Allegation escrow platforms: Target rape, reporter’s dilemma, and the promise of “he said, they said”
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Abstract
Callisto, created by Sexual Health Innovations in 2015, is a sexual assault reporting application based on an information escrow model. By employing a walkthrough method of the platform’s primary tools (recording and matching), this essay situates Callisto’s design within proliferating informal rape justice responses that try to overcome the law’s disappointing rehearsal of “he said/she said” logic. This critical user-centered approach to interpreting the values enacted through the technology suggests that Callisto is the reflection of the evolving social dynamics of “target rape” and internal dynamics of victimization (“reporters’ dilemma”) on college and university campuses. As Callisto generates forms of evidence of sexual assault through its platform, collective forms of responsibility are fostered among victims to report, demonstrating the influence of digital platforms as novel forms of popular evidence unburdened by law’s preoccupation with the immediacy of visual proof.

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Introduction
The expression “he said, she said” is a common way to describe conflicting reports about an issue, often related to unwitnessed interactions between men and women. When conflicts about sexual conduct are framed as “he said, she said,” the implication is that the case is impossible to resolve. The phrase operates as a dismissive but powerful take on sexual assault and misconduct in which the truth cannot be known; the public is massaged into throwing up its hands in exhausted defeat.

Despite the fact that “he said, she said” is not legal language, the phrase impacts official legal strategies in U.S. feminist jurisprudence. Shepherd (2018) pointed out that the saying gained popularity when Anita Hill testified at Clarence Thomas’ confirmation hearing and Christine Blasey Ford testified at Brett Kavanaugh’s hearing, both of which officials publicly described in “he said, she said” terms. Shepherd (2018) further argued the expression is “cavalier, crude and dismissive of sexual misconduct” and
indicative of a “mindset nearly always favor[ing] the alleged assailant who is nearly always male” [1].

In the #MeToo context, the problem of proving such accusations has led private actors to develop new means of reporting sexual assault and misconduct using information escrow technologies that advance new social dynamics of victim reporting. At several U.S. colleges, electronically encrypted applications called “allegation escrows” provide algorithmic fixes that introduce a matching paradigm into sexual assault complaint strategies. Allegation escrow services are platforms that allow users to log time-stamped reports about sexual assault and misconduct that are released to officials only when there is a match among the reporters to the same offender. These tools transform sexual assault and harassment from “he said, she said” to “he said, they said.”

Social media is a growing informal vehicle outside law and policy frameworks for amplifying political feelings and attention to social situations in matters of sexual assault and harassment. Popularized through social media, the 2015 documentary film The Hunting Ground, for example, exposed the prevalence of systematic rape and harassment of female college students and the retaliation that they face after coming forward. The consequences of rape in college, whether prosecuted or not, are not solely physical trauma. Distress caused by violence correlates to poor school performance, which may compromise financial scholarships and a student’s ability to remain in school. Further, the decision to report immediately jeopardizes existing peer relationships and horizons for social interaction, as victims with complex agency can experience intense desire to both avoid and further interact with their abuser and his friends and associates.

Similarly, examining trends in the mediation of sexual assault and misconduct, scholars have underscored the increasingly networked technological means of perpetrating sexual violence, in which recording the assault is a cruel element of the victimization (Fileborn and Loney-Howes, 2019; Mendes, et al., 2018).

Powell (2015) has argued that “social media, blogs and other online communications [are] increasingly mediating informal justice for rape” [2]. Informal rape justice addresses gaps in victim-centered legal responses, including through the circulation of anti-rape technologies such as digital applications offering design features that send alerts, monitor users, and initiate evasive actions for potential victim-survivors (Bivens and Hasinoff, 2018). Research on these tools shows no correlated decrease in sexual violence with their use and implicates anti-rape apps in perpetuating myths of victim vulnerability and helplessness. Still, such technologies are notable for their potential to intervene in dominant evidence-based legal frameworks through popularizing the use of informal monitoring and reporting.

The informal rape justice movement has also spurred more social science research on sexual assault on campuses. Research on Title IX complaints is turning inward, with some U.S. scholars and administrators studying and identifying target rape as a mode of sexual violence prevalent in total institutions. Target rape highlights the controlled spatialized ends of sexual assault in contained institutional settings. This mode of perpetrating sexual violence on prechosen victims reflects forms of popular misogyny on college campuses — with implications for factory floors, prisons, and other institutions. As it is part of the growing informal rape justice movement, the concept of target rape also informs the design of victim-centered digital applications to respond to evidence-based sexual assault complaints in a world dominated by the logic of “he said, she said.”

