

LDRS 320: Activity 8.5

With your Learning Pod, discuss the 6 questions below the article. The answers are to be based on the duty ethic. Separate out your personal preferences or biases and use only the duty theory to include the perennial duties, categorical imperative, and fairness.

Divide into 2 – 3 groups.

- Divide the questions between each group
- Work with your group for 10 minutes to answer the questions
- One person from each group will share their findings with the members of the Learning Pod.

Case Study: Skin and Money

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In the mid-1980s in Los Angeles, Simen “Steve” Banerjee and his friend Nick DeNoia pooled money to start a new kind of strip club: men baring it for women. Since they had no idea what they were doing, it didn’t go well. What finally helped was a couple of showmen from Las Vegas. Steve Merrit and his partner (professional and romantic) Mark Donnelly came aboard and hatched the idea of a Vegas-type song-and-dance show wrapped around the disrobing.

To find performers, they cruised the muscle beaches outside LA. They brought the guys back to a studio, applied some Village People–style outfits (policeman, fireman, construction worker, and so on), and ran the group through a line-dancing routine.

Their idea was simple but innovative: sex sells; but instead of making the show lustful, they made it entertaining. Drawing on their Las Vegas experience, Merrit and Donnelly understood how to do it, how to produce a fun theatrical fantasy instead of a crude flesh show. The general concept made sense and the execution was professional, but on opening night, no one knew what would happen.

Chippendales exploded. Women went crazy for the performances, first in the United States, then Europe, and then everywhere as Banerjee and DeNoia rushed to form multiple traveling versions of their production. The time they didn’t spend together mounting the shows they spent in court fighting over who was entitled to how much of the profits and who really owned the suddenly very valuable Chippendales name and concept. The dispute ended in 1987 after DeNoia was shot dead in his office.

One major problem Chippendales faced is that it wasn’t a hard show to copy. Get some muscled guys, some uniform-store costumes, a pop music soundtrack, and pound it all together into a dance routine with a little teasing; you don’t need a genius to do it. So others started.

Michael Fullington was a junior choreographer for Chippendales. He struck up a friendship with some of the showguys, and they split away into a group called Club Adonis. The original choreographers—Merrit and Donnelly—also got in on the act, forming their own traveling revue called Night Dreams.

Unhappy with these copycat acts, Banerjee hired a hit man to go around killing the whole bunch. The hit man, it turned out, was an FBI informant. Banerjee ended up in jail. The ensuing investigation led to more charges. There was arson (he'd burned down one of his own clubs for the insurance money some time back) and also another count of conspiracy to murder since it was Banerjee who'd arranged to have his original partner shot.

The case never got to trial. Banerjee agreed to plead guilty, absorb a twenty-six-year sentence, and give up his rights to Chippendales along with nearly all his money and real estate holdings.

While the lawyers worked out the details, Banerjee's wife Irene worked feverishly to organize a group of character witnesses. By bringing a parade of people to testify about her husband's good side at the sentencing hearing, she was hoping to get the jail time reduced. Or, maybe she was hoping to hold on to more of the money and real estate they'd accumulated.

No one got the chance to testify. On the morning of the hearing, Banerjee hung himself in his cell.

Because the trial was never completed, the plea deal never went into effect. And because the guilty man was dead, there was no one left to charge with any crime. Chippendales and all the money and property associated with it went to Banerjee's wife Irene.

QUESTIONS

1. Is being a Chippendale's dancer honorable work?
2. Use the perennial ethical duties to justify—in ethical terms—the decision to become a Chippendale's dancer.
3. Ethically, how does this job compare with working for the Metropolitan Opera in New York, an outfit that calls itself “a vibrant home for the world's most creative and talented artists working in opera”?
4. Leaving aside the legal issues and using only the perennial duties, what ethical case could be made in favor of Banerjee getting a hit man to eliminate the people who were copying his show?
5. Club Adonis group worked for Chippendales before splitting to do the same thing elsewhere. How can copy-cattng be wrong in ethical terms?
6. Did Banerjee do the right thing by hanging himself in the end? Justify in ethical terms.