

RAISE – WP 1

Practices and Narratives of Boundary-making in Everyday Life Institutional Settings

General Introduction- Country Reports



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Introduction

This document serves as a general introduction to the four country reports that we produced as part of the first work package of the RAISE project entitled *Practices and Narratives of Boundary-making in Everyday Life Institutional Settings*. In this work package, we conducted qualitative empirical research among parents of children aged 0-12 in four European countries, Belgium, the Netherlands, Poland and Hungary, to investigate how parents construct, maintain, reinforce, narrate, legitimize, and experience boundaries in relation to their parenting and in their encounters with others, such as parents, caregivers, and teachers.

In order to conceptualize borders and the drawing of borders, we draw on sociologist Andreas Wimmer's definition of boundaries. Although Wimmer (2008b, p. 975) develops this definition in relation to ethnic boundaries, we found it useful to adhere to this definition when conducting our study:

A boundary displays both a categorical and a social or behavioral dimension. The former refers to acts of social classification and collective representation; the latter to everyday networks of relationships that result from individual acts of connecting and distancing. On the individual level, the categorical and the behavioral aspects appear as two cognitive schemes. One divides the social world into social groups—into “us” and “them”—and the other offers scripts of action—how to relate to individuals classified as “us” and “them” under given circumstances. Only when the two schemes coincide, when ways of seeing the world correspond to ways of acting in the world, shall I speak of a social boundary.

Following Wimmer (2008a, 2008b) and other scholarship on ethnic boundaries and boundary-making (De Genova, 2005; Guma, 2019), and as we will show in our country reports, we also start from the assumption that boundaries should be seen as dynamic and fluid rather than static and fixed. In this sense, it makes sense to view boundary-making as an everyday affective and ongoing practice that is subject to various dynamics and influences. Therefore, we were interested in understanding the discursive, material, and embodied dimensions of boundaries, and even more how boundaries are constructed and deconstructed in everyday encounters of parents.

We have chosen to examine boundary-making in the context of parenting and parenting encounters because parenting is an everyday affective practice that at first glance appears to be deeply personal and intimate, yet is shaped by broader political, socio-cultural, and religious discourses; and so in parenting, too, the personal is the political (hooks, 1984). Parenting is therefore a suitable site to investigate the interplay between the private and the public (de Koning et al., 2022). It should be added that parenting is a deeply gendered practice as well (Kane, 2018), as, amongst other things, illustrated by the fact that the majority of our research participants are mothers. Also, we are aware that research focusing on the mundane politics of parenting bears the risk of reproducing the heteronormative ideal of the nuclear family as the standard norm of living arrangements. Nevertheless, we have chosen to examine boundary-making in these particular contexts because it involves encounters with other parents and their children, caregivers, and teachers that would not take place outside of parenting, and because parenting can trigger questions in people about parenting, society, education, the future of their children and the world, the values they wish to pass on, and so on.

In order to investigate these processes of boundary-making as experienced by parents, each group of researchers began in 2023 with a qualitative empirical study. Since the project proposal was

to gain access to parents through institutional settings such as primary schools and newborn health centers, we began our study there. As the country reports will make clear, it was not possible to gain access to these institutional facilities in every country for a variety of reasons, which are explained in more detail in the reports. Therefore, in some countries we decided to recruit research participants through other methods, such as snowballing and disseminating the call for participation widely and through various networks. Ultimately, we were able to conduct interviews with parents in all four countries and answer our research question.

The qualitative research was conducted through in-depth interviews and, observations. To facilitate the interviews, we created an interview guide (Appendix 1) in collaboration with the four participating universities. This interview guide served as a starting point for the interviews, but left enough room for additional and/or further questions, depending on the context and interview. All interviews were then transcribed and analyzed. To support the coding and analysis of the interview transcripts, we created a common codebook (Appendix 2). Although we took this common codebook as a starting point, each country also developed its own inductive coding, as the data is different in each context.

