Fieldwork and Fashion:
Gendered and Classed Performances in Research Sites

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Abstract: Researchers' performances in the field are gendered, classed, and ethnicized. We are watched and judged by our respondents based on how we look, what we say, and how we say it. Our appearance in the field may increase or decrease our chances of creating rapport, it may encourage respondents to talk to us or discourage them entirely from taking part in our research. Whereas we have no absolute control over all the factors determining how we present ourselves in the field, we do have some power over our dress. Although the act of getting dressed for fieldwork may appear inconspicuous and mundane, I argue in this article that its implications are most relevant for our thinking about how we design and perform fieldwork. Particularly the assumptions regarding our respondents' and our own class, gender, and ethnicity that we make before entering the field are worthy of careful consideration as they display our thought processes and, as such, are part of academic analysis.

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> "Vain trifles as they seem, clothes have, they say, more important offices than to merely keep us warm. They change our view of the world and the world's view of us"
> (Virginia WOOLF, 2007 [1928], p.490)

> "You have to engage in a strategy with respect to costume"
> (Erving GOFFMAN, 1989, p.128)

1. Introduction

Not only fieldwork itself, but also preparation for fieldwork is a dynamic process that demands careful thinking and reflecting. Before I even enter a research situation, I make a number of decisions based on my experience, expectations, and assumptions. I prepare for fieldwork by reading literature, carefully considering methodologies, and talking to colleagues, but also by planning my route, suggesting or agreeing on the places where interviews are to be conducted, and choosing what to wear. A significant part of my preparations thus involves trying to imagine what the fieldwork will be like: what to expect, what to avoid, what to encourage. Before conducting an interview, for example, I ponder the exact phrasing and order of the questions I want to ask. Preparing various interview scenarios in advance allows for some degree of flexibility in the field: if one set of questions does not seem to work, I know I can move to a different one. The questions we ask, however, their importance notwithstanding, are only part of how we present ourselves to our informants. Fieldwork, as CLIFFORD insists, is "an embodied spatial practice" (1997, p.53). Although we may want to primarily identify with the role of an observer, we also play our part, we also act. Our props may include a recording device, a camera, or a notepad. We assume a certain voice. We exhibit a certain body language. We wear a costume. All these things —the objects we carry with us, the way we move, the way we speak, the clothes we wear, the hairstyle—create an impression of who we are. What I want to address in this article is the researcher's appearance in the field, specifically his/her dress.[1] [1]

The impact of the researcher's dress on the interactions in the field is admittedly elusive, difficult to capture, perhaps even impossible to prove, but it does not mean we should disregard it. How we appear in a research situation matters; all first impressions matter (CARLING, BIVAND ERDAL & EZZATI, 2014; COTTERILL, 1992; GOFFMAN, 1959). I am a researcher of a certain gender, age, class, sexual identity, body type, ethnicity, nationality, and migration history.[2] All these factors, among others, influence not only my research practices, but also my appearance in research sites, albeit not to equal degrees. Some factors

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1 Dress, in ROACH-HIGGINS and EICHER's understanding, is "an assemblage of modifications of the body and/or supplements to the body" (1992, p.1) including, for example, coiffed hair, makeup, manicure, clothes, jewelry, and other accessories.

2 Specifically, I am a 35-year-old, white, slim, Polish woman living in a middle-class neighborhood in a major European city; my migration experience is education- and pleasure-driven.

become more important in some settings than in others. Depending on where I go and whom I talk to, I dress in a way that *I think* will be appropriate, that will not give away too much information about me other than that I am comfortable displaying in the research situation. What I also think about is how my choice of clothing will help me get through to the interviewed person, how (if at all) I will fit into the research site. My outfit is also determined by sheer practicalities: How do I dress when I have to be out all day and move between multiple locations and contexts? How do I dress in changeable weather? How do I dress when I need to attend a special event related to my research? In this article, I will share some of the decisions and decision making processes related to my current research project on Polish mothers in German and British cities. I will discuss how gender and class (my own and those of the respondents) influence my planning, preparations, and, eventually, my performance in a research site. [2]

My article is divided into four sections. I will start by positioning myself in the field as a Polish woman living in Berlin. In Sections 2 and 3, I will briefly explain why I find discussing researcher's dress relevant for our thinking about how we design and perform fieldwork. Clothes, shoes, hairstyles, and accessories are only some of many ethno-national, class, and gender markers that are at play when it comes to acting in the field, but especially important because they are relatively easily exchangeable and, as such, leave much room for modifications of our appearance. Having said that, unlike the various sets and forms of questions I can choose from, I have only one outfit during an interview: once I enter the field, my dress is no longer modifiable. My discussion on dress will therefore focus on the research preparation phase whereby I will elaborate on the factors determining my choice of outfits, particularly the assumptions I make about the research site, the research situation, and, above all, about the respondents. In Section 4, I will explain my thought processes behind these assumptions and demonstrate how they influence my appearance. For the sake of clarity of my argument the assumptions I make can be roughly divided into those regarding the respondents' and my own ethno-nationality, gender, and class—I will discuss each in detail, providing examples from my research. I want to stress, however, that they are all tightly interwoven and cannot be considered entirely separately (CRENSHAW, 1991; KLINGER, KNAPP & SAUER, 2007; MEYERS, 2004). In the concluding section I will present some suggestions regarding incorporation of the choices we make regarding our dress into our field notes and analysis. [3]

