

Avoid catfishing in the online dating world

Written by Ariana M. Taylor, Columnist
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It's always nice to get on Facebook and see tons of comments from your friends on your page or photos. On the other hand, it's annoying to log into your account and see unread messages from random admirers.

Online dating and hoaxes are becoming more popular, and most of them begin with that one random Facebook message.

Recently, the MTV show "Catfish" has grabbed the attention of viewers worldwide as it exposes the realities of online dating. Yaniv 'Nev' Schulman is the host and executive producer of the show, and can best relate to online daters because he once fell in love with a girl he met online. The young woman he thought he was dating online, however, turned out to be an older, less attractive woman. Nev took this experience and created "Catfish." To be catfished means to be deceived over a social network by someone who is not whom they initially claimed to be.

Now, the question is: How don't these people know that they're being catfished?

When someone messages you online, the first thing a smart person would do is go to the person's profile. At this point, there are three questions you should ask yourself: Do I know this person? Does their profile look legitimate? Are they worth messaging back? If this person is a complete stranger, take the necessary precautions.

Facebook has been around for quite some time now. If a person has just created an account and has fewer than 20 friends, that's a red flag. A lot of the online daters who are hoaxed on "Catfish" are chatting with someone who has little to no friends on Facebook. This is simply because the person does not exist, the photos are stolen or the friends they do have were also created by them.

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Another red flag that people constantly ignore is the fact that the person they're online dating doesn't usually want to talk on the phone or meet in person. How can you be in a relationship with someone and never hear each other's voices? To add to that, talking on the phone a couple times, or only when they call you, is simply not enough because someone else could be talking on the phone for him or her. People can usually sense genuineness and deception; however, on "Catfish," people choose to disregard obvious indicators of foul play because they are too busy enjoying the feeling of being wanted.

Whether you are on "Catfish" or not, the most important safety measure that you should take while online dating is to avoid giving out too much personal information. Until you are 100 percent sure this person is sincere, there is no reason to meet them in person or give them your phone number. After doing the research, you may exchange numbers, but be careful to note whether the person's voice is always the same every time they call. Of course, addresses should never be given out over the Internet. If you decide to meet this person, choose a public place with lots of people, and don't be afraid to bring a friend along.

I am guilty of online dating, but thankfully I was not catfished. A guy messaged me online my freshman year in high school. Initially, I thought, "Boy, I don't want to talk to you." But he was attractive, and we had about 10 mutual friends. I asked a lot of those 10 people about him, and they said that he was a nice guy. So when we did finally meet, I dragged a friend of mine with me to a shopping mall. It's kind of corny, but all in all, he was a nice guy and we are still friends today.

I surely hope my mom isn't reading this ... but the point is, if you are online dating, be smart about the decisions you are making. Whether you're the average Joe or Manti Te'o, online dating scams can happen to anyone. Make sure it doesn't happen to you.

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