

## Ex-TikTok executive claims she was fired for lacking ‘docility and meekness’

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TikTok has faced scrutiny over whether its working culture is hostile to women and minorities © Reuters

Hannah Murphy in San Francisco

yesterday

TikTok’s former global marketing head Katie Puris has accused the company of unlawfully firing her because some company executives, including the chair of its Chinese parent company ByteDance, believed she “lacked the docility and meekness specifically required of female employees”.

In a complaint filed on Thursday in federal court in Manhattan, Puris, who joined TikTok in late 2019, said she was “extraordinarily successful” during her employment at the short-form video company, but that she suffered discriminatory treatment due to her age and gender. She was ultimately fired in 2023, according to the filing.

In particular, she claimed that ByteDance chair Lidong Zhang “had a stereotypical view of the way women should behave”, and that Puris “did not fit that stereotypical gender” mould as an experienced hire who advocated for her team’s successes.

As a result of this, she claimed she was not allowed to speak at meetings with Zhang present, and he refused to take one-on-one meetings with her, according to the complaint.

“The disparate treatment Ms Puris experienced only increased as she neared 50 years old and Company executives made it clear that they preferred young, less experienced employees who they believed to be more innovative and pliable,” the complaint said.

TikTok could not immediately be reached for comment.

The lawsuit comes as TikTok has faced scrutiny over whether its working culture is hostile to women and minorities.

In 2022, the Financial Times reported that Joshua Ma, who had been leading TikTok’s European ecommerce team, told staff at a dinner that he “didn’t believe” in maternity leave. The report prompted Ma to step down from his role. A year later, TikTok was accused of mishandling allegations of sexual misconduct and harassment in an FT report citing four staffers.

Separately, two Black former staffers filed a complaint with the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission last year alleging that ByteDance fired them after they complained about racial discrimination in the workplace.

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In the filing on Thursday, Puris also said she reported to human resources that she was sexually harassed at a TikTok event at the Cannes Lions advertising conference in 2022. She said the company “failed to respond appropriately” — for example, inviting the alleged perpetrator to a TikTok event later that week, which she had planned to attend.

ByteDance introduced a “996” culture — encouraging staff to work from 9am until 9pm for six days a week — to the US TikTok operation that it already oversaw in its Chinese operations, the filing said. This “disproportionately favoured younger employees”, it said.

Puris joined TikTok as a managing director and US head of business marketing. Prior to that, she worked at Meta for eight years, including as its global director of the Facebook Creative Shop, and for advertising agency BBDO Worldwide.

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