RAISE – WP 1
Practices and Narratives of Boundary-making in Everyday Life Institutional Settings

Country Report - The Netherlands

RAISE

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Inhoud

1. Introduction

The findings presented in this report have been produced as part of the first work package of a larger Horizon Europe project entitled RAISE (*Recognition and Acknowledgement of Injustice to Strengthen Equality*). This research project aims to better understand the extent to which European citizens draw boundaries between 'us' and 'them' and the extent to which they are willing to acknowledge that inequalities are rooted in structural injustice. RAISE is led by a consortium of nine European partners, including KU Leuven, Central European University, University of Warsaw, and Utrecht University; the four universities involved in work package 1.

This report presents the empirical findings conducted in the Netherlands as part of this first work package. In this particular work package, entitled *Practices and Narratives of Boundary-making in Everyday Life Institutional Settings*, we aimed to uncover boundary-making processes among parents. Examining processes of boundary-making and the ways in which social constructions of group boundaries are formed is important as they largely contribute to the (re)production of discrimination and structural racism. We focused on parenting as we view parenting as an everyday practice that is both situated at the intersection between private and public frameworks and also transcends this intersection, inherently shaped by cultural, ethnic, and religious traditions. As such, it forms a productive case study for examining processes of boundary-making. By gathering experiences of boundary-making in relation to parenting encounters in the context of institutions such as health centres for newborns and primary schools, we are able to unpack dynamics of belonging, inclusion, exclusion, identity, and citizenship.

Together with the other universities involved in this work package, the researchers formulated the following main research question: How do parents construct, maintain, reinforce, narrate, legitimize, and experience boundaries in relation to their parenting and their encounters with other parents? To support this main research question, the researchers formulated the following sub-questions that guided our fieldwork and interviews:

- How do parents experience that they are confronted with boundaries based on their ethnic/social/religious background or other aspects?
- How do parents construct boundaries between different groups of parents and/or their children?
- How are these boundaries perceived, communicated, and constructed?
- What strategies are in place to deconstruct, challenge, or accommodate these boundaries?

The report is structured as follows: First, I present the methodology used in this study, including the recruitment of participants, the methodological and practical challenges, and the methods used. Second, I outline the research context in which this study took place. This is followed by a presentation of the empirical findings based on a number of themes: school choice, attitudes and commitment towards diversity, parenting encounters and everyday boundary-making, and willingness to take action. Finally, I summarize the main findings and in the last section I formulate some suggestions that should be included in the handbook that we will compose as part of this project.

2. Research context

According to Statistics Netherlands (*Centraal Bureau voor de Statistiek*), the Dutch population consisted of 17.9 million inhabitants in 2024. 83.8 percent of the population was born in the Netherlands. For the majority of them, both parents were also born in the Netherlands (72.1 percent). For a smaller proportion, one parent was born abroad (6.3) or both parents were born abroad (5.3). 16.2 percent of the population were themselves born abroad and immigrated to the Netherlands. Of all migrants, around one third were born in Europe and two thirds outside Europe. Most of them are of Turkish, Surinamese, or Moroccan origin. A relatively large group also comes from (the rest of) Asia. For the second generation (born in the Netherlands), the distribution of countries of origin differs according to the parents' country of birth. Of the group with one parent born abroad, just over half are of non-European origin. Around one sixth of them have a parent who was born in Indonesia. Of the group with two foreign-born parents, the vast majority are of non-European origin. They are often of Turkish or Moroccan origin (CBS, 2024b)).[1] In terms of religious diversity, in 2023 the Dutch population is as follows in terms of religious denomination: 58 percent have no religious affiliation, 17 percent are Roman Catholic, 13 percent Protestant, 6 percent Muslim, and 6 percent have another, unspecified religious affiliation (CBS, 2024a).

In recent decades, especially after 9/11, and during the increasing development of the Netherlands into a multicultural society, Dutch society has witnessed an increase in public debates about ethnic and religious diversity in the Netherlands, especially with regard to integration, identity, belonging, and citizenship. In particular, negative attitudes towards migrants, especially those who identify as Muslims, have increased. This was exacerbated by the political murders of the politician Pim Fortuyn and the filmmaker Theo van Gogh, who were both critical of Islam, and led to the rise of right-wing political parties (Ghorashi 2020). These public debates are underpinned by the Othering[2] of Muslim migrants as fundamentally unassimilable in Dutch society (Bonjour and Duyvendak 2020). Duyvendak, Geschiere and Tonkens (2016) have argued that these debates are characterized by a shift away from viewing citizenship as a legal status towards a culturalization of citizenship, in which the culture of migrants is seen as static and incompatible with Dutch culture. Moreover, as Bracke (2011) has pointed out, these debates are often also articulated in the terms of gender and sexual politics. Loyalty and commitment towards gender equality and sexual freedom, such as the legal and cultural consolidation of LGBTQ+ rights, have become yardsticks of both personal emancipation and commitment to Dutch moral values, which is linked to the self-image of the Dutch as sexually liberated, taboo-breaking people (Bartelink and Knibbe 2022). At the same time, Dutch society presents itself as liberal and tolerant and avoids talking about race (Hondius 2009). Gloria Wekker

[1] The migration of people from Suriname, Indonesia, Turkey, and Morocco can be explained historically. Both Suriname and Indonesia are former colonies of the Netherlands. Indonesia gained independence in 1945, Suriname in 1975. In the 1960s, the Netherlands concluded recruitment agreements with Turkey and Morocco as part of guest worker programs to enable the (initially temporary) migration of migrant workers. In addition, there are also a considerable number of migrants from the Antilles in the Netherlands. The Antilles are former colonies of the Netherlands, but still part of the Kingdom of the Netherlands. Antilles residents can move back and forth between the Antilles and the Netherlands relatively easily, as they have Dutch nationality and a Dutch passport (Meijering and Lager 2014; Sharpe 2005).

[2] The concept of Othering is coined by Said (2003[1979]) and refers to the processes by which dominant groups define and portray marginalized or colonized people as fundamentally different or exotic. This serves to reinforce power imbalances and justify domination and control. In Said's work, the West constructs the East as Other through stereotypical representations that shape cultural and political perceptions.

(2016) describes the ways in which the Netherlands responds to issues of race and racism as paradoxical. On the one hand, Dutch society denies the existence of racism—and the colonial histories that shaped it—and the ongoing processes of racialization; on the other hand, racism and discrimination are an integral part of Dutch politics and society, Essed and Hoving (2014) argue, for example in every day life by micro-aggressions of public debates denying the existence of institutional and structural racism. This study aims to fill this gap and show how boundaries can be drawn through denial and despite assurances that people are open to diversity.