While the methods, approaches to recruiting research participants, and demographic characteristics of our research participants may differ from country to country, we have nonetheless managed to assemble a comprehensive collection of narratives that shed light on the complexities and nuances surrounding boundary-making. This should come as no surprise as these four countries, although all part of the European Union, have different political, economic, socio-cultural, and religious histories, with different approaches to and relationships with migrants and racialized people. It thus becomes clear that these differences in history and society shape the narratives of the parents we interviewed and lead to a rich data set. In the coming months, we will compare the results across the four countries, but already we can see some similarities emerging from the data. The findings from the country reports will be incorporated into the handbook and the podcast, which are still under development. Recommendations for the handbook will also be formulated in the country reports.

Although our comparative analysis will have to be carried out over the next few months, we can already briefly present some similarities we have found. We noticed that most parents stated that they had only limited and superficial contact with other parents, and that these contacts were mostly in the context of friendships between their children. Furthermore, the boundary-making in all four countries runs along lines of intersectionality (Romero, 2018). In several cases, boundaries are not only formed in relation to a single identity marker such as religion or ethnicity, but often occur in a matrix of various interlocking axes of difference. Also, we found in the four countries that school choice, which often results in school segregation, is an important issue for our interviewees and was discussed at length by them. These are only brief examples of similarities, we expect a more in-depth analysis of these in the months that will ensue.

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List of appendices

Appendix 1: Interview guide

Appendix 2: Codebook

Appendix 1: Interview guide

The interview guide is designed to direct conversation about the following topics.

- Topic 1: boundary making from an institution
- Topic 2: boundary making by/among parents
- Topic 3: your own boundary making with others
- Topic 4: boundary making by institution with/among your children
- Topic 5: boundary making experienced by your children

1. What are your general impressions about this clinic/school /?
2. We would like to understand a little more about you and your interactions with other parents and with [Clinic/school]. In what ways do you interact with other parents here?
3. When you think about your interactions with the staff at [Clinic/school] what sort of feelings do you have about this place? What are some of things that contribute to that feeling?
4. Now we'd like to think about your child(ren). In what ways are your child(ren) well-received and included at [Clinic/school]?

Follow up: In what ways are your child(ren) not well-received or excluded at [Clinic/school]?

5. Can you tell me about a time you experienced a feeling that you or your child(ren) were not welcome?
6. Do you know an example of another parent who felt they or their child(ren) was not welcome at [Clinic/school]?
7. I have an example I'd like to share with you that I heard about from a school setting. I'd like to share the story with you and ask you some questions about it.

In the hallway of a school, there were two groups of students. Each group was standing in a line waiting for their teachers who were just around the corner. Two of the boys from class A began teasing one of the girls from class B. She began to cry. A new student who was from another country, stepped in between the boys and the crying girl. The new student, who was still learning the language, yelled 'Stop. Go away.' Then the students of class A began to laugh. Suddenly a boy from class B confronted the new student with the weak language. He yelled, 'you don't talk right.' The teachers, having heard the laughter, had returned to the hallway and quickly moved their classes to the place they needed to go.

As a parent, if you witnessed or heard about this situation, how would you respond?

Do you imagine yourself as the parent of one particular child in the story? Which one? Why is that? What if you were the parent of another student [if they say the crying girl, then the teasing boys or if they say the younger boy, then the new girl]—do you think your response to this question would be different than what you thought of earlier? —

Is there a difference if it had been the boy who was laughed at and started to cry?

Based on your experiences here, how would a typical teacher respond to the students in such a scenario? And how do you image the parents of the children might respond if such a situation took place here?

What if I told you each of the five students in this story each came from a different background? Would that change anything in what you imagine would be the appropriate response?

8. Since you started coming to [Clinic/school] are there ways that you really connect with other parents? (...things that make you feel welcome?)

Follow up: Can you tell me more about that? What do you mean by ... [information provided by respondent]?

9. Since you started coming to [Clinic/school] are there things that make you feel you are not welcome? Are there ways that make you feel maybe just a little different than other parents??

Follow up: Can you tell me more about that? What do you mean by ... [information provided by respondent]?

