

Is your Facebook "friend" a Wheelchair Pretender?



"I was recently injured, and there are some private 'things' I want to talk about."



"I've been there, so ask me anything. It's just us girls talking anyway."



Cynthia Ramirez

"That happened to me! I didn't believe anyone could possibly be attracted to me after being paralyzed..boy was I wrong!!"



Tamara Mena

"I used to think it was very cool to get friend requests from people in wheelchairs from all over the world. Little did I know that many of them weren't even in a wheelchair."



Teal Sherer

"It was flattering to receive all of the 'friend' requests and I carelessly accepted. Then my pictures started appearing on disability fetish websites. I learned quickly that these people were not my friends."



Tiffany Carlson

"My stalker has been following me online for 10 yrs and came to my house unannounced after coming 1,000 miles to see me. This is not an issue to be taken lightly."



Monica Quimby

Only FB "friend" people you have met, or that you know are in a wheelchair through a group or organization. Protect yourself."



Erica Davis

"After having some cool opportunities I thought I was helping others by letting them see my pictures. But its creepy to know that people are looking at my pictures for other reasons!"

Internet Social Networking: the Good, the Bad, and the Ugly

THE GOOD: The arise of Facebook and other social media websites have provided People with Disabilities (PWDs) a tremendous opportunity to learn from and to network with other PWDs. It is now relatively easy to locate and contact other PWDs with similar interests and disabilities. No longer are people isolated. They can reach out and connect with people across the globe and share their unique experiences, advice, and support.

THE BAD: These social networking sites have also provided people with disability attractions and fetishes (Disability Trolls) access to view and contact PWDs on a large scale. While the majority of these Trolls are harmless, there are many that are not. These Trolls actively seek out and stalk PWDs on the internet. Many pretend to have disabilities in order to deceive PWDs into “friending” and confiding with them.

THE UGLY: A popular method used by male Trolls is too assume the identity of a young attractive female PWD on Facebook. Sometimes the Troll will impersonate a well known PWD athlete or celebrity. The Troll will use this identity to “friend” as many female PWDs as possible. Once trust is established, the Troll uses this fake identity to illicit personal information and conversations about health, sexual, and other intimate issues.

Some Trolls will download photographs of “friended” PWDs and upload them to disability fetish websites. Others will alert more Trolls about unsuspecting PWDs. The most dangerous of Trolls will become obsessive and engage in stalking behaviors.

Tips on How to Spot a Wheelchair Pretender (Troll) on Facebook

- Profile Picture - The profile picture is the first clue. Many times the Pretender will use a picture that prominently features the person in a wheelchair. The picture could be either of poor quality or a stock photograph. By comparison, many profile pictures from real WC users, do NOT feature the persons wheelchair. Or if they do, the wheelchair is incidental.
- Has very few supporting photographs of themselves. Especially, no photographs of themselves with other wheelchair users, or at public events.
- Has a prominent listing of disability. Most real WC users do not consider their disability as their primary identifying characteristic whereas Wheelchair Pretenders do.
- Has lots of Facebook friends with disabilities, especially female wheelchair users.
- Joins lots of disability groups. Has mainly disability related interests.
- Has very little activity on their profile page other than “friending”.
- Has mainly posts that refer to disability issues.
- A male who only has Facebook “friends” with female WC users. It is highly unlikely that a male WC user would only have female WC user friends.
- Writing disability related clichés on their profile page.
- Profile and other pictures that are small and low res as if they were copied from a web page.

Forewarned is Forearmed

This public service message was brought to you by the self-defense non-profit NOT-ME! Inc.

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