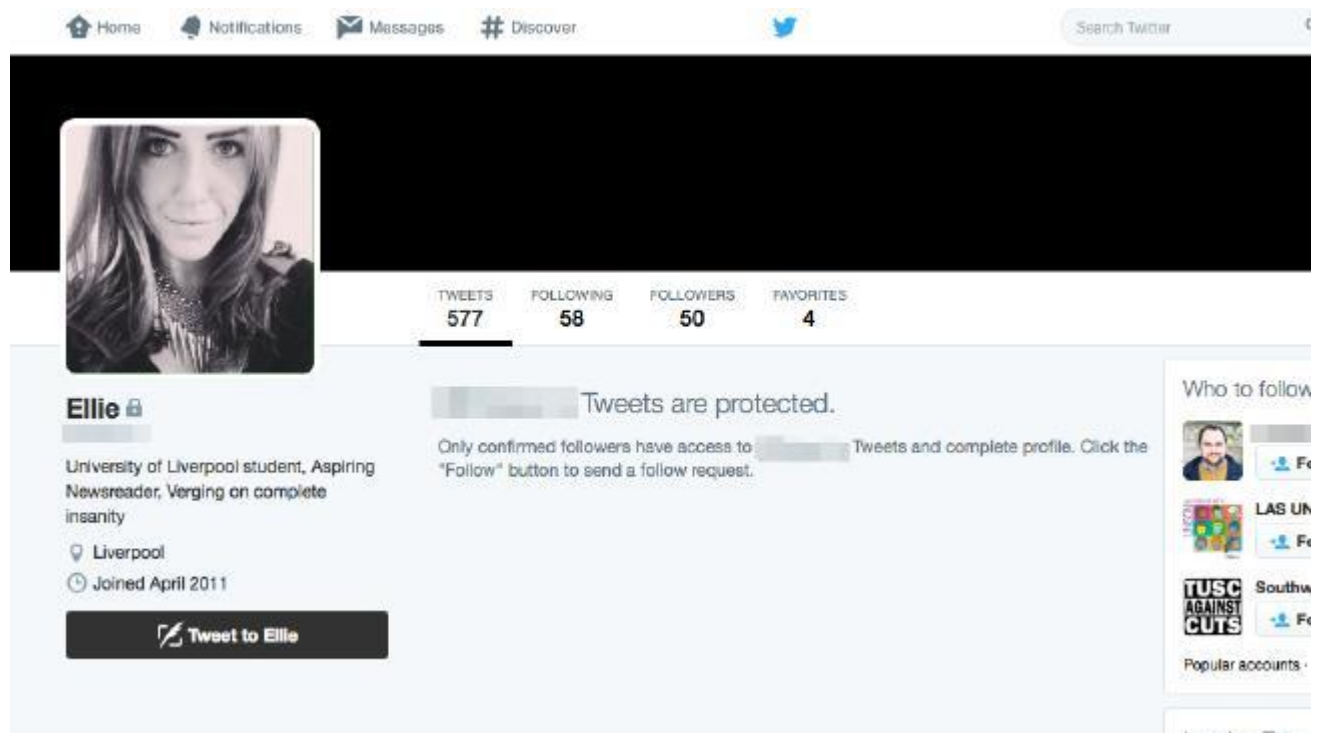


News.com.au

<http://www.news.com.au/technology/online/catfishing-ellie-flynns-name-and-face-have-been-stolen/story-fnjwnfzw-1227195328030>

Catfishing: Ellie Flynn's name and face have been stolen

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A screenshot of a Twitter profile page for a user named 'Ellie'. The profile picture is a photo of a young woman with long brown hair. The bio reads: 'University of Liverpool student, Aspiring Newsreader, Verging on complete insanity'. The location is 'Liverpool' and the account was 'Joined April 2011'. There is a 'Tweet to Ellie' button. The profile statistics show 577 tweets, 58 following, 50 followers, and 4 favorites. A message indicates that the user's tweets are protected and only confirmed followers have access to them. On the right side, there is a 'Who to follow' section with three suggested accounts: a man's profile, 'LAS UN', and 'TUSC AGAINST CUTS'.

A fake profile using Ms Flynn's name and photo.

IMAGINE being recognised by a stranger on the street.

You've never met them before in your life, but they think you're involved with them. Romantically.

Ellie Flynn has lived and relived that moment countless times over the last eight years. She's a victim of "catfishing" — her name and photos have been stolen by someone and used to set up fake profiles on dating and social media sites.

"There are over 60 fake profiles, on Twitter, Facebook, Instagram, and the odd dating site," Ms Flynn [writes for Vice](#).

"Nearly everyone I've befriended through my adolescence has a profile. Every photo we upload is reposted to Facebook by our respective fake accounts; every job we start is updated on our profiles; every tweet is repeated."



Ellie Rose added 53 new photos to the album Summer.

11 September 2013 · 🌐

Dimensions!



Looks legit, right? This is actually from one of the fake profiles. Source: Facebook

Catfishing is more common than we'd like to think. In her autobiography, former Australian Idol winner [Casey Donovan revealed](#) she was madly in love with a man named Campbell for six years, before discovering he was actually a woman named Olga.

"I spent six years of my life loving someone who never really existed," Ms Donovan said. "I know everyone gets their heart ripped out every now and again but that ... that just took the cake for me."



Singer Casey Donovan. Source: News Corp Australia

People like Ms Donovan are the most obvious victims of catfishing. They've been manipulated into believing a heartbreaking lie. But what about people like Ms Flynn, whose identities have been stolen?

"You know how alarming it would be to discover that your new cyber-girlfriend is actually a 42-year-old man living in his mom's basement. But have you ever thought about how odd it

must feel to own the face being used by that man?" [Ms Flynn writes](#). "Trust me, it's equally distressing.

"Over the years, my friends and I have met a number of young men who've spent a substantial amount of time chatting to fake me — or fake versions of one of my friends — online."



This fake profile is based on the identity of one of Ellie's friends, Chia. Source: Twitter

In 2010, Ms Flynn was in Crete with a friend, Chia. They encountered a man who thought he knew them.

"The boy had been speaking to 'Chia Colarossi' every night on the phone for two months," she says. "He believed he was in love with her.

"In fairness, the lie is so vast and all-encompassing that I too would believe that profiles were real if I didn't know for a fact that my friend's surname is not Colarossi."

In another instance, a man "approached" Chia in her college dorm. Whoever stole her face also knew where she lived.



A fake dating profile using Chia's face. Source: Supplied

Often, upon being told that Ms Flynn is not who they think she is, men will become angry and demand proof.

"This has all started to become more of a burden than just a funny thing to talk about at house parties," Ms Flynn says.

"The whole situation is utter f***ing madness, and really, really confusing.

"I've spent years purging my Facebook friend list, becoming suspicious of anyone who could be behind the accounts and driving myself to madness wishing I knew who it was.

"I'm tired of suspiciously eyeing profiles of the girls I went to primary school with, imagining them sitting in the dark, in front of a computer screen, surrounded by thousands of photos of our faces."

The culprit could be anyone. Ms Flynn says she once spoke to a psychiatrist, who told her the fake Ellie was most likely somebody with "mild autistic spectrum disorder".

"Creating these fake profiles allows her to be daring, clever, attractive, and witty, and she can pretend to be something she can't be in real life," the psychiatrist said.

Ultimately, even if they successfully narrow down the field of potential predators, catfishing victims can't do much to stop the nightmare. Whenever Facebook or Twitter shuts down a fake account, a new one pops up. And whenever Ms Flynn goes out in public, there's a chance she'll be 'recognised' by a complete stranger.