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CODES 121

23 April 2024

Reflection #2: "Where We Are" photo gallery

The media we consume plays a significant role in the lives we live. Netflix, Instagram, and whatever the next Marvel movie is all contribute to our schema, and by prox shape the world around us. But what of the inverse? What of the small human moments that are unique to only an equally small group of people? That is the question the New York Times sought to answer with their photo gallery "Where we are."

One of the standout qualities of all the galleries is the interactions between the people in the photos. In the digital age, isolation is ever present, however the typical image of sitting in a dark room alone at your computer is a major misconception about this isolation. This form, unique to the digital age, can be witnessed in public; a man scrolling aimlessly on a train, a classroom full of more TikTok "for you" pages than textbooks, and the unanimous coffee shop podcaster at every university across the globe. In these pictures however, we see the opposite. We see young children playing outside at camp, young men expressing themselves at rap meets, and the beauty of love expressed between young queer people. The lack of performance in these pictures speaks volumes, as the natural spirit of human interaction overrides any notion of staging. These are people living their truth in color; not the saturated hue of filters, but organic light shining upon human beings in action.

Of all the galleries, one stood out to me above the others. Camp Naru is a children's camp in New York for Korean American youth. The children play, talk, go on trips, and make friends while venturing together into an unfamiliar and potentially dangerous world. These children were born into an age separate from previous generations. The camp is an island in the sea for these children, giving them an outlet to play and explore separate from the sea of information known as the internet. The use of perspective in these images is telling; many of the pictures being close shots. They sit, lay, and play in isolation. Zooming out is where we see the true image: unity. The children are truly around their friends, the beauty of which is not lost on the viewer.

The ultimate risk of real-world connections that is often overlooked is the potential for pain caused by the separation of people. Real, natural bonds are dangerous for our human spirit as much as they uplift our lives. We see this in the photos of the queer youth, connecting and sharing intimate space with each other. The pressure of social rejection looms over the heads of all who suffer from anxiety, as well as those who don't. It is encoded in our lives; part of our human experience innate to all people. It is part giving and receiving love, and the ability to overcome this fear is what allows us to love unequivocally.

Real world connections provide us with a look into the shared human experience as much as it shows us how unique we are. The risk of social rejection is present, but the fight to and to be loved triumphs over this human fear. We live in a world where isolation is present and persistent, yet in these galleries, we see a rebellion against isolation. No matter how we live and love, it is a common thread that connects us as humans.

