

NBCUniversal Offers Circumspect Response To “Sordid & Dark Underbelly” Of Reality TV Allegations; Porn, Sexual Violence, Booze Abuse Claimed As Lawsuit Looms – Update



By [Dominic Patten](#)
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(Updated, 1:10 PM with NBCU statement) In Hollywood’s current labor climate, [Bethenny Frankel](#)’s desire for a reality TV stars union may seem like a sideshow. However, as [NBCUniversal](#) learned this week, the [Real Housewives](#) vet and her lawyers want to put the matter centerstage.

“Please be advised that the day of reckoning has arrived,” exclaims a distinctly not understated letter sent on August 3 to NBCU top in-house lawyer Kimberley Harris from attorney Bryan Freedman in conjunction with fellow lawyer Mark Geragos ([read it here](#)).

Advising the Comcast EVP and NBCU General Counsel that they are representing a “significant number of individuals” from the so-called unscripted space, the attorneys blast the media giant for alleged “grotesque and depraved mistreatment of the reality stars and crewmembers.” They pound the drum even harder with affirmations that the “sordid and dark underbelly of NBC’s widely consumed reality TV universe has remained under wraps for far too long.”

Now this is the kind of language Tinseltown lawyers love to use to strike fear in the hearts and wallets of their targets. And, most of us would assume that it’s obvious that “sordid” is literally the soul of reality TV. However, underneath the hyperbolic phrases there is a very real point to Freedman’s letter, an opening stage so to speak.

Declaring virtually every piece of paper and gigabit the company has ever had about reality TV shows like the [Real Housewives](#) franchise has to now be preserved as possible evidence for a lawsuit, the lawyers also state that “while our investigation is still ongoing, we have reason to believe that cast members and crewmembers on NBC reality TV shows have been subjected to disturbing mistreatment by NBCUniversal and/or its employees, contractors, and third-party affiliates.”

Building off Frankel’s union aims, the list of such mistreatment that Freedman lays out is both specific and wide-ranging – – a.k.a. perfect for a future lawsuit.

A warning shot that probably has already caused shrapnel, the bullet points NBCU and [Bravo](#) are facing here include:

- Deliberate attempts to manufacture mental instability by plying cast members with alcohol while depriving them of food and sleep.
- Denying mental health treatment to cast members displaying obvious and alarming signs of mental deterioration.
- Exploiting minors for uncompensated and sometimes long-term appearances on NBC reality TV shows.
- Distributing and/or condoning the distribution of nonconsensual pornography.
- Covering up acts of sexual violence.
- Refusing to allow cast members the freedom to leave their shows, even under dire circumstances.

And if you didn’t pick up what Frankel’s legal team are putting down, they make sure to reiterated it in the data retention correspondence:

On innumerable occasions, which we will further detail in due course, NBC has exceeded the moral and legal limits permissible in a civilized society governed by the rule of law. Undoubtedly, when fully apprised, the legal system—and the public—will agree. It goes without saying that the foregoing misconduct by NBCUniversal and/or its employees, contractors, and affiliates exposes NBCUniversal to significant legal liability for, among many other things, intentional infliction of emotional distress, fraud, distribution of revenge porn, and false imprisonment.

In response to the letter and the threat of a lawsuit to follow, NBCU offered a measured reaction.

“NBCUniversal is committed to maintaining a safe and respectful workplace for cast and crew on our reality shows,” a spokesperson for the company told Deadline. “At the outset, we require our third-party production partners to have appropriate workplace policies and training in place. If complaints are brought to our attention, we work with our production partners to ensure that timely, appropriate action is or has been taken, including investigations, medical and/or psychological support, and other remedial action that may be warranted such as personnel changes.”

Looking at the event horizon, these accusations, which we’ve all heard before in one way or another in relation to unscripted TV (Can you say, *The Bachelor*?), could send a chill through the industry. Also, even as WGA brass and the AMPTP sit down Friday for a meeting about maybe more meetings, reality TV more than ever is the jewel in the Comcast-owned company’s linear networks and streaming crown amidst the on-going strike by the scribes and SAG-AFTRA.

This, of course, may be giving NBCU a bit of déjà vu – after having been up against Freedman over Gabrielle Union’s less than stellar experience on [America’s Got Talent](#) a few years back.

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