2. My Appearance in the Field

My article is based on observations and reflections on some of the fieldwork and interviews I conducted in 2014 for TRANSFORmIG, an ERC-funded project based at Humboldt-Universität zu Berlin[3]. Our research team investigates how migrants develop the competence to successfully operate within a new society and culture and whether these newly acquired intercultural skills and attitudes transfer between individuals and geographical locations. Specifically, we are

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3   "Transforming Migration: Transnational Transfer of Multicultural Habitus" is financed by the European Research Council (ERC), Starting Grant No.313369, awarded to Prof. Dr. Magdalena NOWICKA.

interested in the lives of Polish (urban) immigrants in British and German cities
(that is, people from relatively homogeneous urban settings who now live in
culturally and ethnically diverse places) and their contacts with significant others
back in Poland. [4]

In my research project within TRANSFORmIG—titled "Immigrant Mothers as
Agents of Change"—I inquire into everyday practices of mothering in diverse
urban contexts and the discourses and norms that influence said practices.
These practices can, of course, be performed by more than one person,
regardless of their biological relation to the child and regardless of their gender.
The word "mother" seems unnecessarily exclusive—bell HOOKS (1984)
proposes to replace it with "childrearer." Among Polish immigrants (CIESLIK,
2012; LOPEZ RODRIGUEZ, 2010; WHITE, 2009), however — and, as
substantial literature on gender and migration demonstrates, also among other
immigrant groups (EREL 2009, 2012; MOROKVASIC, EREL & SHINOZAKI,
2003; SLANY, KONTOS & LIAPI, 2010)—it is actually mothers who (often
exclusively) perform childrearing practices on a regular basis, thus engaging with
their environments in the receiving countries in very specific and crucial ways.
Furthermore, when immigrant mothers share their observations, experiences, and
new skills with significant others back home, it is mostly other women, often
mothers, to whom they talk and display their childrearing practices. Women are
instrumental in maintaining transnational networks and transmitting cultural
capital (EREL, 2009, 2012). Although, for the reasons explained above, I focus
on mothers, not childrearers, the definition of "mother" I apply in my work is
inclusive (MANALANSAN IV, 2006): I mean all those women who define
themselves as mothers, regardless of whether they are biological mothers, cis
women or trans women, straight or queer, single or in a relationship. Mothers,
then, in my research, are those women who engage in everyday practices of
childrearing *and* identify themselves as mothers. [5]

I identify as a Polish mother myself. My son was born in Berlin in 2010. I was born
and raised in Poland, but have spent most of my adult life abroad (which has
since ceased being abroad to me). After several education-related stays in
Denmark, Bavaria, and the Netherlands, I settled in Berlin in 2005. With the birth
of my son, I started paying more attention to children's presence in the city and
observing their caregivers; I also started speaking Polish on a daily basis—until
then the dominant languages in my private and professional lives had been
English and German. I speak Polish with my child because it is important for me
that he knows the language well and can thus communicate with our family and
friends in Poland. My son and I skype with my parents nearly every day and visit
them a few times a year (I leave him with them for a couple of weeks at least
once a year while I travel for work or go on vacation with my partner). He is
familiar with our extended family in Poland including my brother, great-aunt,
aunts, uncles, cousins, and close friends. I regularly buy Polish children's books,
either in Poland or at a Polish bookstore in Berlin, and read them to my son every
night. I also introduce him to Polish visual arts, music, and film. His exposure to
"Polishness"—understood here as a set of learned behaviors, competences, and
skills that allow for recognition and reading of specific cultural and social codes—

is thus family and language centered and, as such, highly selective. I do not immerse him in the national(ist) narratives and symbols I learned as a child; I do not cook Polish food; I do not send him to a Polish playgroup; I do not celebrate Polish holidays unless I am in Poland at the time. What I try to teach him about Poland is what I value most myself: the people, the language, the arts. [6]

