

Competition and Mental Exercise in a Mind Sport:

Building Bridges of Fun and Friendship

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Introduction

The Sociology of Bridge is a new and emerging field of study. The card game of bridge is widely played, and is a stimulating social activity in which players are challenged to develop and practice their skills, focus and concentration. This paper is part of a wider examination of bridge from both sociological and neurological perspectives (Graham and Punch, 2016; McDonnell et al., 2017). A partnership between the UK charity, English Bridge Education and Development (EBED), and the University of Stirling, is currently investigating the health and wellbeing benefits of playing bridge, with a particular focus on dementia (Ashworth et al., 2016). Developing an understanding of what drives individuals to play bridge is at the heart of this paper.

The EBED/Stirling partnership conducted a survey in order to explore the link between playing bridge and subjective measures of quality of life. Over 7000 individuals, both bridge players and non-bridge players from the UK and beyond responded to the survey during the summer of 2016, with the vast majority of these individuals being bridge players in either England or Scotland. The study compared the responses of more than 6,400 bridge players with over 10,000 responses from wave six of the English Longitudinal Study of Ageing. The survey found that individuals who play bridge have higher levels of overall wellbeing than those who do not play (McDonnell et al., 2017). This paper examines bridge players' responses to an open-ended question on why people play bridge.

Methods

Respondents were asked to write a line or two, providing the reasons why they play bridge. This generated 6373 answers which were then split into the four age categories: Under 25s, 25-34s, 35-54s, and over 55s. The breakdown of how many people were in each sample is presented in the table below:

Age Group	Female	Male	Total
Under 25	10	30	40
25-34	7	35	42
35-54	149	212	361
55+	2974	2956	5930
All Groups	3140	3233	6373

The bulk of the sample (5930 respondents out of 6373 analysed) consisted of over 55s. Many of the themes and percentages refer to the results of all the age groups combined, however themes which applied only to the over 55s are mentioned. The younger age categories (under 25s, 25-34s, and 35-54s) are underrepresented when compared with the over 55s. Answers were organised into overall themes and will be presented and discussed throughout the report. The number of reasons for playing bridge are shown in the table below:

Total Number of Reasons From All Age Groups						
Total Sample Size: 6373						
Reasons	Gender		Total	Female %	Male %	Total %
	Female	Male				
Total Responses by Gender	3140	3233	6373			
1 Reason	1314	1483	2797	42%	46%	44%
2 Reasons	1176	1163	2339	37%	36%	37%
3+ Reasons	646	591	1237	21%	18%	19%

Initially, responses were read multiple times until general themes were created, which evolved and were expanded on as the analysis took place. The themes were broad, and covered a wide range of answers e.g. Enjoyment covered answers that included 'enjoy it', to 'fun' etc. This was a result of the volume of answers, and the time constraints of the analysis. As the analysis progressed, sub-themes emerged to capture the individual diversity of answers.

To create a manageable set of themes, a research diary was created which served to note down emerging themes, and to create a more detailed analysis that the generic theme framework could not show. This allowed the researcher to explore what themes were most prominent. Therefore, nuances within this data set are expanded on in the analysis, while it is acknowledged that the thematic framework may appear generic.

Within the results, tables will be used for percentages of the total sample and divided by age group to show how prominent themes were across age. Where there is a significant gender difference, this will be noted. Lastly when quoting respondents, the codes (82 F, over 55) is used to denote the number of the respondent, their gender, and the age group they belong to respectively.

Results

The main themes that emerged from the survey were that people play bridge for the enjoyment (51.6%), social interaction (32%), and the mental challenge (37.5%). These were divided into 31 subthemes which are shown in smaller tables at the start of each section. The 31 sub-themes were only applicable for the over 55s, 0% is used to denote where they did not feature, or were not applicable to the younger age categories (See the Appendix for theme tables in full).

Enjoyment

Age Category		Under 25s %	25-34 %	35-54 %	Over 55 %	Total % All Age Groups
Total responses by Age Group		0.6%	0.7%	5.7%	93%	100%
Theme	Sub-Theme					
Enjoy	Enjoy Game	55%	54.8%	53.2%	51.5%	51.6%
	Enjoy Challenge	0%	0%	0%	12.6%	11.7%
	Development Fun	0%	0%	4.2%	0.7%	0.9%

Enjoying bridge was prominent within all the age categories (51.6%). People reported that the game was fun, or enjoyable, that it was addictive, and/or interesting. One word answers of enjoyment, or fun, were common, sometimes in tandem with others – usually social interaction, friends, or the challenge bridge provides to one’s brain. However, enjoyment was also more nuanced, and as the results were analysed it was noticed that fun could be many things. For example, enjoying the challenges of playing bridge (11.7%), where the mentally stimulating aspect was the fun part of playing, enjoyment from social interaction with others, or enjoyment in having a night out. Some people (5.5%) highlighted that they enjoyed the problem-solving aspects, and the reasoning of the game, for example:

Very stimulating. Every hand is new, never get bored. Can play bridge by the 'rules' but every rule has exceptions. Sometimes find gems. (3070 M, over 55)

I enjoy the challenge and the mixture of logical deduction and luck. (218 F, over 55)

These quotes are interesting as they suggest that bridge has a logical, rational component, which people enjoy and find invigorating. They also suggest that bridge allows people to think creatively and critically about the rules of play, and how one works the rules in one's favour in a timed environment. However, the latter quote also highlights a luck aspect to the game, like any card game where the order of the cards is unpredictable, meaning it requires one to adapt to new situations and states of play. This will be returned to when exploring the mentally challenging aspects of bridge.