3. Methodology

We submitted an application for ethical clearance and received ethical approval from the Science-Geo Ethics Review Board from the Faculties of Science and Geosciences at Utrecht University on October 2, 2023. As stated in the RAISE project proposal, the original plan was to gain access to institutional contexts in the field for ethnographic research and to select two health care centres for newborns in the Netherlands (one in a rural and one in an urban context) to ensure differences in diversity composition, as well as two schools in the Netherlands (again, one in a rural and one in an urban context). However, it proved extremely difficult, not to say impossible, to gain access to parenting related institutional facilities in the Netherlands. I contacted several primary schools (both public and particular schools[3]) and baby health care centres, but either our request was declined or I received no response at all. Reasons given for refusals were that they did not have the capacity to invest time and energy in our study, or that they were simply not interested in participating as they could not see how the study could benefit their work or goals.

In order to gain access to these institutions, I spoke to people working in organizations that are in one way or another involved in the field of primary education, such as the *Centraal Instituut voor Toetsontwikkeling* (CITO), which develops and administers exams and tests for primary school pupils, and the *Pedagogische academie voor het basisonderwijs* (PABO), which trains teachers for primary education in the Netherlands. Although these individuals were enthusiastic about the project, they pointed out that it would prove extremely difficult to gain access to institutional facilities. Schools and care centres in the Netherlands are suffering from a shortage of personnel and an extremely high workload which does not make it easy to conduct research in this field. Furthermore, they indicated that there are many research projects at colleges and universities requesting participation, so these facilities have to limit their participation in studies.

While I attempted to get access to institutional facilities, I was also trying to find alternative places where parents come together to meet. I discussed the possibility of participating in an urban initiative in which children aged 15 months to 2.5 years are prepared for pre-school/toddler care together with their parents. Parents who take part in this initiative can also ask questions about their child's education or health or learn the Dutch language. Although they were initially willing to let me attend these meetings to observe and interview the parents, they ultimately stopped communication without providing any further information. I also wrote requests to mothers' cafés, where mothers (sometimes

[3] In the Netherlands, (primary) education is funded by the state and organized along denominational lines and there are both public and particular schools. Particular schools base their curriculum and teaching on a religion, a philosophy, or a particular vision of education such as Steiner or Montessori. The curriculum and teaching at a public school is not grounded in a particular religious denomination or educational philosophy, but aims to be neutral.

with their babies or toddlers) meet to talk about motherhood and related topics such as breastfeeding, parenting, and self-care. I visited 5 mothers' cafés to observe the meetings and to see if these places might be interesting for further participation in the study. Ultimately I abandoned this route as there were practical challenges. For example, one mothers' café decided to (temporarily) pause its meetings due to personal circumstances of the organizer, another mothers' café was focused on women with a migration background, so participants spoke mainly in Tamazight, and a third mothers' café had difficulties attracting enough participants. Nevertheless, the observations I made in these mothers' cafés, about 9 hours, are included in the empirical material I analyze in this report, as they provide interesting insights into boundary-making.

As participant observation turned out difficult, I had to come up with a different strategy and decided to focus on recruiting individual participants for interviews. I started with spreading our call for participation in our personal and professional networks, for example by sharing it on social media and the intranet of Utrecht University, writing a request to online social media groups and blog sites specifically aimed at mothers, and asking friends, acquaintances, and relatives. In this way, and through the snowballing technique, I was eventually able to conduct 36 interviews: 34 interviews with parents and 2 interviews with professionals/experts. It should be noted that many more than 34 parents agreed to take part in this study. However, some ultimately decided against it, mostly due to busy schedules, while some did not provide any further information and stopped responding. It should also be noted that the time for finding study participants was rather limited. As a result, many people fall through the cracks, especially those who need first to build a relationship of trust to share their stories with researchers.

Since the project description stated that we wanted to include the narratives of parents with children attending both health centres for newborns and primary school, I initially tried to interview parents with very young children (0-4). However, it turned out—also on the basis of the preliminary results in Belgium—that parents with children of this age have far fewer encounters and contacts with other parents than parents of older children. Contacts and encounters are mainly experienced in relation to childcare staff and not so much with other parents. In addition, during the interviews in the Netherlands, I found that, according to our interviewees, contacts and encounters between parents themselves tend to take place much more from primary school onwards, for example when the children are old enough to make friends and engage in playdates. Of course, this does not mean that there are no prejudices or boundary-making among parents of young children, but our data shows that parenting encounters become more complex once children enter primary school. Furthermore, the parents I interviewed indicated that their visits to newborn health centres are temporary and occasional, while attending primary school is a daily experience. As the focus of this work package is on encounters between parents, I decided to concentrate on parents with children attending primary school, i.e. between the ages of 4 and 12. I also found that the 'peak' of parenting encounters is between certain ages, because after a certain age, e.g. 10 years, children bike or walk to school alone and more often meet friends without parental supervision.

The interviews were conducted between February and December 2024 and lasted 45 minutes on average. To conduct the interviews, we developed an interview guide together with the research teams in order to have a template to fall back on, but we also allowed the interview to proceed naturally. I transcribed the interviews verbatim and coded the transcripts using the software program NVIVO. A codebook developed by the four research teams served as the starting point for the analysis,

but I mainly analyzed the data inductively. By choosing this method, I was able to capture the most important themes that emerged in the data. The interviews were mostly conducted at the interviewees' homes or in a public space such as a café or a room at the university premises. Although I did not ask about the gender identity of our interviewees, I can conclude from what they said during the interview that 32 individual parents (26 mothers and 6 fathers) and 2 couples took part. It should come as no surprise that more mothers than fathers were willing to participate in this study, as research provides overwhelming evidence that parenting is a deeply gendered practice that plays out differently for mothers than for fathers (Kane 2018). Moreover, research also shows that women spend more time on child rearing and parenting tasks (Van Tienoven et al. 2023). Several mothers who took part in an interview also confirmed this gender imbalance, stating that women are more involved in the daily care of the children and also in organizing things like playdates and children's parties.

All interviewees were white. Although I did not ask explicitly about their religious affiliation, 14 described themselves as Christian, 1 as Muslim, and the others as non-religious. 4 of the interviewees are part of what they call a mixed family in terms of religious and racial/ethnic background, for example part of a Christian-Jewish or Christian-atheist family, or has a relationship with a non-white person, or have adopted children born outside Europe; 1 participant has a European migration background; and 1 participant has a non-European migration background. According to their statements during the interview, I can say that the parents I interviewed lead a middle-class lifestyle, which is reflected in their jobs and in the fact that they have attended college or university. In terms of political views, while I did not ask any questions about this, several parents indicated that they leaned on the left to centre side of the political spectrum. All but two parents lived in the Randstad, a metropolitan area that connects and merges the four largest cities in the Netherlands (Amsterdam, Rotterdam, The Hague, and Utrecht), their suburbs, and many cities in between. 19 parents lived in an urban area, 12 parents in a suburban area, and 3 parents in a rural area. One professional worked in an urban area, the other one in a suburban area.

