



**Subject Formation in Early Childhood Parenting Education:
Migrantification, Motherhood, and Mobilization**

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Abbreviations

ECEC	Early Childhood Education and Care
GTM	Grounded Theory Methodology
DFG	Deutsche Forschungsgemeinschaft (German Research Foundation)
SGB	Sozialgesetzbuch (German Social Code)
BGB	Bürgerliches Gesetzbuch (German Civil Code)
BMFSFJ	Bundesministerium für Familie, Senioren, Frauen und Jugend (Federal Ministry for Family Affairs, Senior Citizens, Women, and Youth)

1. Introduction

In social and educational policy and research, Early Childhood Education and Care (ECEC) is considered crucial for integration and the fostering of equal opportunities (Westphal et al., 2017). This context underpinned the collaborative research project Integration Through Trust,¹ which explored the factors that facilitated or hindered refugee parents' access to ECEC services for children aged 0 to 6 years in Lower Saxony, Germany. Within this framework, I conducted one of six sub-projects, focusing on trust-building in the interactions between staff and parents. To this end, I collected qualitative data from various ECEC contexts, all of which contributed to the overall project findings. However, during praxiographic fieldwork in a regional initiative aimed at promoting parents' access to ECEC, a specific project component stood out: a parenting education group. Several project participants highlighted this group as a prime example of good practice and a pertinent context for researching integration and trust. Finally, then, this thesis focuses on parenting education, incorporating data from two cases of a program for migrantified mothers.

The growing relevance of ECEC in promoting child development and social integration is closely tied to a call for early intervention and support that extends beyond daycare centers. Increasingly, there is a focus on initiatives that position parents as the primary agents of their children's socialization (Betz, 2016). The underlying demand for early intervention has created strong momentum for low-threshold, target-group-specific educational programs, resulting in a proliferation of new initiatives (Westphal et al., 2017; Kadera & Minsel, 2016; Hartung, 2022). However, while these target groups often face deficit-oriented attributions (Betz, 2016; Leitner, 2023), qualitative research that delves into the dynamics between workers and participants in parenting education programs remains limited and beyond the scope of evaluative studies.

The aforementioned Integration Through Trust project initially focused on refugee parents—so why the shift to migrantified motherhood in this thesis?² It becomes evident that parents

¹ The collaborative research project Integration Through Trust was conducted from February 2019 to May 2022 at Leuphana University Lüneburg. It was funded by the Lower Saxony Ministry for Science and Culture and led by Prof. Dr. Philipp Sandermann. Further information and related publications can be found at: <https://www.leuphana.de/idv>

² The distinction between forced and voluntary migration remains contested in academic discourse. On the one hand, it is rooted in historically selective, nation-state definitional power, which risks oversimplifying the complex causes of displacement and lived experiences. On the other hand, it is important to recognize the subjective and social impact of this definitional power and the creation of coercion

defined as “migrants,” “refugees,” or “having a migration background” receive considerable attention as target groups for parenting education initiatives, with a particular focus on mothers (Westphal et al., 2017).

Why use the term “migrantified”? This term refers to the process of migrantification, through which, according to Forkert et al. (2020), individuals are categorized as migrants and thus positioned as “others” in contrast to a hegemonic majority and identity, based on cultural, ethnic, or national differences. This process is often marked by marginalization, negative connotations, and discrimination. Forkert et al. (2020) further emphasize that migrantification intensifies during times of crisis, when societal fears and insecurities are projected onto those labeled as migrants or refugees.

El-Mafaalani (2023) considers migrantification a useful term because it captures how people are marked as “others” due to an assumed “migration background.” Migrantification is intertwined with attributions based on race, nationality, religion, culture, and language. In Germany, it also affects individuals who have no personal experience of migration (El-Mafaalani, 2023). Thus, migrantification refers to multiple processes of categorization and differentiation that go beyond a relocation of one’s primary place of residence across national borders. Lundström (2017) notes that in Sweden white migrants are often not regarded as migrants, which highlights how racialized distinctions determine who is recognized as belonging and who is excluded.

The parenting education program examined in this study identifies its target group as families, parents, or mothers with a “refugee or migration background.” The director of a facility hosting one of the groups I visited told me during a key informant interview that the distinction between asylum and migration is irrelevant in practice. During my fieldwork, when we met again at the group’s Christmas party, she reminded me of this:

She [the director] says she remembers our conversation and is pleased to see me here. “You’re in exactly the right place. And here you can clearly see. . . the topic is migration. Not all participants of the group are refugees.” She looks at Dora [parental guide and group leader of the parenting education program], who nods. “Yes, we all have different backgrounds,” she agrees.

through social causes (Scherr, 2024; Scherr & Scherschel, 2015, 2019). The term “migration background” is also a point of debate. El-Mafaalani (2023) notes that while it can be useful for highlighting intergenerational developments and participation opportunities, it is inadequate for discrimination and racism research, as it fails to sufficiently differentiate the categories that increase the risk of discrimination. In that sense, the expert commission of the most recent Children and Youth Report of the Federal Government of Germany decided to not use the term, which was appreciated by the Federal Government (Deutscher Bundestag, 2024).

The parental guide's reference to individual differences suggests that the framing of migration tends to homogenize the participants. By using the term migrantification, I aim to convey that language is a discursive practice that not only represents reality but also actively shapes the identities, differences, social orders, and norms that affect how we perceive ourselves and others. Furthermore, the workers in the program are not addressed solely based on personal migration experiences, but also through their familial migration background.

This shift in perspective reflects the journey I have taken in developing my thesis. My research evolved as I gained insight into how individuals become subjects within a parenting education program, the identity categories and attributions they encounter, how they position themselves, and how relationships between workers and parents are shaped (by trust, among other things). My focus on these issues led to the overarching research question that ties together the three articles of my thesis:

How do participants become subjects of early childhood parenting education as a result of addressing and positioning practices, and what logics are associated with these processes?

To provide a clearer understanding of the key concepts underlying these terms, Section 2 explores the theoretical and methodological foundations of this study. Section 3 presents a review of existing empirical research on parenting education, focusing on migrantified parents as the target group and the expectations placed on (migrantified) workers. Section 4 outlines my objectives and research questions, including the sub-questions addressed in the individual articles. In Section 5, I present my findings based on the articles, showing how they offer three distinct perspectives on subject formation before I synthesize the results. Finally, Section 6 discusses the implications of my thesis for both research and practice.

2. Theoretical and Methodological Perspectives

My study adopts a qualitative interpretive approach. In this context, transparency and reflexivity are considered essential, particularly regarding the researcher's positionality—that is, the stance the researcher adopts in relation to the research topic, the field, and the decision-making process (Holmes, 2020). My own positionality was not predefined; rather, it evolved dynamically through ongoing engagement with theory, methodology, data, and fieldwork. In this chapter, I outline my theoretical and methodological approach, describe how I implemented it, and demonstrate how they evolved throughout the research process.

The assumptions and approaches underpinning my study are rooted in poststructuralist theoretical traditions. Poststructuralism does not entirely depart from structuralism; rather, it

evolves by critiquing structuralism's focus on fixed structures and universal rules that exist independently of historical context and positing instead the instability and variability of meanings and structures, as well as the role of power in the construction of knowledge and truth (Moebius, 2009). The works of Michel Foucault have been particularly influential in developing poststructuralist thought and have profoundly shaped my theoretical framework.

2.1. Discourses and Practices

Foucault's approach seeks to examine the historical "conditions of possibility that allow forms of knowledge to emerge or, conversely, to be suppressed" (Mohammed et al., 2015, p. 101). Central to his analysis is the concept of *discourse*. Discourses are not passive conduits of information or mere reflections of reality; rather, to quote Lessa (2006), they are "systems of thoughts composed of ideas, attitudes, courses of actions, beliefs, and practices that systematically construct the subjects and the worlds of which they speak" (p. 285). Language is fundamental to discourse, but within discourses, language also intersects with physical and socio-technical dimensions (Bublitz, 2003, p. 7).

Discourses are productive; they organize and materialize truths, norms, deviations, subjects, and bodies. Discourses operate within specific spatial and temporal contexts, providing stability while also being dynamic, diverse, competing, or conflicting (Gunzelmann, 2019). Thus, knowledge is never neutral or static; it is continually shaped by power relations. Certain forms of knowledge gain legitimacy and are constructed as true, while others are marginalized or suppressed. The discursive construction of knowledge can be understood as a selection process, where specific ideas, beliefs, and practices prevail, while others are neglected. According to Foucault (1989), this process is closely related to "problematizations," which refer to "the set of discursive or non-discursive practices that allow something to enter the realm of the true and false, constituting it as an object for thought" (Foucault, 1989, p. 296).

Foucault's concept of discourse is deeply intertwined with his understanding of power and knowledge, often described as a singular construct—*power/knowledge*—as "there is no power relation without the correlative constitution of a field of knowledge, nor any knowledge which does not presuppose and constitute at the same time power relations" (Foucault, 1977, p. 27). Power, therefore, is not a top-down, centralized, or static force; rather, it permeates all social relations: "Power is everywhere; not because it embraces everything, but because it comes from everywhere" (Foucault, 1978, p. 93). Power is both repressive and productive—it constrains but also enables self-formation, a point I will explore further in Section 2.2.

In addition to this Foucauldian poststructuralist perspective, my research is also informed by practice theory. While Foucault emphasizes that discourses not only define regimes of knowledge but also constitute social realities, practice theory posits that social practices form the foundation of the social world. Thus, there is disagreement as to whether primacy belongs to discourses or practices (Reckwitz, 2016).

Building on Reckwitz (2016), I see this as two sides of the same coin, where discourses and practices are interrelated and co-construct each other. Reckwitz states that discourses are practices, and practices in turn are shaped by discourses because they are structured by discursive regimes of knowledge (Reckwitz, 2016, pp. 62–64). Reckwitz further argues that a poststructuralist perspective on practice/discourse formations conceptualizes them as fractured and unstable, rather than homogeneous or unilateral (Reckwitz, 2016, p. 61). From this perspective, practices can be seen as forces that stabilize and reproduce discourses while also having the potential to modify them. This entanglement of discourse and practices is crucial for understanding the processes of subject formation.

2.2. Subjectivation

Foucault's concept of power/knowledge is closely linked to his notion of subjectivity. In his view, the term *subject* has a dual meaning, encompassing being "subject to someone else by control and dependence" as well as being "tied to one's own identity by a conscience or self-knowledge" (Foucault, 1982, p. 781). This duality underscores a central theme in Foucault's work: *subjectivation*, a process where subjection and self-formation interact. As Bröckling explains, "The subject is both effect and pre-condition, address and author of power interventions. It is an entity that performs its own creation but whose performances are built into orders of knowledge, into plays of force and relations of domination" (Bröckling, 2016, p. 2). Foucault defines the exercise of power as "a mode of action upon the action of others" (Foucault, 1982, p. 790). It should be noted that this definition requires a fundamental freedom of action; otherwise, power would be redundant: "Power is exercised only over free subjects, and only insofar as they are free" (Foucault, 1982, p. 790).

Within this framework, the subject is not passive but actively engages with power/knowledge in their self-formation. This is a continuous and contradictory process of negotiation within discursive practices and the subject positions shaped by them. *Subject positions* encompass discursively constructed conceptions and identities, alongside "interpretive schemes, frames, storylines, and dispositifs" (Bosančić, 2019, p. 93). These positions are marked by differentiations aligned with positive or negative valuations. For instance, Bosančić, drawing on Keller (2018),

discusses “the entrepreneurial self” (Bröckling, 2016), which is contrasted with the negative subject position of “the unemployed person” (Bosančić, 2019, p. 93). Subject positions involve interpellations that dictate what actions should be taken or avoided to align with or resist these identities. The subject exists in the simultaneity of being and becoming. It is “in the gerundive, as that to be scientifically examined, pedagogically advanced, therapeutically supported, informed, legally sanctioned, aesthetically presented, politically administered, economically made productive, etc.” (Bröckling, 2016, p. 2). Thus, the subject is both addressee and reproducer of practices, problematizations, and solutions that are discursively shaped within specific historical and cultural contexts.

Butler’s concept of performativity builds and expands on Foucault’s ideas on subjectivation. Both Foucault and Butler conceptualize discourses as simultaneously regulative and productive—that is, they structure power/knowledge and material reality. Discourses precede us—that is, a pre-discursive subject does not exist (Butler, 1990, 1993). Rejecting essentialist concepts of identity, Butler contends that the repetition of performative acts (practices) is a key aspect of identity formation (Butler, 1990, p. 145). Butler distinguishes reiteration as a specific form of repetition involving the repeated enactment of norms, which continually shape and define identity (Butler, 1993, p. 12). Each reiteration is inherently inconsistent and carries with it the potential for variation or subversion, thereby allowing for the transformation of discursive norms, such as those related to gender (Butler, 1990).³ However, anyone challenging or transforming these norms is putting their social existence at risk. Performative acts categorize, prescribe, prohibit, and sanction; they materialize, become embodied and enacted. Therefore, performativity should not be equated with performance in the sense of following a script. Instead, identity is both persistent and dynamic, as well as ambiguous (McKinlay, 2010, p. 235).

2.3. Governmentality and Technologies of the Self

Foucault’s concept of *governmentality* enhances the understanding of how subjects are formed within power relations. Semantically combining governance and mentality, governmentality refers to the relationship between governing and the rationalities through which it is exercised. In defining governing as “the conduct of conduct,” Foucault conceptualizes the exercise of governmental power as a particular form of guidance. As a concept, governmentality captures how forms of self-government are governed, structuring and shaping the field of possibilities for

³ In line with those assumptions, terms like produced/reproduced, formed/reformed, and constructed/reconstructed are used to emphasize that practices are not only reproductive (i.e., they sustain and affirm existing norms), but also constitutive (i.e., they bring norms into being) and reiterative (i.e., they continuously reshape and transform norms through repeated enactment and subtle variations).

subject self-formation (Lemke, 2002, p. 50–52). Governmentality operates indirectly through a sense of individual autonomy. It involves “governing at a distance” and depends on regimes of truth that make reality—including the objects of governance— thinkable and thus calculable (Rose & Miller, 1992, p. 183). Society is thus not only governed by a state authority, but also by the self-government of its members. Accordingly, the exercise of power becomes effective through the mobilization of subjects who embody values that correspond to the dominant knowledge system (Rose & Miller, 1992, p. 184).

A key aspect of governmentality lies in its relation to *technologies of the self*, which enable subjects to shape and reshape their thoughts, practices, and identities in accordance with discursively defined objectives (Foucault, 1988).

According to Foucault (2008), contemporary governmentality is grounded in a rationality defined by neoliberalism. Unlike classical liberalism, which allows markets to operate autonomously and advocates minimal state intervention based on the assumption that they can self-regulate, neoliberalism actively promotes markets by tasking the state with creating the conditions necessary for competition and economic growth. This reconfiguration of the state’s role gives rise to a new subject position: the neoliberal subject. The neoliberal subject is an “entrepreneurial self” (Bröckling, 2016)—that is, an autonomous, self-governing agent responsible for maximizing their own human capital through rational, market-oriented action. Neoliberalism subjects the government to constant economic scrutiny, evaluating policies based on their capacity to increase market efficiency and drive growth (Foucault, 2008).

2.4. Recognition and Addressing Practices

Recognition has emerged as a crucial element in understanding subjectivation within poststructuralist theory, which differs greatly from approaches that reduce recognition to positive affirmation (Ricken, 2013, p. 86–88). In contrast, Butler, as interpreted by Ricken, presents a more radical perspective, conceptualizing *recognition as performative acts* that actively constitute subjects (Ricken, 2013). This perspective emphasizes the relationality of subject formation as a dynamic and interactive process (Ricken, 2013, p. 87). Building on Butler’s framework, Ricken conceptualizes *recognition as addressing practices (Adressierung)*, which provides a deeper exploration of subjectivation and interaction.

To fully understand recognition as addressing practices (*Adressierung*), it ‘is essential to consider how subjects are interpellated into specific social identities. Drawing on Althusser’s concept of interpellation, Butler (1997) emphasizes the performative structure of interpellations, where being addressed involves both recognition and subjectivation within a socially normative matrix of

recognizability (Butler, 1997, 2010; Ricken & Rose, 2023). Recognition, therefore, is not just about affirming someone's presence but about invoking identities and expectations within a social context. As Ricken and Rose note, this process is dynamic, allowing for both conformity to and transformation of norms (Ricken & Rose, 2023, p. 43).

Ricken's framework, as expanded by Rose and Ricken (2018), conceptualizes addressing practices not merely as specific interpellations tied to social identity categories but as a fundamental structure of interaction. They outline four key dimensions:

- (1) *Selection*: Addressing practices select by choosing someone as an addressee, thereby differentiating them from those who are not addressed (Rose & Ricken, 2018, p. 166).
- (2) *Normativity*: Addressing practices (re)construct and legitimize normative frameworks, determining what is recognizable within a given context (Rose & Ricken, 2018, p. 166).
- (3) *Position and Relation*: Addressing practices assign positions to subjects and place them in relation to one another, implying an interplay of other-positionings and self-positionings that structures self-reference and social relations (Rose & Ricken, 2018, p. 166).
- (4) *Valuation*: Addressing practices involve value attributions, which can extend beyond positive or negative judgments to encompass more nuanced stances involving potentiality and temporal factors (Ricken, 2013, p. 96; Rose & Ricken, 2018, p. 168).

To better understand this, imagine a subject being addressed as a "mother." The subject cannot fully escape this address; they must respond to it in some way—by accepting, rejecting, or attempting to evade it. Being addressed as a mother distinguishes the subject from those not perceived as mothers within a given context. Similarly, being addressed as a "migrant" differentiates the subject from those considered "autochthonous Germans." Addressing someone as both a mother and a migrant brings into play norms governing both "being a mother" and "being a migrant," prompting further distinctions along lines such as "competent/incompetent, norm-conforming/deviant, or educator/educated" (Kuhlmann et al., 2017, p. 235). Through reciprocal other- and self-positionings, relationships such as "alliances" or "hierarchies" are established (Kuhlmann et al., 2017, pp. 234, 235), and valuations are implicitly or explicitly made about the subject's current status and what it means to be a "good" mother and migrant. In this process, an intersectional identity category is (re)constructed, with one aspect sometimes taking precedence and normative expectations about what should or should not be done potentially becoming intertwined or contradictory. In this complex interplay, the subject must continuously navigate their position in relation to others and the normative order.

A critical aspect of understanding recognition as addressing practices is its paradoxical character. On the one hand, recognition is essential for social existence and participation (Butler, 1990). On the other, the terms of recognition are never neutral—they are inevitably embedded within power structures that define and constrain what can be recognized. Thus, recognition is both enabling and subjugating (Ricken, 2013).

2.5. Vulnerability and Trust

As previously noted, my research began with a focus on understanding the dynamics of social interaction and trust-building. The theme of vulnerability emerged as a key link between post-structuralist perspectives and trust theory, though its significance was not immediately apparent. Through iterative engagement with both data and theory, it surfaced as a critical concept, significant not only for the theoretical framework but also as an empirical phenomenon.

Butler's (2005) conceptualization of vulnerability is deeply intertwined with her theory of recognition. First, vulnerability is understood as a universal condition of human existence. We are all vulnerable in that we are open and receptive to others, and dependent on others for our self-formation—through recognition that is realized in performative practices and discourses. We are exposed to others, as neither the act of addressing nor the response to it is fully predictable or controllable (Butler, 2005, p. 67). Second, vulnerability itself requires recognition to gain social relevance (Butler, 2005, 2010). Vulnerability is discursively and practically constituted and negotiated within the nexus of power/knowledge and identity categories. In sum, according to Butler, vulnerability is not only inherent to all social interactions but is also produced within them, specifically through performative acts of recognition within addressing practices.

Turner (2021) suggests that Butler has contributed to the increasing emphasis on vulnerability in academic discourse, particularly in the context of displacement. He observes a discursive shift in the conceptualization of vulnerability from Butler's notion of "vulnerability-as-interconnectivity" to a framework of "vulnerability-as-harm." Turner critically interrogates this re-framing, arguing that vulnerability is often externally imposed, sidelining the lived experiences of those affected (2021). This externalization of vulnerability can justify expanding humanitarian control and is frequently tied to resilience discourses—often rooted in neoliberal ideologies—that prioritize adaptation rather than addressing causes. Furthermore, vulnerability can serve as a hierarchical marker of difference, determining who is considered more worthy and deserving of protection and support (Turner, 2021). Turner's engagement with vulnerability demonstrates how the term has become an "object of thought" (Foucault, 1989) across various disciplines,

shaping the ways in which subjects and responsibilities are recognized, and often legitimizing interventions.

Vulnerability also plays a crucial role in trust theory. Möllering (2006) describes trust as ambivalent because it “solves a basic problem of social relations without eliminating [it]” (Möllering, 2006, p. 6). This problem is rooted in the uncertainty and vulnerability inherent in all social interactions. Expanding on this view from a poststructuralist and practice-theoretical perspective, trust is understood as fundamentally relational. Trust, therefore, is not an attribute of an autonomous actor but rather the quality of a subject whose “possibilities” are historically and contextually shaped within discursive practices and power relations that both enable and constrain it. Furthermore, trust must be understood within the context of recognition, which emphasizes how uncertainty and vulnerability are negotiated and (re)produced within addressing practices. As Baier (1986) argues, trust can be defined as “accepted vulnerability to another’s possible but not expected ill will (or lack of good will)” (Baier, 1986, p. 235). This suggests that trust is rooted in relational dynamics that depend on social norms—particularly those that determine what constitutes good or ill will.

Goffman’s interaction analysis (1967, 2019) provides valuable insights into how uncertainty, vulnerability, and the expression of goodwill (or lack of ill will) are handled in interactions. Goffman asserts that interactions are directed toward others and that conversations are organized according to normative expectations. He suggests that sociality is a form of tacit cooperation aimed at safeguarding the “social images” of all parties involved and preventing damage to their social standing (Ricken & Rose, 2023, pp. 47–49).

Zirfas (2019) posits that vulnerability is a core theme in Goffman’s work, particularly in relation to vulnerable identity—the self-image that arises from both the attributions of others and the self-image shaped by both external attributions and self-perceptions—and vulnerable autonomy, which refers to the ability to control one’s image, also known as *impression management* (Zirfas, 2019, p. 91). Goffman distinguishes between rituals of deference and rituals of avoidance. Rituals of deference are actions that signal goodwill, whereas rituals of avoidance serve to prevent situations that could be embarrassing, discrediting, or degrading (Goffman, 2019, pp. 70–85).

As Endreß (2002) discusses in his overview of sociological perspectives on trust, Goffman’s reflections depict trust as a routinized practice aimed at stabilizing social situations (Endreß, 2002, pp. 23–25). This practice is closely linked, on the one hand, to the performance of safety in inherently uncertain social interactions and, on the other hand, to assumptions about the moral

character of others in relation to oneself (Goffman, 2019, p. 13; Endreß, 2002, pp. 23–25). Building on Annette Baier's (1986) definition of trust, rituals of deference and avoidance can be interpreted as performances of goodwill and the absence of hostility, making them key elements of trust building in interactions and addressing practices.

It is important to consider the question of acceptance in Baier's (1986) definition. Every interaction carries the potential for vulnerability, which both parties must navigate. From the perspective of recognition and address analysis, the question is how vulnerability is attributed—to whom, by whom, in relation to what or whom, and under what circumstances—as well as how responsibilities and social relations are constructed in the process. This positioning can be interactive or based on lived experience. Consequently, a refusal to accept vulnerability may involve the avoidance of particular encounters, as Goffman observes (2019, p. 51). Furthermore, acceptance relates to what trust theorists describe as the quality of trust—the willingness to forgo control or monitoring mechanisms and to open oneself to others. When viewed through the lens of recognition theory and Goffman's work, this pertains to the relational conditions that both enable and constrain the recognizability of vulnerability. According to Goffman (2019), interactions between those of equal status are typically based on symmetrical familiarity. In contrast, in hierarchical relationships, such as those between superiors and subordinates, the superior has a certain right to familiarity that the subordinate cannot reciprocate. Goffman illustrates this with the psychiatrist-patient example (Goffman, 2019, p. 72), but this dynamic is equally applicable to other professional relationships.

Butler's work (2005, 2010) suggests that vulnerability is inherent in social interactions but dependent on recognition, while Goffman's interaction analysis (1967, 2019) provides valuable insights into the specific practices involved in these interactions.⁴

Within this framework, trust-building implies mutual self- and other-positionings in relation to vulnerability, threat, and goodwill, embedded in discursive norms of recognizability. As Baier (1986) suggests, trust-building involves “accepting” vulnerability. Building on Baier's idea, I

⁴ Some poststructuralists criticize Goffman's concept of performance for presupposing a pre-discursive subject and for inadequately addressing the materialization of identity (Reuter, 2004). This brings us to the distinction between performance and performativity. In subjectivation theory, scholars are increasingly seeing connections between Goffman's and Butler's approaches (Querfurt, 2016; Rose & Ricken, 2018; Kuhlmann, 2023). These authors challenge the view that, in Goffman's work, the self wears a mask on the public stage and removes it backstage to reveal a “true” self (Querfurt, 2016, p. 79). I support this position, particularly as Goffman's analysis is not ahistorical; rather, it points to the modern concept of the “sacred self,” which emerges from processes of individualization and secularization (Goffman, 1967, 2019).

argue that this process is negotiated, enabled, or constrained within discursive practices. Trust-building is not a unilateral process; it is constituted in the dynamic interplay of address and response. Just as recognition carries the potential for devaluation or rejection, trust encompasses the possibility of distrust and exists on a spectrum. While a recognition-theoretical perspective acknowledges that trust and distrust can materialize and exhibit persistence, my thesis focuses on the performance of trust in addressing practices, i.e., trust-building.

2.6. Praxiography

I have adopted an ethnographic approach increasingly referred to as praxiography. This change in terminology reflects the growing influence of practice theory in ethnographic research. While traditional ethnography has focused on studying social and ethnic groups, often treating them as ontologically given, praxiography identifies field-specific practices and analyzes how these practices, through their specific logics and interplays, (re)produce social order (Kuhlmann, 2023, pp. 84–85). This shift is particularly significant in migration studies, where ethnic categories are often still perceived as fixed entities, reinforcing their essentialization (Querfurt, 2016, pp. 111–112).

My research is informed by Breidenstein et al.'s comprehensive overview of ethnography (2015). In line with their argument that ethnography focuses on practices rather than individuals, I position my study within the framework of praxiography and will employ this term throughout my thesis (Breidenstein et al., 2015, pp. 31–33). The data collection period took place between September 2019 and September 2020.

Getting Started: Integration Through Trust

Within the framework of the research project Integration Through Trust, an initial research question had been established prior to my involvement: “How is access to ECEC services facilitated for refugee parents of children aged 0–6?” When I joined the project, the research method had already been decided on; it was participant observation, focusing on interactions between professionals and parents. The specific context of the observations, however, was deliberately left open. This flexibility led me to adopt a praxiographic approach, which supports open-ended and exploratory inquiry. As Breidenstein et al. (2015) argue, the constitution of a research field in praxiography unfolds through several processes: first, the self-constitution of the field; second, the researcher's analytical decisions, which are shaped by 'their particular focus and interests; and third, the process of access, where the field adapts in response to the researcher's presence (Breidenstein et al., 2015, pp. 45–69). This methodological flexibility allowed me to

identify key areas of interest, with the focus of my research emerging organically from my engagement with fieldwork.

A web search quickly led me to a federally funded initiative in a medium-sized city in Lower Saxony, aimed at “facilitating access to ECEC services for refugee children” (Project Manager, Key Informant Interview). This umbrella project was multifaceted, comprising a variety of programs that focused either on parents alone or on parents and children. I was able to promptly arrange a key informant interview with the project manager. In this interview, “trust” emerged as a critical factor in promoting participation, with the parenting education program—one component of this umbrella project and specifically aimed at mothers—cited as a key example (Project Manager, Key Informant Interview).

The interview deepened my interest in the parenting education program, which framed parenting as a skill to be learned or developed and primarily addressed migrantified mothers. This raised questions about the program’s underlying assumptions and objectives, and how they were implemented in practice. As a result, my inquiry expanded beyond the initial focus to a broader question concerning the (discursive) practices through which the program constructs and governs parenthood.

Gaining Access: Performing Trust

Theory and methodology are intertwined in this study, as trust was not only the subject of my research but also a key strategy for conducting it. Breidenstein et al. (2015) point to Goffman’s concept of *impression management* as a crucial strategy for researchers to gain trust and access to a research field. Trust can indeed be a deliberate, instrumental, and theoretical approach. From the outset, I found myself engaged in the very process I aimed to investigate—that is, trust-building—and I practiced what I would later observe in the field, i.e., attempts not to be perceived as a threat. Early in my fieldwork, I chose not to use videography, even though I had the resources available. This decision was influenced by the project’s diverse institutional settings and its varied and mobile participant base, which made obtaining consent logistically challenging. Furthermore, I was concerned that recording could prevent me from gaining access to informants by portraying me as an agent of surveillance or that it would create a panoptic environment.

To address these concerns, I consistently emphasized that my role was not to evaluate the program—assessing successes or shortcomings—but to explore and understand the processes and practices unfolding. I approached follow-up meetings with careful preparation and sensitivity in order to avoid imposing on the project staff. I dressed and comported myself so as to appear

approachable, trying to create a sense of symmetry and goodwill. This is not to say that I was being disingenuous or that I was misleading participants about my intentions—I was transparent about my position as a researcher taking field notes. Rather, it means that I approached these interactions strategically as a professional, continually balancing the demands of research with my responsibilities to the participants, recognizing that my role required me to objectify to some degree the subjects I was studying.

The team responded to my presence and performance in different ways. Among the team members were the project manager, Hannah, and three other people: Dora, a “parental guide” leading the parenting education groups; Evin, a parental guide supporting daycare centers; and Stephanie, a parental guide leading a parent-child group. The following excerpt from the observation report of the first team meeting I attended gives an impression of how I was received. Immediately prior to the situation described in the excerpt, I had introduced myself and asked Dora, Evin, and Stephanie if I could observe them in their work for a few weeks:

Dora is the first to respond. She says I am welcome to join her group, provides me with the time and location, and mentions the project name. She seems genuinely enthusiastic and explains that she finds the project name—Integration Through Trust—to be an apt description, as trust is a core element of her work. Hannah adds that Evin’s work has also demonstrated how crucial trust is. . . . After a brief pause, Stephanie turns to me. She explains that space in the parent-child group is very limited. I nod and say, “Yes, I have heard that.” Stephanie says she is skeptical about someone observing the group weekly due to space constraints. She says it would be okay for me to join once, but she would like to discuss it with the participating parents first. She offers to get back to me. I express that I would be very grateful for that. . . . Evin leans forward across the table, looks at Hannah, and asks, “Can she accompany me as well?” “Certainly, why not?” Hannah replies.

