

# The Emerging Role of Social Media & Technology in Restorative Justice

When survivors choose to report an instance of sexual misconduct or assault, many times the issue of privacy can become compromised during the reporting/adjudication process. The process of reporting at the UC Berkeley campus is often lengthy and re-traumatizing, requiring the continued re-telling of survivors' stories in a way that can be emotionally and psychologically damaging. Social media channels seem to serve the function of reporting or allowing survivors to tell their story but through a much more stream-lined and rapid process.

## Technology as an Informal Means of Reporting

One way in which technology and social media has done this is that they have enabled survivors to have more control over how their experience gets told. Those who decide to report an incident over a social media channel can often have direct control over the amount of privacy they wish to disclose. Since they are the content-providers, they can disclose as much or as little information as they want and can choose to disclose their identity or post anonymously. This can allow survivors to process their incident and trauma in a way that allows them to tell their story, thereby attaining a sense of 'justice' in a way that can circumvent the bureaucratic strings that come with the official reporting and adjudication process. When individuals do report instance of sexual assault or harassment on existing social media channels prevalent on campus, such as Wildfire or Facebook, responses from campus community members usually offer words of support and gratitude as well as offering references to support entities such as UCPD, Gender Equity center, PATH to Care, etc.

Additionally, social media is being used as an important and informal way to crowdsource and report incidents of sexual harassment/assault and circulate knowledge in the campus community. Within UC Berkeley Facebook groups, especially prominent ones such as "Class of \_\_\_" and "Free and for Sale", people will make posts reporting any incidents of harassment or sexual assault that have occurred, either by witnesses or the victims themselves. Other community members may also comment on the posts stating that they've experienced something similar, or offering support resources or action items (calling UCPD, etc), or just offering condolences or general support. Since survivors actively make the decision to tell their experience on such social media channels, their identity is public; however, most reports and recounting over social media keep perpetrators anonymous or they aren't aware of their identity.

These Facebook groups have served in a way, for victims and survivors to attain a certain type of 'justice' by telling people about their experiences and have their voices heard. It allows them to garner support from the campus community, and also serves as a channel for people to discuss incidents, how to deal with them, and how to prevent them in the future.

Besides Facebook, the Wildfire app is a new app created by UC Berkeley alums that allows students to pin locations on a map in which they witnessed or experienced robberies, assaults, instances of harassment, etc. It's become very popular among UC Berkeley students recently especially in light of recent shootings and robberies near campus, and students will often check the app before they are walking home to see if there are any safety alerts they need to be aware of. This has been very useful for those to report sexual assault or harassment and be able to pin the incidents on the map on campus so others can see where those incidents happened and be aware of them if they're in that area (<http://www.wildfireapp.io/>).

### Applications of Technological Platforms:

The instrumental role of Facebook and Wildfire demonstrate how social media has become a prevalent, informal channel through which individuals can report, discuss, and attempt to prevent incidents of sexual assault/harassment as well as circulate knowledge and resources. These informal reportings and online discussions are also methods that survivors can use to attain a certain sense of justice by notifying fellow campus members, garnering support, and having discussions about the incidents if they so please.

There are many new apps and technological tools similar to what Wildfire offers that have been developed to try to improve campus safety. One in particular that works specifically to tackle the issue of sexual violence on college campuses is Callisto. Callisto works with campus administrations and organizations to provide a centralized platform for reporting, educational resources, and survivor support. One of the key functions that Callisto offers geared towards restorative justice is for survivors to log and document their experience on the platform - this function is separate from filing an official report. Instead, this documentation functions almost like an online journal, is completely confidential and allows survivors to process their experience on their own terms (<https://www.projectcallisto.org/>). Callisto is an example of a multi-faceted platform that works to support survivors, uses data analytics to support campus responses to sexual violence, and can assist in the reporting process as well. Especially since sexual assault on college campuses has become a huge topic of national discussion and a priority for the Department of Justice, it can be expected that more technological platforms and applications will also move to combat this issue.

### Future Recommendations:

Among key campus organizations that work on the issue of survivor support and campus sexual assault, the broad consensus is that the current process is still very much fragmented, bureaucratic, and re-traumatizing. While the campus has taken steps to address sexual violence in the past couple of years, there needs to be a stream-lining of the reporting/adjudication process as well as a standardized procedure to report sexual misconduct committed by UC employees. In light of the widespread use of social media and technology among students, the campus should also investigate possible coordination with Wildfire or even implementing Callisto in an effort stream-line both the adjudication/reporting process as well as the centralization of educational and support resources.