



Bridge: A MindSport For All

Connects People, Challenges Minds

Summary Report Session 1B – Wellbeing and Bridge

The *Bridge: A MindSport for All* (BAMSA) Conference 2021 was attended by academics, administrators and bridge players from 62 countries. Session 1B focused on Wellbeing and Bridge. The full report was compiled by Miriam Snellgrove and Camilla Barnett, and the recording and advance presentations can be accessed [here](#).

The session started with a welcome from Prof. Samantha Punch of the University of Stirling and BAMSA project lead. Prof. Punch introduced Professor Martin Seligman as a world-leading mental health expert and lifelong bridge player. Prof. Seligman addressed for the first time how he is bringing his two passions together in applying his PERMA theory of wellbeing to bridge. PERMA stands for the five pillars of wellbeing: Positive Emotion, Engagement, Relationships, Meaning, and Accomplishment. Prof Seligman explained how PERMA can be usefully applied to understanding wellbeing and the motivations behind why people play bridge. He went on to discuss two types of cognition (automatic and deliberate) and how this relates to playing bridge, ageing, and dementia. Noting the potential benefits of bridge playing to wellbeing and cognition in older age.

In his address, Prof. Seligman combined PERMA anecdotally with bridge and asked participants to identify which aspect of PERMA spoke most to them; it would be useful to engage in a more robust application of PERMA to real-life motivations and interest in playing bridge. Given the global decline of bridge as a mindsport, understanding motivations to play such a time-intensive game could be valuable for further marketing of bridge.

Following Prof Seligman's keynote address, Prof. Punch Launched her new book 'Bridge at the Top: Behind the Screens' (Master Point Press). Prof. Punch discussed her book with the publisher Ray Lee and two elite Bridge players interviewed in the book Jill Levin and Chip Martel. Prof. Punch described how this book was really where BAMSA began, a case study of what goes on at the bridge table. All panel members discussed the importance of bridge to their lives including meeting their spouses and family connections to the game. They then discussed making money at bridge at the potential avenues for this as a professional player. It was noted that people who make money at bridge could make money doing something else but choose bridge because of love of the game.

The panel then discussed difficult and challenging partners and negative comments made at the table and how this behaviour can put players off despite a love of the game. In particular, they discussed the ongoing and systemic experiences of sexism and gender inequality within the game. Academic and in particular feminist research has long highlighted that equality within leisure and sporting contexts needs to tackle the structural inequalities present within the game. This is an important avenue for future research in creating a more inclusive environment in bridge to ensure its survival.

The keynote and book launch covered bridge play amongst older and more elite players, future research needs to take into account the views and experiences of younger novice players. BAMSA's next research project 'Bridge in Schools' will tackle this gap in the bridge world which will speak to issues around recruitment and retainment. This could also be a golden opportunity to apply Seligman's PERMA theory of wellbeing to young people playing bridge in schools.

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