While Dora and Evin immediately agreed to let me accompany them, Stephanie hesitated. Eventually, a single observation session was conducted, but only after several more encounters and persistent follow-up on my part. This illustrates several key points: first, trust was seen as a positive and essential element of working with parents. Second, my experience with impression management showed that self-presentation depends on the audience, and that the amount of time it takes to build trust varies according to the people and circumstances involved. Third, the protective role the group leaders assumed towards their participants suggested that I was indeed perceived as a potential threat. This became even more evident later when I requested interviews with participants. Ultimately these interviews did not take place, but the group leaders took on gatekeeper roles at the prospect, insisting that the interviews be conducted in their presence.

Getting into Position: “She’s Also Here to Learn, But Not the Language”

In total, I studied the project over a period of four months, beginning with a phase of participant observation, followed by a series of semi-structured interviews. I kept the timeline flexible to allow for an iterative process between data collection and analysis, assessing how much time would be needed to reach data saturation. A focus group with the participants of the parenting education program (in the presence of the parental guide Dora) was planned but ultimately could not be conducted due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

Throughout my time in the field, I was actively involved in various contexts, interactions, and practices. Adopting a detached, outsider role—by positioning myself spatially on the periphery, for example—did not seem reasonable to me. Such a position would have limited my ability to adopt a participant perspective. Moreover, I believe that observation and research are always filtered through the researcher’s perception and interpretation. As a sociologist, I saw it as my role to question what might initially seem self-evident, striving to make the familiar strange and the strange familiar, while also remaining open to the unexpected. Ensuring intersubjective comprehensibility was crucial, and team meetings within our research project, as well as the Interpretation Workshop organized by the Institute of Social Work and Social Pedagogy at Leuphana University Lüneburg, proved to be particularly helpful in achieving this.

Observation reports are always selective, perspectival, and interpretive (Breidenstein et al., 2013, p. 102). In mine, I wrote detailed descriptions based on field notes. I also kept analytical notes recording my initial ideas. While in the field, I kept note-taking to a minimum in order to focus on the situation. After each participant observation session, I recorded voice notes and transcribed them into observation reports. During my observations in the parenting education program, I organized a folder with the handouts distributed in the weekly sessions. While participants often used these worksheets to write down German vocabulary, I used them as a space for my field notes. At one point, a participant introduced me to someone, saying: “She’s also here to learn, but not the language” (Observation Report 3).

In the debate about researchers having an insider position (sharing attributes with the group being studied) versus an outsider position (not sharing such attributes), it is often argued that insiders can more easily gain trust and have a better understanding of implicit knowledge, while outsiders are more likely to maintain an unbiased perspective. There is growing criticism of this insider-outsider dichotomy, however. It is said to be overly simplistic, and a poststructuralist critique asserts that a researcher’s identity, similarities, differences, and relationships are continually formed and reformed through social interactions (Bright et al., 2023). Ultimately, it is

speculative to suggest that it would have been easier for me to access or understand the field if I were a mother, if I were migrantified, if I spoke one of the participants' family languages, or if I had previous experience working in ECEC. At the same time, research is always influenced by the researcher's history and identities, leading to different nuances, interactions, and interpretations. Whether my male colleague would have been able to gain access to a parenting education group where men are actively excluded remains appears doubtful. In other words, I believe that being a woman was an advantage. Any further speculation would require making attributions that could have essentializing effects. In summary, I was warmly welcomed by both the parental guides and the participants in the parenting education program, for which I am very grateful. However, this warmth also heightened my awareness of my own position of power (see Section 6).

Case 1: "With Dora, Every Woman Can Feel Like a VIP"

My fieldwork involved various contexts within the regional program, but in this thesis, I have chosen to focus on the parenting education program. Data from other contexts are included as they are relevant to the parenting education program. The parenting education program was of particular interest to me for two reasons. First, as mentioned earlier, parenting education implies change or enhancement, and unlike school education, it is not considered a requirement for everyone. Second, the special status of this group—particularly in terms of trust—and the unique role of the parental guide, Dora, were frequently emphasized in the field. As the project manager put it, "With Dora, every woman can feel like a VIP" (Observation Report 7). In addition, access was not granted to other groups led by former participants, as they were considered more fragile settings with fewer participants and less regular attendance. My presence was thus perceived as a potential threat to these settings. Nonetheless, examining this particular group is valuable, as it was regarded in the field as a model of "good" practice and thus provides insight into the standards and ideals of successful parenting education. All data were anonymized, pseudonymized, and modified where necessary to protect personal information.

The core data from Case 1 consists of:

- Observation reports from nine weekly meetings of the parents' group, led by the parental guide Dora.
- Observation reports from four meetings of group leaders from other regional groups, all of which were supervised by Dora.
- A semi-structured interview with Dora, focusing on her experiences and perspectives in leading the group, her self-positioning and external positioning in relation to the

participants, as well as the practices and situations I observed. This interview was conducted at the end of the observation phase.

- Fieldnotes, including informal field conversations embedded within the observation sessions, capturing spontaneous exchanges primarily with project staff.
- Information materials such as leaflets for parents/mothers and other professionals, which were identified as relevant communication strategies and outreach efforts.

Case 2: "I'm So Fed Up with This Deficit-Oriented Perspective"

After gaining initial insights from Case 1, I wanted to explore other approaches to implementing and practicing the federal parenting education program. Through a colleague, I established contact with a group that had withdrawn from the official program. This group, located in a different medium-sized city in Lower Saxony, continued to be organized voluntarily by its parental guide, who had criticized the program's perspective on its participants: "I'm so fed up with this deficit-oriented perspective" (Interview Parental Guide, Case 2). The guide had shared her views with my colleague, and this had piqued my interest, especially since a similar remark had been made during my final follow-up session with the team in Case 1. An initial interview phase was facilitated by my colleague and a subsequent observation phase had been planned. Unfortunately the observation sessions were cancelled due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

The second case study comprises the following data:

- A semi-structured interview with the group leader on the development and organization of the group, and on self- and other-positionings in relation to the participants and the broader context of ECEC.
- Four semi-structured interviews with group participants, discussing their experiences within the group and in the broader context of ECEC in Germany.
- Field notes on each interview situation, focusing on the interactions between the parental guide and group participants.

The interviews with the group participants were conducted in the presence of the parental guide, who also acted as translator. Once again, the group leader's protective positioning toward the participants was evident. Although we could have provided independent translators, the parental guide insisted on translating herself, stating that she did so professionally. While the presence of the group leader may have constrained participants' openness, it also offered valuable insights into how parental guide and participants positioned themselves in relation to one another.

Due to the different nature of the data collected, these two cases do not lend themselves to a comprehensive comparative study. Nonetheless, parallels and variations in participants' other- and self-positionings emerged, providing valuable insights into the "conditions of possibility" for subject formation within the context of parenting education and the broader ECEC framework. As a result, the data were included in Article 1, which focused on subject positions, self-relations, and self-technologies. In contrast, the other two articles focus on addressing practices within the situational context of parenting education, drawing on the data from Case 1.

An Iterative Process of Data Collection and Analysis

The ethnographic research design of this study was iterative, characterized by two main features: openness and a back and forth between data collection and analysis (Breidenstein et al., 2015, p. 45). This approach facilitated continuous refinement of the research questions and allowed me to adapt data collection and analysis in response to field dynamics.

Regarding the coding process, I employed principles from Constructivist Grounded Theory Methodology (GTM), as outlined by Charmaz (2006). Initial coding was close to the data, using simple, descriptive codes. I prioritized action-oriented and in-vivo codes to preserve participant meanings and support inductive analysis (Charmaz, 2006, p. 47). Focused coding then synthesized these initial codes, abstracting them to a higher conceptual level based on their significance and frequency within the data.

Constant comparative analysis (Glaser, 1965) was used to continually compare data, codes, and categories, refining emerging concepts and advancing theoretical development. Throughout this process, analytical notes and memos were drafted to capture insights and guide further analysis, sharpening the focus of both data collection and analysis. Data collection and analysis involved a reflexive process in which I critically examined my theoretical assumptions and their impact on the analysis. This reflection led me to focus on the analysis of addressing practices.

2.7. Address Analysis

Address analysis as a methodological tool emerged from the theoretical considerations outlined in Section 2.3. The approach is rooted in German-language educational research—in particular, the study of classroom interactions—and originated from the "a:spect" research project funded by the Deutsche Forschungsgemeinschaft (DFG, German Research Foundation), which took place from 2014 to 2017 (Ricken et al., 2023).

Address analysis is conceptualized, on the one hand, as an extension of interaction analysis, based on the assumption that addressing practices are a fundamental structure of interaction

(Rose & Ricken, 2018). On the other, it serves as an approach for empirical research on subjectivation (Rose & Ricken, 2018, Kuhlmann, 2023).

The approach offers a practice-theoretical perspective that extends beyond the discourse-theoretical reconstruction of modern, hegemonic subject positions to examine how subjects form and reform through social interactions. The focus lies on how linguistic and bodily discursive practices construct power relations, knowledge orders, and self-relations (Kuhlmann, 2023). Kuhlmann (2023) describes address analysis as a methodological combination of praxeological, conversational, interactional, and discourse-analytical approaches (Kuhlmann, 2023, p. 83–87). While participant observation remains central to this method, interviews and documents may be among the the field-specific practices that are to be reconstructed.

Address analysis is adaptable to different research questions, allowing a focus either on the sequential reconstruction of practices or on the broader reconstruction of social order formation (Kuhlmann, 2023, p. 84). Practices are defined as a chain of address-response sequences that continue as long as this chain is socially recognized, while social order is understood as a coherent chain of practices (Kuhlmann, 2023, p. 83).

There are differences in the heuristic models used within address analysis. Ricken (2013), and subsequently Ricken and Rose (2018), identify four levels of analysis: selection, normativity, position and relation, and valuation, as outlined in Section 2.3. Kuhlmann (2023) conceptualizes these levels differently:

- (1) *Organizational dimension (selection and reaction)*: Focuses on the formal organization of addressing practices and responses (Kuhlmann, 2023, pp. 88–89).
- (2) *Normativity and knowledge dimension*: Examines the normative orders produced in addressing process and how differentiation and hierarchization occur within these orders (Kuhlmann, 2023, pp. 89–90).
- (3) *Power dimension (position and relation)*: Investigates positioning and relationality, emphasizing that positioning always involves a relationship between the addresser and the addressed, or between the addresser and those present (Kuhlmann, 2023, p. 90).
- (4) *Self-relation dimension*: Extends the focus on subjectivation by asking how individuals relate to the normative order and what self-technologies become relevant in this process (Kuhlmann, 2023, pp. 90–91).

In Kuhlmann’s framework, valuation remains a central consideration across all dimensions (Kuhlmann, 2023, p. 87–91).

These differences are not particularly significant, as the levels of analysis are not rigidly distinct. I view address analysis as a flexible toolbox that allows me to analytically explore the (discursive) practices through which parenthood is constructed and governed in the context of the program. In my articles, I have applied these heuristic questions in varying ways depending on the specific focus of each study. In summary, address analysis has proven to be my most valuable analytical tool, effectively building on and further developing my initial theoretical assumptions.

3. Addressing Parenting Education and its Subjects

In the last two decades, scholars have identified a societal shift in the approach to family, parenting, and childhood. They are seeing changes in the boundaries between public and private spheres, the activation of parental responsibility alongside expanded intervention measures, and increased educational support for parents and families, with a particular focus on early childhood (Fegter et al., 2015; Richter, 2016; Betz, 2016; Jergus et al., 2018; Oelkers, 2018). This transformation is not confined to Germany but is part of broader societal processes of neoliberalization (Betz et al., 2017; Tobin, 2016; A. Butler et al., 2020; Norheim et al., 2023).

These developments are explored in the following sections, which examine parenting education in detail. First, the two most recent German handbook chapters on parenting education are analyzed to illustrate how perspectives can differ based on discipline and objectives. Second, the organizational and structural dimensions of parenting education in Germany are presented. Third, empirical studies are outlined that examine how migrantified parents are addressed and positioned in parenting education and (Early) Childhood Education and Care. Finally, drawing from scholarly literature, Section 3.4 shows how migrantified workers are addressed and positioned within ECEC.

3.1. Parenting Education: Legitimization and Normativity

Comprehensive overviews and classifications of parenting education are primarily found in family policy reports, service provider documents, and handbook chapters. The latter are particularly noteworthy because they highlight the role of science not only in legitimizing but also in actively producing parental education. The following section examines the two most recent handbook chapters from Germany, which demonstrate how perspectives on parenting education can differ.

In “Elternbildung: Weiterbildung im familialen Kontext” (Parenting Education: Continuing Education in the Familial Context), published in *Handbuch Erwachsenenbildung/ Weiterbildung* (Handbook of Adult Education/Training), Kadera and Minsel (2016) point out that although

parenting education is often considered a subset of family education, most initiatives prioritize the education of parents (Kadera & Minsel, 2016, p. 1254). In making their case for the importance of parenting education, they highlight the following points:

- Parental uncertainties arising from societal developments such as the increase in women's employment, a greater range of leisure activities for children, and the growing influence of parenting literature and educational initiatives.
- The importance of early childhood for socio-emotional development.
- The absence of topics relating to parenting within the formal education system.
- Key legal provisions from the *Sozialgesetzbuch* (Social Code), Book Eight on children and youth services, including § 16 SGB VIII on parenting support for families and § 27 SGB VIII on the right to receive parenting assistance; and from the *Bürgerliches Gesetzbuch* (Civil Code), § 1631 Abs. 2, guaranteeing the right of children to a violence-free upbringing (Kadera & Minsel, 2016).

Kadera and Minsel's (2016) perspective is based on the assumption that "parental behavior, unlike other potential risk factors such as biological or socio-economic influences, can be modified and enhanced" (Kadera & Minsel, 2016, p. 1254, translated by the author). They describe parenting and family education as both a preventative and interventive process aimed at altering parental behavior to support healthy child development and mitigate disorders.

Hartung (2022) examines parenting education from a sociological and historical perspective in "Familienbildung und Elternbildungsprogramme" (Family Education and Parenting Education Programs), published in *Handbuch Bildungs- und Erziehungssoziologie* (Handbook of the Sociology of Education and Upbringing). This work examines parenting education in the context of societal and legal changes emphasizing its normative aspects. Rather than viewing it as merely reactive, Hartung presents it as a proactive force contributing to societal change (Hartung, 2022, pp. 1311–1312). Highlighting the family as the primary unit of socialization, Hartung emphasizes the link between social backgrounds and children's developmental opportunities, arguing that parenting education increases individual parenting competence and serves as a mechanism for addressing social inequality, thereby promoting social participation and integration for both parents and children (Hartung, 2022, p. 1316).

Both Kadera and Minsel (2016) and Hartung (2022) discuss the "prevention dilemma," which suggests that those who would benefit most from parenting education are often the hardest to reach. They recommend integrating services more deeply into families' daily lives and stress the

importance of accessible, low-threshold approaches tailored to specific groups. Kadera and Minsel (2016) refer to “educationally disadvantaged families” or those facing specific challenges such as children’s behavioral disorders, psychological stress, or addiction (Kadera & Minsel, 2016, pp. 1259–1260). In contrast, Hartung (2022) focuses on families in “difficult life situations” who are considered “vulnerable,” including those who “receive social benefits, are unemployed, work in precarious employment conditions, are single parents, or are disadvantaged partly due to their migration background” (Hartung, 2022, p. 1320, translated by the author).

In conclusion, the brief examination and comparison of these handbook chapters shows that the academic and political discourses on parenting education are deeply intertwined and rooted in normative ideas about what constitutes and supports “good” childhood and parenting. The perspective can focus on either a psychological-diagnostic approach to individuals or a critical examination of structures. Ultimately, parents are portrayed as objects of change and held responsible for their children’s development and any potential “adverse” outcomes. Against this background, parents are differentiated, with those considered to have the highest levels of risk, need, or vulnerability serving as central figures in legitimizing parenting education. How this applies to migrantified parents is the subject of the following sections.

3.2. Organizational and Structural Dimensions of Parenting Education in Germany

Grunert et al. (2022) describe family education in Germany as a diverse and complex field. Services and activities vary widely in their connection to institutional structures, professionalism, standardization, and objectives. This diversity is also reflected in funding mechanisms. According to Hartung (2022), Germany’s *Sozialgesetzbuch* (§ 16 SGB VIII) requires the state to financially support parenting education and counseling services to promote family-based upbringing. However, this support is limited by § 16(3) SGB VIII, which ties funding to the availability of budgetary resources. As a result, many services receive only partial public funding and rely on other income sources such as course fees and donations. In addition, a market for largely standardized parenting education programs has developed. These programs have been either adapted from other Western countries or created through German academic research and social work practice. Many of these programs, whether privately run or offered by non-profit organizations, are now integrated into the services provided by family education centers and are often recommended by family and youth welfare organizations, with some receiving partial government subsidies (Hartung, 2022, p. 1315).

Family education centers, both independent and municipally sponsored, play a key role in this field (Husen & Sandermann, 2018), as do adult education centers (Volkshochschulen) and other

adult education institutions (Grunert et al., 2022). There is a growing emphasis on partnerships between family education centers, childcare facilities, and the healthcare system. The topics covered ranges from general parenting to specific things like childbirth preparation and infant care. Additionally, there is an increasing focus on integration and target group-specific services, such as those designed for migrantified families or families with particular religious backgrounds (Grunert et al., 2022, pp. 7–8).

In an effort to categorize initiatives aimed at migrantified families with young children under the age of six, Friedrich and Siegert (2013) distinguish between parent-centered and parent-and-child-centered models that may be put into practice in either institutional or private family settings. Many of these programs focus on language promotion, either for children or for parents, particularly mothers (Friedrich & Siegert, 2013, pp. 464–465).

As shown, the landscape of parenting education is complex. To provide a comprehensive overview of current developments and challenges within this landscape, the Bundesministerium für Familie, Senioren, Frauen und Jugend (BMFSFJ) (Federal Ministry for Family Affairs, Senior Citizens, Women, and Youth) conducted a study published in 2020. Surveying approximately 2,200 institutions, the study examined the implementation of family education and counseling services, the target groups reached, and the organizational structures of the institutions involved. This study is an updated version of a previous report from 2006 (BMFSFJ, 2020a; BMFSFJ, 2020b).

The findings show that in 2019, approximately 70,000 “family-related prevention” services were provided. Among the institutions surveyed, 69% identified integration as a key topic. Notably, services for socially disadvantaged families increased from 15% in 2006 to 42% in 2019. The participation of fathers in educational and counseling services rose modestly from 17% in 2006 to 22% in 2019 but remains low compared to mothers. The services predominantly reach individuals with medium to low social status, indicating a shift away from the middle class. However, the uptake of educational or counseling services among refugee families or families with a “migration background” is still considered relatively low. The study also highlights a diverse and precarious staffing situation, with a high proportion of part-time workers and volunteers, particularly in organizations focused on parenting, family education, self-help, and coordination centers (BMFSFJ, 2020a; BMFSFJ, 2020b).

The study concludes that the expansion of services is vital to addressing the needs of all families. It recommends increasing low-threshold, accessible, and outreach-oriented service formats, along with more community-based services, enhanced collaboration, and flexible service hours

to improve outreach to migrantified families, refugee families, and fathers. It also suggests stronger cooperation to establish preventive, family-focused structures at the local level, particularly through partnerships with childcare centers. Finally, it calls for integrating family education into municipal child and youth services planning, with greater involvement from youth welfare offices and the creation of local prevention networks (BMFSFJ, 2020a; BMFSFJ, 2020b).

In summary, the organization and structure of family education in Germany is marked by significant diversity and increasing specialization, particularly regarding migration, while remaining primarily focused on motherhood. Key challenges revolve around resources, accessibility, and barriers to participation.

3.3. Migrantified Parents in (Early) Childhood Education and Care

The previous sections have shown that parenting education in Germany is a multifaceted field where normative expectations are (re)shaped and parents are differentiated, thereby becoming central to the legitimization of these initiatives. The following section examines empirical studies that explore how migrantified parents are addressed and positioned. Given the limited research focusing exclusively on parenting education, studies from the broader context of (Early) Childhood Education and Care are included.

Parental Competencies

Bischoff and Betz's (2015) discourse analysis of political documents in Germany reveals a dichotomy in how parents are addressed, distinguishing between those deemed "competent" and "incompetent." Parents with lower socioeconomic status or a "migration background" are particularly liable to being portrayed as deficient and are held responsible for their children's educational outcomes, especially in relation to ECEC. This is legitimized by empirical educational research, which finds poorer outcomes for these groups across various domains. Simultaneously, the ideal of "good parenthood" is implicitly linked to affluent, highly educated German-speaking parents, reinforcing normative standards of "good parenthood" and subtly pressuring less privileged groups to conform to these lifestyles and attitudes. Moreover, parents are often constructed as needy and uninformed, placing greater emphasis on their personal responsibility. This construction of individual responsibility legitimizes a notion of equal opportunity that holds individuals accountable for their own success and performance within the education system (Bischoff & Betz, 2015, pp. 278–279).

Risk

Focusing on the construction of (early) childhood in these political documents, Betz (2016) identifies a convergence between the notion of childhood and the label "risk," which is closely

intertwined with themes of health, development, and education. Betz (2016) further reveals a strong link between risk and constructions of deficit and passivity, particularly portraying children with a “migration background” or from socioeconomically disadvantaged families as vulnerable. This “risk discourse” fosters the perception that risk primarily originates within the private family sphere and must be mitigated through early interventions (Betz, 2016).

Othering⁵

Based on ethnographic conversations and expert interviews, Kuhn (2018) analyzes how parents with an attributed migration background are discursively represented as “others” in Swiss day-care settings. Kuhn outlines four processes through which this occurs: (1) *Homogenization*: Migrant parents are portrayed as a uniform group, distinct from “non-migrant” parents, with differences within these groups being ignored. (2) *Culturalization*: Deviant behaviors are often attributed to cultural factors, leading to a negative perception of the parenting practices of migrant families. (3) *Hierarchization*: Migrant parents are devalued through binary oppositions (e.g., respectful vs. disrespectful) and depicted as “deficient,” contributing to their marginalization. (4) *Exemplification*: Negative examples and accounts of encounters between professionals and migrant parents are used to emphasize these parents’ deviation from the norm (Kuhn, 2018, p. 87). According to Kuhn (2018), these discursive practices legitimize both the institutional exclusion and the compensatory inclusion of “others.” Migrant parents are either portrayed as problematic cases to be excluded or as subjects who deviate from the established norms of the majority society and are in need of integration (Kuhn, 2018, p. 87).

In scholarly literature, Leitner (2023) observes efforts to counter deficit-oriented perspectives with approaches focused on “resources” or “diversity.” However, these efforts might lead to exoticization and a “development aid mentality” (Foitzik, 2017), where interventions are legitimized by a hegemonic understanding of the “best interest” of the child (Leitner, 2023).

In an interview study focusing on subjectivation processes, Kollender (2021) examines how parents with a “migration background” navigate their identities within the school context in response to discriminatory discourses and practices. The study reveals that these parents often feel pressured to portray themselves as “active” and “engaged” to counteract stereotypes of being “disengaged” or “disinterested.” This pressure leads many parents to adopt highly visible

⁵ “Othering [is] a social process that constructs and classifies differences in such a way that certain groups become socially visible as essential Others. On one hand, the process of Othering operates through a discursive practice that constructs differences, thereby transforming individuals into visible Others. On the other hand, it is based on a power asymmetry that enables the categorization of people, thereby marking them as different” (Akbulut & Razum, 2023, p. 1111).

roles in their children's education and school activities. An ambivalence emerges: on the one hand, parents condemn the racist stereotypes associated with labels like "Muslim" or "Turkish-Arabic" and employ subtle forms of resistance, such as irony or strategic engagement with teachers. On the other hand, they often find themselves internalizing neoliberal notions of "good parenting," which emphasize constant involvement in school matters (Kollender, 2021).

Furthermore, the study highlights that some parents are assigned roles as "intercultural mediators," where their "migrant background" is instrumentalized to benefit the school, positioning them as "good parents" who leverage their cultural knowledge for institutional gain. This expectation, combined with the internalized belief "that every parent is the architect of his/her child's success," (Kollender, 2021, p. 701) often results in parents assuming full responsibility for their children's educational outcomes, thereby absolving the school of its culpability in perpetuating inequalities and institutional discrimination. This reflects a broader trend of shifting responsibilities onto parents, who must constantly balance adaptation, criticism, and the need to present themselves as responsible members of society (Kollender, 2021).

Integration

Siede's study (2021) of how supporters of refugee families frame vulnerability and agency in relation to childcare shows that the non-use of childcare is perceived as a risk to integration for both children and parents—particularly mothers, who may be unable to attend German courses or pursue employment without it. Knoll and Sieber (2023) observe that, particularly in the Swiss context but also internationally, the integration paradigm in early childhood education has gained importance over the past two decades. While academic concepts pursue a broad understanding of integration as a comprehensive, reciprocal process that involves the entire society and actively engages all population groups, the political definition of integration is narrower. It is often limited to people with a "migration background" and reduced to the acquisition of the national language. Parents with a "migration background" are frequently held solely responsible if their children do not yet speak the national language, without adequately considering individual or structural factors (Knoll & Sieber, 2023).

Language/Multilingualism

Knoll and Sieber (2023) further criticize the devaluation of multilingualism, particularly in Switzerland, a country with a multilingual identity. In the German context, Panagiotopoulou and Zetl (2021) similarly argue that multilingualism is often seen as a deviation from the monolingual norm in ECEC settings. Amirpur and Schulz (2022), based on an ethnographic study in the German ECEC context, observe that migrant children are often classified as needing special

education based on biased diagnoses of their language development, where culturalized and racialized assumptions about families come into play. Migrant parents are frequently perceived as unreliable or in denial of reality and are coded as “different.” It is assumed that they provide insufficient support for their children’s language development (Amirpur & Schulz, 2022).

Studying language promotion during the transition from daycare to primary school, Kämpfe (2022) observes that parents identified as migrant and multilingual are often perceived as less competent in supporting their children’s language development. Preschool teachers tend to separate the responsibility for the children’s German language development between the daycare and the family, with the daycare being viewed as the competent educational setting and the family as potentially deficient (Kämpfe, 2022).

Braband’s (2019) interview study on the subjective theories of parents and preschool teachers regarding multilingualism in early education shows that, while there is a shared understanding of the emotional and social functions of language, significant differences emerge in parents’ and teachers’ objectives and approaches to language education in early childhood settings. Parents consider multilingualism crucial for fostering a hybrid identity in their children, whereas the majority of preschool teachers prioritize German language acquisition and cultural integration. Nonetheless, a subset of preschool teachers recognizes the importance of embracing children’s diverse linguistic backgrounds, aligning more closely with the aspirations of parents. These divergent views also apply to the perceived roles of the home versus the preschool in language education, prompting ongoing discussions about whether preschools should actively support multilingualism alongside German language acquisition (Braband, 2019).

Gender

The studies above reveal that the process of migrantization plays a crucial role in the addressing and positioning of parents in ECEC. This process involves differentiation and othering alongside normative conceptions of normality, deviance, culture, race, and parenthood. Gender, however, remains a marginal topic—for instance, when the non-institutionalization of a child in daycare is framed as a risk to the mother’s integration (Siede, 2021). Tunç (2019), whose work focuses on migrant fatherhood, argues that migrant mothers are generally more involved in family education programs. In contrast, fathers are less likely to participate in such programs due to work commitments, language barriers, or cultural norms. In an ethnographic study on childbirth-related services, Rose and Pape (2020) find that participants primarily represent socially privileged groups and that there is an “unintended traditionalization of parental gender roles in family education” (Rose & Pape, 2020, p. 195; translated by the author). While mothers are portrayed

as the primary caregivers and those mainly responsible for child-rearing, fathers are often seen in a secondary, supportive role. Additionally, these services are often tailored to the needs of mothers, with the specific needs of fathers receiving less attention (Rose & Pape, 2020).

Context, Symmetry, and Agency

Based on a qualitative interview study and the case example of an interview with a mediator who is herself a mother and migrant, Leitner (2023) finds that educational professionals often operate from a hegemonic standpoint of knowledge, marking parents as “migrant others” and restricting their agency. Decisions regarding early intervention measures are sometimes made without genuine informed consent from the parents, which exacerbates their fears and uncertainties. Leitner (2023) emphasizes the crucial role of the mediator, who enabled parents to better understand their rights and options and to act accordingly.

However, addressing parents and children is context-specific, depending on the particular institutional practices and attitudes of professionals. In their analysis of team discussions in early childhood education settings, Cloos et al. (2018) demonstrate that there is a variety of approaches to positioning parents and children, ranging from asymmetrical to symmetrical models. Asymmetrical models are characterized by a clear hierarchy, where educational professionals act as experts and parents are primarily positioned as passive recipients of information. In these models, the authority to define children’s behavior and educational issues largely remains with the professionals. Symmetrical models, on the other hand, promote a cooperative partnership, where parents are recognized as equal partners and their views and decisions are respected and integrated into the educational practice (Cloos et al., 2018).

