Introduction

American Hustle is a comedy-drama film that was released in late 2013, and is centered on a
fictional con-based scandal that takes place in the late 1970s. The cast involves a smooth talking conman named Irving Rosenfeld (Christian Bale), his loose lipped wife named Rosalyn (Jennifer Lawrence), his mistress named Sydney Prosser (Amy Adams), a spastic FBI agent named Richie DiMase (Bradley Cooper), and a crooked politician named Carmine Polito (Jeremy Renner). The movie starts with Irving and Sydney meeting for the first time at a train station. There is an instant romantic connection even though Irving is married, and they soon find out that they both have a lot of the same common interests. They have both been kicked around, and are ready to better their lives.

Irving is not willing to leave his wife Rosalyn even though he is having extra marital affairs. The main reason he is not willing to leave her is because of the child that he adopted with her. Rosalyn is not a stable parent mentally, and Irving is afraid the child will be raised solely by her. With this reason, Irving is not willing to divorce Rosalyn, even though the way he is acting from a marriage perspective is extremely unethical.

For work, Irving is running a legitimate laundry business as a cover up to his loan scamming and art scamming businesses. Irving tells Sydney about the scamming businesses and this to Irving’s surprise intrigues Sydney. Sydney plays a key role in the scamming business as she pretends to be a British ‘Lady’ named Edith who has London banking connections. According to dictionary.com, a ‘Lady’ is the proper title of any woman whose husband is higher in rank than baronet or knight, or who is the daughter of a nobleman not lower than an earl. Large portions of the people being scammed are impressed by Edith’s fake British accent, and they instantly believe that she truly has connections with London banks. Irving and Sydney are able to find people that need loans through word of mouth. They would say no to the requester several times, until they have them hooked. They portray the loans as an exclusive opportunity, which
helped to allure people into the scam. The loans required an upfront non-refundable fee of $5 thousand in order to secure the loan.

Everything is going well for the illegitimate scamming business until the day they try to scam Richie DiMase. Rosalyn is caught on fraud charges for having false banking connections, and she is also put in jail since she physically took the check from Richie. Richie is not satisfied with the small time arrest, and he is looking to go after bigger fish. He ends up offering Irving and Rosalyn a deal for release, without charges, if they are willing to work with him. Richie’s end goal is to advance his career, and his intent is to go after politicians and other white collar criminals. This is where Carmine Polito comes into play. Irving befriends Carmine in order to gain his trust before the investment opportunity is proposed. The investment was for millions of dollars which would be used to revamp Atlantic City into a gambling paradise.

**Business World Portrayal**

The business world was portrayed in a positive and falsified light. Irving and Rosalyn are madly in love, and they are running a smooth unethical operation. They seem to have things under control when it comes to the scamming businesses, and the movie portrays the couple as very happy during the scams. The movie portrays the scams as being very easy, and there is typically motivating music playing in the background when the scams are taking place. It can probably be argued that the business world is also portrayed in a negative light because the business revolves around an unethical scam. But for this question I am focusing specifically on the scamming business, and how it was running for the couple. I cannot base my opinion around the ethical business since they did not talk about that business much in the movie.

**Business Ethical Dilemma #1 - Loan Scam**

a) *Briefly describe how the issue was portrayed*
The loan scamming business was portrayed as Irving doing a favor for people who are unable to get loans. They did not feel bad about scamming people since they felt the fake loans were being given to bad people. They classified them as bad people since they went through divorces, embezzlement, and other items of that sort. The people receiving the loans were desperate to receive a loan making them easy targets. Irving and Rosalyn told the people getting the loans that they were very selective with the loans that are being handed out. They would say no a lot to the people requesting a loan until the day that they feel they are hooked. When they felt they had the people hooked, they would finally say yes, which helped to give the business an exclusivity look. Their business was doing so well that they opened a fake firm called London Associates to further flaunt the London connections that they had.

b) How was the issue resolved, if at all?

