

Cure Violence

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Project Outline

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CONCEPT

Create a 21st century global platform that empowers local communities to aggregate and amplify their messages through digital networks to openly discuss the causes of violence and explore solutions.

A NETWORKED MODEL FOR CHANGE

Cure Violence is an international online movement that anyone can join to create and spread media that speak to their personal experiences, reinforce positive messages and social norms, and ultimately change the way we think-- on a massive scale-- so that killing is no longer an option.

Affecting a widespread shift in behavior requires greater awareness and support of positive social norms. For many communities, violence is the norm, whether it's an ongoing conflict that's been plaguing one block for 20 years or the recent emergence of cyberbullying. In order for behavior change to occur on a massive scale, the affected community's members need to be empowered to intervene on behalf of one another, feel safe communicating and organizing, and share resources to get their message out. This change will not occur through traditional top-down public education campaigns. It requires a fresh approach where the most trusted members within a community take on the role of credible messengers, spreading their personal stories and experience to draw in and change the thinking of those closest to them. Instead of one spokesperson with one message that may ultimately alienate the target population, Cure Violence harnesses what millions of potential spokespeople-- in classrooms, town hall safety meetings, community organizations, block clubs, think tanks, local government, and national agencies-- are already working on: Their own solutions to ending violence.

Developed by video artist Lincoln Schatz, Cure Violence is based on the community-driven approach to spreading change through bottom-up credible messaging, models of engagement from the field of participatory culture and especially its application to the practice of youth media education, and public art as a framework for inclusion and personal expression. The project draws on the experiences and individualized expertise of those whose lives are directly and indirectly affected by violence but who have all joined the cause, exploring not just the underlying problems, but proposed solutions from all corners of society.

Initially conceived as a portrait project to present hundreds of differing perspectives on the issue, Cure Violence now exists as an interactive website where anyone can have access to the art, submit their immediate reactions to the issues raised through media of their choice, and access the responses of others. Cure Violence goes beyond raising awareness to merge art and action onto the same platform, encouraging users to share information on resources and self-organize for change in their communities and gives them opportunities to advance the cause even if violence is not a part of their everyday lives.

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Engaging viewers socially and artistically, it establishes participation itself as a new form of public art.

The conversation starts with a portrait of over 200 individual stories filmed in Chicago's neighborhoods hardest hit by violence. Lincoln's generative portrait process amplifies each individual's message by combining their stories into one continually evolving, multi-layered portrait, dissolving the borders between people, ideologies and communities. Portrait subjects were drawn from the broad community networks working to affect change in Chicago neighborhoods including families, educators, community activists, law enforcement, clergy, politicians, health care workers and most importantly, youth. The participants formed a core network who then suggested the inclusion of others who had been instrumental in helping to improve the quality of life in their neighborhoods, ultimately visualizing the process of how change spreads at the community level and laying the groundwork for the networked media responses to follow. Portraits were filmed outdoors in the interviewee's neighborhood and executed with the participation of community partners to heighten local recognition, pride, and ownership of the project while building a public presence in support of speaking out.

Each interview can last from 30-90 minutes and Schatz's software has the capacity to reconstruct and weave together every minute of every interview without editorializing. It is statistically impossible that any combination of imagery would repeat, so that every visit to the Cure Violence website generates a new springboard for discussion. Because the software mixes everyone's stories together and makes its own cuts without an agenda or editorial lens, subjects involved in the process have said that they felt freer to share their honest experiences and thoughts on violence in an art project than they would have with media or news outlets.

SOCIAL MEDIA + PARTICIPATORY CULTURE

Cure Violence is designed to enlist and empower youth and adults from both high risk and lower risk populations who can carry positive anti-violence messages back to friends, family members, neighbors, and others in their networks. To do this, we wanted to take a 21st-century approach to "meeting people where they're at" and allow the messengers to communicate with the tools they're already using.

This is a truly participatory project where media responses are not supplementary but integral to the project's goals. The global network is invited to contribute text and media responses to the violence in their own cities through social networking utilities and SMS technology, comment and connect with one another, and explore ways to affect change through actionable content submitted by Cure Violence partners and local and national organizations who choose to use it to organize and mobilize. The portrait and responses will be accessible via web, mobile device, broadcast, public projection and exhibitions.

The responses can be YouTube videos, Flickr images, SMS texts, Tweets and Facebook and MySpace groups that will be user-initiated and maintained to encourage ownership. To simplify the process and so that media has the maximum potential for sharing and mobility, responses are added to the Cure Violence site automatically when media is tagged with "cureviolence" on whatever platform the responder chooses. Cure Violence will continue to add functionality for more social media utilities based on user feedback.

