

Man Accused of Smacking Reporter's Rear on Live TV Is Charged

[nytimes.com/2019/12/14/us/man-slaps-reporter-arrest.html](https://www.nytimes.com/2019/12/14/us/man-slaps-reporter-arrest.html)

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Image



Alex Bozarjian, a reporter for a television station in Savannah, Ga., reacting after a man smacked her behind while she was on live television. Credit...WSAV

Alex Bozarjian, a reporter for WSAV-TV in Savannah, Ga., was laughing and smiling as she updated viewers on the latest of the 2019 Enmarket Savannah Bridge Run on Dec. 7.

Runners darted by, making silly faces and waving their hands to the camera during her live broadcast.

Suddenly, Ms. Bozarjian's expression changed from one of joy to disbelief. A passing runner appeared to have slapped her on the rear. She looked shocked and upset as she tried to compose herself on camera. Mouth agape, she was speechless for about three seconds.

Ms. Bozarjian, 23, a multimedia journalist at the station, posted a video clip of the episode on Twitter, where it drew outrage.

"To the man who smacked my butt on live TV this morning: You violated, objectified, and embarrassed me," she wrote. "No woman should EVER have to put up with this at work or anywhere!"



Watch Video At: <https://youtu.be/sC7EgnwX3I4>

The man, Thomas Callaway, was charged by the police on Friday with misdemeanor sexual battery, Bianca Johnson, a Savannah Police Department spokeswoman, said. Mr. Callaway, 43, turned himself into detectives, was booked at the Chatham County Jail and was released on \$1,300 bond, Ms. Johnson said.

The video has been seen 12 million times and liked about 736,000 times on Twitter. Supporters of Ms. Bozarjian zoomed in on the runner's face and the time stamp of the runners around him in the hope that someone could identify him.

The Savannah Sports Council, which organized the run, said on Twitter the day after the event that it was helping Ms. Bozarjian and the television station to identify the runner.

"Yesterday afternoon we identified him and shared his information with the reporter and her station," the organization said. "We will not tolerate behavior like this at a Savannah Sports Council event. We have made the decision to ban this individual from registering for all Savannah Sports Council owned races."

As word about what had happened spread, Ms. Bozarjian became a topic on national morning and midday talks shows. She also appeared on "CBS This Morning" and shared her story. "He took my power, and I'm trying to take that back," Ms. Bozarjian said.

Mr. Callaway spoke to WSAV and apologized, saying he regretted what he had done.

"It was an awful act and an awful mistake," he told the station. "I am not that person that people are portraying me as. I make mistakes, I'm not perfect and I'm asking for forgiveness and to accept my apology."

Mr. Callaway's lawyer, W. Joseph Turner, declined to comment Saturday and referred to a statement he released on Dec. 9.

In it, he said Mr. Callaway "did not act with any criminal intentions" and described him as "a loving husband and father who is very active in his community."

After Mr. Callaway's arrest, WSAV issued a statement in its story on Friday.

"This conduct displayed toward Alex Bozarjian during her live coverage of Saturday's Savannah Bridge Run was reprehensible and completely unacceptable," the statement said. "No one should ever be disrespected in this matter. The safety and protection of our employees is WSAV-TV's highest priority. WSAV continues to support Alex completely as this case moves forward."

Ms. Bozarjian referred inquiries Saturday to her lawyer, Gloria Allred, who said in an email: "Alex Bozarjian is glad that law enforcement is taking this matter seriously. She feels that a reporter should be able to do her job without being assaulted."

Dan Shelley, executive director of the Radio Television Digital News Association, said that when journalists are intimidated or physically attacked, "it's really the public that suffers because it's the general public that is being intimidated."

"It's not getting access to the information it needs to make decisions about their community," he added.

Mr. Shelley said that his association, with other press freedom advocacy groups, began tracking physical assaults on journalists in the United States in 2017, which saw 46 cases. In 2018, there were 43, and so far in 2019, there have been 35, with a third of them involving female journalists, he said.

Susan Walker, a journalism professor at Boston University and a former television news producer, said that what had happened to Ms. Bozarjian was "becoming a workplace hazard, particularly for young female reporters in local TV news."

In September a man suddenly kissed WAVE broadcaster Sara Rivest as she reported live from a music festival in Kentucky.

"They do not have the protection of the entourage around network reporters," Ms. Walker said of female local reporters.

Ms. Walker said that her school's college of communications trained its journalism students about what to do if they found themselves in such a situation.

"We teach our journalism students to make the call if a scene is threatening in any way and pull out of the situation," she said.