

## Brooklyn Forever 21 Managers Accused Of Sexual Harassment, Calling Black Worker "Nutella"

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The Forever 21 location at Kings Plaza in Mill Basin is facing its second harassment lawsuit in less than a year: in court papers filed yesterday, a former employee claims that his supervisors sexually harassed him and called him racist nicknames such as "Nutella."

Brooklyn resident Mickael Louis worked at the store as an assistant store manager from January 2014 through April 2015, during which time his manager, Patrick Walmsley, allegedly told him "I love muscular Black guys like you," "I bet you have a big dick," and "I bet you're packing." The suit further alleges that Andy Liu, the store manager, called him "Nutella" to "differentiat[e] Mr. Louis from his White employees," and told him to "Look out for the Black people, they are going to steal."

Liu's alleged racist comments didn't stop there: according to the complaint, he told Louis that "Black people come in here with fake gift cards and fake credit cards"; said that black employees should not work the cash register "[b]ecause they steal"; and referred to black customers as "Ghetto" and "Your people" when discussing them with Louis. When Louis asked Liu not to call him "Nutella," Liu responded, "Well that's my name for you," and when Louis told Liu that Walmsley was sexually harassing him, Liu laughed and said, "Well maybe you should take him out," according to the complaint. Louis directly confronted Walmsley, who allegedly told him to stop "being so sensitive," and that he was just "playing around." Finally, Louis quit working at Forever 21 on April 3rd, 2015, and is now a nurse technician.

He's seeking monetary and other unspecified damages, claiming that his employers violated the New York City Human Rights Law, which prohibits discrimination on the basis of gender, sex, and/or race.

This is not the first time that this particular Forever 21 has come under fire for harassment: in April, 2015, Alexia Daskalakis filed a lawsuit claiming that she was discriminated against and ultimately fired because she is transgender. Walmsley allegedly told her that "[i]n my eyes and in the Company's eyes, you're still a male," later stating, "[y]ou used to be a hard worker when you were a guy, but not anymore!" That suit alleges a host of other discriminatory statements made by Forever 21 management against Daskalakis, who claims her supervisors called her "offensive," "disgusting," and "a hot mess" because of her transition.

Attorney David E. Gottlieb, who represents both Daskalakis and Louis, told Gothamist that there is "clearly a pattern" at the Kings Plaza store.

"At this point at least two people have confirmed that these managers engaged in completely unacceptable harassment and discriminatory conduct," Gottlieb said. "I'm not aware of anything going on at any of the other stores, but the fact that this was going on so blatantly within this store indicates a certain level of acquiescence to this conduct at the very least at the regional level, if not at a corporate level."

Gottlieb said that after Daskalakis's case received so much media attention last April, the company asked the court to have the case be litigated in arbitration, which is a private and confidential forum that would prevent future details from becoming public. He suspects that Forever 21 will attempt to do so with this case as well, and intends to fight any attempt at arbitration, as he is currently doing for Daskalakis's case.

"I think it's very clear that one of the reasons that Forever 21...has filed a motion in court to push [the Daskalakis case] into arbitration is that they want to keep the problems at the stores confidential and outside the public's view, and my opinion is that the public has a right to know what's going in the businesses in their community," Gottlieb said.

Gottlieb believes that Walmsley is no longer employed by the Kings Plaza location.

Forever 21's lawyers did not immediately respond to request for comment, nor did media representatives for the company.