Few people expressed directly the fun in developing as a player (0.9%), therefore whether the process of learning and improving in the game is something people enjoy and is a major reason for playing could not be explored in-depth. A few people mentioned the game to be frustrating and when they did speak of it, it tended to be in juxtaposition of enjoyment:

Absorbing, love it, frustrating, challenging, social, addictive, satisfying. (870 F, over 55)

I love card games - and bridge is the best - challenging, enjoyable, satisfying AND frustrating. (3405 M, over 55)

In these instances, the aspects of the game which were irritating, or negative, did not detract from the overall fun and it is suggested they are integral to the challenge.

Social Interaction

Age Category		Under 25s %	25-34 %	35-54 %	Over 55 %	Total % All Age Groups
Total responses by Age Group						
Social Interaction	Social Interaction	22.5%	31%	25.5%	32.4%	32%
	Friendship	0%	7.1%	3%	3.3%	3.3%
	Team/Partnership	0%	2.4%	2.8%	1.6%	1.6%

The fun of social interaction and enjoyment of having company was another major reason people expressed for being involved in bridge (32%). Responses analysed separately from the previous

enjoyment theme range from social interaction and meeting new people, to friends and a sense of belonging. With hindsight, an additional theme of community would have been beneficial as a separate code to capture the expressions of appreciation for the socially welcoming atmosphere people felt when playing bridge²:

It is fun, sociable and interesting. The people at the various clubs I go to are very welcoming and there is always room for improvement. (3 F, under 25)

I have always liked competitive strategy games. I am still learning the game and want to see how good I can get. There is also a real bridge community with some genuine polymaths to socialise with that is highly intellectually stimulating. (177 M, 35-54)

For the stimulation and interaction as well as a form of meeting people. As having recently returned from abroad after many, many years it got me back into the community. (1698 F, over 55)

These quotes suggest that for all ages, bridge can take place in a welcoming and enjoyable environment. What they convey is that bridge is a game that is good for enabling people to engage in social interaction. The data also suggested the importance of social interaction was more important to women (37.2%) than men (26.8%), although it is not clear why this might be the case. In the case of the latter quote it is implied bridge is a good game to help form connections with people when travelling to new places as demonstrated by the combined percentage of the themes *getting out* and *going places* (2.7%). This is mentioned as it was a theme picked up by some other players:

I learned as a way to get to know new people when I moved city. I am now in charge of bridge at the school I teach in and am picking up my interest again after several years away from the game. (29 M, 25-34)

Social activity. New to city, to meet people. (185 M, 35-54)

Although not mentioned by a large number of people, it emphasises that people identified a community around bridge which was welcoming and supportive. It is also suggested that once involved in the community other doors may open – for example forming clubs can develop one's

² Many expressions of the enjoyment of social interaction implied the interaction was taking place in a club. This was presumed unless stated otherwise by someone e.g. through playing with family at home, or online.

organisational skills outside of playing bridge, and improve one's communication skills and social networks. Bridge players being part of a community was stressed in other ways, such as support when grieving for a loved one:

My husband died six years ago. A girlfriend suggested bridge. It's amazing! The mental disciplines help me cope with the tsunami of emotion that rolls but never breaks. (1294 F, over 55)

For enjoyment and social side. After husband death the members rallied around and got me out of the house to take up a social life again. (1955 F, over 55)

After my wife died when I was 50, my in-laws taught me bridge and it created a social life I did not have. (5489 F, over 55)

Since being widowed it gives me greater opportunities to socialise as well as being enjoyable. (3367 M, over 55)

Therefore, social interaction encompassed several aspects: meeting new people, supportive community networks, and a place to foster valuable connections. It also raises interesting questions for whether relationships formed in bridge club settings foster relationships out with bridge clubs. Additionally, it is implied that bridge may be a good activity to help those while they are grieving through fostering social interaction and a friendly atmosphere, through a mentally stimulating and enjoyable game.

Friendship and Partnerships

Friendship was another area people cited in their reasons for playing bridge (3.3%). Though not as large as social interaction, there was an indication that the friends people had made in playing bridge was a motivation for going to bridge clubs:

Socialise and catch-up with friends doing an activity we both enjoy. (26 M, 25-34)

Great blend of skill, luck & social. I have a group of friends that I've taught to play & it's one of the ways we keep in touch. (180 M, 35-54)

Aid my concentration and improve my memory. To meet new friends and enlarge my social group. (728 F, over 55)

As well as forming new social networks, bridge is implied as a means to strengthen and maintain existing ones. It also highlights the companionship and bonds a shared hobby can enable people to

have. It can be suggested that bridge creates opportunities for social relationships which people value, and that these relationships can potentially offer support and belonging.

Some people highlighted their preference of bridge over other games because of the social aspects it entails, particularly given that it is always a partnership game and sometimes a team game:

It's relaxing and demanding. It's more sociable than chess because you have to form a partnership. (4840 M, over 55)

Compared to chess (which I learned when younger) it is more sociable and less soul-destroying / complicated. (5159 M, over 55)

Partnerships and teams were mostly referenced by the men over 55 (2.2%), indicating the relational aspects of the game. Why partnerships over friendships was mentioned is not certain, neither is whether bridge partners would be described as friends.

I enjoy the challenge. Also, I enjoy being part of a team/ partnership. (3739 M, over 55)

This quote indicates that there is a sense of belonging in relation to being on a bridge team or having a partnership and being part of a group within a mind sport. These quotes suggest partnerships/teams can promote a sense of belonging:

To challenge myself, for partnership and team achievement, and to achieve the highest standard of which I am capable. (5002 M, over 55)

Each hand a new challenge enjoy getting partnerships to work. (5186 M, over 55)

Not for social. Mental exercise - as a partnership. (3709 M, over 55)

In these cases, partnerships offer a strategic purpose for self-improvement or to perform better at playing the game within a partnership. This makes their relation to friendship less clear. Despite this, some people mentioned having a spouse as their bridge partner, and in these examples playing bridge was a way to spend time together as a couple:

My wife and I wanted something to do together once a week when we had a regular babysitter. As we both played other card games and were logically minded (maths grads) we took up bridge. (4485 M, over 55)

This indicates partnerships were not only viewed as a way to maximise one’s own game development, but could also be social relationships between spouses. Whilst the intricacies and dynamics of partnerships could not be explored from the survey data, there were indications that bridge could foster a sense of belonging to a wider community. Bridge partnerships do indicate that bridge offers a wide array of social interactions from friendships to in-game partnerships, which increases people’s social interaction, communication with others, and fosters different types of social engagement.

