

Bowling for Bliss

(Is Ignorance Really Bliss?)

A Source Play by Sabrina Rodock

Second place: Analysis, Synthesis, or Research Writing (UNIV 111/112)

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BARRY ONO, *this character represents the co-authors/researchers of the Public Opinion Quarterly study. Barry Burden is a political science professor at the University of Wisconsin-Madison. Yoshikuni Ono is a political science and economics professor at Waseda University in Japan*

RICHARD KOCH, *former management consultant, entrepreneur, investor, and author of several books about business and success*

JENNIFER KUNST, *clinical psychologist and psychoanalyst at the Psychoanalytic Center of California and an associate professor at the Fuller Graduate School of Psychology*

SR, *VCU undergraduate student in the HPEX major*

SR sighs as she puts her car into park. She unbuckles her seatbelt and slumps down into her seat. It is Friday night, and she is reluctantly attending a bowling outing that the volunteer organization she is a part of has put together. After closing her eyes and taking a few deep breaths, she pushes her door open and heads for the entrance of the bowling alley. Even though this is not her ideal way to unwind, she is determined to clear her head of all the draining events of the past week and just have a good time.

As SR enters the alley, she quickly spots her large group of volunteer coworkers standing by the far lanes and ambles over to them. The head of the organization greets her warmly with a hug and tells her that she will be at lane 36 with Barry, Richard, and Jennifer. SR quickly shuffles towards her lane, where the three have already congregated around the ball return.

KUNST (*seeing SR approach*): SR! So good to see you! What's up? Are you in our group?

Barry and Richard turn around to smile and wave at SR.

SR (*feeling a little more energetic*): Hey guys! It looks like I'll be your fourth gal for this lane! I just want to apologize in advance if I accidentally hit somebody's foot with a bowling ball. As you all know I'm terrible at anything sports-related and my palms are feeling especially sweaty tonight.

KOCH (*laughing*): No worries, we'll make sure to watch our feet.

ONO: You guys ready? Who wants to go first?

The group decides their bowling order and sets up the electronic scoring system. Richard picks up his ball and heads toward the front of the lane. Jennifer perches herself in the seat next to SR's as they watch Richard.

KUNST: Hey, are you okay? I can't help but notice that you've seemed off since you walked in. Are things at work stressing you out?

SR: Yeah, it's been a rough week. Or month, really. I just feel worn down. Work has been stressful but what's really getting to me is all the big stuff going on in the world right now. I've always wanted to stay informed, but I feel like lately, consuming news and information has made me feel nothing but overwhelmed, frustrated, and even depressed at times. I'm starting to wonder if ignorance really is bliss...

KUNST: *(sighs in understanding)* You know, as a psychologist, I've been hearing some similar things from clients at my private practice. These are wild times we're living in. Even beyond the political stuff, though, many people struggle with awareness and responsibility in their personal lives. Adulthood is difficult in this way, and this tends to cause the mind to wander back to our childhood times and idealize them for their simplicity and "ignorance" (1).

SR: That makes sense, I can be nostalgic for those days sometimes.

Barry starts his turn as Richard sits down at the scoring computer.

KUNST: Childhood can have its hardships, though. At least with the downs of adulthood there are plenty of ups, too, that you would never experience in childhood. So, yes, maybe choosing ignorance at times is a respite from reality but part of being a functional adult is being consciously aware and we just need to focus on the joys of this awareness! (1). Let me see,

though... *(scans the lanes nearby)* I think Andrea might be here. *(Spots Andrea and begins waving her hand in the air)* Andrea! Hey, Andrea!

Andrea locks eyes with Jennifer, grins, and waves back. Jennifer motions for her to come over and Andrea complies.

BLUNDELL: Hey Jenn! *(Makes eye contact with SR)* Oh! Hi, my name is Andrea. I'm new to the organization. This is my first group event, but I arrived a little late so I'm sitting out for the first round.

SR: Hi Andrea, I'm Sabrina. It's nice to meet you! And welcome to the org! We just started so why don't you join us? We can alternate for my turn if you'd like.

KUNST: What a great idea! *(To Andrea)* SR and I were just talking about the "ignorance is bliss" philosophy and I was hoping you could give her some advice. *(Turns to SR)* Andrea is a writer and editor for a therapy counseling blog. She has lots of experience in the field of psychology. *(Looks down the lane and stands)* I'll let you two ladies talk, looks like I'm up! *(Walks towards ball return)*

BLUNDELL: *(Sits down in Jennifer's seat)* Ignorance in today's times... That's a lot to tackle *(raises eyebrows and exhales slowly).*

SR: *(laughs)* Isn't it? Jennifer was just telling me how ignorance can appear as a form of bliss for adults amidst their crazy, busy lives but that you obviously can't survive or even thrive if you immerse yourself in it.

