

Becoming a Web Celeb

Essential Question

What does it mean to become an Internet celebrity?

Lesson Overview



Students reflect on the possibilities and perils of an online world in which anyone can become a celebrity overnight. They analyze the journeys of real “Web celebs,” including some of the harsh comments that they have received online, and recognize how these comments may affect other viewers as well as their targets. Students then engage in a discussion about gender roles, thinking critically about the different pressures men and women may face in the public eye.

Learning Objectives

Students will be able to ...

- evaluate the benefits and drawbacks of becoming an online celebrity, using case studies to frame and support their arguments.
- identify the different kinds of criticism that men and women receive as they gain public attention, and how this reflects broader gender roles.
- discuss the impact that negative comments can have on both their targets and their viewers.

Materials and Preparation

- Review the **Gender and Digital Life Teacher Backgrounder (High School)**.
-  Preview the Dude Perfect™ website (www.dudeperfect.com), along with the YouTube video, “Dude Perfect™ | Backyard Edition | Our 1st Video!” (www.youtube.com/watch?v=PD6eQY7yCfw&feature=plcp) and prepare to show both to students.
-  Preview the video, “**Rebecca Black Video Case Study**” and prepare to show it to students.
- Copy the **Don’t Be a Hater Student Handout**, one for each student.
- Review the **Don’t Be a Hater Student Handout – Teacher Version**.

Family Resources

- Send home the **Boys, Girls, and Media Messages Family Tip Sheet (Middle & High School)**.

Estimated time: 45 minutes

Standards Alignment –

Common Core:

grades 9-10: RI.1, RI.2, RI.4, RI.7, RI.10, SL.1a, SL.1b, SL.1c, SL.1d, SL.2, SL.4, SL.5, SL.6, L.6

grades 11-12: RI.1, RI.2, RI.4, RI.7, RI.10, SL.1a, SL.1b, SL.1c, SL.1d, SL.2, SL.4, SL.5, SL.6, L.6

NETS•S: 1a-c, 2a-b, 2d, 3a-d, 4a-d, 5a-d, 6a-b, 6d

Key Vocabulary –

internet meme: an idea – whether a phrase, expression, image, or video – that gains widespread recognition online

viral: the rapid spread of information, particularly online

gender roles: a set of rules and expectations that govern how both men and women, as well as boys and girls, are supposed to look and act

introduction

Warm-up (5 minutes)

ASK:

What does it take to become famous online?

Consider writing students' responses on the board. You may wish to discuss the following factors associated with becoming famous: talent, looks, timing, luck, strategy, visibility, networking, advertising.

Do you think the factors for Internet fame are different for men than they are for women?

Guide students to build their own set of criteria and definitions. Encourage them to recognize that men and women might be judged differently online, just as they are in the offline world.

TELL students that, as a class, you are going to explore the experience of becoming a “Web celeb.” You are also going to explore whether men and women experience attention, fame, and criticism differently.

teach 1

Rising to Internet Fame (10 minutes)

DEFINE the Key Vocabulary terms **Internet meme** and **viral**.

ASK students to raise their hands if they have ever heard of Dude Perfect™. Invite students to describe the group to the rest of the class. (Dude Perfect™ is a group of guys who became famous through YouTube for their backyard basketball trick shots. After being featured in a local news story, their YouTube channel went viral and soon gained national recognition. The guys are now sponsored by GMC and the NBA, have their own online merchandise and iPhone game, and even published a book about their journey to fame.)

SHOW students “Dude Perfect™ | Backyard Edition | Our 1st Video!” to give them a sense of the group (www.youtube.com/watch?v=PD6eQY7yCfw&feature=plcp).

SHOW students Dude Perfect™'s website, specifically their page “Goals” (www.dudeperfect.com/goals). This page illustrates many of the upsides of Dude Perfect™'s rise to fame.

DISCUSS with students the benefits of being able to share one's talents and passions online and have them seen by others. Ask students to provide examples of “Web celebs” or even lesser known people who have inspired them online (bloggers, vloggers, etc.). Use this as a springboard for discussing the appeal of receiving widespread attention online.

