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Pornography and Feminism in the 21st Century

From Feminist struggle, to sexual liberation, America's perception of female sexuality has changed significantly over the past few decades. This revolution has considerably affected the way that female sexuality is perceived in a culture that has become excessively saturated with sex in general. This 'sex' that America has become so familiar with is contrived from an endless barrage of soft-core advertisements, surgically altered Hollywood starlets and a media frenzied over anything that involves sexuality. As women continue to defend their equality in society; they must also determine how they will be affected by these advancing sexual forces. The question at hand is whether or not to accept and adapt to these new factors or to keep fighting an uphill battle against the hyper-real sexuality of the 21st century.

Women have come far in the fight to secure an equal footing in the home, and work place. It has been a struggle to ensure that each new generation retain the rights and respect, equal to men. Assuming that women have achieved equal status in today's society, the issue falls on how to maintain that status. This is especially complex in the area of sexuality due to how far sex has integrated with many aspects of society. Since the beginning of sexual liberation in the seventies, sex has become so intertwined with beauty that it is a vastly complex issue for women to decipher. As Naomi Wolf states in her highly influential feminist literary work, *The Beauty Myth*, "We are in the midst of a violent backlash against feminism that uses images of female beauty as a political weapon against women's advancement: the beauty myth." (Wolf 10). The second wave of feminism, which began during the early 1960s, believed in promoting a harsh critique of the pornography industry. The women involved in pornography were considered to be

forced into their roles because of a history of abuse and sexual oppression. Pornography was believed to be a force created solely for the enjoyment and empowerment of men, the sexual desires of women were not relevant. (Cleveland). As pornography evolved and began to permeate into mainstream society it became a new creature that no longer lurked in the shadow of the underbelly of society. This new pornography was everywhere and not just about the desires of men, but the desires of society as a whole. “If women were going to have sexual freedom and a measure of worldly power, they’d better learn to fuck like men.” (Wolf 134).

To begin to understand the issues of sexuality, beauty and women in the 21st century; it is important to define the current ideals of feminism. Third wave, or postmodern feminism varies greatly from the previous movements, especially in how accepting it is of a variety of different views. Contemporary feminists reject the belief that there is one singular way to achieve liberation and encourage women to discover the kind of feminist she personally wants to be. (Tong 271). Feminism now encourages debate and contradiction as a form of self discovery, but still holds strong to maintaining the woman’s place in society. “We find ourselves the objects of multiple power relations and social discourses about sanity, sexuality, and violence, for example, and we experience ourselves as being controlled by these relations and discourses, as having to be obedient to them.” (Tong 278).

Many aspects of modern views on sexuality have to be analyzed in order to come to any sort of conclusion. It is no longer popular opinion that the sex industry is entirely a forced work environment for women, many women choose to be part of it and seem to enjoy it. The larger issue is whether or not women can promote their best interests while accepting the current sexual climate of America.

Naomi Wolf’s book, *The Beauty Myth*, provides a great entry point from which to analyze and debate the effects of pornography on women. Published in 1990, *The Beauty Myth*

was named one of the most influential books of the 20th century because it caused women to begin analyzing the effects that a sexually saturated society had on feminism. Wolf's theory was that there was a direct correlation between women's increased social status and pressure to conform to a very narrow standard of beauty that ultimately distracted them from continually fighting for equality (Maguire). She introduced very valid points about how the beauty pornography of contemporary culture creates an unobtainable mold for average women to fit into and how this directly affects a female's ability to succeed. She acknowledges that pornography does promote free speech and provides a venue for which women can explore their sexuality but it simultaneously creates an unreal image of what a woman's beauty should be.

It censors representations of women's bodies, so that only the official versions are visible. Rather than seeing images of female desire or cater to female desire, we see mock ups of living mannequins, made to contort and grimace, immobilized and uncomfortable under hot lights, professional set pieces that reveal little about human sexuality. (Wolf 136).

This newly created sexual norm not only causes women to question their own sexual validity, but in many ways further empowers men since they do not have to deal with the same stipulations of beauty.

This sexual norm leads directly into another major issue: that pornography promotes male dominance over women. This reflects back to what the second wave feminists were concerned with, and despite contemporary feminism's lenient views on pornography, it is still an issue for consideration. "Through pornography, men learn to use women for sexual release, and then put us away. At best pornography connects male sexual pleasure with the belief that men have the right to buy sexual access to women; at worst, it allows men to climax to images of women suffering." (Cleveland). Due to sex saturating itself into mainstream society, 'Vanilla' sex has become something that cannot satisfy, and many men do look to 'harder' pornography to be stimulated.

The major question at hand during the 1980's was statistically if sadomasochist pornography in particular, directly affected the way that men treat women, and if it encouraged abuse. (Sarracino 184). The results were fairly unanimous in stating that any normal male (those without a history of sexual aggression and do not display hyper masculine, aggressive personality traits) does not develop any long term negative feelings toward women as a result of pornography. (Sarracino 184). This does not eliminate a threat that it can have negative effects on predisposed men, but it invalidated most preconceptions that pornography created violence. These statistics encouraged women to reevaluate their opinions about the censorship of pornography.

