

# '60 Minutes' Producer Sues CBS for Alleged Retaliation Over Her Complaint About Boss' Lewd Pic

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CBS “remains committed to insulating and protecting powerful men—the ‘talent’—at the expense of its female employees,” a new lawsuit claims.

In a complaint filed Tuesday in New York State Supreme Court, London-based *60 Minutes* producer Cassandra Vinograd alleges that company executives and her immediate supervisor, longtime *60 Minutes* producer Michael Gavshon, retaliated against her, stripping her of all her duties after she objected in late September to Gavshon’s alcohol consumption on the job, and to a sexually offensive photograph he texted to her cell phone.

CBS didn’t immediately respond to Vinograd’s lawsuit, which demands a jury trial to determine punitive and other monetary damages for “mental anguish and emotional distress, humiliation, embarrassment, stress and anxiety, loss of self-esteem, self-confidence and personal dignity, emotional pain and suffering and any other physical and mental injuries.”

For CBS, the lawsuit is an unwelcome reminder of the negative publicity the network has suffered during the past two years over the forced ousters—due to sexual misconduct and harassment allegations—of CBS Chairman and Chief Executive [Leslie Moonves](#), *60 Minutes* executive producer [Jeff Fager](#), and CBS *This Morning* co-anchor [Charlie Rose](#).

“Despite paying lip service about purging men that behave badly and assuring female employees that their voices will be heard, respected and protected, this case shows that nothing has changed and legitimate progress towards eliminating sexual harassment at CBS remains elusive,” the lawsuit states.

With the appointments of [Susan Zirinsky](#) earlier this year as the first woman to run CBS News and of [Tanya Simon](#) as executive editor and second-in-command of the iconic Sunday newsmagazine show, it looked like the CBS broadcast network was positioning itself to leave its severe #MeToo problems in the past.

“CBS wants the public to believe that it takes the #MeToo movement seriously and has cleaned house by removing harassers from the workplace,” the lawsuit states. “This was the message senior executives gave to Cassie during her interview process. Tanya Simon and [senior broadcast producer] Deborah DeLuca told Cassie that it was a ‘great time to be

joining CBS' because CBS 'got rid of all the assholes.'" (The lawsuit notes that Gavshon had been a mentor to Simon and was a longtime producer for her late father, star *60 Minutes* correspondent Bob Simon.)

The 30-something Vinograd was hired by *60 Minutes* in June—and assigned to the 63-year-old Gavshon's team for a job that encompassed "research[ing] and pitch[ing] segments to run on *60 Minutes*" and "interview[ing] sources for current and potential segments, draft[ing] budgets and handl[ing] pre-production and production logistics," according to the suit—after working for NBC News, the Associated Press, and the *Wall Street Journal*.

"Shortly after Cassie began working for Gavshon, she became aware that he drank alcohol often and excessively," the lawsuit states. "Although Gavshon drank openly in the office and out in the field in front of CBS employees, no one said anything about it. Cassie quickly realized that Gavshon had been doing this for years, and employees were expected to tolerate him in a drunken state, even when he became belligerent or passed out drunk in her office."

The suit adds: "As a new employee, and cognizant of the reverence Gavshon received at CBS, she was afraid to say anything about it at CBS...Things changed, however, when one night after [a reporting trip to Hungary], Gavshon texted Cassie an old photo of Gavshon and some friends urinating on what appeared to be smoldering coal."

The complaint, which includes a blown-up screengrab of the offending photo—depicting the teenage Gavshon and a high-school friend (who apparently had died this past September) exposing themselves and urinating—continues: "When she saw the photo appear on her phone, Cassie was disgusted, uncomfortable and scared. Gavshon controlled her fate at CBS.

"Regardless of the photo being of Gavshon in much younger days, it was creepy and gross to receive a picture of her boss's penis and urine stream. She did not find it appropriate that the photo included another man alongside Gavshon who also was holding his penis and urinating.

"Shocked, Cassie did not respond to Gavshon's text.

"More than an hour later, Cassie received another unsolicited text from Gavshon. Incredulously [*sic*], Gavshon said he was 'sorry' he sent Cassie the photo because Gavshon meant to send it to his sister instead."

The complaint includes a screengrab of Gavshon's apologetic texts: "So so sorry...I am so sorry. I thought I sent that picture to my sister who went the funeral [*sic*] of my high school friend..."

Instead of accepting Gavshon's apology or cooperating with his apparent hope that she "would ratify the inappropriateness by saying it was 'funny' or some such comment that would open the door to Gavshon's ability to send her more photos in the future," Vinograd emailed a complaint to several CBS executives in New York, the lawsuit states.

"These late-night texts coupled with her concern about his drinking, knowing that her future work required many days and nights of travel alone with Gavshon," prompted Vinograd to alert the executives to "two highly inappropriate, unprofessional and upsetting events have occurred at work," the lawsuit states, quoting her email.

She continued in the email: "I would like to tell you what happened and show you documentation as soon as possible. However, I need your assistance and would like for this to be kept confidential until we've had a chance to talk. I would like an investigation and protection from retaliation."

While a CBS exec advised Vinograd to stay out of the office for awhile, and even lie to Gavshon that she was home sick, the lawsuit alleges, the company did investigate the texting incident and informed Vinograd that Gavshon would suffer no consequences: "We accept his explanation that he sent this photo to you entirely by accident and believe that this was an isolated incident with no malicious intent on the part of Michael."

In the immediate aftermath, "Gavshon was angry" that he "was forced to undergo an internal investigation about his behavior by a young, junior subordinate, who was expected to feel grateful for the opportunity to work for him," the suit states. "Unconstrained by CBS, he lashed out at his accuser... Gavshon took steps to exclude Cassie from ongoing projects and, contrary to prior practice, made travel arrangements to the NYC office for a segment screening for himself only, excluding Cassie. In Gavshon's mind, Cassie was already done as his associate producer."

Since the incident, Vinograd has been isolated and ostracized, the lawsuit alleges.

"We look forward to holding CBS accountable for its unlawful conduct," her attorney Jeanne M. Christensen of Wigdor LLP said in a press release. "Contrary to CBS's claims that it is doing the right thing when female employees report gender-related misconduct, as alleged, it appears that no meaningful changes to the culture at CBS have been made. It appears that CBS continues to protect senior male talent at the expense of junior women—business as usual."