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“Where We Are” Reflection

While reading the “Where We Are” series, I noticed a recurring theme of young people finding and making safe spaces for them to be themselves and enjoy life with each other. In the pieces that I read, they gave me an insight on how people from different backgrounds, and lives all together, can still end up chasing the same feeling and belonging together. The photo essay that I chose to look more closely at was “The Thrift Market.” This article helped me to see this connection between all of them and allowed me to reflect on the fact that everyone longs for a space where they can truly be themselves.

The photo essay “The Thrift Market” is about Dencity, a group of skaters in Lagos, Nigeria. This group was founded in 2020 by Blessing Ewona “in response to the dearth of spaces for young queer people and female skaters in Nigeria.” They take trips to the market where they thrift for pieces that can help support their style, and they also meet up regularly to skate at “the dilapidated National Stadium or Tarkwa Bay beach.” Blessing said that she wanted a community where she could be herself; where she didn’t have to skate as a way to escape. In the article she said that after trying, and failing, to find a community where she belonged, she decided to make her own. This speaks to how imperative it is for people to find places where they can belong, especially when those people are continuously made to feel like outliers.

Now focusing more on the visual aspect of this photo essay, the images used help to further showcase what the article is trying to convey. For example, Dencity regularly thrifts at the market to find pieces for them to turn into their style. In turn, the images show pictures of them wearing unique outfits; sometimes with the background being the markets they get the clothes from. Another example is how the group was created to be a place for them to be themselves as a community, and this is shown in the images because they are seen interacting as close friends in various places.

Lastly, I want to talk about the text and how it supports the images, as well as furthers the readers interpretation of them. While viewing the article, I would look at the pictures and get one story from them, but after reading the texts that go along with them, it changed my view. To give an example, in a couple of the images, I saw a group of people walking through piles of clothes. My first thought was that they were just shopping there, trying to find new outfits, but after reading the texts, it brought out a deeper meaning from the pictures. The reason being because I then realized that they were not just shopping, but were indulging in an activity that allowed them to break free from societal norms, and they did that together as a community.

In conclusion, the pieces that I read strengthened my belief that no matter what background, culture, life, etc., that a person comes from, they still long for the feeling of belonging; the feeling of knowing that they can truly be themselves in a safe space devoid of judgment. In addition to that, I believe that looking more closely at the photo essay “The Thrift Market,” allowed me to see that in a point of view that I am familiar with. Which also provides more insight on how big or small the feeling of belonging can be since I chose to look more closely at a photo essay that I could relate to, because it allows me to analyze a story that I can share experiences with.