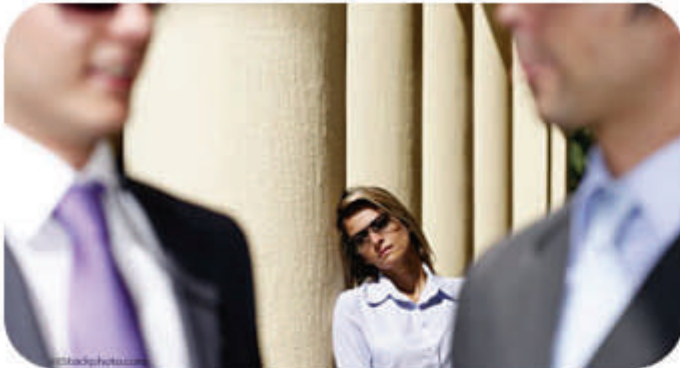


Is it Different for Celebs?



Public Perceptions, Endorsements and Talk at Issue in Celebrity Divorces

By MICHELE KIMBALL

“ People in a high-wealth case might be fighting harder. ”

DIVIDING ASSETS INTO THE FUTURE

One thing most of them have in common is difficulty dividing assets, Kaufman said. “The detailed financial aspects of celebrity divorce are much more complex,” Kaufman said.

Granted, celebrities have more money than most people, but that does not necessarily mean that they will spend more on their divorces, he said. Most celebrities have a team of financial advisors – business managers and accountants – who manage their money and evaluate every expenditure. “People without them don’t have that luxury, and tend to spend more on their divorce than celebrities,” Kaufman said.

When it comes time to dividing assets, Kaufman said, celebrities not only need to negotiate current earning and financial portfolios, but they also have to decide how the future will play out. “There are financial ties well beyond the breakup,” Kaufman said.

A major issue in celebrity financial negotiations is if and how ex-spouses will have a share in the future financial rights of projects, such as royalties. It is a continued participation in a future stream of payments from income developed during the marriage. For example, an ex-spouse may negotiate to maintain a share in a production. That share may then extend to all sequels and spin-offs of the production.

The continued rights are not just relegated to those who develop the work, but those who direct or produce it. It can also be applied to musicians, composers and music publishers “It’s a unique issue to the entertainment industry,” Kaufman said.

CELEBRITY SPONSORSHIPS DROPPED

The press and the public keep a close watch on celebrity marriages. If there is a divorce or separation announcement, the public interest heats up, said Ira M. Elegant, of [Buchbinder & Elegant, P.A. in Miami](#). Elegant is currently representing [Shaquille O’Neal](#) in his divorce. Elegant said he gets calls every day to see if there are any changes or new filings in his high-profile clients’ divorces.



When it's an average client, no one cares what is in the file, he said. But when it is someone well-known, his phone rings off the hook. "The newspapers want to know," Elegant said. "You get calls from all over the country."

The scrutiny by the press and the public is not the most disconcerting, Elegant said. Unique to the athletic celebrity community is the potential to be dropped by endorsement sponsors if the divorce gets messy, he said. "That's a very, very big problem," Elegant said. "So even if the allegations seem somewhat mild to the lawyers, the person who has the contract with the athlete, they are going to say 'Wait a minute, we do not want this person endorsing our product.'"

Whether or not the allegations are true, Elegant said, the sponsors monitor the public perception. He said that if the athlete is not perceived as a "wonderful family person," the sponsors are likely to end the contract for endorsement. Losing an endorsement becomes a great concern during his clients' divorces, Elegant said.

But it may not be a bargaining chip for the soon-to-be ex-spouse because he or she would be hurt by the loss of income, too. Adding fuel to the celebrity's negative public perception just means less money to split at the end of the marriage, he said. "If she cuts into the income stream," Elegant said, "she's going to be hurt in the end."

TACTICS IN CELEBRITY DIVORCES

Celebrities are not fighting harder than average couples – it's just the way the public perceives their divorce battles, said [Stacy Phillips](#), an attorney who handles mostly celebrities and high-net-worth clients. Her client list has included Bobby Brown, the former husband of [Whitney Houston](#); [Corina Villaraigosa](#), the estranged wife of Los Angeles [Mayor Antonio Villaraigosa](#); and Darcy LaPier, the ex-wife of [Jean-Claude Van Damme](#).

She is also the author of "[Divorce: It's All About Control - How to Win the Emotional, Psychological and Legal Wars](#)" and a managing partner of Phillips, Lerner, Lauzon & Jamra, LLP in Century City, Calif. "I absolutely do not think that celebrities fight harder," Phillips said. "That's just what you see. You don't know the other thousands and thousands of cases that are hard-fought."

However, the celebrities and wealthy clients on her roster have the same issue of concern: protecting their reputations. She said that their businesses become their personas and the measure of the power they have, so there are some tactics that are more relevant to their divorces.

First in the list: handling the media. She said she has seen many celebrities use the media to advance their goals in the divorces. They will manipulate and curry favor with the media to have a story told from their perspective. As a result, Phillips said, she often advises her clients to protect their privacy as much as possible in court documents. Hurting the celebrity spouse's reputation will not help in the end financially, she said.

Being overly frank about criticisms of the spouse could mean loss of contracts and jobs, Phillips said. "I have said to clients, you don't want to kill the goose that laid the golden eggs, so you have to be careful about what you say in a document," Phillips said. Sometimes, no matter how much she encourages discretion, celebrities will still tell all. "It's amazing. They all let it out," Phillips said. "You'd think they'd want to be a little more private."

In some cases, there will be a team strategizing how to spin what is happening during the divorce, Phillips said. She said she has had to work with publicists for both sides of a divorce who want to craft how the split will be discussed publicly. In the end, Phillips said, protecting a celebrity's reputation becomes the great issue through the divorce process. And battling public's perception, right or wrong, goes on beyond the end of the court proceedings, she said.

"Sometimes you have to combat the public persona because of whatever happens in court," Phillips said. "But if the public perception is different, you have to deal with the perception in the real world."

