

The 'future' of privacy: Youth-centric notions of privacy and surveillance around the world

June 6th, RightsCon 2023
Dialogue report



Ice breaker

Datafication—Verb; “the process in which children’s actions online are pervasively recorded, tracked, aggregated, analysed, and exploited by online services in multiple ways that include behavioural engineering, and monetisation” (Wang et al., 2022)

Guidance for participants: *Think back to your childhood, we know for some of us—me included—that may be a stretch! If you’re willing, share something from your childhood that would have ‘datafied’ you.*

If you are happy to share your experiences of datafication as a young person

(From ChatGPT for the lols) In a small town nestled within the baby boomer era, childhood held an enchanting simplicity. Neighbors gathered for games on sunlit streets, laughter echoing through the air. But as technology advanced, childhood too became datafied. Old Polaroids were replaced with digital frames capturing every moment. Parents traded treehouse secrets for social media profiles, documenting growth in pixels. Curiosity and exploration gave way to online quizzes and standardized tests. Playgrounds became virtual realms, where screens replaced swings and pixels replaced playmates. Amidst the abundance of data, the spirit of carefree innocence flickered, reminding baby boomers of a time when childhood was a tapestry of pure, unrecorded joy.

When I was a kid, at the start of every school day my teacher would read our surnames in alphabetical order and we’d have to say “present” if we were here. Even in primary school, when there were maybe 10 of us in the class max (rural school), and the teacher knew all our first names and could easily see if we were there. She’d tick off our surnames in a specially formatted blue and dotted-third striped book. At the time, it felt very important to have our attendance noted and formatted in this very particular way. Now it just seems funny.

I’m a little older, so my early childhood was not nearly as “datafied” as younger folks, but there was one really pivotal experience that I remember very well. At Expo 86, my sister and I were taken to a police booth and all of our biometric information was recorded so that our bodies could be identified if we were kidnapped or murdered. This was a very strange experience for a kid, and I remember feeling faintly uncomfortable with this process, because I was a regular murder she wrote watcher and it seemed to me that by giving my fingerprints to the police my parents were not only making it possible to identify me in case of murder or kidnapping (a

gruesome thought for a kid), but also identify me if I committed a crime later on, and I didn't like that, even though I had no intention of committing any crimes.

When I was young I spent a lot of time at the hospital and I had a number of operations. My age, weight, height, condition and all personal medical information was shared numerous times with different hospitals, surgeons, doctors and nurses. I remember medical professionals joining appointments "out of interest". My case was strange and it meant my information was shared wider than the team taking care of me. Growing up I found it strange how much of my personal information, particularly medical information, was shared with people, even if it was for my health.

Growing up my father was in the US military and the military would consider many different "data points" about my family and my father when they were determining when and where we would have to move to next. We ended up moving about every 2 years for the first 10 years of my life. I also remember having to give my fingerprints to get a military ID card and there was a little imprint of it on the ID that they gave me.

Signing-up for Facebook for the first time underage – encouraged to do so by adults around me – because it was a new thing in 2008 and we were not aware of the dangers or risks that it posed at the time.

Definitions of privacy

Privacy had four key components:

- The ability to conceal information
- Protects information from “others”
- Creates a sense of safety and wellbeing
- Was a right or entitlement

“Privacy is the use of your private information in protected and safe ways. Privacy protects and conceals information from those you don’t want to see it. It sets boundaries and makes your personal life more private & comfortable” – Antigua & Barbuda

The digital world is compulsory

Young people described the digital world as compulsory, so “consent” was not the way they’d think about framing data protections. (Is it consent or coercion if young people have no choice but to be datafied?)

“It’s actually very difficult for a young person to just opt out of social media or online sources. For school as well, we use so many digital things, you always have to consent to the cookies. Opting in isn’t really a choice anymore. ... We all kind of depend on it, news, education, communication, or just for socialising with friends. If you’re not on social media, you feel quite excluded from other people. Sports teams, clubs, group work – all of these take place online [in messenger groups], mainly through social media, which is easier than getting people’s phone numbers.” – Australia