Since, as mentioned earlier, mothers share with other mothers, my access to the field is potentially relatively easy. In fact, on numerous occasions, my respondents became more engaged and talkative after I had told them I was a mother too. This should not imply, however, that only researchers who are mothers are capable of producing valuable scholarship on motherhood and mothering practices: the most groundbreaking recent work on motherhood in Polish academia has been published by researchers who are not mothers themselves (HRYCIUK & KOROLCZUK, 2012, 2015). While being a mother may, as in my case, ease the researcher's access to the field, or, as MOSE BROWN and De CASANOVA argue, provide a "unique opportunity to analyze the effects of motherhood in the research process and relations with participants" (2009, p.42), it is definitely not a precondition for conducting research on motherhood. For me personally, becoming a mother triggered my interest in how immigrant mothers navigate dominant discourses on motherhood and social norms related to childrearing in the receiving societies—as such, being a mother remains an important aspect of my academic work and my appearance in the field. Keeping the above in mind, I will continue to refer to myself as a mother, but will focus first and foremost on my appearance as a woman—a Polish woman—in the field, particularly in research situations involving Polish women living in Germany and the UK. [7]

3. Vain Trifles? Thoughts on Fieldwork and Fashion

Latest with developments in feminist epistemology and feminist methodologies (COPE 2002; FONOW & COOK, 1991; HARAWAY, 1988; HARDING, 1987; PRICE & SHILDRICK, 1999; STANLEY & WISE, 2002 [1983]) it became clear that the type of objectivity promoted by positivism is at best illusory. Social scientists are now increasingly aware of how their manifold interactions with respondents—the questions they ask, the relationships they establish, their gender, ethnic and class background, dis/abilities—influence fieldwork practices and, thus, research results. There is little consideration, however, for how researchers dress in the field, unless their research concerns religious or minority communities (FEW, STEPHENS & ROUSE-ARNETT, 2003; OKELY, 2007; ZUBAIR, MARTIN & VICTOR, 2012). Although scholarship is replete with highly self-reflexive accounts of how researchers try to create rapport with their respondents (COTTERILL, 1992; FINCH, 1984; MOSE BROWN & De CASANOVA, 2009; PLUMMER, 2001; TANG, 2002), the researcher's attire is hardly mentioned (MILLER, BIRCH, MAUTHNER & JESSOP, 2012). Preparation for fieldwork is widely recognized as a crucial component of research (BERG, 2001; DENZIN & LINCOLN, 2011; KVALE, 1996), but its general understanding tends to be limited: it usually stands for literature review, framing of research problems, and consideration of methodologies. While these are undeniably

important—even inevitable—steps in a research process, they hardly encompass all activities researchers engage in before going into the field. I find these absences remarkable. After all, our dress affects not only how we are judged by others and how we judge ourselves, but also our cognitive processes (ADAM & GALINSKY, 2012) and speech (HANNOVER & KÜHNEN, 2002). [8]

Deciding on what to wear does not dominate my planning for fieldwork—nor should it. No elaborate preparations are involved, no additional purchases necessary. I never shop for clothes thinking of their potential usefulness in the field. I do, however, give my appearance some thought before entering a research situation—ignoring this fact would be an unfortunate omission because the assumptions I make before choosing what to wear convey important information about my research practices. A researcher's wardrobe does not necessarily have to resemble a costume shop or a theater dressing room. It is very likely, however, that each of us has at least several changes of clothes and already that allows for various combinations of outfits. Clothes play a crucial role in how we present ourselves as academics to various audiences: colleagues, students, journalists, and research participants. In his lecture on fieldwork GOFFMAN advised: "you have to get a mix of changing costume, that isn't complete mimicry on the one hand, and that isn't completely retaining your own identity either" (1989, p.128). GOFFMAN's instructions on how to dress in the field are designed specifically with participant observation in mind (p.125), but may be considered useful with regard to other methods as well including interviews, day-in-the-life studies, and focus groups. [9]

According to the (still budding) science of style (GRAY, SCHMITT, STROHMINGER & KASSAM, 2014), moderate matching (of colors, cuts, design) is a safe bet when trying to make a good first impression. When I go into the field for the first time, I try to avoid items that have obvious symbolic meanings. Certain clothes (t-shirts with explicit political slogans) and accessories (a Rolex watch) have strong connotations and are bound to attract attention. Unless we try to blend into a group that distinguishes itself by wearing symbolically laden garments, we may prefer to avoid items that instantly give away much information about us. Opting for inconspicuous clothes, however, does not make us invisible: our audience will still read our appearance, and judge us. Also, what I consider inconspicuous will not necessarily be regarded as such by my respondents. As BARTHES noticed in his analysis of signifying structures behind everyday life practices, "the wearing of an item of clothing is fundamentally an act of meaning that goes beyond modesty, ornamentation and protection. It is an act of signification and therefore a profoundly social act" (2006, pp.90-91). Strongly dismissive of comparisons between language and fashion (BARTHES, 2006; LURIE, 1981), SVENDSEN, notices that "even though certain types of clothes communicate quite clearly, at least to specific groups that can read the codes, it is not a given that all clothes communicate in this way" (2006, p.64). How do I know then that what my dress communicates is in line with my intentions? How does the meaning of my clothes, make up, hairstyle, accessories change across various contexts? [10]