With an eye toward addressing the popularization of digital evidence among sexual assault victims, I consider how Callisto, a sexual assault reporting application, models the promise of “he said, they said,” in which collected complaints shift the balance of power from alleged offenders to victims and from legal epistemologies to popular knowledge-making practices. Callisto, a platform created by Sexual Health Innovations in 2015, operates an escrow model where users can informally report sexual assault and misconduct.

My analysis frames the platform as a popular and unofficial form of evidence gathering offered to college students, leaving an examination of the legal uses of the app to subsequent work. Here, I analyze Callisto
not through studying a sample trial investigation but through employing Light, et al.’s (2018) walkthrough method to analyze the app’s basic tools: the Record Form and Matching operations. I use the walkthrough method to demonstrate that Callisto is designed in response to the way assault and misconduct are spatialized on campus by male offenders who frequently target female students. The application proffers a novel form of evidence whose production has yet to be incorporated into law but whose popularization may well lead to such a possibility.

My interest in this examination is less about whether Callisto is likely to follow the path toward evidentiary incorporation in the law. Drawing on Mnookin’s (1998) work on visual evidence and using the example of Callisto, I would like to highlight the implications digital platforms pose for gathering evidence in a more fundamental way. What interests me is how popularizing the app promotes informal and collective responses to sexual violence, including new evidentiary formats whose demonstrative ways of seeing broaden our understanding of the spatialization of sexual misconduct, on college campuses more specifically and in matters “before the law” more generally. Guided by Mnookin’s history of the incorporation of novel visual evidence into law through drawing analogical relationships to earlier representational media, I delve into how Callisto’s digital platform promises to further complicate the dominance of law’s visual epistemology in matters of sexual assault and misconduct.

Crucial to my argument about how Callisto incorporates target rape into its design is that its mode of spatialized violence is distinguished by the fact that victims might share the same perpetrator. Callisto responds to the spatialization of these targeted offenses by creating opportunities for multiple victims to virtually collaborate and corroborate their experiences with time differentials. Escrow reporting devices position target rape as a mode of sexual violence and harassment in a manner that demonstrates how digital application features embody both collective popular feminist pedagogies and dating app technology. The platform reflects efforts to unsettle the mindset of the impossibility of proving sexual misconduct while contributing to legal and popular — official and unofficial — histories of evidence.

What might Callisto’s escrow platform suggest about histories of evidence of sexual violence beyond law and its preoccupation with photography? In Mnookin’s (1998) influential examination of the history of the incorporation of photographic evidence into law, she argued the once novel evidentiary form was accepted through analogy to older technologies of representation (e.g., maps, diagrams, drawings, etc.). Similarly, the emergence of digital tools for reporting sexual assault and misconduct helps us to imagine legal evidentiary futures beyond now traditional photographic evidence.

Digital applications, through algorithms and database structures, emphasize recording information often nonvisual. The investigation of reproductive violence is associated with distinct evidentiary forms that, in addition to the judicial rhetoric of analogy, reveal that the spatialization of violence and its interpretation are dominated by a preoccupation with the visual. For example, for decades domestic violence investigations and trial strategies have come to center around the collection and circulation of visual evidence, such as documentary photographs of external bodily injuries and the household space where domestic violence often occurs. These photographs are essential as legal evidence documenting the progression of violence across the victim’s body and throughout the home’s interior. Images of battered women and wrecked living spaces index police and social science epistemologies about domestic abuse, specifically its frequent repetition and localization in the home.

Certainly, Mnookin’s (1998) account would suggest escrow technologies like Callisto, as a novel evidentiary form, could potentially gain legitimacy in law through popular analogies with earlier legal evidentiary forms (e.g., photos of wounds and overturned furniture). However, I explore how Callisto’s evidentiary format maps a territory of struggle around finding demonstrative evidence of reproductive violence on college campuses that suggests that the novel forms of evidence Mnookin discussed have rhizomatic afterlives. That is, the unique affordances and features of evidentiary media promise to transform how we investigate reproductive violence according to spatial modes of perpetration and the management of its victim-survivors. The result is that a form of evidence coveted in one area of reproductive violence may be less valuable or available than forms of evidence in another area.
In the case of Callisto, the platform’s mediation of the affective and cognitive responses to sexual assault reflects recent discoveries about the spatialization of sexual violence on college campuses that differs from knowledge gleaned from visual evidence of domestic abuse. Callisto’s popular and informal role in mediating the transition from “he said, she said” to “he said, they said” is enacted algorithmically, purporting a deeper and more radical awareness of the spatialization of violence because of how the platform links individual victims to the same offender. As offenders and their victims are localized to the same college setting, the campus identifies spatialized (and racialized) forms of reproductive violence in a way that the expression “he said, she said” is heretofore left unmarked. Callisto reflects the mode and impact of reproductive violence, which is structural and systematically occurring in institutional spaces of work and learning. Evidence derived from the application reveals the social and spatial circumstances of campus sexual assault in ways that decenter visual evidence.

