

Former top TikTok executive sues over discrimination that allegedly includes requiring women to ‘remain quiet and humble at all times’

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A top TikTok executive has sued her former employer for allegedly subjecting her to age- and sex-based discrimination.

Katie Ellen Puris, the former head of TikTok’s global business marketing, said those who discriminated against her included Lidong Zhang, the chairman of the social media giant’s Chinese parent company, ByteDance.

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“Lidong Zhang’s stereotypical view of women, even in leadership roles, was that they should remain quiet and humble at all times,” says the lawsuit, which was filed on February 8.

Though others have publicly complained about treatment at the company, Puris is the first high-profile TikTok employee to sue the U.S. offshoot of ByteDance for discrimination.

Neither TikTok nor Puris' attorney responded to *Fortune's* request for comment.



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In the lawsuit, Puris said she was silenced, unable to advocate for her team's success at leadership gatherings and was denied one-on-one meetings with Zhang, among other things. Before joining TikTok, Puris held top leadership roles at Meta, Google, and ad giant BBDO, according to her LinkedIn profile.




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Puris was fired in the fall of 2022 for lacking the “docility and meekness” specifically required of female employees, says the suit.

The lawsuit, filed in New York's Southern District court, adds to a long list of troubles for TikTok. Currently, it's embroiled in a heated debate over paying for music that users post to accompany videos on the service. On February 6, labels owned by Universal Music Group that represent Taylor Swift and Drake, among others, removed all works by its artists from the platform.

Meanwhile, today, TikTok removed trending eating disorder "legging legs" content from its service after it was reported by the National Alliance for Eating Disorders as harmful, according to the *New York Times*.

This follows the contentious testimony on January 31 in which TikTok CEO Shou Zi Chew was grilled by U.S. senators about the platform's harm to children in addition to its Chinese ownership that critics say is a national security threat. TikTok has defended itself, saying that it has implemented measures to protect children and that its U.S. unit operates without Chinese interference.

However, Puris' suit does not mince words on the subject of China: "Despite its attempts to appear independent, TikTok's day-to-day management and business decisions came directly from ByteDance's top-level management in China."

This marks the first time a former TikTok executive has publicly made an allegation about TikTok's close relationship with its Chinese owner. Though such alleged ties involving data, spying and sketchy internal communications tactics have been detailed by various media outlets, most of these reports were attributed to anonymous sources.

A number of executives have left TikTok in the last year, including former CEO V Pappas and U.S. trust and safety head Eric Han.

Have a tip about TikTok? Email alexandra.sternlicht@fortune.com.

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