

One area of the porn industry rarely touched upon by ‘anti’ organisations is that of the world of online fetishes. But I know first hand that these sites can be just as, if not more harmful, than mainstream porn sites.

They’re harmful because they are mostly communities, forums of people into this kind of thing, trying to entice young, vulnerable people (especially women), into their twisted worlds for their own gain. They’re harmful because they’re addictive; they shower you with compliments and praise (as long as you ‘perform’ for them in the way they want you to). They’re harmful because they hold in-person meets, where the only form of verification required is an ID to show you’re over eighteen. Heck, most of the forums don’t even have any kind of age verification at all.

My involvement with online fetish sites begins when I was sixteen, but since this article is specifically about vulnerable adults, I’m going to start from when I was eighteen. I was diagnosed as autistic at the age of four, and like most autistic kids I had obsessions, or ‘special interests’ as we in the autistic community like to call them. One of these special interests was balloons. It was a completely innocent obsession, until I was eighteen. I guess I felt like I was weird for being an adult, and so interested in something primarily for children. So what did I do? I went looking online for other adults who shared my interest. That was my first mistake.

You can see where I’m going with this, can’t you? I can’t remember what exactly I put into Google, but the search led me to various forums for ‘looners’ - people with a balloon fetish (and no, I’m not making this up.) Although I was eighteen, I was a young and naive eighteen. I guess the word ‘fetish’ didn’t really mean much to me, and so I started talking to these people (mainly men, by the way - that didn’t seem to bother me that much either.) Within a few days I

was hooked.

My parents eventually found out what I was up to, and that's when things started to spiral out of control. They tried to convince me that what I was doing was unsafe (which it was), but I was so addicted to the fake praise these men were giving me (because they knew I was female), I wouldn't listen. Things got so bad that I ended up in hospital, I lost my place at college, I had to move away from home and my current relationship eventually broke down. (We're now back together, but that's not the point.) Basically, fetish sites almost ruined my life. I say almost, because I refused to let these people get the better of me. And the experience has changed my life for the better, in many ways. I even wrote two novellas inspired by my experiences.

I wanted to write this article because I know how easy it was for me to get dragged into that world, and how easy it could be for someone else. I don't want anyone else to go through what I went through?

So, how can we stop this from happening to others in the future? One thing we could do is put age verification on all adult-oriented sites, But even that isn't fool-proof. And what about those who *are* over eighteen, but, like me, don't necessarily have the mind of a sane adult? People on these sites *will* exploit these people given a chance, like they did to me.

There's no definite answer to this. The only thing we could do is to delete all adult sites from the internet. That may seem drastic, but I think it's the only way to keep vulnerable people truly safe. But unfortunately, there's no sure-fire way of doing this.

I think the work you do on this website is amazing. And if you can keep just one person safe, then it will all be worth the while.

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(673 words)

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