As we have seen in the example of Callisto, the technology also becomes a tool for users to decide whether to identify as a victim of sexual assault. Self-identification as a victim also comes with an algorithmically mediated chance to show responsibility toward other victims who could be “out there.” Here, too, informal rape justice strategies are at the forefront, targeting bystanders of sexual assault as agents who bear responsibility in an effort to increase informal and situated responses to stop sexual assault. Following Oliver’s (2015) notion of “response-ability,” Rentschler (2021) argued that responsibility is performed through new technologies and “requires that bystanders orient themselves and their concern toward care for victims, where they recognize and understand the harms they suffer” [3].

Likewise, we must be attuned to how logging a report using Callisto may constitute a performance of responsibility between victims who are unknown to each other and who may remain so. In this way, theorizing the relationship between Callisto and its users gives way to entanglements between law and social media more broadly and in a more nuanced sense as emergent phenomena that increasingly impact digitally networked informal rape justice strategies. I demonstrate next how Callisto’s app is a popular feminist form of evidence, with concluding remarks about evolving notions of what it means to identify as a victim.

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### Allegation escrow

It is first important to elaborate upon the new applications at the center of this paper and the principles of contracts and information sharing they entail. Ayres and Unkovic (2012) described the information escrow apparatus in this way:

Information escrows allow people to transmit sensitive information to a trusted intermediary, an escrow agent, who only forwards the information under pre-specified conditions. For example, an allegation escrow for sexual harassment might allow a victim to place a private complaint into escrow with instructions that the complaint be lodged with the proper authorities only if the escrow agent receives at least one additional allegation against the same individual. [4]

Many kinds of information escrow models exist: allegation, whistleblowing, suspicion, and so on. This paper considers the particular example of sexual assault reporting applications. A distinctive feature of sexual assault allegation escrows is how narratives of trauma inform the database structure, partly because victim activists, allies, and entrepreneurs have worked together to pioneer such design initiatives.

Allegation escrows serve well the spatialized violence of sexual assault on campus. They produce popular
forms of digital evidence and expand legal evidentiary traces consisting of photos, social media comments, texts, e-mail correspondence, and videos. Callisto produces digital traces of the evolving mode of target rape perpetration and technological options for victims who find it very difficult to “make visible cases of sexual violence that would have otherwise remained hidden or distrusted” [5]. The platform’s Matching feature requires the offender’s Facebook URL as a “unique identifier.” Matching is a primary element of the Callisto reporting app, as is the Record Form feature. Following a walkthrough of the app and a review of research on campus sexual assault, I suggest the potential expansion and amplification of popular evidence and a recontextualization of the civil contract established between victims.

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**On reporter’s dilemma**

With digital media entrepreneurship thriving on the power of push marketing and behavior tracking, interest grows in harnessing the power of digital applications to influence victim decision-making. Allegation escrow technology is transforming the investigation of sexual assault and harassment through design informed by evolving modes of sexual assault perpetration and self-identification as a victim. The changes are as temporal as they are spatial. Designing ideal platform features for reporting sexual assault and harassment involves expanding the temporal possibilities for victim reporting, for example, preserving evidence through time-stamped records (U.S. Equal Employment Opportunity Commission, 2021). In terms of the temporal aspects of sexual assault, allegation escrows such as Callisto address the complexity of the user’s coming to knowledge (and narration) about traumatic experience.

Trauma unfolds over time and might do so in contradictory ways (Chu, 2017; Mulla, 2014). In one instance, a victim might have serious difficulty recalling their experience. Sometime later, the same person might seek out communication and forms of intimacy with their abuser as a way of processing a set of feelings subtler than anger, fear, pride, and shame — the “grand affects.” From research emphasizing the serial perpetrator of target rape, we learn that victims not only deal with these grand affects but also negotiate an affective predicament of obstructed or suspended agency. According to Ngai (2004), suspended agency is the “situation of passivity itself, [including] the allegorical significance it transmits to the ugly feelings that both originate from and reflect back upon it” [6].

This predicament is increasingly understood to be quite common among sexual assault victims and offers insight into the complexities of sexual assault and harassment (non)reporting. The distinction is subtle: Victims do not report only because they are ashamed, afraid, proudful, or enraged. Rather, as I suggest through an engagement with Ngai (2004), victims often find themselves to be inert in ways that may “anticipate styles of nonviolent political activism” [7]. In other words, the emotional contours of sexual assault and harassment entail “ambivalent situations of suspended agency” [8], forms of negativity constitutive of minor affects. These feelings include anxiety, disconcertion, anticipation, and irritation. The responses are cyclical, repeating themselves over time rather than progressing in a linear fashion. The feelings complicate the idea of a standard model of a developmental response to trauma and suggest an affective gap that explains the complexities of sexual assault and harassment reporting.

