

Torts Outline¹

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1 Intentional Torts

1.1 Intent

1. Intent requires desire or substantial certainty.
2. "...the law of torts is not criminal law and does not condemn, but only shifts the burdens of economic loss."¹
3. Can a child meet the requirements for intent? *Garratt v. Dailey*: A five year old moved a chair from the place where the plaintiff was about to sit. The plaintiff fell and fractured her hip. The plaintiff's battery claim requires proof that the defendant had intent to cause contact that was not consensual or otherwise privileged. The Second Restatement indicates that intent exists if the actor is **substantially certain** that the harmful contact **will** (not might) occur. Court finds that it's unclear whether the defendant had substantial certainty. Remanded to trial court for clarification.
 - (a) When should infancy make a difference in intent?
4. Can an insane person meet the requirements for intent? *Williams v. Kearbey*: Minor shot up a school and claimed insanity. Court held that defendant intended to commit the action (even if his motivation was irrational) and is therefore liable.
5. Insanity is never a defense to intentional torts. It can sometimes be used as a defense in criminal law.²
6. Other notes on torts and intent:
 - (a) Torts are generally excepted from workers' comp immunity.
 - (b) In most jurisdictions, you can't insure against intentional torts.
 - (c) The constitution's Supremacy Clause leads to three kinds of preemption of federal laws over state laws:
 - i. *Express preemption*: Explicit or implicit overriding of a state statute.
 - ii. *Conflict preemption*: In case of direct conflict, federal law preempts state law.
 - iii. *Field preemption*: Congress legislates for an entire field of regulation, leaving no room for states to regulate.
 - (d) The Second Restatement on Torts blends purpose and knowledge (i.e., substantial certainty) into one rule. The Third Restatement proposes separating them into two distinct rules, since limiting liability to "purpose" can have consequences in areas like workplace litigation.

¹ *Understanding Torts*, p. 6.

² See Dressler, *Criminal Law*, p. 613.

- (e) Inadvertent results of actions are not intentional. (But, mistakes usually constitute intent—see below.)
 - (f) The substantial certainty test significantly expands the use of intentional torts in workplace and environmental litigation.
 - (g) A few jurisdictions have rejected the substantial certainty rule.³
7. Can the different approaches towards insanity and infancy and torts and criminal law be justified?

1.2 Battery

1. Battery requires **intent to cause harmful or offensive contact** and that harmful or offensive contact directly or indirectly results.
 - (a) “Unpermitted” touching can be enough—see *White v. University of Idaho*, where a piano teacher touched a student’s back and caused significant injury.
 - (b) Any touching in anger can also be enough.
2. Is battery actionable for very small harms? *Leichtman v. WLW Jacor Communications, Inc.*: A cigar smoker blew smoke in the face of an anti-smoking advocate. The court finds that “No matter how trivial the incident, a battery is actionable...” But it rejects the “smoker’s battery” (which imposes liability if there is substantial certainty that second-hand smoke will touch a nonsmoker).
3. Does compliance with safety standards affect liability for intentional torts? Can radiation constitute contact? *Bohrmann v. Maine Yankee Atomic Power Co.*: University of Southern Maine students took a tour of a nuclear power plant. Plaintiffs allege the company knew a flushing procedure would release radioactive gases during the tour, and that tour guides knowingly took students through plumes of unfiltered radioactive gases. Plaintiffs also allege the company falsely told them they had not been exposed to “bad” radiation. The court holds that compliance with federal safety standards does not affect the defendant’s liability for intentional acts.
4. The proposed Third Restatement would limit intent liability based on substantial certainty to small, localized groups of people. So, for instance, tobacco companies would not be liable for second-hand smoke damages.

1.3 Assault

1. The threat or use of force on another that causes that person to have a **reasonable apprehension of imminent harmful or offensive contact**.

³Casebook p. 6.

