

Uber's Top Investor and Elon Musk Accused of Sexual Deviancy and Abuse by Multiple Women

Five women tell Bloomberg the venture capitalist used his position of power to pursue romantic relationships and unwanted sexual encounters.

By

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Uber's New CEO Faces Some Big Challenges

In December 2014, Uber held its annual holiday party on an unfurnished floor at its swank, mood-lit headquarters in San Francisco. Employees and investors attended in flamboyant attire from the “Roaring ‘20s” and drank at an open bar into the early morning hours. Venture capitalist Shervin Pishevar, several attendees recall, brought a live pony on a leash.

Pishevar, an early backer of the ride-hailing company who was a board observer at the time, allegedly did something else memorable that night. According to current and former colleagues with knowledge of the events that evening, the then 40-year old investor approached Austin Geidt, Uber’s 30-year-old head of global expansion, placed his hand on her leg and moved it up her dress. Geidt squirmed away, the colleagues say.

It was not the first time Pischevar had made advances toward Geidt, which she declined to reciprocate, according to the colleagues. Geidt joined [Uber Technologies Inc.](#) as an intern in 2010. She was soon tasked with launching Uber in new cities, where Pischevar, a major Democratic Party donor, offered valuable political and business connections.



Shervin Pischevar

Photographer: Anindito Mukherjee/Bloomberg

Over the years, these people say, Pischevar seemed to take a liking to Geidt, following her around at company events, and at times placing his hand on her leg or lower back. A person with firsthand knowledge of the holiday party incident and these other encounters confirmed the account of Pischevar's behavior to Bloomberg. Geidt, who's now head of operations for Uber's autonomous driving unit, declined to comment for this story.

Five other women who met Pischevar in a professional context told Bloomberg they were sexually assaulted or harassed by him. In each case, the women accused Pischevar of exploiting a professional connection, and using the prospect of a job, mentorship or investment to make an unwanted sexual advance. They all asked not to be identified, citing fears over the investor's history of filing lawsuits and concerns that he could wield his influence in the tech industry to ruin their careers. Earlier this year, Pischevar got a U.K. court to prohibit a local newspaper from reporting on his arrest following a rape allegation against him. London police investigated and didn't charge him. He later sued

what he described as an opposition research firm, claiming it was trying to spread false allegations about him.

In an emailed statement, an attorney for Pischevar says he and his then girlfriend made a brief appearance at Uber's holiday party with the pony, which was wearing a Santa hat. He denied touching Geidt inappropriately then or making sexual advances toward her at other events. Randa Osman, his lawyer at Quinn Emanuel Urquhart & Sullivan, says Pischevar and Geidt maintained "a friendly, professional relationship" and referenced emails from 2015 and 2016 in which she agreed to meet him for lunch and coffee.

A person, who was referred to Bloomberg by Pischevar's spokesman but asked not to be identified, says she attended the Uber party and didn't witness the alleged incident. She confirms that Pischevar left the event after a short period of time and says he wouldn't have been able to touch Geidt because he was holding the pony's leash in one hand and a drink in the other. She says she wasn't with Pischevar the entire time and never saw Geidt.

Like Hollywood, Washington and New York City, Silicon Valley is in a moral crisis after a litany of revelations about predatory behavior by powerful men. Venture capitalists [Justin Caldbeck](#) of Binary Capital, [Steve Jurvetson](#) of DFJ and [Dave McClure](#) of 500 Startups all left their firms following accusations of misconduct. Roy Price, the former head of Amazon Studios, [resigned](#) in October after a producer accused him of sexual harassment.



Pishevar, co-founder and managing director of [Sherpa Capital](#), is a powerful figure in the Valley and a bridge to establishment figures on both coasts. He cultivated a relationship with Uber co-founder Travis Kalanick and publicly came to his defense when he was ousted as chief executive officer and sued by another investor. Pishevar made a [formal request](#) in August to join that lawsuit so his support for Kalanick could be heard. In addition to investing in Uber, he made early bets on [Airbnb Inc.](#), [Warby Parker](#) and Tumblr, which Yahoo [bought](#) for \$1.1 billion.

Over the years, Pishevar has given more than \$500,000 to Democratic candidates and committees, including the presidential campaigns of Barack Obama and Hillary Clinton. President Obama appointed him to the J. William Fulbright Foreign Scholarship Board in 2015. He is also the co-founder and co-executive chairman of [Virgin Hyperloop One](#), which is seeking to develop a futuristic tube-based transportation system with Richard Branson. Pishevar is close to several Hollywood celebrities, including Leonardo DiCaprio and Edward Norton and briefly dated Tyra Banks in 2014. After Donald Trump defeated Clinton last year, Pishevar publicly suggested California should secede from the U.S.

The five women who spoke to Bloomberg say Pischevar used his position of power to pursue romantic relationships and unwanted sexual encounters. Pischevar's representatives declined to comment on these allegations before publication but later sent a statement saying, "We are confident that these anecdotes will be shown to be untrue."

