

NETIZENS

A FEATURE DOCUMENTARY
DIRECTED BY CYNTHIA LOWEN

LOGLINE

NETIZENS exposes the proliferation of cyber harassment faced by women, spreading from the web to the most intimate corners of their lives. As the internet emerges as the next frontier of civil rights, this feature documentary follows targets of harassment, along with lawyers, advocates, policymakers and others, as they confront digital abuse and strive for equality and justice online.

SYNOPSIS

Maybe it started with a menacing Tweet or an anonymous cyber-mob making threats on your life. Perhaps you Googled yourself to find websites claiming you were once a prostitute. Maybe strangers showed at your door seeking sex, because someone was impersonating you on dating sites. Perhaps your intimate images were being sold to the highest bidder on eBay.

These are the stories at the center of NETIZENS, a feature documentary delving into the lives of women profoundly impacted by digital abuse. Carrie Goldberg is an attorney in New York City, who launches an internet privacy law firm in the wake of her own cyber harassment. Tina, in West Palm Beach, is a successful businesswoman whose career is derailed after an ex creates websites claiming she was once an escort. Detective Jenny Velazquez is a police officer with the Miami Beach Special Victims Unit, who's investigating a prominent non-consensual pornography case. And San Francisco-based Anita Sarkeesian is the creator of a popular web-series, "Feminist Frequency", critiquing representations of women in video games, who is the target of a cyber-mob's ongoing campaign of rape and death threats.

Through a character-driven approach, NETIZENS depicts the diverse forms digital abuse can take: non-consensual pornography, cyber-stalking, threats of violence, privacy invasions, impersonation, character attacks. The film challenges the notion cyber harassment is "only" online, showing the repercussions on targets' lives: lost jobs, thwarted educations, damaged reputations, offline harassment and stalking, and countless hours devoted to containing attacks against a backdrop of mounting legal fees and psychological distress.

NETIZENS follows as the film's subjects seek justice, discovering they often face an uphill battle. As Carrie's law firm takes off, she dreads the expiration of her own perpetrator's restraining order; she is also sought out by a woman who's being advertised for sex on Craigslist by a man she refused to date. After three years of un- and under-employment, Tina is unable to remove the websites defaming her

from Google and decides to pursue a civil suit. Following several bomb-threats, Anita courageously continues to speak at campuses across the United States, yet her harassment continues unabated. And Detective Velazquez obtains an IP-address subpoena to pursue her non-consensual pornography case, but only after she discovers nude images of the victim posted online as a minor.

As a result of being targeted, each woman in NETIZENS is transformed by her experiences. Carrie addresses Congress on the introduction of a Federal non-consensual pornography bill, and is featured in a *New Yorker* profile as “The Attorney Fighting Revenge Porn.” When Tina loses another job due to the websites, she begins writing a book about her experiences and comes out as having been an escort in her 20s. After Detective Velazquez traces IP addresses related to the nude images back to Antonio Giansante, he’s arrested, and the case propels Florida’s passage of a sexual privacy bill. And Anita produces a new web-series about women who’ve been written out of history, called *Ordinary Women*, and launches a personal project about the roots of her own social activism.

With the election of Donald Trump, the stakes rise for each woman in the film. Anita’s harassers are emboldened when the editor of *Breitbart*, which aggressively attacked her and fomented the cyber-mobs threatening her, is made a key advisor to the president. Tina travels to Washington, D.C. to take part in the Women’s March on Washington, and pushes ahead in going to trial as her perpetrator refuses to take down the websites, even in the face of litigation. In the meantime, Carrie’s firm is in the spotlight for representing the ex-girlfriend of Juan Thompson, who called in bomb-threats to Jewish community centers in an attempt to frame the woman, and Carrie signs a book deal with Penguin.

As equal access to the web emerges as a civil right, a new generation of lawyers, advocates, technologists, policymakers and others are challenging the status quo. NETIZENS bears witness as a courageous wave of individuals transform the web as we know it.

ADDITIONAL CONTRIBUTORS

After ANISHA VORA broke up with her boyfriend, her nude images went viral on thousands of “revenge porn” websites. She’s subsequently become a victim’s advocate with the Cyber Civil Rights Initiative.

SORAYA CHEMALY is the founder of the Safety and Free Speech Coalition, advocating for women’s freedom of expression online and working with tech companies and policymakers to prevent online harassment.

