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**Narratives of Motherhood: Polish
Mothers Living in Norway**

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Abstract

In brief, the purpose of this research project is to shed light on the experiences of Polish women living in Norway and to highlight the positions and themes most significant to them, utilizing their own narratives relating to motherhood as a lens to better understand their family dynamics, their interactions with various social welfare institutions and resources available for parents, and their perceptions of and obstacles to integration and belonging in Norwegian society.

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Chapter 1: Introduction

Background

The migrations of different groups of individuals from their home countries or places of origin to other parts of the world characterize an essential proportion of human history. These transient groups have been motivated by a diverse array of driving factors—including but not limited to forced relocation by invasive and colonial powers, escape from religious and ethnic persecution, pursuits in search of financial gain, fleeing climate-related catastrophes and warzones; this list is infinite. Many are also motivated by factors that have seemingly lesser significance on a large scale, but great meaning on an individual or family-level—the temptation of a better paying job, reunion with a loved one, or the promise of a more idyllic education system for one’s child. The study of these migratory patterns and their impetus is revelatory in that we can gain important information about conditions in both the place of departure and in the destination. Closer studies of the individuals who partake in these transitions of place in the modern context, especially in the context of social science research, are valuable for gaining deeper understandings of how and why humans move around, where and for what reasons they settle where they do, and how they adjust to or cope with the conditions they meet in that new place.

Polish immigration has been a notable phenomenon throughout the history of established nations, and the Polish diaspora is currently one of the largest in the world. Poles have migrated in large numbers especially throughout Europe, Australia and the Americas. Since Poland’s entry into the European Union in 2004, Polish migration within Europe has increased significantly. The initial phase of this migration period was especially characterized by temporary labor migration and predominantly fulfilled by members of the male population. In recent years, Polish people have come to be the largest immigrant group in Norway, measuring at about 101,153 in the most recent statistics provided by Statistics Norway in March of 2020 ([SSB], 2020). There has also been a significant shift in the demographic makeup of the population of Polish immigrants

in Norway in recent years—more women and children characterize the population as many families have reunified on Norwegian soil with intentions to settle down for a longer period of time.

The years of peak migration of Polish migrants to Norway also coincided with an increase in debates over immigration issues in Norwegian political discourse. Although the discourse has generally revolved around integration and acculturation practices, and has been considered especially harsh or critical towards immigrant groups of non-European descent, the public discourse has spread feelings of stigma and social exclusion towards the immigrant population at large. As an immigrant group, the population of Polish persons in Norway has been on the receiving end of this social stigma as well, and at times has been characterized as isolationist and resistant to assimilation. A specific branch of public discourse that developed was directed at the Polish population in Norway in relation to child-rearing and interventions by child welfare services. In the realm of the social sciences, studying the role of agency and structures is especially important in relation to migration studies and examining transnational populations—in order to increase comprehension about the lived experiences of potentially marginalized or vulnerable groups, and to advocate for proper policy and legislation creation and implementation that uplifts such groups or at least attempts to address their needs.

Previous Research

The transnational character of Polish immigrants, specifically in relation to families, has been emphasized in a great deal of the research and studies aimed at this population. Transnationalism has more traditionally been utilized in migration studies to describe physical movement or migration between two countries. In the context of Polish immigrants and family practices, there is some need to extend or alter the definition in its application. When we discuss the transnational Polish individual living in Norway—in the context of their family practices—we need to consider not just the formal and structural ties and arrangements to Poland, but also the individual and agentive factors at play.

Various studies examining the transnational character of Polish migration and mobility between Norway and Poland have been carried out following Poland's entry into

the European Union in 2004. One of the most recent and notable efforts contributing to this realm of knowledge was the *Doing Family in a Transnational Context: Demographic choices, welfare adaptations, school integration and the everyday life of Polish families living in Polish-Norwegian transnationality* (Transfam) project. The project had a plethora of different goals in its mission, including:

outlining the demographic and sociological inflow from Poland to Norway, taking into account the transnational and integration strategies employed by migrants and their families in the labour market and the family; examining the waves of inflow to Norway, referring to social migration capital, migration networks, Polish diaspora organizations, level of organization and activism of Poles in Norway [...]; analyzing the way transnational families function, practices of and changes in family roles (motherhood, fatherhood), reproduction behaviors and family objectives, work-life balance, links to Norwegian institutions (pre-school, school, labour market) and the wider social community. (Slany, Slusarczyk, Pustulka, & Guribye, 2018, p. 12)

Tackling a broad spectrum of aspects of Polish migration to Norway, the project focused on the family as a central theme through which to consider many of the other elements involved in the studies of the project. A novel portion of the project was directed at highlighting the experiences of children in the context of these transnational Polish families. Findings from the Transfam project have been and continue to function as important resources for academic and institutional purposes, and will hopefully continue to be sought out to inform and effect relevant public policies.

In 2018, a survey volume—*Transnational Polish Families in Norway*—was published as a product of the Transfam project, its contents presented as a variety of different chapters and studies examining different angles of the transnational space and families resulting from the recent and continuing era of Polish migration to Norway (Slany et al., 2018). The volume contributes significantly to methodological, theoretical and empirical frameworks by which to consider the phenomenon of transnational family practices.

A related area of study, included in the volume *Transnational Polish Families in Norway*, focused on the development of family practices of those settling in Norway, as the flow of migration in Norway has shifted away from temporary labor-motivated migration and more towards family reunification and long-term settlement by families.

Several of the most significant research efforts undertaken have been carried out under the umbrella of the EFFECT project, which took place from 2013-2016, and which overlapped with and shared common aims with the Transfam efforts. The EFFECT project, with the cooperation of Norwegian and Polish research institutions, established a multilevel and cross-national examination of young dual-earner couples in both Poland and Norway and had as its aim the study of understandings and practices relating to their work-life balance. Theoretical aims of the project were to consider these practices in the greater context of policy transferability and the relationship between aspects of policy and shifting notions of gender roles ("EFFECT: Cross-national Polish–Norwegian project on work–life balance," 2019). It is from several of the studies involved with Transfam and under the umbrella of the EFFECT project that I have been inspired to establish the framework for my project. In the next chapter, I will go into more detail on several of these studies and how they were instrumental in assisting me in creating a theoretical framework for my own project.

Whereas the aim of the EFFECT project was to establish a basis of comparison between Poland and Norway—utilizing quantitative and qualitative methods in application to a broad base of subjects including both women and men—this research project focuses specifically on Polish women who have immigrated to Norway, and their experiences through the lens of motherhood. The existing literature in this field urges for the continued effort to promote empirical research relating to transnational experiences of Polish families. The efforts of Transfam, EFFECT and other research projects have spearheaded this—focusing significantly on families and also developing valuable research efforts and insights into the experience of children in this transnational context. During the initial stages of this project, significant research efforts were directed toward bringing to the forefront and exploring the situation of migrant children in the “mobility maze” between Poland and Norway, against a backdrop of Norwegian public discourse that was generally critical of Polish parental practices and a Polish public discourse that was critical of interventions by the Norwegian Child Welfare Services. Against the backdrop of this wave of developing research focused on children and families, and a preceding body of research that centered primarily on seasonal migration by male Polish migrants, I saw a gap in research that focused on women in the context of this

transnational phenomena of Polish migration to Norway. After discovering the work of Bjørnholt and her colleagues, I was curious to explore and contribute to research on this topic and hopefully to provide some nuanced insight of the female experience of parenting for Polish women in Norway, highlighting their own perspective and interests in doing so.

Research Aim and Questions

The Transfam project established two premises on which it shaped its methodology, which were also significant in giving form to my own research aim and questions:

- (1) migration and social integration have to be regarded as embedded in and interrelated with biographical processes;
- (2) migration, migratory decisions or settlement choices, lives of migrants families and their social integration do not exist in isolation, so a systematic evaluation needs to consider the social and other mechanisms and structures that govern behavior in these fields. (Slany et al., 2018)

The first point relays the necessity of contemplating the intricacy of connections between social processes—like migration and integration—within the context of and in relation to the individuals experiencing and participating in those processes, and the second point goes on to address that we must additionally consider the interplay of various institutions and structures involved. Essentially, there are a number of factors and levels that must be considered when we ask broad questions about the experiences of immigration, settlement and integration—and we must be mindful of this intricate, woven web of connections when we are conducting research relating to these types of topics.

The broad research aims of this project seek to inform on these questions:

- What are the experiences of Polish women who have immigrated to Norway, in relation to motherhood?
- How do existing benefits, resources and policies of the Norwegian social welfare system available to families and parents influence the experience of

these women? Are there resulting significant shifts in their experiences relating to their family practices and dynamics between Poland and Norway?

- What other themes of significance emerge from the narratives of Polish women and their experience of motherhood in Norway?

Based off of these questions, the main purpose of this study is to shed light on the experiences of Polish women living in Norway and to highlight the positions and themes most significant to them, utilizing their own narratives relating to motherhood as a lens to better understand their family dynamics, their interactions with various social welfare institutions and resources available for parents, and their perceptions of and obstacles to integration and belonging in Norwegian society. I have chosen to focus on the experience of motherhood as a point of departure and central aspect of informants' identity from which to develop the research. The purpose of focusing on these woman as "mothers" is to form a basis from which to gain understanding about their positions and relations to different groups, systems and structures—institutions in place in Norway such as NAV and barnehage, other families and other mothers, Polish and Norwegian society on a more broad level, and their own families and children.

I would like to briefly expand upon the choice of using motherhood as a lens for gaining a deeper understanding of the Polish female immigrant experience. The focus on females as the subject of this study is intentional, and significant as women make up an increasing percentage of Poles immigrating to Norway. In focusing on women's experiences of parenting in Norway, I hope to see if women experience a difference in the expectations and realities of gendered roles between one country and the other. Do they experience a change in gender dynamics within the practices of their family? If there are differences, are they positive or negative in terms of their mothering experience? I want to look at the experience of Polish women through the lens of their experience as mothers, and the structures at work in this dynamic in their context as immigrants in Norway. Why not specifically conduct this project about Polish mothers and children? I believe this area of research has been and continues to be examined. Some of this research has unfortunately been the basis for critical and negative work directed at Polish mothers and Polish society at large. In public discourse, there has been significant use of

language of “othering” that reflects the homogenous tendencies of Norwegian society – specifically when it comes to rearing of children. The attitude established by this type of language and this negative stance is something I hope to contribute to overcoming through this project. I feel that the words and the experiences of Polish mothers relating to childrearing have at times been taken out of context and misunderstood. In this project, it is my intention to consider the position of these women first and foremost, and to consider their actions and experiences based on their unique positions. I want to consider the criticisms and praise of the structures and institutions in Poland and Norway from the position of my informants, from the women and the mothers who are negotiating their positions as individuals, mothers and members of these societies.

A related area the study hopes to address is the dynamic processes of parenting and integration. Although integration processes can perhaps ease the parenting experience by making certain benefits more accessible, perhaps the experience of becoming a parent and practicing child-rearing is a motivating factor for increased acculturation.

Some broader interests inspiring this project relate to concepts of identity relating to nationality, as well as experiences of being “inside” or “outside” of social belonging. How do social welfare systems provide for or neglect individuals or populations of people who do not fit within the realm of “national belonging”? In Norway, as in America and a growing number of countries across the world, we notice that debates about identity and entitlement related to national-belonging are growing. However, we do not always have the privilege of being exposed to the opinions and experiences of those who face possible exclusion or alienation, whose entitlement rights are under scrutiny. Through this type of project, I hope to center the focus to the lived experience of Polish mothers, and how through different practices they negotiate their integration in the context of the institutions of the Norwegian social welfare system.

