

'60 Minutes' Producer Says CBS Retaliated After She Told HR About Her Boss's Misconduct

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By Emily Peck

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A "60 Minutes" associate producer is suing [CBS](#), claiming she was harassed by her boss, longtime producer Michael Gavshon, and then ostracized at the show after speaking up about his behavior.

The lawsuit, filed in New York State Supreme Court on Tuesday, comes a little more than a year after the famed television newsmagazine supposedly cleaned house in the wake of a series of sexual misconduct scandals that led to the ouster of the show's executive producer, [Jeff Fager](#), and the network's CEO, [Les Moonves](#), among others.

In the complaint, associate producer Cassandra Vinograd said that after formally complaining to CBS executives about Gavshon in September, she was retaliated against by the network.

Vinograd told executives over email and in person that Gavshon was frequently drunk at work, making it hard for her to work with him. She shared with executives an old photo he sent her via text message late at night, of him urinating on a campfire. An hour after sending the text, Gavshon texted that he was "sorry" and that the photo was meant for his sister. For Vinograd, the photo was the last straw.

Since speaking out, the 35-year-old journalist has been "stripped of all her work responsibilities," according to the lawsuit. "CBS has failed to give Cassie a single assignment. Further, she is consistently excluded from work meetings, calls and emails."

Gavshon, who's been with CBS for more than 30 years, produces segments for Anderson Cooper, also a host at CNN, and Jon Wertheim, executive editor for Sports Illustrated.



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“60 Minutes” producer Michael Gavshon (right), pictured here with Steve Croft in 2017.

“In December 2019 CBS remains committed to insulating and protecting powerful men — the ‘talent’ — at the expense of its female employees,” the lawsuit reads.

Neither CBS nor Gavshon responded immediately to a request for comment on Tuesday morning.

Vinograd, who previously worked at The Wall Street Journal, The Associated Press and NBC News, began interviewing for an associate producer opening at “60 Minutes” in early 2019. Fager was fired months before, after bullying a reporter and amid other accusations of workplace misconduct. The show had also fired correspondent Charlie Rose in 2017, after multiple accusations of sexual misconduct. Moonves was gone, too, another ouster over sexual misconduct.

The show’s executive producers told Vinograd that it was a good time to work there, according to her complaint. The network “got rid of all the assholes,” the producers told her.

The network had promoted Susan Zirinsky in run the news division, the first woman ever in the role, and she promised a new day.

"The #MeToo movement isn't behind us, it's alongside us in our thinking. There will be a new and more powerful human resources person in the news division that is working on culture change," Zirinsky, who's been with CBS since she was 20, told the Los Angeles Times in January. "It's really important to me to have an environment where there is transparency, where you can talk, where there are reactions based on actions."

Vinograd sent an email to Zirinsky and several other executives in September, after she received Gavshon's inappropriate text.

"Based on what has taken place, it is impossible for me to do a professional job and go into the office every day," she wrote to the New York-based executives, according to a copy of the email dated Sept. 30 included in the lawsuit.

Vinograd, who is based in London, said she was afraid the harassment couldn't be properly investigated overseas. "I fear the events might not be properly investigated or reviewed in London given how small the team is ... I've reviewed the Code of Conduct, which is why I'm copying in the Head Ethics Officer. Again, I'd like your help looking into this and ensuring I'm protected from retaliation. Please contact me as soon as possible," she wrote in the email.

Vinograd shared more details about the photo and Gavshon's drinking on a call with Michael Roderick, a vice president in employee relations, and Benjamin Matos, another senior HR executive, shortly after sending the email, according to the complaint.

"Cassie told them that Gavshon's drinking was unprofessional, inappropriate and made it difficult for her to perform her job," according to the lawsuit.

Roderick and Matos told her they'd investigate, but also advised Vinograd to tell Gavshon that she was sick and to stay home pending the results of the investigation. According to the suit, being asked to lie surprised Vinograd.

By Oct. 2, at home and hearing nothing, Vinograd followed up by email. She said she was surprised at being "effectively suspended" while Gavshon remained at the office.

"That's contrary to what I understood were the policies at CBS regarding sexual harassment," she wrote in the email, included in the lawsuit. "I am truly distressed to find myself in the situation of being ready, willing and able to work and yet not feeling comfortable to be in the same room as the person who was repeatedly drunk on the job and which culminated in him sending me a photograph of him and his penis."

Read the full email here:

I wanted to follow up on our conversation today during which I explained again the circumstances underlying the sexual harassment complaint (filed and detailed to you on Monday) and also expressed my surprise that I had been advised by HR and Compliance to say I'm sick and stay home from work — with the result that I have effectively been suspended, while the person who harassed me (and for whom I have photo proof of said harassment) is still at the office. That's contrary to what I understood were the policies at CBS regarding sexual harassment. I am truly distressed to find myself in the situation of being ready, willing and able to work and yet not feeling comfortable to be in the same room as the person who was repeatedly drunk on the job and which culminated in him sending me a photograph of him and his penis. I wanted to reiterate per our phone conversation that, as you know, I'm not sick — but I do not feel comfortable going to work directly with him as a supervisor. I would like to know when I can return to work without feeling uncomfortable.

Vinograd finally returned to the office on Oct. 8, having been assured Gavshon wouldn't be there. Shortly after that, an HR representative told Vinograd that Gavshon was cleared of any wrongdoing.

Roderick, a vice president in employee relations, shared a memo with her about HR's investigation. He said they could find no evidence of Gavshon drinking to excess.

"We did not determine that his consumption was excessive or that it impacted his work performance," the memo reads, according to a readout provided to HuffPost by Vinograd's lawyer Jeanne Christensen, a partner at the New York firm Wigdor. "None of the witnesses interviewed said that they had seen Michael drinking excessively during work hours."

Vinograd wasn't told who was interviewed, Christensen said.

The memo said Gavshon's text, while inappropriate, was a mistake. "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," an excerpt from the memo included in the lawsuit reads.

In the lawsuit, Vinograd rejects this explanation.

"There is no explanation for Gavshon's texts. Regardless if he was drunk and sent it to Cassie by 'mistake' when really it was meant for his own sister, or if he sent it to her hoping that Cassie 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, it was not ok," the lawsuit reads.

Nevertheless, according to the suit, HR representatives told her to meet with Gavshon, face-to-face, and try to work things out, apparently without any mediator.

Things didn't work out.

Gavshon cut her out of all his future work, according to the lawsuit. He even blocked her from finishing a segment on Brexit that Vinograd said she had pitched and worked on.

"What am I supposed to do in this situation? It's clearly still business as usual. I do **not** want to be communicating with him but I don't want it to seem like I'm shirking my job responsibilities," Vinograd wrote in another email to CBS HR executives, per the lawsuit.

"They told her she just needs to work it out with the guy," said Christensen, Vinograd's attorney.

Christensen said that Vinograd, who hasn't done any work in months, feels her professional reputation is at stake and that she had no choice but to file a lawsuit.

The attorney emphasized that the crux of the case is not Gavshon's behavior, *per se*, but CBS's response.

"They're saying we're giving a safe place for women to speak out when they think something is wrong," Christensen said. "And they haven't. Talk at your own risk."