DANIELLE KEATS CITRON is a chief legal scholar on cyber civil rights and author of the groundbreaking book, *Hate Crimes in Cyber Space*, exploring how the law can be used to prevent and redress harassment.

At the age of 15, “FAVI” was seduced by her soccer coach, Antonio Giansante. After leaving the decade-long relationship, he posted explicit images of her—much of it surreptitiously filmed—to porn sites and sent the images to her employer and family. Her case propelled Florida’s recent passage of a non-consensual pornography bill.

MARY ANNE FRANKS is a law professor at the University of Miami and is the Tech and Legislative Policy Director at the Cyber Civil Rights Initiative, helping to craft state and Federal anti-harassment legislation.

As the Section Chief of the Cyber and Intellectual Property Crimes Unit, ASSISTANT US ATTORNEY WESLEY HSU’s team has been at the forefront of prosecuting high-profile Federal internet privacy cases.

LEE ROWLAND is the head of the ACLU’s Freedom and Technology project; she has been challenging state and Federal laws criminalizing non-consensual pornography on the grounds they violate freedom of speech.

FLORIDA STATE ATTORNEY KATHY RUNDLE was behind the state’s recent passage of legislation criminalizing non-consensual pornography, making Florida one of 34 states with such statutes.

CONGRESSWOMAN JACKIE SPEIER is the sponsor of the Intimate Privacy Protection Act, a Federal bill introduced in July 2016 targeting perpetrators of non-consensual pornography.

JAMIA WILSON is the executive director of WAM! (Women, Action and the Media) and a leader in social justice and women’s rights; WAM! advocates for gender equality in tech to reduce gendered online harassment.

TOPIC SUMMARY

The web is perhaps the most important public space in our communities, integral to expression, employment, education and opportunity. But as a result of gendered cyber harassment, women are signing off blogs, shuttering social networking profiles, withdrawing from professional circles and limiting their participation in a range of ways. And what happens online has profound ramification offline: many women have their home and work addresses posted, presenting threats to their safety. Many receive violent messages that radically proscribe their freedom of movement and daily routines. Others face the humiliation of explaining to potential employers why nude images surface in Google searches of their name. Women in abusive relationships are under constant surveillance by abusers equipped with location data, stalking tools and a plethora of “revenge porn” websites.

And it *is* predominantly women who are targeted: 70 percent of cyber stalking victims are female. Women make up 90 percent of non-consensual pornography victims. A study published in *New Media & Society* found 70 percent of female

multiplayer online gamers play as male characters to avoid sexual harassment. A recent survey by *The Guardian* found 8 of the news outlet's 10 most abused journalists are women.

But the image of the internet as the "wild west," where abuse is the price of admission, is quickly changing. As equal access to the web emerges as a civil right, a new generation of lawyers, advocates, technologists, policymakers and others are challenging the status quo. Currently, 34 states have enacted laws against non-consensual pornography. Social media sites such as Facebook, Twitter and reddit are revising their terms of use to prevent harassment on their platforms. Recently, Google, Bing, Yahoo and even Pornhub announced they would remove explicit images posted without the subject's consent. Meanwhile, online harassment has launched a fire-storm over what constitutes free speech online.

As gendered cyber harassment is recognized as a barrier to all that the internet offers, and a huge dimension of intimate partner violence, *now* is the moment for NETIZENS to catalyze a movement for justice and equality online.

ARTISTIC APPROACH

My primary goal with NETIZENS is to powerfully and cinematically depict online harassment and the immense impact it has on targets' online and offline lives. Through a character-driven, intimate window into the ways in which harassment has changed each woman's life, I hope to challenge attitudes that minimize or normalize digital abuse, and to debunk the notion that online harassment is "not real" or only online. By spending time in my subject's homes, workplaces and environments, we witness how every aspect of their personal and professional lives are affected.

To portray the web in fresh and unique ways, I'm working closely with cinematographers Cailin Yatsko and Rachel Lears to make the web's presence in each subject's life a tactile, physical phenomenon. Through a strong *verité* approach to the subject matter, NETIZENS breaks down the false divide between our online and offline lives, and shows how online spaces are perhaps the most important public spheres in our communities.

As the co-creator, writer and producer of the feature documentary BULLY, and as the co-author and editor of two books on the subject of bullying and harassment, I am uniquely qualified to identify and tell the stories that reveal the scope of this problem with depth, complexity and compassion. At the core of my practice is the belief that we *can* transform the world through storytelling. As an artist, creativity and storytelling are my tools for innovating change. Therein, NETIZENS is also about women relentlessly pursuing justice, and inspiring the next generation of journalists, scientists, activists, artists and engineers to continue their work in the face of intimidation. NETIZENS depicts women who are transforming the internet as we know it, and why we cannot afford a web without them.

