

According to a report released by the International Organization for Migration in 2022, 281 million people out of the global population are immigrants, which is the largest number within the last 5 decades. Considering the fact that countries are more closely connected to each other than ever before due to globalization and the substantial power of social media, this can be seen as a natural phenomenon. But is actual life as an immigrant the same as what we experience indirectly through our Instagram feeds and YouTube vlogs? According to the studies and interviews I have conducted, not so much.

I held an online interview with my close friend Rachel, who is Korean and currently 23, living in New York. Rachel's family of 4 immigrated to New York when Rachel was 8 years old, and she has stayed ever since. I started off the meeting by asking if she remembered the first few years of living in New York. And to my surprise, she did. She answered that the memories from her first few years in New York were so vivid that they stuck to her head, even until now. Most of the memories she shared with me were moments of adversity. She reminisced of the first time she and her family got kicked out of a restaurant. Right after informing her family that the house was full, the waiter welcomed another white family into the restaurant. It wasn't the fact that they were rejected that shocked Rachel, it was the fact that the waiter welcomed the family right behind theirs, with a face that showed no guilt or shame. She recalled that when her family returned home to have a home-cooked meal instead, the family ate the meal in silence, all probably shocked by the previous happening at the restaurant.

Rachel also shared her memories about her school life, and she told me it was especially more difficult for her to fit in and make friends because there weren't a lot of Asians in her grade. Rachel was made fun of for lunch bags very often. Because Korean dishes can sometimes carry a unique smell that could be unfamiliar to people from other cultures, kids in her class would taunt Rachel for the way her lunch smelled. Rachel said that these two incidents: the one at the restaurant and at school during lunchtime, became a core memory that she could not forget. She said that she still remembers those moments in video motion.

Next, when I asked her about what she misses about Korea the most, she said it was a "sense of community". In the neighborhood she used to live in in Korea, everyone would know who lived next door and every family would feel safe to leave their child with the family next door for a few hours. In New York, she said that it appeared as if everyone was a stranger and nobody fancied having a close relationship with her or her family. Another thing that she mentioned she missed was her friends. She said that she missed her friends back in Korea, and felt sad because there was no way of getting back in touch with them since SNS was nonexistent back then.

When I asked what she loved about her life in New York, she mentioned "freedom". I found this interesting because in the interview video of "In the Heart of Another", many of the interviewees answered in the same way. When I asked Rachel if she could talk more in detail about the type of freedom that she experienced, she said that people didn't judge her for dressing in a certain way. In other words, she appreciated the fact that people didn't care about how others looked. She could sense how freeing this was when she visited Korea during her vacation. People in Korea care a lot about their own looks but also care about others' looks and what they wear on the streets. If you wear something that, in their eyes, looks promiscuous, they will stare

you down. Experiencing this in Korea, Rachel realized when she went back to New York how thankful she was for not having to be judged while walking down the street.

Re-listening to this portion of the interview again made me realize something in common between some of the immigrants that I encountered. They all hold a paradoxical desire of 'being recognized', but also 'being invisible'. Immigrants wish to 'be recognized' and to be respected for who they are, as well as the roots they come from. However, they also wish to 'be invisible' so that they can naturally blend into the surrounding environment.

If we take Rachel's story as an example, she mentioned how shocking it was that the rude waiter treated her family as if they 'were invisible'. Here, we can tell that she holds the desire of 'being recognized' and respected. Yet, later when we discussed what she loves about New York, she particularly commented on the fact that she admires it that people don't care about what she dresses in, that they treat her as if she were 'invisible'. Here, it is clear she yearns to 'be invisible'.

Also, in "In the Heart of Another", Xi Dan Wang is an ambitious Chinese woman who has built a respectable career in China and also wants to build a corresponding career in the United States. In other words, she wants to be 'recognized' by her profession and career. But at the same time, she mentions how she was relieved by the fact that nobody cared about the divorce with her husband. In this case, she was relieved by the fact that she was 'invisible' to others.

The way I understand this coexisting desire of "being recognized" and also "being invisible" is this: immigrants wish to "be recognized" when they are viewed as an individual but wish to "be invisible" when they are viewed as a part of a community. I believe that the only way for both of these desires of immigrants to be fulfilled is for native citizens to actively try to get to know who their neighboring immigrants are. Something as simple as starting small talks about the immigrant living next door and getting to know about their roots, their profession, or even their favorite food could help them recognize immigrants as "just another citizen living next door".

In conclusion, through my interview with Rachel and watching as well as reading about the book "In the Heart of Another ", I was able to better understand the true desires that immigrants hold in common. Small, but thoughtful acts of showing interest towards fellow immigrant neighbors shown by native citizens could be the most important step to fulfill immigrants' desires of "being recognized" as individuals and "being invisible" as members of a community.