

Ex-Fox News Star Ed Henry Accused of Raping Jennifer Eckhart in Brutal New LawsUIT

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A former Fox News reporter and associate producer, along with a frequent guest on the network, have leveled brutal and disturbing sexual-assault allegations against former host Ed Henry as well as harassment allegations against current on-air talent like hosts Sean Hannity, Tucker Carlson, and Howard Kurtz.

In the complaint, filed Monday in New York federal court, former Fox News producer Jennifer Eckhart alleged that Henry—the long-time Fox reporter and host of *America's Newsroom* who was fired earlier this month for what the network called “willful sexual misconduct”—raped and assaulted her and “performed sadistic acts on her without her consent that left her injured, bruised and battered with bloody wrists.”

“What this lawsuit reveals is that today’s Fox News is the same old Fox News,” said attorney Douglas Wigdor in announcing the lawsuit’s filing. “Some of the names in leadership may have changed since Roger Ailes’ regime, but Fox News’ institutional apathy towards sexual misconduct has not.”

According to the complaint, Eckhart alleged that Henry, who is married, “groomed, psychologically manipulated and coerced” her into a sexual relationship in which he referred to her as his “sex slave.” Additionally, the lawsuit claimed, “when she would not comply voluntarily, [Henry] sexually assaulted her on office property, and raped her at a hotel where Fox News frequently lodged its visiting employees.”

The relationship began in 2014, according to the lawsuit, after Henry, who is two decades older than Eckhart, messaged her on Twitter telling her that he thought she was “beautiful.” From there, the lawsuit claimed, “Ms. Eckhart became a sexual target of Mr. Henry,” noting how “Mr. Henry continued to send inappropriate, flirtatious and, at times, sexually graphic text messages to Ms. Eckhart” after they first met in the network’s New York offices. Eventually, after one meeting at a hotel, ostensibly to discuss her career prospects, Eckhart recalled relenting to Henry’s advances, “fearing that her career would be over if she refused Mr. Henry.”

Months later, Eckhart claimed, Henry forced her to perform disturbing sexual acts on him. On one occasion, he told her to remove her underwear and deliver it to him in an envelope. Later that day, he ordered her to perform oral sex on him in a guest office at Fox News headquarters in New York. Over time, the lawsuit alleged, Henry’s treatment of Eckhart became increasingly violent.

On another occasion, Eckhart alleged, Henry “violently raped” her while she was handcuffed, only after he took nude photos of her without her consent. According to the lawsuit, Henry laughed as he took the photographs, and “Eckhart pleaded with Mr. Henry to stop, and to remove the handcuffs, and to delete the naked pictures he took of her without her consent.” The photographs, the lawsuit suggested, were an intimidation tactic to keep Eckhart silent.

Eckhart’s lawyers also provided in the complaint a series of text messages in which Henry referred to their relationship in graphic terms. “Fuck you and your safe word,” he wrote in one message. “You will know when I’m done.”

“When u r owned, you don’t get a ‘choice,’” he wrote on another occasion. “You don’t own me,” Eckhart replied.

“Good long session last time,” he wrote just after 10 a.m. in another series of texts. “Left you bruised, batter, dazed, sated begging for more.”

In a statement, Henry’s lawyer Catherine M. Foti said: “The Me Too movement has helped to bring to light a number of injustices in our society, and everyone that has suffered deserves to be heard. This is not one of those cases. The evidence in this case will demonstrate that Ms. Eckhart initiated and completely encouraged a consensual relationship. Ed Henry looks forward to presenting actual facts and evidence, which will contradict the fictional accounts contained in the complaint. That evidence includes graphic photos and other aggressively suggestive communications that Ms. Eckhart sent to Mr. Henry.”

In response, Michael J. Willemin, an attorney with Wigdor LLP, said in a statement: “Although Ms. Foti notes that the #MeToo movement has helped to bring to light a number of injustices in our country, she proceeds to engage in just the type of injustice that the #MeToo movement has worked so hard to curb. Specifically, Ms. Foti invokes a rape myth; namely, that a victim of rape would never send her attacker friendly or even consensual-looking messages. As we know having watched the Weinstein trial (and represented many of his victims), that myth simply is not true. The statement also seeks to slut-shame Ms. Eckhart and suggests that she was asking to be violently raped. Nothing could be further from the truth, and it is precisely because of these types of attacks that many victims of sexual assault and rape suffer in silence.”

