

Senior producer at CBS News '60 Minutes' accused of gender discrimination and retaliation in lawsuit

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An associate producer filed a gender discrimination and retaliation lawsuit against CBS News on Tuesday claiming she was stripped of work and told to stay quiet by the network after complaining against a prominent "60 Minutes" senior producer who allegedly sent her an inappropriate photo and engaged in excessive alcohol use during work hours.

Cassandra Vinograd, a London-based associate producer, described in the 29-page lawsuit several "serious concerns regarding highly inappropriate, unprofessional and upsetting events" involving senior producer Michael Gavshon, who is considered one of the network's "preeminent producers." Gavshon is not named as a defendant in the lawsuit.

Vinograd, who previously worked for NBC News in London, alleged that Gavshon openly consumed alcohol at work and in the field in front of several CBS employees, but it was part of the culture at the company to tolerate this despite Gavshon becoming "belligerent or passed out drunk" on several occasions, according to the complaint.

While Vinograd was still fairly new to the company, she said she joined Gavshon and several other crew members for a two week work trip to Hungary where she claimed the senior producer often "consumed so much alcohol that Cassie and other employees would have to repeat things to him as well as decipher his slurred words," the complaint stated.

Shortly after returning from this trip, Vinograd said Gavshon texted her an inappropriate photo of him and another man urinating. When she didn't respond, Gavshon texted her one hour later saying he was "sorry" and meant to send it to his sister instead, according to the complaint.

Despite knowing that Gavshon "controlled her fate at CBS," Vinograd emailed several members of CBS's HR and legal team to request an investigation into the photo incident as well as Gavshon's excessive alcohol use during work hours.

The lawsuit says that Vinograd was then put on a "de facto suspension" for one week while company brass looked into the matter but Gavshon was allowed to continue working during this time.

The investigation eventually concluded that the photo was a "mistake" and that Vinograd's claim of excessive alcohol use was "not corroborated." However, by this time, Vinograd alleged that Gavshon began to professionally retaliate against her for speaking up, the

complaint states.

The senior producer blatantly excluded Vinograd from all projects, work meetings, calls and emails, according to the lawsuit. She alleges in the complaint that he removed her from all stories in production, including a segment she had pitched and performed the majority of the work on.

Vinograd said CBS executives did nothing to stop the “blatant retaliation,” and a member of the company’s HR team even told her to stay silent or “gossip” would inevitably erupt that would malign her character.

Vinograd claimed in the lawsuit that she hasn't been given any work at the company in two and a half months and believes it is directly related to her filing a complaint against a senior producer at the company.

“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,” said Jeanne M. Christensen, a lawyer representing Vinograd. “We look forward to holding CBS accountable for its unlawful conduct as alleged in the complaint by our client Cassandra Vinograd.”

CBS News has not returned a request for comment by NBC News. Gavshon did not immediately return a request for comment.

This is not the first time the news giant has been rocked by accusations of gross misconduct by female employees. The company faced an onslaught of criticism after several high-level individuals at the company were called out for harassment in the aftermath of the #MeToo movement.

Les Moonves, the chairman and chief executive of CBS Corp., resigned after six women accused him on the record of sexual harassment or assault including actress Cybill Shepherd.

Talk show host and journalist Charlie Rose was fired by CBS News, PBS and Bloomberg in the wake of eight women accusing him of sexual harassment and unwanted advances.

CBS News fired Jeff Fager, the executive producer of "60 Minutes," after several women told the The New Yorker that Fager inappropriately touched them.

In addition to those claims, The New Yorker reported that 19 current and former CBS employees, many of whom were unnamed, alleged that Fager allowed harassment in the news division.

