

These news anchors say their bosses are grooming younger women who look like them to take their jobs

 [vox.com/2019/6/20/18691881/ny1-anchors-sue-age-discrimination](https://www.vox.com/2019/6/20/18691881/ny1-anchors-sue-age-discrimination)

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Five female news anchors in New York City are challenging some of the pervasive stereotypes and discriminatory practices faced by women working in television news.

Amanda Farinacci, Vivian Lee, Roma Torre, Jeanine Ramirez, and Kristen Shaughnessy — who have all worked for decades at the local news channel NY1 — are suing the company for allegedly casting them aside to make room for younger women and men.

On Wednesday, they filed an age and gender discrimination lawsuit in Manhattan federal court against Charter Communications, which took control of the news channel back in 2016 through a merger with Time Warner. The anchors' ages range from 40 to 61.

The highly publicized lawsuit surprised viewers. After all, the women have had successful careers at NY1, becoming regular, recognizable faces for the 2 million New Yorkers who tune in each day.

But they say their blossoming careers have “wilted” ever since Charter took over in 2016, according to court documents. Their on-air time has been slashed, anchoring opportunities have disappeared, prime reporting roles have been taken away, and promotional events are gone. All these opportunities, they say, have been handed to younger women and men with substantially less experience.

They blame this on the company's male-dominated leadership. They also point out that the top three leaders in the news department at NY1 since the merger are also all men.

“It is not surprising that a company without female leadership acquiesces to a workplace where discrimination thrives and fails to take appropriate measures to ensure that these issues are taken seriously and appropriately addressed when raised,” they stated in their complaint.

The company denies the allegations. In a statement to Vox, a spokesperson for Charter Communications said that some journalists ended up with less time on the air because NY1 added news shows and shifted coverage after the merger.

“We take these allegations seriously and as we complete our thorough review, we have not found any merit to them,” the spokesperson said in the statement. “NY1 is a respectful and fair workplace and we're committed to providing a work environment in which all our

employees are valued and empowered.”

The allegations described in the lawsuit will nevertheless sound familiar to women who work in broadcast journalism. Discrimination against older women in television, after all, is nothing new. But the lawsuit does represent a shift in how women are responding, and challenges the relentless media focus on a woman’s appearance instead of her work.

The NY1 anchors aren’t going quietly

Women in broadcasting aren’t usually this open about complaints of discrimination — especially when they are all still employed.

Unlike past cases, which were often settled out of court and kept out of the news, the NY1 anchors are being very public about their experiences. They’ve even launched a Twitter handle, [@UnseenWomenOnTV](#), and the hashtag [#BroadcastWomen](#), where viewers and colleagues shared supportive messages.

The five broadcasters also continue to work as the lawsuit makes its way through the courts — a sign that they are not willing to give up what they’ve worked so hard to achieve.

Torre, who was the channel’s first on-air hire back in 1992, is a two-time Emmy-winning anchor. She says she’s lost four hours of airtime each day to a younger woman and man. Ramirez, who has been working as a reporter for NY1 for 23 years, says she was removed from the coveted weekday morning fill-in rotation after she reported discrimination last year. Shaughnessy, who has been an anchor there since 1995, was also taken out of the rotation. Lee has worked at NY1 for 17 years. She says was demoted from her high-profile position as an anchor earlier this year.

The women and their lawyers carefully documented the changes and even made charts, like this one:



And this one:



Perhaps the most shocking (and creepy) detail in their lawsuit involves their alleged “replacements.” The women said managers appear to be grooming younger women who look like them to take their jobs. The younger women who usually fill in for each anchor even share their ethnic background.

Here are their photos, side by side:



The Charter spokesperson said this allegation is “simply not true,” and that different people work different beats all the time.

“We find it offensive that these five women and their lawyer tried to match women of similar ethnicities for shock value,” the company said in a statement to Vox. “It devalues the hard work of all of the women, demeans them, and implies that all that should matter is their appearance.”

But the plaintiffs see it the other way around: that the company is demeaning them based on appearances. As part of the lawsuit, they’re asking for their careers back.

In [an open letter](#) published Wednesday on Medium, the women said the court case is about much more than fixing their individual situations. It’s also about fixing the industry:

In this 21st century, we should be long past the double-standard that allows men to age with gravitas while women are saddled with an expiration date. Women in media should be celebrated for their diversity of experience and wisdom. We should be long past the days that women of a certain age are deemed expendable. We call out all newsrooms nationwide to look in their collective mirror.

Age discrimination is uniquely a woman’s issue

Women experience discrimination in nearly every industry — especially women of color — but the world of broadcast television has added another hurdle for them: age discrimination.

On-air journalists, anchors, and television hosts have long described the feeling that their careers had an expiration date — one that men in the industry don’t have to deal with as much.

It’s not unusual to see men in their [50s anchoring their news](#), but most women don’t make it past 40.

For decades, women kept their heads down, trying to avoid the stigma associated with women who complain or speak up at work.

“It’s all very hush-hush. People know, if they go public, it’s the end of their career,” Lisa Bloom, a Court TV anchor, told [Broadcasting & Cable last year](#). Bloom is a civil rights attorney who has handled many age discrimination cases. “Most claims are settled confidentially,” she said. “It is sad. I’d like to move toward the day when that’s not the case anymore.”

The first widely publicized case happened in 1983. Christine Craft, a Kansas City anchor, said managers told her she was “too old, unattractive and not deferential enough to men.” She sued her employer and won \$500,000, but the outcome was overturned on appeal. In 2015, a CBS affiliate in Kansas City fired a 47-year-old anchor and replaced her with a 32-year old. In December 2017, an NBC affiliate in Nashville fired a 58-year-old anchor and replaced her with someone a decade younger. Both women who were fired sued.

This pattern reflects a type of ageism that men in the media industry rarely have to deal with. For example, research shows that women experience age discrimination at work at a much younger age than men, usually in their 50s. It’s not until men are past retirement age that they are viewed as too old for a job.

Highly visible jobs in television news are even harsher on women. The main reason for this is one that has long plagued society: Men consider older women less attractive.

Evidence suggests that physical appearance matters more for women and that aging impacts a woman’s physical appearance more than a man’s, according to Patrick Button, an economics professor who studies workplace discrimination at Tulane University.

The obsessive focus on women’s appearance is largely shaped by how they are portrayed in the media — whether on newscasts, in television shows, or in advertising campaigns. For decades, they’ve been hypersexualized and advertisers have long exploited their insecurities about age and appearance.

To combat the “unconscious bias” against women and girls in advertising, media, and television, the Association of National Advertisers launched the SeeHer initiative in 2016. The project scores commercials and television programming based on how accurately they portray women and girls by polling women and girls to see if they feel represented and respected by what they see on the screen. The campaign says it’s already met its initial 2020 goal to increase the accurate portrayal of women in media by 20 percent.

Major US brands have since joined the project, including the Walt Disney Company, Johnson & Johnson, and Bank of America. Former *Today* show host Katie Couric has been an outspoken advocate for the group, and she showed support Wednesday for the women at NY1. So did former Fox News anchor Megyn Kelly.

Most viewers, I believe, would rather watch/listen to someone who has some life experience to help contextualize the news. <https://t.co/TPaxfSymBq>

— Megyn Kelly (@megynkelly) June 19, 2019