



## Catfish

### Discussion Guide

Director: Henry Joost, Ariel Schulman  
Year: 2010  
Time: 87 min

#### **You might know this director from:**

Paranormal Activity 4 (2012)  
Paranormal Activity 3 (2011)  
NY Export: Opus Jazz (2010)

## FILM SUMMARY

From the inception of public internet usage in the early 1990s to the birth of Facebook in 2004, the presence and increasing noise of social media continues to increase in our lives. CATFISH offers a bare-bones analysis of how electronic communication devices and channels, such as Facebook, allow us to create myths about ourselves, invent alternate identities, and even lead us on the rollercoaster of a false love affair.

In CATFISH, Yaniv “Nev” Schulman receives an email from an 8-year old, small-town Michigan girl named Abby who wanted to paint some of Nev’s photographs. This seemingly innocent email is the first thread in a twisted web of lies and deceit. The email comes from the suppressed, emotionally downfallen Angela, mother of Abby and stepmother of two severely handicapped sons. Angela feels she has sacrificed so much of her life and that the days of being an artistic, free-thinking woman who is worthy of love have passed her by. At her lowest point, Angela grasps for a pinprick of hope, and there she finds Facebook, with Nev at the other end, ready, willing and equally hungry for the emotional bond that Angela offers. Through a network of fake identities and connections, Angela creates Megan, “a real friendship that I was looking for,” Nev admits once the truth is revealed. And the truth is: the 19-year old girl Nev falls in love with is nothing more than keystrokes on a computer screen.

CATFISH is a modern analysis of the undying human need for love, connection, attention, and support, whatever the cost, whichever the tools.

## FILM THEMES

Anyone surfing the internet is bombarded by possibilities, both positive and negative. *CATFISH* reveals how social media can allow deception to flourish and how technology is shaping human interaction.

### A CYNIC'S PARADISE

Many argue that the internet is no place for the innocent and naive. Thus, parents can place filters on their computers, limiting access to certain sites. But the internet is bulging with falsities, and it's not just children who need protection from deception. "They didn't fool me. They just told me things that I never cared to question," Nev tries convincing himself. How many of us question what we find on the internet? How many of us take the carefully constructed content as truth? It's been said that pictures do not lie, but they certainly don't tell the whole truth either. Perhaps there is no place for open-hearted hope on the worldwide web.

### A REFLECTION OF PRESENT-DAY SOCIETY

Take an average urban street scene. What are people looking at? Where is the common gaze focused? Probably at their mobile device. We are plugged in, hooked up, and zoned out of the world around us. Internet addiction has even been referred to as the new mental health disorder, causing a whole host of complications and health implications. As the relationship between Angela and Nev becomes all the more common, the film begs us to consider if this is really the road we wish to follow.

### A NEW KIND OF CONNECTION

The more virtually connected we become, the less space there is for day-to-day interactions or face-to-face communication. While it's true that the internet offers endless opportunities to rekindle lost friendships, make new connections or obtain information, it also allows us to create personal profiles that mirror our imagined identity more than our actual identity. Thus, a new kind of human connection is born, one that is not rooted in reality. With a multitude of virtual connections based on what we can perceive, are we losing touch with our true human natures or rather approaching the inevitable future awaiting us?

### AN ESCAPE

"You are able to show me things I don't have access to," Angela told Nev once the truth of her identity was revealed. Instead of addressing her issues head-on, Angela tried to escape through the excitement she envisioned in a young, artistic, big-city boy. By falling back on the power of her imagination, she was able to escape into a web of deceit and lies that extended over a period of 9 months and included more than 1,500 fraudulent correspondences. This weakness inherent in human nature finds an abundance of options, with social media channels like Facebook or Twitter providing the perfect platforms for emotional trickery and exploitation.

**"There were moments when I felt genuine... Now I don't even know what to feel."**

Yaniv "Nev" Schulman

**"There are those people who are catfish in life. They keep you on your toes. They keep you guessing, they keep you thinking, they keep you fresh. I thank God for the catfish because we'd be dull, boring and dull if we didn't have somebody nipping at our fin."**

Vince



## FILM FACTS:

- Before agreeing on the film title, CATFISH, the directors considered “It’s All Downhill From Here,” “Yaniv’s Internet Girlfriend,” “Michigan Impossible,” and “It’s Complicated.” The term catfish is now commonly used on the internet to refer to individuals who create fake personal profiles on social media sites. By pretending to be someone more outwardly appealing than his/her true self, a catfish uses another person’s photos and false biographical information.
- The main color used in Facebook is blue, as founder Mark Zuckerberg suffers from red-green color blindness. “Blue is the richest color for me. I can see all of blue,” he said. Zuckerberg became the world’s youngest billionaire at age 24.
- Catfish: The TV Show, a reality-based TV series, has been airing on MTV since its premiere in late 2012. Nev Schulman, who hosts the show along with his filmmaker friend Max Joseph, helps couples who are involved in entirely internet-based relationships, couples who have never met one another in person. Some couples have been together for a few months – others, for years.
- As of September 2013, users had uploaded 250 billion photos to Facebook, and continue to upload an additional 350 million photos per day. Users share 4.75 billion content items (posts, comments, images, etc.) per day.
- Despite being blocked, there are roughly 95 million Facebook users in China.
- As of August 2011, CATFISH has been sued twice, both times due to songs being used within the film without the creators being properly credited.
- CATFISH premiered at the 2010 Sundance, was awarded Best Doc Feature Film at the Utah Film Critics Association Awards, and was nominated for three awards, including Best Sound Editing by the Motion Picture Sound Editors.
- Approximately 8.7% of Facebook users are fake, accounting for around 100 million accounts.
- Facebook has 7,185 employees. As of June 2014, there were 1.32 billion monthly active Facebook users, 1.07 billion of those active on a mobile device. Approximately 81.7% of daily active users are located outside the U.S. and Canada.
- Facebook’s mission “is to give people the power to share and make the world more open and connected...to stay connected with friends and family, to discover what’s going on in the world, and to share and express what matters to them.”
- Before working on CATFISH with his brother Ariel and friend Henry Joost, Yaniv “Nev” Schulman (Yaniv means “He will prosper” in Hebrew) was happily making videos for bar mitzvahs and studying dance, and his favorite thing to photograph to this day is ballet dancers. Since achieving fame, he uses his voice as a founding member of the Young Leadership Committee for youth organization, Leave Out Violence.

## WAYS TO INFLUENCE

1. Share this film. Give others the chance to learn from the Catfish tale.
2. Log out of your Facebook account for 24 hours. Connect face-to-face or make phone calls instead.
3. Support local artists. [Wiki How](#) offers 6 great ways to encourage and help struggling artists, including “Respect them. Compliment them. Refer them, but most of all – pay them!”
4. Become involved with the [Handicapped Children’s Association](#), which offers assistance to families raising both mildly and severely handicapped children.
5. Join [Our Time](#), along with Nev, which “empowers and speaks for the interests of young Americans.”

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