In addition to the interviews with parents, I also conducted 2 interviews with professionals: 1 professional who worked in a health care centre for newborns, and 1 professional who worked in an primary school. While both of these interviews were useful and interesting in gaining additional information about diversity policies in institutional settings, they had relatively little insight into the contacts and encounters parents had with each other.

In total, I conducted 36 interviews. An overview of the demographic characteristics of the parents can be found here:

Demographic characteristics parents	Number
Christian	14
Muslims	1
Non-religious	19
Urban area	19
Suburban area	12

Rural area	3

4. Empirical findings

In the following, I present the empirical results that I obtained from the interviews[4]. A key feature of qualitative research is that we do not aim for statistical representativeness, but rather to show the multi-layered and nuanced complexity that I encountered during the interviews. Various themes were discussed in the interviews, such as what makes a good parent, what interviewees consider important to pass on or teach to their child, et cetera.; but with the core themes of RAISE and Work Package 1 (that is, racism, discrimination, boundary-making) in mind, I have distilled some key themes which I present in this report.

In general, all white parents stated that they attach great importance to diversity. I found that diversity was understood to mean ethnic diversity, which is quite common in Northwestern European countries such as the Netherlands. When I asked questions about diversity—without explicitly asking about race or ethnicity—all interviewees started talking about skin color, race, or ethnicity. Furthermore, all white middle class parents described themselves as open-minded and tolerant, which is in line with the imagery of the Dutch being progressive and inclusive (Wekker 2016). In this section, I will examine the paradoxes, difficulties and challenges that I encountered when analyzing the narratives of our interlocutors. I present the results in a thematic order: school choice, attitudes and commitment towards diversity, parenting encounters and everyday boundary-making, and willingness to take action.

4.1. School choice

For our respondents, choosing the right school for their children was of great importance. They indicated that they consider it crucial that their children go to a school that has a solid pedagogical and didactic vision, has a well-equipped and committed teaching staff and management, and respects the children and sees them as individual and autonomous persons and not as a number. This personal approach in particular was often mentioned, along with the desire for their children to be 'seen' and recognized by the teachers. More than once I heard these parents claim that their children needed an education that challenged them, which is why they chose to enrol their children in a school that offered special programs for intellectually gifted and/or fast learners. In this context, it was also often mentioned that when looking for a school, parents paid attention to the so-called '*uitstroom*'. School keep track of how many children, when completed primary school, pursue secondary education on pre-university education, general secondary education, or pre-vocational secondary education. The higher the number of students pursuing pre-university secondary education, the better the school is regarded.

[4] All names are pseudonyms in order to respect the privacy of our interviewees.

It was also often said that they want a 'good' mix in terms of ethnic diversity. They consider it important that their children are enrolled in a school that has a significant number of children with a migration background, as this reflects Dutch society, so that their children become aware of ethnic diversity, they argued. However, a so-called 'black school' (*zwarte school*) was out of the question. People were concerned that the educational level of the school would not be high enough or that the social mix would weigh too heavily on one side.

In addition, I noticed that most parents chose to enrol their children in particular schools that organizes education centred around a confessional and/or pedagogical vision. Some parents argued that public schools offer less quality in terms of pedagogy and that public schools attract students from 'problematic' families because public schools cannot reject students, which affects the overall quality of the school. Parents then fear that this will lead to a slower or negative learning process for their children, leading them to enrol them in a particular school that follows a specific educational and didactic vision, such as Montessori, Steiner, Jenaplan, or Dalton. From the conversations I had with parents, it became clear that these types of schools mainly attract a certain type of parent who has high expectations of the educational and intellectual environment in which their children go to school. Paula, a teacher who works at a particular school, explained that her school works with 'high performance education' and that the intellectual expectations of the children are high. As a result, the school attracts a certain type of parent who wants the best school for their children to enable them to continue their education at a high level. This is not to say, Paula explains, that all parents are like this – some parents also choose the school because it is the closest, but this type of parent tends to be in the majority. In addition, parents whose children attend these schools explained that these types of schools require a relatively high commitment of time and energy from parents, for example, for reading books to the children, taking children on school trips, volunteering in the library working group, cleaning the school, helping in the school vegetable garden, and so on. This means that parents of enrolled children should have the practical, logistical, and emotional skills and willingness to participate in unpaid work for the school. Respondents stated that it was mainly parents and especially women with theoretical jobs with flexible working hours who volunteer for things like these. Also, schools such as the Waldorf schools (the so-called *vrije school*) require a relatively high financial contribution from parents, which means that only a certain group of parents can choose this school.

It should be noted that I have also spoken to parents who think differently about these kind of particular schools, such as Rebecca[5], who has deliberately sent her child to a school that does not have a specific pedagogy for the reason that she wants her child to come into contact 'with different levels of education, […] with different backgrounds in terms of the countries they come from, in terms of the cultures they have grown up with, where they have their origins' et cetera.

Apart from choosing a school that favors a particular pedagogy, a significant number of the parents I spoke to enrolled their children in a Christian, be it Protestant or Catholic school. Some of the parents identified themselves as Christian, which explains the enrolment of their children in a Christian school, as this reflects the Christian education and upbringing they wish to provide for their children. However, some parents stated that they were not religious but wanted to choose a Christian school for tradition and cultural reasons. These parents indicated that these schools pay some attention to

[5] All names are pseudonyms to protect the privacy and anonymity of the research participants.

Christian holidays such as Christmas and Easter, but not in a very active way of teaching religious education or reading the Bible. For example, Saskia said the following:

> We are completely without faith in our home, but we do think it is important that [our] children learn about faith, because we can not teach them that. That was also one of the reasons why we wanted to send them there, yes.

When I then asked Saskia whether she would also send her children to an Islamic school, for example, if that were the most convenient option, she replied as follows:

> I think that [Christianity] is somewhat closer to us in terms of [our own] upbringing and culture. It may be wrong, but I think that the Islamic faith is more than just a faith. It's a way of life, as far as I know it. So I think that goes beyond what I want to pass on to my children, because it's not the goal for them to become religious. […] It would be nice if we came into contact with it [Islam] through school, as we do here. For example, the Islamic holidays are also emphasized so that they learn more about it that way.