Some personal background, framing my own motivation for pursuing such a project, is that I am the daughter of two Polish immigrants who resettled in the United States. I myself have grown up with two parents who learned to navigate social and institutional worlds very different from that in which they developed. I am now myself an immigrant in a new country, negotiating my own practices and ideals within a new

environment. I am interested in the phenomena of migration and transnational life, the motivations that inspire humans to relocate and settle in a new place, the methods individuals and groups employ to integrate into their new lives, and the complex web of interaction and negotiation that occurs in the migration context between individuals, their families, and the various structures and institutions of their place of origin and their destination.

Chapter 2: Constructing a Framework Based on Previous Research

Previous Research

I will now proceed to summarize some of the key publications, mentioned in the previous chapter, that were produced through the efforts of the Transfam and EFFECT project and how they are relevant to setting the context and framework for my own research project.

The article “The Role of Family Policy Regimes in Work-Family Adaptations: Polish Parents in Norway and Poland” examines how different family policies in Poland and Norway effect the family practices and attitudes of gender equality within families, based on data collected in interviews with two groups of Polish-born parents—one set who live in Poland, and the other who have migrated to Norway (Bjørnholt, Stefansen, Wężyk, & Merecz, 2017). The researchers conducted an analysis of work-family adaptations in the context of the different existing “family policy packages” in the relevant countries. They refer to *work-family adaptation* as a broad concept that consists of the arrangements made between paid work and caring obligations, and *family policy packages* broadly encompass the different benefits and entitlements available through the welfare state. An extension of this analysis aims to locate if there are significant shifts in family practices relating to gender relations between the two different groups. Through the analysis, the researchers constructed different categories of models describing the dynamics of sharing breadwinning and care responsibilities and found that overall, the Polish families in Norway:

engaged with the structures available to them in Norway in a pragmatic and eclectic way, negotiating them with voice and agency [and] mentioned the short working hours, the positive attitudes of employers in Norway towards working parents, the opportunity to have time with the family, the public support systems for combining work and family, and the gender-equality policies and ideas in Norway that allowed them to lead better and more egalitarian lives than they would have had in Poland. (Bjørnholt, Stefansen, Wężyk, et al., 2017, p. 7)

The findings showed that Polish migrants in Norway had a strong sense of agency and felt entitled to access and use the different benefits available in the family policy package, and were actively using them as enabling structures to reshape their lives and renegotiate gender dynamics within the family, whereas Polish families in Poland expressed a weaker sense of entitlement—attributing these differences to cultural and historical differences in the development of the family policy packages in Poland and Norway. Essentially, Polish parents demonstrated adaptations of family practices and gender relations that reflected the larger society they had come to live in.

This article was inspirational for my own project in its focus on considering the different methods of adaptation by Polish migrants in the context of the Norwegian welfare system, and made me wonder how Polish mothers might describe their interactions with or uptake of aspects of these existing policy packages. Although in theory the “policy regime” of the Norwegian social welfare system that encompasses family benefits and resources is widely considered empowering, beneficial, and accessible, how might the experiences of individuals who are not originally from Norway appear? I thus include in my interviews questions about my informants’ knowledge of, access to and usage of different family-related benefits and entitlements—specifically maternity and paternity leave and pay, child allowance and *barnehage*. This article was also informative in the interplay it establishes theoretically between the different levels of individual actors on the family level and greater structures like the welfare state’s policy packages, and the role of agency and institutionalized influence.

Other studies of significance that were carried out under the EFFECT project explored transnational family practices of Polish families living in Norway but maintaining strong ties to their country of origin (Bjørnholt & Stefansen, 2018a); differences in work-family adaptations of Polish and Norwegian families in the context of different policy regimes (Bjørnholt & Stefansen, 2018b); and examinations of family care strategies in the context of the Norwegian policy framework (Bjørnholt, Stefansen, Gashi, & Seeberg, 2017).

Theoretical Framework

Within relevant research in this field, specifically the research done by those affiliated with the EFFECT project, some of the grounding theoretical knowledge has been located within practice theory, specifically relating to family practice theory as has been established by David Morgan (Morgan, 1996, 2011). Practice theory in a general sense describes the body of theory that relates to how human beings shape the world in which they live, and encompasses social structure and human agency, and the dynamic relationship between the two. Although practice theory has been significant to many of the studies considering Polish migrants in the transnational context, especially those focusing on families, this study will utilize the capability approach as a framework through which to consider the narratives of the Polish mothers in the context of Norwegian society and its various family-related institutions and resources. The capability approach is a theoretical framework, developed and written about extensively by Amartya Sen and Martha Nussbaum, that is instrumental in its application to evaluations of individual well-being and social arrangements, the efficacy of policies and questions of social justice in society (Sen, 1992, 1999) (Nussbaum, 2011). The capabilities framework has often been applied to situations of human development, in order to evaluate conditions of poverty and inequality in the context of development policy paradigms. I believe that this framework can be applied in a context to evaluate the conditions and capabilities of individual immigrants existing in their new host country.

The choice for utilizing this theoretical application is because of the emphasis on the individual experiences of the informants in this project—by considering their narratives in terms of their capabilities and functionings, the goal is to gather some insight as to how negotiations of, and reflections on, life experience on the individual level can inform on the efficacy of the institutions, policies and various structures of Norwegian society on a more broad level. Essentially, the goal is to explore how these Polish mothers communicate their successes and their struggles in the face of, and in cooperation with, the means provided for them. Further, what means are they developing and seeking out themselves, when the provided supports of the social welfare system do not apply to them?

The capability approach has been written about extensively and has a variety of different perspectives and components between various scholars. In this approach, I will be utilizing a more broad and abstract application of the capability approach. Here, I will briefly address some of the key components of the capability approach, and how I plan to employ this framework in my forthcoming analysis.

- Capabilities: as opposed to other approaches to measuring human capacity that involve material possessions or subjective ideas of fulfillment, this approach focuses on what people are able to *do and be*, the opportunities they have for achievement, what they are *capable* of. Just because a particular resource is technically available to someone does not necessarily mean they can or will utilize it, for whatever reason.
- Functionings: the manifestations of what people actually *are* or *do*. Functionings are essentially operationalized capabilities.
- Means and ends: means are the resources, goods or services that are instrumental in achieving the goals, or the ends. The ends, well-being and development for example, are seen within this framework as having the only intrinsic value. The distinction between the two is not always clear, for example: accessing a high-level education can be considered as an end, but it can also be considered a means to achieving a desired career or higher state of well-being.
- Evaluation: there is no definitive, agreed upon format for the evaluation of capabilities. The value of capabilities is generally considered to be determined in relation to the context and social norms of the society or place under consideration. For example, accessible shelter may be more valuable to consider in a setting where shelter is not a given. On the other hand, in a country like Norway where access to health care is universal, we might consider the capability approach as it concerns those individuals who are not entitled to access the health care system.

In the analysis of my informants' narratives, I aim to deconstruct and thus try to explain their understandings of their capabilities and functionings, as immigrant mothers negotiating their positions in their families and in Norwegian society more broadly. Through the lens of their positions as mothers, I will try to highlight the ways in which they experience their own individual situations, in the context of various family-related benefits, resources and institutions and other structures that facilitate or impede their functionings and capabilities. I will utilize the narratives they provide me with, and through the constructions of meaning and value they present in these stories, develop some categories of capabilities and functionings that reflect the situation of these Polish mothers. Although my sample group of informants only consists of a small number of individuals, my objective in accomplishing this is to contribute to the body of empirical data relating to the lived experiences of Polish immigrants in Norway, and the ways in which various policies and structures of Norway exert influence on their lived realities.

Allow me to briefly mention some of the philosophies and other social theories that structure and inform the approach taken in this project. The foundational concept of *verstehen* as developed by Max Weber is valuable to mention, as an interpretative sociological approach that considers the subjectivity of actors and the value of meaning that they attribute to their actions and expressions. Feminist standpoint theory was also informative in the development of the approach to this project. Much of the research done in this area thus far has involved Polish female researchers, supporting the idea of situational knowledge, that knowledge is local and its production should be for and by those who are active members in a particular community (Harding, 1986). As a central focus in this study is how Polish immigrant women navigate experiences and practices of parenthood in the context of their transnational situations, I hope the findings can be useful to support their interests and contribute to knowledge of how policy and welfare benefits can be structured to activate and strengthen their position. Relating to standpoint theory again, I will reflect on how the trope of the insider/outsider who has "double vision" relates to my own position in researching this topic: although I do not fully characterize the identity of the subjects I seek, I have some insight into the types of experiences they may be living, and may be in a unique position to access them and represent their viewpoints in this study.

Chapter 3: Methods

This section will go on to explain the methodological design and framework of the research project. The research strategy selected was qualitative in nature, as the goal of the study was to collect, emphasize, analyze and present data which took the form of storied language and was descriptive in nature and representative of experiences, rather than represented by statistical data that is quantifiable. I will briefly relay how this project design fits into three descriptive categories that Alan Bryman describes as broadly characteristic of qualitative research in his text, *Social Research Methods*: inductively, epistemologically and ontologically. Firstly, an inductive approach that relied on initially collecting data and analyzing those observations before then moving on to making connections and speculations was taken, rather than establishing a hypothesis and deductively proving or disproving it through the research. Reflective of the epistemological tendency in qualitative studies when “the stress is on the understanding of the social world through an examination of the interpretation of that world by its participants,” the body of this study is specifically focused on the experiences and interpretations of the Polish female informants in the context of Norwegian society and its relevant institutions (Bryman, 2012, p. 380). Finally, my approach to designing this study rested heavily on constructionist beliefs, such that collected narratives of experience within a society and with its institutions are essential to gaining an understanding of those very structures and that the structures alone have little significance when personal interactions or understandings are removed from the equation.

Methodological Inspiration

The methodological approach for data collection in this study was carried out by conducting one-on-one semi-structured interviews with the informants, except in one case where two informants were interviewed together. The choice to utilize the format of semi-structured interviews for data gathering was somewhat inspired by and derived from the frameworks utilized by Bjørnholt and Stefansen in the EFFECT project studies described

earlier (Bjørnholt & Stefansen, 2018a) (Bjørnholt & Stefansen, 2018b) (Bjørnholt, Stefansen, Weżyk, et al., 2017). As mentioned, several of the articles by the researchers were based on a collection of data gathered during semi-structured interviews conducted with several different sample groups: Polish parents living in Poland, Polish parents settled in Norway, and Norwegian parents living in Norway. In my own study, I limited my informant group to Polish mothers currently living in Norway. During the conceptual phase of this study, I briefly spoke with two of the leading researchers of the EFFECT project about my intentions to focus on Polish females in my research, and they encouraged me to do so. Although their own project had ended due to an expiration in their funding, they would have liked to continue further and extend their research specifically to focus on the experiences of women.

Other reasons for the specificity of my informant population—Polish mothers living in Norway—were my own limitations as an individual carrying out the study, as opposed to an established research group with different levels of resources, institutions and personnel to assist in getting access to informants, conducting interviews, organizing and analyzing data, etc. By limiting myself to one target population, rather than multiple groups as were utilized in the other studies, I was limiting the scope and setting realistic boundaries for what information I could gather and process in the period of time available.

Accessing and Recruiting Informants

Various social media forums, such as Facebook—which I had initially planned to utilize as bases for reaching out to potential informants—proved difficult to gain access to. Despite several attempts at contacting and communicating with closed-group administrators and explaining the purpose and intentions behind my project in order to gain access to the groups' message boards, I was not able to gain entry. Posted physical flyers advertising the research project—posted around Oslo near churches that held Polish masses and services—also did not manifest significant outreach from potential informants.

The snowball sampling method, whereby established contacts are used to make contact with other potential participants, was the most effective strategy for locating and

gaining informants (Bryman, 2012, pp. 202-203). Many of my informants would provide me with several contacts whom they believed might be interested in participating in the project. My first informant invited an acquaintance of hers, who was also a Polish mother, to our arranged meeting and so the first interview was conducted with two participants simultaneously. That same woman put me in touch with the next informant I would interview; she, in turn, provided me with several other leads, and so on. Some of the people I reached out to did not respond to my attempts at contact, and several others who showed interest initially eventually dropped out as well before we could engage in the actual meeting and interview. However, it often appeared that an explanation of my connection to a previous informant would often spark interest and response, perhaps because a reputable association had been confirmed, upon which trust could further be established.