INVITE students to share their own experiences creating and posting videos online. What made them post the video? Who did they imagine would see the video? Did the video receive comments or feedback? If so, were they positive or negative and how did the comments make them feel?

teach 2

Web Celeb Case Study – Rebecca Black (10 minutes)

ARRANGE students into groups of three or four.

 **SHOW** students the video, “**Rebecca Black Video Case Study**.”

INSTRUCT each group to discuss the following questions, encouraging them to take notes:

- *What are some positive aspects of Rebecca’s road to fame? What are some negative aspects? (On the positive side, Rebecca’s video gave her the opportunity to express herself and showcase her creativity. It also made her famous — whether or not people truly liked her video. On the negative side, Rebecca was heavily teased and bullied for her video. Many people do not take her singing career seriously.)*
- *To what extent did the backlash that Rebecca experienced have anything to do with gender? If so, how? (Students may be quick to defend Rebecca’s critics, finding fault in the way she looks, sings, and acts. But encourage students to also analyze Rebecca’s experience from a broader perspective. What kinds of expectations do we place on girls, especially those in the spotlight? Are there double standards for things like appearance, body image, and talent?)*

INVITE students to share their reactions to the “**Rebecca Black Video Case Study**,” as well as their answers to the reflection questions you posed.

teach 3

Fame, Backlash and Gender Roles (15 minutes)

DISTRIBUTE the **Don’t Be a Hater Student Handout**.

INSTRUCT students to work in their groups to complete the activity on the handout. Allow about five minutes for them to do so.

HAVE students share their responses to the matching game on the handout. Refer to the **Don’t Be a Hater Student Handout – Teacher Version** for the correct answers.

READ aloud the YouTube comments that were directed at Rebecca Black and Karmin.

ASK:

Do you feel that people make comments to bring down women online? If so, in what ways? What are some common trigger words for criticizing women online?

Guide students to recognize that people commonly criticize or bully women by insulting their appearance, weight, and/or sexual appeal.

READ aloud the YouTube comments that were directed at Justin Bieber, Ryan Hyaga, and Fred Figgelhorn.

ASK:

Do you feel that people make comments to bring down men online? If so, in what ways? What are some common trigger words for criticizing men online?

Guide students to recognize that people commonly criticize or bully men by challenging their masculinity or sexuality. These kinds of comments also devalue women, because calling a man a “girl” is meant to carry a negative connotation.

DEFINE the Key Vocabulary term **gender roles**.

DISCUSS how criticism and hate speech directed at people online can reveal broader social attitudes about gender roles. Men and women arguably face different pressures to look and act certain ways — especially in the public eye.

ENCOURAGE students to discuss who is affected by negative online comments. Guide students to recognize that these comments can have an impact on everyone who reads them, not just on their targets. Have them reflect on how these negative comments might reinforce narrow ideas about how girls and guys are supposed to look and act — and can even make readers feel bad about themselves. Such comments can also discourage others —

especially girls — from showcasing their interests or talents online. For this reason, students may want to consider whether negative comments are a form of online bullying.

closing

Wrap-up (5 minutes)

You can use these questions to assess your students' understanding of the lesson objectives. You may want to ask students to reflect in writing on one of the questions, using a journal or an online blog/wiki.

ASK:

How has the Internet changed the way we think about, and experience, fame? Are there upsides to becoming famous online? Are there downsides?

On the positive side, the Internet allows us to discover and support talented people who may never have had the opportunity to become known otherwise. On the negative side, videos can become viral through ridicule and mockery. The Internet provides a public platform for critics and “haters” to rag on people they don’t like.

Do you feel that people bring down, or criticize, women online? How about men?

Women are often critiqued more for their weight, appearance, and sexual attractiveness than men. When people criticize or try to intimidate men, they commonly challenge their masculinity or sexuality.

How might negative online comments affect people who read them? Do you think they can reinforce certain gender roles?

For example, when girls see other girls being criticized online for their weight, appearance, sexual attractiveness, behavior, etc., it may make them feel self-conscious or negative about their own appearance or abilities. The same can be true for guys.