Only the responses which explicitly referred to friends were grouped under the theme of friendship. This was due to concerns that the social bonds people expressed as enjoying while playing bridge would be overstated. However, overall the data suggests that bridge offers a supportive community in many different ways. Whether the relationships involve friends or acquaintances, what is most important to respondents is the act of getting out and meeting people, interacting and having fun playing a game that enables one to use and challenge their brain.

Bridge and Community

Age Category		Under 25s %	25-34 %	35-54 %	Over 55 %	Total % All Age Groups
Total responses by Age Group						
Places	Getting Out	0%	0%	0.6%	2.3%	2.2%
	Going Places	2.5%	2.4%	0.6%	0.4%	0.5%

A smaller theme, but one that was still present throughout the analysis, was that playing bridge enabled people to get out of the house. This was mostly prevalent in the over 55s (2.3% of over 55s), with only a few from the second biggest age category 35-54 mentioning getting out of the house (0.6% of 34-54s). Whether this is due to age or sample size disparities would need further study, however it implies social bridge communities are an important resource for older people to use in the community:

It is sociable, gets me out of the house and keeps my brain active. (83 F, 35-55)

Initially to get out of the house. (152 F, over 55)

I am good at the game. It fascinates me. I like doing something I can win at. It gets me out of the house and with people. It gives me focus. I get positive feedback. When things go well I feel good. (4574 M, over 55)

These quotes suggest that bridge and bridge clubs enable people to engage in social interaction that people find meaningful, e.g. the game is fun to play and is linked to valued social relations and friendships. The last quote indicates how many of the themes within this analysis intersected, emphasising that bridge fosters connection and a sense of community. A small section of people mentioned being good at the game, and playing because they felt they were good (1.2%). The last quote implies that feeling as though one is good at the game, coupled with a supportive environment, and an interest in the game, can boost people's self-confidence. This was stark within the over 55s (1.8%) who highlighted bridge was a hobby played in illness, and/or older age, as it facilitated competition, social interaction and something which was accessible when people's physical health declined:

The challenge of it, meeting up with friends, testing my memory! (319 F, over 55)

I enjoy the game. It is good mental exercise and meet up with friends. (5493 M, over 55)

Such quotes suggest that getting out has a strong link to social interaction and lessens the possibility of social isolation. One player revealed that bridge could also be a reprieve from caring:

I love the challenge of constantly trying to improve my skills and up my game. I began whilst caring for my husband who had dementia for many years. It gave me a lifeline and opened up a whole new range of possibilities and kept me afloat through the darkest days. Walking into the club, greeting friends, chatting, then being totally absorbed by the bidding and playing of each hand is a wonderful way to spend a happy and sociable evening with the huge bonus of enhancing brain power. (2406 F, over 55)

In relation to older age, sickness, and care, bridge may offer a reprieve from potentially stressful caring relationships, enabling social interaction and a relaxing environment with mental challenges. This could mediate some of the social isolation which can occur when people provide family care. Overall the data shows that some people play bridge to get out of the house more often, in turn leading to people becoming part of a community.

Mental challenge

Age Category		Under 25s %	25-34 %	35-54 %	Over 55 %	Total % All Age Groups
Total responses by Age Group						
Challenge	Skill Progression	5%	14.3%	3.9%	2.4%	2.6%
	Problem Solving	12.5%	11.9%	5.5%	5.4%	5.5%
	Competition	10%	9.5%	16.6%	12.3%	12.6%
	Mental Stimulation	35%	33.3%	47.1%	36.9%	37.5%
	Memory Stimulation	0%	0%	0%	1%	1%
	Learning New Things	0%	0%	0%	2.4%	2.3%
Success	Good At	2.5%	0%	1.4%	1.2%	1.2%
	Winning	0%	0%	3.3%	1.7%	1.8%
	Rewarding	5%	0%	1.9%	1.9%	1.9%
	Achievement	0%	0%	0.3%	0.3%	0.3%

Throughout all the age categories, the theme that bridge was a form of mental exercise was expressed widely (37.5%). People tended to relate this to bridge being the equivalent of a mental workout:

Fun, exercises mind. (30 M, under 25)

Because I enjoy the competition, the mental exercise and the social interaction. (78 F 35-54)

I enjoy the mental gymnastics. (4324 M, over 55)

The mental challenge bridge presents was strongly indicated by the players. While this could generically refer to a challenge, there was another theme where bridge was frequently referred to as mental exercise. People spoke of bridge in terms of work outs, gymnastics, and exercise carried out mentally. This was interesting as bridge was then implied to be played as a mental sport, which was usually one part of a reason for playing. In other words, some people said they enjoyed how bridge challenged their brain and thinking, others felt it to be a productive 'worthwhile' pastime which was better than watching television:

To meet people. To stimulate the brain. Anything is better than the rubbish on TV. (1927 F, over 55)

One can always improve at bridge. The mental challenge, judgement, assessment, interpretation, desire to win, meet people, worthwhile activity. (3574 M, over 55)

Love the thought process, the social aspect and time away from the TV. (4488 M, over 55)

The brain is suggested to be something which should be challenged, engaged, and developed. It is implied through this survey that television is not a way to engage the brain or foster social interaction. By comparison, playing bridge was considered to be a productive use of time. This was particularly emphasised when the quotes were placed in a context of older age with mentions of activities to play in retirement. Bridge was also often referred to as a sport.