Here Saskia touches on an interesting observation. She considers it important that her children are familiarized with the Christian faith, but not with the aim of becoming religious or Christian. Put simply, Christian schools should not be too religious or too outspoken in their religious identity and practice. Rather, they should be concerned with Christian norms and values and pay attention to different cultural and religious traditions so that children learn more about Islamic holidays such as Eid al-Fitr. Some schools were considered to be 'too religious', such as Islamic schools or schools anchored in the Dutch, more conservative, branches of Orthodox Protestantism (*bevindelijk gereformeerd*). Mina, for example, was looking for a primary school for her child at the time of the interview and was wavering between a public and a Catholic school, although there was also an Orthodox Protestant school in her neighborhood. However, Mina's family consists of two mothers and she fears that this will put them and her children at a disadvantage. While she acknowledges that this may be a prejudice on her part, she thinks that Christians on the more conservative side of the spectrum are intolerant of LGBTQ+ people and the children who grow up in such families.

Heleen, who identifies as Muslim, also made a conscious decision not to send her child to an Islamic school, but to a non-religious public school. The reason for this is twofold. Firstly, she believes it is important that her child learns to interact with other children from different backgrounds and beliefs, as this is something she will experience for the rest of her life. Secondly, she explained that most Muslims in the Netherlands are Sunni, and the Islamic primary schools in the Netherlands are also Sunni, but Heleen and her family belong to a different Islamic denomination. Therefore, Heleen considered the possibility that her child might be excluded or that she might be confused because the Islamic faith and traditions are taught in a slightly different way than at home.

In sum, I find that the choice of school where parents want to enrol their children represents a first clear boundary and a form of segregation, as the parents I interviewed have a clear idea of the type of school environment they want to enrol their children in. The choice of school is therefore not a neutral decision, but rather involves important ideological views about the contacts and encounters parents want to have.

4.2. Attitudes and commitment towards diversity

All interviewees stated that they attach great importance to diversity and that it is important for their children to grow up in an environment in which diversity is represented. Nevertheless, many interviewees stated that they live in a fairly homogeneous neighborhood, which is also reflected in the school population. For example, a neighborhood with mostly owner-occupied houses in a gentrified district will attract mainly two-income families with office jobs. This social reality was very common among my interviewees. They described how their children's schools are often schools where the overwhelming majority of children are white as a result – despite their desire for their children to grow up in a more diverse environment.

Yet, during the interviews, I regularly found that the interviewees found it difficult to talk about diversity in all its facets because they were afraid of saying the wrong thing. Examples of this are the phrases 'How should I say this?', or 'How do you say it in a good way?', when the interviewees wanted to say something about people who are different from themselves. Descriptions relating to ethnicity, race, and social class were particularly challenging for people. People were aware that words and terminology matter, especially as Dutch society increasingly grapples with its colonial past and both academics and activists unpack the damage that words can inflict on racialized minorities and how language can reify colonial discourses in creating boundaries between people. The fact that the Netherlands portrays itself as tolerant and not racist (Wekker 2016) also makes it more difficult to talk about, as there is very little or perhaps even no knowledge about how to start this conversation. Laurie described it as follows:

> You're afraid of saying the wrong thing. And even if you express yourself as carefully as possible, I'm still afraid that I might say something wrong, yeah, or ask or say something wrong or yeah.. That it might make someone feel... Well, uh, not seen or....

This lack of language sometimes led to awkward moments when I, as interviewer, had the feeling that the interviewee wanted to express something (negative) but could not find the right words, or spoke about it in a covert way.

The fact that all parents stated that they felt it was important for their children to grow up in a diverse environment and see that society is made up of a variety of people from different backgrounds—despite overall enrolment in white schools—was reflected in the practises of our interviewees. For example, parents like Eveline told me that they make sure to give halal sweets as treats at their child's birthdays. Or at birthday parties, they check whether an invited child can eat and/or drink everything. Heleen, a Muslim parent, has found that parents who invite their child to a birthday party do genuine efforts to accommodate them, for example by buying halal candy that is gelatine-free, or enquiring beforehand about which foods are safe to serve, or offering vegetarian options. In general, according to Heleen, her child's school, including the parents of the other children, is very open-minded towards her and her family. She told me that there was an Easter breakfast planned at school, and when she looked in her agenda, she realized that it was scheduled in the month of Ramadan. She was not going to say anything about it because Ramadan is a month long and things sometimes happen in Ramadan that don't work out, she explained. So she had not even really paid attention to it until she got a message on the WhatsApp parent chat saying that they were going to postpone it anyway because it

turned out to fall in Ramadan and they don't think that is very nice for people who participate in Ramadan. Although the Muslim students at this school are only a handful of students, this is taken into consideration, which is something Heleen appreciates.

This commitment to a genuine engagement with diversity is also expressed in the example of Ruben. Ruben recounted an incident where his child, along with a group of other children, had a plan to eat something at McDonald's. However, one of the other parents said that their child could not eat there. Ruben asked for more details and it turned out that these parents did not want to spend money on an American company that supports Israel in the current Gaza war. So Ruben looked for a solution and eventually they all went to a local snack bar. During the interview, Ruben also said that this is something that not all parents would do, which is to be sensitive to these kinds of issues and to be attuned to minorities:

> That sensitivity [to diversity] is something that I feel that I don't always notice in other parents, some have it too, so I click more with that kind of parent as well. And that has to do with a lot of things. It has to do with your lifestyle, I think also with political beliefs, I think I can sort of write down who votes for which party and that's perfectly fine because of course that's all allowed. But you do realize that you sometimes make different choices.

This commitment to diversity was explained by Ruben and some other parents as being on the left side of the political spectrum, having had a theoretical education at college or university, having seen some parts of the world, and having a certain mindset and ideological perspective through which they view society and the world. This results in a different lifestyle and preferences, such as valuing good and meaningful conversations, being open-minded about gender and sexuality, being inclusive and tolerant about people from different backgrounds, and so on. As we will see later in this report, Ruben does create boundaries—although he advocates racial and ethnic diversity—along class lines. More in particular, Ruben sets himself apart from parents who have a different style of parenting and a different view of politics and society.

4.3. Parenting encounters and everyday boundary-making

In general, the parents I interviewed indicated that most of the contacts and encounters they have with other parents remain superficial and limited. Longer-term contacts that go beyond greeting other parents at the school gate only occur when the children are enrolled somewhere for a longer period of time. As mentioned in the methodological section of this report, I have found that parenting encounters are more profound in the context of a primary school than in a health care centre for newborns, as the latter tends to produce more superficial and shorter encounters between parents. This is not to say that there are no prejudices or certain forms of boundary-making in this institutional setting, but the contacts between parents tend to be more complex in the context of a primary school. I have also heard that the more intensively the children interact with each other, the more intensive the contact between the parents. As Denise said:

> The children ensure that the parents come into contact with each other, that you do not always choose each other, but that you are brought together more through the children, that's what you see. So it's an enrichment, you actually come into contact with everyone.