Extension Activity

Have students work in groups to develop a video case study or a presentation on one of the “Web celebs” listed on the **Don’t Be a Hater Student Handout**, similar to the video case study they watched during the lesson about Rebecca Black. (Remind students to provide proper credit for any video files, songs, or images they use.) Students should research the celeb’s path to fame, and analyze the kind of feedback that person has received from followers. Does the feedback have anything to do with gender?

Note: Teachers should be aware that students could possibly come across inappropriate or offensive language within the comment section of online videos. However, this content may also provide valuable insight into the kind of hate speech that both men and women experience online. Decide what’s best for you and your students.

At-Home Activity

Have students read the article, “Meet Conan O’Brien’s Twitter Friend, Sarah Killen: ‘My Life Has Already Changed!’” (www.vulture.com/2010/03/conan_obrien_has_changed_sarah.html). Students should put themselves in Sarah’s shoes and imagine how sudden fame could change a teen’s life – in both positive and negative ways. What would they do if they were in Sarah’s shoes? Have students post their reflections to a class blog or wiki, or reflect in a journal.

What does gender have to do with digital citizenship and literacy?

Imagine a teen girl clicking through her friend's profile pictures, wishing she could look just as slender. Or imagine a teen boy purposefully waiting an hour before texting a girl back, just to make himself appear more independent and detached. Teens are keenly aware of what it means to be popular, and how others perceive them. They not only turn to mass media for hints about how teen boys and girls should look and act, but also to their peers online. The problem is that the media often encourages narrow definitions of boys' and girls' roles. And these narrow definitions can then make their way into peer-to-peer interactions online, making it that much harder for a teen to keep perspective on media messages.

In order to learn how to be responsible and respectful digital media users, young teens must also develop an awareness of the unspoken rules, assumptions, and stereotypes that can inform their behavior. Gender norms — or common social ideas about masculinity and femininity — play a critical role in framing how young teens develop identities, express themselves, and hang out. Kids who do not think critically about gender stereotypes can be misinformed about how the world perceives them and what they can grow up to be.

Why Does It Matter?

Your students are media creators, with the ability to publish content round-the-clock. This ability, combined with constant access to all kinds of media, makes it critically important to teach kids how to recognize and understand gender stereotypes. Adult mentors are well positioned to help teens develop lifelong media literacy skills — ones that will discourage them from perpetuating harmful stereotypes.

To be upstanding, teens need to crack the gender code. Teens need to think critically about common attitudes that can fuel issues such as digital drama, cyberbullying, and sexting. Quite often, these issues are rooted in social attitudes, not the technology itself.

Not Your Specialty? Not a Problem!

There are more classroom connections than you think. Talking about gender roles can create an easy segue between the subject you regularly teach — whether history, English, or health and wellness — and a class discussion about digital citizenship. Refer to the following page of this backgrounder for tips to help you get started.

Treat students like the experts. Encourage students to feel as though they're teaching you about how they and their friends use digital media, and encourage them to dig deeper into issues by asking lots of questions. They may start the lesson with a certain set of ideas or expectations about "the way things are" online, but then may reevaluate their opinions in the end.

SOCIAL MEDIA, SOCIAL LIFE: IT'S NOT GENDER NEUTRAL

Every day, more teen girls than teen boys text. In the daily Twitter-verse, there are also more girls than boys, and when it comes to photo posting, it's especially a girl thing...but not always a good thing.



77% TEXT DAILY

33% EVER TWEETED

75% LOVE POSTING PHOTOS



60% TEXT DAILY

22% EVER TWEETED

42% LOVE POSTING PHOTOS

For girls, especially, putting their pictures online can be stressful:



57% girls vs. 28% boys sometimes feel left out after seeing photos of others together online

45% girls vs. 24% boys worry about other people posting ugly photos of them online

28% girls vs. 9% boys have edited photos of themselves before posting

Source: *Social Media, Social Life: How Teens View Their Digital Lives* (June 26, 2012). A Common Sense Media Research Study. <http://www.commonsensemedia.org/research/social-media-social-life>

tips for ...

ALL TEACHERS

Know the difference between *gender* and *sex*. Gender has to do with social identities and roles. Gender is about how a culture defines terms like “masculine,” “feminine,” and everything in between. One’s sex, on the other hand, is a matter of anatomy and biology. For example, when you separate a class into groups of boys and girls, you are separating them by sex, not by gender.

