experiences of elite players who can derive positive outcomes from successful strategies for emotion management, including emotional labour, whilst simultaneously often failing to manage emotions. We present a model of emotions in bridge and argue that emotional complexity is necessary to capture how emotions are managed through reflexivity, unfolding in social interaction and changing over time across multiple interconnected contexts.

Bridge as a Mindsport in Research, in the Bridge World, in Society

Professor Samantha Punch, Dr Miriam Snellgrove and Zoe Russell (BAMSA)

Bridge: A MindSport for All (BAMSA) is an academic project that explores the social world of bridge and the benefits of mindsport. BAMSA's research studies relate to social issues including wellbeing, healthy ageing, equality and community. Working with a network of bridge organisations and practitioners, BAMSA researchers translate academic findings into accessible resources for use by the global bridge community. In order to create positive and lasting impact, BAMSA has three key goals: to transform the image of bridge, to encourage more people of all ages to play, and to ensure the card game continues to thrive.

The BAMSA network is an inclusive and international forum of research associates, practitioners (players, teachers, organisers) and policymakers. The project is led by Samantha Punch, Professor of Sociology and hosted at the University of Stirling, Scotland. This paper presents the ongoing and future work of Bridge: A MindSport for All and how it links to concerns and issues in the global bridge community. It also discusses how mindsport studies relate to sport studies and leisure studies both in academia and wider society.

Mind, Body, and/or Confidence? Using Sociological Approaches to Emotion to Understand the Physicality of Bridge

Dr David Scott, Sports Studies, Abertay University; Professor Samantha Punch, Faculty of Social Sciences, University of Stirling

The classification of bridge as a sport continues to prove ripe for debate within the philosophy of sport. The emergence of distinctive categorisations such as 'mind sports' and 'esports' raises important questions as to how they distinguish from more classical categorisations of 'sports', and whether such distinctions are even necessary. The concept of 'physicality' is often cited as being a prerequisite for an activity to be classed as a 'sport', and is typically the given reason for excluding 'mind sports' such as bridge from being officially recognised by sporting organisations and funders. However, this paper raises the question as to whether such an exclusion based on 'physicality' is accurate. By drawing from data collected through in-depth interviews with elite Bridge players, a sociological approach to emotions is applied to highlight the various ways in which the sensorial experiences of bridge play align with those experienced in sports more traditionally classed as being 'physical'. For instance, the effects of fatigue, concentration, communication, pressure, anticipation, and physical presence are all noticeable corporeal experiences which allude to a mind/body conceptualisation of physicality, both while at the table and away from it. Of most significance is the importance of 'confidence' within competitive bridge and the ways this influences performance. The existential-phenomenologically grounded conceptions of 'confidence as a frame' and 'confidence-through-the-body' provide insight into the combined sensorial and physical experiences of confidence during competitions. While this paper does not necessarily argue the case for bridge's inclusion into the wider classification of 'sport' on a philosophical basis, it does present a sociologically-informed understanding of how the bridge world could argue the case that playing is more physical than first seems.

Session 1B

Well Being and Bridge

Dr Martin Seligman, Director of the Penn Positive Psychology Center

Well Being has five pillars: Positive Emotion, Engagement, Relationships, Meaning, and Accomplishment (PERMA). I will examine the effect of playing serious bridge on each. Bridge has entered a new electronic epoch. Skill levels are now higher than ever, and the game has never been better played. If we can overcome the problem of cheating, a positive inflection point for the greatest of games will have been reached.

DAY 2

Session 2A

Digital Bridge during the Coronavirus Pandemic

Miriam Snellgrove, Faculty of Social Sciences, University of Stirling; Professor Samantha Punch, Faculty of Social Sciences, University of Stirling

Within the world of the mind-sport bridge, the pandemic led to the closing down of all bridge clubs and an attendant move to online bridge playing. For some bridge players, the move online has meant they can continue to play bridge. For others, their one point of sociable contact has been removed, resulting in increased loneliness and isolation. Between April and October 2020, players around the world were invited to submit diary entries detailing how Covid-19 had changed their bridge playing habits. Hundreds of entries document the various ways that people have engaged with the move towards digital bridge and the loss of face to face playing.