Cure Violence achieves momentum by scaling grassroots messaging, and it is important that there be some level of editorial

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method to allow the most effective messages to rise to the top. Cure Violence will feature the work of select partners, especially First Responders (outlined below) who have been with us from day one. Their commitment to the project and to finding constructive ways to deal with the violence that affects their communities deserves to be spotlighted and serve as a model for other users who don't have access to training or organizations to help them get their messages out. Media produced by individuals will also have the opportunity to be featured when it is nominated or voted up by the audience.

For more on how social media can impact civic engagement, please download *Public Media 2.0: Dynamic, Engaged Publics*, a publication of the Center for Social Media at American University.

http://www.centerforsocialmedia.org/resources/publications/public_media_2_0_dynamic_engaged_publics/

FIRST RESPONDERS

Youth media, leadership, and safety groups will participate in the project as First Responders, citizen journalists and activists who shape the conversation. They will have previews of the site content and will be the first to upload their own multimedia stories from their unique perspectives. Working with their instructors, they will raise the level of discourse above typical online forums and set a precedent for intelligent, thoughtful, and respectful contributions.

The early and vital role of youth affects this project in a number of ways. By creating a private, controlled environment in which students can contribute initial responses to the artwork and begin conversations with each other, we establish the digital space as a safe environment for dialogue and allow youth to mediate the public interpretation of issues that directly affect themselves, their families, and their communities.

Cure Violence is currently working with youth and community organizations in the Chicago area and Brooklyn who collectively serve over 5,000 students. Students involved with the participating Chicago groups have provided invaluable feedback on the development of the project as Lincoln Schatz and his studio have presented Cure Violence to more 20 classrooms in the 2009-2010 school year. First Responder organizations include:

Free Spirit Media (<http://www.freespiritmedia.org>)

Digital Youth Network/YouMedia (<http://www.iremix.org>, <http://www.youmediachicago.org>)

Community TV Network (<http://www.ctvnetwork.org>)

Mikva Challenge (<http://www.mikvachallenge.org>)

Beyondmedia Education (<http://www.beyondmedia.org>)

Reel Stories (<http://www.voiceofthecity.org/reel-stories.cfm>)

Street Level Youth Media (<http://www.street-level.org>)

CeaseFire Chicago (<http://www.ceasefirechicago.org>)

Brooklyn Community Arts and Media High School (<http://www.bcamhs.org>)

These groups are contributing media accumulated through many years of addressing violence within their existing programs and will be developing new projects specifically around Cure Violence. One is using it as a tool to teach its students about

social utilities as organizing and activism tools; another is partnering with a local community organization to create regular podcasts about the neighborhood and its progress during the project, which could lead to a lasting partnership for them. Others are looking at how they can apply their unique missions-- media education through the lens of gender, for instance, or media education for students who are identified as high risk and who have already spent time in the juvenile justice system-- to expand the conversation and bring in voices from the extreme margins of public debate. National and international youth media partners are being identified and will be contacted to participate after the first round of students have set the tone and made their initial contributions.

For more on how youth use new media and social utilities and how these can be leveraged for learning, please download *Living and Learning with New Media: Summary of Findings from the Digital Youth Project*.

<http://digitalyouth.ischool.berkeley.edu/report>

PROJECTS + RESOURCES

Cure Violence has intentionally chosen not to create its own curriculum so that it can provide an open resource forum on the site for the sharing and discussion of hundreds of project ideas and curricula from external educators and community organizations. Because cultures of violence can differ so much from one area to the next, it's important to give our educational users the autonomy to address violence in the way that they believe is most appropriate to the specific communities they serve. These organizations could never be redundant to one another, but their project ideas and curricula often are and could be modified to serve different populations with minor changes. Cross-communication and collective resource sharing can also go a long way toward coming up with entirely new project strategies to help people approach a difficult topic in constructive, solutions-based ways.

A resource forum built on the individual strengths of its participating educators allows multiple avenues for addressing the issue, expressing personal stories, and analyzing the content of others, sorted and tagged by different skill levels and type of project or media. There are a lot of essential resources out there already-- guides for citizen journalists, interview projects, how to document changes taking place in your neighborhood-- and the forum will help educators who are strapped for time and funds find materials to get their students involved. Contributions to the forum could be edited and re-uploaded by other educators, for instance a fifth grade teacher inspired by an assignment for 12th graders modifies it to fit her classroom then shares the modification with the forum. By continuing to build close partnerships with other organizations who work in media and have experience with these issues, we will also ensure quality content that exemplifies participation for others.

These resources and ideas will also be accessible to the general public to facilitate their own media production and discussion, whether as prompts for a media response or tools to help them contextualize what they see represented on the site or through traditional media. All users are encouraged to repurpose the media they find on Cure Violence to create presentations and proposals to their school administrators and local officials based on the examples of what's worked in other communities, as well as use them as to begin smaller, personal conversations in their classrooms, families, and circles of friends. Suggestions for how to do this will also be available in the resources forum.