A criticism of snowball sampling is that the chain link-character of gathering informants does not form a truly “random” sample and is therefore not necessarily representative of the population being studied and can result in sampling bias. Although this can cause issue for research that is quantitative in nature, within the parameters of this project the lack of “random” sampling is not especially significant as the goal of the project is not to have the informant population mirror the larger-scale population of all Polish mothers living in Norway. Rather, the connections between the network of informants created an opportunity for a more developed trust between informants and the researcher, and potentially allowed a greater degree of access in relation to the information I was provided in the course of interviews.

Once initial contact was established with a potential informant where they had received a brief description of the project, they were then provided with a more detailed and thorough information letter and invitation to participate. The information letter, the English version of which is located in the appendix, was provided to my informants in Polish. It explained that they were being invited to participate in a research project, and their participation would entail approximately two hours of their time to participate in an interview in Polish about their experience of motherhood in Norway. The information letter also included some relevant background information about Polish settlement in Norway and explained that the purpose of the interview was to gain insight on the experiences of

the informants as mothers and immigrants in Norway—in relation to their experiences with aspects of the Norwegian social welfare system and institutions that are directed at and service families and their own family practices in their transnational context—but also to go beyond and give them space to discuss topics of importance to them from their positions as mothers. I also included a brief explanation about myself and my interest in pursuing this research, as a way to ground the study on a personal level and hopefully to persuade some potential participants who may have otherwise been skeptical. I considered my position—as a fellow woman and immigrant in Norway of Polish background—as significant information worth disclosing at this pivotal moment to potential informants. It might afford me some reputability and potentially allow for informants to see me as someone within their community who respected and shared in their interests, rather than as an outsider who might be more difficult to trust or even potentially use collected information in an exploitative manner. I had encountered discussion of previous researchers, mostly Norwegian, who had some difficulty gaining access and trust within their population of Polish informants and so was hoping to avoid a similar conflict by being transparent and open about my own identity and position.

The information letter was also crucial as a tool of ethics, to provide potential informants with a briefing on their rights as participants in the study—specifically to inform them that I would take proper steps to ensure that all of their personal information was anonymized and to keep their identities private; and to inform them that they had the ability to withdraw from the study at any point they chose, for whatever reason. The information letter also included all relevant points of contact they might need if they had questions or concerns. A supplementary tool I utilized to further validate the ethical collection of information and permission for doing so was by providing my informants with a consent form for them to read and sign before proceeding with the interview (Bryman, 2012, p. 139).

Semi-Structured Interviews

The method utilized to collect data was primarily through one-on-one semi-structured interviews with informant, except for one interview which was conducted with two informants simultaneously at their request. The initial reasoning for the selection of this specific method was to provide some level of flexibility in the interview process and to allow for open-ended and follow-up questions based on the types of responses elicited from the informants. Because the primary focus of the project was to amplify the lived experiences of these women through their own narrative, I wanted to avoid being restrictive in the interview process and allow space and time for them to address topics of relevance to them, and to enable them to tell longer storied narratives when they wished to do so.

Unlike more structured, survey-based interviews, the format of the semi-structured interview permits for the establishment of a non-hierarchical dynamic between the informant and the researcher. The researcher is able to establish a more familiar relationship with the individual they are speaking with, which may allow for more transparent and honest responses to questions. Further, the nature of the research objective – which rests on allowing for the women who are participating to voice, highlight and elaborate upon those themes, topics and events that are more relevant to their personal experience—is best elicited through this particular methodological approach. It allows the researcher to lead and direct the flow of questions and resulting conversation to ensure that the general topic of the study remains in focus, while allowing for the interviewees to elaborate upon, add to, redirect from and reflect on events and experiences that are most significant to them.

There are some drawbacks to consider when utilizing semi-structured interviews as a data collection methodology, however. This approach can be too personable and the interviewer must take care to maintain a certain level of objectivity in order to stay committed to the research aims and refrain from the interview turning into a conversation. The closeness and relatability that the semi-structured interview dynamic is characterized by may decrease the objectivity of the researcher, their questioning and their subsequent analysis of collected data—it can be difficult to isolate information and stories from the subjective person and personality they came from. Because of my own position as an immigrant to Norway with a Polish background—which functions as a positive attribute in

terms of enabling access to and trust from my informants—I had to stay disciplined in my focus during the interview process and not allow my empathy with informants to take over.

There was some difficulty in arranging this type of meeting logistically with this specific targeted population—mothers are busy individuals, with many responsibilities to fulfill in their everyday life. Requesting of them to carve out a one- or two-hour window in their day to meet a stranger for a research project is no small favor. Four of the five interviews were conducted in-person, while one was carried out over Skype. In the information letter and in planning our meetings, I asked my informants to set aside two hours of their time for our interview, and most of the interviews lasted between an hour and a half and two hours. Further, once a meeting is scheduled, there is also the aspect of unexpected obstacles—the sickness of a child, a partner or fellow-caretaker being held at work longer than expected—coming up and necessitating rescheduling and reorganization. This occurred on more than one occasion and some potential informants were not able to participate because of situations like this.

Methodology of Specific Details & Choice

Choice of **place**: Oslo was chosen as the location for seeking out informants to participate in the study. This location was selected for purposes of proximity relating to where I, the researcher, reside. It would be most convenient for me to access informants through my community and their networks, and also to arrange for meetings with these informants.

Choice of **informant criteria**: As the source of the data was from the women themselves, I established broad criteria under which to find recruits. Initially, I established criteria seeking out prospective informants who had immigrated from Poland to Norway in the last 3 years and who had at least one child. The rationale for this initial period of 3 years in Norway was under the presumption that that length of residence in Norway would have provided the subjects with enough time to establish their experience living there, but still have some reasonable ties or links to their homeland. Within this period of time, I hoped they may still have access to memories of the process of integration, or still be actively involved in the process (i.e. learning the language). Once I operationalized the

process of recruitment, however, I loosened the criteria to request that my potential informant only necessarily fulfill one of the characteristics listed below:

- You have at least one child who is or has been enrolled in barnehage, in the past 6 years
- You have carried out a pregnancy while in Norway and have utilized the parental leave benefit, in the past 6 years
- You have utilized the cash-for-care benefit or family allowance

I extended the period of time so as to expand the potential pool of participating informants. Ultimately, not all of the informants who I interviewed had qualified for the various entitlements and benefits I listed in the criteria. Some of the women I spoke with had very young children shortly after their arrival, and so did not qualify for parental leave or pay and had varying experiences with accessing the family allowance. However, many of them had valuable opinions and reflections upon the existing system of family-related social welfare resources and programs, regardless of their lack of experience.

I did not require that potential recruits be actively involved in the labor market at the time of our interview—preferably, it would be beneficial to have a mix of women who have and have not had employment in Norway. The reasoning for this was to provide a more varied insight into different life experiences, and not just those of the working woman. In a similar vein, I sought subjects with a variety of educational backgrounds, and for those who were employed to come from a range of different occupations. Similar studies conducted recently also drew from a broad sample of subjects (Bjørnholt & Stefansen, 2018a) (Bjørnholt & Stefansen, 2018b).

Analytical Methodology

Following the interviews with my informants, I transitioned into the process of transcription and translation. I did this manually, without the use of any programs to assist me, so that I could give careful attention to my translation of the audio. I gave my best effort to stay as objective as possible in this process and keep the language of my informants as authentic as possible. However, it is important to note that this is an imperfect process and full, accurate translation of my informants' responses from Polish to English is impossible—the processes of translation and transcription both involve

layers of interpretation in terms of word choice, as well as what contextual information is included or omitted in the transcript. I will expand on the limitations relating to my translation of my informants' responses in a forthcoming section.

In the earlier stages of the project, I had planned to utilize broad thematic analysis as my methodological approach to processing the data. At this point, I conducted several read-throughs of the transcribed interviews in order to familiarize myself with the material. While reading through printed copies of the material, I took notes and highlighted throughout the text to begin to organize a system of preliminary codes for the content. While reviewing the transcripts and carrying out this preliminary coding process, I was also searching for broader patterns and themes that connected the codes across the different interviews. This was a process that involved repetition and revisiting the same material time and time again in order to map out and construct a framework of themes and to organize segments and excerpts of interview text accordingly. While I was conducting this process and attempting to organize the codes into broader themes, I began to struggle with breaking down the longer pieces of narrative I had collected in the interviews. One of the pitfalls of the coding process in analysis results in the fragmentation of longer pieces of narrative, and a consequential decline in the meaning derived from the narrative in its comprehensive form (Bryman, 2012, p. 578). Although I had not intentionally set out to do so, my interviews were characterized by longer pieces of dialogue from many of my informants—they had often communicated their experiences in the form of stories. I was inspired to change my path of methodological approach and utilize narrative analysis instead, as an alternative analytical approach that is more holistic in its consideration of data that takes the form of stories.

Narrative analysis is a useful approach in the context of this project because much of the data gathered in the semi-structured interviews was presented in the form of stories—informants often built on their responses to questions by describing specific experiences in their lives that illustrated their personal history relating to the topic of the question. Further, many of the participants seemed eager to share and divulge their stories and experiences – often a slight question or probe would result in a lengthy and descriptive telling of a specific event or occurrence, sometimes only loosely connected to the original topic, and often following a stream-of-consciousness pattern as informants

relayed important values, successes and disappointments through these anecdotes. “Narratives are the crucial resources that provide people with a template – a scaffolding of sorts – from which to build and structure their own stories as well as understand the stories they hear or see in action “ (Smith, 2016, p. 204). Bryman provides us with another explanation of the function of narrative analysis: “Narrative analysis, then, is an approach to the analysis of qualitative data that emphasizes the stories that people employ to account for events. It can be applied to data that have been created through a variety of research methods (notably semi-structured and unstructured interviewing and participant observation), but it has also become a focus for an interviewing approach in its own right—that is, the narrative interview in which the researcher sets out to elicit stories” (Bryman, 2012, p. 584).

Narrative constructionism is a theoretical framework that structures the forthcoming analysis: “narrative constructionism is a socio-cultural-orientated approach that conceptualizes human beings as meaning-makers who use narratives to interpret, direct and communicate life and to configure and constitute their experience and their sense of who they are. These narratives are passed down from people’s social and cultural worlds” (Smith, 2016, p. 204). Smith here relays the crucial function of narratives—as an expression of the individual’s experience, but also a performance of negotiation and meaning-making through the process of telling.

We can also consider narrative itself as an actor, and not just a term or object: “narrative, far from being passive, has the capacity to *do* things: narratives *act*. What narratives crucially do is help constitute our sense of self and identities, create and frame our subjective experiences and emotions, bring meaning to our lives, and shape what becomes experience through ordering events, teaching people what to pay attention to and showing us how to respond to those kinds of things” (Smith, 2016, p. 205). Smith is highlighting the potential of the narrative itself to be considered an active extension of the teller, an active construction of their identity and positioning in the context of the structures they negotiate within and outside of the narrative. It is instrumental in producing rich material from which we can gain a better understanding of the meaning that people attach to relationships, events, behaviors and actions as they construct them and communicate them in their stories, all of which together can be considered a narrative. This type of

analysis can also enable researchers to understand how well people are served by their stories.

There are potential limitations and weaknesses with utilizing narrative analysis, as well. For example, the story or the narrative can take central focus and detract from the human who the story comes from, coming into its own existence in a way. Further, this project specifically gathers its narratives from one-time meetings with informants. Therefore, the narratives are representations and constructions based off of the experiences or feelings of the informants at that specific moment. A more comprehensive and multi-dimensional version is not possible to isolate in the boundaries of this project.