Preliminary findings show that new opportunities and challenges have emerged with technology playing an important role. Alongside this, having an active bridge club/organisation that is keen to support members move online and provide clear and simple instructions to do so, is crucial to sustaining bridge. However, for some bridge players, the loss of club bridge has meant the loss of bridge entirely. These players cannot make the move online for a variety of reasons some age-related or linked to cheating concerns, some because they lack the technology and some because the entire experience is too overwhelming. Whilst some bridge clubs return to face-to-face teaching and playing, others are in risk of closing forever. Further, all clubs recognise that online bridge has now become a regular feature of bridge playing and will continue long into the future. Using online bridge to appeal to younger players opens up new possibilities, whilst also not losing those players who cannot make the move online is an ongoing concern. This research speaks to the challenges around engaging in serious leisure during a pandemic and how age, technology and organisational support enable or constrain continued participation in playing bridge.

Reconnecting with The Bridge Club: A Critical Understanding of Social Capital and Play during a Pandemic.

Kevin Judge, Faculty of Social Sciences, University of Stirling

A persistent theme within the course of this collaboratively funded doctoral study is that of social capital. Based on reciprocity and trust, it is a process that has, historically, been described as the glue in social cohesion. It is argued that social capital can provide a seedbed for tight-knit communities to flourish, and that the reach and strength of these social ties grows from shared values and an ethos that reflects fellowship, emotional connection, and social intercourse. However, critical perspectives have voiced concerns that it is an implicitly transactional model for social interactions and relationships that can be more exclusionary than inclusionary, with further tensions becoming apparent as play is

overly burdened with an instrumental value. The question emerges of how a 'glue' manifests and what are its characteristics when the habits of reciprocity and trust are absent. With reference to social capital, this presentation will explore how the traditional dependence on trust and reciprocity has changed as a result of COVID-19 and the move to online play. To answer this question, this research will provide a snapshot from within the wider doctoral study of the social lives and relationships of those who play bridge. Based on 31 interviews conducted during the coronavirus pandemic and experiences of prolonged lockdown, the voices of young, later life, and returning players, and teachers of the game share stories of loss and rebuilding. Early analysis, therefore, demonstrates the continued relevance of social capital, and highlights how moments of adaptability and flexibility are essential in the formation of social ties. These findings have implications not only for the benefits, motivations, and barriers in bridge but a reimagining of the game as society reopens and reconnects.

Card Confessions: Unravelling Digital Bridge during Lockdown

Jordan Maclean Faculty of Social Sciences, University of Stirling; Samantha Punch Faculty of Social Sciences, University of Stirling; Michael Xu

Since the onset of COVID-19, there have been several public confessions to 'cheating' from international players in the online version of the card game bridge. Whilst cheating is a perennial issue in the world of elite sports (Culbertson 2005; Ronglan 2015; Sheridan 2007; Watson and White 2007), little is known about how bridge compares as a mindsport. The aim of this paper is twofold: first, to examine a public confession from an international bridge player and the responses from the bridge community; and second, to consider the ways in which the shift to digital bridge during COVID-19 has changed the landscape of cheating. A Foucauldian theoretical lens is proposed for examining the case of a young world champion who publicly 'confessed' (Foucault 2021) to 'self-kibitzing' when playing in online bridge tournaments. Using a 'concept as method' approach, the confession is an entry point into the analysis, followed by unravelling public and organisational responses. The findings illustrate how the use of confessions has become a new model of 'governmentality' as the bridge world grapples with cards digitally. To conclude, we call on others to consider the effects of COVID-19 on new modes of cheating across different sports.

Dishonest behaviour in online bridge tournaments during the COVID-19 pandemic

Tihana Brkljačić, Institute of Social Sciences Ivo Pilar in Zagreb and Catholic, University of Croatia

During the COVID-19 pandemic at least 30 world-class bridge players were found cheating in online tournaments. Most of them were „self-kibitzing“ using a different device under a fake account to kibitz their own game and see all the cards. Detailed expert hand analysis and powerful statistical tools left little doubt in their guilt. Confronted with the evidence, some of them publically confessed their dishonesty.

Goal: The aim of this study was to analyse those confessions as well as most popular comments of members of one of the biggest online bridge community: Bridge Winners.

Method: We applied thematic content analysis to explore (a) explanations of cheating provided by confessors; (b) supportive messages by commentators (e.g. understanding and forgiving); (c) judging messages by commentators (e.g. blaming and accusing).