AUDIENCE

Cure Violence engages the most heavily affected communities as much as it challenges outsiders to advocate for and participate in social change, joining audiences that rarely share the same space or communication channels, online or off. Rather than separating out the students and having them speak only to each other, gathering youth and adults from vastly different backgrounds creates an opportunity for dialogue, understanding, and awareness of the realities and myths surrounding violence. Taking cues from our youth organization partners who consider it part of the educational process to teach each student how to communicate in their own personal style and voice, the project is designed to discourage homogenization of messages. Each person who contributes something to this project believes in the ultimate goal of stopping violence, but they will each have their own opinions on the causes and ideas about the solutions, whether it's that change can come about through more after school programs, jobs, peer mediation, greater family support, or something more abstract. Cure Violence places value on all of these messages in the service of the larger goal. It's important that people see that from these seemingly disparate ideas, you can still form a coalition and work together to innovate around solutions.

Participants may come to the site and find someone who looks like them, who is their own age, who shares their views, and who speaks to them in a media language they understand, like documentary reporting or spoken word and hip hop. They may come to the site and see people with whom they may only share one or two of these characteristics and that could still be enough to engage them as an audience member and content contributor. The plurality of voices and perspectives amplifies the overall message by increasing the potential that users will encounter a story with personal resonance. While it will require different outreach and communications strategies to target diverse groups from inner-city youth to policymakers, Cure Violence ultimately sees no conflict in these groups speaking to one another as peers and informing one another in the same space on issues that affect their daily lives.

SUSTAINABILITY + MAINTENANCE

In order to sustain user participation in the website, the project calls for three branches of maintenance: moderation, relevance, and technical maintenance.

Moderation will involve students from the youth media organizations working with the oversight of professional safety experts from partner organizations. They will be trained to recognize inappropriate content and mediate the discussion and media responses, preserving civility while still allowing the bar for participation to remain low enough that everyone feels welcome. They will drive constructive conversation, redirect if necessary, and actively work to engage someone who posts something toxic rather than kicking them off and pushing them further away from the discussion. Cure Violence acknowledges that in the changing landscape of communication, online drama can spread faster and cause as much damage as conflict in real life. Sanitizing the site and sealing it off from public comment will only do harm because the audience needs to see how to counter misinformation and tamp down drama so that they can model the same behavior and learn from the mediation they see on the site. Moderators will actively work to correct misperceptions, maintain safety, and demand respectfulness for all participants, and report serious abuses to the appropriate local authorities.

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Relevance maintenance refers to monitoring the participation levels on the website to ensure that users are returning and participating. To drive continued engagement, new project suggestions might have to be introduced to the site or moderators may be asked to start discussions or upload fresh media. The site will also have to be reviewed on a regular basis to ensure that all links and resources are current and reflect the most up-to-date material and thinking available. Keeping the site relevant also includes reaching out to new potential contributors like community, youth, and education organizations from regions who are not currently participating, as well as continuing to identify emerging leaders on the social media platforms Cure Violence aggregates from and informing them about how they can join the movement.

Technical maintenance includes hosting costs, updating website code to comply with any changes in third party social utilities, and backend technical moderation. Lincoln Schatz or a third party he designates will maintain hosting and code.

EVALUATION POTENTIAL

This project will accumulate massive amounts of data from website users. The project team is still exploring how to maximize the amount of information collected from tags appended to media responses, and data related to where people access the site, both geographically and from what means (computer, mobile device). People who interact with the project offline, in schools or museums or at public events, will be more difficult to track. Because it is designed to be viral, the ultimate impact of the project in terms of numbers will be difficult to quantify, but it should provide a fascinating view of the future of organizing for social change and how the broadcast of social norms can change the way people relate to one another in the digital and physical community. This project is a new tool for public education campaigns, with larger implications for all kinds of public health and community-based issues.

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SUPPORTERS

Cisco's global consultancy, the Internet Business Solutions Group, (IBSG) is collaborating with Lincoln Schatz and cities worldwide on Cure Violence - a public-private partnership aimed at reducing the epidemic of violence worldwide.
<http://www.cisco.com/>

Seed funding provided by **The Robert Wood Johnson Foundation** <http://www.rwjf.org/>

PRESENTATIONS

Cure Violence has been presented at Picnic, PopTech, TEDActive, DePaul University, Columbia College, FotoWeek DC, George Washington University, UNC Minority Health Conference, Initiatives in Art and Culture Conference, University of Minnesota, and others.

PRIVATE LOGIN FOR BETA SITE <http://www.cureviolence.com/>
Username: cureviolence **Password:** firstresponse