



Bridge: A MindSport For All

Connects People, Challenges Minds

Bridging Brains:

Exploring Gendered Attitudes and Inequalities in a MindSport

Punch, S., Snellgrove, M.L., Graham, E., McPherson, C. and Cleary, J. (Forthcoming) 'Bridging Brains: Exploring Neurosexism and Gendered Stereotypes in a MindSport', *Leisure/Loisir Journal*.

Summary

Within the worlds of leisure and sport, the different aptitudes of men and women are well documented. In elite sport, men are consistently presented as stronger, faster and more competitive than women. For most leisure activities, differences in physical attributes are not relevant. In mindsports like bridge and chess, male domination is conventionally explained as being rooted in differences between male and female brains. In Western cultures, the male mind is characterised by logic, rationality and objectivity whereas emotion has historically been associated with women. Aggressive mentalities are more likely to be emphasised in a boy's childhood rather than a girl's. As a result, men and women are socialised from an early age into culturally appropriate gendered behaviours.

This paper explores the ways in which gender disparity and inequality in bridge is understood, explained and reproduced. In bridge, men players strongly outperform women players worldwide. Elite events are stratified along gender lines, with separate open and women's events. This paper explores gendered assumptions for why women are less successful in elite bridge compared with men, drawing on neurosexist and behaviourist explanations. It uses data from in-depth interviews with 52 elite players from the USA and Europe.

The full paper discusses neurosexism and behaviourist attitudes from an academic viewpoint and is likely to be available by the end of 2022. It argues that gender stereotypes and neurosexism can actively reproduce inequality within the game to the detriment of women bridge players. The future continuity of bridge relies on it being an inclusive and welcoming (as well as competitive and challenging) mindsport. Possible solutions include a gender policy, awareness-raising and unconscious bias training.

BAMSA Project Lead: Professor Samantha Punch

Email: bamsa@stir.ac.uk



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