2. The Second Restatement does not require apprehension to be “reasonable,” but most courts do.
3. Assault in torts is different than assault in criminal law. The criminal law definition requires an attempt to inflict harmful or offensive contact, but it does not require perception.⁴
4. Can damages be awarded if physical harm did not occur? *I de S et Ux v. W de S*: Defendant tries to buy wine from the plaintiff. He beats on the door with a hatchet. When the plaintiff’s wife asks him to stop, he tries to hit her with the hatchet (but did not hit her). The court ruled that the plaintiff was entitled to damages even though no physical harm was done.
5. Can forward looking verbal threats suggest imminent harm? *Castro v. Local 1199, National Health & Human Services Employees Union*: Plaintiff has asthma, which prevented her from working in extremely hot or cold situations. After a disability leave, she attended a meeting where she didn’t receive her usual assignment. She asked what was going on, and Frankel (another employee) replied, “If I was you, I would take whatever they give me, because you could lose more than your job.” When asked he was threatening her life, Frankel said, “Take it any way you want.” The court held that **verbal threats, without “circumstances inducing a reasonable apprehension of bodily harm,” do not constitute an assault**. Here, the threat was “forward-looking” and did not suggest imminent harm. The court granted the defendant’s motion for summary judgment.
6. More questions on assault:
 - (a) Is it possible to rationalize the difference between the criminal and tort definitions of assault?
 - (b) Why prevent assault?
 - (c) Why must assault be imminent?
 - (d) Can words alone ever be enough to constitute assault? See *Campbell v. Kansas State University*, where a university head said “he felt like hitting his assistant on the buttocks, after he had already slapped her on the buttocks,” which the court held to be assault.⁵

1.4 Transferred Intent

1. Historically, transferred intent means that intent to commit any of the five traditional torts (battery, assault, false imprisonment, trespass to land, trespass to chattel) can constitute the necessary intent to commit any of the other five.

⁴Casebook p. 21.

⁵Casebook p. 20.

2. The Second Restatement only incorporates transferred intent for assault and battery.
3. Generally, **intent towards anyone for anything is intent towards anyone else for anything else.**
4. Does the intended target matter? *Alteiri v. Colasso*: The defendant threw a rock that hit the plaintiff in the eye, but he intended to scare somebody else. He did not intend to hit anyone, and he did not throw the rock recklessly. The court ruled that there was no error in the jury's verdict for willful battery.
5. Is it appropriate to transfer intent from a property tort to a personal tort?

1.5 False Imprisonment

1. Intentional, unlawful, and unconsented restraint.
2. Can the implied threat of physical restraint be enough to constitute false imprisonment? *Dupler v. Seubert*: Dupler was fired from her job. Her superiors (including Deubert) kept her against her will in a 1.5-hour meeting. Dupler argued that Deubert and the other defendant screamed and shouted. The trial jury found false imprisonment and awarded damages of \$7,500. The trial judge offered a remittitur of \$500, and Deubert appealed. The Supreme Court of Wisconsin affirmed the order, holding that false imprisonment occurred when Dupler was held against her will after her hours of employment had ended at 5 PM (in contrast to *Weiler v. Herzfeld-Phillipson*, where the imprisonment occurred during work hours).
3. According to the Second Restatement, confinement may be caused by:
 - (a) Physical barriers.
 - (b) Force or threat of immediate force.
 - (c) Omissions where there is a duty to act.
 - (d) False arrest.
4. Victim must be confined in a bounded area (e.g., if movement is allowed in any direction, even if it's not the desired direction, false imprisonment did not occur).
5. The victim must usually be conscious of confinement, but not always (e.g., infant abduction).
6. False imprisonment usually does not recognize highly coercive but non-physical threats (e.g., economic retaliation).
7. Lawful restraint does not constitute false imprisonment

8. *Additur* and *remittitur*: after jury delivers damages, judge adjusts them up or down.
 - (a) Should appellate courts be allowed to issue remittances? Levy says no, because appellate courts get a thin version of the case (only transcripts, etc.) and more is needed to make an accurate determination about damages.
 - (b) There are generally no limits on the damages a jury can award (with a few exceptions).
9. *Shopkeeper's privilege*: Shopkeepers can detain suspected shoplifters.