The construction of symmetry and asymmetry also plays a role in parental materials, as shown in a study by Reisenauer and Lüring (2022), which examines how families with migration experience are addressed and categorized in these materials. While non-migrant families are provided with expert knowledge and addressed in a more universal, undifferentiated manner, migrant parents are specifically targeted through culturally and linguistically adapted content. This approach implies a narrative style tailored to the lived experiences of the recipients and is characterized by a subjective perspective of the protagonist (Reisenauer & Lüring, 2022). Interestingly, the difference in how parents are addressed—whether through the conveyance of expert knowledge or through a subject-oriented, everyday language approach—is reflected in an ethnographic study by Knoll (2020) on two different parenting education contexts in Switzerland. The study examines two different formats of parenting education: evening lectures that rely on voluntary participation and the mandatory workshops that are part of support programs for

schoolchildren identified by their teachers as needing assistance. In the evening lectures, parents are regarded as knowledgeable and interested in academic theory, with the speaker reinforcing her authority by referencing relevant literature and findings. Conversely, the workshops adopt an everyday approach, where the facilitator draws on her personal experiences as a mother to establish a direct connection with the parents and build trust, particularly because these workshops are viewed by the facilitator as fragile in terms of participation. Knoll (2020) concludes that the manner of addressing parents is strongly influenced by the power dynamics within each format: while the academic approach reinforces authority, the everyday approach aims to create closeness.

In summary, the research reveals that educational settings related to parenting are shaped by a complex interplay of normative assumptions, problematizations, and power relations, in which subjects are differentiated and made relevant through the “imposition of migrantness” (Forkert et al., 2020, p. 147). Although the discussion here focuses primarily on ECEC and parenting education in Germany, with occasional references to studies from Switzerland, it is important to recognize that similar trends are observed internationally. These trends are evident within the broader context of debates on neoliberalization, social inequality, differentiation, parent-professional relationships, migration, or diversity in ECEC, alongside a growing body of comparative international research on ECEC practices (e.g., Betz et al., 2017; Tobin, 2016; A. Butler et al., 2020; Norheim et al., 2023). While recent research engages critically with these dynamics, it also faces the challenge of reflecting on its own normative frameworks and the ways in which it addresses and positions the “subjects” of ECEC—both parents and ECEC workers.

3.4. (Migrantified) Workers in ECEC

The discursive negotiation process surrounding parenting education involves not only normative conceptions and differentiations with respect to parents, but also with respect to the professional field and the knowledge and practices of the workers within it. Drawing on relevant literature from both academic and applied contexts, this section briefly outlines these normative conceptions concerning practice and workers.

As highlighted in Section 3.3, a central focus of the discussion is the *critical reflection on power dynamics*. This reflection involves several key aspects:

- The *asymmetrical relationship* between workers and parents, oscillating between professional expertise and equal partnership (Cloos et al., 2018; Leitner, 2023). Emphasis is placed on acknowledging and promoting parents’ perspectives, knowledge, or agency

(Leitner, 2023; Siede, 2021; Knoll & Sieber, 2021; Chamakalayil et al., 2023), as well as ensuring transparency in decision-making (Amirpur & Schulz, 2022).

- The need for *anti-racist professionalization* (Kasatschenko & Zitzelsberger, 2019; Hamra, 2018) and the call to overcome deficit-oriented perspectives (Amirpur, 2019; Terhart, 2015), for example, by placing a stronger focus on recognizing and utilizing parents' resources (Tan, 2014).
- Challenging *hegemonic knowledge, differentiation, categorization, othering, homogenization, and prejudices* related to parenthood, childhood, and migration (Chamakalayil et al., 2023; Cloos et al., 2018; Kuhn, 2018; Reisenauer & Lüring, 2022; Thon & Mai, 2018; Kasatschenko & Zitzelsberger, 2019). This includes reflecting the *reproduction and stabilization of social inequality, stigmatization, and marginalization* through practice (Kuhn, 2018; Geisen et al., 2019), as well as fostering awareness of institutional discrimination (Amirpur & Schulz, 2022).

A key concept in this context is sensitivity, which encompasses the following:

- *Migration sensitivity*: Advocates tailoring work to the specific needs of migrant families (Geisen et al., 2019).
- *Trauma sensitivity*: Focuses on the psychological challenges and needs of parents and children; considered crucial in work with refugee families (Skalla, 2019).
- *Gender sensitivity*: Emphasizes the need to consider gender (differences) in ECEC services and family life (Chamakalayil et al., 2020; Menz & Abdessadok, 2018; Tunç, 2019).
- *Linguistic sensitivity*: Highlights the acceptance of multilingualism, the acceptance and promotion of the family language, and the provision of multilingual services (Knoll & Sieber, 2023; F.P. Fischer & Gorges, 2023; Amirpur & Schulz, 2022).
- *Cultural sensitivity*: Stresses the acknowledgment and integration of cultural differences, but within the framework of universal norms for child protection (F. P. Fischer & Gorges, 2023; Borke & Schwentesius, 2019; Tunç, 2019).

Promoting the *integration* of parents, particularly in the context of ECEC and migration, is also a key objective. This involves facilitating both children's and parents' participation in daycare, supporting parents' career prospects, and assisting in (institutional) network-building (Gambaro et al., 2019; Hamra, 2018; Siede, 2021).

Building on the previous issues, concepts such as intercultural openness, inclusion, or diversity are frequently cited. *Intercultural openness* is framed as an institutional adaptation strategy

(Geisen et al., 2019; Öztürk & Reiter, 2019; Gesemann et al., 2020), while *inclusion* is described as an approach that ensures all children and families, regardless of their backgrounds, can participate equally (Kuhn, 2018; Böhmer, 2019). *Diversity* encompasses the recognition of different life realities. These terms are often used complementarily, though Fischer (2024) critiques intercultural openness for its tendency towards essentialism and othering, positioning diversity as a more suitable approach due to its focus on *intersectionality*; the interconnection of inequality categories. All three concepts are closely tied to the notions of practice and competence and are predominantly rooted in the actions of workers.

As discussed in previous sections, the context of ECEC is closely linked to issues of *accessibility and participation*. Emphasis is placed on overcoming barriers to access, particularly through targeted approaches, low-threshold services, or strategies of interculturality, inclusion, and diversity. Additionally, there is a call to confront the *stigma* associated with parenting education, which is often accompanied by feelings of *shame* due to deficit-oriented and problematizing forms of addressing (Chiapparini, 2022; Amirpur, 2019). Furthermore, *trust* is frequently mentioned as a critical factor for ensuring access and participation (Skalla, 2019; Knoll, 2020; Engin, 2019; Siede, 2021; Wenzel et al., 2022; Münch et al., 2023).

What also becomes evident in the discourse on parenting education is that migrantified individuals and migrantified parents are positioned not only as recipients of parenting education but also as providers. Staff members with a “migration background” are credited with experiences that are seen as enhancing cultural sensitivity, linguistic diversity, and outreach efforts within educational institutions (Öztürk & Reiter, 2019; Tunç, 2019). A distinction is often made between professionals and roles such as mentors, guides, sponsors, cultural mediators, neighborhood mothers, or parental guides (Engin, 2019; Gesemann et al., 2020; Hamra, 2018; Chiapparini, 2022). The people occupying these roles—who are frequently identified as migrants and are often parents themselves, particularly mothers—are referred to as “bridge persons,” “key figures,” or “language role models” (Engin, 2019; Chiapparini, 2022). These labels suggest a gap between professionals and parents, believed to require bridging, door opening, and guidance. Professionals and institutions are encouraged to utilize these facilitators to enhance accessibility and outreach to migrantified parents. However, the relationship between professionals and facilitators is often portrayed as instrumental and hierarchical, with facilitators being depicted as dependent on training provided by professionals such as social workers or preschool teachers (Engin, 2019; Gesemann et al., 2020; Hamra, 2018; Chiapparini, 2022). The discourse on parenting education is characterized by a tension between the aspiration to diversify professional staff and the tendency to delegate diversity to semi-professional “bridge” roles. These roles are often

viewed as stepping stones towards labor market integration and involve precarious employment conditions, such as the lack of permanent contracts and full-time positions (Hamra, 2018). In a study on the management of migration-related diversity in family education institutions in North Rhine-Westphalia, Öztürk & Reiter (2019) found that individuals with a “migration background” are frequently employed as fee-based workers (Honorarkräfte) (84%), while 42% are in administrative roles, and only a small proportion hold positions in social work (26%) or leadership (10%). They attribute this partly to the fact that family education institutions in Germany typically have relatively high proportions of part-time and fee-based employees (Öztürk & Reiter, 2019, pp. 134–135).

In summary, the discourse on parenting education reveals a threefold positioning of migrantified parents and mothers: as participants, as professionalized staff, and as facilitators, with these roles being hierarchically structured based on formal training and professionalization. In this context, parenting education emerges as a normative negotiation process with multiple professionalization requirements, where a particular focus is placed on critical self-reflection and sensitization, i.e., technologies of the self. Both self-reflection and sensitization are influenced and constrained by competing knowledge and structural conditions, which often result in contradictions. Various tensions are identified. Cloos et al. (2018) emphasize that these tensions should not be resolved unilaterally in practice, but rather reflexively. As such, workers in ECEC and parenting education are encouraged to position themselves flexibly and situationally within these tensions, balancing parental agency, autonomy, vulnerability, dependency and specific, subjective needs with professional expertise, adherence to normative standards, and the demands of equality, helping, enabling, and control—all within a resource-constrained framework.

4. Objectives and Research Questions

Existing studies on the addressing and positioning of migrantified parenthood in ECEC show that problematization, homogenization, othering, and hierarchization are relevant dynamics in this context. However, these studies focus primarily on policy documents, daycare centers, and schools. The ways in which migrantified parents are addressed and positioned in parenting education programs have so far only been examined through the medium of program materials. This lack of research is particularly noteworthy given that migrantified parenthood has become a key legitimizing reference in parenting education programs, with migrantified motherhood as its paradigmatic figure. Furthermore, there has been little engagement with the subjectivation of migrantified parenthood, and no studies have focused on this within the ECEC domain. Only a few studies explore “mediators” (Querfurt, 2016; Hamra, 2018; to be discussed in Section 5.4)

or the roles of trust and vulnerability, which are repeatedly highlighted in discussions of migrantified parents in ECEC. With this thesis, I hope to offer some initial insights into these entanglements and into the gaps in research. By exploring addressing and positioning practices within the context of early childhood parenting education and ECEC, I seek to understand the selections, norm formations, positionings, and relations, as well as the logics of differentiation and recognition that (re)produce migrantified motherhood within early childhood (parenting) education.

During the research process, the following overarching question for my thesis emerged: *How do participants become subjects of early childhood parenting education, how are they addressed and positioned, and what logics are associated with these processes?*

Engaging with theory, methodology, and data led to the development of three sub-questions, which are explored in the three articles that constitute this thesis:

- (1) How is migrantified motherhood constituted within the context of ECEC, and what conditions of possibility for subject formation emerge?
- (2) How do participants become subjects of early childhood parenting education through differentiation?
- (3) How is vulnerability addressed and recognized within the program, and what conclusions can be drawn about trust-building?

5. Three Perspectives on Subject Formation

In the following, I will introduce the three articles that form the core of my thesis, illustrating how each article progressively zooms in on the addressing practices in ECEC and early childhood parenting education—from the normative conditions of possibility for subject formation to relational differentiations and dynamics. Subsequently, I will synthesize the findings from my articles, offering a broader perspective on subject formation in early childhood parenting education as a cyclical process of mobilization.

5.1. Article 1: Migrantified Motherhood

Article 1, “The Making and Doing of Migrant (M)others: Subjectivation in Early Childhood Education and Care” (Schwenker & Sandermann, 2024), adopts a subjectivation-analytical perspective and draws on data from Case 1 and Case 2. The article examines four key questions:

- (1) How are participants selected?
- (2) What subject positions are participants provided with?

- (3) What other- and self-positionings of the participants can be identified in the data?
- (4) What hierarchies of power and knowledge are being (re)produced in this context?

The sections below briefly present the findings and conclude with a summary of the first perspective on addressing practices provided in my thesis.

Selection of Participants

Central to the selection of participants in the program are intertwined attributions related to migration, culture, religion, gender, and family structures. While the program initially targeted migrant parents, it quickly narrowed its focus to migrant mothers, based on assumptions about cultural or religious gender norms suggesting they would feel uncomfortable in mixed-gender settings. Fathers, meanwhile, were excluded due to presumed commitments to the labor market. Mothers were positioned as culturally distinct and perceived to be in particular need or desire of ECEC education and language support. However, both parental guides criticized the deficit-oriented framing of mothers in the program materials, prompting the parental guide of Group 2 to leave the federal program and run the group voluntarily. Following this shift, the group gradually opened to include men and non-migrantified supporters who assisted with translation and organizational matters.

Subject Positions

The article introduces two subject positions that have been reconstructed from the data:

Model migrant mother: This subject position is associated with a mother who actively engages in her child's education, assimilates to educational norms, and takes responsibility for her own and her child's integration into German society. The acquisition of the German language is central to this role. The model migrant mother overcomes constraints and challenges, becoming self-sufficient, confident, and able to navigate German educational systems. She confronts systemic exclusion and acts as a mediator for her child within institutions such as day care centers or schools. The model migrant mother embodies the ideal of a self-optimizing caregiver, willing to learn, engage, and serve as a role model for others in the community.

Failed migrant mother: This subject position is associated with a mother who is passive or unable to take on the responsibility of integration. It is linked to psychological challenges following the establishment of a new life in Germany, which cause her to retreat into the private sphere, where she is disconnected from broader educational and social opportunities. As a result, this mother loses contact with her increasingly German-speaking child, whom she is unable to represent in ECEC institutions, and she cannot pave the way for their "proper" integration into German society.

It is important to note that these subject positions are evident across all data. They also serve as an important point of reference in the participants' temporal self-relation and self-technologies, albeit with different nuances and emphases.

Other- and Self-Positionings

Other- and self-positionings are deeply intertwined, unfolding dynamically through the interplay of addressing practices and participants' responses.

Educational, language-related, and psychological needs: Through the formal organization of the program (the selection of the target group, the authority of the parent leaders, and the materials used), participants are positioned as cultural "others" in need of early childhood education. This need is closely intertwined with the invocation of German language acquisition as a normative prerequisite for the mothers' active participation in their child's development, in ECEC institutions, and in public life. Mothers are encouraged to actively confront their withdrawal, fear, and shame regarding the German language, both within and beyond the program, and develop the self-confidence necessary to engage with a non-inclusive educational system. Participants submit to these demands and adopt them as a central self-technology that enables them to position themselves within the constraining ECEC system.

Strangers to the German language and system: Participants construct the space primarily as one intended for acquiring German language skills. In doing so, they position themselves as unfamiliar with both the German language and the broader ECEC system, which they perceive as largely governed by implicit norms and practices. They frame this system as non-inclusive and shift the responsibility for navigating its tacit rules onto the system itself. Through this reframing, they resist being addressed as self-optimizing or deficient educational agents for their children. Instead, their self-positioning reflects a subject who needs to be familiarized with the system before they can navigate it effectively—both for themselves and for their children.

The struggle for balance: Resistance is also evident in the mothers' refusal to fully "Germanize" their parenting practices and in their pursuit of a balanced approach—one that is understood as integral to the child's identity formation but limited in its effects due to the uncontrollable range of influences on the child in German society. As a result, "migrant motherhood" is portrayed as an ongoing struggle to reconcile family values with the cultural and normative expectations of German society.

The process of becoming: Across both other- and self-positionings, a transformative logic emerges that mirrors the program's normative narrative and subject positions. Initially, the mother is portrayed as psychologically burdened—marked by fear, shame, and a withdrawal

into the private sphere. The program is depicted as offering a pathway out of this passivity, enabling her to acquire language, knowledge, and self-confidence, and to encounter role models. Through this process, she can actively participate in ECEC and potentially become a role model herself, gaining access to the ECEC labor market. Group 2 further expands these possibilities by mobilizing participants as active citizens and advocates. It provides opportunities for them to become public voices speaking on behalf of themselves and their children, actively challenging deficit-oriented narratives and racism.

Power/Knowledge Hierarchies

Power/knowledge hierarchies are (re)produced within the program through processes that frame participants as cultural “others” from the outset, positioning them as needing educational, linguistic, or psychosocial support. This framing subordinates their parenting practices to the assumed universal standards of the majority culture. The exclusion of fathers reinforces gendered and racialized assumptions, particularly regarding Muslim women, positioning mothers as the primary caregivers responsible not only for their children’s upbringing but also for their integration into society. The program thereby reproduces the dominance of “German” ECEC norms over the participants’ cultural knowledge, framing German language acquisition as a key self-technology for success. Participants are expected to conform, which reinforces neoliberal ideas that place the responsibility on individuals to overcome non-inclusivity. This emphasis on German marginalizes multilingualism, positioning the ability or inability to speak German as a key marker of success or failure. Through this process of self-responsibilization, participants are positioned as co-facilitators of Germany’s migrantified, gendered educational regime.

Summary: Perspective One

Article 1 offers a broad analysis of addressing practices in Case 1 and Case 2, exploring the production of migrantified motherhood within parenting education and ECEC, as well as the “conditions of possibility” for subject formation. This provides a starting point for further research within the diverse landscape of ECEC services, with a particular focus on migrantification and motherhood.

The article sheds light on the conditions of possibility for subject formation by reconstructing two normative subject positions that frame a narrative of transformation with both positive and negative dimensions. In this narrative, motherhood is redefined within a neoliberal rationality that emphasizes activity and the assumption of responsibility. Through intertwined processes of culturalization, migrantification, and psychologization of the participants, this invocation of “good motherhood” is articulated and extended, encouraging adaptation to the non-inclusive

German ECEC system and its norms. Within the program, the migrant mother is held responsible for integration in this system in three ways: for herself, for her child, and for other migrant mothers. However, moments of resistance to this individualization of responsibility and deficit-based narrative emerge, extending to the politicization of migrantified motherhood in an effort to challenge racism within German society. Ultimately, the article illustrates how self-technologies both enable participation in the German ECEC system and simultaneously require submission to it. While there is no external space beyond this power/knowledge complex, there remains the potential to gain a voice within it—though this voice can only be heard if it speaks in German.

5.2. Article 2: Differentiation and Diversity

Article 2, “The Diverse Subjects of Early Childhood Parenting Education” (Schwenker, 2024) examines how participants are constituted as subjects of early childhood parenting education through processes of differentiations, drawing on data from Case 1. In line with the heuristic of address analysis (Ricken, 2013; Rose & Ricken, 2018), the article addresses four key questions:

- (1) What differentiations are made in the selection of the target group for the parenting education program?
- (2) What differentiations occur in the in the formation of program norms?
- (3) What differentiations are made between the various positions within the program, and how are they related to each other?
- (4) How are differentiations within the program evaluated?

The following sections present the findings and conclude with a summary of the second perspective on addressing practices in this thesis.

Differentiation and Selection

While the general focus on migrantified mothers was briefly introduced in Article 1, Article 2 delves deeper into the selection of Case 1’s target group, based on the program flyer and additional interview excerpts. The analyzed material consistently characterizes the target group as migrantified, multilingual mothers within a traditional gendered family structure, possibly of Muslim faith, and potentially lacking adequate ECEC skills. The exclusive focus on mothers differentiates this group from all other groups led by the parental guide. Notably, the program does not address migrantified fathers or non-migrantified, exclusively German-speaking, culturally unmarked parents, underscoring the culturalized and gendered differentiations that define the program’s target group.

Differentiation and Norm Formation

In Article 2, the subject positions of the “model migrant mother” and the “failed migrant mother” introduced in Article 1 are interrogated at greater depth to show how participants in the program are differentiated according to these normative conceptions. Using program materials, interview excerpts, and observation reports, the analysis illustrates how the program invokes the concept of “good motherhood,” encouraging mothers to actively participate in their child’s care, education, and language development.

Differentiation and Positioning

Article 2 expands on the differentiation processes that position the parental guide, group leaders, and participants in distinct roles. Dora, the parental guide, is linked to participants through shared migration experiences, positioning her as a key figure with assumed cultural similarity. Her migration experience is framed as cultural capital, granting her empathy and a role model status within the program. Professional qualifications are de-emphasized in favor of personal traits presumed to facilitate closeness and trust with the participants.

Group leaders are positioned one level below Dora; they lead their own groups but have attended a shorter period of training. Although they are formally recognized as “parental guides,” Dora distinguishes between her extensive training and theirs, reinforcing a hierarchical distinction. The group leaders, seen as “pre-professional parental guides,” are role models for the participants, while Dora remains the central authority guiding their work.

At the base of this hierarchy are the participants, who are encouraged to become “model migrant mothers,” which includes being a role-model for the child. Thus, the program establishes a clear hierarchy—from child to mother to group leader to parental guide—with each level linked through the concept of role modeling.

Differentiation and Valuation

Article 2 further explores the evaluations embedded in these differentiations. With regard to the selection of the target group, there is a tacit acceptance—beyond explicit positive or negative judgment—of either assumed or self-articulated discomfort in mixed-gender settings, legitimizing the program’s differentiation from other groups. This simultaneously reinforces a normalization of migrantified mothers as primary caregivers, while fathers are marginalized due to assumed labor obligations. The gendered division of family responsibilities remains unquestioned and is framed as beyond the scope of the project’s responsibility. The program passively responds to participants’ presumed preferences and family structures rather than actively engaging with them.

The hierarchical structure between parental guides, group leaders, and participants is evaluated through their alignment with the normative ideals of the “model migrant mother.” The motherly practices of participants are valorized and praised by the parental guide, while any problematizations remain implicit. The distinct positions of parental guides, group leaders, and participants, along with the underlying normative subject positions, are framed within a temporal and transformative context, suggesting an evolution towards the ideal of engaged motherhood.

The parental guide affirms the different ways participants present themselves physically, culturally, and religiously, but adopts a cautious approach to “sensitive topics” such as religion or politics. This fosters an environment where differences are acknowledged and positively valued, though within carefully managed boundaries. Differentiations related to language and culture are intentionally addressed by the parental guide to foster inclusion and cohesion, while always aligning with the broader objective of German language acquisition.

Summary: Perspective Two

Article 2 expands my thesis by providing a detailed perspective on the differentiation processes within the addressing practices through which the subjects of early childhood parenting education—both participants and staff—are (re)produced in Case 1. It demonstrates how differentiation and valuation interact, offering an empirical, reconstructive approach to diversity that shows it to be relationally and interactively (re)produced, rather than a static, normative ideal.

From this perspective, diversity emerges as ambivalent: it is both inclusive and exclusive, both empowering and subjugating. The selection of the target group is legitimized through processes of differentiation and problematization, (re)producing identity categories in which assigned attributes are simultaneously problematized and normalized, while others—namely men—are excluded. The affirmative recognition of participants as engaged mothers and competent mediators of their family language, culture, and religion fosters inclusion within the group. However, religious and political differences among participants are problematized as sources of vulnerability and harm, becoming subject to regulation by the parental guide. This regulation, in turn, imposes constraints on participants’ self-formation within the program.

In the program, relational differences among participants are framed in a transformative logic. The positive recognition of the language skills or migration experiences of parental guides and group leaders positions them as “professional others” (Heite, 2008) and “diversity workers” (Ahmed, 2012). These personalized resources are perceived as granting them enhanced empathy and access to the target group, overshadowing formal qualifications, which still act as key markers of differentiation between the professionalized parental guides and pre-professionalized

group leaders. The structure of the program mirrors a “therapeutic culture” (Rose, 1996), combining elements of a self-help group with a peer-to-peer model, where the peer also takes on the role of (pre-)professional.

Drawing on Kraus and Krieger’s (2021) conceptualization of the interplay between social work and power, Article 2 argues that diversity—and by extension, addressing practices in parenting education—are shaped by pre-existing discursive orders of differentiation and recognition, which constrain possibilities for legitimacy. Addressing practices mediate power by (re)producing social differentiations, identity categories, and structures, while also (re)constituting the relationships between staff and participants. Article 2 concludes by suggesting that this power operates as a mode of governmentality, driven by an identity-political rationality. This means that within the configuration of power/knowledge, identities are not only (re)produced but also become organizing principles of the hierarchy of knowledge and authority—for instance, as migrantified staff are positioned as those who “know best” how to manage diversity.

5.3. Article 3: Vulnerability and Trust

Article 3, “Trust and Vulnerability in Early Childhood Parenting Education” (Schwenker, 2025), builds on the theoretical framework outlined in Section 2.4, conceptualizing trust as a dynamic social practice shaped by recognition and addressing practices. Drawing on Case 1, the article examines how vulnerability is identified and addressed in interaction, and how this shapes relational dynamics and professional practices within the setting.

The analysis is guided by the question of how participants are addressed as vulnerable, in what ways this ascribed vulnerability becomes relevant in the context of the program, and what consequences arise for the constitution of trust and social relations in early childhood parenting education. The article reconstructs six relational positionings in which participants’ vulnerability is addressed and discusses how these shape interactional and normative dynamics within the setting. The following sections present the findings and conclude with a brief summary of the third perspective on addressing practices in this thesis.

Being a Cultural/Religious Woman

Participants are addressed as vulnerable based on intersecting attributions of cultural and religious identity. The presence of men is framed as a potential source of emotional discomfort, legitimizing their exclusion from the setting. While this is described as a shared decision by participants, it is ultimately enacted by the parental guide, who assumes responsibility for the emotional safety of the space. Vulnerability here is framed as inherent and non-negotiable, addressed through practices of non-exposure.

Being Religiously and Politically Diverse

Participants are addressed as vulnerable when expressions of religious or political conviction are perceived as carrying the risk of offense. At the same time, they are constructed as potential sources of threat to others. The parental guide defines boundaries of acceptable speech, enacting conversational norms through avoidance strategies. While this reduces the risk of interpersonal conflict, it limits the space for self-expression and critical engagement with difference.

Being Exposed to the German Language

Language-related vulnerability is addressed as both an emotional and structural condition, accompanied by feelings of shame, fear, or self-doubt. A normative temporality is established, contrasting earlier avoidance with later empowerment. Trust is practiced through a combination of exposure and support, as participants-turned-group leaders draw on their own experiences to affirm participants' struggles while encouraging gradual engagement. Addressing practices aim to affirm the participants' potential for transformation while situating this transformation as necessary for integration into ECEC and public life.

Being Equally or Unequally Worthy

Participants are addressed as emotionally vulnerable in relation to perceived unequal recognition by the parental guide. The guide, aware of her role as a potential source of exclusion, enacts rituals of openness, friendliness, and equal treatment to regulate the emotional dynamics of the group. Practices such as individualized greetings, attention to detail, and consistent goodwill function as relational stabilizers. Here, vulnerability is shaped by the tension between closeness and distance in a setting where recognition is a limited and contested resource.

Being Emotionally Involved

The parental guide addresses herself as vulnerable in moments of gratitude and emotional exchange, underscoring the affective dimension of her relationship with participants. Trust is not only practiced through professional routines but also through emotional openness, with the guide's willingness to be moved and to maintain contact outside the program, reinforcing the relational character of the setting. Vulnerability emerges as mutual and embedded in the emotional fabric of the relationship.

Being Open and Staying Private

Participants are addressed as vulnerable through their exposure to inquiries and expectations around personal matters. While bureaucratic issues are handled in private and with discretion, parenting-related topics are routinely addressed in the group. Participants remain exposed to

the address but are consistently met with empathy, interest, and affirmation. Trust is practiced through routinized interactional forms that preempt misrecognition and aim to stabilize relationships within a setting that remains inherently fragile.

Summary: Perspective Three

Article 3 develops a third perspective on addressing practices by focusing on how vulnerability is discursively and relationally (re)produced in a parenting education program. The study shows that participants are addressed as vulnerable across multiple dimensions—affectively, structurally, and situationally—and that trust is practiced through affirming and protective strategies that seek to stabilize social situations. These trust practices are routinized and emotionally invested, embedding professional support in patterns of mutual dependency and care.

Anticipated vulnerability serves as a central reference point for the normative order of the program. It legitimizes the creation of a separate, regulated, and affirming space, in which participants can be addressed as being in need of support and transformation. The program thereby frames vulnerability as an obstacle to be overcome, while simultaneously reproducing it as a condition for recognition and support.

Building on Ricken and Rose's concept of addressing practices and Butler's notion of recognition and performativity, the article conceptualizes vulnerability not as a fixed attribute but as relationally constituted. Drawing on critiques by Frühauf and Kessler (2020), it reflects on the political and professional implications of vulnerability discourses in social work, including the moralization and homogenization of clients, the construction of trust as control, and the attempted exclusion of risk. The article advances a relational understanding of vulnerability and trust, foregrounding their entanglement in normative expectations, professional practices, and emotional ties.

5.4. Synthesis: Mobilizing Migrantified Motherhood

To synthesize my articles and findings, I employ the framework of mobilization to demonstrate how early childhood parenting education in Case 1 and Case 2 emerges mechanism for activating support, participation, and responsibility. In this context, mobilization operates as a cyclical process shaped by various dynamics of governmental power.

According to Hamra (2018), there has been an increasing trend towards the municipalization of integration policies since the late 1990s. This shift has occurred within the context of a neoliberal reorganization of social policy towards an activating state—a model often marked by internal contradictions. Municipalities carry the main burden of integration efforts, but they are under-resourced, and many programs rely on temporary federal funding schemes (Hamra, 2018, pp.

27, 38). This structural context underpins both Case 1 and Case 2. During fieldwork in Case 1, concerns about securing ongoing funding for the overall project were raised repeatedly. The following excerpt from my fieldnotes captures a brief, informal conversation with a parental guide during one of the group sessions:

She [Stephanie, parental guide] says she hopes there is a way to keep her group. “But I definitely give priority to Dora and Evin,” she adds. “The experience is important—or the language, in Evin’s case.” (Fieldnotes, Case 1)

These uncertainties lead the parental guide to prioritize the project’s staff members, establishing a hierarchy based on the experiences and language they share with parents.

In Case 2, the group withdrew from the federal program, as the parental guide critiqued its deficit-oriented approach. She continued to lead the group on a voluntary basis, supported occasionally by project-related grants.

“I also thought for a long time about whether to turn the group into an association (*Verein*)⁶, because then you have more, I don’t know, financing options and so on. But then I said, no, we’ll not go down that road, it wouldn’t do any good. It would just complicate the situation and also this role assignment, where we’re kind of girl Fridays.” (Interview, Parental Guide Case 2)

In both cases, there is a sense of dependency on higher authorities, which leads the parental guides to either navigate these institutional structures or opt out— often at the cost of financial compensation for support providers. In the interview with the parental guide from Case 2, the reference to role attributions highlights how funding and programmatic frameworks place constraints on the scope and nature of support provision. While the mobilization of funded support imposes substantial obligations, these obligations do not fully determine the conditions of possibility for addressing parents.