What young people wanted

... to improve their online privacy

	ANTIGUA & BARBUDA - 9 principles	AUS - 11 principles	GHANA - 9 principles	SLOVENIA- 14 principles
Key concepts				
Transparency and meaningful consent around data collection and use. E.g. renaming cookies “data grabbers” so young people are not “pushed or tricked” into handing over data, or that “apps must not process or ‘eavesdrop’ on the content of messages exchanged through them”.	2	2	1	9
Providing young users with more control of their data . Suggestions were sometimes broad like “let us be more controllable of our data” to specific, like “young people should have the right to request it be deleted”.	1	7	3	10
Stronger data security . E.g. “make security stronger for young people’s data”	3	4	7	2
Data minimisation or collecting less data, such as requirements to “only collect the information about young people that they actually really need to run their app”. This especially applied to location data, with suggestions to prevent products “Collect as much location data about young people as they want”.	4	3	8	3
Requiring data to be processed only where it is in young people’s best interests or similar (this was described as a meta-principle, for example, suggestions that young people’s data “only collected and used in ways that advance their best interests, but this needs specifics about what it means. Young people need to decide what young people’s best interests are.”)	-	1	2	-
Prevent excessive sharing and selling young people’s data. Popular principles include “for data to not be resold” or “not be sold or traded to other companies.”	7	6	4	1
Restricting or ending targeted advertising to young people. Suggestions ranged from blanket calls to “stop advertising” to more targeted calls for “don’t have advertising turned on by default”.	5	11	5	7
Data retention, and obligations to delete data when it is not needed . E.g. data only to “be kept for as long as is it needed only” to requirements that “when we log out, all our data is deleted”	6	5	9	5
Requiring companies to provide adequate help and support . For example, it was suggested that “companies that collect and use young people’s data should be accountable to them. If something goes wrong, it should be the company’s responsibility to provide help and support and fix it”.	9	8	6	13
Stronger content moderation or algorithmic demotion. These ranged from calls for content controls, such as “banning the posting of videos that encourage children to take up dangerous challenges”, to calls for controls on how harmful content is shared, such as not “encourag(ing) harmful content in ‘for you’ feeds”	-	9	-	6
Improving the use of data for good , or using it to benefit young people. This ranged from simple calls for things like “free games”, to the more transactional “If you take my data, at least make the app better” or a request “to use my data to do things that would benefit me, and let me know”	8	-	-	11
Better education for young people . There were calls for young people to be “supported and educated about privacy”, or for the “safe use of the internet (to become) a school subject.”	-	10	-	14
Restrictions or limitations for young people , such as time limits or age limits to own devices etc. These ranged from soft requests like “For there to be a day without phones”, to stronger suggestions “for under 16s to not use the internet”.	-	-	-	4
Parental supervision , or additional parental supervision in the digital world.	-	-	-	8
Other . The scale of the Slovenian workshops generated some suggestions that fit no other categories, from clarion calls like “for children to be in a decision-making role instead of experts and politicians” to specific issues such as “for it to be easier to change the phone number associated with your account.”	-	-	-	12

What can you do?