Study Limitations

The first limitation to discuss refers to the accessibility and recruitment of informants: in the conceptual phase of this project, some others who had conducted recent research indicated access issues stemming from skepticism of the Polish parent population in engaging with researchers on the topic of parenting. Some have cited that there are streams of thought in the Polish immigrant community that carry perceptions of threats by the Norwegian Child Welfare Services (Barnevernet) to take their children away if they are believed to practice parenting that is not in line with what is deemed proper or ethical. It is possible that some informants were skeptical to come forward and participate in this study due to those reservations. Similar views did come up in conversations initiated by some of my informants, reinforcing the idea that these are valid fears and hesitations that exist in the Polish community of parents in Norway. Further, it is also necessary to consider that those women who chose to participate in the study reflect a skewed sample, perhaps reflecting personalities that are more extroverted and outspoken, or who may have participated in the study in order to discuss criticisms they have of Norwegian society and their experience of motherhood here. The informant pool interviewed in this project is quite small to better allow focus on those narratives provided. However, because the number of informants is limited, the variety of experiences also reflects that limitation. However, the richness of the data produced during those interviews counterbalances the lack of a higher number of informants. Further, because this his

project specifically chooses to consider the experience of Polish women in Norway through the lens of motherhood. The specificity of this scope is restricting, as it necessarily leaves out a broad population of Polish women who exist in this country but who do not have children. I hope that there will be future research that contributes to the empirical data representing the experiences of a broader demography of Polish women living in a transnational context.

Another important potential limitation within this project relates to language and translatability, and the potential loss or change in meaning that occurs during that process. Although I am conversationally fluent in Polish, there were at times linguistic challenges that surfaced during the interviews and in the processing the data. There is certain terminology I am unfamiliar with, and at times required some additional explanation from my informants and may have contributed to the production of moments of lost meaning or significance or breaks in the flow of conversation. Another limitation of this study stemming from language relates to my own access to recent and current research and documentation written in Norwegian on this topic. Although I have studied the language and have a fair comprehension, my skills are lacking on an academic level. Thus, although some research and writing has been carried out relating specifically to the experience of Polish mothers living in Norway, texts that have only been recorded and published in Norwegian have been outside my scope and not utilized for the purposes of this project. It is possible that some information or data that may have contributed in a significant way to this study has been overlooked.

Moving on, another limitation is one involving potential bias and preconceptions: Are my own biases influenced by perceived ideas of stigma towards the Polish community in Norway? Is knowledge about this stigma from an academic perspective something that does not necessarily translate to daily life realities for the group of people who I intended to interview? Was I projecting preconceptions of injustice onto people who generally considered their life to be reasonable or even exceptional? Does the fact that I myself am the child of Polish immigrants put me in a position where I may sympathize with my informants too much? These, among others, were all questions that I engaged with and considered in relation to my own position and while producing this research and analysis, in an effort to practice reflexivity actively throughout its undertaking. At the same time,

reflexive awareness has not absolved me of upholding certain epistemic values that are necessary for the production of valid and thoughtful knowledge and research.

Ethical considerations

I was required to receive ethical clearance and approval from the Norwegian Centre for Research Data due to the fact that I would be gathering data and personal information from my informants while conducting my interviews. The primary considerations involved in carrying out these aspects of the project were to uphold the privacy of my informants and to protect their identities and anonymity throughout their involvement. Further, it was also crucial to ensure that those individuals participating as informants were well-versed on their rights as informants in my study, and that they were aware of their ability to voluntarily remove themselves from participation at any point.

Additionally, it was important to be considerate in relation to the collection and storage of personal data (Bryman, 2012, p. 137). Because I was utilizing computer-based equipment to record, store and sort my data through audio files and transcribed interview, I took precautions to ensure that raw data materials, such as recordings of the interviews, were stored in a secure fashion, in this case on an external hard drive that required a password to gain access. When the recorded interviews were transcribed into text documents, the interviews were codified with pseudonyms and all aspects of personal or private information that might reveal the identity of the informants were altered.

Other ethical considerations undertaken during the conceptualization of this project relate to representation. One of the cornerstone ideas within social work and the social sciences is to do no harm with regard to the subjects of your study (Bryman, 2012, p. 135). This principle was one I kept in mind throughout the project—starting with the formulation of my interview guide and conceptualizing its content in a manner which respected my informant population; to the process of scheduling and carrying out the interviews, taking into consideration the informants as individual human beings who were giving me their valuable time, ensuring to speak and question in an objective manner so as not to provoke, insult or harm them, but also to offer my humanity and ear as a researcher interested in their points of view and experiences; to my experience of

processing and analyzing the data. The stage of processing and transcribing the data required professionalism and careful steps to be taken to systematically record and anonymize all personal data in transcripts of interviews in order to protect the rights of my informants to privacy. Further, it is also important to note that any kind of analysis requires a synthesis of the data and interpretation by the researcher. In this process, it is critical to maintain ethical awareness of the subjects at the center of the research and take care that interpretations and analysis are not exploitative or harmful.

Chapter 4: Presentation of Findings & Discussion

In this study, I carried out in-depth qualitative interviews with five different informants. Four interviews were conducted in-person and one interview was carried out over Skype. Three interviews were conducted one-on-one and one interview was conducted with two informants simultaneously, as the two informants were acquaintances with young children and this arrangement suited them best. All of the respondents live in Oslo—or in neighborhoods in close proximity to Oslo—with their partners, all of whom are also Polish. Within the group of respondents, there is some diversity in terms of age, the length of time they have lived in Norway, educational background and occupation.

The interview guide was structured around a framework that was divided into several different sections: personal background and motivation for migration; family structure, practices and experiences with family-related social benefits and resources; work-life balance; language and integration; and future plans. Many of the questions included in these various sections were open-ended and allowed for respondents to reflect freely and to steer the conversation in ways that allowed them to expand on themes of relevance to them. At the completion of questions from the structured framework of the interview, I inquired of informants if there were any additional topics, themes or incidents relating to their experience of motherhood as Polish immigrants in Norway that they would like to contribute and expand upon.

Participant Profiles

**All names and aspects of personal data or background have been altered to preserve the anonymity of participants

1. Karolina, age 30, comes from a small town outside of Wrocław in Poland. She lived in the city of Wrocław from the age of 18 until she moved to Norway with her partner. She has lived in Norway for two years and rents an apartment with her partner on Nesodden, a peninsula in close proximity to the center of Oslo. She finished her high school education in Poland before embarking on a career as a professional cook. When she moved to Poland, she continued to work as a cook in a restaurant. She has one son who was born in Norway; at the time of the interview her son was about three months old and Karolina was taking her maternity leave. Karolina described her

motivation for moving to Norway as a way to fulfill her desire for a change in perspective, and a way to move on from a negative past work experience. Her partner had previously been working in Norway seasonally, and they together decided to relocate for a longer period. They were not necessarily planning to start a family so soon into their settlement in Norway. Before she became pregnant, she had started taking Norwegian language courses, but needed to stop during her pregnancy. She hopes to continue with her courses and would like to gain fluency in the language. After her maternity leave is over, Karolina is contemplating returning to her work as a cook but is concerned it will take away from her time with her son and family. She is considering looking for a different type of work that will have a more structured schedule. Karolina does not know if they will settle in Norway permanently, but says she wishes to stay for a significant time, until her son is a few years old at least.

2. Gloria, age 34, comes from a small village located in the north of Poland. She moved to Norway the summer after completing her college education in environmental protection and conservation ten years ago. She described her motivation for migrating to Norway as primarily financial. She moved here alone, and her then-partner, who is now her husband, joined her within a year. She has lived on Nesodden for the entirety of her stay in Norway. She has two sons who at the time of the interview were 17 months old and 2 months old, both of whom were born in Norway. Her older son attends barnehage. She and her husband each own and run their own firms; hers is a cleaning business and his hires out movers and painters. Over the course of her stay in Norway, she has tried several times to take language courses. She says that because of her children and work, she has never been able to get to the level she hoped but can follow conversations and has a general understanding. She and her family were planning a permanent return to Poland a few months from the time of the interview, motivated by a desire to reunite with family remaining there, to support her widowed mother, and to return "home".
3. Agata, age 29, is from Krakow. She studied theatre for five years at a reputable academy in Poland and stayed on as an actor there for two years after she completed

her studies. Although she had initially planned to move to Warsaw, she chose to follow her long-term romantic partner to Norway and has been living here for two years, and they are now married. She describes the initial decision and experience of relocation as spontaneous and somewhat tumultuous—she became pregnant only a few weeks after her arrival and returned to Poland because she was unsure if she was entitled to any entitlements or care. She returned to Norway in her sixth month of pregnancy, where she ultimately carried out her birth—Agata communicated that she was extremely satisfied with the quality of care and attention in the Norwegian health care system. Her son is one and a half years old, and she says that it is not likely she would have stayed in Norway if not for her child. Her son attends barnehage and her husband works as a driver for a Norwegian company. She works at a staffing/recruiting agency for construction and contracting jobs and is developing her art in various creative projects on the side of her work and family obligations. She is taking Norwegian language courses online, and says that her primary motivating factors for learning the language are to live a normal life in Norway and to relate to her child. She is not sure if her family will stay in Norway permanently, but is sternly opposed to returning to Poland before a change in the governing party occurs.

4. Maria, age 34, was born and raised in a small mountain village in southeastern Poland. She lived in Warsaw prior to moving to Norway. She has a very developed education and work history, holding a law degree and certified as a life coach. While living in Warsaw, she held various positions working with youth and the mentally disabled, as a caseworker in family courts and as a sociotherapist, and also doing wilderness therapy. She describes her primary motivation for moving to Norway as being her daughter—other related factors she posits are the wealth of nature and lack of pollution, the superior education system, and the quality of health care for children. She emphasizes her disdain for the Polish approach to childrearing throughout the interview and is also the only informant who has given birth to her child in Poland. Her daughter is three years old and attends barnehage. She and her partner live in Stabekk with their daughter, where they rent their home. Maria has lived in Norway for a bit over two years.

Although Maria did not qualify for most of the different family-related benefits I discussed with the other informants—because she gave birth to her daughter in Poland—she discusses in length the various resources, NGOs and organizations she sought out for advice and assistance relating to legal help, enrolling her daughter in barnehage, language assistance, and various other endeavors. Her partner is fluent in Norwegian after taking some immersive courses and highly educated in informatics and computer science, but with great difficulty has only been able to find administrative work in the construction field. Maria herself works part-time as a bicycle courier, but dedicates a great amount of her time to organizing recreational workshops for Polish mothers with their children, as well as wilderness meet-ups for women. She hopes to eventually turn these workshops into a financially lucrative endeavor and has founded her own firm. Maria is currently finishing a degree in psychotherapy of dance and movement. She has been searching for potential work in that field for some time, hoping to find work that involves her therapy skills and helping people. She has been studying Norwegian, but she feels that it will be difficult to find work in her field before she has established fluency in the language.

Maria says that her future in Norway depends on whether she can find relevant work that she is qualified for and cares about, but that she would also strongly have to consider the consequences that moving again might have on her daughter. She would love to move to the north or to Finland and set up a practice that engages her therapy skills and her love for nature.

5. Julia, age 29, comes from Szczecin, near the western border of Poland. She moved to Norway two years ago and rents a part of a home in the area near Holmenkollen with her husband and one-year old daughter. She studied law and worked in a fitness center when she was living in Poland. Her husband worked seasonal shifts in Norway and so travelled back and forth often. Julia described this period of time as difficult on the relationship and motivated her husband to request a full-time position in Norway so they could relocate together for the long term. Their wish was granted and her husband continues to work for a company that constructs tennis courts. Julia mentioned that the company her husband works for was instrumental in helping them

get settled in Norway—such as assisting them financially until they had bank accounts set up, helping them to find their home and her to find a job, etc. She had worked part-time at a center that provided printing services for some time after they moved to Norway but was no longer employed there at the time of the interview.