Vulnerability serves as a key concept for legitimizing and mobilizing support (Turner, 2021). As outlined in Section 2.4, the recognition of vulnerability is both powerful and ambivalent. In Case 1, support is legitimized through the structural vulnerability of migrantified mothers in Germany, as well as through culturalizing differentiations. Participants are encouraged to overcome this vulnerability through self-technologies, particularly those related to language acquisition. The program responds to the non-inclusiveness of the ECEC system by mobilizing its subjects to adapt. However, in collaboration with childcare centers, the program also has the potential to facilitate feedback loops between the institutions and the program itself and to serve as a form

⁶ According to § 21 of the Bürgerliches Gesetzbuch (BGB, German Civil Code), a *Verein* (association) is a legal entity established to pursue a common purpose that is not primarily economic in nature. As a formal organization, a *Verein* is eligible to apply for public or private funding and grants, and is often used by non-profit and community-based groups.

of institutional representation for participating mothers, making their perspectives visible within these networks.

At the same time, another layer of vulnerability emerges through the practices of the program and the mediating role of the parental guide, participants are not only positioned as structurally vulnerable and in need of support but are also portrayed as emotionally fragile in their temporary role as participants. This portrayal—partly produced through cultural othering and assumptions about their propensity for conflict—constructs an imposed vulnerability that constrains their possibilities for self-formation. It simultaneously elevates the parental guide to the role of a guardian over the space, thereby reinforcing the framing of both participants and the program environment as fragile.

Trust-building practices stabilize the situation, partially implying paternalistic dynamics of inclusion and exclusion. They foster a sense of comfort within the setting, encouraging mothers to remain consistently engaged as active participants in the program. Vulnerability emerges as a unifying element—not only among participants but also between participants and the parental guide, who, by sharing experiences from her “beginning,” embodies the goal of overcoming vulnerability.

The “struggle” to reach and engage migrantified parents in ECEC services, as outlined in Section 3, is evident here. The framing of the setting as fragile, combined with the inclusion of personal experiences, parallels Knoll’s (2020) findings, which suggest that the “everyday” approach seeks to navigate this fragility by building trust and closeness. Furthermore, Reisenauer and Lüring (2022) show that this approach rests on the assumption that formal, academic content does not appeal to migrantified parents—an assumption that differentiates them from the generalized majority society and implicitly homogenizes them as uneducated. The everyday approach is personified and embodied, creating a dynamic interplay between affirmatively engaging with heritage, culture, and language differences on the one hand and adhering to normative education standards on the other.

In this context, legitimate knowledge, closeness, and trust are not abstract concepts but are embodied in the figure of the professionalized parental guide. Serving as both mediator and role model, the guide mobilizes participants to aspire to the normative values and integration standards she embodies—encouraging them to align with the program’s norms and, in turn, to become role models themselves. Participants are called upon to assume multiple layers of responsibility: for their children, for themselves, for other migrantified mothers, and even for broader

societal change. Responsibility for integration is thus projected onto and mobilized through the figure of the mother.

The mobilization and instrumentalization of motherhood for political purposes, as well as the mobilization of migrantified, often culturally defined mediators, is not a new phenomenon (Berner, 2022; Hartung, 2022; Querfurt, 2016, pp. 96–98). This dynamic may point to an intersection between the naturalization of motherhood and the essentialization of what Ebner von Eschenbach (2016, p. 54, translated by the author) terms an “identity-logical conceptualization of migration,” which(re)produces a subject that not only knows best, but that can also care best for an imagined community.

However, this intersection remains underexplored. Hamra’s (2018) ethnographic study offers insight into the *Stadtteilmütter* (Neighborhood Mothers) projects, which emerged in various districts of Berlin in the early 2000s. These initiatives primarily recruit migrantified mothers to engage in outreach within their local communities. After receiving training on how to advise families on early childhood education, health, language development, and parenting, they act as key representatives of Berlin’s integration policy. The “neighborhood mothers” are seen “cultural brokers,” and their migration experiences and cultural backgrounds are perceived as vital resources for bridging the gap between families and institutions. Hamra (2018) shows that these projects serve as spaces of negotiation, shaped by both municipal and federal agendas. Tensions emerge between the recognition of social realities—such as the central role of mothers in ECEC—and the reproduction of exclusion mechanisms. Further tensions arise in relation to anti-Muslim racism. While “neighborhood mothers” are expected to build trust, they themselves are often met with distrust, particularly regarding adherence to norms around child protection, democratic values, and gender equality (Hamra, 2018).

De Jong’s (2015) study of the Viennese project *Nachbarinnen* (Neighbors) inspired by Berlin’s *Stadtteilmütter* project, offers insights into intersectional positionings in relation to gender and ethnicity. Focusing on media representations of the project between 2012 and 2015, De Jong demonstrates how narratives surrounding the “neighbors” reproduce gendered and ethnically marked hierarchies. These narratives draw on historical colonial discourses as well as contemporary notions of “progress” and “integration.” Men are largely absent from the narratives or appear “as obstacles in the ‘development’ of their migrant wives” (de Jong, 2015, p. 118). There is a clear parallel with the “makeover” narrative in Case 1, where the emphasis on empowerment and independence is often framed in contrast to husbands, who are frequently depicted as sources of dependency.

Querfurt's praxiographic study (2016) examines the subject formation of "mediator subjects of migration," focusing specifically on the self-formation of "integration guides" (*Integrationslotsen*). These guides are primarily selected based on migration experience, successful integration, and German language skills. Querfurt's findings (2016) reveal the ambivalences embedded in the self-formation processes of integration guides, who must navigate multiple tensions: being both individual and collective subjects of experience; being positioned symmetrically as fellow migrants and asymmetrically as role models; being positioned as recipients of support while simultaneously acting as support providers; and balancing everyday, experiential knowledge with professionalized expertise. While integration guides contribute to the visibility of migrant experiences, they are required to meet the predefined integration standards of the majority society. They must embody both "migrantness" and "Germanness," selectively distancing themselves from either identity when necessary. Querfurt, drawing on Bourdieu, describes this process of leveraging their migration experience as a form of symbolic trust capital (Querfurt, 2016, pp. 327–328).

This brings us back to the concept of trust, which emerges as a central factor in both Querfurt's (2016) and Hamra's (2018) studies. As outlined in Chapter 3.4, trust serves as a key term in addressing workers in ECEC. Trust-building is considered essential for mobilizing parents as engaged participants and citizens, and this trust is embodied and activated by mediators.

However, the "trust mediator" is not necessarily migrantified, although this intersection is prominently represented in German ECEC. A study by Fretwell et al. (2018) on a British pilot program to promote parental involvement among "hard-to-reach" families in a white, working-class community in London exemplifies this. The study explores the role of "link workers," defined as "insiders" from the same white, working-class background as the program's target group. The program seeks to cultivate responsible, self-disciplined parents who conform to normative expectations of "good" parenting. Fretwell et al. (2018) argue that trust is strategically employed by link workers, who deliberately distance themselves from institutions perceived as threatening by parents while actively building relationships based on goodwill and personal bonds. The study conceptualizes trust as a "soft" technique of neoliberal governmental power used to guide parental behavior in contrast to more authoritarian or repressive forms of control.

The trust mediator is thus an intersectional identity-logical subject, simultaneously belonging to a marginalized group and to the generalized majority society. The individual's experience within the marginalized group is intertwined with submission to the dominant knowledge systems of majority society. The trust mediator embodies both personal experience and professionalized expertise.

As demonstrated in Case 1 and in the studies by Hamra (2018), Querfurt (2016), and de Jong (2015), the trust mediator is situated in a hierarchy structured by varying degrees of reflexive and educationally conformist integration into society and formal education. Mobilized through the trust granted by professionals or other trust mediators, they in turn facilitate the mobilization of parents, encouraging trust and engagement with ECEC services and thereby enabling spaces of observation and authoritarian control.

In line with the study by Fretwell et al. (2018), the trust mediator is constituted as a soft mediator of the power/knowledge that structures the possibilities of subject formation. At the same time, the trust mediator themselves is constrained by their positioning as the “professional other” (Heite, 2008) who “cares and knows best” how to “manage diversity.” The following statement from a key informant interview I conducted resonated with me as an example of this dynamic.

Lately, if I may elaborate a bit, I’ve been feeling rather frustrated that I always end up with these projects that somehow have to do with a migration background. They say, ‘Hey, why don’t you do this?’ I studied this [social work]. But they don’t ask me what I want to do. I mean, I’m supposedly the expert—but who says I am? It’s as if it were a fate that was laid in my cradle, something I’m destined to do. But in principle, it’s not what I want to do. Or maybe—I don’t really know. (Key Informant Interview, Väter-café [“father café”])

The interviewee, who works for a large social service provider and runs a low-threshold “father café” for migrantified fathers—a space for informal exchange about fatherhood and family life—describes how he is migrantified, instrumentalized, and responsabilized within the organization to support migrantified “others” without being addressed as a generally professionalized social worker. His narrative reveals several intertwined dynamics: an affective one, marked by frustration and resignation about being repeatedly assigned to “migration background” projects; a professional one, in which his formal qualification as a social worker is disregarded in favor of biographical assumptions about cultural competence; and an organizational one, where his “fate” of being the “expert” is reproduced through diversity management logics.

The circle closes with those individuals being mobilized for support who are considered especially capable of mobilizing trust—that is, migrantified professionals and pre-professionals. In the context of parenting education, this frequently implies precarious working conditions, with the positions of professionalized staff not necessarily being more secure, but better paid and formally recognized. For migrantified mothers, taking on the responsibilities of a pre-professional “trust mediator” is seen as a stepping stone into the formal labor market. The norm of the working mother is especially pertinent here, as employment is equated with integration. However, as Hamra (2018) demonstrates, structural barriers frequently obstruct this path.

During my fieldwork, this was particularly evident in relation to monolingualism and the downgrading of foreign professional qualifications.

It is important to note that the program does not rely on a snowball system; participation is voluntary, and participants are diverse. Going down the role model path or entering the ECEC labor market is just one option. Some mothers were pursuing or planning formal education, while others were putting off education because of their children or waiting until they were older. Some were involved in volunteer work, and others were in the process of having their university degrees recognized. The group also provides a welcome space to pause and engage in exchange. The mothers come from different national and educational backgrounds, have been in Germany for different lengths of time, and vary in age. Some of the “pre-professionalized” group leaders were born in Germany. However, a greater commonality can be found—largely due to the selection of the target group—in relation to Muslim religiosity or ascriptions regarding Muslim cultural identity. Racism is structurally embedded in German society, with anti-Muslim racism being mobilized in particular by right-wing groups and movements. The parental guide from Case 2 was motivated by the experience of racism—directed at herself but also and especially toward her child—to politically mobilize the group and resist external ascriptions. While migrantified motherhood can mobilize resistance, this does not imply that migrantified mothers inherently bear responsibility for providing support or challenging the non-inclusivity and racism that is imposed on them or their children.

6. Discussion

Having synthesized and discussed the findings, I will now turn to the methodological choices that shaped this study. While the praxiographic approach offered valuable insights into the practices and logics of subject formation in parenting education, it was influenced by contextual and practical constraints that limited its scope. In the following section, I will reflect on the methodological decisions and constraints, examining their implications for the depth and breadth of the analysis. Finally, I will outline the broader implications for future research and its connection to practice.

6.1. Methodological Reflections and Limitations

The data underpinning my thesis stems from a broader dataset collected within the Integration Through Trust project, but it was analyzed independently from the project’s broader focus. To address the research question central to my thesis, I followed a praxiographic approach. However, it is important to note that this is not a full-scale praxiography. Instead, it takes the form

of a praxiographic case study, blending elements of praxiography and case study methodology. As Bayeck (2023) argues, “ethnographic” case studies merge the prolonged observation period and immersion of ethnography with the focused analysis of case studies. This allows for a deep engagement with the practices, dynamics, and logics of specific groups or phenomena within bounded contexts—whether temporal or spatial—while employing a range of data collection methods such as observations and interviews.

As Bayeck (2023) and Fusch et al. (2017) suggest, “ethnographic” case studies are particularly well suited for doctoral research, offering data saturation and in-depth analysis of practices, even when time and scope are limited. In my dissertation project, this approach allowed for a focused investigation of case-specific practices—in particular, those related to subject formation—within a specific parenting education program. Rather than attempting to capture the full spectrum of practices across the diverse landscape of parenting education programs in Lower Saxony that address migrantified mothers, this approach allowed for a nuanced, context-specific inquiry. Given the fact that the field of parenting education in Lower Saxony (and in Germany generally) is marked by varied program structures, regional differences, and a dearth of qualitative interpretive research, the limited scope of my study is well-suited for a qualitative inquiry. Nonetheless, it is important to recognize the constraints of generalizing from a study that deliberately focuses on specific contexts.

Due to constraints related to the COVID 19 pandemic, the two cases differed with regard to methodology and data. In Case 1, participant observations provided insights into the addressing practices used during meetings, while in Case 2, interviews offered perspectives on both other- and self-positioning in relation to the group context and ECEC. Due to the differing nature of the data, these two cases do not lend themselves to a fully comprehensive comparative study.

With respect to the data base of Case 2, it is important to acknowledge the limitations of address analysis when relying solely on interview material. In address analysis, interviews are meant to complement participant observations.. However, subjectivation research has traditionally depended on interviews to “reconstruct subjective positioning (within the interview) in relation to discursive other positioning, (both within and outside the interview setting)” (Kuhlmann, 2023, p. 75, translated by the author). While the analysis revealed some commonalities and distinctions regarding self- and other-positioning, which contributed to a broader understanding of subject formation possibilities (Article 1), the disparities in the data prevented a more comprehensive comparative analysis. This was particularly evident in the exploration of practices related to diversity (Article 2) and trust-building (Article 3). A more detailed examination of these

practices and dynamics would have required observing addressing practices within the group setting.

However, limitations were also present in Case 1. As my thesis was driven by an initial interest in understanding trust-building as an aspect of social work practices, my observational attention gravitated toward the worker. Firstly, my physical positioning as a participant during group meetings influenced my perspective. As the participants were always focused on the parental guide, it was difficult for me to detach from these dynamics. Secondly, I was introduced as a university researcher working in the Integration Through Trust project, with a particular interest in the ECEC context. This was consistently met with enthusiasm, indicating that my presence was positively valued. As a result, an implicit “alliance” (Kuhlmann et al., 2017, p. 235) formed between the research project and the regional project, which positioned me closer to an intern than to a participant.

Language occasionally proved to be a barrier during one-on-one conversations with participants, particularly when the group was not yet gathered at the table or had dispersed after sessions. However, at the group table, this was less of an issue, as someone was always available to translate. Overall, at least six different languages, including German and English, were spoken, and having translators would have provided limited advantages. The group’s primary language was German, and conversations held in other languages were often marked as private exchanges. Nevertheless, it is important to acknowledge that language influenced how participants engaged in group discussions. Some participants expressed that they feel uncertain, ashamed, and self-conscious about speaking German. The parental guide initiated conversations, selected speakers, enforced turn-taking, and prevented interruptions. This constituted a regulated and inclusive address order, though the quantity of contributions and speech varied. In Case 1, the focus was on addressing practices in the situational context, and this was primarily structured by the parental guide.

I intended to integrate participants’ perspectives in Case 1 through individual interviews, with translators available for support. However, the parental guide’s positioning as gatekeeper limited this option. Due to time constraints, individual interviews were deemed impractical, and a group discussion, facilitated during a regular meeting with the parental guide present, was proposed instead. This approach would have remained consistent with the methodological framework and aligned with subjectivation research. As Geipel (2019) notes, group discussions offer a means to explore subjectivity as a performative and relational process, where meaning is actively produced, transformed, and stabilized through participants’ interactions. By addressing the group as a collective entity, specific collective positionings and group formations emerge,

(re)presenting discursive power processes and subject positions (Geipel, 2019). However, due to the COVID-19 pandemic, it was not possible to hold group discussions. Consequently, the study's focus is limited to capturing participants' subjective positionings during the observed interactions.

In Case 2, the parental guide was present during the interviews with the group participants and acted as a translator. One of the four interviewees requested full translation, while the others chose to conduct the interview in German, with occasional support from the parental guide. This undoubtedly influenced the interview dynamics, creating a threefold address dynamic. At the same time, it provided insight into the relational dynamics between the parental guide and the participants. The parental guide encouraged participants to speak openly and, in some instances, acted as a trust mediator, reassuring them that they could express criticism about ECEC.

Both cases highlight a specific challenge in praxiographic research—that is, that field access often depends on gatekeepers, leading to a top-down pathway to observation sites or interviews. Long-term immersion and snowball sampling could mitigate these limitations by fostering trust directly with participants over time. However, the snowball approach still depends on initially building trust with key participants, i.e., “trust mediators.” Another possible approach lies in collaborative research methods, engaging participants in the design process from the outset. Such an approach, focusing more on participants' subjective positioning, could have involved participant-generated diaries or logbooks as a data collection method (Kunz, 2015). Both participants and the parental guide could have retrospectively documented their perceptions, reflections, and emotions using an open-ended guide. A “mothers' journal” would have been another option. From a poststructuralist perspective, each method constitutes its own form of addressing participants and being addressed in return. The contradictions that emerge are of particular interest; rather than revealing hidden truths, they serve to destabilize or expand the scope of possibilities. Participant-generated diaries or logbooks could have provided an additional means of critically reflecting on my own observational perspective and further examining the relationship between self- and other-subject formation. However, due to the project's time constraints, this method was not implemented.

Overall, my thesis reflects the insights gained through the use of address analysis, as developed by Ricken et al. (2023). This methodological framework provides a power-sensitive approach to understanding interactions, making them heuristically accessible and methodologically adaptable. It further allows for a critical examination of the researcher's positionality. By selecting the groups for case studies, I marked them as significant within the research context. My affiliation with the university and the broader research project reinforced the normative context of ECEC,

which elicited a dual response: affirmation, particularly with regard to trust-building (“You’re in exactly the right place with us,” Observation Report, Parental Guide Certificate Award), but also caution, as fragility was ascribed to certain settings and I was perceived as a potential threat.

My own trust-building practices, particularly those employing avoidance, shaped the limitations of this study. Preconceptions and interpretations of interactions at the research site became entangled. I opted not to use videography in order to avoid disrupting the group or jeopardizing access. While subsequent experience with the group affirmed the prudence of this choice, it nonetheless limited the scope of my analysis. In retrospect, I might have pursued access to other groups more persistently; at the time, I was concerned that this would place undue pressure on the parental guides. Trust in research is not something established once and maintained; it is constantly renegotiated and can easily destabilize. As Foucault puts it, academic knowledge production is itself a form of power, and as a researcher, I tried both to be aware of the assumptions underlying my trust-building practices and to consider how I was, in turn, addressed and positioned by the research participants.

With this thesis, I contribute to the “problematization” of “migrantified motherhood,” introducing it as an “object of thought” (Foucault, 1989). Rather than focusing on the intentions, actions, or traits of individuals, my analysis centers on the dynamics of address, recognition, and differentiation. As Behrens (2019) notes, research creates possibilities for subjectivation through the categories it employs. By examining practices of categorization and differentiation, research offers the opportunity to challenge the power/knowledge dynamics underlying these processes. My findings underscore the importance of examining processes of categorization and differentiation in conjunction with processes of homogenization and essentialization, and considering how categories such as migration, motherhood, and work relate to one another within broader integration discourses and practices (see Lingen-Ali & Mecheril, 2020, for an overview of these discourses and practices).

Ultimately, this thesis offers in-depth insights specific to the analyzed cases rather than aiming for broad generalizability. Nevertheless, overlaps with other studies, as outlined in Sections 3 and 5.4, suggest that the findings have empirical relevance beyond these cases. While the study has its limitations, it contributes to theoretical and methodological discussions on the possibilities and constraints of subject formation, as well as on practicing diversity/difference and vulnerability/trust, which will be explored in the next section.

6.2. Implications and Outlook

Migrantified parents are positioned at the center of integration and education policy discourses, often categorized “by the character of the vulnerable parent of risk” (Westphal et al., 2017, p. 142). A key objective to these agendas is to support their children’s early education. To grasp the complexities of parenting education as a site of subjectivation and the (re)production of social power structures, further research is needed. This should aim to bridge the gap between policy development and conceptualization at both federal and state levels, while also critically examining the organizational structures and program designs of implementing institutions, as well as case studies that illuminate the interactions and practices within specific programs. Such an approach would contribute to intersectional research on parenthood by reconstructing the conditions of possibility for subject formation and the interpellations of “good” parenthood across specific contexts. It would also allow for an analysis that incorporates both the “tense (biographical) becoming of positionings” and the “dynamic process in the situated enactment of practices” (Kuhlmann 2023, p. 75, translated by the author).

Parenthood is a site of projection during times of societal change and upheaval. As Hartung (2022) notes, parenting education has historically served as a tool for the instrumentalization of families, shaping and stabilizing political ideologies. Similarly, Waterstradt (2018) argues that “conceptualizations of parenthood represent indispensable archetypes of governance in power processes, which are also utilized in nation-building” (2018, p. 44; translated by the author). This highlights the importance of adopting a long-term process perspective when analyzing parenthood. In this context, it is essential to examine how parenthood is (re-)produced, differentiated, and hierarchized—for example, in relation to the integration imperative.

Against this backdrop, the call for diversity becomes particularly significant, and it must be directed not only at practitioners in the field of family and parenting education, but beyond that as well. There is a need for critical diversity research that engages with the recognition of differences beyond mere affirmation and critically examines positively conceived recognition by questioning stereotyping, othering, etc. Equally important is an examination of how diversity is deployed as a personnel strategy within the often precarious and hierarchical field of family and parenting education. This field, much like ECEC, is subject to pressures of professionalization on the one hand (Akbaş et al., 2017), and on the other hand relies heavily on workers considered “pre- or semi-professionalized.” These dynamics involve both the (re)production of othering—where cultural and symbolic capital are instrumentalized to secure cooperative clients—and the precarization and exclusion of migrantified workers (Akbaş et al., 2017). Inclusivity and equal opportunity in ECEC apply not only to the target group but also to workers.

Another approach explored in this thesis involves integrating subjectivation theory and trust research to explore the interactions between workers and participants in parenting education and related contexts. This integration offers a lens through which to examine the positioning dynamics in trust-building, as well as the socio-historically specific discursive practices that (re)produce vulnerability and trust—practices that are foundational to the establishing of professional relationships. Here, too, research can be undertaken at various levels to demystify the conditions under which vulnerability and trust are constructed and sustained.

Workers in social and educational sectors are subject to ongoing interpellations regarding what constitutes “good” work, often leading to tensions that must be negotiated situationally through processes of self-reflection and sensitization. In this context, self-reflection involves relating one’s own thoughts, emotions, and actions to established bodies of scientific knowledge, while sensitization refers to the process of acquiring that knowledge and translating it into practice. This reflexive process of guiding oneself to guide others is essential, as social work contexts rarely allow for fully standardized or controllable procedures, except in highly repressive power structures. At the same time, these interpellations must also be critically reflected back to their originators—most notably the scientific community, which formulates and enforces these standards, but also political decision makers.

By undertaking this thesis, I inevitably align myself with those advocating for increased sensitivity to power dynamics. Before continuing with this line of thought, I wish to note a recurring insight that has emerged across two recent projects on trust: sensitivity to power should not be equated with its exclusion from social work. Turner (2021), drawing on Butler’s concept of vulnerability being inherently tied to power, argues that power has become a central concept not only in academic and theoretical discourse but also in a broader societal context.

It is therefore the responsibility of scholarship to articulate clearly what is meant by sensitivity to power. In everyday discourse, power carries negative connotations, and calls for greater sensitivity to power can unintentionally provoke defensiveness and outright denial. In some discussions about trust, power has even been portrayed as the antithesis of trust—something that renders trust impossible. However, the conception of power adopted in this thesis suggests that power, rooted in dependence and the absolute unavailability of others, is precisely what both necessitates and enables trust. From the perspective of subjectivation theory, power is ubiquitous; it enables social existence and identity, while simultaneously limiting what is recognizable. This is particularly relevant with terms like diversity and trust, which are often seen as inherently positive but are in fact (re)produced within and through power, not in opposition to it. The work of parental guides illustrates that trust is not an inherent capability tied to identity but a crucial

aspect of professional practice—manifested in dedication, the assumption of responsibility, sensitivity, and efforts to shape inclusive spaces. At times, this labor extends beyond the confines of paid work, particularly in the face of chronic underfunding.⁷ This engagement unfolds within power/knowledge regimes that differentiate, hierarchize, and normalize—even when the aim is to support, empower, or include. Trust and diversity must therefore be understood not as normative ideals or interpersonal achievements, but as discursive and institutional practices through which subjects are recognized, positioned, and made governable within social and educational work contexts.

⁷ I: Because you said, you can't cover everything, you're limited in time [working hours] and can't go to as many places anymore. If parents ask you now, and you realize that it doesn't fit in your time/ B: Then I do it on a volunteer basis. I: You do it on a volunteer basis? B: Yes. I'm doing a lot outside my paid hours now. I don't look at the clock, and I don't log my time. And that's through my work phone, right? But some families had my number through the project. Their kids are no longer in daycare but are now in school. But they still have my work number, and for those families, I work free of charge. They took my number with them, and they send me letters from school. But I can't say no. That's why. I: Yes. I imagine that's very difficult. B: Yes. Very difficult, yes. "It's nice here, why isn't there someone like that at the school?" Then I try to [help]. I: Okay, and are you formally volunteering anywhere? B: No, I just do it privately. Just like that. (Evin, Parental Guide)

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Appendix I: Data Overview and Interview Guides

Data Overview

<i>Case</i>	<i>Data Type</i>	<i>Description</i>	<i>Quantity</i>	<i>Duration ~[min] each</i>	<i>Collected In [Month, Year]</i>	<i>Location</i>
All cases	Fieldnotes (cross-case)	Descriptive and reflective notes written during and after observations, and before or after interviews; include contextual impressions, informal exchanges, and reflexive insights. Fieldnotes serve as the basis for all observation reports and complement interviews and background data.	–	–	November 2019 – November 2020	Germany (mainly Lower Saxony)
Case 1	Key informant interview protocol	Project leader	1	50	April 2019	medium-sized city, Lower Saxony 1
Case 1	Key informant interview protocol	Facility director	1	40	April 2019	medium-sized city, Lower Saxony 1
Case 1	Conversation protocol	Initial contact via phone	8	2-15	September 2019-October 2019	medium-sized city, Lower Saxony 1
Case 1	Observation report	Project meeting	2	60	October 2019/February 2020	medium-sized city, Lower Saxony 1
Case 1	Observation report	Meetings of parenting education group (one district)	9	135	November 2019-January 2020	medium-sized city, Lower Saxony 1
Case 1	Observation report	Meetings of group leaders	4	120	November 2019-January 2020	medium-sized city, Lower Saxony 1
Case 1	Observation report	Daycare center consultation	1	180	November 2019	medium-sized city, Lower Saxony 1
Case 1	Observation report	Parental guide supporting daycare centers	6	200	November 2019-December 2019	medium-sized city, Lower Saxony 1
Case 1	Observation report	Parent-child group	1	150	February 2020	medium-sized city, Lower Saxony 1
Case 1	Documents	Information material	7		October 2019-February 2020	medium-sized city, Lower Saxony 1
Case 1	Interview transcript	Semi-structured interview parental guide Dora	1	56	February 2020	medium-sized city, Lower Saxony 1
Case 1	Interview transcript	Semi-structured interview parental guide Evin	1	45	February 2020	medium-sized city, Lower Saxony 1
Case 1	Interview transcript	Semi-structured interview parental guide Stephanie	1	31	February 2020	medium-sized city, Lower Saxony 1
Case 2	Interview transcript	Semi-structured interview participant 1	1	90	September 2020	medium-sized city, Lower Saxony 2
Case 2	Interview transcript	Semi-structured interview participant 2	1	64	September 2020	medium-sized city, Lower Saxony 2
Case 2	Interview transcript	Semi-structured interview participant 3	1	29	September 2020	medium-sized city, Lower Saxony 2
Case 2	Interview transcript	Semi-structured interview participant 4	1	47	September 2020	medium-sized city, Lower Saxony 2
Case 2	Interview transcript	Semi-structured interview with parental guide	1	116	September 2020	medium-sized city, Lower Saxony 2
Key informant interview 1	Interview transcript	Group leader father's café	1	102	November 2020	large city, outside Lower Saxony
Key informant interview 2	Interview transcript	Group leader men's café	1	73	October 2020	large city, Lower Saxony 1
Key informant interview 3	Interview transcript	Parental guide	1	61	November 2020	large city, Lower Saxony 1
Key informant interview 4	Interview transcript	Migration consultant	1	69	January 2020	medium-sized city, Lower Saxony 1
Key informant interview 5	Interview transcript	Migration consultant	1	42	October 2019	medium-sized city, Lower Saxony 1
Key informant interview 6	Interview transcript	Family service office	1	37	May 2019	medium-sized city, Lower Saxony 3
Key informant interview 7	Interview transcript	Family service office	1	48	April 2019	large city, Lower Saxony 1

Semi-structured Interview Guide – Workers



Forschungsprojekt der Leuphana Universität zum Zugang geflüchteter Eltern mit 0-5-jährigen Kindern zu frühpädagogischen Angeboten in Niedersachsen

Informationen zu Projekt und Interview

- *Es geht uns im Rahmen des Forschungsprojekts um den Zugang und den Vertrauensaufbau geflüchteter Familien zu frühpädagogischen Angeboten im weitesten Sinne, d.h. neben Kita oder Krippe eben auch zu Eltern-Kind-Gruppen, Eltern-Treffs etc. Dazu möchten wir Einblicke in die Praxis gewinnen, d.h. wir möchten versuchen nachzuvollziehen, wie die Familien auf entsprechende Angebote aufmerksam werden, sich entscheiden, wie das Kennenlernen abläuft, welche Personen oder Organisationen dabei vielleicht relevant sind und wie die Angebote und Kommunikation gestaltet sind. Wir interessieren uns dabei speziell für die Perspektive von Personen, die in der Elternbegleitung, -bildung oder -beratung haupt- oder ehrenamtlich tätig sind.*
- *Wir interessieren uns also für ihre Erfahrungen und Erlebnisse aus ihrer Arbeit mit Familien. Ich würde gerne versuchen, zu verstehen, wie sich Ihre Elterngruppe sowie Ihr Kontakt und Ihre Beziehung zu geflüchteten Familien aufbaut und gestaltet. Am Ende des Projekts planen wir, unsere Ergebnisse in Weiterbildungsmodulen für Fachkräfte, Ehrenamtliche und Organisationen zugänglich zu machen, die in Kontakt mit geflüchteten Familien stehen oder treten möchten.*
- *Formalien:*
 - *Alles, was Sie sagen, bleibt vertraulich. Wir werten die Ergebnisse anonymisiert aus und stellen sie nur anonymisiert in Publikationen dar.*
 - *Tonbandaufnahme*
 - *Einverständniserklärung*

Einstieg

„So, nun haben wir die Formalitäten erledigt und können mit dem Gespräch beginnen. Wir sind interessiert an Ihren Erfahrungen und Ihrer persönlichen Sichtweise. Sie können sich gerne Zeit lassen mit Ihren Antworten, auch für Einzelheiten, denn für mich ist alles interessant, was Ihnen wichtig ist.“

1. Zu Beginn, würde ich mich freuen, wenn sie etwas genauer über sich, Ihre Arbeit und Ihr Engagement bei [Gruppe/Organisation] und darüber hinaus erzählen könnten...
 - Weg ins Engagement (Motivation, Ausbildung/Weiterbildungen)
 - Wie sieht Ihre Arbeit/Ihr Engagement praktisch aus

Entwicklung

2. Mich interessiert genauer, wie die Arbeit/Gruppe gestaltet ist und was Ihnen dabei wichtig ist...
 - Wie kam es dazu, dass Sie Kontakte/die Gruppe zustande und wie hat sich das seither entwickelt? (Welche Rolle haben Sie hierbei gespielt, was war ihre Motivation?)
 - Für wen ist das Angebot konzipiert/Mit wem arbeiten Sie aktuell zusammen? Teilnehmer*innen: Für wen ist die Gruppe gedacht? Wie sieht die Gruppe aktuell aus? Wer sind die Teilnehmer*innen, wie viele, wie regelmäßig?
 - Zugang: Wie wurden und werden Eltern auf das Angebot/die Gruppe aufmerksam (Hindernisse)?
 - Erstkontakt: Wie sieht ein typischer Erstkontakt zwischen Eltern und Ihnen/der Gruppe aus?