...to advance young people's perspectives

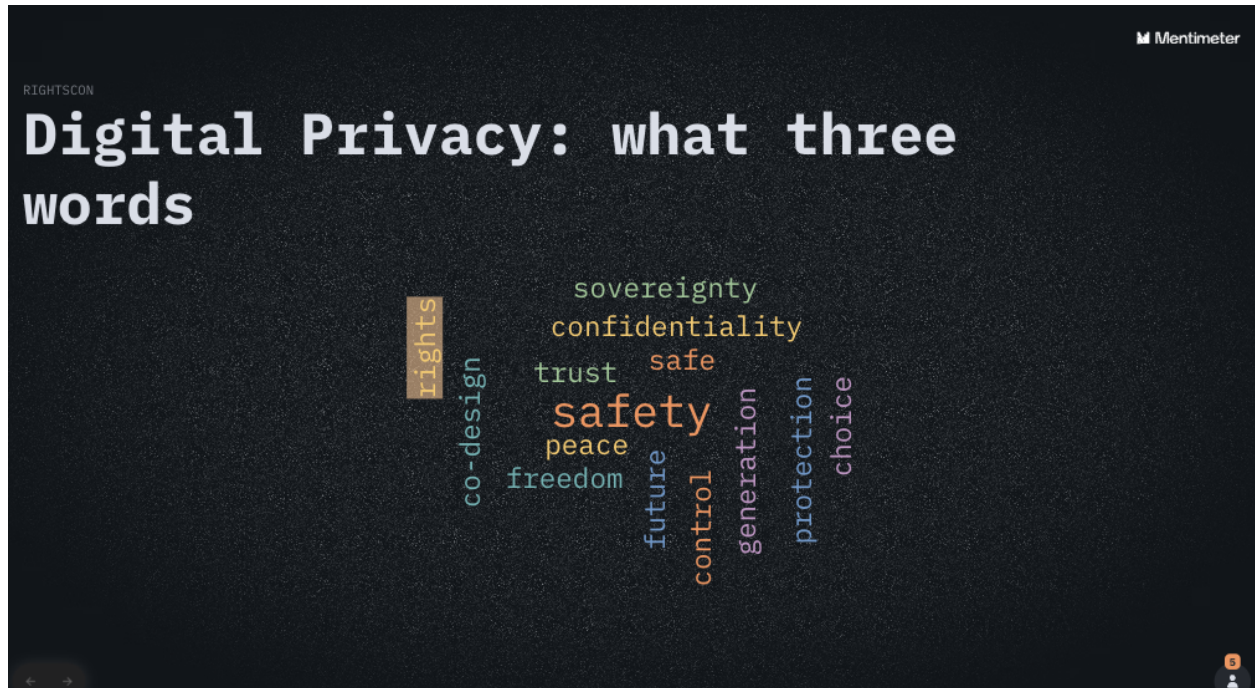
An offer to keep the conversation going from [Fairplay](#). Fairplay hosts an international coalition of organisations looking to advance children's rights across the globe through policy reforms. If you are a civil society organisation that would like to join, that is fantastic. Email Bzu at bzu@fairplayforkids.org

Thoughts or ideas about how you could include or make real young people's ideas for privacy protection

I'm a lecturer in Digital Media, computing teacher (PGCE) trainer, and in previously a highschool Computing teacher. One of the difficult/challenging things we always find about developing curriculums or ways of teaching young people, is how to make it meaningful and engaging and teaching to a high quality. I've found understanding young people's perspectives about privacy really helpful, because it can shape the contents of a curriculum and the way we teach to make sure it reflects what young people are interested in but that also aligns to the curriculum. For example, off the back of the sessions run as part of this research in Antigua and Barbuda, I hosted a workshop with high school IT teachers, where we looked at how we might include this in the curriculum. This sort of co-design in curriculum can lead to both more engaging teaching, but also a more effective critical education. In this instance, young people had some really nuanced things to say about the commodification of their data and privacy. Creating space to unpack that in their curriculum can lead to some really high quality critical reflections.

Digital Privacy: what three words

What three words come to mind when you think about digital privacy and young people?



Presenters & contacts

Teki Akuetteh Teki is a privacy and data protection advocate. Teki is a member of the *Ghana Bar Association* and the *International Bar Association*. She is the Founder and Executive Director of the *Africa Digital Rights Hub* (a not-for-profit think tank that promotes digital rights across Africa), a member of the *UN Global Pulse Privacy Advisory Group* and a non-resident fellow at the *Center for Global Development* in Washington DC. She was also appointed the Co-Chair of the *Common Thread Network*, a network of Commonwealth data protection authorities in July 2017 and was a member of the advisory committee for the 40th *International Conference of Data Protection and Privacy Commissioners* in 2018. She was a member of the *UN Special Rapporteur on Privacy Task Force on Privacy and Medical Data*; and sits on several other international bodies. <akuetteh@africadigitalrightshub.org>

Rys Farthing Rys is a policy researcher with a focus on children's rights, especially around technology and disadvantage. She is the Policy Director for Reset.Tech Australia and holds a DPhil from the University of Oxford. She has held policy roles at civil society orgs including Reset.Tech (Australia & US), 5Rights Foundation (UK), and Fairplay (US). She has also held academia posts at Oxford and RMIT, and is a Research Associate at the Information Law & Policy Centre (University of London) and Associate Investigator at the Centre for the Digital Child (Deakin, Australia). <rys@au.reset.tech>

Kadian Camacho Kadian is a research associate in the Department of Education, University Of West Indies, Saint John's campus. She also holds a central role within the Research Unit of the Ministry of Education, Government of Antigua and Barbuda. Working between academic research and Government, Kadian informs evidence based policy and practices, with a focus on the digitisation of Antiguan and Barbudan education systems and an interest in the role of privacy within the process. <Kadian.Camacho@ab.gov.ag>

