SOCIAL MEDIA AND YOUTH MENTAL HEALTH

AN EVENT TO CONFRONT THE MORAL PANIC

In May of 2023, the Stanford Center for Youth Mental Health & Wellbeing's GoodforMEdia team co-designed a youth-led event with the Stanford d.school around addressing the national emergency around youth mental health and social media. This report shares what we learned and how others can engage in this portfolio of work.

organized by

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goodformedia

THE CALIFORNIA AGE APPROPRIATE DESIGN CODE

ACTIONABLE POLICY

Having successfully incorporated youth voices during the passage of the California Age Appropriate Design Code bill last year, and since observing the flurry of other bills recently being proposed across the country to regulate the potential harms of social media on youth, the Stanford Center for Youth Mental Health & Wellbeing's GoodforMEdia team joined with the Stanford d.school to plan an event that could make space for youth voices to weigh in on the next steps needed to put these laws into practice in ways that are supportive of young people's wellbeing and autonomy.

FOR YOUTH BY YOUTH

This youth-centered event set out to offer hands-on workshops and interactive activities that would encourage youth to take the lead in critiquing and creating policies and design choices that directly affect them. The overall goals were to 1) directly engage youth in the policy and design decisions that impact them on a daily basis, 2) pause to gather and share their innate wisdom on this issue, and 3) co-create stimulating exercises that could easily be replicated and incorporated in to coursework across the University or future events in order to embed principles of ethical design into future technologies. This report-out shares what we learned, what worked and how different communities can get involved.

OUR PANEL OF EXPERTS

The evening's panel spanned a range of issues that sparked questions around youth agency on social media. We thought together about whether technology companies were responsible for and had enough guardrails in place around mental health.

WHAT WE HEARD

[LEFT TO RIGHT] YOUTH LEADERS RANI SINDLEDECKER AND KHOA-NATHAN NGO FROM GOODFORMEDIA, IN CONVERSATION WITH ELIZABETH INGLESE, CONTENT DESIGN LEAD FOR INSTAGRAM WELLBEING, AND JEFF HANCOCK, HEAD OF THE STANFORD SOCIAL MEDIA LAB.

"I felt so many emotions as a young person at the table and being so deeply involved in the conversation around social media's impact on youth mental health. There is no lack of irony that a topic so heavily centered on young people's well-being has excluded youth for so long and I am grateful to be part of the shift towards greater inclusivity of youth voice. It meant so much to me to not just represent my experience as a young person but also as a minority and child of immigrants, which are other underrepresented groups disproportionately impacted by social media dis/misinformation. I am incredibly grateful to my fellow panelists and the community that showed up–it's an incredible opportunity to be invited to share my insights but it was just as much of a privilege to learn from other people and their experiences."

-KHOA-NATHAN

The Youth Voices testimonial space was specifically curated for young people who attended the event to ensure there was a safe environment for them to share their ideas through video recording, written feedback, and conversations with peers in the space.

# YOUTH VOICES: A SPACE TO SPEAK UP

WHAT WE SHARED

YOUTH PARTICIPANT RESPONDS TO DIFFERENT PROMPTS AROUND THE FUTURE OF SOCIAL MEDIA ON THE WALL OF WISDOM IN THE YOUTH VOICES SPACE.

Thought-provoking prompts were posted around the space to help stimulate conversations around social media design and policy. Young people expressed enthusiasm in having a collaborative space to think about social media design ideas with other passionate youth who have experienced the complex effects of social media use on their mental health. They also appreciated learning about aspects of current social media design and design frameworks (ex: speculative design). One major topic of discussion was how youth voices are underrepresented in the process of designing social media platforms and legislation. Together, youth brainstormed ways to amplify their voices via youth social media advisory councils, focus groups, and testimonials. Young people shared their excitement about having a unique space at the d.school event to learn about how they can shape social media design alongside peers, Stanford professors, and industry professionals.

FROM POLICY TO PRACTICAL ACTION

WHAT WE CREATED

WORKSHOP: DESIGN CODE (THE ACT IN ACTION)
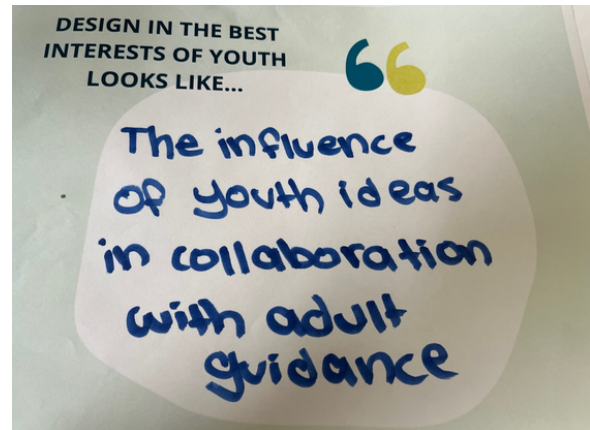
Laws and policies can be passed by federal and local government, but operationalizing them into design solutions is an entirely different challenge.