ENGLISH TEACHERS

Imagine characters in books using 21st-century technology. What would Holden Caulfield think of texting? How would digital drama play out between the Montagues and the Capulets? Have students explore how male and female characters’ lives would change if they had access to social networks, cell phones, and other forms of digital communication.

HISTORY TEACHERS

Think about gender roles across history and across cultures. Depending on when and where people grow up, expectations about men and women’s roles may differ. For example, in the early 20th century, Americans associated the color pink with strength and masculinity, rather than femininity. Have students research how attitudes about boys and girls have changed over time, and the extent to which these differences relate to race, class, and community culture. Consider connecting virtually with a school or class in another country, and have students explore what it’s like to be a teen boy or girl in another part of the world.

TECHNOLOGY TEACHERS

Explore gender gaps in the fields of science, technology, and math. Fifty-seven percent of girls say that if they went into a STEM (science, technology, engineering, math) career, they’d have to work harder than a man just to be taken seriously.¹ Discuss with students where these attitudes come from, and find examples of role models who have challenged the status quo, such as the late Sally Ride.

HEALTH AND WELLNESS TEACHERS

Dive deeper into media messages. The Internet allows us to access media anytime, anywhere. Explore messages about boys and girls in your students’ favorite magazines, songs, movies, and TV shows. For example, you can use documentary films such as *MissRepresentation*, as well as those offered by the Media Education Foundation, to spark class discussion about gender representations in the media.

¹ “Generation STEM: What Girls Say about Science, Technology, and Math.” Girl Scouts of the USA (2012).

Becoming a Web Celeb

Directions

Match the real-life comments below with the Web celeb they belong to. (Some celebs have more than one comment associated with them.)

She has a horrible voice and the song aint good, so what?

1. she's a girl
2. she's kinda cute after all and that is all you need to become famous nowadays

posted 2 days ago

good luck finding a girl that will put up with you making these vid...lol that voice even if it is edited...

posted 1 year ago

he sings like a girl

posted 1 month ago

he was still young here, his voice is a little deeper now

posted 1 month ago

she has more muscles than justin bieber

posted 10 hours ago

I like her hair naturally without the puff on top

posted 11 hours ago

see this budget cut is so low they couldn't even afford make up for the acne

posted 19 hours ago

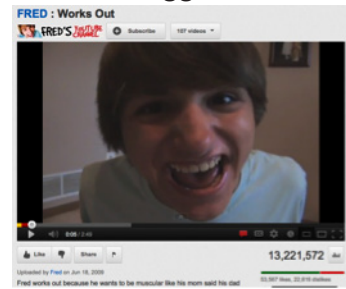
she look very ugly when she rap..sry but its still true

posted 2 days ago

An asian guy who acts just like an american guy does haha so funny to see that ...

posted 1 year ago

Fred Figgelhorn



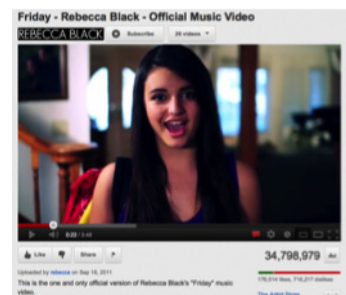
Karmin



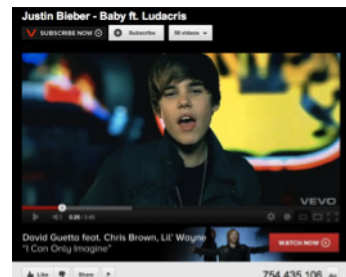
Ryan Higa



Rebecca Black



Justin Bieber



All comments and screenshots were pulled from YouTube (www.youtube.com)

Directions

Match the real-life video comments below with the Web celeb they belong to on the next page. (Some celebs have more than one comment associated with them.)

Rebecca Black

She has a horrible voice and the song aint good, so what?