Situation

3. Ich würde gerne genauer verstehen, wie ich mir ein typischen Arbeitskontakt/ein typisches Treffen der Gruppe vorstellen kann...
 - Würden Sie mir Schritt für Schritt, gerne möglichst detailliert - von der Begrüßung bis zur Verabschiedung-, erzählen, wie das abläuft?
 - Wie würden Sie die (Gruppen-)Dynamik und Atmosphäre bei den Treffen der Elterngruppe beschreiben? Was ist Ihnen diesbezüglich wichtig?
 - Wie ist die Gruppe organisiert? Gibt es bei Ihnen z.B. bestimmte Regeln (z.B. Gesprächsordnung, Regelmäßigkeit der Teilnahme, Erwartungen)?
 - (Ich habe in der Zeit, in der ich Dich begleitet habe, folgende Dinge beobachtet...wie würdest du diese Situationen einschätzen?)
 - (Wie hat sich die Situation durch die aktuellen Bedingungen durch Corona verändert? Wie wirkt sich das auf die Gruppe und/Ihren Kontakt mit den Eltern aus?)

Rolle/Beziehung

4. Welche Rolle übernehmen Sie in der bei den Treffen/der Gruppe?
 - Welche Rolle, glauben Sie, übernehmen Sie für die Teilnehmer*innen und Eltern? Für welche Themen sind Sie Ansprechpartnerin (innerhalb der Gruppe und außerhalb der Gruppe)?
 - Was glauben Sie ist wichtig in dieser Arbeit/als Anleiterin einer solchen Gruppe? Was glauben Sie muss man, (wenn man eine solche Gruppe leiten möchte) mitbringen/beachten?
5. Wie würden Sie Ihre Beziehung zu den Eltern beschreiben?
6. Was ist Ihnen persönlich wichtig im Kontakt und Umgang mit den Eltern?

Themen

5. Über welche Themen wird (in der Gruppe) gesprochen, was ist für die Eltern relevant?
 - Inwiefern spielt das Thema frühkindliche Betreuung, Bildung und Erziehung eine Rolle?
 - Finden sich bzgl. der Themen Unterschiede zwischen den Eltern, z.B. in Bezug auf Fragen oder Herausforderungen?
 - Welche Wünsche/Bedürfnisse nehmen Sie seitens der Eltern wahr?
6. Inwiefern wirkt die Gruppe unterstützend für die Eltern?
7. Welche Wünsche/Pläne haben Sie bezüglich der Zukunft ihrer Arbeit/der Gruppe?

Abschluss

8. „Wir haben jetzt viel über Ihre Arbeit/die Elterngruppe gesprochen. Im Projekt spielen auch Zugänge zu Kinderbetreuungsangeboten allgemein eine Rolle...“.
9. Was müsste sich bei Ihrer Arbeit/ in ihrer Institution ändern, damit Sie besser arbeiten können?
10. Gibt es noch weitere Dinge, die Sie mir mit auf den Weg geben möchten...

Semi-structured Interview Guide – Participants



Forschungsprojekt der Leuphana Universität zum Zugang geflüchteter Eltern mit 0-5-jährigen Kindern zu frühpädagogischen Angeboten in Niedersachsen

Gespräche mit Familien

Einleitung: Informationen zu Projekt und zum Gespräch

- *Es geht uns im Rahmen des Forschungsprojekts darum, den Einstieg geflüchteter Familien zu Kinderbetreuung (zum Beispiel Kitas, Krippen) einfacher zu gestalten.*
- *Dafür untersuchen wir, wie das in der Praxis aussieht, d.h. wie geflüchtete Familien mit kleinen Kindern sich über Kinderbetreuungsangebote informieren, sich entscheiden, wie das Kennenlernen, die Anmeldung und die Eingewöhnung abläuft und welche Personen oder Organisationen vielleicht dabei unterstützen.*
- *Deshalb interessiere ich mich für Erfahrungen und Erlebnisse aus Ihrem Leben, zum Beispiel welche Rolle für Sie als Familie das Thema Kinderbetreuung spielt und welche Erfahrungen Sie damit gemacht haben*
- *Am Ende des Projekts planen wir, Empfehlungen für den Einstieg geflüchteter Familien in Kinderbetreuungsangebote zu entwickeln, um die Situation zu fördern*
- *Formalien:*
 - *Alles, was Sie sagen, bleibt vertraulich. Wir werten die Ergebnisse anonymisiert aus und stellen sie nur anonymisiert in Publikationen dar.*
 - *Tonbandaufnahme*
 - *Einverständniserklärung*

Einstieg

So, nun haben wir die Formalitäten erledigt und können mit dem Gespräch beginnen. Wir sind interessiert an Ihren Erfahrungen und Ihrer persönlichen Sichtweise. Sie können sich gerne Zeit lassen mit Ihren Antworten, auch für Einzelheiten, denn für mich ist alles interessant, was Ihnen wichtig ist.

1. Zu Beginn würde ich mich freuen, wenn Sie mir etwas über Ihre Familie erzählen könnten. Wer lebt hier mit Ihnen und wie sieht Ihr Alltag als Familie aus?
 - a. Kinder
 - b. Erziehungsverantwortung
 - c. Typischer Tag unter der Woche
 - d. *Wenn relevant:* Wer bringt die Kinder regelmäßig zur Kita bzw. wer steht in Kontakt mit der Kita (Elternabende etc.)?
 - e. Was ist Ihnen in der Kindererziehung wichtig?
 - f. Wie ist es, Mutter / Vater in Deutschland zu sein?

Betreuung der Kinder

2. Welche Unterstützung haben Sie bisher in der Betreuung Ihres Kindes/Ihrer Kinder erfahren?
 - a. Kita, Tagesmutter, Freunde, Verwandte, etc.
 - b. Wie ist das in Deutschland?
 - c. Wie war das im Herkunftsland?

Option A (Kinder schon in Betreuung)

Entscheidungsprozess

3. Wie ist es dazu gekommen, dass Sie Ihr Kind in/bei dieser [Kita / Tagesmutter / ...] angemeldet haben? Ich würde mich freuen, wenn Sie mir das Schritt für Schritt erzählen könnten, z.B. angefangen damit, wie Sie entschieden haben, nach Kinderbetreuung zu suchen und wie Sie Informationen über Angebote der Kinderbetreuung bekommen haben.
 - a. Woher wussten Sie von der Möglichkeit, Kinderbetreuung in Anspruch zu nehmen? Wie haben Sie von diesen Angeboten erfahren? Von wem haben Sie Informationen bekommen? Wie fanden Sie die Informationen, waren sie hilfreich? Fehlte Ihnen etwas?
 - b. Wie haben Sie Ihre Entscheidung getroffen, Ihr Kind in Betreuung zu geben? Welche unterschiedlichen Möglichkeiten gab es? Was für Gedanken haben Sie sich gemacht? Was waren für Sie Vor- oder Nachteile? Was haben Sie sich davon erhofft? Gibt es noch etwas, das Ihre Entscheidung beeinflusst hat?
 - c. Was war Ihnen beim Kennenlernen wichtig? Worauf haben Sie geachtet? Wie haben Sie sich mit den Angestellten gefühlt?
 - d. Was hat [Ehrenamtliche] gemacht? Wie war das für Sie? Wie haben Sie sich mit [Ehrenamtliche] gefühlt?
 - e. Was hat Ihnen an dieser [Kita / Tagesmutter / ...] gefallen? Was hat Ihnen weniger gefallen?

Anmeldung und Eingewöhnung

4. Wie ist es dann weitergegangen (mit der Anmeldung und Eingewöhnung)?
 - a. Wie haben Sie die [Kita / Tagesmutter / ...] kontaktiert und kennengelernt?
 - b. War da noch jemand mit dabei und was hat die Person gemacht?
 - c. Wie hat die Anmeldung bei der Kita funktioniert?
 - d. Wie war das für Sie, als Sie Ihr Kind dort zum ersten Mal dort gelassen haben? Wie war das für Ihr Kind?

Bewertung und aktuelle Situation

5. Jetzt haben Sie mir schon viel darüber erzählt, wie es dazu gekommen ist, dass Sie Ihr Kind in/bei dieser [Kita / Tagesmutter / ...] angemeldet haben. Wenn Sie an diese Phase zurückdenken, wie fühlen Sie sich damit? Ich würde mich freuen, wenn Sie versuchen könnten, Ihre Erfahrung einmal zusammenzufassen.
 - a. Was fanden Sie schwierig daran?
 - b. Was hat Ihnen geholfen?
 - c. Gibt es noch zusätzliche Informationen oder Unterstützung, die Sie gerne gehabt hätten?
6. Ich würde mich freuen, wenn Sie mir nun erzählen könnten, wie es für Sie ist, seitdem Ihr Kind in dieser [Kita / Tagesmutter / ...] ist.
 - a. Wie häufig und wie lange ist Ihr Kind [in der Kita / bei der Tagesmutter / ...]? Ist das für Sie gut so oder wünschen Sie sich mehr oder weniger Betreuung?
 - b. Wie ist das für Ihr Kind?
 - c. Was dachten Sie vorher, wie es wird, wenn Ihr Kind in der Kita ist, was haben Sie sich davon erwartet? Ist es so, wie Sie sich das vorgestellt haben? Was ist anders?
 - d. Was machen Sie, wenn Ihr Kind [in der Kita / bei der Tagesmutter / ...] ist? Wie verbringen Sie die Zeit?

Option B (Kinder noch nicht in Betreuung)

[Anknüpfend an Frage 2]

Derzeitige Situation und Möglichkeiten

7. Sie haben erzählt, dass Ihr Kind im Moment [*Betreuungssituation z.B., dass Sie zurzeit alleine für die Betreuung Ihrer Kinder zuständig sind*]. Ich würde mich freuen, wenn Sie mir erzählen könnten, wie diese Situation für Sie ist, wie Sie sich damit fühlen.
 - a. Bedarf nach Unterstützung
 - b. In welcher Form
 - c. Kommt es für Sie in Frage, Ihr Kind anderweitig betreuen zu lassen?
 - d. Was für Angebote kennen Sie? Wie haben Sie über diese Angebote erfahren?
 - e. Welche Angebote kommen für Sie in Frage und wie kommen Sie zu der Einschätzung? Was gefällt Ihnen an dieser [*Kita / Tagesmutter / ...*]? Was gefällt Ihnen weniger?

Anmeldung und Betreuung

8. Ich verstehe, dass Sie Ihr Kind gerne in der / bei der [*gewünschten Betreuung*] anmelden würden. Ich würde mich freuen, wenn Sie mir erzählen könnten, was da bisher passiert ist. Vielleicht können wir das einmal Schritt für Schritt durchgehen.
 - a. Kontaktaufnahme
 - b. Kennenlernen
 - c. Was hat [*Ehrenamtliche*] gemacht? Wie war das für Sie? Wie haben Sie sich mit [*Ehrenamtliche*] gefühlt?
9. Wissen Sie, wie es jetzt weitergeht?
 - a. Verfügbarkeit eines Platzes
 - b. Zeitraum

Bewertung

10. Wenn Sie an Ihre bisherigen Erfahrungen oder Kontakte mit Kinderbetreuung in Deutschland denken, wie fühlen Sie sich damit? Wie würden Sie Ihre Erfahrungen beschreiben/zusammenfassen?
 - a. Was fanden Sie schwierig daran?
 - b. Was hat Ihnen geholfen?
 - c. Gibt es noch zusätzliche Informationen oder Unterstützung, die Sie sich wünschen oder gewünscht hätten?

Semi-structured Interview Guide – Key Informants



Integration durch Vertrauen – Bedingungen des Vertrauensaufbaus geflüchteter Eltern mit 0-5-jährigen Kindern gegenüber frühpädagogischen Angeboten in Niedersachsen

Interviews mit Key Informants

Vorbemerkungen

Der Fragenkatalog dient als grundlegendes Repertoire an möglichen Fragen. Auf dieser Grundlage kann für die einzelnen Interviews jeweils ein Leitfaden erstellt werden, wobei der Fragenkatalog nach Bedarf angepasst werden kann. So können auch je nach Akteur*in unterschiedliche Schwerpunkte gesetzt werden, zum Beispiel auf die Themen Medien, Soziale Dienste und Ehrenamt.

Fragenkatalog

Einleitung

[Begrüßung, Vorstellung unseres Projekts, Ziele des Interviews, Frage nach Tonbandaufnahme u. kurze Erläuterung der Rechte]

Aufgabenfeld des Interviewees / der Organisation

Mögliche Zugänge geflüchteter Eltern zu frühpädagogischen Angeboten

1. Ich würde mich freuen, wenn Sie sich zunächst vorstellen könnten und mir knapp Ihr Aufgabenfeld beschreiben könnten/Vielen Dank. Ich interessiere mich jetzt zunächst einmal dafür, genauer zu verstehen, an welchen Stellen Sie mit frühpädagogischen Angeboten zu tun haben.
2. Dies könnten zum Beispiel folgendes beinhalten:
 - a. Maßnahmen (z.B. Projekte, Medien oder allgemeine Beratungsangebote), die speziell dafür geschaffen wurden, Zugang geflüchteter Eltern zu frühpädagogischen Angeboten herzustellen
 - b. Andere Wege, die nicht explizit für dieses Ziel geschaffen wurden, aber dennoch möglicherweise Zugang geflüchteter Eltern zu frühpädagogischen Angeboten ermöglichen
3. Welche dieser Wege halten Sie für besonders relevant um geflüchtete Eltern in Kontakt mit frühpädagogischen Angeboten zu bringen und warum (Häufigkeit, Zielerreichung)?

Ablauf der Interaktion mit geflüchteten Eltern innerhalb der relevanten Zugänge

Wir haben eben konkrete Maßnahmen identifiziert, über die geflüchtete Eltern möglicherweise Zugang zu frühpädagogischen Angeboten erhalten. In den nächsten Fragen würden wir gerne besprechen, wie die Interaktionen mit geflüchteten Eltern innerhalb dieser Maßnahmen typischerweise ablaufen und würden diese gerne Schritt für Schritt verstehen.

4. Wie findet im Rahmen der besprochenen Maßnahmen die Kontaktaufnahme mit Eltern statt?
 - a. Über welche Kanäle treten Eltern mit den besprochenen Maßnahmen in Kontakt (persönlich, telefonisch, per E-Mail, Anmeldeportal, Vermittlung durch andere Akteure)?
 - b. Inwiefern betreiben Sie Werbung für die Angebote (Online-Auftritte, Broschüren, Informationsveranstaltungen, Networking)?
 - c. Gehen Sie auch gezielt auf geflüchtete Eltern mit kleinen Kindern zu und wenn ja, wie?
 - d. Welche Personen agieren als persönliche Ansprechpartner für die geflüchteten Eltern? Können Sie uns eine typische Situation schildern, in der die Ansprechpartner:innen mit geflüchteten Eltern in Kontakt treten?
5. Wie werden Informationen über frühpädagogische Angebote typischerweise an Eltern vermittelt?
 - a. Über welche Kanäle werden Informationen vermittelt (persönliche Beratung, telefonisch, Online)?

Integration durch Vertrauen – Bedingungen des Vertrauensaufbaus geflüchteter Eltern mit 0-5-jährigen Kindern gegenüber frühpädagogischen Angeboten in Niedersachsen

- b. Welche Personen vermitteln diese Informationen (falls dies nicht die gleichen sind wie in der Kontaktaufnahme)?
 - c. Welche Medien werden zur Information und Aufklärung der Eltern bezüglich frühpädagogischer Angebote eingesetzt?
6. Findet eine Vermittlung von Eltern zu frühpädagogischen Angeboten statt? Wenn ja, wie sieht diese aus (z.B. Kontaktvermittlung, Begleitung, Hilfe bei Anmeldung)?
7. Was sind Besonderheiten in der Kontaktaufnahme und im Umgang mit geflüchteten Eltern im Vergleich zu nicht geflüchteten Eltern (Vorbereitungen, spezielle Fortbildungen, spezielle Kommunikationsstrategien, Herausforderungen)?
8. Ihrer Einschätzung nach, wie hoch ist das Interesse an frühpädagogischen Angeboten seitens geflüchteter Eltern? Besteht eine aktive Suche?

Vertrauen

9. Welche Rolle spielt Vertrauen in der Arbeit Ihrer Organisation mit geflüchteten Eltern?
 - a. Was ist im Arbeitsfeld Ihrer Organisation wichtig, um das Vertrauen geflüchteter Eltern gegenüber frühpädagogischen Angeboten zu ermöglichen?
 - b. Welche Herausforderungen treten in Bezug auf den Vertrauensaufbau zu geflüchteten Eltern auf? Inwieweit spielt der Fluchthintergrund dabei eine Rolle?

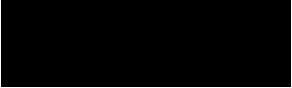
Hinweise zum weiteren Forschungsverlauf und Abschluss

10. Kennen Sie (weitere) konkrete Projekte, Organisationen oder kommunalpolitische Initiativen, die in diesem Bereich besonders relevant sind? Könnten Sie uns die relevanten Ansprechpartner nennen?
11. Halten Sie in Ihrer Organisation Informationen, die Aufschluss über den Zugang geflüchteter Eltern zu frühpädagogischen Angeboten geben, und die Sie mit uns teilen können (z.B. Projektanträge und -evaluationen, Statistiken)?
12. Fällt Ihnen noch etwas in Bezug auf den Zugang geflüchteter Eltern zu frühpädagogischen Angeboten ein, dass wir noch nicht besprochen haben oder möchten Sie sonst noch eine Anmerkung machen?

[Dank, Frage nach möglichem Kontakt bei Rückfragen, Unterzeichnung der Einverständniserklärung]

Appendix II: Articles

Article 1

Titel	The making and doing of migrant (m)others in Germany – subjectivation in the context of early childhood education and care.
Author Status	Co-authored with Prof. Dr. Philipp Sandermann Contribution of Vanessa Schwenker (lead author): - Conceptualization - Analysis - Writing of the initial draft of Chapters 1–4 Contribution of Philipp Sandermann - Supervision - Critical review - Writing of the initial draft of Chapter 5 Confirmed by Philipp Sandermann: 
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The making and doing of migrant (m)others in Germany – subjectivation in the context of early childhood education and care

Vanessa Schwenker and Philipp Sandermann

1 Introduction

“The mother, today, is to be more than a technician in child guidance. [...] She has been incorporated as an actual or potential ally into pedagogic programmes advocated by reformers. [...] If she plays her part well, the child's future life chances will be immeasurably enhanced; if she fails through ignorance or impatience to realize or to actualize such a learning scheme, woe betide her child when he or she enters school.” (Rose 1990: 178)

The above quote from Nikolas Rose outlines an ongoing social process that is restructuring family life in (post-) modern societies: the realignment of public and private responsibility. In German academic discourse, this is referred to as a “new attention to families” (Fegter et al. 2015). Among other things, this attention is associated with an activation of parental responsibility, an “expertisation and pedagogisation of everyday family life” (Thiessen/Villa 2010), an intensified focus on early childhood development and an increase in pedagogical support for and intervention in families (Jergus et al. 2018; Oelkers 2018).

However, in German early childhood education and care (ECEC), not all parents are included to an equal degree in pedagogical and educational programmes. On the one hand, Rose and Pape (2020), in their ethnographic study of childbirth-focused programmes, find that the participants primarily represent socially privileged groups (183). On the other hand, Betz and Bischoff (2018), using a discourse analysis of government policy documents, find that parenting abilities are politically defined as deficient especially when parents are judged to have a low socio-economic status, low levels of education, are single parents, have a ‘migration background’, are ‘culturally different’ or lack German language skills (39f.). The effect of these political differentiations is exemplified by interviews with day care professionals, in which nationality, culture and poverty present as partially interchangeable and problema-

tised categories (Betz/Bischoff 2017: 108f., 114; 2018: 40). Based on these social differentiations, the target groups of parenting education and the needs of participants are defined.

Ultimately, the addressees of ECEC in Germany, such as parenting education programmes, are selected and addressed within a nexus of various intersectional categories of inequality and difference, such as gender, class and migration. Operating within this context are differentiating and hierarchising ideas of 'good' vs. 'inequate' parenting and corresponding problematisations of 'parenting competences' (Jergus et al. 2018; Oelkers 2018).

Othering processes, such as those by which individuals are identified as migrants in racialising or culturalising ways, and the negative effects that can accompany these processes are increasingly reflected in broader academic and political discussions. Concepts of heterogeneity and diversity have also become more established. However, 'the migrant' continues to be a relevant professional and organisational category for potential addressees of social work and ECEC (Amirpur/Schulz 2022). The same applies to 'the mother' and the intersection of these two categories: 'the migrant mother' or migrantified motherhood. Corresponding positionings, attributions and invocations within ECEC in Germany have not yet been systematically analysed.

Research on power and knowledge relations have so far predominantly focused on broad international and national discourses (e.g., Henward 2018; Hunkin 2018) or on specific conceptualisations of care and education (Ailwood 2020; Aslanian 2022). Our study, on the other hand, places an ethnographic focus on actors not only as "globally embedded subject[s]" (Chandler 2013), but as subjects embedded into specific, local ECEC arrangements of parenting education in Germany. We will present empirical data from two parent groups. One group is closely linked to a federal parenting education programme in Germany. The other group became largely independent of this programme over time. We explored how parents who have children below the age of six and are perceived as 'women' and 'culturally different' are constructed as 'migrant mothers in Germany'. We will show that, empirically, the figure of the 'migrant mother' serves as an essential, intersectional reference point in the context of ECEC as she reconstructs the hierarchical practices in this field. In order to elaborate the nature of this process, we will first outline our theoretical and methodological perspective as well as our data corpus. We will then present some key findings from our analysis before discussing our research in light of recent academic debates on the interrelations between education, migration, family, and gender in ECEC.

2 Theoretical and methodological perspective

To capture the making and doing of migrant (m)otherness in Germany's ECEC field as a process, we draw from Foucauldian notions of subjectivation, knowledge and power. Foucault uses the term 'subject' in two different ways: An actor becomes "subject to someone else by control and dependence; and tied to his own identity by a conscience or self-knowledge" (Foucault 1982: 781). Along with this, 'subjectivation' is a formation process in which submission and self-modelling interact. Considering Foucault's definition of "the exercise of power as a mode of action upon the actions of others" (ibid.: 790), a certain scope of action must be given, since it is within this simultaneity of submission and mastery that directing action becomes possible: "Power is exercised only over free subjects, and only insofar as they are free" (ibid.). Through this simultaneity of submission and mastery, the subject appropriates power in creative ways and integrates it into an identity which continuously develops: "The subject is [...] an entity that performs its own creation but whose performances are built into orders of knowledge, into plays of force and relations of domination" (Bröckling 2016: 2).

Subjects are historically and spatially embedded into discourses and therefore depend on the reproduction of discursive truths or legitimate knowledge. The 'reiteration' of power inevitably implies discontinuities and deviation, and it also destabilises actors to some extent in their ability to perform as subjects, but mere resistance against this ongoing reiteration entails the risk of social exclusion or devaluation (Butler 1997: 11–16). Therefore, every performance as a subject is permeated and interpellated by a multiplicity of complementary but contradictory discourses and carries these contradictions within itself (Bröckling 2016: 2). A subject thus exists as being and becoming "in the gerundive, as that to be scientifically examined, pedagogically advanced, therapeutically supported, informed, legally sanctioned, aesthetically presented, politically administered, economically made productive, etc." (ibid.).

Building on these assumptions, Bosančić developed the analytical category of "subject positions" for empirical investigations of interactions between actors and discourses (Bosančić 2019: 93). Subject positions comprise discursively constructed subject conceptions and identities which are accompanied by "interpretive schemes, frames, storylines and dispositifs" (ibid.). Subject positions constitute belonging and therefore differentiate, normalize, stereotype, and thus include or exclude. As described by Butler, normative subject positions re-constitute in a process of repeated acts of recognition, which, according to Ricken, can be operationalised as practices of addressing and re-addressing (Ricken 2013: 92–94). Through this, actors are not merely integrated into verbal and non-verbal social practices but constituted as 'someone' and a 'self' in the first place. Actors are inevitably exposed to "addressings", i.e., they are forced to relate to being addressed in certain ways

and to the subject positions referenced herein – e.g., by interpretatively adopting, transforming, shifting, denying or rejecting them (Keller 2012: 102). Accordingly, (re-)addressings can be understood as an interactive practice of other- and self-positionings, in which subject positions and identities are processually (re-)constructed.

In our data analysis, we will draw from all of the aforementioned theoretical and methodological approaches and primarily use a terminology of subject positions, power and knowledge. Moreover, we will use the terminology of ‘other- and self-positionings’ to emphasise that relations between actors, subject positionings and corresponding practices of convergence and distinction emerge processually.

3 Data

Reconstructing the ‘doing and making of migrant mothers’ in ECEC requires a variety of empirical data. We therefore chose an ethnographic approach. However, the data collection period between September 2019 and September 2020 was interrupted by the COVID-19 pandemic, and the collection of data was therefore less systematic than originally planned. As a result, our material includes:

- a) observation reports, transcripts from several semi-structured and ethnographic interviews as well as documents from one parenting education group and its federal umbrella programme. This group (group 1) exclusively aims at the integration of children identified as migrants into ECEC services.
- b) five in-depth interviews with the parental guide and participants of another group of parents (group 2) which, over time, was hived off from the aforementioned federally funded programme and continued to be run by the parental guide on a voluntary basis.

In both groups, the interviews with the participants were (to be) accompanied by the parental guides, although it was also possible to provide translators, and participants were free to choose the place and time of the interviews. As a first finding from the field, we interpreted this as a self-positioning of the parental guides as guardians of the participants. Access to both groups was rather uncomplicated. In key informant interviews and ethnographic interviews, participants repeatedly emphasised the groups’ high reputation in their respective communities and the parental guides’ exceptionally high level of professionalism. In consequence, our collected data should be quite useful for our analysis of normative subject positions, other-positionings, and knowledge and power relations in the field, but it somewhat limits our perspective on the actual modes of subjectivation and the participants’ self-positionings. Due to the relatively small number of investigated cases,

we generally assume that there might be more subject positions and, in particular, modes of subjectivation than those that we found in our data. However, since little research has been done on the subjectivation of social actors as ‘migrant mothers’ in the context of ECEC in Germany, we are certain that our analysis at least offers some initial insights.

4 Analysis

For our analysis of the empirical data, we pursued four questions: 1. How are participants selected? 2. What subject positions are the participants provided with? 3. What other- and self-positionings of the participants can be found in the data? 4. What hierarchies of power and knowledge are being (re-)produced in this context? We will reflect on these questions as interrelated during our analysis section but answer them one by one in our conclusion.

In terms of its target group, the analysed parenting education programme explicitly refers to ‘migrant parenthood’, equating it with a ‘specific culture’ of the parents. On closer examination, the programme understands ‘migrant parenthood’ mostly as ‘migrant motherhood.’ The programme’s major focus on mothers is justified on the part of the parental guides and the project coordinators by the idea that women are more willing to participate, and that the earlier labour market integration of ‘migrant fathers’ limits their time for participation.¹ We saw this in both groups. Men (fathers) were explicitly excluded from group 1, and initially excluded from group 2.² Both parental guides argued that women would feel more comfortable without men given their cultural and religious backgrounds.³ Hence, already on the level of how participants are addressed, the group formats that were investigated draw from culturalising associations of migration with Islamic religiousness and traditional family images. This includes assumed gender relations that are seen as grounded in a) the families’ own virtues and beliefs, and b) the socio-structural conditions embedding them. In effect, there is a gender-specific ‘migrantness’ that is attributed to women and their (current) life situation, so the ‘migrant mother’ – as a woman – becomes the key person of her child’s (early) upbringing and advances to the primary addressee of parenting education. Consider this example from group 1:

1 Document analysis of official concept papers of the state-funded programme and Parental Guide Interview, Group 1

2 During our field phase, among the participants in Group 2, there was one father among about 20 participating women, as well as a voluntarily engaged “German elderly man” (Parental Guide Interview, Group 2).