To be clear, in using Ngai’s (2004) theory of minor affects, I do not mean to cast victims’ difficulty reporting as result of passivity and simply feeling bad, nor do I presume to speak the truths of victimized subjects. Rather, these negative affects are distinctive because they are characterized by the absence of catharsis and therefore important to my argument about reporting interventions. To borrow from Muñoz (2020), reporter’s dilemma is representative of “a predicament that obstructs agency” [9]. Noncathartic affects are those “ugly feelings” felt prior to (and even after) the survivor identification becomes available (Bivens and Hasinoff, 2018).

The absence of catharsis is an impediment that shapes Callisto’s approach of value sensitive design, ultimately encouraging user interest in the service (Friedman, et al., 2006). Though minor affects speak of
hesitation, a sense of hedging, or being “on the verge,” they are overwhelmingly conditioned by the history of victims’ acts of reporting that have been historically ignored and structurally discouraged. Reporting may produce responses feared to be carceral in ways victims resist (Crenshaw, 1991; Fitzgerald, et al., 1995; Ritchie, 2012; Sampson, 2003). In cases of campus sexual assault, ugly feelings include “reporter’s dilemma,” in which victims become wary of the risks associated with being the first to lodge a complaint against an offender.

I consider reporter’s dilemma more broadly, as part of a larger condition of negative affect circulating about how to process assault but that accords with Ngai’s theory. The reporter’s dilemma is equally constitutive of the rapidly unfolding scene of campus sexual assault, including the frequency of being sexually assaulted while unconscious, the assault being publicized in the offender’s social media “trophy videos,” and the victim being harassed again because of this content (Heyes, 2016; Oliver, 2015; Powell, 2015).

If responses to sexual assault unfold over time in different degrees of grand and minor affects and reflect a dominant emotional situation of coping and processing, then, as Tettegah and Noble (2016) argued, through our use of technology “we are attempting to extend and transcend our emotions by way of robots and other intelligent technological systems,” including allegation escrow [10]. The development of sexual assault reporting apps constitutes a “digital witness” and a crucial pivot toward working on and working through the affective dilemmas concerning reporting, with evolving modes of violation such as target rape matched by evolving circuits of feelings faced by victim-survivors (Dodge, 2018).

I point to Callisto’s algorithmic Matching function as a key feature through which alternate feminist collectivities and pedagogies are enacted in response to recent analyses of the social dynamics of sexual assault on campus settings. By drawing upon feminist studies on the value sensitive design principles of technology, I also demonstrate how escrow allegation apps create a context for victims to explore the negative feelings named in Ngai’s (2004) *Ugly feelings.*

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**Rethinking evidence of reproductive violence**

Callisto and other applications like it are designed around a distinct way of conceptualizing evidence of sexual assault, one that considers the affective and cognitive responses to trauma. Escrow technology extends the temporality of victim allegations. By creating a digital space to mark what happened, sexual assault reporting apps emphasize the minor affects, the ugly feelings of uncertainty, irritation, and awkwardness that can lead victims to avoid reporting their experiences. The app allows the act of reporting to be extended over time as the subject processes the violence and its meaning.

Yet, according to Haley (2020), who drew on McKittrick’s (2006) method of considering specificity of place in accounts of reproductive violence, slavery’s racial capitalism “must haunt our analysis, saturate our political imagination” about how to resist the history of gender violence in the U.S. and the Americas [11]. To this end, the application features that intervene in the temporality of victim reporting must be contextualized by referring to victims’ rights as a movement that historically mobilized Anglo-American legal frameworks and media in ways that sidestepped prior fugitive responses to reproductive violence committed against enslaved and ostensibly free Black and Indigenous women.

Rentschler (2011) showed how media forms constitute the language of victims’ rights and advocacy. Her important study described the period during the 1960s when victim advocates created a variety of documents, reports, pamphlets, and other texts for the movement. Rentschler’s term “secondary wounds” refers to the strategic argument advocates made about how victims of crime are traumatized not only by the crime but by the very system meant to adjudicate justice. The media forms that advocates circulated established victims’ rights on a platform of law-and-order legal reforms and antidefendant discourse. Guided by manuals, composite victim narratives, and other training materials, movement advocates
heightened public outrage over a supposed gradual supplanting of victims’ rights in favor of the rights of criminal defendants. The popular movement brought Anglo-American law and media together over the figure of the violent crime victim — typically a young white woman — through the concept of secondary wounds.