PROJECT STAGE

I commenced production on NETIZENS in the spring of 2015; over the past two years, I've filmed with women across the United States who are targets of various forms of online harassment. I've also filmed interviews with several experts on the issue, as well as policymakers, legal scholars, advocates and law enforcement officials. Currently, several main subjects in the film are at turning points in their stories, and I intend to film with them as they come to a resolution. Tina is in the midst of a civil suit that's going to trial over the next several months, charging the perpetrator of causing her extensive financial harm with the reputation-harming websites. In the wake of the election, Anita is developing a new project about racism and inequality in the United States, called the *Freq Show*, and I will be following as this is produced, and as she also works on an autobiographical project. Carrie's law firm has continued to expand and she's currently going to trial with Grindr. Importantly, I am also actively working to research, identify, and gain access to film with perpetrators in the coming months.

I recently commenced editing scenes we've identified as being critical to the developing stories, with editor Emily Williams, while we continue filming and production. (I understand this grant is not for post-production purposes.) Given the timeliness of the subject matter, I am aiming to complete the film in early 2018, for a 2018 film festival premiere and wider distribution.

January to May 2015

Preproduction, research, secure access to primary subjects

Spring 2015 through Spring 2017

Production and filming

Fundraising and development

Initiate outreach and engagement partnerships

Spring through Fall 2017

Commence editing

Continue production with primary subjects and perpetrators

Expand outreach and engagement partnerships

Winter 2017/18

Complete rough cut of film

Finalize filming with all subjects

Complete fine cut

Lock score and graphic elements

Apply to festivals and contact sales agents

Lock picture, complete digital intermediary, sound mix & finishing

Commence planning for phase 1 engagement campaign initiatives

Spring 2018

Festival premiere, launch of phase 1 of engagement campaign and website

Strategize on theatrical/VOD/TV wide release and community screenings

With wide release of film, launch of phase 2 of engagement campaign

JOURNALISTIC PRACTICE

A strong journalistic practice is at the core of NETIZENS, beginning with extensive research and development. In commencing this project, I spoke with a wide range of experts who are tackling online harassment from diverse perspectives. From the legal angle, I filmed with attorneys who are central in taking these cases: Elisa D'Amico, who run a pro-bono cyber-law clinic at K&L Gates, Erica Johnstone, who started *Without My Consent*, a legal advocacy project around non-consensual pornography, and Carrie Goldberg, an internet privacy attorney who subsequently became a primary subject in the film. In looking at the First Amendment issues that digital abuse has ignited, I interviewed constitutional scholars Danielle Keats Citron, author of the groundbreaking *Hate Crimes in Cyber Space*, and Mary Anne Franks, as well as the head of the ACLU's Technology and Speech Project, Lee Rowland. I also filmed with many of the primary advocacy organizations at the forefront of digital abuse, including the Cyber Civil Rights Initiative, the National Network to End Domestic Violence, Women Action and the Media, Hollaback/Heartmob, and others. To understand the challenges of responding to digital abuse from a tech company perspective, I spoke with Jacqueline Bouchere at Microsoft and Juniper Downs at Google on background, and I'm in the process of getting access to film with the Wikimedia Foundation on their developing online harassment tools. And from a law enforcement and policy perspective, I filmed with Assistant US Attorney Wesley Hsu, who is a federal prosecutor tackling high-profile federal internet cases, as well as Florida State Attorney Kathy Fernandez Rundle and Congresswoman Jackie Speier, who are pushing for sexual privacy legislation.

As many women in the film have significant safety concerns, maintaining privacy and security in the production has been a top priority. I am taking various precautions to protect my sensitive information and the information of those participating in the film, by using 2-step authentication, encryption on my computer, removing my information from people-finder databases, and other safety measures. Before the film comes out, I plan to hire a security consultant to manage any other security concerns for myself and those participating in the film. As several women in the film also have ongoing cases, I have needed to protect their identity and involvement in the film. At this time, we are also doing extensive research in public and court records to identify perpetrators, and have been contacting several individuals who are currently incarcerated, using secure methods.