3 Parental Guide Interview, Group 1 and Parental Guide Interview, Group 2.

"B: Well, you roughly know, because we work in cooperation with day care centres, the parents who could make a good use of it, with a cultural background, I would say [laughing]. So, the parents with a cultural background, we roughly know. From the locations sometimes, also from the day care centres. And also, the day care directors are very, very nice and they tell us, she or her could really make use of it and she wants to learn a bit more, do a bit more [...]" (Parental Guide Interview, Group 1)

The quote exemplifies a hierarchical and intersectional other-positioning that can be found regularly throughout our analysed data: The 'migrant mother' becomes selected and problematised as the primary addressee of parenting education. To this end, first a 'cultural background' is identified as a specific characteristic that allows for positioning mothers as 'culturally different' as compared to an assumed majority of the society. In a next step, 'migrant parenthood' is transformed into 'migrant motherhood.' By ascribing 'cultural (m)otherness' to the women personally, an individual need for educating and activating the 'migrant mother' is derived and linked to her subjective willingness and motivation.

The practices in the federal programme reflect these asymmetrical assumptions with respect to knowledge and power in ways not unusual in the field of social work. The programme's materials contain norms of early childhood education which are set as superior or complementary to the participants' knowledge, and which become continuously Germanized over the course of their amalgamation with German language training. In addition, the parental guide observes the mother-child interactions on site and invokes an ideal of 'responsive motherhood,' which entails attention to the child's needs and prioritizing them.⁴ In group 1, the 'migrant mother' is thus not merely addressed as a subject 'insufficiently qualified in educating her child', but also as a subject 'insufficiently qualified in caring for her child'. Concurrently, both parental guides describe the materials as inappropriate to the participants' actual abilities or needs and distance their work from a 'focus on deficits'. In group 1, which continues to operate under the umbrella of the federal programme, the attributions of deficits to the participants found in the materials are mitigated by adopting the programme's wording of 'educational inspirations' or by addressing the mothers as 'capable if motivated', and as 'great moms doing their best while being challenged in multiple ways by their living situation as a (recently) migrated person.'⁵

4 "Go and see what he [the child] needs"; "If she is not well, you have to put her [the child] to bed" (Observation Reports, Group 1)

5 "What they say is that in Germany you're never finished, you're always getting letters, you always have to go somewhere. [...] Sometimes when they have an appointment somewhere else in the morning, they have to go there, too, of course. But some of them attend for an hour and then excuse themselves. It's okay, it's all right. But as I said, sickness or sickness of a child can be a reason for not attending. And the weather sometimes. But I have to say, hats

The participants of both groups prefer to position themselves as 'strangers to the German language' and 'strangers to an (ECEC) system that relies on tacit knowledge' e.g., in relation to implicit practices of everyday (day care) life and the (pedagogical) goals behind them, or in relation to the implicit rules of behaviour in the day care centre. This tendency of the participants to resist a subjectivation as persons who need to self-optimize as educators or caregivers for their children is important, because it places at least some of the responsibility for disclosing tacit knowledge to mothers and children – and thus responsibility for integration (into ECEC) – on German society and its institutions such as day care centres. In contrast, the available position of the 'self-optimizing caregiver or educator of one's own children' ascribes this responsibility primarily to the mother herself.

Rejecting the materials' deficit attributions, and in accordance with the participants' self-positionings as 'strangers to the German language', both groups focus on supporting the participants in acquiring German. However, gaining command of the German language becomes associated with the participants' willingness, motivation and courage to connect socially. The participants are repeatedly advised to actively participate in formal or informal language learning, and to privately seek contact with German speakers.⁶ In turn, the participants describe both groups as German language-related formats. In keeping with this perception, the participants submit to their own responsabilisation and interpellate themselves and each other.⁷ In consequence, the field discursively ties the acquisition of the German language to a whole chain of associations about how to successfully assimilate as a 'migrant mother' in Germany:

"[...] But then comes the war and it was very bad and we are here, had to (...), it's hard. But (...) I, um [sighs] how can I say this? When I'm under stress // Um (...) I say, I thought, I have to be a role model for my children, for my friend [feminine form], for my husband, for everybody. They can't understand what life is here in Germany. [...] For example, I was the first in my family to learn German. Yes. // For example, the older daughter was very sad, she didn't want to stay here, she wanted to go back [laughing]. And she [laughing], yes. Oh [sighs] yes, that's why I thought, I have to start, so that they see and yes, okay, we have to learn German, that's the first step. And also, for the other women, I/sometimes, or not sometimes ALWAYS we have to, we have to learn German, if we can speak well, then we have the possibilities, so society is opened, opened for us. And now they have noticed, for

off, actually hats off, they're always heroically out there." (Parental Guide Interview, Group 1).

6 Parental Guide Interview, Group 1; Parental Guide Interview, Group 2; Observation Reports, Group 1

7 Observation Reports, Group 1 and Interviews of Participants 1–4, Group 2

example my friend [feminine form] has not yet done an integration course, because they have small children. But when we cook together in a course and I talk to the others, to the guests and they say: '[name of the interviewee] you can explain to us, we have to learn German' [laughing]. Well, that helps, that makes more, I don't know in German, confidence, // self-confident, yes." (Interview of Participant 4, Group 2)

The quote illustrates the linkage of German language acquisition with access to and participation in German society, with women's opportunities and empowerment, and with the intersecting role of the mother, who is primarily responsible for her own assimilation and that of her children. As a migrant and (married) woman, the interviewee expresses a keen commitment to participating in society, which she associates with gaining educational and professional opportunities, and to becoming independent of German-language support. Young children are depicted as a constraint to learning German and taking advantage of opportunities. Alongside the ideal of the 'self-sufficient woman', the norm of the 'working mother' is latent here. In further material, a culturalising and gendering logic is reproduced when independence from translational support is repeatedly emphasised only in relation to the husband.⁸ As a migrant and mother, the subject is interpellated as someone who should acquire German primarily for the sake of her child. The German language is characterised as an inevitable tool for becoming a 'capable mother', namely one who actively engages in the child's early education.

The use of the German language is made a public duty of the 'migrant mother'. In particular, it is linked to participation in parents' nights and conversations with day care professionals:

"[...] Sometimes it's really like that, it's also about the day care professionals' conferences with the parents. And ok, should I go or not? And when I go, do I understand everything, do you think? Yes, please, I say, shoulders back and head up. And first of all, you have to present yourself and stand there as a mum, and that is very important. Especially for your child it is very important, mum takes it seriously and mum is there for me, she is going." (Parental Guide Interview, Group 1)

The approach exemplified in this quote is similar to 'on-the-job learning', with activity emphasized over language skills as a criterion for being and becoming a 'capable mother.' As 'migrant mothers,' the actors are interpellated to become active mediators for their child's educational interest. Here, the subject position of the 'responsive mother' is actualised and expanded, so that the needs of the child are not only

8 Observation Report, Meeting of the Parental Guides and Observation Report, Parental Guide Certificate Award of the Parenting Education Programme

perceived and met but are also confidently represented in the institutional context. It is thus not only German language skills, but also the courage to speak and thereby individually confront systemic exclusion that is discursively set as the norm for the 'model migrant mother' who overcomes insecurities and acts confidently on behalf of herself and her child with regard to all educational matters.

As a counterpart of the 'model migrant mother,' there is another subject position: the mother who loses contact with, and access to, her increasingly German-speaking child. Such maternal passivity is associated with depression and trauma following (forced) migration and with feelings of shame or insecurity regarding the unquestionable dominance of the German language. It is represented most powerfully in various participants' self-positionings.⁹

Since the child's integration into ECEC institutions is equated with the child's participatory and developmental opportunities in general, the activation of the 'migrant mother' is intertwined with the overall integration of her children into German society. Attending supportive or educational activities such as parenting education or self-help-groups is defined as a performative moment of the actor's 'integration efforts.' Against this background, the motivation or activity versus passivity of the 'migrant mother' are psychologised and characterised in ECEC contexts as an opportunity or, conversely, a risk for the child's integration into society. Concurrently, having young children is viewed as a risk for the migrant mothers' integration into education and the labour market. In turn, the act of becoming a 'model migrant mother' serves as a success story for women who accept support and thereby actively overcome the subject position of a 'failed migrant mother' who would have decided to withdraw into the private sphere.

This relation of knowledge and power is reflected not only in the subject positions available for both groups' participants, but also in those available for the parental guides. The latter, as such, can actively serve as a role model. The degree to which they do so varies, however. Also, a state of 'permanent becoming' is crucial to the part they play. At the awarding of the parental guide certificates, this story is repeatedly performed:

"Michaela announces a short introduction of the parental guides. They rise and line up next to her. Michaela asks Selma to begin. Selma clears her throat,

9 "Well, our children have already had a difficult life, and that's why I try to be there for my children as a mother. Sometimes it's very difficult, because I have to be strong and I don't feel strong. And I want to be there for my children, but sometimes I don't know how to cope with it. But I have to do it. Because they don't deserve anything else." (Interview of Participant 4, Group 2); "[...] well, yes, my husband and I always try to learn at home [the German language] (.) always, or (.) with the children [laughing], a little bit, not much actually, I learn because I'm always afraid of them forgetting our mother language" (Interview of Participant 3, Group 2); "In the beginning, you are depressed." (Interview of Participant 2, Group 2).

steps forward, introduces herself with her full name and reports which group she is leading. She smiles a little nervously and says – And yes, I am a mother of four myself and this is my first job – She explains that she was asked by the day care centre whether she could imagine leading a group here. At first, she was very nervous about it, but over time she has gained a lot of self-confidence. [...] Now she can transfer this self-confidence to the participants of her group, Selma says. Strong developments can be observed here. The women are doing more and more things on their own, such as conversations in the day care centre or school, where they would never have gone before without their husbands. She learned a lot during her time in the project, Selma says. She thanks the team. [...] Applause and cheers. Selma smiles and steps back.” (Observation Report, Parental Guide Certificate Award of the Parenting Education Programme)

Here, the parental guides position themselves and are positioned as ‘migrant mothers’ among others. However, there is a hierarchy. The subject position of the ‘model migrant mother’ is largely embodied by pedagogically professionalised parental guides, while the pre-professionalised parental guide in the report quoted above is still in the process of becoming a ‘model migrant mother,’ yet at an advanced level. Chosen either by day care professionals or by project employees among former participants, the pre-professionalised parental guide represents someone who proved worthy of being positioned as a parental guide ‘in the making’ and who works up to four hours per week, which itself is framed as a first step towards (gendered) labour market integration.

The two fully professionalised parental guides that we observed and interviewed during this study both self-position as ‘mentors’ and role models of their participants. In group 1, the parental guide self-referentially addresses topics of settling in Germany, of handling corresponding challenges (while having children), and of everyday family life in Germany.¹⁰ In doing so, the parental guide invokes possible paths of ‘good migrant motherhood’ through the life experiences making her a ‘model migrant mother’ and less explicitly through her professionalised knowledge as a parental guide. Against the background of such expertise, the parental guide is accepted as an authority who can legitimately make judgements regarding the subjective emotionality of the participants.

Similarly, parental guide 2 adopts a frame of reference that situates migrant motherhood not only in the everyday context of family, education and work, but also in the political public sphere.¹¹ She explains her motivation for initiating the group and its activities – in which the participants frequently address the public and aim for social recognition of migrated people and of cultural diversity in the

10 Observation Reports, Group 1

11 Parental Guide Interview, Group 2

community – by describing herself as a mother who will not acquiesce to racism suffered by her children in German society. She thereby serves as an example of a new identity assumed by the ‘migrant mother’, that of an actor for social change motivated by her own children’s future well-being. This implies an interpellation of the participants, insofar as they are addressed as mothers and migrants who, as such, can perform as co-creators of the group’s activities.

All interviewed participants of group 2 describe their children’s well-being and healthy development as their top priority. This is associated with the child’s participation in the day care centre, which is further described as indispensable for the mothers’ participation in language or integration courses. At the same time, the day care centre is positioned as a partially non-inclusive institution for non-German-speaking children and as an institution without a ‘proper’, i.e., school-like, educational mandate. Concerning their children’s negative experiences in German society, some participants additionally blame themselves for having left their home country, and for exposing their children to flight or to their new life in Germany.

When asked what it is like for her to be a mother in Germany, one of the interviewed participants of group 2 describes it as an exhausting and difficult search for balance, because “you cannot allow everything that is possible here, but you cannot forbid everything either”.¹² When asked how she is currently dealing with this, the interviewee and the parental guide who is acting as an interpreter both start laughing. The parental guide comments: “You just brought up a painful subject. For all of us”, and thus generalises the search for balance as a universal experience of all ‘migrant mothers’. The interviewed participant elaborates:

“The most difficult thing about your question is that we have to establish a balance between our own ideas of values, of customs, of traditions, of basic religious attitudes that we have brought with us, which we would like to pass on to our children [...] and that the children will also experience many other influences, and see many other things, and I always try to tell my children that we should not become a copy of people in this society and that they will never become a copy of us, but that there has to be a middle way somewhere. So that you don’t blindly imitate everything, um, but somehow maintain your own identity. But you still have to adapt to the extent that you can cope.” (Interview of Participant 1, Group 2)

In this quote, the participant describes migration as being in conflict with parenting. The aim of good parenting is to balance the child’s appropriation and rejection of knowledge and practices. On the one hand, the participant describes her child as potentially open to (too) many influences from outside the family. On the other

12 Interview of Participant 4, Group 2

hand, the child is assumed to be carrying a familial and cultural identity that has to be maintained and should only adapt as much as necessary in Germany.

The parental guide's laughter and her comment during the quoted interview may be interpreted as her conviction that, in the end, even the 'model migrant mother' cannot fully control her child's future in German society. In another interview conducted solely with her, she refers to the previous interview and, in this context, describes not only the 'migrant child' but also the 'migrant mother' as an 'open and transforming identity':

"[...] for example, like [person] today, she said, yes, if the children get naked [in the day care centre], what's going to happen with them? And so on. I have a lot of understanding for that and I would then tell her, yes, exactly, I always had those fears too and so on and so forth. But then I would try to explain [...] that, maybe, from the other perspective, there could also be a reason why you raise children like that. And then I would go back and say, but that doesn't mean that you necessarily have to do it the same way and that you will also/you yourself might also change, so that the attitude you have today might be different in five years and, um, that you also don't know how your child will develop and that you, um, also have to prepare for that. We try to pass on our values to our children, but that doesn't mean that they will keep them, let alone put them into practice. And that it is a consequence of living in a foreign place." (Interview Parental Guide, Group 2)

Here, the 'migrant mother' is positioned as an initially powerless participant, as far as her child's and her own development in Germany are concerned. She is seen as fearful of the possibility of her child developing 'wrongly' in German society and ECEC. As a 'stranger to the system,' she can only prevent this by becoming familiar with it. Only on this basis will she supposedly be truly capable of remaining resistant to certain aspects of educational systems in Germany. Again, this provides for a subject position of a highly competent, active mother – a 'model migrant mother.' Likewise, the parental guide repositions as such a role model. She depicts herself as an expert on the subjective emotionality and development of 'migrant mothers' and describes her approach as slow and gentle guidance regarding (ECEC) system knowledge and practices. This practice of gently guiding the 'migrant mother' via education, role modelling, and gradual exposure implies an ongoing approximation of the 'migrant mother' to the prevailing knowledge and power hierarchies in Germany.

5 Conclusion and Discussion – Governing ECEC via the ‘migrant mother’

To conclude, we will first answer our four leading research questions and then inquire into the implications for gender- and migration-related governmentality and subjectivation studies in the context of ECEC.

Firstly, we can infer from our analysis that participants of the investigated groups are selected through official documents, materials, interactive positionings and direct address as ‘culturally different’, ‘female’, ‘socio-economically deprived’, ‘child-raising’, and – for all of these reasons – as only potentially ‘active subjects’ who are ‘in need of educational and German-language support’ in order to achieve an active state. Our data suggests that one or more of the above aspects are highlighted in various ways when the participants are addressed, and this provides multiple opportunities to attribute deficits or potential to the participants.

Secondly, in our data, we were able to identify two main subject positions that the participants are provided with during their participation in the parenting education groups. The first subject position radicalises the inherent deficits that each participant is addressed with as a beginner: It is the subject position of a (potentially) ‘failed migrant mother’, who withdrew from responsibility for herself and her child and who seeks shelter in the private sphere, fearfully hoping for the best for her children, but unable to guide, educate, or even care for her children, since her withdrawal ensures that she will remain a disoriented, uneducated and passive migrant woman herself. As a counterpart to this, there is the subject position of the ‘model migrant mother.’ She embodies activeness and sovereignty and overcomes cultural and educational exclusion step by step on her own and her children’s behalf. She proves worthy to serve as a role model for other ‘migrant mothers’, which is why she can play the part of a subject who, during a permanent act of becoming, moves up the career ladder of a specifically gendered and ‘migrantified’ field of parenting education, and presumably beyond.

Thirdly, we were able to identify other- and self-positionings of the participants in our data that complement the subject positions described above. We were able to identify two main types of other-positionings: There are quite openly ‘deficit-oriented’ positionings of the participants, mainly expressed through the programme’s materials and organisational set-up. However, both parental guides engage with these other-positionings only indirectly when they either relativise the federal programme’s framework and materials as mere ‘educational inspirations’ and shift the focus to language acquisition (group 1), or even formally detach their group context from the programme (group 2), with the effect of politicising its participants as something akin to activists who claim social recognition for themselves in German society. In both cases, the participants are positioned as ‘capable if motivated’, which qualifies them to become all-important subjects of individual and societal change. As a complementary counterpart, we were able to identify other-positionings of the

'migrant child' as an ever evolving and transforming object of parenting. This, in turn, serves as an important relata for positioning their mothers as potentially flexible, self-transforming subjects.

In sum, our data indicates that there is a distinct complex of power and knowledge in the broader context of parenting education in Germany. Its inherent hierarchy builds on an amalgamized norm of 'modern education', 'maternal passion' and 'German culture'. 'Migrantified' actors play an important role in submitting to these norms and at the same time mastering them. As subjects, the actors are offered key positions as model 'migrant mothers in Germany'. As such, they do not only maximize their chances of achieving subjective freedom and self-sufficiency but also serve as useful co-facilitators of a migrantified, gendered regime of 'modern education' in Germany.

Our findings on how the participants of the investigated groups are being positioned as 'migrant mothers' with reference to a broader, neo-liberal regime of migrantification and gendered responsabilisation in Germany (Chamakalayil et al. 2022) coincide with findings from other empirical studies. Arriving at results similar to our own, Nordberg (2015), for example, was able to show ethnographically that actors find themselves positioned as 'migrant mothers' in various contexts and must find ways to relate to these other-positionings. In contrast to our research, this study focused on the actors' self-positionings across different institutional contexts. However, Nordberg states that "following from the understanding of the 'self' as an embedded subject, it becomes analytically meaningful to explore notions of locality, of places and spaces of formal and informal interaction." (ibid.: 68)

Our study revealed some particular relations between power, knowledge and subjectivation in the field of parenting education. Such research proves worthwhile in theoretical terms, as it makes broader Foucauldian assumptions regarding contemporary forms of governing (under conditions of neoliberalisation) more tangible. With our narrow focus on the field of parenting education in Germany, we were able to show that here, governing as a "conduct of conduct" (Rose/Miller 1992: 184) becomes visible as a mostly implicit interplay between actors, discourses and subjectivation in which group participants become selected, individualized, responsabilised and activated as 'migrant mothers in Germany'. As such, these subjects are key to an ongoing exercise of power, not only in society more broadly, but also in the narrower field of ECEC.

They play this key role because, as 'migrant mothers', they are being mobilized and mobilize others as individuals, no matter which of the two available subject positions that we identified in our study they take up or decline to adopt. Those who choose to embody the 'model migrant mother' directly represent values of individualism, responsabilisation, activeness and, therefore, the deservingness of being selected as a 'role model', which in turn secures their integration as a 'modernised', albeit (m)othered self. In effect, the subject position they take corresponds with the

neoliberal, 'enterprising' or 'entrepreneurial self' (Rose 1990, Bröckling 2016). As an alternative to taking this position, participants are 'free' to serve as a contrast to that model – the disoriented, uneducated and passive migrant woman who is incapable of taking appropriate care of her children. With either 'choice', the 'migrant mother' is key to representing a subject position amidst 'standards for conduct' (Rose/Miller 1992: 184) for a neo-liberal regime of a migrantified, gendered society and its system of early childhood education and care.

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Article 2

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The Diverse Subjects of Early Childhood Parenting Education

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1 Disentangling Diversity & Difference

In recent decades, "diversity" has become a central concept in numerous areas of society and academia. Discussions surrounding the term usually focus on the recognition of differences in the social sphere, in the biological sphere and between bodies (Bührmann, 2020, pp. 34-38). This focus relates to questions of inclusion and exclusion, standardization and normalization as well as representation and anti-discrimination.

In socio-political, socio-economic, educational and socio-scientific discussions, diversity is usually discussed in relation to a specific context: organizations and institutions. The focus is on the organizational implementation and administration of diversity management, diversity policies, diversity practices and diversity workers (Villeséche et al.; 2018; Ahmed, 2012). On the one hand, diversity refers to personnel-related practices and management, i.e., workforces. On the other hand, the debate extends to the addressees of certain organizations, such as customers, students or clients, shifting focus to the organizational mission.

Bührmann (2020) categorizes diversity research in the social sciences into two perspectives: a positivist-functionalist approach and a critical approach to diversity (pp. 38-46).

In positivist-functionalist approaches, diversity is described as an objectively given fact and as a bundle of personal characteristics (Bührmann, 2020, p. 40). The focus here is on the conceptualization of diversity management. Villeséche et al. (2018) describe the historical development of diversity management as a shift from a focus on social injustice, which manifests itself in debates about discrimination, equality, group-based differentiation and inequalities within groups, to a focus on individual characteristics, which is based on economic rationality (p. 14). In such a perspective, social differences are perceived as resources and instrumentalized for economic purposes (Bührmann, 2020, p. 107).

Critical approaches draw on the principles of critical theory or post-structuralist thinking (see chapter 2). They are based on the premise that diversity and difference are not simply ontologically given to be identified, managed and utilized, but are socially produced in the first place. Diversity is understood in terms of social processes of differentiation. These processes are embedded in the structural context of society as a whole, beyond the organizational framework (Bührmann, 2020; Villeséche et al., 2018; Formanek, 2016; Kelly et al., 2020; Jones, 2004; Ahmed & Swan, 2006; Ahmed, 2012; Ahonen et al., 2014).

Both positivist-functionalist and critical approaches regard diversity as a phenomenon to be addressed in the context of social practice. The term is used to define organizational social and educational missions and practices (Ahmed & Swan, 2006, p. 96). With regard to their practical relevance, both approaches are linked to normative strategies that involve either transforming social differences from a vertical, hierarchical structure to a horizontal,

egalitarian stance, or conceptualizing diversity as a political practice for the empowerment of marginalized groups, or focusing on the deconstruction of social differences (Tischhauser, 2023, pp. 11-24). In this context, a dilemma arises between the reproduction of social differences through their designation on one hand, and a critical view of the powerful effects of social differences on the other (Tischhauser, 2023, p. 13). Accordingly, critical approaches underscore the need to shift focus away from specific categories of difference towards empirical analysis of power relations and the processes of social differentiation (Bühmann, 2020: p. 12; Tatli & Özbilgin, 2012, p. 189). Further, the inherent normativity of critical perspectives themselves is emphasized, and there is a focus on the question of which norms are confirmed or challenged by the critique of differentiation processes (Arbeitsgruppe Inter Kultur, 2010, p. 22).

2 Differentiation in Social Work & Early Childhood Education

Mecheril and Melter (2010) characterize differentiation practices as a fundamental logic within social work that continually distinguishes between groups to determine eligibility for support (p. 117) and highlight the profession's dual role in enabling inclusion and exercising disciplinary power (p. 128). Against the background of this logic of differentiation, the addressees of social work are defined and selected (Mecheril & Melter, 2010, p. 119). Relevant points of reference include the attribution of 'migration experiences' and culture (Mecheril & Melter, 2010, p. 127). In this context, Eppenstein (2010) identifies a paradigm shift from homogenization or normalization towards supporting cultural 'others' in their 'otherness' (p. 96). Heite (2008) delineates a shift from 'inequality' to 'difference', and then to 'diversity', noting that the concept of diversity often entails an affirmative stance towards presumed differences, including those related to culture (pp. 77-78). In light of this, Georgi & Karakaşoğlu (2021) caution against allowing a focus on an attributed 'migration background' to obscure other important dimensions of inequality (pp. 11-12). Furthermore, Formanek (2016) underscores the importance of critical diversity research and the need for social work practices to engage thoughtfully with cultural attributions, thoroughly examining these processes and their societal implications (p. 23).

A closer look at the field of family education in Germany reveals that in this field, there is also a noticeable shift towards a greater focus on diversity. This shift has led to a more nuanced differentiation of its target group, taking into account factors such as migration background and cultural identity. At the same time, an activation of parental responsibility, a shift in public intervention, an expansion of educational support for parents and families with a special focus on early childhood, and a focus on educational and parental competences can be observed in this field (Fegter et al., 2015; Jergus et al., 2018; Oelkers, 2018). In a study on the relationship between parents and childcare centers, Özlem & Otyakmaz (2021) observe a general devaluation of migrant parents and their ideas about early childhood education. Criticism is also directed at ethnocentric quality models in early childhood education (Lengyel & Braband, 2021). Based on a discourse analysis of government policy documents, Betz and Bischoff (2018) show that parenting skills are politically defined as deficient in particular when parents are ascribed a low socio-economic status, a low level of education, single parenthood, a migration background, a cultural difference or a lack of German language skills (pp. 39-40). The effect of these differentiations is exemplified in interviews with childcare workers, in which nationality, culture and poverty are presented as partially interchangeable and problematized categories (Betz & Bischoff, 2018, p. 40).

In her analysis for the Ninth German Family Report, Fischer (2021) emphasizes the role of 'bridge persons' in family education with migrantified¹ parents – an expression already implying differences that need to be bridged. The required skills of 'bridge persons' are identified as bilingualism, an awareness of the heterogeneity of the target group, knowledge of the addressees' living situation and family culture, understanding of the education system as well as empathy and discretion (Fischer, 2021, p. 157). Considering this concept of bridge-builders, Heite (2008) addresses the problematic positioning of migrantified professionals in social work as 'native informants'. This positioning implies that the professional's migration experiences and cultural affiliations provide better access to certain target groups (Heite, 2008, pp. 84-86). Such positioning, however, tends to depreciate their professional competence and reduce it to merely ethnic or cultural affiliations, whereby migrantified social workers are apt to be viewed as tools for reaching specific target groups (Heite, 2008, pp. 84-86). Heite argues that this positioning constructs 'professional others' as 'representatives of others', potentially devaluing their professional identity and skills (Heite, 2008, p. 85). This discussion resonates with broader analyses of the nuanced positioning of diversity practitioners, albeit in different settings such as educational institutions (Ahmed, 2012). Such examinations reveal that within the framework of diversity and difference in social work, the construction of identities extends beyond the recipients of services to include the professionals themselves on the provider side, highlighting the complex interplay of positionings and differentiations within the field.

This outline of the current German research landscape relevant to diversity and early childhood parenting education reveals that the focus is either on evaluative studies (Fischer, 2021) or on studies critically engaging with positioning processes. However, these studies often concentrate on either the positioning of parents (Betz & Bischoff, 2018; Özlem & Otyakmaz, 2021) or the positioning of professionals (Heite, 2008), rather than examining these positionings in a relational, interactive context.

3 Analyzing Diversity: Conceptualizing Recognition beyond Affirmation

As hinted at in the previous chapter, this article adopts a critical perspective on diversity. These approaches can be divided into those based on critical theory and those based on post-structuralist theory. Without delving into the broad debate as to what similarities or differences exist between these two theoretical positions (with regard to diversity see Villesèche et al., 2018), the article alludes to post-structuralist considerations.

Post-structuralist approaches emphasize the fluidity of identities and the social construction of categories. Identity and diversity are addressed here as a constant process of becoming. The focus is on the relationship between power and identity formation (Villesèche et al., 2018). Social differentiations are understood as having both symbolic and material effects, i.e., they structure and constitute experiences while normalizing and subjectifying individuals (Mecheril, 2008, para. 6). Mecheril (2008) notes that incorporating the notion of subject positions into the analysis of power dynamics is essential for a fuller understanding of how identities and relationships are dynamically shaped within the context of diversity (para. 4). This article builds on these considerations but extends them to considerations on recognition

¹ The term 'migrantified' refers to social processes of 'migrantification,' where subjects are positioned as migrants (see, e.g., Forkert et al., 2020, pp. 146-148). Within the framework of recognition theory and differentiation, this term indicates that in certain contexts, specific subjects are recognized as migrants, while others are not.

theory and addressing analysis formulated by Ricken (2013) and collaboratively by Rose and Ricken (2018), as this extension situates identities and relationships in interactive processes and clarifies the underlying structure of these interactions.

Subject positions include discursively constructed subject conceptions and identities, which are accompanied by "interpretive schemes, frames, storylines and dispositifs" (Bosančić, 2019, p. 93) – they constitute belonging and therefore differentiate, normalize, stereotype and thus include or exclude. Following Butler's framework, normative subject positions are constituted in acts of recognition, which according to Ricken can be operationalized as addressings and re-addressings (Ricken, 2013, pp. 92-94). This assumption builds on Butler's (1997) reflections on subject formation through interpellations, i.e., the process of addressing someone as someone, whereby this person becomes someone in the first place. Rose and Ricken (2018) extend this idea by conceptualizing addressings not only as specific interpellations based on broad social categories, such as 'citizen' or 'girl', but as a fundamental structure of interaction and communication. Acts of communication or interaction are understood as implicitly or explicitly directed towards one or more recipients (p. 166). According to Rose and Ricken (2018), addressings (1) select by choosing someone as addressee, whereby a differentiation is made from those who are not addressed; (2) normalize by (re-)constructing and legitimizing situational orders or frameworks; (3) position and relate by assigning positions and placing them in relation to each other; and (4) value by explicitly and implicitly linking (re-)addressings to value attributions (p. 168). Ricken (2013) points out that the valuation inherent in (re-)addressings encompasses more than mere positive or negative judgments, extending to intricate assessments like the evaluation of development potential and the consideration of varied temporal perspectives (p. 96). This approach opens up a broader perspective on recognition processes, as it proposes an analytical consideration of the variety of possible valuations instead of prematurely categorizing them in normative terms.