Genevieve Smith-Nunes Genevieve is a 3rd-year Ph.D. candidate at the University of Cambridge and a lecturer at the University of Roehampton. She is also the founder of ReadySaltedCode, an organisation providing innovative digital computing STEAM-focussed education. The organisation provides workshops and training and produces DataDrivenDance performances: large scale technology-enhanced classical ballet performances designed to highlight, engage and encourage people to love computing. DataDrivenDance looks to explore the ethical and social justice implications of future technologies, including biometrics and XR, and aims to reimagine how we could potentially deliver a creative computing education. <ges52@cam.ac.uk>

Jun Zhao Jun is a senior research fellow at the University of Oxford, Department of Computer Science. Her research focuses on investigating the impact of algorithm-based decision makings upon our everyday life, especially for families and young children. For this, she takes a human-centric approach, focusing on understanding real users' needs, to design technologies that can make a real impact. <jun.zhao@cs.ox.ac.uk>

Adele Taylor Adele is the Youth Digital Programs and Partnerships Manager at Thorn, where she spearheads the youth prevention brand called NoFiltr. The mission of NoFiltr is to provide youth with the tools and resources to safely navigate their online digital landscape. Holding a Bachelors of Arts in International Studies from Spelman College and Masters of Phil in International Peace Studies from Trinity College, in Dublin, Ireland she has worked with many international non profits focused on youth empowerment and education. You can reach her at <adele.taylor@wearethorn.org>

References & research outputs

- Wang, G., Zhao, J., Kleek, M.V., & Shadbolt, N. (2022). 'Don't make assumptions about me!': Understanding Children's Perception of Datafication Online. Proceedings of the ACM on Human-Computer Interaction, 6, 1 - 24
- Farthing, R, Smith-Nunes, G., Akuetteh, T., Camacho, K., Ošljak, K.K. and Zhao, J. (2023) "It Sets Boundaries Making Your Life Personal and More Comfortable": Understanding Young People's Privacy Needs and Concerns," in *IEEE Technology and Society Magazine*, vol. 42, no. 1, pp. 75-82, March 2023, doi: [10.1109/MTS.2023.3244554](https://doi.org/10.1109/MTS.2023.3244554). Cheeky open access version here: <https://technologyandsociety.org/it-sets-boundaries-making-your-life-personal-and-more-comfortable-understanding-young-peoples-privacy-needs-and-concerns/>

From Antigua & Barbuda

- Farthing, R., Smith-Nunes, G. & Camacho, K. 2023 *Young people's rights in the digital age* <https://trustech4kids.github.io/files/ABReportFinal202303.pdf>
- Hear young people from Antigua and Barbuda talk about the issues of privacy online, in a podcast made by the New Grass Roots about the research <https://anchor.fm/grassroots-radio>

From Australia

- Report coming! Contact Rys on rys@au.reset.tech if you would like to receive a copy
- Young people's self authored submission to a parliamentary inquiry <https://au.reset.tech/uploads/YPs-submission.pdf>
- Mandell, K., & Farthing, R. (2023). Online privacy, digital trust and young people. *Centre for the Digital Child Blog*. <https://www.digitalchild.org.au/blog/online-privacy-digital-trust-and-young-people/>
- Farthing, R. (2023) *Can the consent model improve the digital world for young people?* <https://au.reset.tech/uploads/The-capacity-of-consent-Policy-Memo.pdf>

From Ghana

- Report coming! Contact Teki on akuetteh@africadigitalrightshub.org to receive a copy

From Slovenia

- Ošljak, KK. & Farthing, R. 2023 *Young people, privacy & trust* (in Slovene) <https://vsak.si/zapisi/mladi-zasebnost-in-zaupanje-v-sloveniji/>
- Ošljak, KK. & Farthing, R. 2023 *Young people, privacy & trust* (in English) <https://trustech4kids.github.io/files/SLOReportENG202304.pdf>
- If you happen to be in Slovenia, join us for an exhibition inspired by the research: Computer Science Museum 2023 Kaj Te Briga?!// What's it to you?! May 11th to June 11th <https://vsak.si/spored/kaj-te-briga-razstava-o-mladih-zasebnosti-in-zaupanju-v-sloveniji/>

You can also check out our website at <https://trustech4kids.github.io/>