

FINDING THEIR PLACE IN PICTURES: REFLECTING ON IMAGES OF
INTERNATIONAL WOMEN'S LIVES IN STATE COLLEGE, PA

Lesley Anne Flaherty

Dr. Soren C. Larsen, Thesis Supervisor

ABSTRACT

Immigrant and international women experience a number of challenges as they move to an unfamiliar community within a new country in search of opportunities or improved living conditions. Understanding the lived realities of immigrants and the challenges they face is key for communities to meet the needs of all those living within its borders. The purpose of this study is to contribute to the literature on immigrant women's perceptions of and experiences within their communities as well as heighten awareness of the immigrant experience among community members through research on international women's experiences in State College, Pennsylvania. To address these goals, I employed multiple qualitative methods, including photovoice, mapping of emotions, interviews, and focus groups to understand the immigrant women's experience in State College. Numerous factors influenced how women experienced and adapted to different places in State College, including but not limited to time of day, positionality as an international woman, how proficiently they spoke English, and visa status as student, worker, or dependent. As a result, the women experienced emotions and connections to locations that were diverse, fluid, and at times discordant as factors relating to these locations or to the women themselves changed during their time in State College. Women in this study often negotiated their belongings in many places including their neighborhoods, workplaces and classes, as well as to State College and their native homes.