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Digital Society – the tension between child protection and children’s agency, Siv-Britt Bjørktaota, Uppsala University, Sweden, and Heidi Aarum Hansen, Østfold University College, Norway

ABSTRACT

Digital Society and the increasing use of internet and social media generates new challenges on child welfare services (Aarum Hansen, Bjørktaota & Svalastog 2017). Today, internet is wholly integrated in the Scandinavians’ daily lives and the border between on-line and off-line is virtually erased. Almost 46% of nine years old Swedish children are the owner of a tablet. Moreover, five percent of children younger than one year are using internet every day (Statsens media råd 2015). It is also the children and young people that are more active on social networks with updating and posting their own content (e.g. text, photos or videos).

The 2.0 Web has made communication available in new ways, all the time, and more or less everywhere. Instagram, Snapchat and Kik Messenger are examples of popular formats of informal social communication that fit children and young peoples’ way of communicating, and therefore facilitates their agency. The content and the relations that children and young people establish and develop on-line are mostly available only for their friends. So, consequently this mean that they could be under the radar for people, e.g. parents and other adults, in their off-line contexts. More recent studies have shown that there are a group of parents who underestimate the risks children expose themselves to on the internet (von Feilitzen, Findahl & Dunkels 2011). A number of international studies suggests that children in a danger-zone on-line also are children with a risky life off-line. Furthermore, this is often linked to a hard and/or conflictual life at home, in school and/or with friends (e.g. von Feilitzen 2009, Shannon 2007, Svedin & Åkerman 2006, Ungdomsmyndelsen 2009).

In an earlier article (Aarum Hansen, Bjørktaota & Svalastog 2017) we point to the need of developing new methodologies of social work with children and young people, i.e., to support as well as protect them against harm. Although there is many researches about digital society, how and when children and young people are on-line, few (neither) of

1 2.0 Web is interaction contrary to 1.0 Web which is homepages etc. without interaction.

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them focused on the digital society versus the tension between child protection and children’s agency regarding social welfare services and child protection. So, this chapter attempts to fill this gap of knowledge and provide a more detailed exploration regarding new methodologies of social work with children and young people.

To further discuss the challenges on child welfare services in digital society in general and on child protection in particular, we will take inspiration from the sociology of childhood. The point for the departure is an understanding of childhood as reflecting time and context with the key concepts being and becoming. Whilst the “being child” interprets as a social actor who actively is constructed “childhood”. The “becoming child”, however, interprets as an “adult in the making”. Furthermore, a child that is lacking competenc