Bridge, as a sport, was mentioned as people from all age groups expressed competitiveness as a reason for playing (12.6%). Men spoke more about competition than women (men: 15.5%, women: 9.5%) as a whole. However, the reasons for playing due to being competitive or enjoying the competition of the game were the same for men and women:

It is a competitive, challenging game of skill. (12 M, under 25)

Because I'm competitive. (39 M, 25-34)

Friendly competition. An enjoyable evening's entertainment. (1980 F, over 55)

It was suggested that this competition was inherent in the game, but also because people themselves identified as being competitive. It is less clear whether this competitiveness impacted people's experiences of enjoying bridge; hostile competitiveness was not spoken about:

It's an interesting game, challenging, I like to improve when I learn something. I'm quite competitive, though I am a good loser. (1176 F, over 55)

I enjoy the challenge and the camaraderie shared at our local bridge clubs. (2673 F, over 55)

These quotes suggest that competitiveness in itself does not detract from the friendly atmosphere within bridge clubs. People also professed to playing as it was something they felt they were good at (1.2%), with a slightly higher proportion of people saying they liked to win (1.8%). This implies that people play because they like to win and winning feels good. Again, however, the dominance of competition as being friendly suggests playing to win is not a single-minded determination. Winning and losing takes place in social contexts within competition that is friendly:

To win. (68 F, 35-54)

Brain feel active – socialise with meaning – confidence building – achievement in winning without being aggressive towards others – developing partnership. (315 F, over 55)

To win. (3196 M, over 55)

I like the intellectual and mathematical challenge. I like the social side of the game. I love winning. (4060 M, over 55)

While some responses of winning had little context, when they were contextualised, winning tended to occur within social relations linked to the enjoyment of social aspects of the game. Winning as an achievement (0.3%) – again a smaller theme – could be important in boosting self-confidence and spirits – as will be expanded on in the next section.

Bridge as a hobby and as a leisure activity in older age/illness

Age Category		Under 25s %	25-34 %	35-54 %	Over 55 %	Total % All Age Groups
Total responses by Age Group						
Hobby	Hobby (general)	7.5%	7.1%	2.2%	2.3%	2.4%
	Hobby in Older Age/Illness	0%	0%	0%	1.8%	1.6%

Bridge as a hobby was mentioned by participants of all ages. It was seen as something to do, or as something to pass the time:

Something to do. (11 F, under 25)

Social life, hobby. (4 F, 25-34)

Bridge is a hobby, a challenge, way to prove myself, always gives you something new. But also a society where I met most of my friends. (220 M, 35-54)

Unsurprisingly, bridge as a hobby again stresses the intellectual nature of the game, and of bridge as a purposeful activity. Bridge as a hobby in older age and/or illness was overwhelmingly restricted to the over 55 category (1.8% of over 55s, 1.6% in the context of the whole sample), and some saw it as an investment for later life:

I enjoy learning something new. I am still having lessons. I hope it will keep my mind active as I get older. (69 F, 35-54)

Investment in my old age. (1353 M, over 55)

To be able to stay socially active when I am old and to keep the little grey cells in trim. (4951 M, over 55)

This returns to the notion that bridge is a way to exercise the mind, a form of sport and a healthy mental exercise. While keeping the mind active in the first quote above is implied to mean how someone engages their brain and logical reasoning, the second quote refers to bridge as an important means to remain socially active. This creates various perspectives on health as an engagement and the continued use of mental reasoning abilities; with social activity and communication with others as an important reason for playing bridge in older age. It returns to the idea of bridge and bridge clubs fostering a collective sense of wellbeing and belonging through socialising and forming relationships, engaging one's brain, and having fun.

Achievement was also found to be more prevalent in men rather than women as a reason for playing bridge (0.5% of men compared to 0.1% of women). Why this might be the case is beyond the scope of this dataset. Yet what this implies is that winning at bridge games can boost one's confidence possibly in relation to one's reasoning skills given that participants (37.5%) play and value the game for its mentally challenging aspects. Reasoning abilities, socialising, and getting out of the house were perceived as important parts of a leisure activity in older age when physical abilities were likely to decline, or in cases where physical abilities to compete in active sports had declined. Additionally, it was suggested in cases of illness and disability that bridge offered an inclusive, accessible mind sport for people to play:

It is fun, and provided I can get there, no disadvantage to being disabled. (5578 M, over 55)

Cheap, accessible (husband, sometimes partner) uses a wheelchair so it is an activity we can do together. (431 F, over 55)

I enjoyed all sports and when I was disabled I had to take on something to fill in and I got hooked into bridge. (2297 F, over 55)

Again, this was a small subset within the overall sample. However, it is suggested that bridge can be a fun pastime for people who are no longer able to take part in physically demanding sports. As in the last quotation, games like bridge could be a good replacement to take up if strenuous physical activity is no longer a viable option for someone through illness or disability. It may enable a

supportive, accessible, and social environment, combined with a sense of achievement. This can also apply in older age if someone feels they cannot engage in sports like they used to:

I like it and I need a hobby which I will be able to do into old age when I can no longer bowl. (1457 F, over 55)

Goes with golf! 93-year-old mother still plays, and it has kept her involved. (654 F, over 55)

This further suggests bridge can aid friendship and social interaction in older age, and that it is an investment in the future where current physical levels of activity may not be viable.