The issue was resolved when Irving and Rosalyn tried conning an FBI agent named Richie. Irving was suspicious of Richie from the get go, but still ended up going through with the deal. Irving was more suspicious because he thought that Rosalyn had feelings for Richie. Richie came into the deal acting like a nervous business owner desperate to get a loan. Richie ended up handing the check to Rosalyn, and that is when the issue was resolved. Rosalyn was locked up, and the loan scamming business was only being used to trap white collar criminals.

c) How should the issue have been resolved in your opinion?

This issue should have been resolved through both Irving and Rosalyn being locked up, and charged for the scamming businesses that they ran. Instead Richie locked up Rosalyn, and had her sit in a jail cell for 3 days with poor quality of life conditions. He did this to help get Irving on board with scamming the white collar criminals.

Business Ethical Dilemma #2 – Bribing government officials
a) Briefly describe how the issue was portrayed

Carmine Polido was a politician looking to get funding for a multi-million dollar casino project. The casino project was to revamp Atlantic City into a gambling paradise. Polido is portrayed as a humanitarian, and overall a good person. Throughout the movie they show Carmine doing good things for the community, and his family. Richie is trying to trap Polido by having him take illegal funds for the casino project. Richie wants to go after Polido in order to get a lot of media attention, and ultimately advance his career.

b) How was the issue resolved, if at all?

Carmine Polido ended up taking the brief case filled with money, and was sentenced to jail time.

c) How should the issue have been resolved in your opinion?

I feel that Carmine deserved to go to jail since he did break the law. I do feel that the way Carmine was set-up was wrong. Richie went out of his way to entrap Carmine, who previously was only showing ethical behavior. I feel that he should have been left alone unless he had a history of unethical behavior.

Business Ethical Dilemma #3 – Using sex appeal to enhance business

a) Briefly describe how the issue was portrayed

Rosalyn would dress in very provocative ways in order to help get business to move faster. The movie only showed male clients receiving the loans, and Rosalyn would always be sitting in a provoking position in order to get the clients attention. The client would make a spontaneous decision without asking additional questions. If she were wearing modest clothing, I feel that they would have lost out on more clients. The clients most likely would have asked more questions, and some of the clients may have caught on that the loan was a scam.

b) How was the issue resolved, if at all?
The issue was never resolved. She was put in jail, but she continued to dress provocatively even after she got out of jail.

c) *How should the issue have been resolved in your opinion?*

I feel that Rosalyn should have known better than to dress so provocatively. I would say that the only resolution would be to have her dress in a more modest way. Also, Irving could have asked her to dress more modestly. They most likely would not change the way she was dressing though since they were trying to scam as many people as possible. Also, it was an illegal business so they were not worried about business ethics.

**Other Business Ethical Issues**

Some of the other business ethical issues in the movie revolve around Richie. He was having a relationship with Rosalyn who was helping to entrap the politician. I feel that relationships in the workplace should always stay professional. Keep work at work, and the relationship outside of work. Richie made poor decisions because he was swayed by Rosalyn to make those decisions. If he would have continued to be professional, and not have a relationship during working hours, he would have stayed on an ethical path and would have most likely trusted only his input. Richie was also unethical with his boss and workplace. He went behind his bosses back to get money wired. The wiring of the money was also unethical since Cooper sweet talked the wire transfer lady into wiring the money illegally. She was an awkward woman so he made her feel special in order to get what he wanted.

**What I Learned**

I learned that the power of sex appeal and smooth talking is something that can easily influence the decisions that people make. I feel that in the business world people should dress more
modestly, and smooth talking is something that should only be limited to ethical business practices. I also learned from this movie that I should trust my gut instinct if I feel something is unethical. There were a couple of times throughout the movie where Richie was second guessing the situation, but he ended up taking the money anyway. If something seems fishy then I will make sure to at the very least ask questions to ensure everything is ethical. From there, I should be able to make a decision on whether the situation is legitimate or not.

Reference