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## Polish Immigrant and Second-Generation Women in the United States: Private and Intimate Lives (1890-1940)

### General audience summary

The aim of the project is to analyze the understudies of the lives of Polonia women settling in and inhabiting the United States in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century and first decades of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Despite the fact that women constituted a significant groups of immigrants who came to the US at the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, their experiences of everyday, private and intimate life have not yet become a subject of reflection by historians and sociologists or they have been presented in a biased way due to the source materials used (e.g. Thomas and Znaniecki, *The Polish Peasant in Europe and America*). The scholars researching the past of the Polish community in the US also have not sufficiently studied the experiences of the second generation of Polonia born in the interwar period of expansion of consumerism and popular culture in the United States.

The project has the ambition to change this state of affairs, asking questions about the experiences of Polonia women in a few selected spheres such as reproduction and motherhood (i.e. practices related to pregnancy and childbirth, attempts to control fertility, childcare); family bonds (i.e. changes in marital relations, child-parent relationships evolving under the influence of American culture); sexuality (i.e. the influence of popular culture on changes in the sphere of intimate life, differences between the immigrant and second generation); household (i.e. the economic role of women within the family, attempts to reconcile work and family responsibilities); leisure time and entertainment (i.e. changes in ways of entertainment and the impact of American popular culture and consumerism in this regard).

One of the assumptions adopted for the study of Polish women's experience in the sphere of private and intimate life is the special emphasis on their agency in the situation of being situated between the requirements and expectations of the Polish community, the Catholic Church and American social and philanthropic organizations. The above-mentioned institutions (including the Americanization movement, which was very dynamic during the analyzed period) perceived Polish female immigrants receptive to their identity projects. Unearthing real women's experiences, goals and desires is in this context one of the key objectives of the project.

Achieving this and other goals will be possible through the analysis of source materials such as oral histories, ethnic surveys, letters, journals, autobiographies and memories (often unpublished, found in the collections of personal papers) housed in American archives and libraries located mainly in the Midwest region, characterized by the largest population of Polonia in the analyzed period. In addition, the research will be also carried out in documents of Polonia organizations or and American voluntary associations (i.e. settlement houses), or in selected press and publicity materials.

The results of the project will contribute significantly to a better and fuller understanding of the history of the American Polonia, as well as to the development of the research on immigration from Polish territories to the United States, the history of Polish ethnic minority in the United States, and the history of women in Poland and overseas.