Yet, it is also the case that if the contact between the children decreases, then the contact between the parents also decreases; and if the children do not have many friends/contacts, then the parents do not either. Contact between parents also decreases the older the children get, e.g. from a certain age, children go to play and school alone without parental supervision.

As mentioned earlier, the parents I interviewed stated that they were open-minded and tolerant of (ethnic and racial) diversity. I found that the practices of everyday boundary-making run along different lines, such as gender, political ideology, socio-economic position, class, educational level, and parenting style. In what follows, I will look at these different lines by first examining the stories of parents who experience other parents setting boundaries or seeing or treating them differently, and then examining how parents produce boundaries with other parents.

4.3.1. Experiences of boundary-making

a) Gender

Although our respondents belong to the ethnic and cultural majority in the Netherlands and did not testify to have experienced racism, some parents nevertheless stated that they had the feeling of being seen as different or treated differently by other parents for various reasons.

As mentioned in the methodological section, parenting is a deeply gendered practice and I found during the interviews that mothers take on more (emotional) tasks in child rearing and that they are more often involved in parenting encounters than fathers. Hans' story deviates somewhat from this general trend. Hans describes himself as a stay-at-home dad who looks after the children, takes them to school, and is the parent who is most involved in everything to do with school. His wife has a busy and demanding job, he said, and he feels comfortable in this role. However, he has noticed that other parents think it's a bit strange to be a stay-at-home dad, and Hans regularly feels different in this regard. Linda, on the other hand, sometimes feels different as a working mother, she says:

> Some moms really are moms, if you know what I mean. The ones who put their family first. And I do not necessarily have that feeling. Because I think my work is also very important to me and that I am more than just a mom. And with some mothers I have the idea that they really are just a mom.

She explained that the other mothers she has the most contact with are also women with paid jobs, as this makes her feel more comfortable. At the same time, mothers who have paid jobs also experience the insecurity of being labelled as a mother who does not look after her children well enough, as the following quote from Heleen shows:

> Sometimes I forget to take bread out of the freezer and, say, we have two muffins in the cupboard, then we will just have a muffin for breakfast because we are in a hurry and have to go to school and so on. But then I say [to my child], for example, that they should not tell the school, otherwise we will end up on the blacklist of extremely bad parents.

b) Religion

Apart from gender, I have found that Christian parents share the feeling of being viewed differently. This may be paradoxical, as our respondents indicated that they feel it is important for their children to learn about religious traditions. Christian parents, however, indicated that they regularly feel

different. For example, Katrien and Liesbeth, who described themselves as Christians, explained that birthday parties of their children's friends are sometimes organized on Christian holidays, for example on Ash Wednesday or Good Friday, or sleepovers from Saturday on Sunday when they want to go to Sunday Mass as a family. In most cases, Katrien and Liesbeth give their children permission to go to a party, as they feel that the friendships of their children should not be affected. Katrien told me that while she has not received any explicit comments about her Christian identity and practise, she is sure that other parents feel negatively about it.

Ingrid, another Christian mother, told of a Christmas celebration in school that moved her in a negative way. Although she is Catholic, she has enrolled her children in a Protestant school. Every year at Christmas there is a kind of celebration where the children sing and recite poems. Yet, the Protestant church building is too small to accommodate the children and all the families and relatives who want to attend this celebration, so they have organized it in the (larger) Catholic church building, which is Ingrid's church. The organizers of the celebration had turned the altar into a podium and, in Ingrid's opinion, those present were not very aware of the sacred space that the church represents and were disrespectful:

> You come to my house of prayer, you know, we have made agreements here about how you move in this space. Namely, that you are here with reverence, whether you believe or not that Jesus is in the tabernacle. But I do believe it and it is my church. So, if you come here, you are very welcome, but this is how we do it here. […] There was no explanation [about the sacred space] at the beginning or something like 'how nice that we are guests here in this [Catholic church], this is an important space for them [Catholics], so do not run over the pews here, we do not start shouting'. […] It's a house of prayer; it's not a hall.

This experience made Ingrid feel very hurt and disrespected in her Catholic identity and created distance towards other parents. However, it is not only Christian parents who sometimes feel a certain distance to other parents, but also Muslim parents. Heleen, a Muslim mother, has volunteered to check for lice[6] at her child's school:

> I also really wanted to do something positive for the school, but I also thought, yeah, I just don't want people to think, oh, there's another totally uninvolved parent who [is also Muslim]. I thought, I want to prevent that. And if people have prejudices about me in the meantime, then I'm afraid it's more like, oh, this is this mother who works 60 hours a week and then suddenly pops up every now and then, you know… It could be that people now have a completely different, semi-justified prejudice about me that has nothing to do with me being Muslim.

Moreover, when Heleen examined the children at the school for lice, she also noticed that while she was sitting next to two other mothers who were not wearing a headscarf, the children mostly preferred to have their heads examined by one of the other two mothers and avoided having their hair examined by Heleen. This led Heleen to believe that these children simply do not see and meet many Muslim women in their lives, which leads to a kind of avoidance.

[6] In the Netherlands, parents are asked to volunteer in school to search for lice among the pupils, the so-called *luizenmoeder* [lice mother].

c) Race

In addition to gender and religion, race, and skin color are also reasons for some of the parents who have a mixed family to feel they are treated differently. Julia's children, who are mixed, attend a particular school that she deliberately chose because it told her it had a diversity and inclusion policy and was committed to welcoming children and families from different backgrounds. But in reality, Julia explains, it is a 'very white school' and several parents from non-white backgrounds and/or families have left the school for this reason in recent years:

> We are certainly not the only ones who are different. There is also a Dutch-Moroccan family, for example, who also stand out. And actually, we do not have much to do with each other, but because we are both different in this school, we feel increasingly attracted to each other [laughs]. And uh, but I happen to know a lot of people who [have] a Surinamese background, or even, uh, a family with a Nigerian mother or... They have all left.

For Julia, this school turned out to be a disappointment, both in terms of the other parents, who are white, and the school staff and management, who reproduce the boundaries. Julia talked about a recent event that made her angry with the school, namely the school musical, which is a tradition in the Netherlands:

> They had chosen Aladdin. Now you know that [in] Aladdin, Yasmine is not a white girl. And my daughter also has a good voice, she can sing quite well, but in the end the role was given to three other white girls. […] And [her child] got the part of the servant, the sultan's servant. And then I'm like, come on… You know, giving the role of servant to the only non-white child is just stupid. And I can get really angry about that. But I didn't say anything about it, but [in hindsight] I think I should have said something so they wouldn't do it next time, you know. [Her child] was okay with it in the end because she got to be a servant with her best friend. But she wanted the role of Jasmine, of course.