Although "we cannot avoid giving others an impression of who we are by what we wear" (p.151), we can try to shape that impression to some extent by deliberately considering what to wear on particular occasions. "Clothing style can reinforce or compensate for [other] markers" of positioning ourselves in the field such as physical appearance, gender, age, class, sexuality, and religion (CARLING et al., 2014, p.45-46). Since there is no way for us to know what exactly our dress will mean to the people we meet (especially if we meet them for the first time), we can only *assume* what it *may* mean (JOHNSON, YOO, KIM & LENNON, 2008; ROACH & EICHER, 1965; ROACH-HIGGINS & EICHER, 1992; STONE, 1962; WORKMAN & JOHNSON, 1991). In what follows, I want to share the assumptions I make before entering a research situation whereby I focus on assumptions regarding my research partners' and my own ethno-nationality, gender, and class. While discussing the various sets of assumptions, I will keep returning to how they affect my practices of dressing for fieldwork in order to show that each set of assumptions I make impacts my self-positioning in the field in unique ways even if the mechanisms determining my dress stay the same. [11]

4. Making Assumptions

Before I enter a research situation I try to understand whom I am going to meet. I think about cultural, class, and gender contexts of my planned interactions. I think about various understandings of femininity and respectability (BUTLER, 1989, 1993, 2004; McDOWELL, 2006; SKEGGS, 2004a; TSEËLON, 1995). In some situations—if, for example, recruitment questionnaires have been already filled out—I know my respondents' gender, age, marital status, and some of their migration trajectory. In other situations—if my goal is recruitment or participant observation in places where immigrant mothers meet—I make assumptions about their age (based on whether they are mothers of babies, preschool or school children), their identification with "Polishness" (or lack thereof), and their worldviews. [12]

While making my assumptions, I consider it essential, as Lise NELSON urges, to conceptualize a situated subject, i.e. "one constituted by discursive processes yet not reducible to them" (1999, p.332). Before entering the field I am aware that each of my respondents negotiates various identities and discourses (what it means to be a Pole, a mother, a wife, a daughter, a Catholic, etc.) and that the estimations I make about them are at best rough. If I go to an event organized by the Polish Catholic Mission, for example, I expect to meet people who seek out—or at least do not mind—the values that institution represents. A hard-line Polish Catholic organization with a dynamic international network, the Mission organizes marches against abortion, preaches moral superiority of Catholics and Poles, and runs educational programs that not only question, but try to counter gender equality. Even if not all the Poles who participate in the Mission's activities identify entirely with its ideology, it is safe to assume they are familiar with it. The Polish mothers sending their children to a Catholic Saturday school in Germany or the UK may not be religious themselves and may only want their children to practice Polish. The fact that they encourage—or at least do not object to—classes aimed

at teaching their children conservative values, however, is an important piece of information in its own right. [13]

In the following sections I will reflect on how I try to present myself to my respondents (and why) and to what extent I think I can steer my appearance. In the field, I am a Pole talking to other Poles, a mother watching other mothers, a woman looking at and being seen by other women, a middle-class person interacting with people from various social strata; above all, however, I remain a researcher trying to make sense of intricacies of immigrant motherhood. I do not need to disclose all the information about my ethno-nationality, gender, and class, but I also do not think I should hide them from my respondents. Instead, I try to select how much I want to display. In this sense, my strategy in the field is not unlike those of my respondents who choose to share some details from their lives and conceal others. [14]

4.1 "Polishness"

As part of my preparation for fieldwork, I try to scrutinize how my knowledge about Poles and Poland relates to my respondents' habits, values, and worldviews. My familiarity with Polish customs is largely based on my memories from Poland though updated regularly through my frequent trips to Poland, conversations with Polish family and friends, following the Polish media and popular culture, and the research I have done on Polish cities (LISIAK, 2010). Since my respondents are Polish immigrants, their knowledge about Poland and understanding of "Polishness" likely also depend on their private memories of life in Poland. Depending on how long they have been living in the UK or Germany and how often they visit Poland, understandings of what qualifies as "Polish" and whether, as such, it should be cultivated or rejected, may vary greatly between individuals. The fact that I am myself a Pole living outside Poland does not necessarily make me an insider (on immigrants researching immigrants and advantages of avoiding methodological nationalisms see, e.g., CARLING et al., 2014; CHERENI, 2014; NOWICKA & CIESLIK, 2013; SHINOZAKI, 2012; on various styles of mobility see, e.g., MASSEY, 2001 [1994]; McDOWELL, 2013; SKEGGS, 2004a); I have, however, found my Polish socialization helpful in several situations. As CARLING et al. argue, "cultural competence can be a subtle but powerful marker of [researchers'] positioning" in the field (2014, p.47). Through displaying my familiarity with context-specific codes and norms, I construct my position in the field and, thus, "provide informants with cues" as to how to read my appearance according to "pre-existing social categories" (p.44). [15]

