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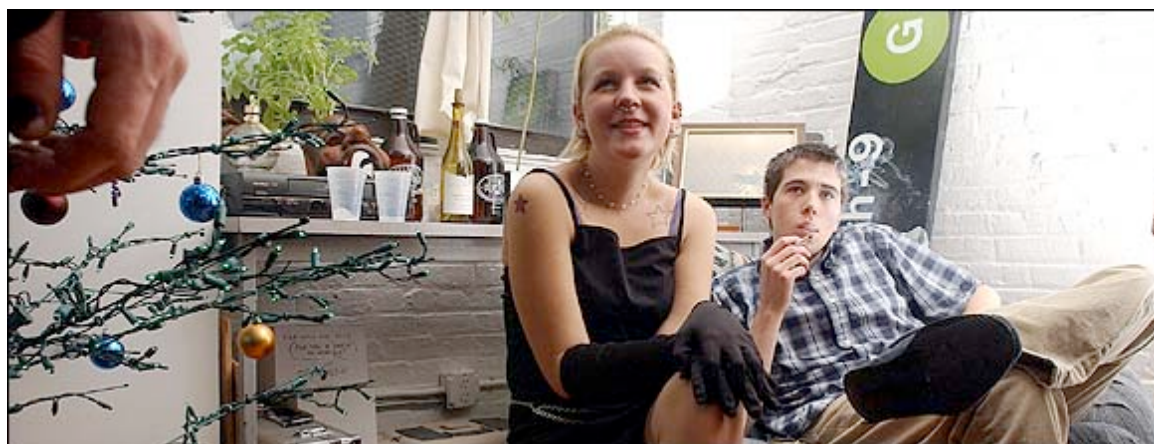
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GOOD COMPANY

Connected by a Web Site, With Erotica Played Down



Suzy Allman for The New York Times

COMING UP Kelly Rowe, whose photographs are to be posted soon on [Suicidegirls.com](#).

By VANESSA GRIGORIADIS

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THE holiday season is generally the time to reconnect with family and friends, but at a party on Dec. 20 at a loft in Bushwick, Brooklyn, few of the guests had met previously — at least not in person.

They knew each other as subscribers to [Suicidegirls.com](#), a Web site founded in 2001 that costs members \$4 a year and features photographs of about 250 amateur models in various states of undress. It's not *Playboy*: the models are tattooed, pierced, occasionally overweight, and their personal profiles can include odes to Charles Bukowski and to Siouxsie and the Banshees.

[Suicidegirls.com](#) sells itself with provocative pictures, but the chat rooms and virtual bulletin boards, with regional

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themes on special-interest topics like "Anime" or "Thrift Stores," also function as a meeting place for people interested in alternative lifestyles.

"There are a lot of great people posting on the site," said one subscriber, Chelle Barnwell, 27, a freelance project manager for a music library.

Although around midnight a subscriber with a Betty Page haircut and red, red lipstick took off her pants after claiming to have spilled beer on them, there were no naked girls at the party, whose host was Will Evans, 28, a fellow member, bartender and Web designer. There was only one Suicidegirls model, and, to the disappointment of some, she remained fully clothed.

According to one of the site's founders, membership is evenly divided between men and women, and the same was true of the party. Male guests wore shirts bearing phrases like "Straight Edge Means I Have No Friends," and women wore big black boots and skin-tight tank tops that showed off complex tattoos.

"I posted a bunch of pictures of different outfits on my page before I came and asked people which one they liked best," said Melisande Echanique, 30, a fuchsia-haired member of Suicidegirls who works as a nanny and an art model.

Mr. Evans wove through the crowd languorously. He put a tin of brownies on the kitchen counter. Guests had been encouraged to bring snacks, which included a Tupperware container of trail mix.

"I'm a really chill person," Mr. Evans said. "So I thought it would be cool to have a bunch of people I don't know so well at my place. Everyone's who they are, you know?"

Sort of. Though some guests said that they did not think of Suicidegirls as pornography but as its less-taboo cousin, erotica (the models do not interact with men in the photos, and some take only their tops off), many declined to reveal their last names. Fearing that fellow workers and family might look askance at their membership, a few used their screen names.

"You never know how dorky your screen name sounds until you say it out loud," said a member from Bay Ridge, Brooklyn, going by his online name, Uncognitive. "Mine is Obsidity," another guest said. "That's not a real word," she explained. "It was the title of a book that I read in a dream."

Conversation shifted from places to purchase \$2 bottles of wine to members who had been "zotted," or canceled, by the Web master for inappropriate comments (generally of a sexist nature).

One member told stories about working as a Santa at Bryant Park in Manhattan this

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Suzy Allman for The New York Times
Charmaine Ensinger, left, a designer and model on the Web site, and Chelle Barnwell.



Suzy Allman for The New York Times
A knot of Suicidegirls.com partygoers in a bedroom in Bushwick.

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holiday season. "All the kids want Xboxes, or American Girls, or things I can't understand," he said. "Either they're speaking with a lisp or it's a new game from Japan."

Perched on a stool next to a sign for the G train was Kelly Rowe, a "limbo girl," lingo for a model whose photos will soon be posted on the site. (Models apply to appear on the site with digital photos, and if selected are paid \$200.) Her face sparkled with barbell piercings: she has 22 on her body. "I'm going to shoot the next photos at a train yard in Queens," said Ms. Rowe, 19, a clerk at an all-night music store in the East Village.

As house music blared and "Reservoir Dogs" played mutely on the television, Ms. Barnwell passed by with a strap in her hand. "It's my favorite thing to beat people," she said.

Around 1 a.m., the lone Suicidegirls model at the party, Charmaine Ensinger, a graphic designer, sat alone the couch. She described her upbringing as "the Mennonite version of `Kids.'" "They're not acting too creepy," Ms. Ensinger said, squinting into the crowd. "But no one will talk to me. I think they're intimidated."

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