

Stuart Weitzman VP Sues Former Creative Director Over Sexual Harassment

 fashionista.com/2018/05/stuart-weitzman-giovanni-morelli-sexual-harassment-lawsuit

Last Monday, Tapestry, Inc. (the owner of Coach, Stuart Weitzman and Kate Spade) announced that Stuart Weitzman Creative Director Giovanni Morelli had resigned. Morelli had joined the luxury footwear brand, replacing its namesake founder, about a year prior. That abbreviated tenure, paired with the fact that a replacement hadn't been named, suggested that the decision was sudden. There was also this ominous quote from Tapestry CEO Victor Luis in the announcement: "While we greatly admire Giovanni's creative talents, Tapestry is committed to an environment where every individual feels respected and at times his behavior fell short of these standards."

Now, per a lawsuit against Tapestry filed Tuesday in New York State Supreme Court on behalf of Thomas Gibb, Stuart Weitzman's Vice President of Product Development & Production of Footwear, we know more about what allegedly led to the decision.

In the complaint, Gibb alleges that he was "continuously sexually harassed" by Morelli, enduring unwanted touching as well as a number of explicit comments. "However, because of Mr. Morelli's position within Stuart Weitzman, this conduct was permitted without consequence," the complaint reads. It also states that even though he'd gone to HR, the company only took action after Gibb secured legal counsel, allowing Morelli to "'resign' in an attempt to shield itself from liability." Gibb also feels that Luis's statement (above) "minimized" Morelli's conduct.

"Mr. Gibb has filed an action today to ensure the public is aware of the extent of this conduct and the Company's utter failure to take it seriously until the possibility of a lawsuit became apparent," wrote Gibb's lawyer David E. Gottlieb in a statement sent to Fashionista.

The complaint details Gibb's many less-than-professional interactions with Morelli, from their very first meeting together after Gibb joined Stuart Weitzman from Coach, during which Morelli allegedly asked Gibb, "How is your dick?" Morelli would also allegedly lament Gibb's identifying as heterosexual and call him "Tommy Straight," at one point drawing "two large penises" on a company whiteboard next to that nickname. When Gibb sent a photo of the image to an HR rep, she perceived it only as a joke. The HR rep, to whom Gibb complained about Morelli many times according to the filing, was also let go, but permitted to announce her firing as a resignation to save face.

"As Stuart Weitzman's Creative Director, and therefore the de facto 'face' of the brand, Tapestry effectively allowed Mr. Morelli to operate outside the normal confines of acceptable conduct and made seemingly endless excuses and exceptions for him," reads one portion of

the filing. A "high-ranking Stuart Weitzman HR executive" allegedly told Gibb, "We all need Giovanni to succeed."

The company had inarguably invested a lot in putting forth Morelli as a face of the brand: Just in the past year, he attended the CFDA Awards with actual brand face Gigi Hadid, and had separate celebrity-filled dinner parties thrown in his honor by *InStyle*'s Laura Brown, *Elle*'s Nina Garcia, and Kate Moss and *Vogue* UK's Edward Enninful. In February, the brand presented at New York Fashion Week for the first time, and Morelli held court there, as well.

Gibb is claiming discrimination "on the basis of his gender and/or sexual orientation" by both Tapestry and Morelli. He's seeking a declaratory judgement that the defendants broke the law, injunctive measures to remedy such conduct and monetary damages.

In response, a rep for Tapestry sent us the following statement:

While we historically have not commented on pending litigation, we can confirm that the Wigdor firm, representing Mr. Gibb, wrote to our General Counsel on May 15, 2018. On that date, the Company commenced an investigation which ultimately resulted in the announcement on May 21, 2018, regarding the resignation of Giovanni Morelli.