Parents in mixed families also indicated that they are aware that they sometimes try to anticipate and prevent forms of boundary-making as Islamophobia, racism, and discrimination through their own behavior, which requires a lot of energy. For example, Heleen told me that she refuses to wear black clothes, although she loves black clothes, but in combination with wearing a headscarf she does not want to project the image of a conservative Muslim woman.

4.3.2. Practices of boundary-making

a) Class

Another important findings of this study is that the parents I interviewed draw boundaries primarily based on class and socioeconomic and cultural position. When asked which parents they have the most contact with, they responded that these are mostly the parents of their children's friends. However, when I asked them about these friends and their parents and how they would describe these parents, I mostly heard that these families were very similar to them in terms of race, class, type of job, etc. Some parents, like Laurie, indicated that they were aware of their social bubble, but that it is also a sort of a coincidence:

> There are social housing flats round the corner and yet… We literally live round the corner, say if you go down the road there's more [social housing] and yet [her child] has never played

> in one…. It's predominantly owner-occupied homes where [her child] plays [with other children]. So that's what I mean by bubble. Is that the socio-economic class then? I think so, but that's also a coincidence. I think it's partly a coincidence, but it could well be that it clicks with a girl who comes from a different bubble. But predominantly that's not the case in our case, no.

In other interviews, however, I found that class in fact is an important issue. Several parents stated that they find it difficult to have a real connection with people who have had a more practical education and are anti-social (asociaal) in their behavior with different manners. These parents indicated that it is difficult to build a relationship with people who have a different attitude towards life and parenting, and often also towards politics. Therefore, the parents I interviewed tend to avoid meeting and socializing with people who do not share the same intellectual abilities and/or ideological views.

In our conversation, Heleen, who identifies as a Muslim, talked about the neighborhood next to the one where she lives and where some children who live there attend the same school as her child. This neighborhood is characterized by a high number of people with a (recent) migration background who often have a low income as well. Heleen said that she and her family 'might feel very comfortable there culturally', but not in terms of manners and behavior. She gave an example of a boy in her child's class who often curses the other children and the teacher, whose parents, in Heleen's eyes, 'did not deal with it adequately'. Heleen also confessed during the interview that she also struggles with not thinking in stereotypes about this boy:

> But when I see that he is the first in the whole class with a fatbike, this word is also very bad, then I think: Riding a bike to school is a kind of free physical activity. […] Then I think: what kind of parent buys an electric bike for a child who is already obese when he can just bike to school? Who does that?! So it's very hard for me not to be negative about it, and then I find myself thinking about the prejudices: 'Oh yeah, it's that [that neighborhood] again, where they give kids fast food and an electric bike'. […] You know, you start to judge, you catch yourself judging what other people are spending their money on, when maybe these people just have a very successful business and are making very smart financial decisions, and this was just an outburst because he's been whining about it for years. Or maybe the kid has physical issues that make a normal bike impossible... So yes, I find myself realizing that it could be prejudice. So it's hard for me not to make an overly negative judgement when you see certain patterns confirmed, let's say.

Processes of boundary-making in relation to class and socio-economic and cultural position have often been discussed by interviewees under the banner of parenting style.

b) Parenting style

Some parents openly criticized how other parents brought up their children and explicitly stated that they had a different opinion on how to raise a child. Mina, for example, attaches great importance to bringing up her children in a gender-sensitive way and finds it difficult to talk to parents who bring up their children in a gender-stereotypical way. Intensive parenting was also an important topic that was either supported or criticized. Some of the parents I spoke to described themselves as parents with clear structure and rules that children should obey, and criticized parents who raised their children too loosely; and vice versa: some of our interviewees criticized parents who are too strict. Although

parenting style may be an abstract topic, I asked these interviewees if they could give some examples – and some of them mentioned it themselves.

The critique of the parenting style was mostly concretized by the judgement of how other parents deal with things like (television and phone) screens and games. Watching cartoons such as Paw Patrol, for example, was seen by Ingrid as 'not in keeping with her aesthetic standards'. Games in general were often mentioned as something that 'other parents' provide quite easily for their children, whereas the parents in our study felt that children should be protected from (too many) games. Sometimes it was even implicitly suggested that it was a bit of lazy parenting. Daan said that he was not against screen time in general, but that it should not be the main activity for children:

> For example, [his child] was playing at another friend's house one afternoon recently and they spent the whole afternoon watching a film and playing games. I am not against that in principle. But if a friend comes over to play, I am not going to turn on a film.

In this context, playing with toy guns, for example, was also criticized as being too violent for children, and parents who let their children play with such things were seen as different. The use of language and swearing was also seen as something bad, something that children should not do or hear. Hence, if parents swore in front of their children or around them, this was seen as a bad thing, as were parents who had a negative communication style with each other and/or with other parents. Saskia told about a family where her child often went to play:

> These parents were both at home full time to look after the child. So they weren't working and I was there some time and these parents were absolutely not friendly to each other and the father was so misogynistic, and it was all such a strange situation.

For Saskia, the behavior of these parents was so out of step with her own values that she decided to dissolve the friendship between the children, as she had already done with another of her child's friendships, in which this family spent a lot of time with 'alcohol, drugs, and criminal behavior' and in which another daughter had a teen pregnancy.

Some parents were also well aware that class was a dominant category of boundary setting, as Renate recounted in her story:

> Well, in my [child's] class there was a girl who lived in a trailer park. And then you also realize that you have a kind of prejudice because she was often not at school, which made me think: What are these parents doing? Shouldn't she just go to school or something? Is she allowed to stay at home so often because they have different norms and values to us? But I assume the school just had a good conversation with [these parents] about it, because I never heard anything weird about it. So that's more my own prejudice that I am projecting onto someone else.

Candy, and by extension food that is considered unhealthy, was also an important topic for boundary-making. Several parents said that they found it worrying that other parents were giving their children too much candy and that they wanted to prevent their own children from eating too much candy. They said the same about fast food, which they want to avoid as much as possible for their children, while, in their opinion, other parents, especially parents from lower social classes, are much more flexible when it comes to offering this type of food to their children.