While NETIZENS is a character-driven film, it is also extremely well-researched and solidly grounded in the most current, reliable information available. The production is dedicated to depicting the facts of the individuals' cases, the laws at hand, the challenges presented by the technology, the legal and constitutional hurdles, and the proactive steps advocates are taking to confront online harassment with integrity and accuracy.

JOURNALISTIC ENRICHMENT

I hope to work with IDA to identify the strongest way to craft the film's stories, and would value the opportunity to get support and feedback on the work in progress. Because policies attempting to prevent online harassment of women are often attacked as violations of free speech, this film enters extremely volatile territory, and I expect this film will generate a lot of dialogue, and possibly come under attack from the same sources who are targeting some of the women in the film. With IDA as mentors in this process, I seek to ensure this dialogue remains respectful, constructive and inclusive and that meaningful transformation emerges from the film and the responses to it. I would hope to work with IDA to channel any trolling or harassment the film received into positive outcomes that fosters digital citizenship.

DISTRIBUTION AND MARKETING STRATEGY

Upon completion of the film, I will be submitting NETIZENS to film festivals and aim to secure a sales agent to ensure the project reaches potential buyers. As with BULLY, I hope for the film to find a home with a theatrical/TV/VOD distributor, and for the release of the film to be amplified by a robust audience engagement and social impact campaign (outlined below). I also plan to partner with prominent women who have been the targets of online harassment and non-consensual pornography, to promote the film and engagement campaign, in addition to partnerships with organizations focused on gender and internet equality. I intend to work with an educational distributor to bring the film to college and university audiences, and to hold wide-spread community screenings with key stakeholders, including policy-makers, site operators, tech companies, women's justice organizations and others, both in the US and abroad.

INTENDED AUDIENCE

The internet a universal force in our lives around the globe, transcending borders, cultures, religions, genders and geographies and fostering equality and opportunity in communities world-wide. As we grapple with the ways technology can be abused, and how the internet can and should be regulated, it's my hope this film will be watched by the widely diverse audiences with a stake in online safety and equal access to the internet. Key audiences include women, young adults and university students, the technology sector, policy-makers, law enforcement and criminal

justice personnel, the gaming community, internet rights advocates and general audiences with an interest in the internet.

AUDIENCE ENGAGEMENT AND SOCIAL IMPACT

Building on my experience co-creating The BULLY Project, I intend to develop a robust, impactful engagement campaign for NETIZENS, using the stories from the film to catalyze meaningful impact and change. The campaign has three distinct goals: to shift online social norms; to champion policies that prevent digital abuse; and to connect targets, advocates, site operators and those in criminal justice with tools and resources to effectively respond to cyber harassment. This is a joint effort to be accomplished through partnership with advocates, policymakers, organizations, tech industry leaders, brands and a diverse range of citizens working to make the web a safe, just, accessible and equitable space for all.

Campaign highlights include:

- Creation of an online community hub with tools, resources and support for targets, advocates, law enforcement, educators and citizens
- Cyber harassment response training in all 50 states for law enforcement, criminal justice officials, advocates, tech professionals and educators
- Policy and tech summits with industry leaders and key stakeholders focused on cyber harassment prevention and response implementation
- Development of impact modules derived from the film's stories for use by partners, advocates, educators and citizens to educate and engage the public
- Wide-spread community screenings with diverse audiences and key stakeholders resulting in concrete action-items and takeaways

At this time, I've begun to foster partnerships with organizations at the forefront of internet justice, including the Cyber Civil Rights Initiative, the National Network to End Domestic Violence, Heartmob, Without My Consent, the National Stalking Center, Women, Action & the Media, Aequitas, the MIT Game Lab, Cultures of Dignity, and others. I have also interviewed leading advocates on digital rights and cyber abuse prevention, including Danielle Keats Citron, Mary Anne Franks, Soraya Chemaly, Congresswoman Jackie Speier, Florida State Attorney Kathy Rundle, Jamia Wilson, and others, all of whom are enthusiastic supporters of the project, and have expressed a commitment to engagement partnership upon the film's release. Additionally, Congresswoman Speier has offered to host a screening of the film on Capitol Hill.

