Just Say No to 'Just Say No'

Organizational Approaches to Youth and Online Privacy in the Americas

Executive Summary - September 2018

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In this research, I examine the practices of eighteen organizations in the field of youth privacy advocacy in the Americas through interviews with organizational leaders working on youth development, personal data protection, digital rights, and countersurveillance.

- I address tensions between the digital rights and youth rights movements. These tensions exist because 'youth protection' has been used as a powerful pretext to promote greater state surveillance and increased censorship.

- I address this censorship agenda — often pushed through tropes like *stranger danger*, *Just Say No*, *Think Before you Sext* — and argue that we need to change four well-meaning but ultimately harmful frames for youth privacy online:

✔ **"We should promote youth agency," rather than "as adults, our main goal is to protect youth"**

Youth protection might be well-intended, and is an action frame that aligns youth rights discussion with existing human rights efforts worldwide, but protective actions that overlook agency can be ineffective and harmful.

✔ **"We recognize that marginalized youth face the worst harms from privacy violations," rather than "All privacy violations harm all youth equally."**

Protection has been particularly harmful to young people who are marginalized in terms of race, gender identity, sexual orientation, class, and/or other axes of power. They face more risks and greater potential harms from many different actors: other young people, adults, and institutions including schools and police.

✔ **"We need collective responsibility from everyone involved, including classmates, corporations, and lawmakers," rather than "Don't Sext" (only recognizing individual actions).**

Individualistic approaches place the burden of action on youth who are already in marginalized positions. The consequences of advocacy on sexual content and privacy are gendered, and asking girls not to share their content feeds into victim-blaming culture (like asking women not to wear miniskirts).

✔ **"Youth have rights today," rather than "Youth are to be understood as conditional citizens.**

By seeing youth as conditional citizens, adults exercise a role as protectors who are excused to violate the privacy of the youth they live or work with; privacy is a right to be enjoyed later in life.

The participating organizations set good examples of what agency-promoting, intersectional, rights-based privacy work that emphasizes collective responsibility already looks like in practice.

1. Support youth decision-making to promote youth agency.

- Codesign
  Faro Digital speculative codesign workshops in Argentina get kids to identify problems and propose solutions to the technologies in their everyday lives. This enables conversations on privacy and safety: sexting, bullying, grooming.

- Institutional youth involvement
  eQuality Project at the University of Ottawa have a youth advisory board, accompanied by intentional guiding principles. Similarly, Hiperderecho in Peru have a youth league.

If it comes down to youth agency, then why push corporations and legislation?

Harm reduction advocacy, as practiced by Head and Hands in Canada, provides frameworks and experience to make sense of phenomena where youth have agency and, at the same time, are recipients of environmental influence. It is an alternative to moral and criminal and models of privacy advocacy, and proposes methods based on speaking with, not at, youth.

Faro Digital's codesign experience culminated in a campaign, '#SextWithYourHead. Best to cover yourself now than pick disguises later.' It poses a harm reduction approach to sexting. It's not about Just Saying No, but about making critical decisions around devices, services, practices.

2. Focus on the most harmed youth, and support their creative forms of resistance.

- Gender
  TEDIC held a digital security workshop with trans women in Paraguay, to make sense of the implications of real name policies, sex apps; Sula Batsu's privacy workshops in Costa Rica were also tailored for mothers who were the only non-users in houses where devices had been acquired for kids. Faro Digital and Pensamiento Colectivo host discussions on the gendered implications of sexting in Argentina and Uruguay.

- Class
  Derechos Digitales' research showed class divides in privacy behaviors among children in Chile, and north/south inequalities became visible in contrasting the content escalation capabilities of the organizations.

How do we promote intersectional views of privacy institutionally?

The eQuality Project at the University of Ottawa's consideration of equality at the center of their research and advocacy on youth and privacy is one of the strongest programmatic commitments to intersectionality found in this research.

LIGA JUVENIL DE DEFENSA DE INTERNET

The Youth League for Internet Defense is Hiperderecho's engagement opportunity for higher education students in Peru. They have collaborated on different projects, like a guide for safer sexting.

3. Shift from victim-blaming to collective responsibility.

- Emphasizing the sociotechnical structures at play
  TEDIC's campaigns on State surveillance and corporate data practices in
  Paraguay, Article 12's corporate advocacy to promote youth-friendly privacy
  notices in Mexico, Hiperderecho's outreach to technical students and
  iCanHelpline and Safernet's intermediation between social media companies and
  users through their internet helpline services.

- Intergenerational work
  Pensamiento Colectivo's workshops with adolescents and with their parents, and
  Red PaPaz's training for parents on ways they can speak with their own kids
  about technology.

> **What are the best frames to talk about collective responsibility?**
>
> **Digital footprint and data**: how Safernet in Brazil promotes discussion on the role of
> the corporations that make up the social media ecosystem.
> **Otherness** and **our responsibility to others**: how Faro Digital and Pensamiento
> Colectivo move away from approaches that place all the burden on the victim.
> **Privacy by design**: how Hiperderecho advocates with technical students for the
> recognition of the role of technical structures in the fulfillment of youth rights.