Recognition, conceptualized as (re-)addressing, is not normative. Recognition is not seen as a positive affirmation, but also includes non-recognition or disregard (Ricken, 2013, p. 96). Recognition refers to the process in which specific identities and roles are not only ascribed to individuals in specific situations but are also constructed in differentiation from others. A subject position is constructed in relation to other subject positions or self-related to past subject positions (Ricken, 2009, as cited in Alkemeyer & Pille, n.d., p. 10). Recognition, conceptualized as (re-)addressing, thus implies differentiation and goes beyond reproduction by also focusing transformation. This process is linked to norms of recognizability, i.e., overarching, often implicit rules and standards that define which behaviors, characteristics or identities are considered worthy of recognition in a certain social context and thus structure the possibility of recognition, both positive and negative, and the overarching criteria of difference formation (Alkemeyer & Pille, n.d., p. 10).

Individuals are inevitably exposed to addressings. They are forced to refer to certain addressings and the subject positions referenced therein – e.g., by interpretatively adopting, transforming, shifting, denying or rejecting them (Keller, 2012, p. 102; Ricken, 2013, p. 83). This means that even though subject positions are an important aspect of subjectivation, they do not coincide with identity or subjectivation, i.e., they do not determine self-positioning (Bosančić, 2019, p. 94).

Adopting a theoretical framework grounded in recognition theory and address analysis (Ricken, 2013; Rose & Ricken, 2018) facilitates an examination of diversity, in line with

Fuchs (2007), as an outcome of socio-historically variable and contextually specific social differentiations and interpretative processes (p. 17). Additionally, this approach avoids predefining specific categories of difference. By analyzing how (re-)addressings select, normalize, assign (subject) positions, relate and value, attention is paid to how acts of recognition within social contexts establish or consolidate hierarchical or horizontal differentiations that contribute to the constitution and maintenance of social orders and power relations beyond these settings.

Given these theoretical considerations, ethnographic approaches are particularly suitable for studying recognition and addressing practices, as they focus on identifying and reconstructing field-specific practices and how these interact to produce social order. This method allows for an open analytical focus, extending beyond material boundaries to capture discursive practices that shape power relations, norms, and knowledge orders within the field (Kuhlmann, 2023, pp. 84-85).

4 Data & Limitations: Early Childhood Parenting Education Provided by Parental Guides

This article draws on a study using an ethnographic approach, conducted within a regional initiative aimed at enhancing access to early childhood services in a medium-sized city in Lower Saxony, Germany. The focus is on one component of this initiative: a parenting education program that was accompanied over a four-month period. The data include: a) observational reports from various contexts, including weekly meetings of a parents' group in one district, group leaders' meetings, and project team meetings, b) three semi-structured interviews, c) ethnographic interviews, and d) documents and printed materials collected during the fieldwork.

The data were selected using theoretical sampling, allowing for the identification and exploration of emergent themes and the discovery of new contexts, subjects, and documents relevant to the research question and field. Access to the group meetings observed was fairly straightforward. In previous key informant interviews with project coordinators, the group's high participation rate, the parental guide's high level of professionalism and her 'excellent relationship work' were highlighted. The other district groups are not led by staff experienced in parenting education but by 'group leaders' who undergo training within the program to become parenting guides. This differentiation between parental guides will be further explored in chapter 5.3. Access to the other district groups (led by group leaders) was not arranged until well into the data collection and then proved unfeasible due to the COVID pandemic. As a result, the data do not cover the full range of practices in parenting education in this specific project and local context. However, given that differentiation practices in parenting education in Germany likely vary across different programs, regions, and contexts, this study provides a foundation for future comparative studies.

Against this background, it is important to emphasize that this article does not aim to evaluate the practices of a single parenting education program. Instead, the study's critical perspective aims to illustrate logics and frames of differentiation within parenting education, conceptualizing diversity not as a practice for escaping power, but as a powerful practice of recognition itself. In this context, power is primarily understood as productive, meaning it constructs, reconstructs or deconstructs subjects (Foucault, 1982, p. 781).

5 Findings: Becoming a Subject of Early Childhood Parenting Education

To investigate the research question of how participants become subjects of parenting education through differentiation in a specific parenting education program, this chapter is divided into four sections, focusing on the questions: (1) What differentiations are made in the selection of the target group for the parenting education program? (2) What differentiations occur in the norm formation of the program? (3) What differentiations are made between the different positions within the program, and how are they related to each other? and (4) How are differentiations within the program evaluated?

5.1 Differentiation and Selection

The selection process for participants in the parenting education program is characterized by a complex interplay of identity attributions. The program employs various channels to reach its target audience, among which the program flyer stands out. Distributed across public spaces such as daycare centers, neighborhood cafes, and municipal buildings, the flyer serves as a crucial initial touchpoint for prospective participants. This necessitates a deliberate communication strategy that clearly delineates the intended audience. The flyer therefore offers an insight into the practice of differentiation in the selection and definition of the target group in order to reach precisely those for whom the program is intended:

“[program title] is a parenting education program. A trained parental guide (usually a mother herself) meets regularly with you and other mothers/parents in a group. You will be given advice and suggestions on how to support your child's development through simple games and exercises. You will also receive materials to take home from the meetings. The materials are available in Albanian, Arabic, Bulgarian, English, Farsi, French, German, Greek, Italian, Polish, Russian, Serbian/Croatian, Spanish and Turkish.”

In the flyer, participants and parental guides are defined as mothers. The specific mention and prioritization of ‘mothers’ creates a gendered differentiation in contrast to fathers. Although the additional mention of ‘parents’ broadens the target audience, the emphasis on mothers as the primary recipients remains dominant. Educational advice regarding child development is mentioned as a benefit of participating in the group. Here, mothers are addressed as the primary caregivers responsible for the child's upbringing, in contrast to fathers who remain unmentioned. It is indicated that the materials are intended for use at home, thereby situating the mother's support of their child within the private family context. On one hand, mothers are addressed as ‘seeking advice,’ while on the other, a need for such advice is implicitly attributed to them. The use of the adjective ‘simple’ implies educational aids that everyone can understand, providing an initial indication of the nature of the materials and positioning mothers as potentially incapable of comprehending and implementing more complex educational advice or practices. Thus, all mothers are addressed regardless of their abilities. This is coupled with the note that the materials are available in various languages. The language range of the materials suggests an intercultural orientation. This not only implies acceptance of the language heterogeneity among the potential participants but also implicitly reflects an assumption about the necessity to specifically reach mothers who speak a language other than German. The flyer is not only available in German but also in Arabic, which specifies the origin of the potential participants, addressing them in a low-threshold manner and acknowledging possible lack of German language skills.

The flyer for the parental education program features three photographs depicting various interactive scenes: a child being assisted with reading, a child and a woman drawing together,

and a woman wearing a hijab who is smiling and lovingly embracing a boy. The pictures underscore the importance of early childhood development, mother-child interaction and bonding. Of the two women shown, one wears a braid, the other one a hijab. In the flyer's imagery, men are absent, indicating that the program is geared towards mothers. Additionally, the imagery suggests a welcoming approach towards mothers adhering to Muslim religious traditions.

At the level of the program's presentation in the flyer, its target group is constructed according to the criteria of gender, family, language, origin, and religion. These intersectional attributions not only shape the address in the flyer but also the internal positioning at the regional project and program level, with a specific culture being ascribed to the participants as well:

"Well, you roughly know, because we work in cooperation with daycare centres, the parents who could make a good use of it, with a cultural background, I would say [laughing]. So, the parents with a cultural background, we roughly know. From the locations sometimes, also from the daycare centres. And also, the daycare directors are very, very nice and they tell us, she or her could really make use of it and she wants to learn a bit more, do a bit more [...]" (Dora, parental guide).

In the quote, the target group is culturalized, and an implicit differentiation is made between people 'with a cultural background' and those without. This veils the cultural heterogeneity within society and leads to the normalization of an assumed 'majority society' devoid of culture. The term 'cultural background' thus serves to homogenize the program's target group while simultaneously segregating it from other ECEC (Early Childhood Education and Care) parent groups. Notably, the quote initially encompasses 'parents' broadly, but swiftly narrows to 'she', indicating a gendered differentiation and confining the address to mothers. The role of daycare centres in selecting participants for the program is emphasized in the quote, suggesting that these institutions are actively engaged in defining and selecting 'appropriate' recipients. The mention of specific locations and daycare centres underscores a deliberate selection, possibly influenced by socio-economic factors. From these multi-dimensional differentiations regarding culture, gender, and space, a need for education in ECEC is derived which, in the last sentence of the quote, is connected to the mother's willingness and motivation. The addressing of the participants as women, mothers and as culturally different is linked to fatherhood, migration and other ECEC groups of the parental guide as the interview progresses:

"In the beginning, fathers were very welcome. I don't know it any other way. This morning I had a group and there were four fathers there, they come regularly. To the parent and child groups too. But then they [the participants] decided for themselves: no, among women we feel much more comfortable than when there are a few men. And that has to do with culture and a little bit with religion. But I respected that. If that's the case, then of course we can have mothers only meetings. But some fathers have asked. So, I said they were very welcome to come. But I don't think it would have helped much anyway, because of language courses and training opportunities men have to leave much, much sooner than the women, than the mothers. And so, they wouldn't have found the time for something like that" (Dora, parental guide).

Referring to her own experiences, the parental guide describes the participation of fathers as normal, thereby differentiating the parenting education group from other ECEC groups she leads. The parental guide refers to it as the participants' choice to feel more comfortable

without men, attributing this decision to their cultural and religious backgrounds. Further, she mentions that fathers cannot find time for such programs due to earlier integration into the labor market. Therefore, the sole participation of mothers is justified both by cultural and religion-related attributions regarding gender in the context of family life, and in relation to the structural limitations faced by migrantified fathers. This once again culturalizes being a migrant, on one hand, and places it within a specific structural context, on the other, where migrantified mothers are positioned as the primary caregivers for children through cultural and religious attributions, and migrantified fathers are marginalized by attributed structural constraints in participating in ECEC. This particularization of the target group implies a differentiation and othering in relation to an assumed majority society, where cultural and religious preferences and labor market integration supposedly do not entail gender differentiation, and where fathers are regularly subjects of ECEC offerings. The statements that fathers were initially very welcome, and that they are welcome to drop by, with a subsequent emphasis on the structural conditions that would prevent this anyway, highlight a fundamental openness to the participation of fathers. Meanwhile, their exclusion is attributed partly to the participating mothers and partly to migration-specific structures of labor market integration. The gendered group formation is thus relativized, remains unquestioned, and is situated outside the responsibility of the local project.

In summary, the target group for the program is characterized as migrantified, multilingual mothers within a traditional gendered family structure, possibly of the Muslim faith and potentially lacking adequate ECEC skills. Thus, those not addressed include non-migrant, solely German-speaking, culturally unmarked parents, as well as migrantified fathers.

5.2 Differentiation and Norm Formation

The selection of the program is deeply intertwined with norm formation depicting an engaged, responsive, language sensitive mother. This norm of motherhood is updated in the interactive practice of the program. Children are present during the weekly meetings but are cared for in a separate area of the room. If a child cries, the parental guide appeals to the mother to look after it: "Look, Lale, put that aside for a moment and check what she needs" (observation report 1). If the child remains unsettled, the participant is advised to leave: "You know what, I think he's just tired. Maybe he should be put to bed" (observation report 5). The parental guide's intervention calls on the participants to take responsibility for their child's needs and to prioritize them over participation in the program, and thus positions the mother as the child's primary caregiver. The exclusion, i.e., the norm, is accepted without question and accompanied by an invitation to the next meeting, meaning the exclusion is temporary and does not jeopardize membership.

The program's materials encourage mothers to discuss topics such as "my body, clothes, seasons, day care, playing outside [...]" (Document 2) in German during group meetings and to follow up on these topics at home in their family language. This content focus underscores the expectation that mothers will deliberately support both the cognitive and emotional development of their children and will maintain family multilingualism. These expectations are adhered to in the practice of the program through the application of the educational materials. At the same time, the materials are described to me, as a researcher, as 'deficit-oriented' (observation report project meeting 2) and are placed in a context of acquiring German when working with the participants. This is particularly evident in the parental guide's use of a small blackboard, on which she notes the vocabulary while working through the materials:

“We practice a second finger game, touching different parts of the head. Dora [the parental guide] gradually draws a face on the board and writes the vocabulary next to it. Lale points out that an article is missing. Dora responds, ‘Oh yes, thank you’ and adds it. The women all draw a face on their materials and copy from the board” (observation report 9).

As shown in the quote, the participants are actively involved in shaping the group meetings in terms of learning German, indicating that this is their central objective. They ask questions about vocabulary and point out to the parental guide when something is missing on the board. By doing so, the participants position themselves primarily as 'strangers to the German language', which challenges their positioning as mothers with a fundamental need for ECEC impulses. However, a lack of proficiency in the German language is associated with motherhood:

“[...] it's also about the daycare parents' evenings. And ok, should I go or not? And when I go, do I understand everything, do you think? Yes, please, I say, shoulders back and head up. And first of all, you have to present yourself and stand there as a mum, and that is very important. Especially for your child it is very important, mum takes it seriously and mum is there for me, she's going" (Dora, parental guide).

In this quote, mothers are encouraged to actively participate in the daycare parent's evenings and to adopt a confident stance. Despite potential language barriers and insecurities, they are encouraged to step into the public sphere, engage in the child's educational context, and present themselves as mothers. The quote implies that this expectation originates from the child's perspective and that the mother's involvement in the daycare center is directly linked to the child's well-being. To become an engaged, responsive mother is described as a process of prioritizing the child's needs over one's own fear, overcoming personal language challenges and being courageous. This narrative is deeply rooted in the program, as illustrated by the following quote taken from an observation report of the group leaders' meetings. Here, the parental guide and the group leaders discuss options for their presentation at an upcoming event where the group leaders, having led a group for a year, receive a certificate as parental guides. Local politicians, professionals in integration and education, daycare staff, and the press are invited to this ceremony:

“You can start with how you've developed during the program – Yeah, I can do that, Jasmin responds turning to me – Before I was part of the team, I could never have spoken in front of a group like this. I just didn't dare – [...] And now I'm considering becoming a social assistant – Supportive words from the others – Yes, I think now I have the confidence for it – says Jasmin – And that's something you can pass on to the mothers – Dora explains. Jasmin refers to a woman in her group who was initially very shy and hardly dared to speak German. Recently, the woman told Jasmin that for the first time she went to a parent-teacher meeting alone – And before, she went everywhere only with her husband – Jasmin emphasizes. Dora interjects – Yes, that's also a beautiful story. You can talk about that too...how our mothers are becoming more confident” (observation report 12).

Jasmin describes her time and work in the program as a personal journey from shyness to self-confidence. This transformation is seen as a direct result of her experiences within the program, positioning the program as a transformative and empowering force that enabled Jasmin's integration into the labor market. The mention of another woman in Jasmin's group, who for the first time went to a parent-teacher meeting alone, without her husband,

symbolizes progress in societal, familial and gendered independence. By placing the focus on personal development and emphasizing the importance of these stories as a source of inspiration, Dora underlines this as the central narrative of the parenting education program. Dora's statement that self-confidence is a transferable skill that Jasmin can pass on to the mothers in her group reflects the notion that these are cyclical transformation processes within the program, where mothers support and encourage each other.

Against this background, two normative subject positions are constituted and differentiated: On one side stands a migrantified mother who speaks little or no German, lacks self-confidence, and thus cannot take responsibility for herself or her child, retreating passively to the private sphere. On the other side is the 'model migrant mother', who actively overcomes her insecurities and lack of knowledge with the help of the program to become the representative of her child's needs. This mother serves as a role model for others, engages in the program's gendered work, and subsequently moves on to the broader labor market.

5.3 Differentiation and Positioning

Having identified the attributions regarding the participants, the group leaders and the child as a co-addressee of the program in the previous sections, the focus will now be on the position of the parental guide. Subsequently, the relations between the different positions will be outlined. For this purpose, attention is drawn to a quote from an ethnographic interview with another parental guide in the project, who was leading a parent-child group. This parental guide was discussing the project's continued funding, which was uncertain at the time:

"She says she hopes there is a way to keep her group – but I definitely give priority to Dora and Evin – she adds – the experience is important, or the language in Evin's case" (Stephanie, parental guide).

The parental guide Stephanie distinguishes between herself, parental guide Dora, and parental guide Evin, who works with the daycare centers, in terms of their roles in the project. She deems her work as secondary to that of Dora and Evin, stating that she would prioritize their positions in the event of potential job cuts. She justifies this by highlighting the importance of experience and language. Regarding Dora, it is implied that due to similar experiences, she can establish a unique rapport with participants. Dora is thus linked to the participants by an assumed bonding migration experience.

A regional information document features an interview with Dora about her work in the program. In this context, she is asked, "How do you manage to get in contact with the mothers if they don't speak your language?" (document 5). The question refers to the fact that Dora, unlike the majority of the program's participants, does not speak Arabic. This identifies language differences as a particular challenge in working with migrantified mothers. The phrase 'your language' positions Dora as primarily belonging to her first language, which is not German. Subsequently, Dora is asked: "When you arrived in Germany [...], what made settling in easier for you?" Dora shares her experiences and concludes with:

„[...] Thanks to these experiences, I can empathize well with the situation of the mothers. I often share my own experiences with them, which gives them a lot of courage" (document 5).

As the interview focuses on the parenting education program and Dora's work as a parental guide, both migration experience and language are directly linked to the performance of this

work. Dora frames her migration experience as a form of cultural capital that helps her develop strong empathy with the participants. This suggests that the ability to empathize with the life situation of migrant mothers is a valuable tool in her work and derives from personal migration experiences. While Dora is addressed with reference to her migration experience and language, her formal qualifications remain unmentioned. Professionalism is subordinated to traits that are presumed to facilitate bonding. Dora's mention that sharing her own migration experience 'encourages' the participants suggests a role model function with regard to the processes of settling into German society.

In the programs' interactive practices, Dora self-positions as a participating group leader, meaning that she acts as an authority, a counsellor, and an educator, while also portraying herself as a mother, woman, multilingual speaker, and migrant. She shares experiences from her family life, her marriage, her first language, and from settling in Germany. When a participant emphasizes to me that they learn German 'playfully' in the program, this is her reaction:

"Then Dora tells of a grammar course – at her beginning – which was terribly dry and the topics were covered too quickly – I came to my husband in the evening and said: I didn't understand anything! – she imitates sobbing. Laughter and agreement follow" (observation report 3).

Dora shares the challenges 'at her beginning.' Through this phrasing, she clarifies that her arrival in Germany was followed by a process of settling in. This personal insight into Dora's life creates a relationship between the experiences of the participants and those of the parental guide. The phrasing characterizes life in Germany not merely as a geographical change but as the start of a personal transformation, linked to the acquisition of the German language. The disclosure and humorous portrayal of personal challenges and emotions create a space for empathy and understanding, normalize initial fears, and underscore Dora's position as a role model.

The program's group leaders, similar to the parental guide, are positioned as 'model migrant mothers' by being selected either from daycare centers or from among the participants of the parenting education groups. Their weekly meetings, which focus on exchanging experiences about their work in the groups, are led by the parental guide, who further navigates them through the materials for the upcoming meetings. Thus, the group leaders are subordinate to the parental guide. A linguistic connection between their roles is established through the qualification process of the group leaders: after leading a group for a year and attending a training course, they receive a certificate as 'parental guides.' This qualification positions the group leaders as pre-professional parental guides, who, in the program, take a first step into the labor market. However, in an interview with parental guide Dora, she differentiates between her position as a parental guide and the prospective position of the group leaders:

"There are actually two different types of parental guidance. One is further training. I did this a couple of years ago and it was a very, very extensive training program. [...] And there's also a parental guide, well maybe this term is not quite accurate, but the mothers [group leaders] actually call themselves parental guides, too. They had a short little training opportunity and we [the regional project] did that too, which means they can now also lead the groups" (Dora, parental guide).

Dora emphasizes that her position as a parental guide differs from those of the group leaders in terms of qualification. She describes her own training as 'very extensive,' distinguishing it

from the shorter training of the group leaders. This differentiation attributes more substantial expertise and higher authority within the program to the position of the parental guide that Dora holds. The program's designation of the leaders as 'parental guides' reflects a positive recognition of their commitment to the program. In the quote, this recognition is relativized in Dora's self-reference regarding the professionalism of the group leaders. Dora self-positions as an active part of the project and central figure within the organizational framework of the program. In doing so, she indicates a hierarchical differentiation between the parental guide and the group leaders during and after the program.

Within the hierarchical structure of the parenting education program, the parental guide occupies the top position. The parental guide is assigned the responsibility for the work of the group leaders as 'model migrant mothers' and serves as a role model for their transformation towards labor market integration. The position of the group leader is one step below and serves as a role model for the participants in their transformation into 'model migrant mothers'. Below this is the position of the participant, whose transformation into a 'model migrant mother' is equated with the responsibility for her child's development: "Children learn from role models - the first and most important role models are you" (document 2). In this quote from the program flyer, the mother's responsibility is associated with role modelling as well. This implies that the mother's responsibility extends beyond direct parenting to also include modelling behaviors and attitudes for the child to emulate. To sum up, the parenting education program establishes a hierarchy from the child to the mother to the group leader to the parental guide, all linked by role modelling.

5.4 Differentiation and Valuation

The previous sections have shed light on who becomes a subject of the early childhood parenting education program through differentiations, and how these subjects are related to one another. The following section will delve into the valuations associated with this.

The selection of participants is accompanied by the ascription of gendered traditional family structures: Mothers are positioned as the primary caregivers responsible for early childhood development, while migrantified fathers are considered absent due to their earlier integration into the labor market. This gendered differentiation remains unquestioned and is thereby normalized, which homogenizes families in relation to migration experiences and distinguishes them from families without such experience, subsequently leading to the marginalization of migrantified fathers. Furthermore, the gendered differentiation within the parental education program is located outside the local project's responsibility, attributed instead to the families on one hand and to politics on the other.

The hierarchically organized positions in the program – child, mother, group leader, parental guide – are structured in a role model logic that reflects a gradation of experience, qualification and participation in German society. Against this background, the norm of an engaged, responsive, German-language-aware, self-confident, working mother takes shape and is presented as a transformative process of becoming. This implies differentiation from a type of motherhood that is primarily characterized by passivity and withdrawal. This norm upholds motherhood as primarily responsible for ECEC because fatherhood is not addressed within it. Consequently, the traditional, gendered family structure regarding the division of family tasks is not challenged. Although the engaged working mother participates in public life, her role is confined to the gendered context of ECEC. Both subject positions are placed in a hierarchical relationship that entails a dichotomous differentiation between 'good' and 'inadequate'. Voluntary and active participation in the program is described as an active first

step in the transformation towards the ideal of motherhood. Mothering practices are only implicitly problematized in the program; instead, an orientation framework is established:

“They [the participants] report meetings with family and friends, activities with their children and days spent at home. Dora turns directly to the speakers. She smiles, nods, comments – Lovely! – Oh great, that must have been fun! – or – That's needed sometimes! – and asks follow-up questions. There's talk of an event at the mosque, which several mothers from the group attended. Leyla shares that she taught the children about the story of the Prophet Muhammad. Elina interjects that Leyla is a teacher at the Quran school. Dora responds – Oh, I didn't know that! – and adds that she thinks teaching children why certain festivals are celebrated is great” (observation report 2).

The parental guide's affirmative responses to mothering practices in family life endorse and validate these activities. The statement ‘That's needed sometimes’ serves as an acknowledgment of the need and normality of rest periods in the engaged family life, accepting the various aspects of motherhood and its challenges. The parental guide positively evaluates education about cultural or religious festivals with children, in this case, Ramadan. This underscores the mother's role as a mediator of cultural or religious values, which adds another dimension to the norms of motherhood. The parental guide self-positions as appreciative of culture and religion. Within the group, she creates an atmosphere of openness and acceptance of various expressions of religiosity. The parental guide compliments new glasses as well as long hair and a new way of wearing a hijab (observation reports 4, 8, 9), thereby signaling affirmative recognition for the different ways in which participants present themselves physically, culturally, or religiously. Nonetheless, the parental guide positions religion as a matter of differences:

“I would include religion and politics only for specific purposes because everyone has their own views and sometimes it can cause offence, or someone may feel offended” (Dora, parental guide).

In the quote, the presence of different religious and political beliefs within the group is acknowledged. Participants are positioned as vulnerable in the face of these differences, yet also potentially harmful to others. The parental guide describes a sensitive approach to topics that could evoke negative emotions and potentially lead to conflicts. This reflects a cautious strategy of introducing such topics only in specific contexts deemed appropriate in order to maintain group harmony and protect individual well-being. It involves the deliberate creation of settings which are inclusive to varying degrees, where all participants feel safe to express their various identities. It also extends to the inclusion of heritage, culture, and language in group activities:

“Initiated by Dora or not, the participants share how various kitchen utensils are named in different languages – It's interesting how these words are so similar – says Dora. The participants laugh about using different names for the same object in the same language. Maya informs us that the hole in a spaghetti spoon measures one portion of spaghetti – But that's the way in Italy, not in Syria – laughter. Dora writes the name of another object on the board. I look puzzled. Maya catches my gaze – I didn't know that either, I admit. Maya laughs. Fatima leans over to whisper to me – I have no idea what it's called in [language] either. The mood at the table is cheerful” (observation report 3).

The quote illustrates that the participants' various first languages are an integral part of the program's practice, and referencing these languages is linked to the goal of learning German. The parental guide initiates moments where participants explore language similarities and differences, and she positively deems this as 'interesting'. Language uncertainties are portrayed as communal experiences that occur regardless of individual background or role within the group. Maya introduces a cultural differentiation by referring to the spaghetti spoon, using it as a self-referential joke that plays on stereotypes. These differentiations relating to language and culture are intentionally initiated by the parental guide to foster group inclusion and cohesion, and to address the participants in terms of their competencies.

6 Discussion: Guiding Diversity in Parenting Education & Social Work

The analysis of differentiation at the levels of selection, norm formation, positioning, and valuation enables a perspective on diversity as context-specific interactive recognition practices. In these practices, the subjects of early childhood parenting education – both participants and workers – are produced and placed within a social frame of reference.

Diversity is ambivalent in that it has both inclusive and exclusive, empowering and subjugating effects. The accepting, unquestioned recognition of participants as culturally and religiously 'others' is accompanied by a gender differentiation, which is reproduced by the structures of the program insofar as it is deemed consistent, normal, and beyond the project's field of responsibility, thus legitimizing the exclusion of fathers. The affirmative recognition of participants as engaged mothers and as capable mediators regarding their first language, culture, and religion has an inclusive effect within the group. At the same time, religious and political differences among participants are problematized as sources of vulnerability and harm within the group, which places their performance under the regulation of the parental guide. The subject position of the passive, withdrawn mother lacking self-confidence due to insufficient German language skills is also problematized, serving as the starting point of the project and thereby legitimizing it as an educational program requiring funding. Simultaneously, this subject position is put into a transformative relationship with the subject position of the engaged, responsive, language-sensitive, working mother, inscribing a makeover narrative into the project. This is closely linked, firstly, to the psychologization of migration experiences as a loss of language, which limits self-confidence and activity. Secondly, it is associated with a strategy of empathetic recognition of these psychological aspects, which are described as a resource that is best understood and addressed by someone who has overcome this experience. The positive recognition of the languages or migration experiences of the parental guide and group leaders as a resource for work in the program positions them as 'professional others' (Heite, 2008) and diversity workers (Ahmed, 2012); it is a resource that grants them special access to the target group and helps them to manage differences. These guides and group leaders stand in a role model hierarchy above the participants and children, yet simultaneously embody the addressees of the program at a further stage of development. The program empowers participants and group leaders in terms of social integration demands, yet simultaneously imposes limitations, as adherence to the norms of good motherhood is required to ascend the hierarchy. The parental guide receives affirmative recognition regarding her migration experiences, with her professional qualifications being subordinate. Thus, the structure of the program resembles the 'therapeutic culture' (Rose, 1996) of a self-help group and the role modelling aspect of peer-to-peer approaches, except that the peer does not act in a supportive role but has supposedly grown into the professional role herself.

Diversity as a practice of recognition can thus be understood in the interplay of the three levels of social work and power suggested by Kraus and Krieger (2021). Firstly, diversity practices are subject to societal power. On the one hand, this implies a dependency on societal discourse and the orders of differentiation within it; on the other hand, it implies a reliance on legitimization strategies that make the funding of an educational mission possible. Secondly, diversity practices act as a mediator of power in society, reproducing certain differentiations and structures. And thirdly, diversity practices act as a force in the interactions that determine the relationship between professionals and addressees. At this level, the relationship between the parental guide, group leader, and participant in the parenting education program can be understood as a form of governmental power in the Foucauldian sense (Foucault, 1988). The focus is on guidance towards self-guidance, where this external guidance is provided by an expert not primarily defined by formal qualifications, but by identity characteristics such as attributed migration experiences. This demonstrates an identity-political rationality of governmentality that needs to be further explored in relation to diversity practices in parenting education and beyond.

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Article 3

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Trust and Vulnerability in Early Childhood Parenting Education

Vertrauen und Vulnerabilität in der frühkindlichen Elternbildung

This article examines how trust is practiced in a parenting education program for migrantified mothers in Germany, focusing on the relationship between trust and vulnerability. Conceptualizing trust as a dynamic social practice shaped by recognition and addressing practices, this study reconstructs how vulnerability is identified and regulated within the program. Drawing on ethnographic data, including observation reports and interview transcripts, it explores relational positionings defined by identity categories and status. It illustrates how practicing trust involves affirming and protective practices that create inclusion and help to build relationships while also setting the boundaries of exposure. The findings suggest that analyzing trust through the lens of vulnerability and recognition provides insights into the conditions of social and educational work relationships.

