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Bridge: A MindSport For All
Connects People, Challenges Minds

<https://bridgemindsport.org/>

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“Bridge is a good vessel for socialising”

Community, belonging, and
connection among young bridge
players

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Leisure Studies Association Conference, 2026



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1

Research approach

- How does community and partnership function in young people's experience of bridge?
- What draws young people to a pursuit associated with an ageing demographic (intergenerationality)?
- How do young players navigate physical and digital spaces?

Aim: examine youth leisure practices and connections with heritage through the case study of bridge

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2

What is bridge?



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The card game bridge



Queen of card games:

Endless card combinations



The card version of chess:

Skill, not luck



A classic game:

Played since 1925

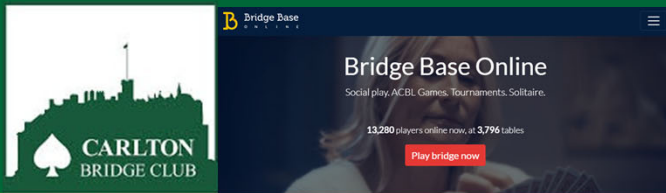


A mindsport:

Competition and strategy but no need for athleticism

4

Who plays bridge, and where?



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5



6

Interviews with **40** young people aged 13-31

Also, interviews with **32** parents, **40** bridge teachers, and **52** schoolteachers, head teachers and school staff members, **20** focus groups with pupils, survey of **909** young bridge players

Starting point in the literature: The "loss of community" narrative

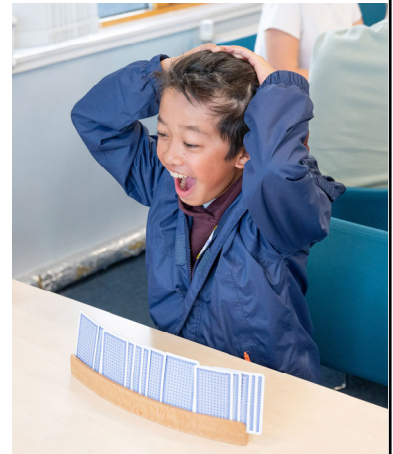
- Tönnies (2017): the shift from Gemeinschaft (community) to Gesellschaft (association without cohesion)
- Scholars lamenting the loss of community ties: Durkheim (1984), Putnam (2000), Bauman (2001) brought on by urbanisation and individualisation
- The impact of technology: rising loneliness among the most digitally connected generation in history (Batsleer & Duggan, 2020)



Counterpoint:

Finding community alive and well

- People actively resist and reshape structural conditions through shared agency (Crow, 2002)
- A community collapse narrative set against studies finding community "alive and well" (Abrams, 1984)
- Serious leisure as one site where the desire for community is met (Stebbins, 2020)



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9

Loss or change of community organising?

An emphasis on space and belonging

- Oldenburg's (1989) concept of third places has been central to discussions: the closure or neglect of libraries, youth centres, parks & green spaces
- Third places reimagined in the information age – can third places be digital? (Yuen and Johnson, 2016)
- Elliott and Urry's (2010) reflections on technology: miniaturised mobilities, network capital, portable personhood, 'meetingness'



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10

Theorising community and partnership in bridge

Communities of Practice

Lave & Wenger (1991): learning as situated participation in a community of practice

Shared *practice*: conventions, meanings, and the repertoire of play

Simmel's dyad

Simmel (1950): the dyad is a unique social form, dependent on both members, with no majority to outvote the individual

Gap in knowledge: Community is often the unit of analysis – how does it relate to partnership?

Findings



Community as motive and medium

- The **partnership** in bridge creates particularly enduring relationships
- One cannot play without **communicating**, which lowers social barriers for even reserved players
- Socialising for **fun** and socialising for **strategy**

*The best bit for me is just the **sociality** of it, the number of lifelong friends who I've met through bridge who I will keep for the rest of my life.*

*I have friends through school, I don't want to slag them off in any way, but my friends from bridge are probably going to be **longer-lasting** and I'm better friends with people I've met through bridge than I am with people I've met in any other way.*

(Craig, 15, England)



From dyad to community

- Bridge is a “**community of practice**” (Cole, 30, USA)
- **Enculturation** through learning rules, conventions, and terminology (the jargon) as a dyad
- **Nested** levels: partnership dyad -> community

We had our moments where I would say, “Well why did you put that bid out? That doesn’t make any sense. I can’t play you on that.” So then I would try and outbid and he said, “Well I can’t do that.”

*So we had our moments to the point where our competitors are looking at us like, **are you partners or are you competing with each other**, what’s happening here.*

(Abi, 23, USA)



Intergenerationality

- “**Age is just a number**”: bridge communities are intergenerational
- Access to **life experience, mentorship, and social capital**
- **Tensions**: a sense of rigidity and formality

*You sit down at a bridge table and play against former top lawyers, you meet former political leaders, you meet people who have lived these **vast and varied and experienced lives** and who are always happy to share a story.*

*We decided we were going to rock up and see if a game was available. We were told it was Teams’ night and that **we should have known** because it was the first Wednesday of the month and it was always like that since the dawn of time.*

(Bruce, 19, Scotland)



Navigating between digital and physical spaces

- Digital natives prefer **in-person bridge**, reconstituting *Gemeinschaft* within, and against, the conditions of *Gesellschaft* (Tönnies & Loomis, 2017)
- Online play is seen as a **substitute**, and somewhat synthetic in comparison
- Screen fatigue post-COVID persists

*I want to touch the cards. **It's like a different game for me, really.***

When I touch the cards, it feels more realistic and I can picture things in my head, but when it's online, it's on the screen, I'm just not used to it, and it doesn't feel real enough for me.

(Harry, 23, Scotland)



Conclusions

Young people's participation in a classic serious leisure pursuit and preference for in-person play are reflective of the desire for **community in late modernity**.

Community is indeed "alive and well" but **reorganised pragmatically across physical and digital realms**, with some resistance against the digital.

Community may be **experienced dyadically** and not individually, particularly in the mindsport bridge, where partnership is built into the very fabric of the game.



17

Questions and suggestions

Thoughts on community in late modernity?

Do any other theoretical and literature connections spring to mind?



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18



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Thank you



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19

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20