KEY CREATIVE PERSONNEL

Director and Producer: Cynthia Lowen (PGA) is an award-winning filmmaker and the co-creator, producer and writer of BULLY, a feature documentary film following five kids and families through “a year in the life” of America’s bullying crisis, released by The Weinstein Company. Lauded by reviewers, BULLY was nominated for two Emmys and awarded the Alfred I. DuPont-Columbia Award for excellence in journalism. Drawing on the power of BULLY’s stories, the filmmakers created The BULLY Project Social Action Campaign, a collaborative effort in partnership with multiple organizations, foundations, brands and corporate sponsors, sharing a commitment to ending bullying and transforming society. Cynthia is also the recipient of the Hedgebrook Women Authoring Change prize from William Morris Entertainment, and fellowships to Yaddo and MacDowell, among other honors. Her poetry collection, “The Cloud That Contained the Lightning,” was selected as winner of The National Poetry Series.

Executive Producer: Abigail E. Disney is an award-winning filmmaker, philanthropist and the CEO and president of Fork Films. An active supporter of peace building, she is passionate about advancing women's roles in the public sphere. Disney's 20+ films and series focus on social issues, sharing a quality of spotlighting extraordinary people who speak truth to power. Disney's directorial debut, THE ARMOR OF LIGHT, has been selected for the 2015 Tribeca Film Festival. Disney has also executive produced films on a wide array of social issues, including 1971, FAMILY AFFAIR, CITIZEN KOCH, HOT GIRLS WANTED, THE INVISIBLE WAR (Academy Award Nominee®, Best Documentary Feature), RETURN, and SUN COME UP (Academy Award® Nominee, Best Documentary Short).

Executive Producer: Gini Reticker is an Academy Award nominated and Emmy Award winning director and producer with a distinguished career that spans more than 20 years. She recently directed THE TRIALS OF SPRING, which has played at Human Rights festivals around the world and was accompanied by six shorts that launched on The New York Times. Reticker previously won the Tribeca Best Documentary Award for PRAY THE DEVIL BACK TO HELL, the story of Liberian women whose actions helped bring an end to a brutal civil war. She co-produced THE BETRAYAL (NERAHKOON), nominated for both an Academy Award and an Independent Spirit Award, and served as executive producer on THE ARMOR OF LIGHT, CAMERAPERSON, CITIZEN KOCH, HOT GIRLS WANTED and SHE'S BEAUTIFUL WHEN SHE'S ANGRY.

In Association With: Ruth Ann Harnisch is the president of The Harnisch Foundation, supporting the work of effective leaders and creative communities working to advance gender and racial equality and diversity, with a focus on women and girls. THF has given grants to the Sundance Women Filmmakers Initiative and established a program of professional coaching for each of the female filmmakers selected for the SWFI program, as well as supporting Chicken & Egg Pictures’ Diversity Initiative and

Film Fatales. Ruth Ann has executive produced several award-winning films including UNREST and THE HUNTING GROUND, among others.

Editor: Emily Williams' work has been shown extensively on HBO, PBS and MTV and has screened at film festivals and museums around the world. She was series editor for each of the three Emmy-nominated seasons of HBO's MASTERCLASS, for the Academy Award-winning Simon & Goodman Picture Company, including the Emmy-winning episode "Alan Alda: The Actor Within." Ms. Williams recently completed the feature length documentary PULITZER AT 100 directed by Academy Award-winning director Kirk Simon. Williams has also worked with Emmy-winning directors Ric Burns, editing AMERICAN BALLET THEATRE: A HISTORY for American Masters on PBS, and Peter Kunhardt, editing FREEDOM: A HISTORY OF US for PBS and THE KENNEDY TAPES for Bravo.

Cinematographer: Rachel Lears' most recent feature documentary, THE HAND THAT FEEDS, won awards and recognition at Full Frame, DOC NYC, AFI Docs, Chicago Latino, and numerous other festivals on the 2014-15 circuit. It was supported by Sundance Documentary Film Program, the Ford Foundation, Latino Public Broadcasting, Chicken & Egg Pictures, New York State Council on the Arts (NYSCA), Bertha BRITDOC Connect Fund, and the Cinereach Project at Sundance Institute.

Cinematographer: Cailin Yatsko is a New York City-based cinematographer and co-founder of Bicephaly Pictures. Cailin has shot over 100 pieces of digital content for a variety of brands including Bloomingdale's, Artsy, Gagolian, MoMA, and Paperless Post. She conceptualized and shot four web series for James Franco TV, Glamour, and Dailymotion. Her first feature film, DAYS OF GRAY, a silent coming-of-age story shot in Iceland with an original score by the Icelandic orchestral pop band Hjalतालín, was released in 2015 after making the rounds on the international festival circuit.