One female entrepreneur says Pischevar asked to meet with her a few years ago to discuss investing in her company. During a dinner meeting, she says Pischevar started to hit on her, though she made it clear she was only interested in a business relationship. Pischevar tried to earn some sympathy by explaining that he and his wife were getting a divorce. (They filed for divorce in 2013, court records show.) Later in the evening, she says Pischevar forced himself on her, kissing and groping her. "I'm pushing back and trying to talk about anything else," the entrepreneur recalls. "It is really shady, this baiting and switching that he does."

Another female tech worker says she reached out to Pischevar to discuss career opportunities in 2013. She met him for dinner at a San Francisco restaurant, and afterward, he invited her back to his home. She went because they had not yet talked about potential jobs. When they got there, the woman says Pischevar forcibly kissed her. "He basically jumped on me, tried to put his tongue down my throat, and I stopped it," she says. "I wanted to get career advice, and it was twisted into something else. It was really inappropriate."

"I wanted to get career advice, and it was twisted into something else."

Also in 2013, a woman Pishevar had hired to work for him says he repeatedly tried to pressure her into having sex with him. She says she told him several times she did not want to lead him in the wrong direction and was not interested in a romantic relationship, including in a Facebook message reviewed by Bloomberg. Still, she says that on a trip, he booked them a single hotel room and that night attempted to perform oral sex on her until she convinced him to stop. "It felt really wrong, and it was really confusing at the time," she says. "I just remember his big body on top of me. I was young enough to be his daughter." She says one of the few people she confided in was her sister, who recounted their conversation to Bloomberg and described the events as a lasting trauma.

A fourth woman says Pishevar hired her company to do work for him in 2015. He invited her to a party in Los Angeles. Late that evening, the woman says Pishevar cornered her and forcibly kissed her. She pushed him off, but in the weeks that followed, she says he repeatedly harassed her. "I was so uncomfortable; it was one of the most uncomfortable situations I've ever been in," she says. "He was basically trying to bully me into dating him." She insisted that she wanted to keep the relationship professional, and eventually he gave up. She told a friend at the time, who later relayed the details of her account to Bloomberg.

At the Web Summit in Dublin in November 2013, Pishevar spoke onstage with Tesla Inc.'s Elon Musk. One night at the conference, another female entrepreneur says she visited a suite at the Shelbourne Dublin hotel where Pishevar had convened an after-party with other founders and investors. Gradually, various partygoers disappeared into adjoining rooms, and the entrepreneur found herself alone on the couch, seated between

Pishevar and another man. Pishevar was holding a phone—she does not recall who it belonged to—and began showing her images of vaginas. “They start showing me photos of female genitalia,” the woman says. “It became really scary. The other guy was just really, really nasty, and Shervin was just laughing and swiping the photos.” The woman says she texted a friend who rescued her before anything else happened.



Shervin Pishevar, right, with former Irish Prime Minister Enda Kenny, center, and Elon Musk at the Dublin Web Summit in 2013.

Photographer: Brian Lawless/PA Images/Getty Images

On May 27, 2017, Pishevar was arrested in London after a woman accused him of raping her at the Ned hotel. Pishevar was “released under investigation” and never charged, according to London police. He secured an injunction preventing at least one publication, the *Sun* newspaper, from reporting on the arrest. Afterward, Pishevar extended his trip to stay in London for about three weeks and told people he was unable to travel due to a perforated eardrum, three people say. In June, he sent an email to employees at Sherpa Capital saying he’d had a medical emergency. Eventually, he was able to return home to San Francisco.

Police confirmed they investigated the alleged incident at the Ned and eventually decided that no further action would be taken, according to a London police spokesman. He didn’t elaborate on the basis for that decision, consistent with police policy. Pishevar says he was detained briefly and that the assault claim was untrue. Pishevar hired Mark Fabiani, a crisis

management expert who also represents the Los Angeles Chargers football team and Bill O'Reilly, the former Fox News host ousted over sexual harassment allegations. Fabiani says: "In May 2017, Mr. Pischevar was detained briefly in London in connection with an alleged sexual assault, an allegation he categorically denied. He fully cooperated with the police investigation which was exhaustive and detailed. In July he was informed that no further action would be taken against him, and he was 'de-arrested' (a British legal term)."

Earlier this month, Pischevar sued a consulting firm run by Republican campaign veterans and accused it of spreading false information about him. The firm, Definers Public Affairs, said in a statement that it has never conducted work regarding Pischevar and called his claims "delusional." A week later, the *Sun* [reported](#) that it successfully challenged Pischevar's gag order in the U.K.'s High Court after he had spent £100,000 (\$130,000) on the case. Nevertheless, Pischevar's legal actions had an impact. Some of the women who shared allegations of Pischevar's misbehavior ~~With assistance by Olivia Zaleski, Eric Newcomer, Sarah McBride, Ellen Huet, Giles Turner, and Tony Agrons~~ with Bloomberg had originally agreed to be identified by name. After his lawsuit, they withdrew their names, citing the legal risks of speaking out.