Pensamiento Colectivo emphasizes collective responsibility by flipping the message: by placing the spotlight not on the person who sent the nudes, but on the people who shared them without consent. Their video asking people not to share others' nudes quickly went viral.

4. Analyze how their rights are supported or violated by current technical, political (and organizational!) structures.

- Analyzing implications of legislation and outcomes for youth
Derechos Digitales and Datos Protegidos' research about youth privacy practices in Chile to advocate for the inclusion of their rights and needs in data protection legislation, which highlighted the importance of expanding on children's concepts of personal data and consent; Article 12's work for youth-friendly privacy notices in Mexico; the Office of the Privacy Commissioner's recommendations on youth data protection to legislators and corporations operating in Canada. InternetLab's work to understand the outcomes of these systems, as seen in court rulings on non-consensual image sharing, advances this mission as well.

- Building youth-friendly institutional capacity
Red PaPaz's efforts to promote youth privacy perspective in their capacity building efforts with the Colombian government.

- Addressing gaps in services
iCanHelpline in the United States, Red PaPaz and Safernet, who provide internet helplines and therefore become stakeholders in content moderation issues, and capacity builders within the institutions with which they cooperate.

How do we align organizational practices with youth's right to privacy?

First step: institutional confidentiality practices. Head and Hands in Canada and Safernet's helpline in Brazil pose excellent organizational standards.

In their quest to revitalize the discussion of internet legislation and non-consensual image sharing in Brazil, InternetLab looked at all the judicial outcomes of cases in Sao Paulo Court, showing the concrete ways that the existing frameworks have failed to support young women's rights.

Other key findings

- Organizations work to create conversations that challenge what they consider to be pervasive views on privacy.
  InternetLab's judicial outcomes research on non-consensual image sharing in Brazil revitalized an old discussion that framed gender equality versus freedom of expression by showing that they are not opposed in reality; that the old debate on anonymity did not reflect the cases that women in Brazil were facing. Sula Batsu saw the creation of a tabletop game in Costa Rica as a means to reach youth in their digital security efforts, recognizing the boredom and unwillingness they had witnessed in previous attempts to talk.

- For these organizations, their most meaningful work is that which ultimately resonates best with youth.
  These organizations' advocacy campaigns were notable in terms of reach, of alignment with youth perspectives, and their impact on legislative processes.

  They achieve resonance through codesign and institutional youth involvement, through local narratives and programming that do justice to those most marginalized, through going to the spaces where youth already are, and through interactive and media-based approaches.

  We see it in Internet Bolivia's outreach to the 27% of Bolivians that went online in the last two years; Head and Hands' confidentiality practices to sustain their work with youth affected by undue contact with the justice system in Canada; in various organizations' facilitation of workshops in youth spaces; and in efforts to think outside the technology branding, like Head and Hands' inclusion of privacy topics in their sexual education programming.

Areas of opportunity found in the field

- **Lack of a common vision in topics such as digital citizenship.**
  Digital citizenship is term that has become popular in youth and technology efforts from policy to non-profit advocacy. Researchers, practitioners and funders can work together to find the topics, frames, and skills used by different actors under the umbrella of digital citizenship, and find ways to unify and strengthen advocacy in this regard.

- **Small range of opportunities for youth participation at all levels of programming.**
  Outside of the organizations that use codesign in their work, organizations limited youth participation to very particular stages of their processes. Research can be undertaken to identify the best ways to build youth participation structures within the different collectives and organizations in the field of youth and privacy.

- **Lack of cooperation between most of these organizations' education efforts and the formal education systems in their countries.**
  Only two of the organizations work with the formal school system in their context, and only one of them has a programmatic focus on making an impact on curriculum. Research can be done to identify the reasons for this lack of cooperation and the pathways to bring both sides together.

- **Lack of independent evaluations.**
  Most of the organizations in this research described projects that have not been evaluated independently; research can play a role in the impact evaluation of all these initiatives.

More information

Blog posts of each organizational interview on the Center for Civic Media blog:
https://civic.mit.edu/2018/02/27/youth-and-privacy-in-the-americas-a-blog-post-series/

I gratefully acknowledge the time, wisdom and contributions from these participating organizations:

Datos Protegidos, Chile
datosprotegidos.org

Derechos Digitales, Chile
derechosdigitales.org

eQuality Project, Canada
equalityproject.ca

Faro Digital, Argentina
farodigital.org

Head and Hands, Canada
headandhands.ca

Hiperderecho, Peru
hiperderecho.org

iCanHelpline – The Net Safety Collaborative,
United States
icanhelpline.org

Mozilla Learning – Mozilla Foundation, United
States/global
Learning.mozilla.org

InternetLab, Brazil
internetlab.org.br

Internet Bolivia, Bolivia
internetbolivia.org

Office of the Privacy Commissioner, Canada
priv.gc.ca

Pensamiento Colectivo, Uruguay
facebook.com/pensamientocolectivouy/

Red PaPaz, Colombia
redpapaz.org

Safernet, Brazil
safernet.org.br

Son Tus Datos – Artículo 12, Mexico
sontusdatos.org

Sulá Batsú, Costa Rica
sulabatsu.com

TEDIC, Paraguay
tedic.org

UNICEF Brazil
unicef.org/brazil