Julia says she is passionate about makeup and aspires to find work in that field, or in some capacity that will allow her to be creative and stimulate and develop her intellectually. She has taken a Norwegian course and plans to continue her efforts to learn the language formally, but for now is doing independent study on her own with books, radio and by reading the news in Norwegian. She says that when her family first moved to Norway, they only planned to stay for a year. Although some things can be difficult, they enjoy the calm and peace of life in Norway and do not plan to leave anytime soon.

Contextualizing the Narratives & Analysis

The following section will provide a selection of different narratives derived from the interviews conducted with the informants, accompanied by a narrative analysis of the text. It is noteworthy to mention several different points before going into the analysis and discussion of the narratives. First, the interviews were not initially structured to intentionally produce stories that would function as narrative excerpts—this was an unexpected and organic product of the manner in which informants chose to respond. This supports the idea that informants were actively utilizing storied narrative as a tool in the process of meaning-making to communicate their experiences of motherhood and integration practices in the context of Norway, and this often went outside the realm of discussion of the family-related social welfare resources, benefits and entitlements I had initially planned to focus on. This falls in line with Riessman's discussion of the need for researchers to surrender their focus or planned methodology in interviews in order to shift the power in an interview setting and "follow participants down *their* trails" (Riessman, 2008, p. 24).

Second, the narrative excerpts that have been chosen for analysis are kept in the true form from the time of their transcription. Although my own role in the translation of

the text and selection of its transcription format must be considered as forms of interpretation, and will be further discussed, I have chosen to work with more brief and tightly bound pieces of narrative to attempt to limit any further intervention as a result of researcher curation on my behalf. As my intention through this research is to highlight the experiences of the informants, I hoped to portray and work with their accounts in the most authentic form possible, so effort was placed on maintaining the holistic format of the segments of narrative derived from the interview transcripts.

The format of the analysis done here does not follow one single mode of narrative analysis, but combines several approaches. Throughout the field of narrative analysis, there are a number of philosophies and types of analysis, many of which are often combined in a variety of ways for distinctive objectives. In this study, there will be a focus primarily on a thematic level, to consider the content of the informants' narratives, to focus on *what* it is they are speaking about and how this is significant in the context of the research aim. However, narrative thematic analysis in its strict focus on the *content* of a narrative often neglects to consider other structures and influences at play in its the creation and meaning. I believe that my role as the researcher, translator and analyst of the narrative, as well as contextual elements of the life and identity of the informant who provides a particular narrative are crucial for consideration. The women who are the subjects of this study are speaking about their positions in a context that extends the contents of the narratives selected here, after all. Thus, I will also include some functional and dialogic considerations in my analysis. By functional, I mean that I will examine what the narrative *does* as a result of its telling. The dialogic component of the analysis will unpack the context of the story-telling within the interview setting and as part of this research project, and contribute to a relation of how the topics or themes reflect the broader context of the informants' experience as an immigrant mother in Norwegian society interacting with its various structures.

Analysis of Narratives

I. Karolina & Gloria

The first narrative is a selection from the only interview that was conducted with two informants simultaneously. Although the planned methodology arranged for one-on-

one interviews, I was willing to be flexible in consideration of the fact that my informants are busy mothers who do not necessarily have a lot of free time in their day to spare, much less two hours to surrender for the sake of research. The dynamic of having two informants responding at the same time proved to contribute significantly to the richness of the data—not only were they speaking with me, but they were having conversations between themselves as well, commiserating in some instances and sharing advice in others. Just to provide a small bit of background briefing, both Karolina and Gloria live on Nesodden, a peninsula that is a short ferry commute away from the center of Oslo. They both have young newborns who are just a few months old, but Gloria also has another son who is a year and a half. Karolina has lived in Norway for about two years. Gloria has lived in Norway for about a decade, and at the time of the interview is planning a permanent return to Poland. The context for this narrative was a discussion about how each of the women gained knowledge about the variety of benefits and entitlements available for parents and families. Gloria expressed that her main source for information was online and through her network of Polish friends, and continued on:

Gloria: To be quite honest, it's not a secret that Norwegians are in their own territory. They are familiar with the systems and the regulations, they know this information. For us, immigrants, we have to familiarize ourselves and learn all of this from new. Especially in the case that you're having your first child. I went to NAV often for advice and clarifications, relating to sick-leave, etc. But that was also, I was under the impression, related to me trying to sort it out, and they weren't quite there with me. So, the whole process of sorting out my maternity leave, specifically relating to my pay—I should have started collecting in November for Fabian, but I will just now get the transfer this week because I only heard back last week. So, overall I waited a very long time through this process. I called and asked frequently, and they assured me everything was normal in the process and they had all the relevant documents. But then, funny story, I received a notice that they required a few more documents from me. I was confused about what exactly they needed and why, but I sent them in because I didn't want to drag the process out any longer. I finally got a response that they had analyzed my maternity leave period and the payouts and everything looked in order. I was like, "What maternity leave are you talking about?" It turns out that instead of looking over my application relating to Fabian, they had gone over my payouts during my maternity leave with Filip. Then I finally realized why everything had taken so long, and I contacted NAV to let them know I have a second child. And that my application had been for my second child... [laughter] So overall, I know how this all looks. I had fulfilled all of my duties from my side, and they had made a mistake on their end.

First, I will address some of the themes that come up in Gloria's story. She begins by making a distinction in the accessibility of native Norwegians and immigrants to

information about available programs and resources—indicating that she sees the difference of accessibility to such resources based on knowledge-standpoint. I interpret this to mean that she considers her capabilities different from those of native Norwegians. Because of this, she utilizes her information resource—the social welfare administration NAV—actively to assist her in decoding the bureaucracy involved in motherhood, toward utilizing the various family-related benefits she is entitled to. The next turn in her story describes the error in processing by the administrative office when she is applying for maternity leave. Although she had gone out of her way to confirm that she had carried out her duties accordingly and was met with an affirmative response, the error of inconvenience still met her. She was emphasizing that although she had operationalized her capability to cooperate with the office to access her entitlement, she did not have full control to secure that the process went smoothly. Throughout her telling of the story, she laughed and did not communicate anger or frustration, but rather seemed to accept her experience as normal. Gloria had lived in Norway for a decade—she was acquainted with the shortcomings of the bureaucracy.

Researcher: And once you realized this, did everything sort out afterward?

Gloria: Yes. Just like I said, last week I heard back. My English isn't that good, so I had a friend who has lived here for a long time and is good with Norwegian help me out. She called them, and spoke to them in my place, and we got some clarification.

Researcher: We'll return to some more questions about language later, but do you think it might have been a bit easier if you were fluent in Norwegian?

Gloria: Certainly. Unfortunately, but in almost all cases, language was an obstacle for us.

Researcher: Specifically with NAV?

Gloria: Especially with NAV, where most processes and communications will be carried out in Norwegian. In schools and hospitals, it is more flexible and there are few occasions where you can't communicate in English. But I'm not surprised that it's different with NAV. There are a lot of different situations and different people.

In this subsequent portion of the narrative, Gloria specifies the factor of language as an obstacle. She has a fair understanding of conversational Norwegian, but she is not necessarily comfortable with it in a professional environment. Although the previous error she discussed was quickly fixed, she posits blame for the misunderstanding and other

difficulties with the social welfare office as a result of language differences. Her last line suggests that the social welfare office, which deals extensively with immigrants and foreigners, is intentional in its preferred use of Norwegian. Gloria is again acknowledging the existing obstacles for foreigners within the institutions that are meant to assist them. Karolina then continues the conversation:

Karolina: And I myself, I found all of the information I needed on my own. I didn't really have a network to check in with. So, NAV was the source of a lot of my information. I settled a lot of what I needed to do on-line, sending in relevant documents and attachments directly through the site. I had to upload lots of documents through the site relating to my sick-leave during pregnancy. I had some issues with getting the relevant documents through on time, but those issues stemmed mostly from my employer who wasn't getting me those documents on time. They were failing with their delivery. What was surprising for me, was that NAV has no influence on the part of the employer. They will simply send them a reminder, but if for instance they don't want to or they forget or they are resentful, and they don't send you what you need there are no consequences for your employer, just on you because you need to make an effort and stress yourself, and even fight with your employer so they submit what you need.

Researcher: Do you think it's possible for it to be some other way?

Karolina: There could be fines they have to pay. Some kind of formal written notice, that if they do not fulfill their end then they will have to pay. You're in this situation, where you have a child, and because your employer won't fulfill their part of the obligation, you can't receive the benefits you are entitled to. What are you supposed to live off of?

Karolina says she does not have an extensive social network she can rely on in Norway and must seek information out herself and through NAV. Overall, she commends her experiences with the social welfare office. However, the point of contention she has is their limited power in exerting influence on her employer, who is not fulfilling a duty related to her request for sick-leave pay. This is another example of difficulty with operationalizing a given entitlement—due to bureaucracy—but magnified because Karolina feels a lack of existing support toward the activation of her benefit. The capability on her part exists, but an obstacle impedes her from the structural level of the institution.

Gloria: Exactly. And it differs from case to case, you have an issue because of your employer and I have an issue directly because I know I am obligated myself to organize all of my documents because I have my own business, and even though I had everything prepared and in order, the error was on their side and I couldn't influence that at all.

Karolina: It's chaos. But either way, I still think it's much better with NAV and all of the existing benefits here than in Poland. I imagine if I had gotten pregnant in Poland, we were living in a small apartment where we were paying 1,100 zloty a month, I had lost my job because I had broken my leg, had no employment contract, so I didn't get any disability benefits, Karl worked odd jobs here and there. It would have been a disaster if we had a child in the mix. We would have had nothing at all, and we probably would be completely dependent on getting help from each of our mothers.

The conversational dynamic between Karolina and Gloria allows them to reflect their own experience of inconvenience with the other's—they are thus finding a common ground for how they, as mothers, navigate the Norwegian social welfare system. This dialogue exhibits how these mothers are negotiating the obstacles they meet in the process of activating the entitlements they are owed and in the process of sharing are also finding out that their experiences are not isolated. Karolina, at the end, puts perspective on her current situation in Norway against what it might have looked like to have a baby in Poland—her capabilities for well-being are without a doubt easier to functionalize in Norway, despite the obstacles that have been at the center of this discussion.

The dynamic of having both informants in one interview inspired me to consider how different my collected data might appear if all of the interviews were organized as group meetings. The level of richness for analysis and interpretation would also differ. I will expand on this further in the forthcoming discussion.

II. Agata

My second informant, Agata, provided me with the greatest quantity of storied narrative, often going into long monologues in response to questions. She described herself as an open, emotive person and emphasized the importance of creativity in her life, coming from a background in theatre and dance. The following narrative was in response to two related questions: the first about the intersection of language abilities and accessibility of parental benefits; the second about the intersection of being a mother and motivation toward learning the language:

Agata: I want to learn the language mostly just to be able to live a normal life here. That is for sure. And relating to my child, definitely. When he gets a bit older, like I mentioned earlier, I don't want him to be embarrassed and I want him to be able to invite his friends over. I want to go to meetings at school, only the youngest woman working there speaks English. They are open, they of course want me to learn and they like me, so they are

helping me. But it is definitely very important. But it is frustrating. I want to know how [my son] is doing in school, how his day went and how he behaved. I want to be able to ask about all of this, but I can't.