Bridge and Dementia

Age Category		Under 25s %	25-34 %	35-54 %	Over 55 %	Total % All Age Groups
Total responses by Age Group						
Challenge	Memory Stimulation	0%	0%	0%	1%	1%

Family was mentioned by a small portion of the sample who explicitly stated that they play bridge to improve their memory (1%), or to try and mitigate the onset of dementia where there is a family history. Several of the participants (1.8%) mentioned family members playing as a reason to take up bridge:

My dad got me into it. (1 F, under 25)

Quality time with my mother! (18 F, 35-54)

Because my wife's family played and I felt left out. (3761 M, over 55)

A minority of players who played since childhood (0.4%), specifically referred to having been taught bridge by family members (0.1%). Thus, for some players, a spouse or parent playing bridge may have determined the likelihood of their playing, but this was not always the case:

Enjoy, stimulating, wife likes me out of the house 2 nights per week so she can watch her rubbishy TV in peace! (3896 M, over 55)

While only a few of the few quotes stated a lack of family involvement, involvement of one family member in bridge does not necessarily mean others will take it up as an interest. However, given the response to a different question in the survey, it is likely that playing bridge creates a stronger bond

between family members through having a shared activity and that one is more influenced to play bridge if those around them are involved in the game (see McDonnell et al.).

Two of the main reasons for playing bridge - social interaction, and a mentally stimulating game - are also suggested as factors to decrease an early onset of dementia. People expressed this within the responses:

I feel it energises my brain - there is a lot of Alzheimer's in my dad's side of the family so I hope it helps protect against that! I really enjoy it too - good social activity and ever interesting! (240 F, over 55)

I enjoy the challenge and mental exercise. I also took it up because there is a history of early onset dementia in my family. (1403 F, over 55)

Because i) I enjoy it, and ii) I believe (& hope) it may guard against Alzheimer's! (4382 M, over 55)

This suggests that bridge is good for keeping the brain active and preventing cognitive decline which is advised as a dementia risk factor (see Ashworth et al. 2016). Whilst it is not scientifically known whether playing bridge can reduce the risk of dementia, the belief that bridge may at least delay the onset was raised:

Because my mother had dementia and I consider that the onset of this was delayed because she played bridge. (1972 F, over 55)

Key themes emerging from the survey data: social interaction, friendships, increasing cognitive functioning, and getting out of the house are thus likely to be beneficial for healthy ageing.

Dementia risk factors include social isolation, cognitive decline, and a lack of physical exercise (Ashworth et al. 2016). The perceived social and cognitive advantages that playing bridge has for improving wellbeing have been identified in this survey as positive reasons for participating in this mind sport.

Additional Themes

Age Category		Under 25s %	25-34 %	35-54 %	Over 55 %	Total % All Age Groups
Total responses by Age Group						
Unique	Bridge standing out	0%	0%	0%	1.9%	1.8%
Cheap	Playing Expenses	0%	0%	0.8%	0.8%	0.8%
Hobby	Career	5%	0%	2.5%	0.2%	0.4%
Family	Childhood	0%	0%	0.3%	0.4%	0.4%
	Family Taught	0%	0%	0.3%	0.1%	0.1%
Distraction	Relaxing	0%	2.4%	0%	0.7%	0.7%
	Distraction (switch off)	0%	0%	0.3%	0.2%	0.2%
	Distraction (Escape)	5%	4.8%	0.8%	0.8%	0.8%

There were other themes within the data which were briefly mentioned. Very few people indicated they had a career in bridge as a reason for playing, and careers were not expanded upon within the answers (0.4%). This is unsurprising as bridge professionals are a small minority of those that play. A few people (1.8%) highlighted that they played bridge as it was a unique game, and found it incomparable to others:

Best card game in the world (57 F, over 55).

Hard to explain! Probably because of its infinite variety and succession of unique challenges. (5587 M, over 55)

You have a unique set of problems to overcome and then about 7 minutes later you have another unique set of problems to consider. (4468 M, over 55)

Bridge was seen by a few as being a more challenging and distinct game from other games played. This was linked to the mental challenges it offers and suggests these are valued aspects of the game as a whole, with the idea of overcoming the problems possibly indicating the game invoking a sense of triumph and achievement, while keeping people on their toes. People also mentioned (0.8%) bridge is appealing as an inexpensive hobby to take up, and that it can be relaxing (0.7%) and offer a distraction either as an escape from the worries of life (0.8%) or as a means to switch off (0.2%). Presumably a distraction to switch off (0.2%) was smaller than that of an escape (0.8%) given the overwhelming response that bridge is mentally engaging and challenging (37.5%).

Conclusion

This report is based on a survey given to over 7000 respondents largely within the UK, and presents the results of the analysis of 6373 of the responses to the question 'Why do you play bridge?' The

above discussion has revealed the most salient points emerging from the analysis of the results.

Overall it was found that people play bridge because they enjoy it – either it is fun, or they enjoy the challenges the competitive game presents, and that it provides a sociable and friendly atmosphere.

Players conveyed the social interaction they get from playing bridge as a key reason for playing, meeting people and having bridge friends as valued relationships in their lives. The social aspects of the game are enjoyed alongside the challenges it brings. Where challenges were not expressed explicitly as enjoyable, they were seen as a reason for playing in itself. Therefore, the challenging aspects of bridge make it a leisure activity people like to commit time to. Additionally, it is an accessible hobby with others choosing to do it in older age, and/or as a result of disability.

Lastly, all of these factors combined, and the age demographic of most of the respondents, requires a mention of bridge and dementia. Two of the three main themes found in this research are recommended activities to try and mitigate the onset of dementia: social interaction and getting out of the house, and engaging in mentally stimulating activities. Club bridge fulfils two of these requirements through being a socially and mentally challenging game, while also enabling people to get out of the house for a few hours. This was then found to foster social networks and a sense of community. In answer to the question of why people play bridge, these results suggest people play bridge as it is enjoyable, mentally challenging and engaging, and helps expand people's social networks and can lessen isolation.

