

'Catfish' host Nev Schulman: 'If you're gonna do something, do it all the way'

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Nev Schulman performs at the Archie M. Griffin Grand Ballroom Nov. 4 for 'OUAB Presents: Catfish on Campus ft. Nev Schulman.'

Credit: Ritika Shah / Asst. photo editor

Host of MTV reality hit "Catfish: The TV Show," Nev Schulman sipped a steaming cup of peppermint tea while candidly discussing his life and the show that's shed light on a cultural phenomenon.

"I never thought in a million years it would be so successful and that I would actually have lots of people seeing and knowing about my story," Schulman said in an interview with *The Lantern* before the show.

Schulman visited Ohio State Monday for an Ohio Union Activities Board-sponsored event titled "Catfish on Campus ft. Nev Schulman." The Archie M. Griffin Grand Ballroom was filled with fans eager to hear from the reality TV figure as Schulman gave advice to students on topics ranging from love and relationships to his own past and future.

For those who do not know what a "catfish" is or why the term is used, Schulman made sure to explain its whereabouts. A "catfish" is someone who pretends to be someone they're not through the use of an online profile with the intent of luring another person into an online relationship.

The namesake of the reality show "Catfish" comes from a story told to Schulman during his documentary, which was released in 2010, two years before the show premiered. The story explained that when cod were shipped to Asia from North America, they would remain inactive in their tanks, which would result in mushy flesh unsuitable for consumption.

The issue was eradicated with the use of catfish, used to keep the cod active. The real life "catfish" are the people who keep others on their toes and vigilant so as not to become monotonous while living day-to-day. Schulman experienced this firsthand and now spends his time helping others stuck in online relationships discover their own "catfish."

Although Schulman is paid to spend most of his life on camera, he believes many fans do not really know who he is or what his past entails. Through short films and pictures, Schulman shared his life prior to "Catfish" and how he was so different from how many people see him today. Hitting rock bottom at 19 years old, Schulman said he was "unhappy, confused, upset (and) friendless."

"I've accidentally sort of stumbled into this position to be able to really help people and shed some light on issues and be at the center of conversation,"

Schulman told *The Lantern*.

Although hosting a reality show on MTV was never Schulman's plan, he said the way to build character is through the openness to new experiences.

"If you're gonna do something, do it all the way, even if it means miserable failure," Schulman said. "You have to be willing to get a little weird and try things."

This advice was a theme that carried through his presentation, and Schulman urged his audience to show kindness to all and hear their story.

"Everybody has a story and you shouldn't judge them, you should listen," Schulman said.

JJ Iula, a first-year in finance, attended the presentation and enjoyed the chance to hear Schulman's story.

"It was cool hearing his story versus just the show," Iula said. "(It was interesting) hearing about his life and the decisions he made and how (they) shaped him."

Schulman's direct honesty and willingness to share resonated with many in the audience.

"My job, maybe more than anything, is just sort of try to make them comfortable to be themselves," Schulman told *The Lantern*. "I am there to console and encourage everybody who I am dealing with and more than anything be a neutral, non-judgmental mediator."

Schulman and "Catfish" do not attempt to persuade people to stop using the Internet to meet people, but rather reevaluate the way in which they interpret and respond to social media.

“Unfortunately, there are lessons to learn in life. Nothing has changed in regard to what they are but now there’s just a new platform, so finding out that people will take advantage of you and lie to you,” Schulman told *The Lantern*. “Now it’s digital and you don’t have to ever see them or touch them. They can just take advantage of you emotionally.”

Taylor Black, a fourth-year in strategic communication, expressed distrust about finding love online.

“I’m kind of skeptical, especially today where it’s so easy to fake a profile or picture,” he said.

Throughout the entire process, Schulman has remained proud of the work his show has achieved and the positive changes in the lives of those affected by a “catfish” and the “catfish” themselves.

“We’re really trying to (be) very fair and honest and real, which is not common in reality TV these days,” Schulman told *The Lantern*. “Hopefully by watching it, you will identify with and sort of draw from the experiences you see and connect to them in your own way.”