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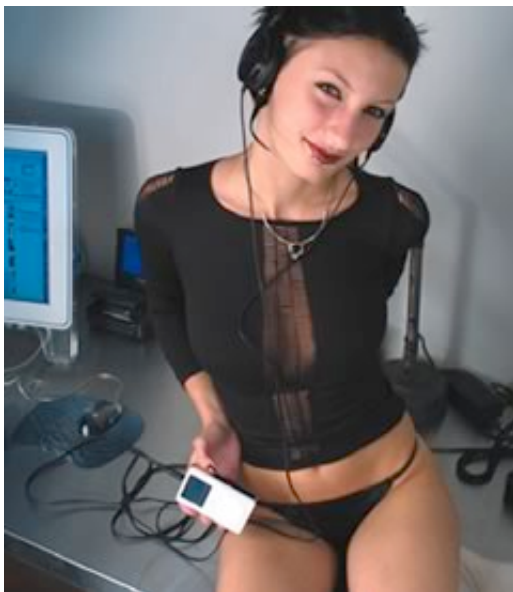
Magazine Features

The Punk Pornographers

By: Kate Sullivan

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Meet the goths and punks behind [Suicidegirls.com](http://www.suicidegirls.com)--the alternative porn site that's got everyone from Courtney Love to Ted Koppel talking



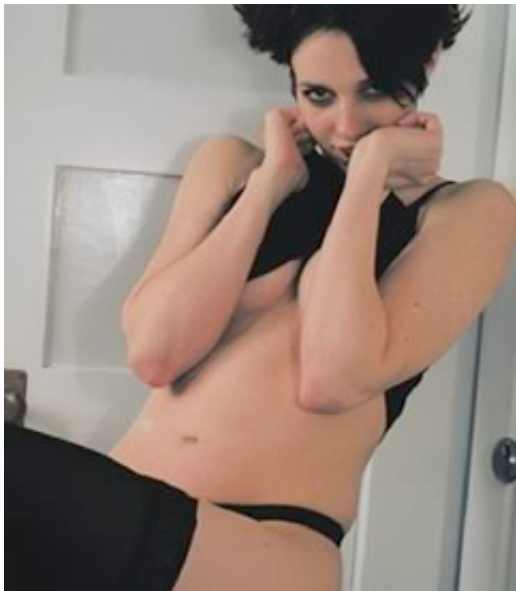
"Oh my God, she's so cute! She's so cute!" Veronica is squealing at her computer terminal, and her coworkers come running. She's just received an email with several amateur photos of a long-legged redheaded girl with a bob wearing thigh-high black and pink stockings, a string of Christmas lights, and not much else. Posing like a 1940s pinup, the girl grins at the camera in a *God-this-is-fun* way. She's easy in her body. She's beautiful. She's unusual. Her boobs are real. She's *such* a Suicide Girl.

Veronica lives for moments like this. Actually, everyone at [Suicidegirls.com](http://www.suicidegirls.com) does. The website, which operates out of the top floor of an airy, light-filled Victorian mansion in downtown Portland, Oregon, has to be the most lovingly created homemade porn site on the Web. "We prefer to call it a pinup site," says cofounder Missy, 24, who has a pierced septum and wings tattooed on her back. "We call ourselves reluctant pornographers," adds male cofounder Spooky, 26. Every time staffers find a new Suicide Girl to flaunt on their website, they get really happy. "It's shocking," says Spooky, "but boobs never become boring."

[Suicidegirls.com](http://www.suicidegirls.com) (<http://www.suicidegirls.com>)

SuicideGirls.com, which launched on September 14, 2001, is a combination nudie site, online debate forum, blog, and instant social network for people who dig alternative chicks--punks, goths, indie/emo babes, whatever. Approximately 99 pierced, tattooed young women--the Suicide Girls--post photos and journals on the site, while the many female members (50 percent) chat on the boards about everything from Iraq and Eminem to hair-dyeing tips and lingerie. Members meet up regularly in various cities--a group from Los Angeles recently went to Disneyland--and keep their own public journals online. (Monthly membership is \$9.) And while the site is obviously a refreshing turn-on for lesbians and bisexual women, straight girls dig it, too. "I don't know many heterosexual women who can't at least appreciate the fact that a nude woman is beautiful," says Lesa Pence, a member almost from the start. "There's something about the site that gives the feeling that these women are being celebrated and respected rather than looked upon as merely sexual objects."

Not to get all hippie-ish, but SuicideGirls is people's porn, standing in conscious opposition to the fake intimacy of most Internet erotica. To put it another way: You'll come for the porn, but you'll stay for the people. The vibe around the office, which is nestled between Urban Outfitters and an espresso stand on a tree-lined street, is more *Gilmore Girls* than *Boogie Nights*. The place is full of antique furniture, books, and comfy couches covered in cat hair. Today, SuicideGirl models-turned-employees Chloe and Veronica work at the mega Mac computers, eating Double Stuf Oreos and smoking. Veronica, 21, fields applications and does Photoshop; Chloe, 19, handles accounting and merchandise.



