

Opinion

Sharing the Visual Experience: Life on Instant Replay?

What got me thinking about this topic anyway? It was a group of preteen girls at a restaurant, apparently celebrating a birthday. They were huddled together in a giggle-fest, watching on a smartphone a video of themselves saying “cheese,” taken just moments earlier at someone’s arm’s length. For the girls, the original experience wasn’t nearly as entertaining as the replay, I thought, and I wondered if I hadn’t stumbled on something important. What was it about the replay that was so captivating? It wasn’t like a football instant replay whose intent is to judge the behaviors on the field. And it wasn’t a replay on a digital video recorder, useful to review important plot details that were missed during a daydream. It was simply an opportunity to share a visual experience with friends.

Sharing of visual experience is nothing new, of course. In Greek mythology, the Graeae were three old women who shared a single eye and passed it around so that each in turn could see. Perseus stole the eye while they were passing it, forcing the now-blind women to disclose to him the secrets he would need to slay the Medusa. Perseus returned their eye, and they resumed bickering about who got to see next. (They also shared only one tooth, but I’ll leave the ramifications of that to the dentists.) Thankfully, unlike the Graeae, we are not forced to share visual images sequentially;

rather, we can do so simultaneously. Movies were an instant success as soon as they were invented, as was television. They allowed sharing of visual experience with others, but with the drawback that most of the content was copyrighted. The digital video revolution has made acquisition of images ridiculously easy, and with the press of a button, they can be shared legally with friends. The particularly popular ones, such as cat videos, can go viral on the Internet overnight.

Ophthalmology is a visual specialty in more than one sense of the word. Not only do ophthalmologists take care of eyes, and thereby the sense of sight, but our knowledge is fundamentally image based. “Seeing is believing” is a saying so old that the original source is not known, but it certainly applies to modern ophthalmic diagnosis. The Academy has a huge storehouse of ophthalmic images that it has now made available to members without charge, as a member benefit, through the ONE Network. To search this visual treasury, go to <http://one.aao.org/browse-multimedia?filter=image>. And if you have images that you would like to share and add to the Academy library, visit <http://one.aao.org/submit-an-image>.

Excited though I am about the ability to share video or still photographs with others, I am pleased that there is a kind of image we haven’t yet figured out how to share—the images we con-

jure for ourselves as we dream, as we read a good novel, as we read *EyeNet* Opinions; these cannot be shared with others except as narratives. And neither can we share the replay that our mind conjures of events in which we have been participants. Regret seems to be a uniquely human characteristic, requiring multiple mind replays, but imagery can also be positive, fueling our self-image. Since they are images in the mind only, I guess they must be believable only by the individual who visualized them. And since they are not subject to instant replay viewable by the world, they are still a part of life that we can guard as our personal domain.



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