1. she's a girl
2. she's kinda cute after all and that is all you need to become famous nowadays

posted 2 days ago

Fred Figgelhorn

good luck finding a girl that will put up with you making these vid...lol that voice even if it is edited...

posted 1 year ago

Justin Bieber

he sings like a girl

posted 1 month ago

he was still young here, his voice is a little deeper now

posted 1 month ago

Ryan Higa

An asian guy who acts just like an american guy does haha so funny to see that ...

posted 3 weeks ago

Karmin

she has more muscles than justin bieber

posted 1 month ago

I like her hair naturally without the puff on top

Rebecca Black

see this budget cut is so low they couldn't even afford make up for the acne

posted 19 hours ago

Karmin

she look very ugly when she rap..sry but its still true

posted 2 days ago

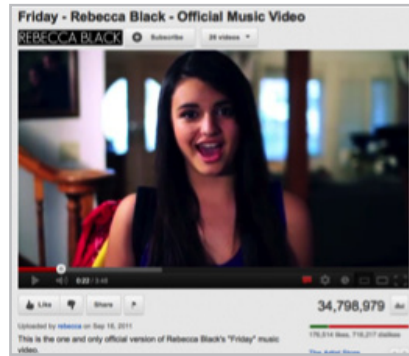
All comments and screenshots were pulled from YouTube (www.youtube.com)

Fred Figgelhorn



Lucas Cruikshank acts as “Fred Figgelhorn” in his online video series. He digitally alters the sound of his voice to be high pitched, and acts like a hyper six-year-old.

Rebecca Black



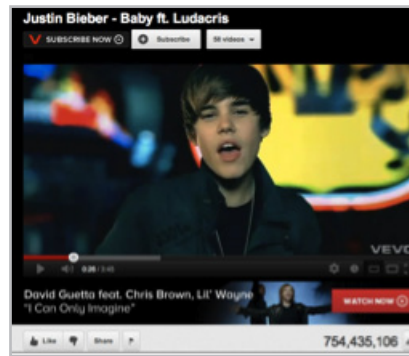
Rebecca Black’s music video “Friday” went viral online in 2011. The criticism she received for her video gave her widespread media attention.

Karmin



Amy Heidemann and Louis Noonan’s cover of the rap song “Look at Me Now” went viral online in 2011. Their popularity grew even more after they performed on *The Ellen Degeneres Show* and *Saturday Night Live*.

Justin Bieber



Justin Bieber was signed by a record label at the age of 13. His mom had posted videos online of him singing, as a child and as a young teen. Bieber’s career then took off and he’s now a huge pop star.

Ryan Higa



Ryan Higa is famous for his YouTube channel *NigaHiga*, to which he posts original comedy videos that he and his friends act in.

All comments and screenshots were pulled from YouTube (www.youtube.com)

Becoming a Web Celeb

1. Do you think this photo comment is directed towards a girl or a boy?

- a) Girl
- b) Boy

es5763 (3 days ago)

Ur ugly and u need to go on a diet

Explain your answer:

2. The term “gender role” means:

- a) The role that someone plays in a virtual world or video game
- b) Common ideas about how boys and girls should look and act
- c) Biological differences between boys and girls

3. Which of the following is an example of something going “viral” online?

- a) A blogger posts a video demonstrating how to properly frost a cake.
- b) A mom emails a video of her child singing to her family members.
- c) A YouTube video becomes so popular that it’s mentioned in the news.

Becoming a Web Celeb

1. Do you think this photo comment is directed towards a girl or a boy?

a) Girl

b) Boy

es5763 (3 days ago)
Ur ugly and u need to go on a diet

Explain your answer.

Answer feedback

While there is no true “correct” answer here, students should lean more towards answer choice **a**, Girl. People commonly criticize or bully women online by insulting their appearance, weight, and/or sexual appeal online.

2. The term “gender role” means:

a) The role that someone plays in a virtual world or video game

b) Common ideas about how boys and girls should look and act

c) Biological differences between boys and girls

Answer feedback

The correct answer is **b**. Gender has to do with social identities and roles. Sex, on the other hand, is a matter of anatomy and biology.

3. Which of the following is an example of something going “viral” online?

a) A blogger posts a video demonstrating how to properly frost a cake.

b) A mom emails a video of her child singing to her family members.

c) A YouTube video becomes so popular that it’s mentioned in the news.

Answer feedback

The correct answer is **c**. When referring to digital content, “viral” means the the rapid spread of information, particularly online.