Although class is one of the main lines of boundary-making between the parents I interviewed, it should be noted that some parents told me things that are somewhat contradictory to this observation. For example, Eveline's child's best friend lives in a single parent family and Eveline clearly notes that there is not much money in this family, which she can tell by the way 'the house is decorated or what [they] wear, you know'. However, Eveline consciously chooses not to share this type of information with her child as she feels that this is not useful information for children and she does not want her child to think about this when they meet up to play.

c) Language and culture

Although the parents I interviewed said that they were committed to diversity, their stories still highlighted some challenges. For some parents, it was difficult to communicate with other parents who have an immigrant background. This was partly due to language issues, for example with parents who are not fluent in Dutch or English, but also due to cultural issues, as the story of Daan reveals:

> Once [Arabic name] and [Arabic name], a boy and a girl with a, I do not know where the mother is from, a single mother, and they came to play with [our children] and then you realized that erh... It was a lot more complex in many ways than with this [other white child], for example. And the mother [brought] the children and she came back later [to pick them up], she had bought us a present. And it was all very, very loving and positive. But you think, oh yeah, this is suddenly [different], you need to be a bit more actively involved. And I see this mother talking to [another] mother with the niqab very often [at school]. So, I think they can relate more easily in that as well, like I can relate more quickly with [another white child's] parents, that at first glance you think, these [kind of] people, yeah, I meet them at work as well, I know exactly how to approach them, so to speak […]. [You have] these lines that run easier and faster and [lines that] require a bit more effort.

I have regularly heard the idea that it takes more energy and (emotional) labor to talk to parents from different backgrounds. Often it was combined with a discomfort in talking about diversity which consequently leads to a closed attitude and hesitation and even fear of talking to other parents who are different in some way, as Laurie says:

> What I would really like to do, but which still makes me uncomfortable, is to ask, for example, when we are at the Christmas celebration and I am sitting next to someone wearing a headscarf[7]: How does that make you feel? Because I am really curious about how it feels to be at a Christmas celebration [as a Muslim]. So I'd really like to have a conversation about that, but that is, that does not really feel like the proper setting, while [our] kids are actually sitting together in the same class, so how difficult can it be [to start a conversation], but it's still... I then feel that I am experiencing a threshold at that moment. How shall my question be perceived? […] You know, for example, if I were to meet a Muslim woman on the school council, or if she were to become part of the school council, then that [asking how she perceives the Christmas celebration] would be something I would [dare to] ask someone in the long run. But for that you need some kind of common ground first and I do not have that at the moment with parents from a different background.

[7] In the original quotation, Laurie speaks of a *hoofddoekje* instead of a *hoofddoek;* which has a patronizing undertone.

Perceiving to have little in common with parents from a different background is also consistent with the statements of other parents. In addition, some of the parents I spoke to stated that migrant parents often cling to each other, as Linda said:

> It's often the Islamic women, so Moroccan, Turkish, Syrian, and yes, you always see them... They're always there, when I'm at the school gate, they're always there, and yes, you see them in the morning too, they're always there. They also stick together and often speak in their own language.

In addition, Linda said that her child has a friend whose mother is Moroccan, who 'speaks Dutch, but not very well, and [she is] a very friendly woman and so on, but […] there is a difference, on, well, an intelligent level, I think', which prevents Linda from building a relationship with this mother.

This idea that mothers who (visibly) identify as Muslims stick together is something I have heard more than once. During one of the observations at a mothers' café, which was clearly aimed at middle-class parents, I briefly explained our research to the parents present and gave some examples to illustrate the kind of boundary-making practises we were looking for. One of the mothers present said that at her child's school, the visibly Islamic mothers always stand together, talk on a bench together, and do not really make an effort to talk to the other parents. According to this mother, other mothers of Turkish or Moroccan origin without visible religious symbols do talk to the other parents. As a suggestion, this mother advised us to 'ask these mothers [the ones with a headscarf] why they stay together like this and do not mingle with the other parents'.

Some parents praised cultural traditions other than Dutch or Western European culture for their different parenting methods, but this praise was often underpinned by essentialism. During a mothers' café, Sylvia, one of the organizers of the event, discussed the self-help parenting book *Hunt, Gather, Parent: What Ancient Cultures Can Teach Us about the Lost Art of Raising Happy, Helpful Little Humans*. She found the book at times 'too critical of Western parenting culture', but at the same time it offered other ways of parenting. The adage 'It takes a village to raise a child' was mentioned here. Sylvia, for example, said that the Inuit, the Eskimos, focus a lot on regulating emotions, which was echoed by another participant who said that this could have to do with the climate, that people have to save their energy and use it well because of the cold. Karlijn, another mum, picked up on this by saying that people in southern climes are often more temperamental, especially if they live closer to the equator, although, she said, 'some African men can also be very calm and chill. The conversation continued about parenting styles and how parents in the West mainly raise their children individually, without a large network. At one point, Karlijn picked up on this by saying that when mothers in Africa go to the well to fetch water, they don't ask other villagers to look after their child(ren), they just do it. 'We don't know that here,' she said. Sylvia noted that it is indeed less common in the Netherlands to support each other to this extent. It is interesting to note that Sylvia and Karlijn proved at first glance to be open-minded towards other cultures and the way parenting is viewed there. They also stated that they believe that European cultures can learn a lot from other parenting styles. But at the same time, they reproduce essentializing stereotypical and gendered discourses about non-Western cultures.

4.4. Willingness to take action

I also asked our interviewees if they had ever noticed anything that made parents from other backgrounds uncomfortable or not welcome. Most parents replied that they had never noticed anything like that, but Katja told me about a time when there was a new child and therefore new parents at the school and some parents in the WhatsApp chat group immediately started guessing about the origin of these parents, whether they were refugees, whether they spoke Dutch and so on, with a racist undertone. The majority of the parents in this chat group remained silent. But Katja had already spoken to these parents to make them feel welcome at the school. Therefore, she wrote a short note in the chat group to let them know that these new parents were expats[8] who would be staying here for a few years. However, Katja still felt very uncomfortable about it:

> I did not feel... How do you say that? […] Well, I thought it was really bad that it happened anyway, but you also feel a bit insecure when you contradict people. People can react very strongly […] And you also see them again at school. And well, I found that difficult myself. But I also thought it was important to do something about it, to not allow this atmosphere to be made unpleasant by a number of people.

Katja is addressing here the fact that when you have a discussion with other parents, you still have a sort of relationship with them in a school context and still need to see them regularly. She also wants to avoid people starting to talk about her, or being perceived as annoying, or as someone who knows better.

In the course of the interviews, there were some conversations where I realized that our questions triggered something in our interviewees. Whilst I was clear about the aim and research questions of our study and the respondents more or less knew what to expect from the interview, I realized that some parents indicated that they were confronted with their own thinking.

For example, Emmy said about the interview that I conducted with her:

> I am becoming aware of how much I think in groups and code myself, that when I say certain things I realize 'oh, what are you saying now' […] I also tick a lot of the 7 *vinkjes*[9].

