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Peter Thiel isn't behind my \$35 million fight against Gawker: scientist

Gawker derided Shiva Ayyadurai as a “fraud” and an “imposter” for having said he invented email as a teenager in 1978.

YAHOO! FINANCE By Erin Fuchs May 29, 2016 10:08 AM



Peter Thiel vs Gawker Pits Journalists Against Silicon Valley

The gossip empire Gawker Media made a formidable enemy when it outed a tech billionaire as gay in a 2007 article called “Peter Thiel is totally gay, people.”

Thiel — an early investor in Facebook and a PayPal co-founder — has recently acknowledged using his wealth to try to take down Gawker. Thiel backed Hulk Hogan’s lawsuit over Gawker’s publication of the pro-wrestler’s sex tape, which led to a \$140 million verdict against the gossip site. Thiel told [The New York Times](#) he’d funded other suits but declined to name them.

‘There is no third party involved’

Hulk Hogan’s lawyer, [Charles Harder](#), also worked on at least [two other pending cases](#) against Gawker — including one brought by Shiva Ayyadurai, a scientist derided as a “fraud” and an “imposter” in Gawker’s Gizmodo for having said he invented email as a teenager in 1978. In a phone interview Friday, Ayyadurai insisted Thiel has nothing to do with [his lawsuit](#).

“My relationship with my attorney is direct ... There is no third

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party involved," said Ayyadurai, who's seeking at least \$35 million in damages in a suit asserting various claims including libel.

Despite Ayyadurai's assertion, Gawker suggested Thiel may secretly be backing the scientist's lawsuit, which he filed this month in Massachusetts federal court a few weeks after the Hulk Hogan verdict.

"We're still waiting for the Facebook board member [Thiel] to acknowledge if this is one of the several cases he's admitted to funding in his secret vendetta against Gawker," Gawker Media said in a statement Saturday.

For his part, Ayyadurai says he's been putting out feelers for an attorney since 2012 when Gizmodo first featured an article about him that described him as a "fraud" and included his image [with the text "imposter?" over his face](#).

"It's not like I said, 'Oh, let me get on the bandwagon. This is about me trying to correct history,'" he said. At another point in our conversation, he said, "No one should be called a fraud. That's a criminal term."

'Email was invented in 1978 by a 14-year-old working in Newark'

This story goes all the way back to 1978, when then-14-year-old Ayyadurai went to work in the University of Medicine and Dentistry of New Jersey. Ayyadurai, who had been studying computer science, was asked to "translate the paper-based interoffice mail and memo system into an electronic communications format," [according to his account on his website](#).

"In the end, I wrote nearly 50,000 lines of code to design and implement an electronic version of the mail system and called it EMAIL, a term never before used in the English language," he writes on his site, noting that he received the first US copyright for the term EMAIL.



Noam Chomsky believes Shiva Ayyadurai invented email.

Ayyadurai would go on to become a lecturer at MIT, where [he earned four degrees](#) focused on electrical engineering, visual studies, mechanical engineering and systems biology. In 2011,



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Time Magazine would describe him as “[The man who invented email](#).” His MIT colleague, famed linguist Noam Chomsky, also gave him credit for inventing email as we know it.

“Email, upper case, lower case, any case, is the interoffice, inter-organizational system, the email we all experience today — and email was invented in 1978 by a 14-year-old working in Newark, N.J. The facts are indisputable,” Chomsky [said in a statement cited by Wired](#).

‘A nut and a fraud’

Of course, others have disputed those facts; Raytheon engineer Ray Tomlinson is also widely credited for having [invented email in 1971](#). In 2012 Gawker publication Gizmodo called into question Ayyadurai’s credibility in an article called “[The Inventor of email did not invent email?](#)”

“V.A. Shiva Ayyadurai is a fraud who has been masquerading for years as the pioneering mind behind email. At least according to a bunch of geeks [who mobilized from all corners of the digital world](#) to try to set the record straight,” the story began.

A follow-up article from Gawker’s Sam Biddle came the next month: “Corruption lies, and death threats: the [crazy story of the man who pretended to invent email](#).” That article said that, at MIT, Ayyadurai was “generally described by his colleagues as a nut and fraud — the terms ‘asshole,’ and ‘loon’ were tossed around freely by professors who were happy to talk about their coworker but prefer to remain anonymous.”

That article became the “de facto primary source” for other news outlets, Ayyadurai said. It immediately hurt his career, according to Ayyadurai, who says he thinks about that coverage of him every day.

“I was bereft .. hundreds of calls came into MIT asking for my firing,” he said.

‘Funders disappeared and reneged on their contracts’

Two years after the initial articles, Ayyadurai married the actress Fran Drescher, spurring Biddle to follow up with another story, this one called “[If Fran Drescher read Gizmodo, she would not have married this fraud](#).”

The 2012 and 2014 articles have cost Ayyadurai numerous paid speaking engagements and made it virtually impossible for him to raise money for his ventures, he says.

In 2012, when the first articles were published, Ayyadurai was teaching one of MIT’s most popular electives, called Systems Visualization, according to his complaint. MIT canceled the class after the negative coverage, he says.

He was also director of a new initiative at MIT back in 2012. But after the Gizmodo coverage, his complaint stated,



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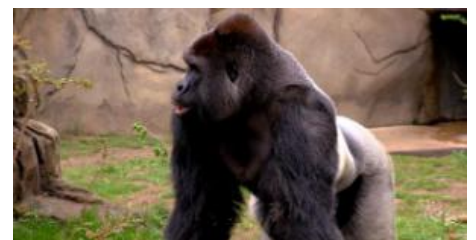
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Shiva Ayyadurai with his wife, the actress Fran Drescher.

"funders disappeared and reneged on their contracts, citing the negative press and its impact on their brand through their affiliation with Dr. Ayyadurai."

Gawker stands by its reporting that he didn't invent email.

"These claims to have invented email have been repeatedly debunked by the Smithsonian Institute, Gizmodo, the Washington post and others," Gawker Media stated.

We've reached out to Charles Harder and Peter Thiel but did not immediately receive a response.

—

Erin Fuchs is deputy managing editor at Yahoo Finance.

Read more:

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