I remember from living in Poland that certain occasions demanded appropriate dress. When I was growing up in the 1980s and coming of age in the 1990s, it was customary to dress up for all family holidays (birthdays, Christmas, Easter) and various school events (first day of school, graduation, final exams). Both children and adults were expected to dress neatly for the mass and make even more effort on special church occasions such as baptisms, first communions, and confirmations. By now, I have been living outside Poland long enough to get used to the more relaxed dress codes prevailing in Western Europe (Berliners, in

particular, show strong inclinations towards informal outfits). I do, however, try to switch to "Polish" rules of dress when entering a research situation involving Polish immigrants. [16]

On a recent research trip to Munich I was planning to attend a Mother's Day celebration at a Polish weekend school and a first communion mass in a Polish church. As part of my preparations for the field trip I visited the website of the organization in charge of both events and looked carefully at photos from various other school and church events. I paid attention to how people looked in these pictures: their outfits, makeup, and hairstyles; the (in)formality of their attire on different occasions; their poses. The photos reminded me of similar celebrations I knew from Poland. Based on the images on the website and my own familiarity with Polish customs, I deduced that the Polish women attending the Mother's Day academy in Munich would be dressed up and I intended to adjust my own outfit accordingly: I wanted to make sure I looked "neat"—thus signalizing my respect for the occasion—but not as dressed up as other mothers. After all, I was going to attend the event first and foremost as a researcher, not as a mother. I was going to be in the field alone, without my son. My own motherhood would perhaps come up in conversations with Polish mothers, but would not necessarily be evident through my appearance. [17]

I opted for black pants and a black blouse combined with a brown trench coat and black brogues; my only accessories consisted of two silver rings, my make-up was minimal (mascara, eyeliner, blush, compact powder, lip gloss). I was concerned my outfit would appear too dark for Mother's Day, yet the more colorful clothes in my wardrobe (vintage dresses and jackets, patterned pants and shirts) could possibly stand out or even be perceived as eccentric and I wanted to avoid drawing attention. I ended up taking part in preparations for the Mother's Day academy alongside Polish mothers, helping them set the tables, decorate the rooms, and make coffee. All the mothers were dressed up whereby some came to school in casual outfits (sweatshirts, jeans), but brought "neater" clothes with them (flowery, red, orange, and dark blue dresses, white blouses, high heels), and changed right before the performance the children and teachers put together for the occasion. The children were also dressed up (boys in white shirts, girls in dresses or white shirts and dark blue skirts) and so were their teachers. My assumptions about how Mother's Day is celebrated in a Polish community outside Poland were thus fully confirmed: it did not look much different from similar events I had participated in as a child in 1980s Poland. The Polish mothers I talked to in Munich where between 32 and 45, most of them were, like myself, born in Poland under communism and came of age during the socio-economic changes of the 1990s. Regardless of whether we grew up in cities or villages, we seemed to share basic ideas of how certain events (in this case, Mother's Day) are celebrated in a Polish context and how people are expected to dress for them. [18]

The day after Mother's Day, I planned to attend the first communion mass in a Polish church in Munich. I expected that children would be wearing albs or white dresses and that the church would be decorated in white. Since first communions

customarily take place in May, adults tend to dress in spring or summer clothes: men in tan or light gray suits, women in pastel two-piece dresses. I arrived at the church an hour early to watch people prepare for the mass. I saw and greeted some of the mothers I had met the day before. They looked different: they wore more make-up, their hair was meticulously coiffed, their manicure freshly done, their dresses more formal; many wore high heels and accessorized their outfits with gold or silver jewelry. Although I expected people to be dressed formally and in pastel colors, I did not consider it necessary to try to adjust my outfit accordingly. I planned to stand in the back of the church where extended families of the first communion children gather (or so I remembered from Poland). Indeed, the first several rows were reserved for parents and godparents; grandparents, cousins, siblings, etc., as well as regular churchgoers were asked to take the seats in the back. Most of the people in the back of the church were also dressed up, but not as elaborately as those in the front. Interestingly, whereas the dominant color palette of the first several rows was various shades of beige and pastels, the people in the middle and back rows wore darker clothes (green, dark blue, brown, red, black). It was a rather cold day for May (about 17°C and windy) so those who did not have their outfits carefully planned months or weeks before the first communion, probably opted for more weather appropriate attire which tended to come in darker colors. As such, my own outfit—which resembled the one from day before—did not seem to stand out at all. [19]

