

# Former Fox News employee who accused Ed Henry of rape "was paralyzed by fear" working at the network

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In a lawsuit filed Monday, former Fox News employee Jennifer Eckhart and co-plaintiff Cathy Areu allege sexual misconduct at Fox News, years after revelations that led to the departure of CEO Roger Ailes. They described to CBS News a workplace where abuse was routine and even expected.

Eckhart accused former White House correspondent and anchor Ed Henry of rape.

"After we met and we had our photo taken together, he messaged me, 'Wow, you are way more beautiful in person,'" Eckhart told "CBS This Morning" national correspondent Jericka Duncan.

Eckhart said her connection to Henry began in 2014, when she was a production assistant.

"As a 24-year-old girl, when the chief White House correspondent follows you on Twitter, you, you know, you get stars in your eyes," she said.

But Eckhart said those stars quickly faded. In the lawsuit, she accuses Henry of "violently" raping her while she was "helpless and restrained in metal handcuffs" and performing "sadistic acts on her ... that left her injured, bruised and battered with bloody wrists."

Eckhart said she would characterize her relationship with Henry as abusive.

"I felt that he had the power to derail me, to destroy me, to ruin my career. And, I just, I didn't have a voice until now," she said.

Eckhart alleges Henry asked her to be his "sex slave" and "threatened punishment and retaliation" if she didn't comply.

Henry was fired three weeks ago in response to Eckhart's allegations. An attorney for Henry said, "The evidence in this case will demonstrate that Ms. Eckhart initiated and completely encouraged a consensual relationship."

Asked if there was ever a time at Fox that she felt safe, Eckhart said, "I think it's safe to say that I was paralyzed by fear when I was working there. ... I don't know how you could continue to cultivate and foster an environment that rewards sexual predators consistently year after year."

Areu said she hopes that speaking out will create change at the network. She alleges she was sexually harassed by at least four men there.

"I kind of got numb to it. I thought it was perfectly fine to receive pornographic images and gifts," she said. "I thought that was normal for a male anchor to do."

Areu claims she was targeted by some of the network's biggest stars. She said Tucker Carlson invited her on his show less often after she refused his sexual advances.

She also alleges that Sean Hannity "completely unsolicited — threw \$100" on his anchor desk, "demanding that someone take (her) out on a date for drinks."

"What's most troubling about this lawsuit ... is that it's occurring in 2020," said Attorney Michael Willemin, who represents Eckhart and Areu.

When former "Fox & Friends" host Gretchen Carlson was paid \$20 million in a settlement of her historic sexual harassment lawsuit against Fox News and Ailes in 2016, some believed the workplace conditions would improve. Not Areu.

"Some of the men complained that there were so many meetings that they had to go on ... how to speak to women and how not to sexually harass," she said.

Fox News says it concluded Areu's allegations were "baseless" after an independent investigation.

"Based on the findings of a comprehensive independent investigation conducted by an outside law firm, including interviews with numerous eyewitnesses, we have determined that all of Cathy Areu's claims against FOX News, including its management as well as its hosts Tucker Carlson, Sean Hannity & Howard Kurtz and its contributor Gianni Caldwell, are false, patently frivolous and utterly devoid of any merit," a statement from Fox News said. "We take all claims of harassment, misconduct and retaliation seriously, promptly investigating them and taking immediate action as needed — in this case, the appropriate action based on our investigation is to defend vigorously against these baseless allegations. Ms. Areu and Jennifer Eckhart can pursue their claims against Ed Henry directly with him, as FOX News already took swift action as soon as it learned of Ms. Eckhart's claims on June 25 and Mr. Henry is no longer employed by the network."

The network also said there were no claims against Henry prior to Eckhart's.

Eckhart said she was fired from Fox News in June.