

Polish American group in the Pacific north west: A gender perspective

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ABSTRACT

The paper aims to discuss the role of women in the Polish immigrant group in the Pacific Northwest. The origins of the group history date back to the 1870's, and since then subsequent streams of Polish immigrants have settled in the region. The group is not very large, but it has managed to build a dense fabric of social networks that cross generational and class divisions. Women have been visible in the group's activities from the beginning, but their role has never been recognized. Recent immigrants, mostly IT professionals, including many women, are joining and contributing to ethnic networks.

The study was conducted mainly in Seattle, but also in smaller towns in the Pacific Northwest. The paper is based on a literature review, critical analysis of local histories, reports, local newspapers, records of immigrant associations and churches, personal documents, interviews, and oral histories. The analysis is informed by concepts of social practices (Schatzki), social capital (Putnam), invented ethnicity (Neils Conzen at al.), and superdiversity (Vertovec). The overall goal is to find a conceptualization that overcomes limitations of the classic perspectives on ethnicity and the immigrant communities and sheds light on the role of women in the immigrant community.

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