Agata omits answering the first part of the question all together—she became pregnant very shortly after reuniting with her partner here in Norway and wasn't entitled to receive paid maternity leave. However, earlier in our interview she talks about how enabling having her son in nursery school is, providing her with time so she can work full-time and help support her family in Norway. Instead, in this piece of narrative she focuses on her desired capability of fluency in the language, so that she can “live a normal life” and relate more to her child who is starting to speak Norwegian before his parents do. The first comment speaks to the idea that until she acquires the language, she is living a life that is atypical. Language, from her view, is a necessary means to the end—in order to live a “normal life” in Norway. Further, her mention of her son and her limitations in interactions with his school as a result of her lack of language proficiency represents an obstacle of functionalizing her full capacity as a mother—she wants to have the freedom to participate fully in her son's schooling but is stunted by her linguistic limitations. She continues to relay this sentiment below:

Researcher: So none of the workers beside the one speak English?

Agata: Most of them don't, no. Two of the older women are Norwegian and they don't speak any English. And the leader speaks English, but she's not always there. And I would like to be able to ask and know whenever, about whatever problems there are, and I want to have good contact of course, I want them to know I am interested. I don't want to be judged as a mother on the basis of not knowing the language. Because that is hurtful. But I can't make full contact, full communication with them—about what I am going through, that I am isolated here, I can't tell them these things and it's irritating. And I am irritated at myself, because I have to learn. But on the other hand, I am also tired. And I am not structured with the language classes. They are late in the evening, at the end of the day, so I am usually studying right before the class. He tells me too that I have to be a bit more structured. And I think sometimes that I really just need to try to get into a course through NAV, so I am going every day like school. Suffer through that half year with less income, and finally do something more. It is hard to balance all of these things—a child, work, language, following your passion—not even to mention spending a bit of time with my husband. And for that, there is pretty much no time at all. And it feels good to say all of this out loud, because I realized I should just reach out to NAV right away and see if there is any chance for a course. And then I could quit my job for that, that would be wonderful.

Agata communicates that it is not just for her son's sake that she wants to learn Norwegian—she wants to engage with his teachers and have a relationship with them so she can fully participate in and actualize her role as mother. She switches over from talking about the situation at the nursery school and starts to discuss her efforts in the online language courses she participates in some evenings. Because Agata works long days—she sometimes leaves at 5 in the morning—and then has to fulfill the role of mother when she comes home, she is struggling to focus her energy on acquiring the language skill she sees as crucial to achieving fulfillment in her life. The last section of her narrative plays out almost as if it is stream-of-consciousness thought—after describing a hopeless situation, she starts constructing an alternative plan for realizing her dream. This portion of the narrative is demonstrative of how Agata strategizes a method to operationalize her capability—to become fluent in the Norwegian language—into a functioning—to *be* fluent in the language.

III. Maria

The following narrative comes from the interview with my fourth informant, Maria. Despite her high level of education and ambition to pursue her career path here, she has had difficulty finding work that matches her skills and qualifications and credits her lack of fluency in Norwegian as the primary reason for this. Since moving to Norway, she has organized a series of meet-ups for Polish mothers to network and share information. Here she talks about the formation of these meetings:

I started my own business because I am studying psychotherapy and I am a life coach. Because it was so difficult for me in the beginning when we moved here, especially as a mother because my daughter was one when we moved here and after a year, I think that was the hardest time. She was coming off of breastfeeding and we were trying to set new boundaries, and you can really go crazy. So, I started organizing meet-ups for Polish mothers with children, so we could meet and share information – my daughter was in barnehage, and I didn't just want to do this on a volunteer basis, but wanted to invest my time to try to reap some kind of financial return. This was last year before summer vacation, and we met a few times before vacation. We all met and shared lots of different things, within the boundaries of... I saw later that this was a vital event and was necessary for many of the women, that many of us were in a similar situation: our partner was the only one working, so we did not have a lot of income or money, and we found ourselves somewhat isolated and lonely, many of us were communicating or trying to reach out through forums like Facebook, but... I was under the impression that we were missing something.

Maria's educational background and work history involve law and extensive social work—she is not a stranger to the world of organizing and acting. When she is struggling in the unfamiliar setting of Norway, during the strenuous early period of motherhood, she takes action and creates an opportunity and a space to interact with others who are in a similar position to her own. She activates her difficult condition into a situation that allows her and others to thrive—her organized meet-ups and conversations with other Polish mothers allow her to see that there is “something missing,” while also simultaneously aiding in filling that void. The following excerpt followed shortly after the previous, right after Julia shared a story about a pivotal moment in the mothers' group when they opened up to one another for the first time and spoke of the difficulties of being a mother and an immigrant in Norway:

Maria: I am a holder of the belief, which is getting more common, that motherhood is not easy. I personally feel that I wasn't born naturally with perfect skills and talents in mothering, it's not a given... I know these women exist, and I am close with some of them, so I know this is their passion and they have a flow in it. Not for me—I love my child but it is hard work in every minute. And if you are sleep-deprived, you haven't gone out of your house in many days, you haven't had contact with any adults, it's psychologically... you run on empty. You have been pulled in so many directions—a pencil falls and you lose your mind. So, I try not to hide this from others. For me, no one really told me it would be like this – some people scare you and say “You'll see, you'll have your own kids and you will see...” But nothing concrete - no one advises you that it will be difficult because you are tired, that you can't go to the toilet, that you won't have time to take a bath or to eat, that the child will always come first, that you should forget about sex, when you see your partner you will hand him the child and run the other way... That he might have expectations of you, to be sexy and attractive but all you can dream about is just putting your head down on a pillow and falling asleep... So this is all heavy on my heart.

This monologue from Maria is presented almost as pouring out of her heart—the way she spoke during this portion of the interview was moving, for lack of other words. Throughout the interview, she has framed herself as someone who holds a progressive pedagogical approach in high esteem, and was specifically motivated to move to Norway to give her daughter a better life. For her to speak her honest truth and admit the hardship of motherhood is not easy, but she regards it as essential to share with others in order to break down the stereotype of perfect motherhood. This links back to her motivation in

organizing the meet-ups for Polish mothers and creating a space where Polish mothers can talk openly and honestly about their shared experiences without judgement.

Although it does not occur in this specific narrative, it is significant to share that Maria also spoke at length about how language functioned as an obstacle for her in Norwegian society, to connect back to some of the narratives provided by other informants. Despite her high level of education, extensive qualifications, and persistence in seeking out contacts in her work field, she has not been able to find work in her field.

This was the only interview that was conducted in my own home, which I believe is significant to mention. Maria was very genuine and open to sharing, which was part of her personality as it translated to me during our meeting, but perhaps the intimacy of our environment also contributed to her ability to speak from a more vulnerable position than the other informants had.

IV. Julia

The next narrative comes from Julia, my final informant. This is the only interview that was conducted over Skype and not in person, so the dynamic of the interview was different from the others based on the interface—there were drops in the connection when parts of the conversation may have been lost or had to be repeated, for example. Additionally, the fact that we did not meet in person may have affected the level upon which Julia opened up to me; conversely, it may also have allowed her to open up in a way she may not have been comfortable with in person. Julia has lived in Norway for about two years, and did not qualify for paid maternity leave after she gave birth to her daughter because she had not worked in Norway long enough prior to her pregnancy. Instead of discussing her uptake of social welfare benefits, she focused many of her responses around her experiences with pregnancy and post-pregnancy related health care and programs. Julia provided the following narrative after discussing her history of miscarriages prior to her pregnancy in Norway:

Julia: I needed peace and calm. I know some women want to have control, they want to have access and control over their doctor's visits and check-ups and results... but for me the most important thing was to have peace and quiet, and not to be scared by negative opinions. Honestly, the Norwegian health care system—I know that there are many Polish women who complain about it, who don't agree with this system – but I personally really liked it. I really liked having a midwife, and that it wasn't strictly a visit at the doctor to check

my vitals and observe the results – I felt cared for, nurtured – I felt like there was a relationship between me and the midwife. It wasn't just a transaction, my psychological and emotions state were important and considered. I really liked that.

For Julia, it was important that she have conditions of safety and tranquility provided to her in the health care system managing her pregnancy and birth. What she communicates as valuable in her experience in the Norwegian hospital is that she was treated like a human and not an object—the feelings of nurture and care aided her through what could have been a psychologically difficult time, in relation to her history. Although she positions herself as an outsider, in comparison to other Polish women, with regard to her favoritism for the Norwegian health care system, most of my other informants spoke positively about their experiences with their own pregnancies in Norwegian hospitals. Many even said they would never consider giving birth in a Polish hospital after their experience in Norway. Julia continued on to talk about her experiences following the birth of her daughter:

I really appreciated the post-birth approach to the mother's health taken here. We were in touch with our *helsesøster* [nurse] after the birth, and she took care of organizing the *barselgruppe* [maternity group], even though I did not have a good experience in that context – I felt the women were not open and accepting toward me, the women did not really want to make a bond with me, they were all Norwegian. But that may also be because we live in a bit more “posh” area... it was somewhat traumatic for me, because I generally feel positive about assimilating into this culture and getting to know people, and I felt this wall up around them.

Although Julia has had a positive experience relating to her birth and post-birth, an occasion that she is looking forward to—engaging in a mothers' group—becomes an unpleasant experience where she feels alienated and like an outsider. Later in our interview, she describes how important her position as a mother has been for her as a grounds for integration, providing her with opportunities to socialize and meet others. Unfortunately, in this first interaction she was met with a “wall” by the other mothers. Julia attributed this to a cultural difference that was not based in ethnicity, but rather class—her neighbors were generally from a higher bracket of income and did not try to relate to her on a genuine level. She continues her narrative:

But well, I really liked that our helsesøster organized different talks and workshops about childcare, I also liked the first aid course I attended with my husband where we learned a lot of new information. They have many brochures and information generally, which was important for us. Our helsesøster was readily available for us to contact when we had questions, we could text her and she would respond, we really liked that. When our daughter was a bit older, we started going to baby-singing meet-ups at the church, which was super. We also started going to swimming classes and met many mothers there with a more positive attitude, they were interest in getting to know me and meeting outside of the classes.

Julia communicated her valuation of the care provided to her during her pregnancy, and her positive feelings about post-birth care and resources sustained. The provision of information and educational workshops were effective in contributing to Julia's sense of fulfillment in her early stages of motherhood. Whereas the mother group made Julia feel socially isolated and othered, the activities organized by her local nurse provided her with knowledge and socialization. As her daughter grew a bit older, Julia continued to engage in a variety of different activities that connected to her position as a mother.

I think it's difficult because we don't have anyone close to physically help us day-to-day, no family nearby to take my daughter for an hour so I can take a nap, that is the difficult part of immigration. But I will say that considering all of the resources I have encountered while living in Norway the past year, there are many to take advantage of. You just have to know the language, or know someone who will tell you about your options and cooperate with you, or know exactly where to look to find this information. I also got a lot of support and information through the mothers' group I attended for Polish mothers. I had people to talk to, people to open up to about my own personal experiences and struggles. And this is what the first year after birth has looked like for me.

Julia was only briefly employed in Norway before she became pregnant. Her daughter is about a year old and still has not started attending nursery school, and so the majority of Julia's time living in Norway has revolved around her experience of pregnancy and motherhood. She does not say this explicitly, but she expresses that a lot of aspects of her identity currently relate back to her position as a mother. Her lack of a support network, in the sense of family members nearby, makes it so that she has to extend herself and be the primary caregiver while her partner has been working over the past year. However, she actively seeks support in other forms—through the resources that have been provided to her by the health care system, through her participation in various classes for moms and children, and then in the Polish mothers' group she mentions at

the end of this narrative. Participation in these various activities are examples of how Julia is operationalizing her capability to activate inclusion in her life, to assimilate and socialize in the context of her new setting in Norway.