OUTLINE OF OUR RESOURCES

Click here to see a one-page summary of the international codes at play, a one-page summary of the CAADCA, and the template for the design activity.

OVERVIEW OF PLAN

The objective of our design module was for people to walk away able to comment on policy from **a values and current events perspectives.**

We started by asking participants to think broadly about their stance on the value tensions relevant to child protection policy. For example, we prompted "At what age should advertisers be able to sell a child's data to advertisers." Participants aligned themselves and shared with the group (10 minutes). By rooting the conversations in personal belief, we thought people would be less likely to have policy speak for them and, instead, define their own viewpoint.

We then brought the module back to tangible policy by laying out the California Age Appropriate Design Act and where it stands from a values perspective (10 minutes).

With knowledge of values and policy restrictions, we prompted participants to go into groups and choose a social media app you have in common (note: our event hosted a range of ages). We asked them in groups to come up with one well-thought-out design change they would make to the platform that would better align it with the values discussed previously (10 minutes).

By starting our conversation macro and ending it with a single design change, we allowed participants to experience the process of encoding values in policy and design.

FROM POLICY TO PRACTICAL ACTION

WHAT WE CREATED

WORKSHOP: FUTURES WHEEL

The futures wheel is a method to visually imagine the consequences of a central trend event, be they first, second, third order consequences or beyond.


OUTLINE OF OUR RESOURCES

Click here to see the deck we used to design and run the workshop.

OVERVIEW OF PLAN

We had students start with one of these 3 events:

1) New law requires social media companies to send weekly reports to parents.
2) Congress passes a law making it illegal for advertisers to sell children's data.
3) A new law makes social media use allowable at the age of 5.

They used the futures wheel to imagine the consequences of these laws. some were obvious, some surprising.
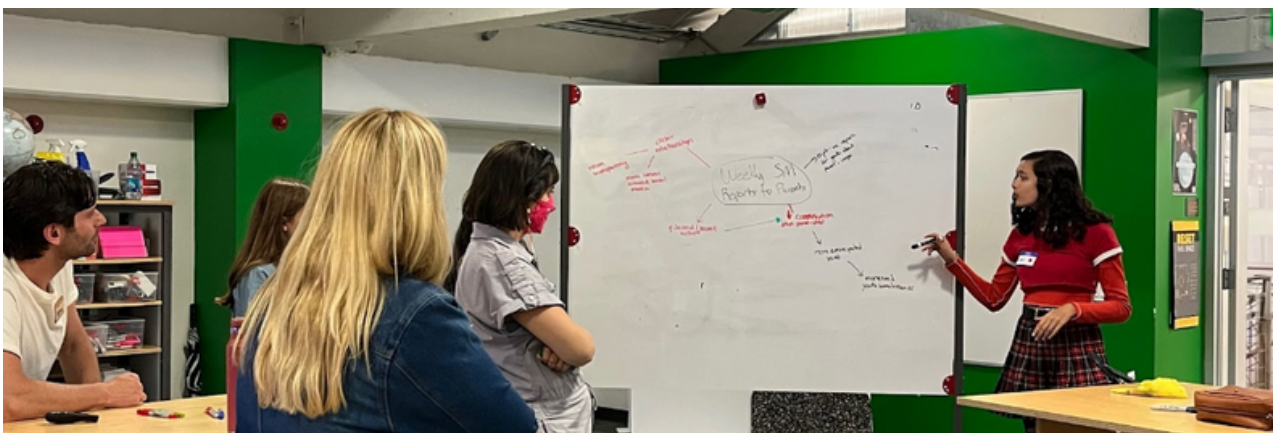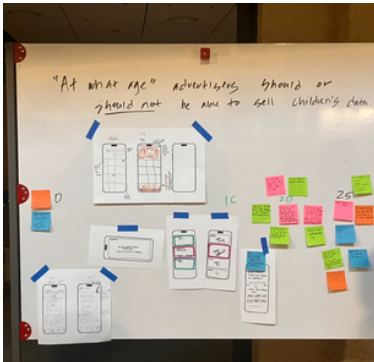
HOW YOU CAN ENGAGE

We are just at the beginning of this portfolio of work, and we'd love for you to join us! Here are a few ways you can get involved as a young person, educator, technologist, academic, parent, policymaker, citizen or grantmaker.

WORKSHOPS AND EVENTS

Hear more youth perspectives, access youth-developed resources and inquire about youth-delivered workshops at goodformedia.org or follow @goodformedia on Instagram and Twitter.

ACTIVITIES

If you are a young person between 13-24 and want to have your idea heard, we welcome your submissions at any time! These videos, quotes, artwork and posts are shared with other youth through our GoodforMEdia website, social media channels, peer mentoring workshops...and directly with policymakers!

FUNDING

Want to see more events like this? Find out how you can support our work with GoodforMEdia or the Stanford Center for Youth Mental Health & Wellbeing (vickih@stanford.edu)

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