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Catfish: Campus Edition

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Like a relationship superhero, technology can save you from the embarrassment of getting shut down by the hottie in your chem class. Instead, you can friend your crush on Facebook and make not-so-subtle hints as to your romantic intentions. But what happens when the hero turns out to be the villain?
Catfish [kat-fish] verb (as defined by MTV)

To pretend to be someone you’re not online by posting false information, such as someone else’s pictures, on social media sites usually with the intention of getting someone to fall in love with you.

This term arose after the movie “Catfish” chronicled the journey Yaniv “Nev” Schulman took to meet his Facebook fling, Megan. In the movie, Nev’s budding relationship turned out to be nothing more than the fantasies of a stay-at-home mom. “I’m so gullible. I’m so embarrassed,” Nev says in the movie. He has since developed “Catfish” into an MTV show, bringing Internet couples together to uncover the truth of their online relationships.

KE$HA CONNECTION

With an obvious appreciation for the pop-singer Ke$ha—that’s borderline obsessive—Brittany Helbing, junior in biology, let fate take its course when she messaged Joey Milosevich, Arizona resident, in response to him ‘liking’ her comment on Ke$ha’s Facebook page. Milosevich liked Helbing’s comment simply because he decided to show his approval of Ke$ha’s post by liking each individual comment on the post. “She was just one of a thousand,” he says.

After that fateful encounter two and a half years ago, Helbing and Milosevich have continued to talk and enjoy each other’s friendship. “He’s really silly and easy to talk to,” Helbing says. With roughly 1,400 miles separating them, Helbing and Milosevich have never met in person. Their communication is limited to text, Skype, phone calls and social media. Milosevich did attempt to visit Helbing once, but she turned him down because it was the summer and she was living at home. “What would I have done?” Helbing says. “Say, ‘Hey Mom, this is Joey. We just met five minutes ago in the driveway. Can he sleep here?’ That wouldn’t have gone over well, I think that’s what sparked the whole ‘you’re fake’ thing.”

This modern, electronic type of friendship comes with its own set of pros and cons. “I kind of like not having met, because it’s new and exciting every time we talk,” Helbing says. “He’s the type of person that would want to hang out all of the time and I can’t because I have class. But, if he lived here, I would feel bad and hang out with him anyway. Since he lives so far away, I have an excuse not to hang out so I can go to class and do homework.”

The biggest con is pretty obvious—no in-person interaction. “It’s especially hard if one of us has had a bad day, because all we can do is talk on the phone,” Helbing says. Another con is that when either of them gets upset with the other, they can’t hash it out in person. “We can’t talk it out, and that’s what I like to do,” Helbing says. In the event that she’s the one upset, Helbing would say, “Joey, back off. I’ll talk to you in a week.”

Milosevich is currently in the process of getting on the MTV show “Catfish” and claims he is in the final stages. “I want to be on the show and just know that she’s a real person,” Milosevich says. “I’m slightly worried. I get the feeling that something’s going on.” Upon hearing Milosevich’s suspicions, Helbing laughed and said, “He thinks Ke$ha is trying to punk him or something.”

Should Helbing and Milosevich ever meet face-to-face, whether on MTV or in the natural course of life, it will have been long awaited. “It’s nerve-wracking to think about,” Helbing says. “It would be weird because we don’t have a physical relationship—we’ve never high-fived or nudged each other … If he were to come right now, I would be cool with that because I have an apartment.”
FAMILIAR FACE

It was just like any other day. Elizabeth Nahas, senior in event management, sat watching TV in the summer of 2010 when she received a call from her cousin, Michelle Farrage. Farrage was distraught over the discovery that a fake profile was using her Facebook photos. Wanting to see the fake profile of her cousin, Nahas pulled up the link. She noticed the profile had about 20 friends, so she quickly scrolled through them. What she found was surprising—herself. But it wasn’t herself, really. A fake profile had been created using her photos, just like they had her cousin.

It seems being catfished runs in the family. Nahas and Farrage found a third fake profile using Nahas’ sister’s photos. The profiles created in lieu of Nahas’ sister and Farrage used only their Facebook photos, changing names and information. The profile created in lieu of Nahas, however, used her photos and listed that the person “attended the University of Iowa.” “Even though I don’t go to Iowa, it scared me that the person who made this site knew I live in this state,” Nahas says.

Shocked and confused, Nahas immediately reported the page to Facebook. Then, she deleted any “friends” on Facebook she wasn’t close with—totaling around 60 profiles—secured her profile as private and removed her profile picture. The fake profile was removed from Facebook within a couple of weeks, but Nahas’ page remained barren for a long while.

Presently, Nahas continues to be vigilant regarding her social media sites. “I used to be so careless with who I added,” she says. “Now I make sure I actually know the person before I accept.” She advises others to take the same measures of security.

Nahas is not alone. In August 2011, Facebook reported that 46 million profiles are fake under the category labeled “duplicates.” Facebook defines this category as “an account that a user maintains in addition to his or her principal account.” This makes up 4.8 percent of all accounts. So this means, if you have 400 friends on Facebook, almost 20 of them are likely fake.

Worried your photos are being used on a fake profile? Drop them into Google Images by clicking the camera icon. Google will show images that match or are similar to your photo. If the links associated with your photo are in fact yours, relax. If some links aren’t yours, look into it and use your discretion.
HARD TO GET

We’ve all been there at some point in our social media lives—the scenario where some creeper tries to get fresh over Facebook. Not cool. But what do you do when the creeper is obviously using a fake profile? Adam Wangler, sophomore in accounting, decided to play along.

The name on the profile, created July 2, 2012, is listed as Ava Brown and is accompanied by a profile picture of Nicki Minaj. Brown got busy right away by friending and messaging Wangler that very day.

After a few messages of neutral content, Brown randomly implied that Wangler’s girlfriend, Katelyn Hall, was cheating on him. “Bitch she is going out with my brother,” Brown wrote. Then Brown told Wangler she liked him, revealing a possible motivation to lie. She also friended Hall and began messaging her. Boldly, her first message read, “I’m sorry, Adam is going out with me.”

Skyping the whole time this was going on, Wangler and Hall find it laughable. “The conversation was just funnier and funnier as it went on,” Wangler says. One funny instance was when Brown decided to post on Facebook, rather than just messaging the couple. The post read: “Adam Wangler is my dream boy.” Hall commented saying, “awkward,” and Brown replied by saying, “bitch is my likes.” Although unsure of Brown’s use of grammar and what the phrase actually means, Hall, Wangler and a few of their friends showed support of the situation by liking the post.

To counter Brown’s insistence that Hall was cheating, Wangler asks Brown to describe Hall. Having never actually met her, Brown asks Hall via Facebook to describe herself. Knowing what Wangler asked, Hall provided Brown a fake description, made obvious by Hall’s profile photo that depicts a skinny redhead.

Not seeing the discontinuity, Brown copied and pasted the description Hall wrote, only bothering to change the first three words before sending it to Wangler: “Well she is about 300 pounds and super curvaciously beautiful. I have long blonde hair and blue eyes.” The ‘I’ gave it away.

The conversation ended shortly after Wangler called Brown out on the bad copy-and-paste job. Neither Wangler nor Hall know who created the fake profile, but Hall jokingly says, “I’m going to find that bitch.”

It appears that Brown hasn’t been active on Facebook since August of last year. The person behind the profile appears to have hit on Wangler, in particular, because of a shared connection to Lawrence High School in Lawrence, Kansas (where Wangler is from). Most of Brown’s Facebook friends attended Lawrence High School and some of them are even friends of Wangler as well.