Planning how to dress for both research trips made me reflect how closely our performance in the field depends on our familiarity with the cultures we investigate. As LOXLEY argues, "our bodies cannot be understood as standing outside culture, as the ground or origin of our social identities" (2007, p.117). Regardless of possible class and worldview differences between my respondents and myself, regardless of our understanding of gender roles, I was familiar with the rules of the game I entered as an observer. Although in my private life I choose not to follow many of these rules (I do not attend the mass, I do not send my child to a school affiliated with a religious organization, I do not dress up for events in my child's kindergarten, etc.), I grew up in a community where they were cultivated and am thus proficient in the conventions—including dress codes—that determine Poles and Polish immigrants' ways of conduct in formal and semi-formal situations (GOFFMAN, 1983). [20]

4.2 Gendered performances of "Polishness" and motherhood

Before I introduce myself as a researcher, I appear in the field first and foremost as a woman, a woman speaking Polish, a Polish woman. Although my respondents have never remarked on the "Polishness" of my appearance, I have heard repeatedly from friends, acquaintances, students, and strangers in Europe and North America that I do, indeed, look "Polish" or "Eastern" or "Slavic." My respondents seem to take my facial features and skin color for granted (I am from Poland thus I look "Polish"), I do reflect, however, on what "Polishness" as a marker means to them and what it means to me, particularly when it relates to appearance. *Polka*—a "Polish woman" or a "female Pole"—means literally a woman of Polish nationality, but it also conveys countless other meanings, it

alludes to a certain type of femininity, to specific types of gendered performances and norms. In this section, I reflect on my gendered performances in the field as a Polish woman researching other Polish women. [21]

From the interviews conducted by our research team it is evident that Polish immigrant women perceive their femininity to be divergent from the types of femininity identified as dominant in Germany and the UK.[4] Our respondents talk about "Polish femininity" as characterized first and foremost by *dbanie o wygląd* (taking care of one's looks), which they understand as putting on some (but not too much) makeup, having manicure and pedicure done, styling their hair, and putting together a "feminine" outfit (including shoes and accessories). Notably, whereas Polish women in Germany report dressing "more womanly" than German women, those living in the UK say they felt underdressed on various occasions in the first months after their migration (one respondent from Birmingham compared the outfits worn by British women to a club to fancy dresses one would wear to a wedding in Poland). Being familiar with discourses on femininity in Poland, Germany, and the UK, I expect my respondents to embody certain ideas of femininity and prepare myself accordingly before going into the field. Judging by the respondent's profile available through a recruitment questionnaire or by the type of event I am going to attend, I make assumptions with regard to various embodiments of "Polish femininity." I try to dress in a moderate way, choose clothes that could pass for "womanly," but make sure not to appear overdressed. It is not a particularly complicated process, but it does involve some preparations including scanning my wardrobe and deciding with items will fit together. [22]

Before going into the field, I pay more attention to my appearance than I normally would, but I do not engage in any additional routines. It may be that I am so socialized into "Polish" standards of femininity that I embody them without even noticing it anymore (BUTLER, 1993). As BUTLER has famously argued, social conventions animate our bodies and our bodies, in turn, "reproduce and ritualize those conventions as practices" (1997, p.155). My basic beauty routines (manicure, delicate makeup, simple hairstyle) are not entirely mine then, but conditioned by various layers of experiences and discourses—including, though not limited to, Polish socialization. When I meet with Polish immigrant mothers, they may read my appearance as "Polish" or "urban" or both (among other labels), depending on the topic. I noticed that when comparing "German" and "Polish" or "English" and "Polish" femininity, my respondents spoke in a tone and manner that alluded to my insider position: they clearly considered me one of them. [23]

Following BOURDIEU (2013 [1984]), SKEGGS argues that "gender operates as a hidden form of cultural capital" (2004b, p.22) and that "femininity can be a form of cultural capital if it is symbolically legitimate" (2004a, p.16). Among my

4 The fieldwork I refer to in this article includes participant observation, semi-structured interviews, and narrative interviews. I will paraphrase the interview excerpts I find relevant to my discussion on fashion and fieldwork, but will refrain from quoting as that would demand a careful contextualization of each case and necessitate excursions into issues which are not immediately connected to the focus of this article.