Findings: Confessors made clear that they were fully aware that they done wrong thing. They explained their behaviour by (a) their belief that others (i.e. their opponents) were cheating too (b) lockdown crises (e.g. tiredness, family issues); and (c) the fact that online cheating was so easy. The analysis of the comments showed that judging messages outnumbered supportive ones. Judging messages were also more often liked by Bridge Winners member compared to supportive messages. The findings were discussed using the Theory of self-concept maintenance and Simple Model of Rational Crime (SMORC).

DAY 3

SESSION 3A

Bridge Research with Older People and in Schools
Dr Marek Malysa, Bridge to the People Foundation, Poland

The Foundation 'Bridge to the People' together with scientists from Nicolas Copernicus University in Toruń carried out pilot research with older residents of Nursing Homes in 2019 and 2020.

Besides standard activities, we offered them a bridge course and later regular play of the game. Both before intervention and after twenty weeks of bridge, residents were checked with a series of various tests. Results showed much lower depression and significant growth of well-being. The Main Research will commence later this year once the COVID lockdown is over.

The same team is studying the effects of a year-long bridge course we applied to pupils in 38 schools in Poland. Data are still coming in so the conclusions and the main research plan for the period 2021-2022 will be presented during the Conference.

There's a bit of a ripple-effect: A social identity perspective on the role of third-places and ageing in place

Polly Fong, PhD researcher; Professor Catherine Haslam; Doctor Tegan Cruwys; Professor S. A. Haslam

This case study examines a well-functioning medium-sized bridge club in Australia. Using a social identity approach, it explores when and why older adults engage with community spaces, such as bridge clubs. The bridge club in question is located in a Council-owned community centre in a suburb of a major city. The clubhouse's physical environment is not well suited to the needs of the bridge club as it comprises three small rooms and has limited capacity to accommodate their 400 active members. However, despite its restrictive environment, the club has been regularly attended by 70-100 players daily in pre-COVID19 times. In 2018 we conducted focus-group interviews with 31 members of the bridge club,

whose average age was 71 years old, to gain a better understanding of how club attendance contributed to a sense of wellbeing and perceived ability to age well in place. Three key results of thematic analysis appeared to show that (a) the social and physical context can be facilitative or restrictive of participation (b) the bridge club supports social identities of bridge players, club members and locals, and (c) bridge clubs can serve to 'bridge' into the wider community.

Between Loneliness and Connection: Older Adults' Leisure during a Pandemic
Miriam Snellgrove, Faculty of Social Sciences, University of Stirling; Professor Samantha Punch, Faculty of Social Sciences, University of Stirling

From the end of March 2020, a national lockdown was announced in the UK. All businesses, schools and hospitality venues shut down, with only a category of 'essential worker' allowed to continue operating in a face-to-face capacity. With the majority of people sequestered indoors, digital spaces for work, socialising and leisure became part of the 'new normal.' Through diary data collected during the first lockdown and beyond, this paper explores how older adults' leisure was impacted due to the pandemic. Using the case study of bridge, we show how the move to online bridge was a social lifeline for many older people, cut off from regular contact with family, friends, and their local bridge club. For other participants, the move online was difficult, fraught with issues around using a new technology and fundamentally, no substitute for face-to-face bridge play. Despite these issues, online bridge has boomed during the various lockdowns, and national bridge organisations recognise that online bridge is here to stay in a (post) Covid world. This paper shows the ways in which online bridge is interconnected with other aspects of participants lives, thereby eschewing any easy distinction between online and offline worlds. Alongside this, we demonstrate how participants articulate online bridge as enabling connections across the globe, region and neighbourhood whilst also missing the feel of cards, the smell of bridge clubs and the chatter before and after games. This paper reveals the processes, practices and narratives older adults' engage in to maintain a much-loved leisure activity during a pandemic. It further reveals the important role technology plays in enabling leisure activities to be continued and developed in a time of serious health risk to older generations.

