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An Ethnography of Polish Immigrant Women Residing in the Suburbs of Chicago, Illinois

A Capstone Project Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements
of the Renée Crown University Honors Program at Syracuse University

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December 2011

Honors Capstone Project in Geography

Capstone Project Advisor: _____
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Honors Director: _____
James Spencer, Interim Director

Date: December 8, 2010

Abstract

The purpose of my Capstone project is to construct an ethnography centered on Polish immigrant women living in the suburbs Chicago. The goal is to study whether or not they believe they keep their Polish culture and identity alive. However, in order to study culture, I had to first identify the factors that contribute to the construction and maintenance of Polish culture. They are: values, community, culture, identity, and perceptions of the United States and Americans.

My research began with attempts to gather information from established and respected Polish organizations, like the Polish Museum of American (PMA) and the Polish Women's Alliance of America (PWAA). However, after both institutions proved unhelpful, I asked a family friend, Anna, who was the inspiration for my project, for help. An interview with Anna and a former coworker of mine, Ada, helped me to establish strong interview questions and techniques and shifted my project in a different but more accessible and interesting direction.

I began collecting data via interviews and questionnaires. My greatest resource turned out to be St. Margaret Mary Church in Algonquin, Illinois. Nearly half of the participants of my project were parishioners. The women from the parish, made it possible for me to gather the necessary data to conclude that although the majority of the women have American citizenship, and quite a few identify their children as American, the woman succeed in maintaining their Polish traditions, culture, and identities.

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