respondents, "Polish femininity" is valued higher that "German" or "British" femininity. Appearing "feminine in a Polish way" may thus give me better access to my respondents and help establish rapport. Even if femininity admittedly lacks the sort of symbolic dominance masculinity enjoys, it can operate "as a local cultural resource" (ibid.). Due to its ambiguous value—which, as SKEGGS urges, should always be considered in relation to masculine domination—femininity may thus be more adequately conceived of as a resource rather than a capital (2004, p.17). By implication, as any other cultural resource, "Polish femininity" may be an asset in a research situation involving Polish immigrant women, but not likely to be valuable across various fields (ADKINS, 2004; SKEGGS, 2004a). On my last trip to London, for example, I attended a workshop for immigrant parents in a public primary school in Islington. All participating mothers—immigrants from Somalia, Algeria, Bangladesh, among other places—wore headscarves and their bodies were entirely covered. I wore a sleeveless dress and a pair of combat boots (I was going to walk for hours after that appointment and needed comfortable footwear). I had briefly talked to the organizers about the workshop before my scheduled visit and I had expected that many—possibly all— participants would be Muslim women. I knew there was no way for me to adjust my dress to fit into the group: even if I had covered my arms, my clothes would still stand out (on working with Muslim women as a non-Muslim researcher see, e.g., RYAN, KOFMAN & AARON, 2011; on cross-dressing in the field see CLIFFORD, 1997). When the workshop leader introduced me to the group and explained who I was (a researcher visiting from Berlin), I explicitly presented myself as a mother: it was a conscious strategy on my part developed prior to the visit. I estimated that in this case it would be the shared condition of motherhood, not dress or femininity that would help me create rapport. Motherhood, as CARLING et al. notice, is one the "universal experiences that can create a sense of commonality across ethno-national boundaries, be it as a basis for ice-breaking small talk or a more prominent aspect of the researcher–informant relationship" and sharing information about my own motherhood is definitely part of my "identity management in the field" (2014, p.46) as a researcher. After disclosing that I, too, was a mother, I instantly felt welcomed in the group, several mothers told me their stories, and invited me to visit them again. Both the facilitators and the participants were immensely kind and generous and would probably have been just as hospitable had I not presented myself as a mother. For myself, however—for my awareness about my position in this particular setting—identifying motherhood as a condition we all had in common was important in that it helped me feel less of an intruder in a workshop where people make themselves vulnerable by sharing their most private experiences, expressing doubts, and admitting to helplessness. [24]

4.3 Interrelations between gender and class

Keeping in mind how gender and sex are socially and culturally constructed and performed (BUTLER, 1989, 1997, 2004; MOI, 1999) and how our tastes are produced (ADKINS, 2004; BOURDIEU, 2013 [1984]; SKEGGS, 2004a), femininity needs to be always considered in relation to class (JONES, 2012; McDOWELL, 2006; SKEGGS, 2004a). In this section, I want to discuss various

interrelations between gender and class that come up in my preparations for fieldwork and later in the field. The assumptions I make regarding my respondents' class can be roughly divided into two kinds: assumptions regarding potential similarities and assumptions regarding potential differences. I choose my outfit depending on said assumptions in order to present myself in the field as not entirely detached from my respondents' position. Whereas I do try to display some level of similarity with respondents in an attempt to establish rapport, I refrain from any pretentions to claim an insider status because—like the editors of this thematic issue—I do not subscribe to the insider-outsider dichotomy. [25]

The reasons for assuming similarities and differences with a respondent can be manifold and differ from case to case (CHERENI, 2014; GANGA & SCOTT, 2006). Before a first meeting, I make some initial assumptions about respondents based on their publically accessible internet presence. Before I met with a Polish blogging mother in Munich, for example, I carefully read her blog, paying close attention to the images she posts and the style of her blog entries. I found some of her blog content genuinely appealing to my taste or at least familiar—it fit into the type of urban motherhood I encounter in my daily life in a middle-class neighbourhood in Berlin. I meet mothers like her on a regular basis at preschool drop-offs and pick-ups, in local cafes and playgrounds, in children theatres and at birthday parties. The blogger from Munich, let us call her Martyna[5], seemed like a familiar character—a middle-class urban mother. Before our scheduled interview in a café, I picked an outfit I would normally wear to a meeting with a friend: beige chinos, a print t-shirt by a Polish designer, colorful socks, and brogues. Martyna was dressed casually and modestly in light colors ranging from white to beige, with subtle accessories and basic makeup. During our meeting, Martyna recognized and repeatedly alluded to the similarities between us. Later on, when coding the interview, I noticed that unlike in the case of many other Polish immigrants interviewed by my colleagues and myself, Martyna's answers are rarely framed as explanations—perhaps she did not feel compelled to clarify certain behaviors and practices she encounters in Germany, assuming I would be well familiar with them. In analyzing the interview, I therefore make note of the potential impact my appearance in the field may have had on the content and framing of Martyna's responses. [26]

On a research trip to Birmingham, before meeting with the women who run a Polish expats organization, I visited their website to see what kinds of events they organize, what types of people attend them, how they describe what they do, and what kind of audience they try to reach. Already their positioning themselves as expats, not immigrants, demonstrates that they distance themselves from the majority of Poles who came to the UK in and after 2004 and found quick employment in menial jobs. Their activities range from coordinating playgroups for Polish children through organizing literary evenings to commissioning public art pieces. The events described on their website do not vary much from those I attend on a regular basis in Berlin and other places. When we met, we found countless topics in common and ended up talking for hours. Assuming a range of

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5   The names of all the interviewees have been changed to assure anonymity.

similarities with the Polish expats even before meeting them, I dressed in my regular summer clothes: a vintage dress accessorized with colorful jewelry. They were all dressed casually and did not look much different from the people from my regular social circles in Berlin, Warsaw, or New York. I was able to establish rapport with them instantly, they invited me to an event the following day, and we have been in touch via email ever since. [27]