Keywords: bridge, pandemic, online/offline, older people, diary data

Mind Sports in Competition: Globalisation and Socio-political Influence at the Local Level – the Case of Bridge
Jose Julio Curado, Global Studies, Open University of Portugal

In the context of globalisation, games and sports - as congregating and bonding cultural elements - contribute to the existence of a global culture. Sports are an excellent medium for cultural and political influence, on account of their popularity and quick expansion. Even better for this purpose are mindsports, which are less circumscribed by gender, age, ethnicity, religion, and physique. Among mindsports, bridge may have an advantage in terms of promoting society-transforming policies, owing to some of its intrinsic characteristics: it is simultaneously competitive and cooperative; it requires decision-making

on the basis of incomplete information, which promotes the development of initiative and is hence a great tool for empowering girls and young women (especially in places where they are not encouraged in these attributes); it combines reasoning with social skills, with great benefits to the immune system, autonomy and wellbeing, especially in the elderly population. Could, therefore, bridge be an interesting way to promote a more inclusive, fair, and cohesive society, and at the same time increase longevity and social wellbeing? Tracking recent lines of investigation in the fields of the Sociology of Mind Sports and Bridge Sociology may help to answer such questions.

Building bridges: developing community and linking the intergenerational gap through contract bridge

Chris Panagiotaros, PhD Candidate School of Social Sciences, Western Sydney University

There has been a fracturing of relationships around the world – and loneliness continues to grow at prodigious rates. This breakdown of community is having distressing effects on our health and wellbeing. Social work, with its sound understanding of community development and grass-roots action, can play a pivotal role in restoring community connection. This involves a multiplicity of narratives with the prospect of developing new ways of being. Contract bridge is one avenue the profession can utilise. Bridge is a popular trick taking card game played in partnerships using a combination of short- and long-term memory. Partnership adds a collective element to the game where players work together to solve complex problems. The demographic of bridge players is overwhelmingly older people. Although, this article postulates that bridge can be taught to young people with positive communal implications. Linking the intergenerational gap through a shared activity is an endeavour that can create reciprocal benefits for both populations. The article will explore this idea through an auto-ethnography approach and semi-structured, in-depth interviews with three professional Australian bridge players. The data will be subsequently analysed using a thematic analysis. Alongside the joys of incremental improvement and deep concentration, bridge provides an exciting opportunity for social work to foster cohesiveness, reduce isolationism and restore community.

SESSION 3B

Between Equality and Discrimination: The paradox of the women's game in the mindsport bridge

Dr Ashley Rogers, School of Business, Abertay University

Gender differences in the sporting world are long-standing and historic. Couched often as biologically given, differences in the uptake, training and playing of sport, from hobby to elite Olympian, are riven with discourses, practices and attitudes regarding the different aptitudes of men and women (see the Caster Semenya furore). Recognising the ways these gendered differences operate is contentious and problematic, particularly in relation to women-only spaces. Such spaces are used often to promote the development and skills of women in leisure and sporting fields often dominated by men. Conversely however, such segregation is seen as perpetuating and reinforcing women's difference and inequality to

men. Using the case study of bridge (the card game), we analyse the ways in which the women's game is viewed as both hindering wider take-up of the game whilst also providing women spaces to compete internationally. Discussions with players, teachers and organisers of competitive, tournament and club bridge show how the women's game is riven with both inequality and opportunity. We conclude that in order for women to progress competitively within the mind-sport, greater attention must be paid to the training of coaches and the managing of sexist behaviours at and away from the bridge table. Until such changes are made, women will continue to face pressures to justify their success (and lack thereof) as a personal failing, rather than a structural issue that reflects ongoing hetero-patriarchal discourses.

Bridging Brains: Exploring Gendered Attitudes and Inequalities in a Mind-Sport
Professor Samantha Punch, Faculty of Social Sciences, University of Stirling; Elizabeth Graham; Charlotte McPherson; Miriam Snellgrove, Faculty of Social Sciences, University of Stirling

Bridge is enjoyed at multiple levels and in a diversity of environments by tens of millions of players, making it the most popular card game worldwide. Its challenging, complicated nature has seen it be declared a 'mind-sport' by many, with Paul Mendelson (2008, p.9) arguing that bridge is 'as taxing on the brain as a decathlon on the body'. As with most sports and leisure pursuits, bridge's player base and their performances feature inequalities. Whilst a roughly equal proportion of men and women play bridge, at the top level of the mind-sport male players significantly outperform female players worldwide. Using data from 40 semi-structured interviews, this paper explores the gendered assumptions that exist and are reproduced by elite bridge players. Many of the research participants draw on ideas of male brains being more rational, logical and competitive whereas women's brains are more emotive, caring and uncompetitive. These gendered stereotypes are used to explain and defend why more women are not playing at elite level. However, those women who do make it to the highest level are described in masculinist terms of success thereby demonstrating the socially constructed nature of elite bridge skill. Arguably then, using gendered brains as a defence for the lack of female representation at the top is a smokescreen that damages women's opportunities to progress. This article speaks to ongoing, systemic inequalities around gender in (mind) sport.