Recommendations for future research could include an exploration of the social networks people form when playing bridge, whether these networks exist outside of bridge clubs, and whether bridge fosters a sense of belonging to a local community out with bridge. Additionally, research could focus on the perceived health and wellbeing benefits people feel they gain from playing bridge, and people's experiences of playing bridge with dementia and other ongoing health conditions. It could also be of interest to explore to what extent a sense of accomplishment, and the positive boost of winning along with social relationships and interaction which bridge has been implied to offer,

impacts upon other areas of peoples' lives. This is particularly salient in a time of local cutbacks to community care and community resources for providing support and care in the community.

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Appendix

Table 1: Respondents by Age and Gender

Age Group	Female	Male	Total
Under 25	10	30	40
25-34	7	35	42
35-54	149	212	361
55+	2974	2956	5930
All Groups	3140	3233	6373

Table 2: Reasons for Playing Bridge

Total Number of Reasons From All Age Groups						
Total Sample Size: 6373						
Reasons	Gender			Female %	Male %	Total %
	Female	Male	Total			
Total Responses by Gender	3140	3233	6373			
1 Reason	1314	1483	2797	42%	46%	44%
2 Reasons	1176	1163	2339	37%	36%	37%
3+ Reasons	646	591	1237	21%	18%	19%

Table 3: Times a Theme is Mentioned in Number, and Percentage, Split by Gender.

Total Numbers and Percentages of All Age Groups							
Respondent size: 6373							
Theme	SubTheme	Female Total	Male Total	Total	Female %	Male %	Total %
Total Responses by Gender		3140	3233	6373			
Enjoy	Enjoy Game	1697	1593	3290	54.0%	49.3%	51.6%
	Enjoy Challenge	411	337	748	13.1%	10.4%	11.7%
	Development Fun	39	16	55	1.2%	0.5%	0.9%
Social Interaction	Social Interaction	1169	868	2037	37.2%	26.8%	32.0%
	Friendship	129	80	209	4.1%	2.5%	3.3%
	Team/Partnership	31	72	103	1.0%	2.2%	1.6%
Challenge	Skill Progression	83	83	166	2.6%	2.6%	2.6%
	Problem Solving	126	225	351	4.0%	7.0%	5.5%
	Competition	299	501	800	9.5%	15.5%	12.6%
	Mental Stimulation	1126	1261	2387	35.9%	39.0%	37.5%
	Memory Stimulation	42	19	61	1.3%	0.6%	1.0%
	Learning New Things	78	66	144	2.5%	2.0%	2.3%
Cheap	Playing Expenses	29	21	50	0.9%	0.6%	0.8%
Unique	Bridge standing out	61	51	112	1.9%	1.6%	1.8%
Identity	Identifying as Bridge Player	8	10	18	0.3%	0.3%	0.3%
Family	Family Involvement	69	47	116	2.2%	1.5%	1.8%
	Childhood	13	11	24	0.4%	0.3%	0.4%
	Family Taught	2	3	5	0.1%	0.1%	0.1%
Places	Getting Out	73	66	139	2.3%	2.0%	2.2%
	Going Places	18	12	30	0.6%	0.4%	0.5%
Success	Good At	15	61	76	0.5%	1.9%	1.2%
	Winning	28	85	113	0.9%	2.6%	1.8%
	Rewarding	47	73	120	1.5%	2.3%	1.9%
	Achievement	2	17	19	0.1%	0.5%	0.3%
Hobby	Hobby (general)	74	79	153	2.4%	2.4%	2.4%
	Hobby in Older Age/Illness	68	37	105	2.2%	1.1%	1.6%
	Career	4	21	25	0.1%	0.6%	0.4%
Distraction	Relaxing	10	34	44	0.3%	1.1%	0.7%
	Distraction (switch off)	12	1	13	0.4%	0%	0.2%
	Distraction (Escape)	23	31	54	0.7%	1.0%	0.8%