A nearby shelf is packed with buttons, stickers, and band paraphernalia--"Peaches stopped by the office," says Spooky proudly, "and she gave us these underwear to give out." (The crotch reads "Fuck the pain away".) "Bands and record companies are always giving us things, hoping we'll mention them on the site." SuicideGirls has other high-profile fans: Courtney Love, a member and major booster, featured several girls on her *24 Hours of Love* MTV2 show. Even Ted Koppel mentioned the site on a *Nightline* segment investigating the porn industry. "I think it's a great site," says potential competitor Emma Taylor, editor and sex columnist for the intellectual smut site Nerve.com. "Unlike so many other so-called alternative porn sites, this one truly looks like a new kind of porn, rather than porn stars dressed up goth. It really does seem to be women-owned and operated. The chicks are actually alternative-looking, too--most of them aren't traditionally pretty or *Playboy* hot."

Like Nerve, SuicideGirl's creators "draw a distinct line between ourselves and the 'adult community,'" Missy says tactfully. As Taylor notes, the girls are attractive, but a lot more human than professional porn models. They're the girls next door--but more colorful and with better record collections. "I think that most girls in the world, if they really wanted to be a Suicide Girl and put in the effort, could be accepted on the site," says Spooky. "It's all about the packaging. There are very few girls we've rejected on the basis of their looks. On their appearances, yes, but not their physical looks." The core of Suicide Girlhood is the something-from-nothing, DIY makeover spirit--say, Thora Birch dyeing her hair in *Ghost World*; Kelly Osbourne and her punk-orchid individualism; or that girl you always see at the bookstore who designs her own clothes.

"If some girl's wearing a denim skirt, a T-shirt, and no makeup and just takes a bunch of pictures on her bed, well, we're not going to put her on the site," says Spooky. "But if that same girl does something really

cool to her hair and something interesting for her photo shoot, we might put her up."

The site's alternative aesthetic has clearly hit a vein: SuicideGirls gets 200,000 unique visitors per week. (They won't reveal membership on the advice of their accountant.) Their business model combines a sort of '60s-based grassroots ethic with the painful lessons of '90s dot-com insanity: Making money is important to the site's founders, but it's not the prime directive. "We really wanted to build an online community," says Spooky, "and we knew that a sexual angle would help us draw people."

Because the models control every aspect of their photo shoots (Missy shoots most of the Portland-area models) and do their own hair, makeup, and wardrobe, their pictures have a distinctly girl-friendly quality. They're more about atmosphere and titillation than all-out exposure. Of course, there is a downside: Running the site means rejecting a lot of people. "We get about 20 applications a day," says Spooky, but ultimately SuicideGirls winds up hiring maybe two new girls per week (who are paid a nominal fee). And however open they may be, the reality is that their models are overwhelmingly white and rarely even remotely chubby. (One wonders if Kelly Osbourne would fit in here after all.)

Spooky is up-front about it: "There's a certain level of this site that is about the attractiveness of the girls," he says. "That's true in any medium. How many unattractive people are there on TV?" He says they would love to have a better ethnic mix but simply don't receive many applications from women of color.

For those who do get the SuicideGirls stamp of approval, posing on the site can be a huge ego boost--especially for former high school outcasts. "A lot of the girls grew up in small towns, were kind of the alternative to that, and were persecuted for it," says Missy. "They weren't appreciated and were told over and over they weren't pretty, they weren't sexy."

Chloe knows all about that. Growing up in rural Alaska, she says, "People would splash me with their cars when I was walking home from school. They picked on me because I shaved my head and had piercings. They'd say, 'You're a freak! We don't like you!'"

"Even alternative guys would call me a dyke and stuff in high school," Missy chimes in. "And the punk scene is so male. There isn't much room for appreciating a beautiful woman. So SuicideGirls is a place where girls can come and say, 'I am pretty and I am smart and I am sexy. And fuck you, quarterback asshole!'"

In other words, SuicideGirls expresses the long-stifled feminine component of punk and alternative culture. Member Scott Landes, a 21-year-old musician from Orange County, California, puts it this way: "The women on this website are not just doing it to do pornography per se but to actually explore the beauty and art of the female form, body, mind, and heart."

For Chloe and Veronica, the benefits are also practical: Chloe's SuicideGirls job is a huge improvement on the fish cannery and telemarketing gigs she had before. Ditto Veronica. A farmer's daughter from rural Oregon, she dropped out of college and was facing some fairly grim career options--until Missy and Spooky (both also college dropouts) hired her after she'd posed for the site. Now she's got marketable computer skills (or "muscle," as she calls it), friends, and cool hobbies. She's learning photography and also runs the SuicideGirls burlesque show at two local bars.

"These guys have helped my life so much," she says earnestly, turning away from her computer. "It sounds cheesy to say, but if it weren't for them, I don't know what I'd be doing. I'd probably be dancing right now,

or I'd just be a dropout. But here I have a bunch of girlfriends to hang out with, and I can go around town and feel kind of famous." She smiles. "This is my 15 minutes."