Keywords: trust, vulnerability, recognition, ECEC, parenting education

In diesem Artikel wird untersucht, wie Vertrauen in einem Elternbildungsprogramm für migrantisierte Mütter in Deutschland praktiziert wird und welche Rolle Vulnerabilität dabei spielt. Vertrauen wird als dynamische soziale Praxis verstanden, die durch Anerkennungs- und Adressierungspraktiken geprägt ist. Auf dieser Grundlage wird anhand von ethnographischem Material rekonstruiert, wie Vulnerabilität im Programm identifiziert und reguliert wird. Basierend auf analysierten Beobachtungsprotokollen und Interviewtranskripten werden relationale Positionierungen entlang von Identitätskategorien und Status analysiert. Es wird aufgezeigt, dass das Praktizieren von Vertrauen sowohl affirmative als auch protektive Praktiken umfasst, die Zugehörigkeit ermöglichen und Beziehungen aufbauen, zugleich aber auch die Grenzen des Ausgesetzt-Seins markieren. Die Ergebnisse legen nahe, dass eine Analyse von Vertrauen durch die Perspektive von Vulnerabilität und Anerkennung Einblicke in die Bedingungen sozialer und pädagogischer Arbeitsbeziehungen eröffnet.

Schlüsselwörter: Vertrauen, Vulnerabilität, Anerkennung, frühkindliche Bildung, Elternbildung

1 Introduction

Parenting education has gained increasing significance as an integral part of expanding early childhood education and care (ECEC) services (Betz, 2016; Fegter et al., 2015). In Germany, the organization and structure of parenting education is shaped by a diverse landscape of actors, concepts, and funding models. In recent years, there has been a growing focus on integration-related aspects and the development of low-threshold, target-group-specific programs, particularly for migrantified families (Grunert et al., 2022).

Beyond evaluative research, parenting education remains an understudied field. In particular, there is a notable lack of studies explicitly examining programs for migrantified parents, despite their designation as a key yet hard-to-reach target group. Indeed, research from the broader field of ECEC suggests that migrantified parents are frequently subjected to deficit attributions and processes of othering (Bischoff & Betz, 2015; Kuhn, 2018; Leitner, 2023).

Conceptual debates on parental engagement – particularly in early childhood education and in relation to migrantified parents – emphasize the importance of trust in both programs and practitioners. In international and national research, trust is predominantly measured statistically as an indicator of client-practitioner relationship quality. However, there are very few studies exploring trust in this interactional dynamic (Hummel & Anders, 2022). This absence is striking, given that both trust and distrust are widely recognized as dynamic social processes that are pre-reflexively present, interactionally negotiated, and continuously (de-)stabilized through social interactions (Endreß, 2002; Möllering, 2013).

Tiefel and Hille (in press) offer a brief survey of trust research in social work within German-speaking settings that highlights dimensions of trust processes specific to social work contexts. Wagenblass (2004) argues that trust is not a personal trait but closely linked to the professional role and specialized expertise of social workers. Arnold (2009) describes trust primarily as an individual achievement, associated with social workers' 'pedagogical tact'. Becker-Lenz (2014, 2018) discusses trust as an integral part of the professional ethics of social work, emphasizing the importance of reflecting on power asymmetries and risk assessment. Hille (2024) expands this perspective by highlighting the affective and embodied dimensions of trust. Taube (2021) as well as Tiefel and Zeller (2014) demonstrate the role of transparent and reliable settings in shaping trust processes, while Rüegger et al. (2021) stress how institutional mandates of control can reinforce distrust.

Trust is recognized as a fundamental aspect of professional practice in social work. Becker-Lenz et al. (2024), in line with broader interdisciplinary trust research, highlight its reciprocal relationship with vulnerability. First, trust in social work requires clients to open up about their experiences, needs, and concerns, inherently exposing them to vulnerability. Second, vulnerability emerges through the formation of the work relationship, which depends on trust to function effectively.

In recent years, the concept of vulnerability has gained increasing significance both in social work and in broader social science debates (e. g., *ibid.*; Burghardt et al., 2017; Noack Napoles, 2019, 2022; Vorrink, 2015). This debate unfolds along three dimensions. First, vulnerability is framed as a universal, ontological condition arising from human dependence on others and the inherent unpredictability and irreversibility of human action (Agbi, 2021; Misztal, 2011). Second, attention is directed toward the unequal social distribution of vulnerability, shaped, for instance, by processes of marginalization affecting specific groups (Agbi, 2021). Third, its discursive construction as a category of attribution is considered, particularly in relation to how it functions as a hierarchical marker of difference, shaping perceptions of who is considered more or less worthy of protection and support (Turner, 2021).

Against this background, Becker-Lenz et al. (2024) identify a socio-historical reformation of the social work client as 'vulnerable'. Providing an initial insight into these dynamics, a study by Frühauf and Kessl (2020) shows that the construction of the vulnerable client subject is accompanied by the positioning of social workers as potential threats and sources of harm. In this article, I address several research gaps: the ways migrantified parents are addressed as clients in parental education, the discursive-practical construction of vulnerability, and the intersection of these perspectives with the concept of trust. I focus on a specific case study: a parenting education program for migrantified mothers in a middle-sized city in Lower Saxony, Germany. Specifically, I examine how participants are addressed

and positioned within the program, in what respect they are identified as vulnerable, and what implications this holds for understanding trust practices within social and educational work.

First, I derive the article's theoretical perspective from concepts of recognition and addressing practices. Next, I present the research design, data, and limitations of the study, followed by the findings. Finally, I discuss the implications of considering vulnerability through recognition for analyzing trust practices and work relationships.

2 Vulnerability, Trust, and Recognition: A Relational Perspective

Möllering (2006) characterizes trust as inherently ambivalent, as it “resolves a fundamental problem of social relations [uncertainty] without eliminating it” (ibid., p. 6). Uncertainty arises from vulnerability, which entails the risk of being harmed. Trust involves accepting this vulnerability based on the assumption that harm will not occur. This perspective typically assumes a degree of autonomy in actors, while recognizing that trust is a relational phenomenon in which the assumption of non-harm is either reinforced or destabilized through interaction (Endreß, 2002; Möllering, 2006). In this context, interaction is understood to be context-dependent but primarily a situationally emergent process.

In this article, I suggest a perspective that prioritizes dependency over autonomy and frames interaction not only as emergent but also as discursively constituted. This perspective builds on Ricken and Rose's (2018, 2023) concept of addressing practices, which draws on Butler's (2001, 2005, 2010) conceptualization of recognition and connects it with interactionist perspectives.

The central assumption is that sociality and individuality – understood as self-referentiality – are intrinsically linked. Consequently, one's self-experience and identity formation depend on being recognized by others (Rose & Ricken, 2018). Butler (2001) draws on Althusser's (2010) concept of interpellation and shows that being addressed means being recognized and subjectivized simultaneously. In these acts of address, individuals are assigned a position within the socially normative framework of recognizability through identity categories (Ricken & Rose, 2023). A failure to fit into these identity categories can pose a threat to social existence. Thus, recognition is conditioned by categories, conventions, and norms that precede the self and delineate the framework of what is recognizable (Butler, 2010). However, according to Ricken and Rose (2023), Butler's concept of performativity emphasizes the fluidity of discursively mediated sociality, allowing for both conformity and transformation within normative frameworks.

Butler's (2005) conceptualization of vulnerability is closely intertwined with her theory of recognition. First, vulnerability is understood as a universal condition of human existence, emphasizing the state of exposure – neither address nor response can be fully controlled. Second, vulnerability depends on recognition to attain social relevance (Butler, 2005, 2010). Thus, vulnerability is not only inherent in interactions but also discursively (re-)produced within them.

Ricken and Rose (2023) expand Butler's approach by conceptualizing recognition as addressing practices, identifying them as a fundamental structure of social interaction. While addressing practices place a strong emphasis on verbal aspects, they also encompass physical dimensions (ibid.). Addressing practices are

understood as a recursive process of addressing and responding to (i. e., re-addressing) the other – a process in which expectations can be identified, but the course and outcome remain uncertain (ibid.). It is not possible to control being (re-)addressed; however, some form of response to the address is inevitable, whether through refusal to engage, confirmation, or rejection.

According to Rose and Ricken (2018), addressing practices can be analyzed along four dimensions. These dimensions determine who is addressed and who is excluded (selection), (re-)produce normative orders and define what is deemed recognizable (norm formation), constitute relational self- and other-positionings (position and relation), and involve processes of ascribing value (valuation) (ibid.).

By conceptualizing interaction as addressing practices, interaction becomes evident as a processual event in which recognition is situationally and normatively constituted and reproduced. Against this background, vulnerability is to be understood relationally: First, as the inescapable condition of being exposed and thus addressable, meaning that one is potentially subjected to devaluing, identity-threatening language and practices; second, as dependent on hierarchical recognition frameworks, which constitute unequally distributed vulnerable positions; and third, as an ascriptive characteristic within the situational processes of positioning oneself and others and the relations that come with it, such as those between social work practitioners and their clients.

In the following, I examine how participants in the parenting education program are identified as vulnerable within addressing practices. In particular, I ask: In what ways are they positioned through these practices, and what role does the ascription of vulnerability play in shaping trust within social and educational work?

3 Data, Methods, and Limitations

This article draws on an ethnographic case study of a parenting education program in a mid-sized city in Lower Saxony, Germany. Ethnographic approaches are particularly suited for examining addressing practices, as they reconstruct field-specific practices and analyze how they (re-)produce social order (Kuhlmann, 2023).

The case was selected because the program was repeatedly identified as central to the topic of trust within a regional project supporting migrantified parents, a project that initially facilitated field access. The program is designed for migrantified parents with children aged 0 to 6. Every week, they meet with a parental guide – a group leader responsible for facilitating the parenting education sessions. In this case, the role was filled by a professional, though in other instances, former participants, who have completed additional training, may take on this position. Together, in German, they discuss playful education materials for children, which are then used at home speaking the family language. A parental guide named Dora was considered to be an exemplary group leader. As the project manager put it: “With Dora, every woman can feel like a VIP” (Observation Report 7).

The data, collected from September 2019 to February 2020, include 23 observation reports from various contexts within the overarching project, five semi-structured interviews with project staff, and informational materials. Since this article focuses on addressing practices within the parenting program, the data sources were limited to the following: nine observation reports from the main parenting group, which was led by the parental guide Dora; five

observation reports from the weekly meetings of the leaders of other regional groups (former participants of the program), who were also guided by Dora; and lastly, a semi-structured interview with Dora.

A group discussion with participants had been planned, but this was cancelled after the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic, resulting in the absence of the participants' reflexive perspectives. Further, when focusing on (re-) addressing practices, the imbalance in German language proficiency within the group must be considered, as it contributed to the parental guide largely shaping the course of conversation. Overall, while this study provides an in-depth exploration of a previously unexamined context, its focus on a single case naturally limits the ability to draw generalizable conclusions about the broader field.

The data was analyzed following the four analytical dimensions outlined by Rose and Ricken (2018) – selection, norm formation, position and relation, and valuation – which served as a heuristic framework. Since this article focuses on reconstructing relational positionings within the program, particular emphasis is placed on the third dimension (position and relation).

4 Findings: Being Addressed as a Vulnerable Someone

This section presents the study's findings, focusing on its reconstruction of six relational positionings: (1) being a cultural/religious woman, (2) being religiously and politically diverse, (3) being exposed to the German language, (4) being equally or unequally worthy, (5) being emotionally involved, and (6) being open and staying private. For each of these positionings, it looks at how vulnerability is identified or ascribed – in particular, to whom it is ascribed, by whom, in what ways, and how this, in turn, shapes relationships and practices.

Being a Cultural/Religious Woman

Previous analyses of the parenting education program have shown that participants are positioned via intersecting categories such as being a non-German speaker, being culturally specific, being religious (Muslim), being a woman, and being a mother (Schwenker, in press; Schwenker & Sandermann, 2025). These positionings play a central role in how vulnerability is addressed within the program.

But then they [the participants] decided for themselves: no, among women we feel much more comfortable than when there are a few men. And that has to do with culture and a little bit with religion. But I respected that. If that's the case, then of course we can have mothers-only meetings. (Parental Guide Interview)

In the interview excerpt quoted above, the parental guide attributes a potentially vulnerable position to the participants concerning the spatial arrangement of the program. She identifies them as vulnerable due to their cultural and religious identities, presenting men as a latent threat – not because of overtly threatening behavior, but through their mere presence. The anticipated and thus proactively circumvented outcome is that participants may feel uneasy, unsafe, or unable to fully engage with the group.

This perception of vulnerability, tied to being a cultural/religious woman, is addressed by excluding men from the group space. Framed as a protective measure to safeguard participants' emotional well-being, this approach treats cultural and religious vulnerability as an inherent, non-negotiable characteristic – one necessitating protection through non-exposure rather than coping through exposure. The parental guide notes that participants themselves

decided to exclude men, portraying the participants as co-creators of the space and granting them some agency over their exposure. However, her declaration that she “respected” and ultimately enacted this decision underscores her authority in structuring the group’s spatial and social organization. Consequently, her role expands beyond mere facilitation to active boundary-setting, determining acceptable forms of exposure and delineating the limits of inclusion within the group.

Being Religiously and Politically Diverse

While the previous section examined how the parental guide considers participants as a homogeneous group of women with shared cultural and religious identities, this section shifts attention to how she frames diversity as a source of vulnerability.

I would include religion and politics only for specific purposes because everyone has their own views and sometimes it can cause offence, or someone may feel offended. (Parental Guide Interview)

The parental guide defines vulnerability in the group as the risk of someone being offended when religious and political views are expressed. Participants are identified as vulnerable because they could potentially be addressed in a way that challenges or invalidates their values, beliefs, and identity. At the same time, they are also identified as potential threats to others, as their speech carries the risk of offending fellow participants.

The parental guide mitigates this vulnerability by defining the topics that may be addressed within the group. In doing so, she positions herself as the authority over conversational norms, determining which forms of expression are legitimate and which are not. By excluding religion and politics from discussions, she once again employs an avoidance strategy, i. e., protection through non-exposure. This regulatory practice has consequences for how participants can position themselves within the group. Religious and political identities are framed as aspects of the self that should remain private rather than as topics open for discussion. At the same time, by enforcing these boundaries, the parental guide actively shapes the conditions under which recognition and belonging are negotiated within the group.

While the previous quote reflects the parental guide’s general concern about religious and political speech, the following excerpt describes her reaction to a specific situation:

For example, there was a comment from a mother who said, “Yes, the refugees are here, they are taking everything away from us.” And she herself has been here for fifteen years or maybe longer. And I found that a bit inappropriate, I must say, for this group. And [while speaking to her later in private] I said, “I’m sorry, but I have to tell you [this]. Maybe you didn’t notice or maybe it wasn’t your intention.” Of course, I try to phrase things in as friendly a way as possible. And then [I said], “But please, don’t [say that.] [...] That’s not appropriate in our group, and please don’t do it [laughs].” (Parental Guide Interview)

Rather than addressing the issue openly within the group, the parental guide intervenes privately, balancing communicative regulation with relational maintenance. By framing the statement as unintentional and handling it in a friendly manner, she minimizes potential conflict while still enforcing conversational norms. In deciding to address the participant privately, she positions herself as a potential threat – someone who could publicly call out, reprimand, or embarrass the participant in front of the group. Opting for a more private intervention allows her to maintain authority and still avoid being perceived as punitive or confrontational. As a result, potentially affected group

members remain unaddressed, and no space is created for acknowledging or contesting the impact of such statements. This approach prioritizes group cohesion and interpersonal harmony between the parental guide and participants over actively engaging with conflicting perspectives or challenging threatening speech.

Being Exposed to the German Language

The German language plays a central role in how vulnerability is identified and addressed within the parenting education program and beyond. Participants are identified by the parental guide and group leaders – and also self-identify – as vulnerable when navigating German-speaking environments due to emotions of shyness, shame, fear, and lack of self-confidence. This vulnerability is tied to the risk of feeling inadequate when addressed in German.

The following quote stems from an observation protocol of the regional group leaders' weekly meetings, where they discuss their work and prepare materials for the coming weeks:

Jasmin [group leader] refers to a woman in her group who was initially very shy and avoided speaking German. Recently, the woman told her that she had attended a parent-teacher meeting alone for the first time. "Before, she went everywhere only with her husband," Jasmin emphasizes. Dora [parental guide] interjects: "Yes, that's also a beautiful story. You can talk about that too [at an upcoming event] [...] how our mothers are becoming more confident." Jasmin reports that it was a long process to encourage the woman to speak: "But I slowly developed a strategy, „she says. [...] "I always asked her [for help]: 'I don't know how to say this in [language], can you tell me?' And then I kept asking her questions, so she no longer felt so ashamed when she had to ask." Selma [another group leader] relates to this experience, recalling her own early years in Germany: "I was really scared. What if someone spoke to me on the street? Then you just stand there and look silly." (Observation Report 12)

This passage illustrates two strategies for navigating language-related vulnerability: (1) avoidance, such as relying on one's husband, avoiding formal settings, or not actively engaging in the program; and (2) exposure, i. e., confronting insecurities by actively participating in the program and beyond. These strategies are embedded in a temporal-normative framework, which contrasts the "time before the program," marked by avoidance and passivity, with the "time after," characterized by exposure and activity as a positive transformation.

This framework also structures the relational positioning between participants and group leaders, who are former participants themselves. They are positioned as alike, distinguished only by their progress along this trajectory – from "being/feeling vulnerable" to "having overcome" this vulnerability by developing the self-confidence that facilitates social integration. In this way, language-related insecurity is framed not as an inherent deficit but as a temporary state that can and should be overcome.

At the same time, strategies are employed to equalize hierarchical relationships. Dora, the parental guide, shares stories of her own insecurities and experiences upon arriving in Germany. Similarly, Jasmin, the group leader in the previous excerpt, is aware that exposing participants to German may cause discomfort but mitigates this by sharing her own language-related insecurities and addressing participants as experts in their common native language. The parental guide and the group leaders recognize that they are a source of exposure and as such are potential threats. They mitigate this threat by fostering a more symmetrical relationship, representing language-related empowerment as a gradual but necessary process.

Beyond controlled exposure within the parenting education program, group leaders and the parental guide encourage participants to confront their language-related vulnerabilities in external settings, particularly in ECEC institutions. The parental guide explicitly advises mothers to attend daycare meetings, emphasizing their presence as crucial for their children's well-being:

It's also about the daycare parents' evenings. And, "Ok, should I go or not? And when I go, will I understand everything, do you think?" "Yes, please go", I say, "Shoulders back and head up. And first of all, you have to present yourself and stand there as a mom, and that is very important. It is especially important for your child that mum takes it seriously and mum is there for me, she's going." (Parental Guide Interview)

Here, children are positioned as even more vulnerable than their mothers, reinforcing the expectation that mothers must overcome their own language-related insecurities not only for themselves, but for their children. This highlights the mother's potential to be a threat herself – in this case, by failing to meet both the child's needs and her own maternal responsibilities. Thus, the confidence to literally "speak up" is not only encouraged but explicitly demanded.

Being Equally or Unequally Worthy

This section examines how the parental guide positions herself in relation to individual participants within the group setting, identifying them as vulnerable in these relational contexts. In the following excerpt from the interview with the parental guide, she addresses the fact that her group is quite full compared to other regional groups:

My colleagues also think of me when there are too many participants, saying that I could actually direct some of them to the other groups, but I don't want to do something wrong by doing that. Because it's a sensitive issue, it really requires a lot of tact. If I were to go to a participant and say, "Hey, we're quite full, could you go to the group near your place," they would definitely take it very personally and wonder why I said it to them and not to the others, thinking perhaps that I don't want them here, and so on. I can't do that [laughs]. (Parental Guide Interview)

In this excerpt, the parental guide recounts how her colleagues suggest that she might be overburdened by the group's large size, implicitly addressing her as vulnerable. Conversely, she anticipates the participants' vulnerability in the scenario where she would inform them of the group's capacity and suggest they join another group closer to their home. The parental guide expects this situation to cause stress and feelings of offense, exclusion, and diminished self-worth among the participants. They are seen as unable to grasp the parental guide's own vulnerable position and as incapable of taking responsibility for this.

At the same time, the parental guide explicitly positions herself as a potential threat – capable of offending participants or showing favoritism, thereby risking her relationship with them. Her strategy here is avoidance: she subordinates her own vulnerable position to the risk of offending participants, prioritizing their well-being over her own. Above all, she aims to shield them from negative emotions.

Openness and friendliness, too. And being open to other languages and cultures is very, very important. You should be close to everyone. Not so, uh, personally perhaps, but equally close to everyone, I mean. So, with the same distance and without, without, uh, prejudice. (Parental Guide Interview)

Here, the parental guide articulates what she considers crucial in her role. She emphasizes the normative expectations regarding relationship-building with participants, highlighting the importance of openness, friendliness, and an affirmatively inclusive attitude toward diversity. These qualities serve as markers of goodwill. Participants

are positioned as equal or potentially unequal in their relational proximity to the parental guide. The situation creating this vulnerability is the individual's presence among others who are also receiving positive recognition from her. This implicitly involves a situational and competitive struggle for visibility and positive valuation.

While the negative emotional consequences of this group dynamic are not explicitly mentioned in the interview excerpt, the parental guide alludes to emotions that could be disruptive – such as insecurity, shame, and feelings of being disregarded or not equally valued. She positions herself as responsible for maintaining a relationship-defining order, ensuring that everyone is granted equal distance or closeness. Relationships are thus depicted as inherently precarious, requiring constant observation, re-evaluation, and routinized practices to maintain stability.

Dora comes out of the kitchen. She smiles and spreads her arms wide: "Hello, everyone! So glad you're here!" [...] She walks with open arms to one side of the table. All the women stand up and hug her one by one. Dora also hugs a new woman, who turns out to be a participant's mother. She gently strokes her arm, looks at her with a beaming smile, and says, "So nice to have you here." Dora addresses all the women by name. Noticing one woman, she remarks, "Oh, you're wearing glasses today." [...] Then she comes to the other side of the table and greets Yesim [participant] and me [observer] with a hug. (Observation Report 4)

In the scene described above, the parental guide warmly welcomes the group with a positive statement and then proceeds to address each participant individually with open arms and a hug, including a new participant and the researcher. This bodily engagement through hugging is a routine practice in the program, breaking with traditional concepts of professional distance.

By noticing small personal details, such as a participant wearing glasses, she creates a space in which each participant is acknowledged and appreciated. The emphasis is on establishing a predictable, emotionally safe environment that mitigates potential vulnerabilities related to exclusion, inequality, and uncertainty by fostering a sense of community, belonging, and stability.

The parental guide assumes responsibility for regulating these emotions by taking authority over the space – navigating between addressing participants as individuals with unique relationships to her, as equal group members, and as a valued collective.

Being Emotionally Involved

While the participants are portrayed as emotionally approachable and thus potentially vulnerable, the parental guide demonstrates a strong emotional involvement both with the group as a whole and with its individual members.

The participant whom Clarissa [the social assistant] and Dora helped with documents last week steps forward. "Thanks again for everything, Dora!" she says. [...] Dora and Clarissa are visibly moved. Dora places her hand on her heart, thanks everyone again for the wonderful time, and says, "And I wish you all a wonderful Christmas season with your family, all the best. [...] I am really looking forward to seeing you all again in the new year and will miss you. I'd be happy if you write in the WhatsApp group and just let us know what you're up to and how you're doing. Love you all." Applause, approval, hugs. (Observation Report 7)

Here, vulnerability is rooted in a situation where the participants emotionally address the parental guide, Dora, and the social assistant, Clarissa, who looks after the children while their mothers are attending the program. The parental guide's reaction to the participants' expressions of gratitude, which includes placing her hand on her heart,

demonstrates a sense of deep emotional connection with the participants. The parental guide's mention of missing the participants during the holidays suggests that a break in these relationships could be harmful to her.

The parenting education program is thus depicted as a space of emotional support that extends beyond the physical and temporal boundaries of the group meetings. This is further emphasized by the encouragement to keep in touch via the WhatsApp group during the holidays. On the whole, the relationship between the parental guide and the participants is defined as an emotional bond, which includes open – that is, vulnerable – boundaries regarding space, relationships, and the parental guide's addressability.

Being Open and Staying Private

This section examines a type of vulnerability addressed and identified within the program that is less about emotional fragility and more about the boundaries between openness and privacy. Afterwards, the group disperses.

I talk to Clarissa. Nearby, the participant whom Clarissa had helped earlier with some documents from the job center is now showing the same documents to Dora. Dora looks serious, nods repeatedly, and studies the paper. (Observation Report 5)

Participants entrusting job center documents to the social assistant Clarissa and the parental guide Dora is a common scene at the end of group meetings. These interactions are effectively private, as others maintain distance and avoid drawing attention to the exchange. Dora presents herself as someone who takes participants' concerns seriously, approaches them thoughtfully, and handles them discreetly. Participants who share these documents are addressed as vulnerable insofar as they are shielded from the observation of others, whose gazes are implicitly treated as potentially threatening. However, the gazes of the parental guide and the social assistant are regarded as necessary and trustworthy in handling these matters.

As shown, participants' privacy within the group setting is structured both in terms of content and who is considered a legitimate observer. While job center documents remain reserved exclusively for the parental guide and the social assistant, motherhood-related topics are a central focus of the program and are shared openly within the group. During discussions, the parental guide asks direct questions about family life, child behavior and development, and related issues:

Dora asks which gynecologist she visits. [...] Dora addresses the group and inquires if everyone has a gynecologist. People nod. "You have a gynecologist too, Lale?" Dora asks. Lale agrees and mentions the name of her doctor. (Observation Report 9)

While participants may choose to disclose information, withhold it, lie, or challenge the address, they cannot fully evade it; they remain exposed and must respond in some manner. However, Dora's reactions to their responses are consistently positive and empathetic:

Dora leans in towards each speaker in turn. She responds with positive remarks ("great," "nice"), asks follow-up questions, and when one of the mothers mentions that the weekend was stressful because her child was sick, she reacts with a sympathetic facial expression (furrowed eyebrows, pressed lips, and a nod). (Observation Report 4)

The exposure to inquiry is thus embedded in a routinized framework, making it predictable for participants. This establishes both procedural and relational transparency. Any perception of ill will or disregard is preemptively coun

tered through explicit displays of goodwill – attentiveness, genuine interest, positive appraisal, and empathy. In this context, the leveling of hierarchical positions within the group also comes into play. Overall, these practices aim to foster a sense of safety within a situational order that remains susceptible to disruptions and requires continuous maintenance and restoration.

5 Discussion

The anticipated vulnerability of participants serves as a central reference point for the addressing practices in the parenting education program examined here.

Firstly, the participants' vulnerability is affirmatively recognized as a constitutive and affective aspect of ascribed identity categories and their temporary status. The participants are defined as worthy of protection, and the situational configuration within the program is deemed fragile, with everyone present considered a potential threat. The parental guide assumes responsibility and authority as the creator and preserver of this situational order. Practices described by Goffman (1967) as deference and avoidance rituals are employed. Deference rituals present goodwill, while avoidance rituals prevent degradation or discreditation, as seen here through the exclusion of certain groups, topics, and types of information. This structures and limits the participants' opportunities for recognition and self-expression. The hierarchical relationship between the parental guide and the participants is occasionally rendered more equal in moments when the professional-to-client relationship is disrupted by the guide's self-positioning as vulnerable. When the guide does this, she legitimizes the participants' affective vulnerability as non-native speakers and frames the relationship dynamics in the program as emotional. Consequently, the practicing of trust as a means of addressing vulnerability involves engaging in affirming and protective practices to manage the inherently uncertain nature of addressing. Here, practicing trust parallels emotion work (Hochschild, 1979) and, following Goffman (1967), emerges as a routinized practice to stabilize social situations.

Secondly, anticipated vulnerability serves as a reference point for the program's normative order, defining the purposes and objectives of the program: the reliance on support for integration into ECEC institutions and the labor market, due to the participants' affective and structural vulnerability as non-native speakers and migrants. This vulnerability is problematized as a barrier to integration and is situated within a spatiotemporal context of overcoming. In an affirming, separated, and regulated environment free from hostility or threat, participants open up, speak in German, and are empowered and supported to meet the normative demands of ECEC and the labor market.

By conceptualizing interaction as addressing practices and vulnerability as conditioned by recognition and relationality, the theoretical framework employed here sheds light onto how professionals practice trust. The practicing of trust is found to be embedded in norms of recognizability, which are not only practically situational but also discursively pre-structured. In discussions of diversity sensitivity among social workers and the establishment of child protection as generalized violence prevention, Frühauf and Kessl (2020) demonstrate how the figure of the vulnerable self serves as a central justificatory figure for positions of political correctness and make a number of critical observations, including the moralization attendant on this process, the homogenization of clients, the

perception of professionals under aspects of security and control, the paternalistic dynamics, and the attempted exclusion of risk, which is an inherent and constitutive element of social work. These points also apply to the current study. Cole (2016) describes this as a “vulnerability-as-harm” (ibid., p. 266) discourse. In contrast, Frühauf and Kessler (2020) argue for a stronger emphasis on dependency and relationality in understanding vulnerability – something Cole (2016) terms “vulnerability-as-interconnectivity” (ibid., p. 266). A perspective on ‘practicing trust’ within the framework of recognition and vulnerability could provide the broader, relational lens called for by Frühauf and Kessler (2020) and could also contribute to the discussion on different types of vulnerabilities in their relation to trust (Bormann et al., 2021; Hamm et al., 2024).

Further research could provide valuable insights into how vulnerability is identified within interactions across various social and educational work settings, as well as how it is experienced by both clients and practitioners within these contexts. To better understand how the concept of vulnerability becomes integrated into constructions of clienthood, it is essential to examine how vulnerability is conceptualized within theoretical frameworks, policy documents, institutional guidelines, and academic literature. This includes analyzing who is identified as vulnerable, who remains excluded from such categorizations, and how vulnerability becomes a marker through which support and intervention are legitimized. Contextualizing professional practices within their broader discursive dimensions enables a more comprehensive analysis of the processes of normalization, differentiation, and hierarchization implied by ascriptions of vulnerability, which affect how relationships between clients and practitioners are constituted and regulated within these frameworks. It also draws attention to what constitutes ‘professional practice’ and shows how these ideas are established, maintained, or contested. All of this ultimately leads to broader theoretical reflections on professionalism, for instance, in relation to concepts such as ‘relational professionalism’ (Königter, 2009). Within this context, trust and distrust function as critical reference points structuring the conditions of (im)possibility for establishing and maintaining working relationships.

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