Table 4: Breakdown of Responses by Age Category in Figures and Percentages

Breakdown of Responses by Age Category in Figures and Percentages											
Total Respondent Size of All Age Groups: 6373											
Age Category		Under 25s	25-34	35-54	Over 55	Total	Under 25s %	25-34 %	35-54 %	Over 55 %	All Age Groups
Total responses by Age Group		40	42	361	5930	6373	0.6%	0.7%	5.7%	93.0%	100.0%
Theme	Sub-Theme										
Enjoy	Enjoy Game	22	23	192	3053	3290	55.0%	54.8%	53.2%	51.5%	51.6%
	Enjoy Challenge	0	0	0	748	748	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	12.6%	11.7%
	Development Fun	0	0	15	40	55	0.0%	0.0%	4.2%	0.7%	0.9%
Social Interaction	Social Interaction	9	13	92	1923	2037	22.5%	31.0%	25.5%	32.4%	32.0%
	Friendship	0	3	11	195	209	0.0%	7.1%	3.0%	3.3%	3.3%
Challenge	Team/Partnership	0	1	10	92	103	0.0%	2.4%	2.8%	1.6%	1.6%
	Skill Progression	2	6	14	144	166	5.0%	14.3%	3.9%	2.4%	2.6%
	Problem Solving	5	5	20	321	351	12.5%	11.9%	5.5%	5.4%	5.5%
	Competition	4	4	60	732	800	10.0%	9.5%	16.6%	12.3%	12.6%
	Mental Stimulation	14	14	170	2189	2387	35.0%	33.3%	47.1%	36.9%	37.5%
	Memory Stimulation	0	0	0	61	61	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	1.0%	1.0%
	Learning New Things	0	0	0	144	144	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	2.4%	2.3%
Cheap	Playing Expenses	0	0	3	47	50	0.0%	0.0%	0.8%	0.8%	0.8%
Unique	Bridge standing out	0	0	0	112	112	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	1.9%	1.8%
Identity	Identifying as Bridge Player	0	0	2	16	18	0.0%	0.0%	0.6%	0.3%	0.3%
Family	Family Involvement	1	1	11	103	116	2.5%	2.4%	3.0%	1.7%	1.8%
	Childhood	0	0	1	23	24	0.0%	0.0%	0.3%	0.4%	0.4%
Places	Family Taught	0	0	1	4	5	0.0%	0.0%	0.3%	0.1%	0.1%
	Getting Out	0	0	2	137	139	0.0%	0.0%	0.6%	2.3%	2.2%
Success	Going Places	1	1	2	26	30	2.5%	2.4%	0.6%	0.4%	0.5%
	Good At	1	0	5	70	76	2.5%	0.0%	1.4%	1.2%	1.2%
	Winning	0	0	12	101	113	0.0%	0.0%	3.3%	1.7%	1.8%
	Rewarding	2	0	7	111	120	5.0%	0.0%	1.9%	1.9%	1.9%
	Achievement	0	0	1	18	19	0.0%	0.0%	0.3%	0.3%	0.3%
	Hobby (general)	3	3	8	139	153	7.5%	7.1%	2.2%	2.3%	2.4%
	Hobby in Older Age/Illness	0	0	0	105	105	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	1.8%	1.6%
Distraction	Career	2	0	9	14	25	5.0%	0.0%	2.5%	0.2%	0.4%
	Relaxing	0	1	0	43	44	0.0%	2.4%	0.0%	0.7%	0.7%
	Distraction (switch off)	0	0	1	12	13	0.0%	0.0%	0.3%	0.2%	0.2%
	Distraction (Escape)	2	2	3	47	54	5.0%	4.8%	0.8%	0.8%	0.8%

Table 5: Under 25s Responses Divided by Themes in Figures and Percentages

Under 25s Responses Divided by Themes in Figures and Percentages							
Total Respondent Size of All Age Groups: 6373							
Respondent Size of Age Group: 40. Female Responses: 10 Male Responses: 30							
Theme	Sub Theme	Gender		Total	Female %	Male %	Total %
Total Responses by Gender		Female	Male	Total	Female %	Male %	Total %
Enjoy	Enjoy Game	7	15	22	70.0%	50.0%	55.0%
	Enjoy Challenge	0	0	0	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%
	Development Fun	0	0	0	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%
Social Interaction	Social Interaction	2	7	9	20.0%	23.3%	22.5%
	Friendship	0	0	0	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%
Challenge	Team/Partnership	0	0	0	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%
	Skill Progression	1	1	2	10.0%	3.3%	5.0%
	Problem Solving	0	5	5	0.0%	16.7%	12.5%
	Competition	0	4	4	0.0%	13.3%	10.0%
	Mental Stimulation	3	11	14	30.0%	36.7%	35.0%
	Memory Stimulation	0	0	0	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%
	Learning New Things	0	0	0	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%
Cheap	Playing Expenses	0	0	0	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%
Unique	Bridge standing out	0	0	0	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%
Identity	Identifying as Bridge Player	0	0	0	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%
Family	Family Involvement	1	0	1	10.0%	0.0%	2.5%
	Childhood	0	0	0	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%
Places	Family Taught	0	0	0	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%
	Getting Out	0	0	0	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%
Success	Going Places	1	0	1	10.0%	0.0%	2.5%
	Good At	0	1	1	0.0%	3.3%	2.5%
	Winning	0	0	0	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%
	Rewarding	0	2	2	0.0%	6.7%	5.0%
	Achievement	0	0	0	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%
	Hobby (general)	1	2	3	10.0%	6.7%	7.5%
	Hobby in Older Age/Illness	0	0	0	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%
Distraction	Career	0	2	2	0.0%	6.7%	5.0%
	Relaxing	0	0	0	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%
	Distraction (switch off)	0	0	0	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%
	Distraction (escape)	0	2	2	0.0%	6.7%	5.0%

Table 6: 25-34s Responses Divided by Themes in Figures and Percentages

25-34s Responses Divided by Themes in Figures and Percentages							
Total Respondent Size of All Age Groups: 6373							
Respondent Size of Age Group: 42 Female Responses: 7 Male Responses: 35							
Theme	Sub Theme	Gender		Total	Women %	Men %	Total %
		Women	Men				
Total Responses by Gender		7	35	42			
Enjoy	Enjoy Game	4	19	23	57.1%	54.3%	54.8%
Enjoy	Enjoy Challenge	0	0	0	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%
Enjoy	Development Fun	0	0	0	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%
Social Interaction	Social Interaction	3	10	13	42.9%	28.6%	31.0%
	Friendship	0	3	3	0.0%	8.6%	7.1%
	Team/Partnership	0	1	1	0.0%	2.9%	2.4%
Challenge	Skill Progression	1	5	6	14.3%	14.3%	14.3%
	Problem Solving	0	5	5	0.0%	14.3%	11.9%
	Competition	0	4	4	0.0%	11.4%	9.5%
	Mental Stimulation	3	11	14	42.9%	31.4%	33.3%
	Memory Stimulation	0	0	0	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%
	Learning New Things	0	0	0	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%
Cheap	Playing Expenses	0	0	0	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%
Unique	Bridge standing out	0	0	0	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%
Identity	Identifying as Bridge Player	0	0	0	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%
Family	Family Involvement	1	0	1	14.3%	0.0%	2.4%
	Childhood	0	0	0	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%
	Family Taught	0	0	0	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%
Places	Getting Out	0	0	0	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%
	Going Places	1	0	1	14.3%	0.0%	2.4%
Success	Good At	0	0	0	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%
	Winning	0	0	0	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%
	Rewarding	0	0	0	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%
	Achievement	0	0	0	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%
Hobby	Hobby (general)	1	2	3	14.3%	5.7%	7.1%
	Hobby in Older Age/Illness	0	0	0	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%
	Career	0	0	0	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%
Distraction	Relaxing	0	1	1	0.0%	2.9%	2.4%
	Distraction (switch off)	0	0	0	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%
	Distraction (escape)	0	2	2	0.0%	5.7%	4.8%

