

The Professional Bridge Player: Devotee Work




 Bridge: A MindSport For All
 Connects People. Challenges Minds

The Professional Bridge Player: Devotee Work

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The Sociology of Bridge

- Elite bridge is a serious leisure pursuit
- Interviews conducted with 52 elite players spanning US, UK and Europe
- *This paper focuses on understanding bridge as a profession*



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Theoretical and Concept Context

Devotee Work:

The main difference between serious leisure and devotee work is that the latter is so attractive to those that engage in it, that work is essentially leisure and, unlike the former, workers are paid for their efforts. (Stebbins 2004)


Powerful devotion to an activity one is proud to be in

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Blurred boundaries and the concept of liminality

Liminality is a concept that refers to states of ambiguity, imperceptibility, intermediacy and as Vincent Mosco (2004, p.32) describes it, a “sense of betwixt and between”.

Useful as a way of understanding a complex social world that is professionalising and blurring the boundaries between work and leisure for participants




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Bridge as work: not a proper job?

I suppose it's tradition as much as anything. In my younger days, it wasn't seen as being something that you ever made a living out of. It's difficult to come round to the conclusion that it now is a serious way of actually earning one's living. I think one element of the problem of earning your living through bridge, is how you have to do it.

(Tony Forrester, UK)




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Earning a living doing something you love

Basically, work is three tournaments a year and I don't have to go to the office every day. I have a lot of freedom, whereas most people get up, go to the office, go home, have good, and then go to sleep. I don't live that schedule. I get up at eleven o'clock in the morning and I stay up at night, so I don't live the standard life.

(Marion Michielson, The Netherlands)



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Feeling bridged out...

Now, I play bridge because it's my living and it's fair to say that because of the type of partner I get playing professionally, a certain amount of the enjoyment of the game has been gradually knocked out of me.

(Brian Senior, UK)



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Blurring the boundaries between work and leisure

Professional players can move between positive and negative experiences, dependent on:

- the playing context (specific relationships with a paid client and the kind of bridge one plays)
- wider circumstances as a player (whether there are sustained opportunities for income)
- and the associated pressures of seeking income from bridge

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Blurring the boundaries between work and leisure

- The elite community as a liminal space for amateurs and professionals
- Some however maintain the boundaries
- The range of experiences from 'permanent holiday' to prostituting one's leisure



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Conclusion

- Devotee work is possible in elite bridge for professionals - its effects though are diverse for players
- An amateur/professional distinction as a key factor for understanding the blurring of work-leisure
- Whilst boundaries blur for some players, they remain rigid for others giving elite bridge a tendency to exist in a liminal space



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