Being aware of one's privileges is something I heard from several respondents. They stated that they are privileged in various ways, which can mean that they may not see when others are excluded, marginalized, or discriminated against. A similar reaction was given by Trudy:

> I feel very comfortable there, very much at home at school and [in] contact with other parents, that I, that I also realize very well that I might have blind spots there, because when you have the feeling that you belong there […] that sometimes, that you do not even notice when that's not the case with others or that you exclude others. In this sense, I also find it an interesting conversation [this interview] to become a little more aware of this.

It even prompted some parents to take action in the school council as Laurie indicated:

[8] While Katja uses the term expats, it should be noted that scholars have argued that 'expat' is also part of a racialized class discourse that offers belonging to a group of people who are different, but not quite; and who simultaneously belong, but not quite; see for example Kunz (2019).

[9] *De zeven vinkjes* [The seven check marks] is a book written by Joris Luyendijk, a Dutch writer and journalist, about privilege.

> Now that I'm talking to you about it, my intention to put the issue on the agenda for next year is growing. It's not on our priority list at the moment, but I'm now going to make it part of our priorities for the next school year. Because when I think about it, I think: if you really want to make it better for all the kids in the class, you need to talk about it, and not to burden the teacher or the principal, but simply to make the topic discussable and to learn from each other to talk about it.

One of the main aims of the larger RAISE project is to raise awareness of racism and structural discrimination. In this respect, it is a positive outcome that some interviews were transformative for some of our interviewees.

5. Conclusion and recommendations

This report aimed to provide an overview of the main research results obtained in the Netherlands as part of the first workpackage of the RAISE project. Based on 36 in-depth interviews and 5 observation sessions, I have arrived at four main categories of research material in which I see the construction of boundaries, how boundaries are experienced, and whether and how parents are aware of these boundaries: School choice, attitudes and commitment to diversity, parenting encounters and everyday boundary-making (consisting of experiences and practises of boundary-making) and willingness to take action.

The first topic, school choice, was an important one. All parents indicated that they felt it was important that the school their children attend is a good quality school, where children are seen as individual adults and not as numbers, and has a solid staff. Most parents have chosen a particular school instead of a public school, i.e. with a particular pedagogical and didactic orientation and/or a (nominally) Christian school. The latter was not only the case for Christian parents, but also for non-religious parents; not, as they argued, to make their children religious, but out of culture/tradition and to familiarize them with Christianity and Christian norms and values. This choice is not a coincidence, but a choice in which segregation arises from the fact that parents decide what kind of environment they want to raise their children in and what kind of contact they as a parent will have with the other parents. Thus, spatial segregation between children, and their parents, due to school choice is also a form of boundary-making.

A second topic was the attitude and commitment of our respondents towards diversity. This relates to personal beliefs which is essential to understand if we want to analyze processes of boundary-making in parenting settings. All parents stated that they believe their child should grow up in an environment where diversity is celebrated and where they meet several other children and people who are different from themselves. However, this is not necessarily reflected in the schools their children attend. This is mainly to do with the fact that I interviewed middle-class parents who live in neighborhoods with similar people, resulting in ‘white’ schools. Nevertheless, these parents are committed to accommodating diversity and the examples given were mostly to do with food and candy. It became clear that our interviewees understood diversity to mean racial and ethnic diversity, including through the examples they gave in relation to food practices. They also regularly pointed out that these are sensitive topics and that they are aware that the language used to talk about experiences of diversity is crucial.

A third topic, and the most central in this study, is the encounters between parents and the everyday processes of boundary-making. There are two main categories here: Parents who experience boundaries and parents who create boundaries. The first category was characterized by gender, religion, and race. Some parents felt they were seen and treated differently because they did not conform to societal norms of what it means to be a mother or father. I also found that the Christian parents in our interview sample felt perceived as different because of their religious identity and practise, and that parents belonging to a mixed family also stated that they had experienced moments of prejudice and distance. In terms of everyday boundary-making practises, I found that class, parenting style, language and culture were the most important components of how these white middle-class parents constructed boundaries. In particular, class was an important line along which parents drew boundaries. Several parents said that they find it difficult to relate to parents who have a lower socio-economic position in society, as they display a different habitus and behavior. The differences in educational levels meant that there were not many commonalities or points of discussion. This was often linked to the parenting style of the parents. Parents who had a different vision (or no vision at all) for child rearing were seen as different, and some parents did not want their children to be friends with children from families that were a little outside the social margins. A final form of boundary-making related to language and culture, with the lack of a common language leading to distance, but also to differences in culture and not knowing exactly how to interact properly with people who have different customs.

Finally, the fourth topic concerned the willingness to take action and how to cope with boundaries. When I asked parents if they had experienced moments when other parents were seen or treated differently, most responded negative. In the few exceptions where parents did notice something, they did not find it easy to respond—even if they disagreed with what was said or done. Fear and discomfort were often cited as reasons for not responding. Moreover, I heard more than once that our interviewees were confronted by our interview questions and started to reflect on their own attitudes, behavior, and privileges. In addition, one of our interviewees stated months after the interview that they had decided to change schools for their children. One of the reasons for this move, they said, was that as a result of the interview and the interview questions, they began to think more critically about the school (which they were not very happy with anyway) and decided to leave and look for a more inclusive school. This study has thus shown that interviews can serve as moments of reflection and qualitative research can bring change not only in larger social structures, but can also be transformative in everyday interactions with research participants.

In addition to these conclusions, I also formulate some recommendations. In the interviews I had with parents and professionals, I explained that one of the goals of this research project was to develop a handbook for parents, professionals, school management, etc. Therefore, I always asked for recommendations or tips and tricks: What should definitely be included in the book? What are good practices? What should we consider if we want to strive for a more inclusive care and school environment for children and their parents? The main advice given had to do with finances and parents' financial resources. For example, Laurie, who sits on the parent council at her children's school, told me that the school charges a voluntary parental contribution. Until recently, she said, parents were reminded three times. She campaigned for this to be changed to a single reminder, because if parents are unable to make a financial contribution, it is awkward and embarrassing to be reminded three times. Similar advice given a few times was to ask parents (anonymously) how much

money they could spare for the treats the children bring to their birthday so that the school can set an upper limit to keep it equal and fair.

All in all, this study was designed to shed light on how parents of primary school children construct and experience boundaries with other parents. In general, the parents, who are white and middle-class, described themselves as open-minded and tolerant, with a genuine commitment to (ethnic and racial) diversity. In practise, however, I saw that they mainly socialized with other white middle-class parents. I also found that class and parenting style were important elements in the everyday construction of boundaries.

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