The lawsuit additionally accused Fox News of willfully downplaying the severity of the allegations against Henry in order to protect the network’s reputation. Fox announced on July 1 that it fired Henry after conducting an internal investigation into Henry’s “willful sexual misconduct.” But Monday’s complaint alleged that the network and higher-ups

including Fox News president Jay Wallace and Fox Business Network President Lauren Petterson, were already aware of several years-old complaints against the former on-air host, and he continued to receive promotions anyhow.

“Mr. Henry was not terminated because he engaged in sexual misconduct—Fox News was willing to support and promote him knowing that he had engaged in sexual misconduct,” read the lawsuit. “Rather, Mr. Henry’s employment was terminated because Fox News realized that it was on the precipice of a public relations nightmare and wanted to get out ahead of this suit and be able to claim that it had done the right thing. It had not.”

Meanwhile, journalist Cathy Areu, who had been a frequent on-air guest on Fox News programs—often labeled by Carlson as “The Liberal Sherpa” for her ability to explain obscure, often lazily stereotyped liberal views to his viewership—alleged in the lawsuit that in early 2020, Henry sent her “a slew of wildly inappropriate sexual images and messages—which are in her possession.”

In a statement, Fox News said: “Based on the findings of a comprehensive independent investigation conducted by an outside law firm, including interviews with numerous eyewitnesses, we have determined that all of Cathy Areu’s claims against FOX News, including its management as well as its hosts Tucker Carlson, Sean Hannity & Howard Kurtz and its contributor Gianni Caldwell, are false, patently frivolous and utterly devoid of any merit. We take all claims of harassment, misconduct and retaliation seriously, promptly investigating them and taking immediate action as needed – in this case, the appropriate action based on our investigation is to defend vigorously against these baseless allegations. Ms. Areu and Jennifer Eckhart can pursue their claims against Ed Henry directly with him, as FOX News already took swift action as soon as it learned of Ms. Eckhart’s claims on June 25 and Mr. Henry is no longer employed by the network.”

In response, Willemin wrote in a statement, “It is outrageous and contrary to common sense that Fox News purports not to take responsibility for his actions. Ultimately, we are confident that a jury will hold Fox News responsible for the acts of its employees, as well as its own conduct in responding to these allegations.”

The attorney for Areu and Eckhart continued: “Fox News claims—as it almost always does—that an ‘independent’ investigation found no evidence of wrongdoing. Of course, Fox News will have paid the investigator, who also happens to be a management-side employment lawyer. In other words, a significant part of this ‘investigators’ time is spent defending companies like Fox News against allegations such as the ones brought herein. Moreover, the investigator did not even speak with either of our clients, even though both Ms. Eckhart and Ms. Areu offered to meet with him under reasonable conditions. We call on Fox News to work with our clients to retain a truly independent investigator who is transparent. The results of any such investigation should be made public for the world to see.”

According to the lawsuit, the messages in Areu's possession from Henry include "a 'closeup' photograph of a woman's vagina being 'clamped' closed by four clothespins; a photograph of an individual wearing a mask that has a large penis in lieu of a nose; a photograph of a vibrator faux smoking a cigarette; a photograph with a woman with her mouth open and tongue extended, with a man's hands pulling her towards his midsection, captioned 'In case you wondering ... the male g-spot is located at the back of a woman's throat;' a photograph of a woman's rear end and vagina modified to include the features of a bunny rabbit (this was sent for Easter); a woman wearing nothing but three masks, in which her entire body is exposed other than her breasts and vagina; [and] a photograph of a rubber glove where each finger appears to be a dildo and/or ribbed like a condom."

Henry also sent Areu, the complaint alleged, "a video of a woman running across the room and jumping towards a camera—her skirt lifts up and the video ends with a closeup of her vagina; and a video entitled 'Fastest Interview ... candidate selected in 3 seconds.' In the video, someone purportedly interviewing for a position exposes her vagina, after which the interviewer indicates that she got the job."

The complaint continued: "Immediately after Mr. Henry sent Ms. Areu this video, he texted her, 'Are you avail for anchor interview.' Mr. Henry knew that Ms. Areu was looking for full time work at Fox News, and was telling her, in no uncertain terms, that he would assist her career if she had sex with him."