My choice of dress for individual research situations based on assumed similarities with the respondents has not always proved fitting however. Before visiting a Polish journalist and translator in the Greater London area, I assumed a certain level of similarity and decided to wear whatever felt most comfortable on that rainy September day. The moment I entered the respondent's house, I realized my all-black attire and combat boots are entirely misplaced. The suburban home was meticulously clean, with carefully arranged furniture and nearly all-white décor. The respondent was dressed in white and light gray, with not a single hair or eyelash out of place. I was the single dark spot in the whole house and felt rather awkward. I tried establishing rapport through small talk (on the cook books I saw in the kitchen, on coffee brewing techniques) and my tactic seemed to work, but I didn't manage to entirely overcome the feeling of being out of place over the course of the two-hour meeting. Later, upon listening to the recorded interview, I could sense some distance on the part of the respondent, but also on my part, even though the conversation ran seemingly smoothly and the respondent was keen to share her stories and observations. [28]

In the case of the aforementioned visit at a Polish school in Munich, I expected to encounter more differences than similarities with my respondents. My assumptions were based partly on my reading of the school's website and partly on my general knowledge about the religious organization that runs the school. I deduced that the people who subscribe to the organization's values—or at least do not mind them—must be conservative themselves and revere the types of traditions with which I have very little, if anything, in common. I also assumed that they came to Germany straight from small towns or villages—an assumption confirmed in the recruitment questionnaires I asked them to fill out—maintain strong links with Poland and Polish community in Munich, and are working class or lower middle class. I thus wanted my outfit to be as neutral as possible and tried to establish rapport with my respondents based on our shared identification as Polish mothers. [29]

Although in my private and academic life I am openly atheist and leftist, I do not want my politics to overtly affect my presence in the field, particularly in situations in which I face people who are conservative or religious or both. My research visits at the Polish school and in the Polish church were thus particularly challenging. I was not pretending to be someone I am not, but I was also not being entirely myself. I was not pretending to be religious, but I was also not openly atheist. I had to admit to myself that I would have never gone to either of these places if it were not for the research project. At times, I felt like an imposter. I also realized I had to be careful not to eroticize either my respondents or my own presence in these situations. Incidents and encounters in the field can leave

a researcher deeply moved, confused, angry, even shattered. What I found extremely helpful in processing the research experience was discussing it with my colleagues from TRANSFORmIG, reflecting together on our respective feelings of alienation in the field, and trying to make sense of it all. [30]

5. Concluding Thoughts

Our performances in the field are gendered, classed, and ethnicized. Regardless of how much we may want to appear "neutral" or "objective" as researchers, regardless of how much we may strive to blend into the field, we end up being watched and judged by our respondents based on how we look, what we say, and how we say it. Our appearance in the field may increase or decrease our chances of creating rapport, it may encourage respondents to talk to us or discourage them entirely from taking part in our research. Whereas we have no absolute control over all the factors determining how we present ourselves in the field, we do have some power over our dress. Although the act of getting dressed for fieldwork may appear inconspicuous and mundane, I have argued in this article that its implications are most relevant for our thinking about how we perform fieldwork. Particularly the assumptions we make before entering the field are worthy of careful consideration as they display our thought processes and, as such, are part of academic analysis. [31]

My article is not a call on researchers to substantially expand our wardrobes. Such an idea would be ridiculous, particularly in the light of growing hardships, waning funding, and adjunctification of academia worldwide (LISIAK, 2014; MÜLLER, 2014). Also, simply not everyone has to feel compelled to scrutinize their outfits. I do believe, however, that not reflecting on how we appear before our respondents is an unfortunate omission. As BOURDIEU famously urged, "there are scientific profits to be drawn from scientifically studying 'unworthy' objects" (1995, p.132). Thus, I want to encourage researchers to try to include the dress aspect of our preparation for fieldwork in our methodologies and analyses. [32]

As VALENTINE remarks, "we can never really know … how the information we use might have been different if our performances, those of our interviewees, or inter-actions between us, had been different" (2002, p.125). The clothes we choose to wear in the field—and the manner with which we wear them—may help us steer our gendered, classed, and ethnicized performances. Yet how do we assess the importance of fashion in fieldwork? A definite evaluation may not be possible, but we may find it useful to include this step of preparation for research in our methodologies. We may, for example, document our choices and include them in our field notes. One way of doing it would be to take a photo of myself before leaving for fieldwork and take short notes on why I opted for each item (comfort, practicality, assumptions, etc.), whether I had considered other outfits, and, if so, why I decided against them. We may find the information about our own appearance relevant later in the analysis. When we succeed or fail at establishing rapport with respondents, we may want to go back to our field notes,

determine the possible meanings of our dress in each of the research situations, and draw conclusions for future research encounters. [33]

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