Victims’ rights also emerge out of the unanswered claims of enslaved people, whose erasure from popular movement discourse places them structurally out of reach of even secondary wounds. The archive of U.S. slavery structures the history of sexual assault and abuse reporting and its systematic dismissal across media forms and spaces. As Haley (2020) reminded us, the “nexus of carceral racial capitalism, domesticity, and reproduction” has continued to “mark the terrain of racial captivity, economic development, and un/gendering” [12]. Her study of Black women in the Southern convict leasing system in the 1890s attended to the prisoner’s uniform bloodied from the whip, forced labor, and sexual slavery endured in the camps. For Haley, rags cemented with blood and other bodily fluids are the missing evidence of racial and gendered subjection that testifies to the “elusive hapticality of gendered carceral violence” [13]. The space of violence shapes what evidence can be.

Similarly, Rosen (2009) has studied the respatialization of sexual assault from the plantation to free Black settlements as evidenced through rape affidavits against white men by freedmen and freedwomen. In doing so, she has established an evidentiary history of sexual violence and related abuses in U.S. law. Rosen importantly observed that rape affidavits were acts of freedom mediated by enslaved people’s newly acquired status as freedwomen and freedmen after the Civil War. During Reconstruction, freedmen and freedwomen immediately reported their suffering to the Bureau of Freedmen, Refugees, and Abandoned Lands. They also disclosed the return of plantation sexual violence to free Black communities postemancipation. Reporting occurred in freedom that was as nominal and fugitive as the affidavit form, as their many reports (and the right to make them) were contested, if not totally ignored. Organized Klan violence and systematic refutation of Black women’s testimonies by the press led the Bureau to cease most of its activities by 1868, finally closing its doors to freedmen and freedwomen by 1872, a form of “federal abandonment” Rosen linked to silencing victims.

Reconstruction and feminine ideals shifted the rhetoric of rape from frank speech to the language of concealment. This shift is seen in nineteenth-century slave memoirs, in which the culture of dissemblance in Black women’s rhetoric around rape became pervasive (Hartman, 2008, 1997; Hine, 1989; Jacobs, 2000). The production and circulation of contemporary domestic violence photography — images of battered women — is also entwined with freedwomen’s affidavits and memoirs (Rosen, 2009). Evidence of violence can be hard to discern (Dodge, 2018; Moore, 2018). Something similar to Black women’s culture of dissemblance reappears in often ambiguous images of battered women that are open to interpretation and exacerbate the problem of reporting.

We must recall that legal evidence of rape on the plantation, chain gang, and free settlement was systematically delegitimized or has simply not been present in the archive in a manner that secures racialized and patriarchal spatial dynamics. A genealogy of evidence of sexual violence and victims’ rights has alternately been an archival absence and presence, crossing at discontinuous intervals between the freedwoman’s rape affidavit, missing prisoner’s rags, dissembling rhetoric about rape, and images of battered women (Hartman, 2008; Foster, 2019; Haley, 2020, 2016; Noble and Tynes, 2016; Snorton, 2017; Sweet, 2016). Put differently, evidence of complaint passes first through beaten female and male enslaved people as silent witnesses.

Resurfacing in all of these media forms is the unanswered claim of the enslaved victim (Han, 2015). In this sense, victims’ rights and its media history in the U.S. sit upon the archive of slavery and conquest (King, 2019; Ryan, 2019; Smith, 2015). Current interventions around fostering sexual assault complaints are indebted to enslaved populations who reported victimization formally and officially as an act of freedom. All of these, including the prisoner uniform, which accumulates physical evidence as the inmate’s body is exploited and punished, are part of what Haley (2020) called “racial capitalism’s [gendered] fabric” [14]. Callisto’s app features emphasize the networked aspect of this fabric that differs from, yet is aligned with,
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The power of this evidence to stand as racial capitalism’s gendered fabric lies partially in the way such materials stress liveness and the immediacy of events. But what tactile and visual artifacts proffer as documentary evidence of reproductive violence, Callisto’s platform proffers as networked and algorithmically rendered evidence produced some time after the events in question. The application projects into a future when the liveness and immediacy of events have passed. In doing so, the technology experiments with forms of evidence that are unburdened with recording harmful events that disappear from view in the precise moment they occur. Callisto’s escrow technology invests in the algorithm, eschewing the immediacy of photographic and video evidence; instead, the platform embraces the victim’s delayed but anticipated report. I turn now to the mode of assault and misconduct at the center of algorithmically mediating the victim’s delayed response.

Target rape

This contemporary shifting mode of reproductive and sexual violence draws from Rosenfeld’s (2015) concept of target rape and encapsulates changes to the spatial-temporal mode of sexual violence. Target rape refers to patterns of sexual assault by incapacitation with drugs and alcohol or confiscating purses at entryways and can include conducting the attack in designated rooms where other men may watch. Differing subtly from date rape, target rape occurs when the “acquaintance is made for the distinct purpose of accomplishing the rape,” thus it “is not the product of misunderstanding between two situated students, but rather a patterned behavior that is premeditated, intentional, and often repeated” [15]. This mode of assault may be directed toward groups or individuals, but common to the practice is the campus geography of captive, impressionable, and sexually active young people living away from home.