The lawsuit alleged that Areu was "also subjected to inappropriate sexual harassment and retaliation" by on-air Fox News personalities Sean Hannity, Tucker Carlson, and Howard Kurtz, as well as Fox News contributor Gianni Caldwell.

During Areu's March 8, 2018 appearance on Hannity's show, the lawsuit alleged, the prime-time star "threw \$100 on the set desk. He then began calling out to the men in the room and demanding that someone take Ms. Areu out on a date for drinks at Del Friscos. He repeatedly yelled "who wants to take her on a date?" "Take her on a date to Del Friscos.' Ms. Areu was completely mortified and made clear that she was incredibly uncomfortable with Mr. Hannity's misogynistic behavior by quietly pleading with one of her friends in the room to accept the money so that the humiliation would end."

The complaint continued: "To make matters worse, Ms. Areu was 'stuck' and could not even leave because Mr. Hannity engaged in this conduct while she was 'hooked into' studio equipment that could only have been removed by a stagehand."

During a December 2018 appearance on Tucker Carlson's show, meanwhile, the host demanded that Areu stay on the set after her segment and then, according to the lawsuit, "hardly making any effort to hide his intentions, began telling Ms. Areu that he would be alone in New York City that night, and specifically said that he would be staying alone in his hotel room without any wife or kids."

The complaint continued: “Without question, Mr. Carlson was probing to see whether Ms. Areu was interested in a sexual relationship. Ms. Areu awkwardly sidestepped Mr. Carlson’s advances and declined to spend the night at his hotel. Mr. Carlson promptly retaliated against Ms. Areu, who was featured on his show only three times in 2019 and has not appeared once in 2020.”

Areu was a frequent guest on Howard Kurtz’s Sunday *MediaBuzz* program, and Kurtz (a former Daily Beast columnist until 2013) , knowing that she was trying to get a job at Fox News, repeatedly invited her in March and July of 2019 to dinner and drinks, and also to his New York hotel room, the complaint alleged. “Ms. Areu politely declined but invited Mr. Kurtz to dinner with her and a friend who was in town. Mr. Kurtz, who plainly wanted to see Ms. Areu only if she were alone and at his hotel (i.e., for sexual reasons) declined,” the complaint claimed.

“The morning after Ms. Areu rejected Mr. Kurtz’s advances,” it continued, “he refused to meet with her at the studio and curtly said to her, ‘I’m booked solid this morning which is why I hoped to connect last night.’ Mr. Kurtz was punishing Ms. Areu for refusing to join him at his hotel. As if this were not already obvious enough, shortly after this, Mr. Kurtz stated to Ms. Areu, in sum and substance, ‘you’re the only woman here who won’t come to my hotel room.’ Ms. Areu has only appeared approximately three times on Media Buzz following her rejection of Mr. Kurtz’s advances.”

The lawsuit further alleged that Fox News political analyst Gianni Caldwell repeatedly pressed Areu to date him, using the possibility of an introduction to his friend Ann Coulter as a lure.

“On May 31, 2020, Mr. Caldwell texted Ms. Areu a video of him together with Ann Coulter, a far- right media pundit who regularly appears on Fox News,” the lawsuit stated. “The video depicted Ms. Coulter being swarmed by media. Mr. Caldwell wrote, “Ann is my friend.” Mr. Caldwell, who knew that Ms. Areu would have loved the opportunity to meet and work with Ms. Coulter, used this fact to attempt to coerce Ms. Areu into dating him. Indeed, right after he sent the video, he wrote, “I had no idea you were here [in Florida]. We def need to get together.”

The complaint added: “Mr. Caldwell then made clear that the ‘price’ to meet Ms. Coulter would be a date with Mr. Caldwell. Specifically, Ms. Areu asked, ‘Can I take you two for lunch,’ and Mr. Caldwell responded, “Take me to lunch.” Ms. Areu ignored this request as well, and Mr. Caldwell never introduced her to Ms. Coulter.”

Cathy Areu said in a statement: “Like Ms. Eckhart I was too fearful to come forward. However, I simply could not stay silent given the tremendous harm that Mr. Henry and others at Fox News have caused for women affiliated with the company. I chose to file this

complaint because no woman should have to suffer the conduct to which I was subjected, much less the egregious conduct suffered by Ms. Eckhart.”