Table 7: 35-54s Responses Divided by Themes in Figures and Percentages

35-54s Responses Divided by Themes in Figures and Percentages							
Total Respondent Size of All Age Groups: 6373							
Total Respondent Size of Age Group: 361. Female Responses: 149. Male Responses: 212							
Theme	Sub Theme	Gender		Total	Women %	Men %	Total %
		Female	Male				
Total Responses by Gender		149	212	361			
Enjoy	Enjoy Game	90	102	192	60.4%	48.1%	53.2%
	Enjoy Challenge	0	0	0	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%
	Development Fun	4	11	15	2.7%	5.2%	4.2%
Social Interaction	Social Interaction (general)	47	45	92	31.5%	21.2%	25.5%
	Friendship	4	7	11	2.7%	3.3%	3.0%
	Team/Partnership	3	7	10	2.0%	3.3%	2.8%
Challenge	Skill Progression	11	3	14	7.4%	1.4%	3.9%
	Problem Solving	4	16	20	2.7%	7.5%	5.5%
	Competition	21	39	60	14.1%	18.4%	16.6%
	Mental Stimulation	58	112	170	38.9%	52.8%	47.1%
	Memory Stimulation	0	0	0	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%
	Learning New Things	0	0	0	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%
Cheap	Playing Expenses	2	1	3	1.3%	0.5%	0.8%
Unique	Bridge standing out	0	0	0	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%
Identity	Identifying as Bridge Player	0	2	2	0.0%	0.9%	0.6%
Family	Family Involvement	9	2	11	6.0%	0.9%	3.0%
	Childhood	0	1	1	0.0%	0.5%	0.3%
	Family Taught	1	0	1	0.7%	0.0%	0.3%
Places	Getting Out	2	0	2	1.3%	0.0%	0.6%
	Going Places	0	2	2	0.0%	0.9%	0.6%
Success	Good At	1	4	5	0.7%	1.9%	1.4%
	Winning	2	10	12	1.3%	4.7%	3.3%
	Rewarding	2	5	7	1.3%	2.4%	1.9%
	Achievement	0	1	1	0.0%	0.5%	0.3%
Hobby	Hobby (general)	4	4	8	2.7%	1.9%	2.2%
	Hobby in Older Age/Illness	0	0	0	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%
	Career	1	8	9	0.7%	3.8%	2.5%
Distraction	Relaxing	0	0	0	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%
	Distraction (switch off)	1	0	1	0.7%	0.0%	0.3%
	Distraction (escape)	1	2	3	0.7%	0.9%	0.8%

Table 8: Over 55 Responses Divided by Theme in Figures and Percentages

Over 55 Responses Divided by Theme in Figures and Percentages							
Total Respondent Size of All Age Groups: 6373							
Total Respondent Size of Age Group: 5930. Female Responses: 2974 Male Responses: 2956							
Theme	Sub Theme	Gender		Total	Women%	Men%	Total %
		Women	Men				
Total Responses by Gender		2974	2956	5930			
Enjoy	Enjoy Game	1596	1457	3053	53.7%	49.3%	51.5%
	Enjoy Challenge	411	337	748	13.8%	11.4%	12.6%
	Development Fun	35	5	40	1.2%	0.2%	0.7%
	Frustration	18	14	32	0.6%	0.5%	0.5%
Social Interaction	Social Interaction	1117	806	1923	37.6%	27.3%	32.4%
	Friendship	125	70	195	4.2%	2.4%	3.3%
	Team/Partnership	28	64	92	0.9%	2.2%	1.6%
Challenge	Skill Progression	70	74	144	2.4%	2.5%	2.4%
	Problem Solving	122	199	321	4.1%	6.7%	5.4%
	Competition	278	454	732	9.3%	15.4%	12.3%
	Mental Stimulation	1062	1127	2189	35.7%	38.1%	36.9%
	Memory Stimulation	42	19	61	1.4%	0.6%	1.0%
	Learning New Things	78	66	144	2.6%	2.2%	2.4%
	Cheap	Playing Expenses	27	20	47	0.9%	0.7%
Unique	Bridge standing out	61	51	112	2.1%	1.7%	1.9%
Identity	Identifying as Bridge Player	8	8	16	0.3%	0.3%	0.3%
Family	Family Involvement	58	45	103	2.0%	1.5%	1.7%
	Childhood	13	10	23	0.4%	0.3%	0.4%
	Family Taught	1	3	4	0.0%	0.1%	0.1%
Places	Getting Out	71	66	137	2.4%	2.2%	2.3%
	Going Places	16	10	26	0.5%	0.3%	0.4%
Success	Good At	14	56	70	0.5%	1.9%	1.2%
	Winning	26	75	101	0.9%	2.5%	1.7%
	Rewarding	45	66	111	1.5%	2.2%	1.9%
	Achievement	2	16	18	0.1%	0.5%	0.3%
Hobby	Hobby (general)	68	71	139	2.3%	2.4%	2.3%
	Hobby in Older Age/Illness	68	37	105	2.3%	1.3%	1.8%
	Career	3	11	14	0.1%	0.4%	0.2%
Distraction	Relaxing	10	33	43	0.3%	1.1%	0.7%
	Distraction (switch off)	11	1	12	0.4%	0.0%	0.2%
	Distraction (escape)	22	25	47	0.7%	0.8%	0.8%