Research on target rape gets at the work of prevention by digging deeper into the dynamics of organized male forays into sexual assault and harassment. Target rape theory addresses mounting criticism of campus responses to sexual assault by making the theory an object of power-knowledge. The theory hones in on distinct social phenomena at play in sexual violence on campus, whereby male students “ally together in sexual pursuit of females not only regardless of the females’ sexual desire, but often in deliberate violation of it,” to learn more about how campus assault happens [16]. These social factors turn campuses into hunting grounds for male students, exist to different degrees at any college or university, and are at play in numerous campus assaults. Research on this mode of assault, as illustrated in the administrative difficulties of numerous Title IX investigations at the campus of Harvard University, highlights the problems of reporting and investigating sexual violence (Rosenfeld, 2015; Lisak, 2011). The research offers authoritative data meant to assist with secondary forms of victimization experienced due to the very protocols of investigation followed on college campuses and is akin to the secondary wounds Rentschler (2011) found definitive of the contemporary victims’ rights movement.

The idea is that once informed by the target rape theory, colleges may use “the number and character of all-male exclusive spaces, such as fraternities, social clubs and athletic teams; male social capital and social currency; party themes; and control of social spaces” as indicators of the level of male dominance on campus [17]. As a mode of gendered violence, target rape supports the need for alternate possibilities of monitoring dominant male conduct and social dynamics in the campus environment. Through a general accounting of male dominance on campus, target rape theory has already been informing the dynamics of male status on college campuses, encompassing factors that administrators use to manage the prevention, response, and resolution of the feedback loops of proliferating Title IX complaints.

While target rape offers a picture of how assault happens to build rape prevention strategies, Gersen and Suk (2016) suggested research on campus assault is grounded in a much larger “bureaucratic sex creep” that seeks to regulate not only sexual violence and harassment but sex itself. In addition to these fears, part
of their critique draws attention to the complementary rather than oppositional relationship between regulation and racial discrimination. They pointedly asked, “Is there good reason to think that the unconscious racial stereotyping that may affect police and citizens in decisions to suspect, accuse, arrest, or shoot black men would have no analogue in the pattern of campus accusations and discipline for sexual misconduct?” [18]

Gersen and Suk’s (2016) concerns are supported by the absence of an analysis of the racial data on target rape. Target rape is theorized as a color-blind mode of sexual assault. Haley’s (2020) call to haunt political analysis with the history of racial capitalism demands we query target rape for an analysis of racialized gender violence. If target rape captures the mode of campus sexual assault in which several victims are targeted by one offender, how might the analysis of race and class be active in subsequent reporting dilemmas? Recalling the historically anti-Black structure of rape reporting and legal response acknowledges the role of racist ideology conditioning in institutional response and complicates a range of contemporary dynamics through which target rape becomes visible, and more informal responses, such as Callisto, become viable.

Banet-Weiser (2018) argued that the celebrated rise of popular feminism has been matched by an equal and accompanying rise in popular misogyny. Popular feminism “exists along a continuum, where spectacular, media-friendly expressions such as celebrity feminism and corporate feminism achieve more visibility, and expressions that critique patriarchal structures and systems of racism and violence are more obscured” [19]. Popular feminism, now “all the rage,” is accompanied by male rage. We can see target rape as an articulation of popular rage, denoting agreements between perpetrators and misogynist planning between men over perceived injuries to male power.

That forms of feminism could be matched by misogyny is helpful for testing the idea that Callisto’s reporting app mediates informal feminist planning that counters the popular misogyny at work in target rape. Callisto does not just match survivors to one another; it matches the form of misogyny at play in target rape. Through matching target rape, Callisto promotes a shifting evidentiary paradigm from legal to popular evidence and from the logic of “he said, she said” to “he said, they said.” Target rape expands the performativity and theatricality of reproductive gender violence to campus settings, where popular misogyny pervades. But how does the history of racialized reproductive violence inform popular feminism and misogyny? How does Callisto respond to the color blindness of both “he said, she said” and “he said, they said,” the dichotomy that target rape theory describes? What do the Record Form and Matching features of Callisto reveal about popular evidence of campus sexual misconduct?

