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Group B

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Catfish

1 The television show, Catfish, is a show where the hosts, Nev and Ariel, attempt to help others
2 find out the truth behind online relationships. Often times, the subject of the show is a victim of
3 “Catfishing,” or being deceived by an anonymous person online who claims they are someone who
4 they are not. The “Catfishers” are people who create fake Facebook or Twitter profiles, use other’s
5 property, such as pictures, and hide behind the anonymity of the internet to deceive others. While
6 it is unethical to lie to others under most ethical theories, a Utilitarian perspective provides insight
7 into the ethics of many of the methods that Catfish use to Catfish others.

8 The key focus of Act Utilitarianism is that actions are determined ethical or unethical based
9 on the quantitative outcome of the action (Quinn 74). In almost every situation presented in the
10 show, the victim only communicates to the Catfish over the internet, usually Facebook or a similar
11 platform (Catfish: The TV Show Wikipedia). Since Facebook requires users to use actual names,
12 many Catfishers steal other’s real names. Under Utilitarianism, this may not actually be an inher-
13 ently unethical action. For example, a Catfish may steal a name without any intention of causing
14 harm to the person from whom they stole the name. In one episode of the show, a woman under-
15 going Transgender surgery assumed the name of a close friend of the victim because she found the
16 name interesting (Schulman and Joseph). The outcome of this action is just that the Catfish goes
17 under another name, rather than his or her own name, which has no negative effect. In other situ-
18 ations, Catfishers have been known to assume the identity of another person to harm that person.

19 The negative effect of this action far outweighs the neutrality of simply picking the name. In that
20 respect, stealing another's name is certainly unethical.

21 Technology, especially the internet, has made it very easy for people to take other people's
22 property, such as pictures and other artistic works. In many episodes of Catfish, Catfishers will steal
23 the profile pictures of others. As Nev stated in one episode of the show, "...that's when you know
24 [the catfishing] is bad... when they use someone else's profile picture" (Schulman and Joseph).
25 Taking pictures from the internet is not necessarily unethical or even illegal. People's Facebook
26 profile pictures are easy to download, and there is no Facebook policy that prevents users from
27 taking other's profile pictures. Since Utilitarianism does not focus on the intention of the action,
28 it may not even be unethical for a Catfish to take another's profile pictures and use them as their
29 own. In order to determine the ethical implications, one must consider the amount of good and bad
30 produced by the action. Posing as someone else only does harm if the Catfish is attempting to make
31 the victim look bad. If the Catfish does not defame or boost the victim's character, then the Catfish
32 has not done anything unethical. Moreover, if the Catfish makes the original picture's owner look
33 better, then the amount of good done actually outweighs the bad.

34 Not every episode of Catfish ends with deceit. In some cases, the Catfish is struggling with
35 other issues that end up misinterpreted by the other party. One episode in particular resulted in the
36 marriage of two lovers after they met following an eight year online relationship.

Works Cited

Quinn, Michael J. *Ethics for the Information Age. 6th Edition*. Boston: Pearson/Addison-Wesley, 2013.