

LESSON: Relationships in the Media

Overview

Teens may assume they “know” a great deal about the lives of celebrities and the types of relationships they have with their significant others. As only one example among many, consider a couple such as Rihanna and Chris Brown. Both were well known stars who received a great deal of media coverage appearing in many happy-looking photos together.

Yet behind all the media hype, their relationship was a very troubled one. Your students will be able to cite many other examples of celebrity relationships that they later discovered were unhealthy.

Since many teens do not consider an unhealthy relationship to be such a big deal, it's important to focus on what happened AFTER the abuse in celebrity cases such as the Brown case were reported. Generally there was public outcry by the mainstream media; advocacy groups for abused women (or men) also often speak out. The public's response as depicted by mainstream media's coverage of both emotional and physical abuse indicates that unhealthy behavior is generally not considered acceptable in our country.

Objectives:

- Taking a second critical look at media reports about the relationships of celebrity couples
- Brainstorming and discussing indicators of both healthy and unhealthy relationships

Level: Middle/High School

Time: 1 class period

Preparation and Materials:

- Paper and pens
- Whiteboard, or flip chart
- Reese Witherspoon and Ryan Phillippe
- Teacher Discussion Guide: Healthy/Unhealthy Relationships
- Healthy/Unhealthy Relationships Worksheet

Procedures

CELEBRITY COUPLE RELATIONSHIPS (10 MINUTES)

Ask the students to divide up into teams of 2-4. Appoint one person as the recorder for the group:

- Divide a paper into four columns: a) name of a famous couple b) “healthy relationship,” c) unhealthy” relationship and d) unsure
- Brainstorm and list famous couples.
- Based on what you've read or heard about these couples, now choose what kind of relationship you think that these couples had/have and why (e.g. if you choose healthy, list characteristics you've heard about that make you come to that conclusion; if “unhealthy,” again tell why)

Now ask for volunteers to discuss some of the couples on their lists.

- Ask them to name one couple that according to all the media hype has a good relationship. Write down their answers on a white board.

- Ask them to name the indicators they have read or heard about in the media to indicate that this couple has a healthy relationship. (Allow students to debate what they've read or heard about these couples, citing contradictory indicators that they may have heard about.)
- Name a couple that seems to have an unhealthy relationship? Why do you think it's unhealthy? Write their answers on a white board for the class to consider.

Discuss what happens when the media discover that the relationship seems to be an unhealthy one? Does the public generally support the abusive party in the relationship? (Stress the negative reaction.) Do any of these couples break up after the unhealthy relationship is discovered?

Activity

PART 1: REAL LIFE RELATIONSHIPS (5 MINUTES)

Celebrities live in a kind of fantasy world. There is a great deal that we don't know about their real lives based on all the media hype surrounding them. Sometimes we are surprised to learn "the rest of the story" such as in the case of Rihanna and Chris Brown.

Discuss with the class what constitutes a healthy versus unhealthy relationship in the real world. Have them respond to the following True or False statements:

- In a healthy relationship, one person makes all the decisions for the couple.
- Girls shouldn't have too many opinions or make their feelings known too often or they'll scare away the boys.
- It's okay for a guy to call a girl by a nasty name because he saw it on television or heard it in a song.
- Use the Teacher Discussion Guide: Healthy/Unhealthy Relationships, to develop additional true or false statements. Distribute the handout, Healthy/Unhealthy Relationships Worksheet.

Tell the students to continue working in their teams. Give all the teams 5 minutes to list indicators for both a healthy and an unhealthy relationship as they observe it in real life around them.

PART 2: WRITE AN ARTICLE ABOUT A CELEBRITY COUPLE (20 MINUTES)

Tell students to assume each of them is a reporter and their assignment is to write about the health of a relationship of a celebrity couple of their choice. There are some things that they know about this couple based on current reports. But they also should have questions that make them want to know more before they can confidently conclude that this is a healthy or unhealthy relationship.

Instructions: Write your article to address what you know as well as the unanswered questions that you have about this couple.

- What indicators does the media tend to focus on to prove that this is a healthy or unhealthy relationship?
- What's missing from these reports? What hasn't the media chosen to cover?
- What else would you like to know before drawing any firm conclusions?

Before they start writing, ask students to check the two different lists they have constructed as a team in Parts One and Two to review the indicators they have identified.

Encourage volunteers to share their articles with the class.

Assessment

Pinpointing indicators of healthy and unhealthy relationships, verbal explanation of ideas their team has recorded; student articles including indicators of a healthy or unhealthy relationship, and analysis and evaluation of current media reports to justify their conclusions.