### Callisto walkthrough

In the app, a minimalist chalk drawing of a person wearing a fashionable dangling earring appears to be listening to Callisto. Selecting For Survivors leads to these words:

> There is no ‘right’ way to respond after experiencing assault, and there is no ‘standard’ story. We believe you and we are here to support you as you think about what you’d like to do next. The important thing is knowing that the choice of next steps is yours to make. [20]

The app frames assault as a matter open to a multitude of responses from the survivor and frames the experience as one that remains in process, one in which the survivor is in control. Callisto tells survivors they are believed and supported, and that as they consider what to do next, they have options. By mediating survivors’ acquisition of legitimacy, agency, and, crucially, the time to come into possession of these political elements, the platform demonstrates that engaging the minor affects (ugly feelings) is critically
productive for manifesting evidence of campus assault and possibly uncovering target rape.

“When you’re ready, here are resources for you to explore” [21]. Survivors may voluntarily enter the site through their desktop, provided their university has made Callisto available, and enter the unique identifying details of an offender or perpetrator. Entering the offender’s details is a search query whereby the app’s Matching feature can be enacted. From right to left, survivors are encouraged to click to learn more about Matching. They can download a record form, explore resources for therapy, see recommendations for recording evidence, and learn about their legal rights.

A link to download a record form stages the platform’s intervention into the temporality of the reporter’s affective dilemma. “Not ready to enter Matching? You can document what happened as you decide what to do next” [22]. Matching cannot occur without first filling out a record form. By emphasizing nonreadiness as an option, the app routes users (“Not ready for Matching?”) to an alternate activity to engage (“You can document ... as you decide”). Users might never submit a match query, but they may engage the Record Form feature as a kind of therapeutic play that builds interpretive agency. Like a game, the feature explains its laws and risks of engagement. It opens to an eight-page questionnaire that includes information about who can see the document, what to write, and how to save the file. The Record Form tool mediates an activity nexus between popular evidence collection, therapeutic play, and the creation of a larger “survivor empowerment ecosystem” [23].

Though users can mark and make time to cope with the many facets of reporter’s affective dilemma, Record Form and Matching are separate operations that the platform anticipates bringing together to transform the discourse of sexual assault from “he said, she said” to “he said, they said.” Lilley and Moras (2017) pointed to this potential when they described the app’s promotion of both self-empowerment and social justice. Rather than simply a personal escrow tool, Callisto is “a coordinated ensemble of servers, advisory boards, social networks, programming code, counselors” that expands victims’ rights by transforming evidence [24]. Reporting what happened is phrased to suggest the user might never submit a match query (“document ... as you decide”). In combining answer check boxes with space to write testimonial narrative, the Record Form feature mediates an activity whose duration the user controls. Users can take as long as they need with the form as they (re)consider an experience in which control had been removed. Thus, the form’s temporality is separate from a matching event yet crucial to its enactment of “he said, they said.”

In terms of racialization of sexual misconduct, the questionnaire asks users to recall anything about the offender(s), leaving communication about race and class up to the user. As the form avoids mentioning offenders’ race, this omission can be interpreted as inheriting the color blindness modeled by target rape theory. Gersen (2015) pointed out, “The dynamics of racially disproportionate impact affect minority men in the patterns of campus sexual-misconduct accusations, which schools, conveniently, do not track” [25]. Coupled with Callisto’s “We believe you” credo, the platform may “aggravate and hide” the racialization of campus social life, which according to Gersen, makes patterns of racialized assault difficult to study and expose.

Callisto may thus contribute to the underappreciation of the disproportionate impact of assault accusations against male students from underrepresented racial groups. The platform may also rehearse the complications that Crenshaw (1991) identified among Black and brown female survivors. In the context of popular evidence making, the form shifts the identification of the offender’s race onto the user, aggravating and hiding the inscription of race into popular evidence of campus sexual misconduct, as Gersen (2015) warns. The disproportionate effect of race on sexual misconduct accusations suggest taking an ambivalent if not wary posture toward the significance of the positive match.

To be sure, working through reporter’s dilemma may offer “no satisfactions of virtue, however oblique, nor any therapeutic or purifying release,” for victimization has “a remarkable capacity for duration” across the history of U.S. reproductive violence [26]. Interacting with Record Form and Matching offers no guarantee of a cathartic experience for the user. For example, Callisto (2021) states:
A Match means that more than one person entered the same perpetrator’s unique identifiers. If we find a Match, that does not guarantee that a perpetrator is a repeat offender, only that two or more people have identified the same perpetrators in Callisto. [27]

Conversely, “If we don’t find a Match, that does not guarantee your perpetrator hasn’t victimized other people. It only means that other people have not identified the same perpetrator in Callisto’s Matching system.” [28].

Callisto may thus conform to what Ngai (2004) explained as noncathartic aesthetics “that produces and foregrounds a failure of emotional release (another form of suspended ‘action’) and does so as a kind of politics” [29]. Both the Report Form and Matching features may reassert the reporter’s lack of catharsis even as the platform invests in and supports ideals of reporting activity as substantive evidence leading to better investigation and outcomes for survivors.