1.6 False Arrest

1. “[A] form of false imprisonment whereby the improper assertion of legal authority can unlawfully restrain a victim.”⁶

1.7 Malicious Prosecution

1. Second Restatement requires initiation of proceedings without probable cause and for a purpose other than bringing the offender to justice. It also requires that the proceedings have terminated in favor of the accused—so, a defendant who is sued and loses can’t claim malicious prosecution. The defendant can’t bring a malicious prosecution claim until the initial suit is resolved, and if charges are dropped, there are no grounds for malicious prosecution.
2. Some jurisdictions recognize malicious prosecution only in criminal contexts, with the parallel civil tort “wrongful institution of civil proceedings.”⁷
3. See *Maniaci*, below.
4. Can a legal process be used for a purpose other than that for which it was intended? ***Maniaci v. Marquette University***: Saralee Maniaci became dissatisfied with Marquette University and, with her father’s permission, decided to leave. School administrators tried to persuade her not to leave. When they were unsuccessful, they requested that the Milwaukee police bring papers for temporary emergency detention in a mental hospital for people considered “irresponsible and dangerous.” The school physician, the Dean of Women, and a registered nurse signed the application for temporary custody.

She was held for a night until her father demanded her release. Maniaci and her father filed suit on multiple charges, all of which were dismissed

⁶Casebook p. 38 n. 1.

⁷Casebook p. 39 n. 2.

except false imprisonment. The jury assessed compensatory and punitive damages, which the court reduced on motions after the verdict.

The defendants appeal, arguing that the only legitimate cause of action was **malicious prosecution**, and moreover that the evidence was insufficient to prove malicious prosecution and that the damages were excessive. Court agrees that there is no cause of action for false imprisonment because the restraint was “lawful.”

The court does not find that malicious prosecution applies. It finds no malice because the defendants “had a genuine concern for the plaintiff’s welfare.”

The court believes there is support—“skeletonally at least”—for a cause of action on the basis of abuse of process. The defendants did not have serious concerns about Maniaci’s mental health. Rather, their purpose was to restrain her until her parents had been notified of her decision to leave school, and had either given their permission or directed Saralee to stay in school.

Judgment is reversed and remanded, and the plaintiffs are required to amend their claim to allege cause of action for abuse of process.

1.8 Abuse of Process

1. Misuse of legal process for an ulterior purpose.
2. Does not require termination of the legal process in favor of the one bringing the complaint.
3. Can a legal process be used for a purpose other than that for which it was intended? *Maniaci v. Marquette University*: Saralee Maniaci became dissatisfied with Marquette University and, with her father’s permission, decided to leave. School administrators tried to persuade her not to leave. When they were unsuccessful, they requested that the Milwaukee police bring papers for temporary emergency detention in a mental hospital for people considered “irresponsible and dangerous.” The school physician, the Dean of Women, and a registered nurse signed the application for temporary custody.

She was held for a night until her father demanded her release. Maniaci and her father filed suit on multiple charges, all of which were dismissed except false imprisonment. The jury assessed compensatory and punitive damages, which the court reduced on motions after the verdict.

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1.9 Intentional Infliction of Emotional Distress

1. “Intentional infliction of emotional distress occurs when the defendant, through extreme and outrageous conduct, intentionally or recklessly causes the victim severe emotional distress.”⁸
2. Not a historic tort, but a product of the 20th century.
3. The relationship between the plaintiff and defendant can impact the court’s characterization of the conduct as extreme or outrageous.
4. Should employers be liable for wrongful termination as well as intentional infliction of emotional distress?
5. What constitutes gross recklessness or intent to cause severe distress?
Slocum v. Food Fair Stores of Florida, Inc.: A shopper in a store asked the price of an item. An employee replied, “if you want to know the price, you’ll have to find out the best way you can...you stink to me.” She had a heart attack and sued for intentional infliction of emotional distress. The court denied the claim, reasoning that the language did not constitute “gross recklessness,” nor was it intended to cause “severe emotional distress.”
6. ***Rulon-Miller v. International Business Machines Corporation***: The plaintiff, a longtime IBM employee carried on a relationship with an employee at a rival office products firm, QYX. Her managers at first indicated they did not think the relationship constituted a conflict of interest—“I don’t have any problem with that.” But then her manager told her to end the relationship or lose her job, giving her “a couple of days to a week” to think about it. The next day, he said “he had made up her mind for her” and dismissed her. The court held that the manager “intended to emphasize that she was powerless to do anything to assert her rights,” affirming the judgment for intentional infliction of emotional distress.

