

## DRAMATURG NOTE

### Why Bowling?

So, you may notice that we don't actually see any bowling in this show. So why might the playwright have chosen a bowling alley bar as her setting over any other bar in rural Wisconsin?

The Swiss Lanes Bowling Alley in New Glarus, WI closed in 2013. Though fondly remembered by members of the community, attendance had been dwindling, as it has been across the country for the last three decades. Bowling can be played alone or in groups but playing in leagues has been steadily decreasing since the early 1980s. Social scientist Robert Putnam used the decline of social bowling as a microstudy of the decline of "social capital," the network of relationships that give people status and a sense of identity, which allows a community to function. Because socially engaged people are more likely to be civically engaged, developing social capital in a society leads to improved living and working conditions for everyone. With more people "bowling alone" literally and metaphorically, we are losing social capital.

Putnam wrote about bowling alone in 2000, before the rise of social media. In this new social climate, status has become a precious resource. The young women you see on stage exist in the same polarized social and political climate that we do. Green County, home to the fictional town of Reynolds, is politically split red and blue, and about 23% of inhabitants have a Bachelor's degree by 25 (in Dane County the number is 50%). Everyone in *Twilight Bowl* is finding out what success means for them, and whether they will take cues from their parents, or friends, or forge out on their own.

As they make these decisions they are finding where they have social capital and where they don't and discovering the limits of that capital when faced with new places and people. All the women who have grown up in Reynolds are familiar with its rhythm, though they can still be surprised. Disturbances are deeply felt and ripple out, effecting each woman differently but profoundly.

Rebecca Gilman writes in the genre of naturalism, which is defined by a realistic style and an emphasis on the environmental factors that act on characters. Class is obviously a major influencer in the lives of the characters of this play, but so are religion, politics, education, sex, and race.

Take a moment to think about how these factors influence your own life and consider how they might impact your ability to see, hear, and empathize with people of different backgrounds.

Bowling is an affordable pastime that can and has been enjoyed by people of all genders, classes, religions, and political leanings. When bowling there is room for conversation, but not the necessity of it. The bowling alley can be a neutral territory or a public forum. Everyone must put on bowling shoes, then they can decide whether to bowl alone or together, and if together, with whom.

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