

How Not to Get Famous on YouTube

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I'm shy. I blush often and stammer more than I blush. I'm the girl who always sits on the back row and avoids eye contact with the teacher, because she's mortally afraid of speaking in class. Don't get me wrong—I may suffer from a mild case of Social Anxiety Disorder; in other words, I am s-a-d, SAD, but even so, I have friends, close friends, and I'm happy. I enjoy life and I love people; I just like living and loving quietly. You might think a person like me, so bashful, would be happy enough to go unnoticed. It's not so. Though I'm quiet, though people make me anxious, though I hate compliments, mostly because I never know what to say, and though I prefer spending my time alone instead of pretending I find other people interesting, I want recognition. In fact, I've always been a little tempted to try and use the internet to become famous.

The glorious interweb, the world at my finger tips; I remember the fat kid who wore glasses and lip sang to “Numa Numa” on YouTube—more than fourteen million people viewed him hopping around on his computer chair, his rolls jiggling, as he threw his hands in the air and mouthed the gibberish that begins the song, “Ma-ia-hii, Ma-ia-hoo, Ma-ia-haha,” and, though this kid was more American than me, he continued to the Romanian lyrics. Watching the video is nearly poetic; the effect of his head bobbing all the while.

“Numa Numa” was originally intended as dancing music in European night clubs, but today, when a person googles the song, the first result is that dorky American kid. I want to be like that kid. I want to make a name in cyberspace. But the problem is that I don't know quite how to go about it. Most people set their MySpace profile to private to avoid stalkers. I don't. I want to be stalked. Any person with internet

access can visit my profile, where they can read about my life, view photos of me, see who my friends are, and read the comments people have left me, all on a pale brown background with tan swirls, while the mellow guitar music of Gregory and the Hawk plays in the background, amidst the modules, full of information in elegant font about my interests. It's like the Sonic Drive-in to all the pretty aspects of my personality. And it has been viewed about six times.

These past few days, my strange obsession with using the internet to find my purpose comes and goes. But the other night, I stumbled across a webcam in a junk drawer. With a childish gleam in my eye, I immediately made a YouTube account. After putting on lots of makeup and plugging in a small fan so my hair would about blow in the wind, I put on an enormous pair of sunglasses. Then I clicked the mouse to take a profile picture. I haven't uploaded any videos yet, but I've memorized my roommate's schedule. When she's gone, I film.

As we drove to Wal-Mart, my friend Mandy asked me what I'd been up to over the weekend, and I began to laugh. I couldn't stop.

"Nothing," I said, shrugging. But Mandy knows me well enough to realize what 'nothing' might entail. Well, either that or she was suspicious because of the laughter.

"Hannah...what did you do!?"

"Nothing..."

"Hannah!"

"I made music videos."

"What?!"

"Well, I was really bored, and I'm kind of vain. So, I used my webcam to make music videos, for YouTube."

Mandy laughed. I felt the need to defend myself. "You're vain, too!" I declared.

"We are all vain, Hannah, but most of us don't make

music videos to manifest that vanity!” She shook her head and gave me a motherly look. She paused, thought for a moment, then eagerly asked, “Can I be a back up dancer!?”

YouTubing is not my only attempt at fame. I also blog. I know no one wants to read about my life, so I make things up. I take pictures of myself wearing different kinds of hats and sunglasses. I use them for templates, and then I write daily blogs about people who don't exist. There's Sylvia Purehartsk, a Czechoslovakian nun who fights crime undercover and is currently involved in a love affair with a ruggedly handsome, dark haired Englishman; Petunia Poppins, a Dutch florist who, in her spare time, travels to exotic locations and studies dinosaur bones; and finally, Allison Clearwater, an American marine biologist who has devoted her life to the study of the sea cucumber. Each of these blogs has been viewed more than one-hundred times, and only ninety-something of those views were mine.

You might think the only sort of people who sit around all day trying to get famous by YouTubing, blogging, or programming computer games, are skinny, zit faced, reject high school kids who wear glasses and are, for lack of a better word, total nerds. But I aim to break this stereotype. Not because I have anything against computer nerds; actually, I think computer nerds are pretty cool. I just don't think I'm a nerd. I don't wear glasses. I don't even like computer games. If you saw me walking down the street, you would never assume I YouTubed. I guess I'm a closet computer nerd, of sorts. That's why I wear sunglasses, so I won't be recognized.

But here's the problem: the other day I was online when Mandy looked over my shoulder. She's one of the privileged few who know of my keen ambition for fifteen minutes of cyber fame, and I am the only person she regularly makes fun of. Anyways, she looked up and down my page and said she liked my sunglasses. I was horrified.

