**Legal, Ethical and Contractual Obligations**

In the media industry there are certain blocks put in place to protect the integrity of the film shoot, the actors, crew and extras. The difference between each of the three is quite simple; 'legal' refers to the laws in place to protect the shoot, 'ethics' concerns morals on the shoot and 'contract obligations' concerns the cast and crew.

**Legal**

The legal side of film and television spans a huge range of issues and topics. The most common legal concerns that crop up on shoots include, animal and childcare, location security and healthy and safety. Over the decades there have been more companies set up to protect certain parties involved in the shoot. The thing with legal issues is that prosecution is the consequence of failure to comply, where as ethical and contractual issues have less severe consequences.

Health and safety is a huge on set worry and issue because failure to comply could end up in a heavy lawsuit. On the recent film set for *Midnight Rider* 2nd AD Sarah Jones, was killed in an accident. During an investigation into the incident, it was found that serious and willful safety violations were committed, resulting in the 1st AD and Executive Producer being charged with involuntary manslaughter and criminal trespass. This incident however did inspire film crews to pay tribute to her by posting slates in her memory. Many TV shows also adopted this and it was later adopted by the Academy Awards ceremony, where a number of winners and guests wore a ribbon in her memory. This incident has led to safety regulations within the industry to be questioned and addressed.

The 'AHA' is a company specifically dedicated to protecting animal rights in movies. Their image 'No Animals Were Harmed' appears on many films to show that the animals used on set were not armed in anyway. Beginning in 1940, the companies set out to monitor and protect animals on set. There have been other companies since to adopt this particular area of film.

Films need to land the rights to shoot on certain locations. *Darren Aronofsky* famously didn't have the rights to shoot the film *Pi* on the streets, so they had people looking out for police in case they were caught. Other institutions like the school system plays a large part in film also, especially if a film wants to shoot on location there. *Scream* is notable for being rejected by their first school choice for being too violent and the school did not want the violent nature to be associated with the school (Wes Craven got his own back in the credits where he shamed the school for not allowing filming there).

**Ethics**

The ethical issues on a film set concern mostly actors and crew. A number of 'Acts' have been put in place to protect actors and crew from sexist, racist and homophobic discrimination from others whilst on set. *The Sexual Discrimination act 1975*, *The Equal Pay act 1970*, *The Race Relations act 1976* and *The Disability Discrimination act 1995* are all put in place to protect the interest of all involved and the breaking of these acts have been met with harsh criticism from industry professionals. It does not look good on the part of a studio or production company if ethical issues go without being addressed or perused.

On set of *Grey's Anatomy* series regular *Isaiah Washington* was fired from the show after 3 seasons after he used homophobic language towardsopenly gay actor *TR Knight.* Despite denying that he used the language, other cast members said that they heard him, which caused ABC (the channel it is made and shown) to fire him because it went against both the Sexual Discrimination Act and the companies policy against verbal abuse.

Other channels like A+E dropped suspended a star from *Duck Dynasty* after a video surfaced of *Phil Robertson* going on a homophobic rant, ABC fired star *Columbus Short* after reports he attacked his wife, the studio behind *Ted 2* fired star *Stephen Collins* after he confessed to child sex abuse and *Paula Dean* being dropped by her publisher and the food network after her racist remark scandal came to light in 2013.

Large companies like these find their hands tied in situations like these because it can brand the studio or company as an endorser of racial, sexual, domestic or homophobic abuse for not punishing those who cross the ethical barrier, which directly affects another member of cast or crew. Although a number of decisions have led to public outrage for being too fair or too harsh like only the suspension of *Phil Robertson* and him not being fired considering ABC's policy on homophobic abuse.

**Contracts**

Before starting a film shoot, studios must work with agents to write up a contract for the actors involved. Certain actors will work in their own personal 'wants' into the contract to protect their interests and make the shoot better for them. The contract could cover everything from nudity on screen to the position of the stars name on promotional material. For example, *Sarah Jessica Parker* had it in her contract that she would not appear naked on *Sex and the City* making her the only star not to appear naked. *Dakota Fanning* took a huge pay cut to have her name put next to *Robert DeNiro* on promotional material on *Hide and Seek*.

There have been some notable cases where contracts and agreements cannot be reached meaning either stars drop out or re-work their contracts to still star in the film. Notable cases include *Catherine Zeta-Jones* and *Renee Zellweger's* agents being involved in a long battle as to promotional material and which star would receive the 'top billing' but it was eventually solved by having diagonal billing meaning depending on which way you would read it, both would have top-billing.

Major studios include clauses into certain contracts that mean actors belong to that particular studio and/or franchise. *Jennifer Garner* was under contracts to appear in the *Elektra* spin-off despite her dislike of the project. All the *Marvel Universe* stars are contracted for a certain number of films meaning they must appear in the films regardless of other commitments. *Idris Elba* has recently said that he wants out of his contract and the film universe. During *Gillian Andersons* run on the TV show *The X-Files,* it was in her contract that she could not portray another FBI agent in show or film during her run, meaning that she missed out on the part of Clarisse Starling in the 2001 film *Hannibal.* Contracts like these can be restrictive and cut out a lot of work for actors but can provide a safe working environment and wealthy outcome.

*Bette Davis* was under the 'studio-system’, which dominated Hollywood during its Golden Age in the 20’s-60’s. This system referred to major studios like MGM, Paramount and Fox who controlled a hundred percent of the filmmaking, distribution and cinema chains. The contracts under this system were long term and included certain stars belonging to certain studios and certain cinemas being paired with a studio, showing their films only. However this system came to an end after a court decision decided that studios could no longer 'block-book' cinema chains and actors. Actors were owned by their respective studios, so when *Bette Davis* moved to England and planned on making movies their, she was thrown into a legal battle with *Warner Brothers* who did not want her making movies anywhere else and despite her suing to get out of her contract she lost but benefited from this greatly because the studio presented her with bigger and better roles, which let to her Academy Award wins and nominations.