Further Discussion

The project initially undertook the pursuit to explore how Polish women experience motherhood as immigrants in Norway—through their experiences, successes and discontents with some of the existing social welfare resources made available to parents and families—such as maternity leave and pay, paternity leave, various forms of financial assistance available, and the institution of subsidized nursery school known as barnehage. The intention was to utilize the position of the informants as Polish mothers living in Norway as a lens—and through analyses of their provided narratives—to understand their experiences in Norwegian society on several different but interconnected levels: in relation to those different benefits and resources available to parents through the Norwegian social welfare system and their experiences accessing and navigating them through networks and institutions, and regarding their family practices and dynamics—specifically concerning whether there were changes or developments in these practices and dynamics in the context of migrating from Poland to Norway. While the focus of the project was centered around these pursuits, the research was also aimed at keeping the interviews flexible enough so as to allow for the Polish informants to highlight topics and themes of importance to them and their experience of motherhood.

The data collected in the interviews and forming the variety of narratives from the informants covered a variety of different topics. I believe that an inductive approach to data analysis—as opposed to a deductive approach whereby the analysis would be carried out based upon pre-existing frameworks developed in other studies and from existing theories—was necessary in the context of this project because of the expository nature of the research approach and goal. Because one of the primary purposes of data collection in the interviews was to allow for the informants themselves to open-endedly highlight and discuss the subjects that mattered to them most, the purpose was for their stories and their narrative to function as the enriching material upon which to find similarities and themes.

An advantage of using the capability approach in application to contexts of migration is that it can be applied to analyze different levels. Sabrina Juran, in an article

about the applicability of Sen's capability approach in international migration contexts, relays that:

Despite its person-centered perspective on human development, it also considers the surrounding systems that prevail in the countries of origin and destination [...] that shape developmental outcomes. Therefore, the capability approach allows for the explanation of international migration as a by-product of macro conditions, without ignoring the perspective of the individual. The migration process, including trajectory and settlement, is understood as a means to expand people's freedoms. (Juran, 2016, p. 25)

Juran describes the essential characteristic of layered applicability that makes the capability approach an instrumental method in unpacking experiences of migration and settlement—there is room to consider the individual level of experience, but it is often essential to consider the variety of influencing factors, such as differing cultures, policies, labor markets, etc. between host and destination country, and how those differences interact with an individual's ability to achieve their desired freedoms and state of well-being. Public discourse and popular opinions often reference migration as a strategy to operationalize and create new freedoms and opportunities. However, we must also consider that individuals who migrate often surrender a certain set of capabilities and functionings—they may leave behind a familiar language, established family and social network, culture, institutionalized system of bureaucracy they are acquainted with, established career—and enter a sphere of the unfamiliar which they must assimilate to and learn to navigate anew. The capability approach is effective at teasing out the negotiations that take place in the process of migration and settlement—new freedoms and opportunities may be available, but the actual process of enablement and functionalization of those capabilities can be tested and brought under investigation.

A drawback to utilizing the capability approach in this instance, that is in relation to narratives from the informants, is the difficulty in measurability of capabilities and functionings. Their narratives cannot be reduced down to specific, quantifiable statistics that translate the extent of their accessibility to the ends of "well-being". My analysis in the narrative seeks to explore and seek out how the informants construct and express their experiences, successes and difficulties and how they conceptualize their own capabilities. However, it is not an easy task to interpret, from holistic pieces of narrative,

the greater context of their life as they experience it. I must rely on the information they provide me and the limited context I have of their situations in general.

Further, I must consider the role of bias in the interviews and in my process of narrative selection. Although my informants also spoke of many of the enabling structures in Norway, it must be considered that “social desirability bias” may have had an influence (Bryman, 2012, pp. 227-228). My position as a researcher exploring the experiences of Polish immigrants in Norway may have created a presumption that I was looking for them to share their negative experiences. On the other hand, the narratives of difficulty and struggle may be disproportionately represented in my selection of the narrative excerpts.

In the explored narratives, and throughout the conducted interviews, lack of fluency in the language for the informants was mentioned again and again as a significant obstacle on a number of levels—accessing information about family-related benefits and resources, operationalizing the actual entitlements through the proper institutions, finding work that matched education and skill level, and staying informed about their children’s experiences at nursery school were some that carried across the interviews with different informants. None of the five informants considered themselves fluent in the language, and they all experienced difficulties associated with this. Although most of them described some level of interaction with studying the language, in most cases they described their difficulties in balancing language courses and their other responsibilities. I suggest the expansion of affordable opportunities for learning Norwegian, specifically strategies that would cater to women like my informants. Perhaps something to consider might be the formation of *barselgrupper* (mother groups) for foreign mothers where they can practice their Norwegian with one another.

My position here is as the analyst of the material the story-tellers (my informants) provide me with; however, I also take the position of the story-teller to the extent that I am presenting the findings here through my own interpretation. This is an important dynamic to remember when considering the function of narrative analysis—although my intention is to relay the experiences of my informants in as true a manner as possible, the findings I present are inevitably the results of several levels of filtering and interpretation placed upon the stories I have been told.

It would be interesting to continue this project utilizing the structure of focus groups as an alternative method for data collection. Several points have led to me to this belief. First of all, my initial interview was conducted with two informants at the same time. Although I was still leading the conversation with my questions, the dynamic was interesting for observation purposes in giving me insight on the interaction between the two mothers—how they would respond to one another and not just to me. For narrative analysis specifically, this provided another rich layer of context and depth in that they were sharing stories and accounts with another mother, and not just directed at me, the researcher. In a larger group setting, this could develop even more. Secondly, a recurring theme mentioned throughout the interviews was the value of having a network to reach out to—some women described this as something lacking in their life, others described their satisfaction in knowing they had a friend or contact they could rely on or speak to. Overall, it seemed that socialization was something all of the women were open to. Thirdly, my fourth informant discussed workshops that she organizes for Polish women and their children to meet, socialize and share information, advice and clothing.

The application of a micro/macro level theory could be an interesting extension of this analysis, in order to connect the individual themes and experiences into a greater picture that could potentially have some kind of influence or value in the context of policy and institutional practice, for example with NAV. This project falls more into the category a micro-approach—it considers a small group of individuals who share some traits or characteristics, and considers these informants on an individual basis. However, certain commonalities or patterns based off of the data build knowledge/information that could contribute in a meaningful way on a macro-level—for example, the generalized difficulties that informants discussed with regard to language (as a barrier to finding professional work or in navigating and utilizing existing social welfare systems and schemes) indicates that there is a **gap of accessibility**. Although the opportunities exist and are technically available to all, there is an “invisible” obstacle that was referred to repeatedly throughout the interviews. The references were not explicit, but were manifested in references of frustration over issues of accessibility and understanding at places such as NAV, experiences with discrimination, and a disadvantage and disconnect that parents often felt in relation to their inability to fully interact with teachers at their children’s nursery

school. So, although Norway is a country which is generally praised on the basis of its richness of social welfare resources and benefits, specifically those that support working parents, data from this study seems to suggest that those benefits are not fully accessible to all—specifically alienating those who are not fluent in Norwegian.

Chapter 5: Conclusion / Summary and Implications for Future Research

In conclusion, the purpose of this research project is to shed light on the experiences of Polish women living in Norway and to highlight the positions and themes most significant to them, utilizing their own narratives relating to motherhood as a lens to better understand their family dynamics, their interactions with various social welfare institutions and resources available for parents, and their perceptions of and obstacles to integration and belonging in Norwegian society. Utilizing a narrative analysis and the capability approach, this project considered different narratives from Polish mothers in order to gain insight into their experience of motherhood as immigrants in Norway.

This study is only a small portion of observations of a small group of individuals, of a much larger and growing population of Polish people settling in Norway. The original projects—specifically Transfam and EFFECT—that inspired this study were composed of many different studies and levels of research, targeting a scope of different themes and questions, utilizing a number of methods and approaches. They were ground-breaking in the research that was completed, the frameworks that were established, and the wealth of information that was provided to inform academics, policy-makers, government officials, institutional workers, and many others in Poland, Norway and beyond. “Most importantly, however, we give voice to the respondents and infer from their narratives about their own understandings, definitions, and means that they employ to organize their lives abroad” (Slany et al., 2018, p. 16). The authors of *Transnational Families* describe this as their most significant undertaking—and I posit this as the central guideline and inspiration for my own research in this project. I hope that it contributes to this growing body of empirical data and research and helps to enrich understandings of the nuances of experience within the Polish migratory community in Norway, specifically to the population of women and mothers.

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Appendix:

- Invitation Letter
- Consent Form
- Interview Guide (English)
- NSD Approvals pg.

Are you a Polish mother living in Norway? Are you interested in taking part in a research project...?

You are the recipient of this invitation letter as a request for your participation in a Master's level research project about the experience of Polish mothers raising children and navigating the resources available to parents through the social welfare system in Norway.

The main purpose of the project is to gather information about the experiences of parenting in Norway for Polish women, highlighting important themes and topics expressed by the women themselves. Polish immigrants have come to make up the largest percentage of the foreign population living in Norway. More and more, individuals and families from Poland are settling in Norway long-term. My hope in conducting this research project is to highlight concerns, successes, benefits and shortcomings between existing policies and aspects of the Norwegian welfare system directed towards parents, and the target population of this research—Polish mothers.

Some background information about myself and my interest in this area of research:

I am a student at Oslo Metropolitan University, completing my Master's thesis project on this topic. Although I was born and raised in New York, my interest in researching Polish immigrants in Norway relates to the fact that my parents are both immigrants from Poland. Increasingly more research has been directed toward studying men who immigrate from Poland, as well as family practices and integration efforts for Polish immigrants in Norway. To my knowledge, little study has focused specifically on the experiences of women relocating from Poland to Norway. I hope to contribute to this lacking field of research by highlighting first-hand experiences and themes of importance—by speaking directly to Polish mothers and providing them the opportunity to share their experiences and to cooperate in developing this project.

I hope that you will participate and look forward to hearing about your experiences.

Who is responsible for the research project?

Oslo Metropolitan University is the institution responsible for the project.

Why are you being asked to participate?

Your participation is requested because you fit the criteria of the target population. The researcher is looking for Polish women who are currently raising children in Norway. The only other guidelines for participation are that you fulfil at least one of the criteria below:

- You have at least one child who is or has been enrolled in barnehage, in the past 6 years
- You have carried out a pregnancy while in Norway and have utilized the parental leave benefit, in the past 6 years
- You have utilized the cash-for-care benefit

I am still actively seeking out other participants. If you know of anyone in your community who may be interested in participating, please feel free to pass along the relevant contact information, which you can find at the end of this letter.

What does participation involve for you?

This project is not meant for the gathering of statistical data, or for painting a fully comprehensive picture of the experience of mothering in Norway as a Polish immigrant. Rather, it is meant to be a platform for sharing specific experiences and stories of individuals from a collective group, and in doing so perhaps elucidating some common themes or practices.

You will be one of approximately a dozen participants who will participate in a one-on-one interview with the researcher. The interview is expected to last approximately 1-2 hours, in a quiet location to be chosen jointly by you and the researcher. The themes of the interview will cover a variety of topics, including but not necessarily limited to: your experiences with various aspects of the Norwegian welfare system related to parenting; your family structure and practices; your views and experiences of family gender dynamics in Poland and in Norway; your experiences with integration in a new country. Any personal data about your background will be anonymized to conceal your identity.

With your consent, the interview will be audio-recorded. Following the interview, the researcher will transcribe the recorded interview into a written format, at which time all personal information will be altered or deleted to maintain your anonymity.

If necessary, the researcher may contact you through email, by telephone, or request for a follow-up interview to clarify or elaborate on certain details. It is your choice to continue participating and you are by no means obligated to do so.

Participation is voluntary

Participation in the project is completely voluntary. If you choose to participate, you may withdraw your consent at any time without giving a reason. All information about you will then be made anonymous. There will be no negative consequences for you if you chose not to participate or later decide to withdraw.

Your personal privacy – how we will store and use your personal data

We will only use your personal data for the purpose(s) specified in this information letter. We will process your personal data confidentially and in accordance with data protection legislation (the General Data Protection Regulation and Personal Data Act).