10. Do you have friends from different backgrounds than yours?

Follow up: What do you mean by different background... [information provided by respondent]?

Follow up: What things do you do together? Where do you meet to spend time together?

Follow up: Can you tell me more about that? What do you mean by ... [information provided by respondent]? 1. Have you seen or experienced a kind of discrimination—rejection of a person because of their ethnic, racial, or religious identity while at [Clinic/school]?

Follow up: Can you tell me more about that? What do you mean by ... [information provided by respondent]?

11. Since you've been at [Clinic/school], have you seen anyone being treated worse because of their background or identity?

Follow up: Can you tell me more about that? What do you mean by ... [information provided by respondent]?

Follow up: Have you witnessed or experienced anyone being treated worse because of their ethnic, racial, gender, or religious identity here (in this country)? How do you think that experience influences your answers in this interview?

12. We've talked about some experiences that can be very distressing, but we also want to understand positive moments too. What are your expectations for how your child should feel in [Clinic/school]?

Appendix 2: Codebook

	Subcode	Explanation
Intersectional identity markers	Gender	Something is said about women/mothers, men/fathers, LGBTQI+ persons, gender roles
	Ethnicity and race	Something is said about someone's skin color, the assumed ethnicity of someone else
	Culture and traditions	Something is said about someone's cultural background, cultural traditions
	(Dis)ability	Something is said about (dis)abled persons
	Class and level of education	Something is said about someone's financial status, spending pattern, educational background
	Political orientation	Something is said about someone's political preferences, voting behavior
	Religious identity	Something is said about someone's [presumed] religious identity, religious practices, or religious attire
	Age of participant (in ranges)	10s, 20-45, 45-65, 65+

Code	Subcode	Explanation
Diversity	Meaning of diversity	What is meant if the word diversity is voiced
	Attitudes towards diversity	How do they perceive diversity

	School and diversity	Do they consider the school to be 'diverse'
	Commitment towards diversity	Do they label themselves as openminded
	Diversity-seeking	Do they engage in intentional proximity to diversity?
	Colour-blindness	Denies or downplays the role of racialisation
	White-normativity	Implicit bias towards white majority culture

Code	Subcode	Explanation
Xenophobia	Attitude towards specific others	Something is said about a specific group of people
	Attitude towards people with an [presumed] experience of migration	Something is said about people who have migrated
	Attitude towards religious others	Something is said about those who express any religious identity
	Attitude towards Islam	Something is said about Islam, Muslims
	Attitude towards Christianity	Something is said about Christians
	Attitude towards Judaism	Something is said about Judaism
	Attitude towards Hinduism	Something is said about Hindus

Code	Subcode	Explanation
Racism	Observations of racist behavior	Have they noticed racist speech or behavior
	Resilience towards racism	Do they speak up against what they see

	Everyday racism	Generally accepted social norms that are race-based are mentioned
	Anti-racism	Making statements of not being racist
	microaggression	They describe exclusionary behavior as jokes, stereotypes, everyday expressions
	Verbal expression	A prejudicial statement is made or referred to
	Physical expression	Gestures or altercations are mentioned or described

Code	Subcode	Explanation
Boundary-making	Observations of connection or exclusion	Have they noticed behavior that excludes by design
	Setting boundaries	Declarations of what is permissible/preferred in society
	Symbolic boundaries	Shared social conventions, expectations for 'legitimate culture'
	Institutional order	The expectations of a given organization are highlighted
	Social closure	They describe the limits of what is socially acceptable
	Individual strategies	A mechanism an individual uses to enforce a boundary
	Shifting boundaries	They speak about strategies for accommodating/preventing greater inclusion

	Enforcing	They mention mechanisms used to enforce boundaries
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Code	Subcode	Explanation
Roles		
	Victim	Something is said about a situation of discrimination against them
	Perpetrator	Something is said about a situation when they discriminated against another
	Bystander	Something is said about a situation of discrimination that they observed
	Upstander/Active bystander	Something is said about their own intervention in a situation of discrimination