

# Classroom Learning Activities

## The Horseshoe Club: A Case Study of Deviant Leisure

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### Introduction

Anonymity and escape from responsibility enable individuals to assume roles or experiment with leisure behaviors that may otherwise be unacceptable due to the social constraints of their normal routines. This case study, based on ethnographic research conducted at a strip club in the southern United States, provides a teaching tool for theory-based recreation courses. Following the case are conceptual points that instructors can use to encourage student dialogue. These concepts include deviant leisure, motivation, leisure constraints, recreation environments, commodification, and gendered roles, power and control.

### Learning Activity: The Horseshoe Club Case Study

Allyce opened the door at 5:38 p.m., greeted by the simultaneous blasts of the TV and stereo. "Todd and Mildred must be home," she thought. The tempting scents coming from the kitchen told her that her third housemate, Juan, was in as well. Whenever possible, the four of them started off Thursday evenings with a group meal, followed by the customary bar hop. As Juan was the only decent cook of the group, everyone was glad when it was his week.

*"So what are y'all up to this weekend?" Mildred asked as they sat down to eat.*

*"Noah's taking the GRE on Saturday," said Todd, "and Juan and I are heading out with him Saturday night to celebrate."*

*"Let me guess," Allyce said, rolling her eyes, "will you be heading to the 'Whore Club' again?"*

*"It's the 'Horseshoe Club'" Todd said, "and we view it as a cultural experience."*

*"Oh, truly?" said Mildred, "Do tell."*

*"It's kinda like going to a museum," said Juan, "but instead of looking at beautiful paintings, you look at beautiful women who dance for money \*."*

*"Well, then perhaps it is time that Allyce and I were exposed, so to speak, to this high art," chimed Mildred.*

*"Oh no no," said Allyce.*

*"Where I come from, when we go to strip bars, we leave our women at home\*," said Juan.*

*"It's unusual, but why not?" said Todd.*

*"Done," said Mildred, ending the conversation.*

*Allyce checked her watch as they pulled up to the lounge Saturday night. "11:13," she noted. "By midnight, I am out of here."*

*The small, rundown strip bar was located on a road parallel to the main highway. The dirt parking lot had about forty cars.*

*"A good crowd," commented Noah.*

*Weeds surrounded the blond brick building. "Nice place," Allyce said sarcastically.*

*"The character is inside," said Juan.*

*Through the solid gray doors was a dark entranceway. They walked past the unused windowed ticket booth, through metal double doors and towards the bouncer who controlled access to the club and the strippers. Todd found the group a table close to the action and the guys proceeded toward a knee-high rail that separated the strippers and the crowd. As she and Allyce sat down, Mildred took in the scene with curiosity. Across the room was a step up bar with bolted down barstools. To the left of the bar was a raised walkway for the strippers. Two poles and a mirror were strategically placed, and the wrought-iron rail surrounded the walkway. To the right was a jukebox with a hand written sign that said, "Do not play music. Dancers only." A chair was next to the*

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<sup>1</sup>Authors' Note: All statements contained within quotes that are followed by an asterisk (\*) are direct quotes from the study. Other data are based on observations and paraphrased quotes or are hypothetically-based to set the scene. Names were changed to protect the confidentiality of the study participants.

*jukebox, and a lap dance was in progress. The customers ranged in age from early 20s to late 50s, mainly whites and Hispanics and almost exclusively male.*

*“That Miss America – she’s a tough one\*,” Todd said as he and Juan returned from the rail.*

*“What do you mean?” said Mildred. “She has the best body in the place.”*

*“She needs to loosen up, to smile\*,” said Todd. “She had a stupid, dazed look on her face. If they don’t put no heart in it, they don’t get my money. I want them to look like they are really enjoying stripping for me. I want her to grab me, but she doesn’t have to, she just has to act like she wants to\*.”*

*Juan piped in, “That’s why they have the control. All they have to do is pretend and they make a lot of money. Like sometimes an ugly girl will come and talk to you or something and she’ll just be really cool or she’ll, you know, she’ll talk you in to getting a dance. Even though she’s not that good looking, if you get a good dance then you’ll give her money\*.”*

*“So y’all know you’re being used – what’s the draw?” said Allyce.*

*“It’s an opportunity to go out ... with friends and be surrounded by women who don’t know you\*,” said Todd. “Look at Noah up there,” he said, pointing to his friend who was cutting up to the rail to try to get a private dance from the topless dancer. “When you are up there just sitting with your money, pretending that they are going to like you or that they are going to go home with you or something\*.”*

*“You know it’s all just, you know a scenario or something\*,” said Juan, “but it’s fun to get away and drink and look at naked women and have them dance in front of me. It’s just different\*.”*

### **Learning Outcomes**

Below are a series of talking points, accompanied by relevant research citations. These questions and the associated readings offer a basis for discussion and analysis of the case study. Students will gain an understanding of how these recreation concepts can be applied to practical settings. Further, this activity provides a forum for alternative perspectives regarding the construction and labeling of recreation activities.

1. Are Allyce, Todd, Juan, Mildred or Noah engaged in deviant leisure? Discuss why or why not. (Rojek, 1995; 1999)
2. What are the internal and/or external motivations of the participants in this leisure setting? (Deci & Ryan, 1985)
3. What are the potential constraints to participation faced by the college students? (Jackson, Crawford, & Godbey, 1993; Jackson & Scott, 1999; Henderson et al., 1996)
4. How has this leisure setting been constructed? What impacts does the setting have on the experiences of the participants? (Kaplan & Kaplan, 1983)
5. Consider the issue and effects of commodification as evidenced in the case. (Daniels & Bowen, 2003)
6. What are the various roles played within the scenario and how are they defined? Within those roles, how are power and control distributed? (Deem, 1986; Wearing, 1998)

### **Recommendations for Activity Use**

This case study can accompany a single lecture on one or more of the above concepts. Alternatively, it can be used to integrate multiple lectures within a unit pertaining to sociological and/or psychological aspects of recreation. The activity is intentionally flexible and the case study content is designed to challenge the boundaries of acceptable leisure expression (Rojek, 1999). The depth of discussion on any of the above concepts, the relationships between them, and the degree to which alternative perspectives are encouraged has been left up to the instructor, as the case can be used at the undergraduate or graduate level.

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