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How Photography Connects Us

“Photography is the art and science of capturing images with a camera. Photography can connect people across time, distance, and cultural boundaries.” (Sanchez 2024) As David Griffin illustrates in his TED talk, “How Photography Connects Us,” this medium has the power to unite people by preserving significant moments and evoking shared emotions. Through personal anecdotes and the works of skilled photographers, Griffin demonstrates how photographs can convey compelling stories and foster connections. Similarly, Lynn Johnson's National Geographic video, “How Photography Connects Us All,” highlights the narrative strength of photography and its ability to deepen our understanding of others. Angel Sanchez's article further supports this notion by discussing photography's role in emotional and societal engagement. In this essay, I will analyze these sources alongside the works of my favorite photographer, Stephen Shore, and share personal experiences to argue how photography connects us as a society.

Photographs capture moments, preserving details and emotions that trigger memories of people, places, and events. They document milestones and allow us to revisit and share memories, thus fostering a shared identity and community. Griffin emphasizes the importance of storytelling in photojournalism, stating, "But to be a great photojournalist, you have to have more than just one or two great photographs in you. You've got to be able to make them all the time. But even more importantly, you need to know how to create a visual narrative. You need to know

how to tell a story." (00:04:29 - 00:04:44) He further illustrates this with the story of Paul Nicklin, who captured more than just images of leopard seals; he brought back a compelling narrative, "Paul set out to photograph a relatively mysterious and unknown creature, and came back with not just a collection of photographs, but an amazing experience and a great story. It is these kinds of stories, ones that go beyond the immediate or just the superficial that demonstrate the power of photojournalism." (00:14:04 - 00:14:21) These narratives highlight the profound impact of photojournalism in connecting people through visual stories. In a video by the National Geographic Society, photojournalist Lynn Johnson remarks on the continuous impact of storytelling: "It's easy to just kind of do a story and move along into the next one in the next in the next and you can lose sight of the fact that each and every one can impact others we really are connected to a web of people" (00:01:12 - 00:01:32). This underscores the significance of each captured moment in weaving a web of shared human experiences. Reflecting on personal experiences, I cherish viewing photo albums with friends, reminiscing over images from sleepovers, beach, and backpacking trips. These visual memories not only bring us back to our younger days but also strengthen our bonds, underscoring the power of photography in connecting us through shared stories and emotions.

Photographs speak a universal language that transcends verbal communication, allowing people to connect across diverse backgrounds. They convey emotions, stories, and perspectives through visual elements like lighting, composition, and captured moments, evoking feelings without the need for text. Sanchez emphasizes this in her article, stating, "Photography has the power to create empathy and understanding between people by providing a window into the lives of others. By seeing the world through the eyes of others, we can gain a deeper understanding of

the world around us and connect with others on a more meaningful level." This quote underscores how photographs offer a glimpse into different lives, fostering connections and empathy without words. Photographs freeze specific moments in time, enabling viewers to engage with the emotions and experiences depicted. In his TED Talk, Griffin discusses the work of Randy Olson, "Back on land, Randy Olson photographed a makeshift fish market in Africa, where the remains of fileted fish were sold to the locals, the main parts having already been sent to Europe. And here in China, Randy shot a jellyfish market. As prime food sources are depleted, the harvest goes deeper into the oceans and brings in more such sources of protein. This is called fishing down the food chain." (09:49 - 10:12) This narrative highlights how Olson's photographs illuminate the pressing issue of overfishing and its impact on global and local communities, demonstrating the role of powerful imagery in raising awareness about significant global challenges.

Photographs have the power to make us care about important issues by vividly depicting the experiences of others, thus uniting us in collective action. Photography illuminates real-world challenges through compelling images that document and raise awareness of harsh realities. Stephen Shore, an American photographer renowned for pioneering the use of color in art photography during the 1970s, captured the mundane aspects of everyday life in urban and suburban America. His works, such as "American Surfaces" (1972) and "Uncommon Places" (1982), offer insightful glimpses into American society and landscapes through a "deadpan" style that elevates ordinary subjects. For instance, Shore's photograph "Causeway Inn, Tampa, Florida, May 26, 1977" depicts a dilapidated motel sign against a stark blue sky, symbolizing urban decay and economic disparities, and highlighting the need for urban renewal. Another poignant

example is Johnson's photograph, "Memorie Naba, Age 9, Carries Containers of Water," which brings attention to the global water crisis. The image of a young girl burdened with heavy water containers on a barren landscape underscores the daily struggles faced by millions without access to clean water. Johnson remarks, "It's a privilege to be present, it's a privilege to tell someone's story" (00:00:37 - 00:00:49), emphasizing the role of photography in capturing and preserving these critical narratives. A photograph that personally moved me is Steve McCurry's 1984 "Afghan Girl." This iconic image features a 12-year-old Pashtun orphan in a Pakistani refugee camp, her haunting gaze framed by vibrant colors. Her piercing green eyes and pensive expression convey resilience and vulnerability, making a profound impact on viewers worldwide. This portrait, like many powerful photographs, connects us deeply to significant issues and diverse experiences, demonstrating the unique ability of photography to bridge gaps and foster empathy.

Photography is a powerful medium that connects people across distances, cultures, and experiences, fostering a sense of togetherness and understanding. Firstly, photographs help us share stories and memories, creating emotional bonds and preserving traditions. Secondly, images communicate without words, transcending language barriers and conveying emotions visually. Thirdly, powerful photographs shed light on real-world issues, raising awareness and inspiring action. Photography's ability to connect is profound because it allows us to see the world through different perspectives, empathize with others' experiences, and find common ground in our shared humanity. By embracing photography as a tool for storytelling, communication, and social impact, we can use it to promote understanding, and bring people together in meaningful ways.

Works Cited

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