

Bowling ethnography

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**ASSIGN
BUSTER**

Heather Dooley 10 Pound Balls We tend to think that bowling is a very simple and boring sport played by only older men. I did my fieldwork at a bowling alley during two different leagues to explore the different social interactions among bowlers. I learned that bowling is not limited to one specific age group or gender. I also discovered there is a unique hierarchy among the bowlers that is not determined by their age or gender. This social status is dependent upon their bowling average, type of ball used, and the weight of their balls.

I found there were many other social interactions that occurred between smaller groups of bowlers such as teammates. I first entered the field during a Wednesday night bowling league. The bowling alley was filled with mostly men. I walked the length of the building and couldn't find any women bowling. I soon found out this was a men only bowling league. I was told there was also a women only bowling league that occurred on Tuesday's. The majority of the men bowling were middle-aged or older. However, there were a lot of men in their twenties bowling as well. On my second entry into the field it was during a Friday night bowling league.

On this night the bowlers were all different ages but with a majority of younger men and women in their twenties. When I walked the length of the bowling alley that night I counted almost an equal amount of women as I did men. In this league it was required to have at least two or three women on each team. This is called a mixed league. On the third night of observations, my second Wednesday night, I sat down at a table with a team of bowlers. Three were in their twenties and two were in their late forties. While I was

talking to one of the younger men I told him how I noticed a lot less women in this league than the Friday night league.

I asked what the requirements were, if any, to join either league. He said " In order to join this league you had to have a 180 average. " He also told me this league was more competitive because it was only men and because they had the average requirement. This league has a larger amount of money to be won at the end of the season because of the competitiveness. When the bowler referred to average he meant the average amount of pins he will usually knock down during three games. Every game you have the opportunity to knock down 120 pins. Each game played has ten frames. The term frames means each turn all the bowlers take.

Every frame the bowler has the chance to knock down ten pins. If you knock down all ten pins at once this is called a strike. When you bowl a strike it earns you more than ten points. If you bowl a strike for every frame you can receive a 300 game. This is the highest score you can reach and it is very difficult to achieve. Strike Terminology: 1 - Strike 2 - Double 3 - Turkey 4 - Four Bagger 5 - Five Bagger 6 - Six Bagger 7 - Seven Bagger 8 - Eight Bagger 9 - Nine Bagger 10 - Ten Bagger 11 - Eleven Bagger 12 - Twelve Bagger I discovered the main way bowlers judge each other's skills is through the average they hold.

Someone with a 250 average considers himself a better bowler than someone with a 185 average, even if the lower average bowler beats him in a game. Another form of bowling hierarchy is determined by the type of ball you use. Some bowlers will pay anywhere between \$250 to more than \$300

for just one ball! I learned that there are different types of bowling balls made to help you throw the ball a certain way. Some people may buy a ball they can throw straight better and others buy balls they can throw with a curve better. While I was sitting at the table with the bowlers I overheard a couple of them talking about their balls.

Some men used them as a way to brag to the other men. They would say the reason another man is bowling so bad is because he has a bad, cheap ball. I also noticed the men bowlers would use the weight of their balls to poke fun at the other bowlers. They will compare their ball's weight to their manhood or manliness. For instance, "Wow, you're only using that little ten pound ball. Did you borrow that from your girlfriend?" "Careful carrying that big sixteen pound ball you might not be big enough for that yet." [pic] There are many different kinds of socialization among the bowlers.

They joke and tease each other, give tips on how to bowl better and they also play card games with their teammates. There are two different types of games played among the different leagues. On Wednesday night they play a game called Kiddy Pot. This is a money game played by the men bowlers only that corresponds to how well you are playing. If you miss the five pin, throw a gutter ball, or miss the head pin twice you lose a dollar. If you are hung, which in bowling terms means four members of your team strike or split during the same frame but one does not, then the person who misses the strike loses two dollars.

If all five members of the team strike during the frame, the next frame whoever misses the strike loses a dollar. At the end of the season all of the

money lost playing this game is split among the players of the team evenly.

[pic] [pic] The Friday night bowling league plays a different game. This game is set up like poker. Every member of the team who throws a strike or a split will get a card from the deck. If you miss a spare or have an open frame then a card is taken away from your pile.

At the end of each game the person with the best poker hand wins. Usually any women who play this game don't lose a card if they miss a spare or have an open frame. I learned that bowling is a very complex social structure with its own set of socialization rules and terms. It is not gender or age specific. Bowlers have their own private language they use to communicate towards one another. They are generally accepting of outsiders joining in on their conversations and own private jokes. Is there more I could learn by entering the field and joining a league myself?