⁸Casebook p. 44 n. 1.

7. Does sexual harassment constitute intentional infliction of emotional distress? ***Jones v. Clinton***: Paula Jones claimed Bill Clinton’s “actual exposure of an intimate private body part” constituted extreme and outrageous conduct. The court found no evidence that the incident caused any significant lasting emotional distress and rejected the claim.

1.10 Defenses to Intentional Torts

1.10.1 Self Defense

1. Force intended to inflict death or serious injury is only reasonable in response to the **immediate threat of serious bodily injury or death**.
2. The Restatement of Torts also requires retreat if safely possible (except from the victim’s own dwelling) before the victim can respond with force intended to inflict serious bodily injury or death. Most courts disagree.⁹
3. If the threat is not immediate, self-defense is not valid. There is dispute about spousal abuse cases, however—should the smaller spouse be required to wait until the physical threat is immediate before asserting the right to self-defense?
4. There is a limited right to self defense against excessive police force.
5. Should good Samaritans be encouraged to intervene? The Second Restatement allows bystanders to assert self defense if they reasonably believe that the third party has a privilege of self defense and that intervention is necessary to protect him. The traditional rule, however, only allows intervention when the third party is privileged. The Second Restatement would allow reasonable mistakes.
6. ***Drabek v. Sabley***: Ten-year-old Drabek and friends were throwing snowballs at passing cars. One driver, Sabley, stopped, caught Drabek, took him by the arm to his car, and drove him back to the village of Williams Bay. He turned Drabek over to the police. Drabek was with Sabley for a total of 15-20 minutes. The court held that Sabley was justified in preventing the commission of a crime, and so it was reasonable to admonish Drabek and march him home. But it was not reasonable to detain him and take him to the police station, so Sabley is liable for false imprisonment and nominal battery. Remanded to determine compensatory (but not punitive) damages.

1.10.2 Defense of Property

1. Reasonable force can be used to protect property. Force intended to cause death or serious injury to protect property is never reasonable.

⁹Casebook p. 64.

2. The Second Restatement holds that reasonable force can be used when intrusion on property is not privileged, when the actor believes the intrusion can only be prevented by force, and when the owner first makes a request to desist (or believes a request will be useless).
3. *Katko v. Briney*: spring guns protecting property are not reasonable unless the owner would have been privileged to use the same force if present.

1.10.3 Private Necessity

“Private necessity is a privilege which allows the defendant to interfere with the property interests of an innocent party in an effort to avoid a greater injury. The privilege is incomplete since the actor must still compensate the victim for the property.”¹⁰

1. *Vincent v. Lake Erie Transp. Co.*: Defendant was moored at the plaintiff’s dock to unload goods when a severe storm struck. Defendant kept his boat secured (and repeatedly replaced damaged or broken lines) to the dock throughout the storm, causing \$500 in damages to the dock. The court held that an actor is justified in using another’s property in extreme circumstances, but will be held responsible for any damages incurred.

1.10.4 Public Necessity

Public necessity allows appropriation of property in order to prevent a greater public harm. Compensation to the property owner is not required. In *Surocco v. Geary*, the city San Francisco ordered the destruction of a building to create a gap to prevent the spread of a citywide fire. The owner unsuccessfully claimed he should have been allowed to remove his wine cellar before the building was destroyed. Not all courts, however, hold that public necessity can insulate municipalities from damages in all cases.

1.11 Intentional Interference with Contractual and Economic Relations

1. *Calbom v. Knudtzon*: Mr. Henderson died and left Mrs. Henderson to execute his estate. Harry Calbom, a lawyer, had been hired to help sort out the legal issues. Mrs. Henderson’s accountant, Mr. Knudtzon, told Mrs. Henderson that Calbom was unsatisfactory and provided a list of other attorneys. Mrs. Henderson found another attorney, and Calbom sued for intentional interference with his employment contract. The court held that an attorney-client relationship existed, which Calbom had every right to expect would continue. It found that the “defendants’ interference was malicious, intentional, and without justification,” affirming the judgment for Calbom.

¹⁰Casebook pp. 69–70.

2 Bibliography

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