Your personal data will only be available to me—the researcher—and to my supervisor. Following the collection of data during interviews, I will replace your name and contact details with a code. The list of names, contact details and respective codes will be stored separately from the rest of the collected data in a secured hard drive. I will take care to anonymize all data relating to private aspects of your life during transcription and processing of the data.

Personal information related to you will be anonymized in the final publication of this project. Your occupation and aspects of your personal and family life may be described in the project, unless you choose to withdraw this information. Your rights to your information are described in more detail below.

What will happen to your personal data at the end of the research project?

The project is scheduled to end in June 2020. At the completion of the project, any collected data that contains personal information and has not been anonymized, such as audio recordings, will be deleted. Data, such as anonymized transcripts of audio recordings, may be kept indefinitely. In the case that the project is not completed and the use of personal data will be necessary beyond the date stated above, you will be contacted with further information.

Your rights

So long as you can be identified in the collected data, you have the right to:

- access the personal data that is being processed about you
- request that your personal data is deleted
- request that incorrect personal data about you is corrected/rectified
- receive a copy of your personal data, and
- send a complaint to the Data Protection Officer or The Norwegian Data Protection Authority regarding the processing of your personal data

What gives us the right to process your personal data?

We will process your personal data based on your consent.

Based on an agreement with Oslo Metropolitan University, NSD – The Norwegian Centre for Research Data AS has assessed that the processing of personal data in this project is in accordance with data protection legislation.

Where can I find out more?

If you have questions about the project, or want to exercise your rights, contact:

myself, Paulina Gorczyn by email: pgorczyn@gmail.com or by telephone: +47 947 81 869.

Oslo Metropolitan University via Randi Wærdahl, the supervisor to the project by email: randi.wardahl@oslomet.no or by telephone: +47 67 23 80 33.

Our Data Protection Officer: Ingrid S. Jacobsen by email: Ingrid.jacobsen@oslomet.no or telephone: +47 67 23 55 34.

NSD – The Norwegian Centre for Research Data AS, by email: (personverntjenester@nsd.no) or by telephone: +47 55 58 21 17.

Yours sincerely,

Project Leader
(Researcher/supervisor)

Student (if applicable)

CONSENT FORM

I have received and understood information about the project carried out by Paulina Gorczyn—concerning Polish mothers and their experiences of parenting in Norway—and have been given the opportunity to ask questions. I understand my rights and know that I can stop participating at any time, and that I can request to have any and all personal information withdrawn. I also understand that I have access to the data which I provide.

I give consent:

- to participate in one-on-one interviews with the researcher. I understand these interviews will be audio-recorded and later transcribed into a written format.
- for materials, such as photographs and written narratives/timelines, that I provide to be utilized for analysis by the researcher. I understand materials will not be published in the project, but are tools for the researcher.

I give consent for my personal data to be processed until the end date of the project, approx. June 2020.

(Signed by participant, date)

Interview Guide: One-on-One Semi-Structured

Before beginning the interview, if the participant has not already provided **consent**, share the consent form and have them sign it.

Before beginning the interview, ask the participant to **brainstorm a short list of words/terms** that communicate something about their experience of being a Polish mother in Norway. The purpose here is to first elucidate themes that are of significance to the participant before entering into the formal interview (which may skew or lead participant's discussion about their experiences).

Personal background:

- Where were you born? Where did you live prior to moving to Norway?
- How old are you?
- When did you move to Norway? How long have you been living here?
- Where in Norway do you currently live?
- Do you own or rent your home?
- What is your level of education?
- Can you please tell me a bit about your initial reasons for coming to Norway?
 - Allow for free response from informant, but follow-up with more specific questions if necessary: Temporary or permanent? Did you move here alone or with family? Was it job-related?

Details of family / children / family structure and practices (cultural factors?):

- What is your civil status (married, single, divorced, living with partner, etc.)?
- What was your civil status at the time of your immigration to Norway?
- If you are in a relationship, can you tell me for how long?
- How many children do you have? How old are your children?
- Where did you live when your child/children were born—Poland, Norway or somewhere else?
 - If your children were born while you lived in Poland, can you tell me about what your opportunities and experiences of taking parental leave were?
 - If your children were born while you were living in Norway, did you and/or your partner utilize parental leave benefits? If yes, can you please tell me about how you decided to divide the leave period? What were your reasons for this division?
 - In your opinion, how does the parental leave benefit in Norway compare to that of Poland? (Allow for free response, but if necessary directly ask which they find preferable and why?)

- Have any of your children attended barnehage?
 - If yes, what age were they when you enrolled them in barnehage?
 - If no, what alternative forms of child care have you utilized? (e.g.: babysitter, family members, self or partner as primary caregiver)
 - If you are the primary care giver for your child/children, have you utilized cash-for-care or family allowance?
 - *Probe on:* were you put on a waiting list? Were there other obstacles that made you seek out alternative forms of child care?

- What are your experiences with parental leave, barnehage, cash-for-care and/or family allowance in Norway? For example, how did you become informed about these existing benefits? Was information readily available to you or did you pursue it?
 - **Follow-up questions can relate to:**
 - Were there language barriers to accessing this information?
 - Did members from your community educate you, or did you find this information yourself?
 - Have you shared what you have learned with others?

- Do you and your partner share the role of caregiving to your child/children? If you do share, how would you describe the amount of caregiving you each perform as a percentage?
 - *50% and 50%? 40% and 60%?*

- Which of these “family models” reflects your own family most closely? (Leira 1998)
 - 1) **roles are divided:** mother takes on all, or majority of caregiving/parenting responsibilities, and father takes the role of “breadwinner” or economic provider
 - 2) mother takes on some work outside of the home, but **primary role is caretaker**
 - 3) both mother and father take **equal part** in duties of parenting and breadwinning
 - 4) none of these describe my family model (**ask for them to elaborate**)

- How has your family changed from when you lived in Poland to when you moved and settled in Norway?
- Is your current “family model” the ideal type you desire for your life, or would you prefer a different dynamic? Please elaborate.
- Are there certain factors that you believe have significant influence in creating this family dynamic? What are they, in your opinion? (Allow for free response, but if necessary you can suggest some of the following to see if informant agrees/disagrees: religion, lack of certain resources (like family to take care of kids, language

capability, community with neighbors, etc.), lack of education to pursue certain jobs))?

- Do you find gender roles in the family in Norway and Poland to differ?
 - In what ways have you seen this play out in your life?
 - Have you experienced changes in your own relationship/partnership, or within your family somehow, since moving to Norway? If so, can you describe them to me?

Duality of mothering and working (work-life balance)

- Are you employed?
 - If yes:
 - What type of work do you do?
 - How did you find your job?
 - How long have you been employed?
 - What type of profession do you have?
 - Do you work part time or full time?
 - Were you employed when you lived in Poland? If so, what type of work did you do there?
 - Can you tell me about how you find the experience of working while raising a child/children here in Norway? Do you find that existing benefits available to parents enable you to work/return to work? Is this similar to, or different from your experiences in Poland?
 - If no:
 - Were you employed when you lived in Poland? If so, what type of work did you do there?
 - Have you sought out employment? If yes, how have you found the experience?

Questions about language/integration:

- How do you find the experience of being a foreigner living in Norway—on a scale of 1 (very negative) to 10 (very positive)? Can you please explain your answer in some detail?
- Can you tell me about your experience integrating into Norwegian society? Do you consider yourself to be fully integrated, not integrated at all, or somewhere between?
- Describe your closest community/friends/acquaintances: mostly Norwegian, mostly Polish, equally distributed between the two, or something else?
- Can you speak Norwegian? Have you taken any Norwegian language courses? If not, would you like to?
 - How do you find the experience of seeking out language-learning resources?

- Do you think it is important to learn Norwegian in order to have access to and take full advantage of parental benefits?
 - Do you think it is important to learn Norwegian to integrate into Norwegian society?
 - Do you think that being/becoming a parent has had any influence on your integration experience? If so, can you tell me why?
-
- **Future plans?**
 - Do you plan to return to Poland, move somewhere else, or continue living in Norway in the future? Can you explain some reasons for your choice?
 - Do you plan to have more children? How many?

NSD Approvals

A) NSD Approval, January 4th, 2019

NSD Personvern 04.01.2019 11:10

Det innsendte meldeskjemaet med referansekode 572060 er nå vurdert av NSD.

Følgende vurdering er gitt:

Our assessment is that the processing of personal data in this project will comply with data protection legislation, presupposing that it is carried out in accordance with the information given in the Notification Form and attachments dated 4.1.2019, as well as dialogue with NSD. Everything is in place for the processing to begin.

NOTIFY CHANGES

If you intend to make changes to the processing of personal data in this project it may be necessary to notify NSD. This is done by updating the Notification Form. On our website we explain which changes must be notified. Wait until you receive an answer from us before you carry out the changes.

TYPE OF DATA AND DURATION

The project will be processing special categories of personal data about racial or ethnic origin, religious beliefs and health data, and general categories of personal data, until 30.6.2019.

LEGAL BASIS

The project will gain consent from data subjects to process their personal data. We find that consent will meet the necessary requirements under art. 4 (11) and 7, in that it will be a freely given, specific, informed and unambiguous statement or action, which will be documented and can be withdrawn.

The legal basis for processing special categories of personal data is therefore explicit consent given by the data subject, cf. the General Data Protection Regulation art. 6.1 a), cf. art. 9.2 a), cf. the Personal Data Act § 10, cf. § 9 (2).

PRINCIPLES RELATING TO PROCESSING PERSONAL DATA

NSD finds that the planned processing of personal data will be in accordance with the principles under the General Data Protection Regulation regarding:

- lawfulness, fairness and transparency (art. 5.1 a), in that data subjects will receive sufficient information about the processing and will give their consent
- purpose limitation (art. 5.1 b), in that personal data will be collected for specified, explicit and legitimate purposes, and will not be processed for new, incompatible purposes
- data minimisation (art. 5.1 c), in that only personal data which are adequate, relevant and necessary for the purpose of the project will be processed
- storage limitation (art. 5.1 e), in that personal data will not be stored for longer than is necessary to fulfil the project's purpose

THE RIGHTS OF DATA SUBJECTS

Data subjects will have the following rights in this project: transparency (art. 12), information (art. 13), access (art. 15), rectification (art. 16), erasure (art. 17), restriction of processing (art. 18), notification (art. 19), data portability (art. 20). These rights apply so long as the data subject can be identified in the collected data.

NSD finds that the information that will be given to data subjects about the processing of their personal will meet the legal requirements for form and content, cf. art. 12.1 and art. 13.

We remind you that if a data subject contacts you about their rights, the data controller has a duty to reply within a month.

FOLLOW YOUR INSTITUTION'S GUIDELINES

NSD presupposes that the project will meet the requirements of accuracy (art. 5.1 d), integrity and confidentiality (art. 5.1 f) and security (art. 32) when processing personal data.

To ensure that these requirements are met you must follow your institution's internal guidelines and/or consult with your institution (i.e. the institution responsible for the project).

FOLLOW-UP OF THE PROJECT

NSD will follow up the progress of the project at the planned end date in order to determine whether the processing of personal data has been concluded.

Good luck with the project!

Contact person at NSD: Håkon J. Tranvåg

Data Protection Services for Research: [+47 55 58 21 17](tel:+4755582117) (press 1)

B) NSD Approval of Extension of Research Period, August 9th, 2019

NSD Personvern 09.08.2019 14:37

Det innsendte meldeskjemaet med referansekode 572060 er nå vurdert av NSD.

Følgende vurdering er gitt:

NSD has assessed the change registered on 31.07.2019

The research period has been extended until 30.06.2020.

NSD will follow-up the project at the new end date in order to determine whether the processing of personal data has been concluded.

Good luck with the rest of the project!

Contact person at NSD: Karin Lillevold

Data Protection Services for Research: [+47 55 58 21 17](tel:+4755582117) (press 1)