Upon matching, Callisto authorizes a legal options counselor to mediate anonymous communications between matched survivors wanting to discuss further coordinated action. Legal options counselors are not administrative experts who merely reinforce lawyers’ indispensability by advising and managing reporting and possible legal activity among matched strangers. Rather, counselors emerge as part of a holistic response to reporter’s dilemma. What the platform cannot guarantee in terms of reporter’s dilemma even after a match, it does provide in terms of social movement building contra the logic of “he said, she said” and the popular misogyny of target rape.

Callisto’s operating model relies upon college and university engagement. Whether a school offers Callisto appears primarily to be the student-driven work of campus associations that reach out to the organization. For instance, a case study on the site discusses how Syracuse University’s Student Association collaborated with Callisto. I tried to enter the site by typing my “.edu” e-mail address and was given a screen informing me that “Matching is not yet available on your campus.” While my university did not have access to Callisto as of this writing, I had the option to allow my e-mail address to be retained and used as targeting data for its marketing. For now, however, the operating model seems less about possibly selling access to its escrow service and more about fostering institutional networks through student-led associations (U.S. Equal Employment Opportunity Commission, 2021).

Importantly, this means the platform’s potential is modeled on student organizing. Students may collaborate with Callisto in a variety of ways that recall past histories of victims’ struggles to report violence. But Callisto has to be invited first. At an organizational level, the platform models the kind of consensual interaction debased by target rape on campus. Through the collaboration of student organizations working to bring Callisto to campus, the paradigmatic logic of “he said, she said” transforms into “he said, they said.”

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**Conclusion**

How do we change the balance in rape cases? This paper applied a broad conception of reporter’s dilemma to analyze how Callisto, a digital witness, shifts the balance in campus sexual assault and harassment reports. The app’s popularization at select U.S. colleges facilitates collective empowerment in response to reporting dilemmas in cases of sexual misconduct. The app shifts the balance of campus assault by developing informal networked spaces to consider anti-rape justice pursuits.

Callisto responds to the concerning politics of campus assault. Its escrow technology contributes to legal and popular forms of evidence that reveal shifts in the spatialization of the larger category of reproductive
violence reaching back to U.S. slavery throughout the Americas. As Haley (2020) implores us to see, our politics must be analyzed in terms of the gendered fabric of spatialized reproductive violence. Callisto’s popularization of informal reporting mechanisms testifies to the networked aspect of reproductive violence’s gendered fabric, a network I examined in two ways.

First, by taking as a point of departure Mnookin’s (1998) analogical description of the relationship between evidentiary forms incorporated into law, I suggested that evidence of campus assault has an analogical relationship to evidence involving other historical forms of reproductive violence. The college campus has emerged as a hunting ground for reproductive violence and is haunted by the sexual exploitation of the plantation, chain gang, free settlement, and home. Some campuses have also emerged as spaces of power-knowledge to research and organize around the experiences of victims. Here I linked the app’s primary features to institutional research on target rape, arguing that Callisto is modeled after the frequency of repeat offender’s systematic, targeted mode of sexual assault.

Second, my walkthrough of Callisto explored the primary features offered to users to informally report assault. The Record Form and Matching features construct an alternative space, gathering users in informal communication about reporting sexual misconduct in the face of disappointing feedback from administrators. I suggest the platform may inherit the color blindness of target rape theory it models, making the known disproportionate impact of reporting on members of racial minority groups harder to trace through popular evidence because the app leaves it to the user to make any disclosures about race. The reproductive violence of slavery underwriting capitalism can only haunt Callisto’s response to the emotional and cognitive dilemmas of target rape on campus. The technology’s significant intervention into extending the temporality of reporting must be read against the time of those victims whose reports have been historically ignored and disavowed.

Amid the historical erasure of the racial from emerging cartographies of reproductive violence and its investigation, more should concern us about how reporting apps shift the balance in rape cases. Also compelling is how the informal space to ponder and report experience presents a radical scenario in which a user decides whether they are a victim. Allegation escrows such as Callisto invite people to reflect upon victim self-identification, amplifying and expanding its spatial and temporal scales in ways that allow users to work through claiming a status whose redress contours the gamut of liberal democratic debate. Through the algorithm, Callisto makes being a victim an object of collective knowledge that fosters collective responsibility among victims for fighting sexual assault.

Changing the balance of campus sexual assault can occur through popularizing social media technologies and practices in which victims hold a mirror up to themselves and the possible recognition of other victims. Through Callisto, victims matched to a mutual offender might introduce a novel technology into legal evidence paradigms that challenges the primacy of the visual and “he said/she said logic.” In the context of encroaching federal regulations, informal and popular responses to complaint in which individuals consider reporting an assault are all the more important to examine in relation to race and spaced reproductive violence.

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