Bridging the Women-only Game: (Un)Equal Play in a Mindsport
Ashley Rogers, School of Business, Law and Social Sciences, Abertay University; Professor Samantha Punch, Faculty of Social Sciences, University of Stirling; Miriam Snellgrove, Faculty of Social Sciences, University of Stirling

Gender differences in the sporting world are long-standing and historic. Couched often as biologically given, differences in the uptake, training and playing of sport, from leisure activity to elite Olympian, are riven with discourses, practices and attitudes regarding the different aptitudes of men and women. Recognising the ways these gendered differences operate is contentious and problematic. Within leisure studies, the macro context of inequalities tends to be less frequently examined compared with the personal satisfaction

and transformative power of a particular leisure activity and sporting practice. Using the case study of the card game bridge, we explore how gender inequalities within a mind-sport are experienced and reproduced at a structural level and how this directly impacts women's (in particular) participation. Using email data from 151 participants, we analyse the ways in which segregation in the mind-sport is viewed as both hindering wider take-up of the game and providing women spaces to compete nationally and internationally. Discussions with players, teachers and organisers of club, tournament and international bridge show how the women's game is riven with both inequality and opportunity. We conclude that in order for women to progress competitively and equally within the mind-sport, greater attention must be paid to the training of coaches and the managing of sexist behaviours at and away from the bridge table. Until such changes are made, women will continue to face pressures to justify their success (and lack thereof) as a personal failing, rather than a structural issue.

DAY 4

SESSION 4B

Serious Leisure Experience in A Mind-Sport: Elite Player Motivations and Participation in Tournament Bridge

Zoe Russell, Faculty of Social Sciences, University of Stirling; Samantha Punch Faculty of Social Sciences, University of Stirling

International, elite level tournament bridge is a unique and interesting context to explore the dynamics of serious leisure experience. This paper presents qualitative sociological research of participation and motivations in this mind-sport, understood through the lens of the serious leisure perspective and complementary approaches of social worlds, leisure experiences, and recreation specialisation. The study is based on in-depth interviews with 52 elite players of bridge from the US and Europe. The findings pertain to motivations as they emerge through social interaction involving individual and interpersonal dynamics and agency whilst being shaped by wider structural constraints. The experience of motivations are contextually specific and shaped in relation to career contingencies and turning points, associated with a differentiation of professionals and amateurs within this elite social world. As a case study, an exploration of the motivations of elite bridge players offers empirical insights that can inform a multi-paradigmatic approach to theories of leisure experience.

Developing a Marketing Strategy for Mindsport: Insights and Motivations

Esme Nicholson and Christina Ballinger (Bridge 2 Bridge), Jordan Maclean and Professor Samantha Punch (BAMSA), Professor Maurice Biriotti (Bridge 2 Bridge)

Bridge is often stigmatised as a dull card game played by older people. The Bridging Insights project aims to revitalise the mindsport by developing a marketing campaign strategy that can promote bridge to the widest possible audience. In particular, the focus will be on attracting younger players rather than the pre-retiree group, which is more commonly

targeted by the bridge community. The project is inspired by an arts-based methodology (Leavy 2020) of focus groups and diary methods. Small group workshops will take place at the Bridging Academia, Policy and Practice virtual conference, where academics and members of the bridge community will be encouraged to discuss how four different 'ideal types' fit in with their own experiences of bridge (or not). The four ideal types of self-improver, competitor, socialiser and mind-gamer have emerged from various sources, including previous BAMSAs research in partnership with English Bridge Education and Development. The outcome of this first stage is to develop narratives (Kim 2015) in the form of short stories based on ideal types of bridge players. The responses will inform the questions that will be used in part two's focus groups with non-bridge players. Ultimately, the narratives will lead to the formation of a marketing strategy and best practice guidelines for promoting the game of bridge to new players. A diary method (Barlett and Milligan 2020; Hyers 2018) will also be used for documenting the research process on the collaborative workings between academics and a marketing research team. The partnership has the potential to produce insights for both academics and practitioners beyond the world of bridge.