“You recognize me?!” I replied, astounded. Mandy was confused.

“Of course. That’s you wearing sunglasses. Why wouldn’t I recognize you?”

“Because, I’m wearing sunglasses!”

“Yeah, but it still looks exactly like you...”

I shook my head in disbelief and said: “Next time I’ll wear a hat.”

When I was in junior high, I commented incessantly in Harry Potter forums, predicting the end of the seventh book. I always said something along the lines of: everyone will die and Voldemort will win. I received a lot of nasty emails from furious fans. I was despised in every Potter forum, which made me smile a little. Then, when I was in the ninth grade, I decided I hated my life. I applied online to European boarding schools, which offended my parents. I planned on leaving my troubles behind and moving to England.

I still had an unhealthy obsession with Harry Potter, so finally, I decided my ticket out of high school would be to play a leading role in the new Potter film. I Googled and found the audition information. I was happy to discover, in an online news article, that Warner Brothers was holding open auditions for the film. Perfect. All was according to plan.

I practiced a British accent every day, and I researched ways to speak ‘British English.’ I read on one website that if you hold your chin still while you speak, you might sound British. That sort of worked. Then, hoping to pick up on the accents, I watched Monty Python and the first two Harry Potters roundabout fifty-three times each. But then, I was appalled, after reading at bbc.com that the auditions were only accepting British applicants. That was the stupidest thing I’d ever heard. I corresponded with an Englishman in a BBC forum, lamenting the unfairness of the situation. He called me an arse and told me to bugger off.

But there was still hope. I could fool the producers. I would use my new accent even when we weren't filming. No one would ever know. Brilliant. I was back in the game. I knew the role I would play and everything. I was a little in love with Harry Potter; I mean, how could it be possible not to love him? I could not help but swoon when I read this scene, from the third book, described so artfully by J.K. Rowling:

But a reckless rage had come over Harry. He kicked his trunk open, pulled out his wand, and pointed it at Uncle Vernon. 'She deserved it,' Harry said, breathing very fast. 'She deserved what she got. You keep away from me.' He fumbled behind him for the latch on the door. 'I'm going,' Harry said. 'I've had enough.'

I thought he was so brave. And I wanted him to love me, too. In the new film, I was going to play his crush, Cho Chang.

I told no one, except Susan Cummings, about my plan. Behind a shelf in the school library, I whispered to her that I was auditioning for the role of Cho Chang in the upcoming Potter film, and that I had a pretty good chance. She looked at me and tilted her head.

"Hannah, Cho Chang is Chinese."

"What?!" I declared. My mouth fell open. Susan laughed.

"Well, yes, why do you think she has a name like Cho Chang?"

"Don't know," I replied with a shrug. "Why does Hermione have a name like Hermione?"

I went home and Googled the Cho Chang auditions, which had taken place months ago, in London. Chapfallen, I stared despondently at the photographs of hundreds of Asian girls standing in line, waiting patiently in the rain, just outside the studio. Life was not fair. I was never going to be famous.

But I think there might be a moral to the story.

I once met a man even quieter than I am. His name was Roberto Miguel. He was burly, with thick dark hair and a black mustache; he looked like a member of the mafia, but when I looked into his eyes, he was passive and gentle. If I stared long enough, I felt as if I saw a little of his soul, and even there, deep inside him, was timid. Large and awkward, he walked with a limp and stared at the ground. Not only was he quiet, but he was closed and not just closed but locked, really: dead bolted. He never said a thing about himself. Though he was not much for confabulating—never, not once, have I heard him chatter pointlessly—he loved people and hearing what they had to say. He would listen to people talk for hours upon hours, and that's why he and I got along so splendidly. I love the sound of my own voice and talking about me is my favorite pastime.

I was shocked when Roberto, ordinarily so secretive, opened up with alacrity one evening. We connected, and spoke all night. He told me about his life and his family: his father who passed away years ago; the relatives in Italy, deep in financial trouble; his overbearing mother who, though he supported, begged him to return to Italy, accusing him of “forsaking his blood.” He told me he shoveled coal on a barge in the summers to pay for college. He was injured there and that's why he limped. He talked. I listened. He told me of his aspirations, hopes, and dreams. I assumed someone so quiet and awkward would be content as a hermit, far away from his troubles. Nope. Roberto Miguel wanted to be an actor. In the movies. In Hollywood. He wanted fame. He was serious, too. I'm the only person he told, and I'm sworn to secrecy. What it all comes down to is this: a desire for recognition is ingrained in all of us, reclusive or outgoing, beautiful or hideous. That's my conclusion.