BLUNDELL: She's certainly right in a lot of ways. First and foremost, I think it's important to point out that ignorance is often intentional. Oftentimes, people don't want to learn or believe anything that contradicts their existing beliefs. Or perhaps they don't want to learn anything at all so they can just go with the flow. These two things can play a role in racism. Or, in other situations, ignorance is used to manipulate or get away with things we wouldn't otherwise be able to. So, in that sense, ignorance can be bliss but in a distorted way. The dissociation from reality can damage relationships or prevent authentic ones from developing. It can close us off from opportunities and prevent personal growth or positive change. (1)

SR: Wow. So, ignorance can serve as a strategy or a tool to control someone's environment. I would hate to fall into that habit, create an alternative reality for myself, and miss out on so much.

Andrea nods and stands up as Jennifer returns.

KOCH: *(Turning towards SR from the computer)* You know, ignorance isn't always a bad thing. I've learned a thing or two from my days as a management consultant and entrepreneur and let me tell you, the best in the business are usually the so-called ignorant or naïve ones. A fresh mind and a lack of knowledge are the keys to innovation. (1)

BLUNDELL: Ignorance as a form of potential... That's an optimistic way of looking at it. Is that really ignorance, though? As I said, ignorance is often a purposeful state but, in those cases, people are clearly willing to think and expand their knowledge. (1)

KOCH: *(shrugs)* I suppose I've always just seen ignorance as a lack of knowledge or experience.

SR: So, what is ignorance, then, really?

Andrea walks away to retrieve a ball and take her turn.

ONO: *(Moving closer to the group from his position next to the scoring computer)* I'm sure that ignorance can be a conscious state of bias. I also believe that ignorance is a lack of knowledge. But it's more complex than that; ignorance, at least on the political scale, can be an unconscious state of bias that forms as a result of consuming information in a certain way. This can create age gaps in levels of "ignorance" (839-841).

Jennifer turns to SR and quickly whispers that Barry is a political science professor and researcher.

SR: *(Nods at Jennifer)* Oh. *(Turns back to Barry)* Can you elaborate a bit more, what do you mean by that?

ONO: Well politics have changed a lot since I was a kid. Young people, around your age in particular, have therefore had vastly different experiences and exposures to politics. They also tend to stay less informed than older generations so when they consume one piece of information, they latch onto it and form an exaggerated opinion of things around it. But even those who do try to keep up with politics often consume news from the same types of sources and have conversations with people that share similar views. This is not conducive to a completely well-rounded mindset or foundation of knowledge. And if misinformation is spread through one of their trusted sources or peers, they are susceptible to developing “false” opinions. Either way here, an unintentional state of ignorance exists (841).

SR: So, you’re saying that people my age can exercise ignorance by not actively seeking out a good variety of sources for news and information? That makes sense. I’ll be the first to admit I’m guilty of that.

ONO: Exactly. People don’t necessarily want to be fed misinformation or information that is incomplete, but they typically want to continue to view things in the way that they currently understand them, so they practice selective exposure and retention of information (555).

SR: Got it. That sounds like what Andrea was saying earlier. Except now I’m starting to think ignorance can influence the way our democracy works a whole lot more than I originally thought.

ONO: Absolutely. Many voters are not making decisions that accurately represent their values because they are often ill-informed (856).

KOCH: Woohoo! That's what I'm talking about! *(Pumps fist and strolls back over to the computer to sit down)* Barry, you're up man!

Everyone turns to the monitor above the lane to see that Richard has bowled a strike. The group pauses their conversation to cheer and high-five Richard. Barry stands and walks away from the group to complete his turn.

SR *(still deep in thought after the commotion of the strike)*: Ignorance sure does have a lot of consequences on a personal and societal level. It can just be so draining, painful even, to be cognizant and keep up with all the information that is thrown at us every day in a proper way.

JENNIFER: You're right that it can be. Knowledge is one big burden. (1)

KOCH: And remember, a lack of knowledge can be a powerful state that allows the mind to imagine and create (1).

SR: So, depending on the circumstances, ignorance is a tool that can be used to achieve bliss in some forms, but it can also have some negative effects that prevent bliss or lead to the opposite. I'm just grateful to understand these intricacies now so I have a better idea of how I might want to approach many of the situations we discussed going forward. You guys and your smarty brains

should all come together and write a book so other people can get new perspectives on ignorance and its effects.

Barry overhears SR as he finishes up his turn and approaches the seating area.

ONO: Maybe we will!

Everyone laughs and SR stands up to take her turn. With a clear mind, she grabs her ball, hurls it down the lane, and knocks every single one of the pins down without hurting anyone's feet.

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Author bio:

Sabrina Rodock was a third-year student at VCU majoring in Health Sciences at the time of publication. She composed “Bowling for Bliss (Is Ignorance Really Bliss?)” for Jennifer Flanagan’s UNIV 112 class in fall 2021. In spite of the findings of her research on this topic, she still sometimes chooses ignorance. Please don’t judge her.