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This Confidential Method of Reporting Sexual Harassment Identifies Serial Predators



BY KIMBERLY WEISUL, EDITOR-AT-LARGE, INC.COM @WEISUL

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Tech founders, who have been vulnerable to sexual harassment and assault from investors or potential investors, will now have a new way to report them—one designed to maintain confidentiality while helping to identify people who repeatedly harm others.

The new reporting system comes from Callisto, a nonprofit that builds technology to help uncover sexual harassment and abuse. Callisto has so far focused on college campuses. The company is one of three nonprofits to join the most recent Y Combinator class and announced at Tuesday's Demo Day that it will expand to the technology industry.

Callisto's expansion is being funded by multiple venture capital firms, including Greylock Ventures, First Round Capital, Obvious Ventures, Uncork Capital, and Data Collective VC. The new service is expected to go live this summer. "We're going to roll this out one industry at a time," says Jess Ladd, the founder of Callisto. She says Callisto will focus specifically on two forms of bad behavior: sexual physical contact that happens without consent, and sexual overtures from someone who has power over another person professionally.

Callisto was founded on the premise that those who experience unwanted sexual contact may be more willing to report it if they know that others have spoken up as well. That hypothesis has been borne out with striking frequency during the still-young #MeToo movement. Callisto also believes that if victims have different avenues to report abuse, and different outcomes they can seek, they'll be more likely to come forward.

The tech-industry version of the product will focus on rooting out serial harassers, which is also a strength of the version for colleges. Victims will report their experiences online and identify the alleged perpetrator. This information is stored securely and kept confidential, and Callisto creates a time-and-date-stamp record of the event. Victims agree that if a match is found—in other words, if someone else has already identified that person, or does so in the future—each victim will be contacted by a Callisto counselor. The counselor will then explain the options, such as filing a lawsuit, confronting the assailant, or getting a human resources department involved. The counselor also offers to connect victims to others who have identified the same assailant.

After Cheryl Yeoh, a serial tech entrepreneur, wrote about her harassment by 500 Startups co-founder Dave McClure, she says she was contacted by other women who had similar experiences. "We wished we could have found each other rather than going to the press," she says. "If I'd had a choice, I wouldn't have gone to the press. And I was only able to do it three years later, because I wasn't running a startup or fundraising and I had married."

She believes Callisto could have helped her find other women who had been victimized much more quickly, and that she would have reported the incidents much sooner. "It would have shortened the time to catch the perpetrator and stopped him from approaching other women," she says. Yeoh is now a co-founder of #MovingForward, which

has convinced 88 venture firms to publicly share their anti-harassment and discrimination policies and to provide a point of contact for entrepreneurs who wish to report issues of discrimination or harassment.

To reach tech founders, Callisto will white-label the email addresses of companies across the startup ecosystem. They'll get those domain names from accelerators, funders, conferences, and co-working spaces. "Over time, we'll figure out what will work at scale," says Ladd. "Some of the most vulnerable people aren't going to be at incubators."

Individual companies that want to use Callisto can sign up on the organization's [website](#), although there is currently a waiting list.

The college campus version is a little different, as Callisto builds customized sites for each college, and because school administrators serve as counselors. But the basic idea is the same, and Callisto says that, on average, students who use Callisto create a record of an incident three months after it happens and report it to the university a month after that. At schools without Callisto, the company says violations are reported, on average, 11 months after they happen.

"We've found serial predators that otherwise would not be reported," says Ladd, noting that about 15 percent of on-campus perpetrators "matched" within a school year.

Anecdotally, she's heard that once a campus starts using Callisto, some students, "pay a little more attention to those anti-sexual-assault lectures. I have no way of knowing if it's true, but I like to think we've prevented some rapes."

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