It was determined that promoting censorship in pornography would ultimately have negative effects on the rights of women if the government was allowed to have power over self expression or threaten the rights of the first amendment in any way. (Dority 2008). In short, pornography does not create violence, people do, and sexual violence will be an issue regardless of the existence of pornography.

There has been an increasing rise in how many women access pornography since the early nineties, especially with the advent of internet porn. There are many ways in which women can access and appreciate pornography with the internet, and it has started an entire pornography market that directly targets women. Ex porn star, now producer of pornography, Candida Royalle is a prime example of this phenomenon. Royalle began as self proclaimed feminist porn star in the 1970s, but left the industry because she was disturbed with how they treated women in general. She now owns Femme Productions, one of the top producers of women's pornography. (Sarracino 188). Her formula for female friendly pornography focuses on creating a venue that focuses on a women's right to achieve sexual pleasure through visually pleasing films (not

created with a hand held camera in someone's basement). In an interview about how effective women's pornography really is, Royalle states,

The first thing I wanted to do was change the way the sex is portrayed. The porn industry is like a dinosaur unable to see beyond its own shadow. I think it will take more women from outside the industry who will have the courage to put their film-making skills to work in an industry that's still quite taboo but actually affords women directors opportunities that the mainstream film industry does not. The glass ceiling is far lower in Hollywood! And as I always say, if women don't get out and create their own erotica men will continue to do it for us. (Royalle).

Royalle is not the only woman involved in the making of pornography, and it has become fairly common for women to place themselves in the director's chair.

In general, women want to see women who are 'real' and defy the hyper-real sex doll that Wolf narrates in *The Beauty Myth*. Women also want to know why people are having sex, and enjoy seeing the seduction process. Feminist pornography seeks to accommodate heterosexual women's desires and create an even playing field between men and women. As another producer of pornography, Erika Lust, states; "I want to make movies for straight girls because we are a big group of people and we are supposed to go with the mainstream heterosexual porn, made by men, for men. Lesbians, gays, trans...every group lately had their own porn, and I felt that there was no body thinking of the needs of heterosexual women." (Lee 22). The question then arises if pornography created for women is a positive for the advancement of women in 21st century.

Pornography created for women certainly provides a new way for women to begin to justify experiencing sex as a positive form of self-expressionism. Another venue for sexual self-expression that has gained a lot of popularity in the past decade is alternative pornography. Alternative pornography otherwise known as 'Alt Porn', generally features women and men that are considered part of sub genres such as goth or punk. The models or actors usually have tattoos, piercings or hairstyles that set them apart from most of the more highly polished

individuals of mainstream pornography. The website that gained the highest momentum and popularity out of Alt Porn is Suicide Girls.

Suicide Girls was launched in 2001 by owners Missy and Sean as a venue for self expression through pornography. Their mission states,

With a vibrant, sex positive community of women (and men), SuicideGirls was founded on the belief that creativity, personality and intelligence are not incompatible with sexy, compelling entertainment, and millions of people agree. The site mixes the smarts, enthusiasm and DIY attitude of the best music and alternative culture sites with an unapologetic, grassroots approach to sexuality. (Suicide Girls).

Suicide Girls wanted to break away from the reputation of sexism in pornography that follows publications like Playboy and Hustler. The website only features soft core pornography, and does not allow vaginal penetration in any form. This lack of penetration creates a more welcoming atmosphere for models, and more women seem interested in participating due to this factor. From solely reading all the company's achievements over the past decade one can conclude that from a list of publications and mainstream media coverage, Suicide Girls knew how to successful market their products from the beginning. The website itself is very welcoming with polished design elements, the images of few partially nude girls and most interestingly, evidence that Suicide Girls is actually an online community.

This element of mixing pornography with an online community is what has in many ways made Suicide Girls such a success among Alt-Porn sites. With the purchase of membership, one can make their own profile complete with pictures and an area to share personal information that directly reflects the format of popular social networking websites. The member page is also virtually identical to that of the actual models, so members have their own blog, email and even 'friends'. Most importantly, being a member allows a person to access all the models pages, which includes albums of nude photos, personal photos, personal information and a personal

blog. This gives the member the opportunity to learn more about the model, other than what they look like in the nude. It also allows the actual models to define what sexuality is to them through word and image.

This element of combining a well rounded look at the models personal information with their own nudity creates an interesting breed of pornography that deserves its 'feminist friendly' title. The nude photos are very flattering to the women, who greatly vary in size, shape, tattoos, hair and ethnicity. It creates a solution to the problem of beauty pornography by featuring women who are not found in mainstream pornography. The Suicide Girls no penetration policy also keeps the website tamer and proves that they can still be a huge success with only soft core interaction. The blogs allow the girls to express their thoughts and share their stories, which are also all very diverse.

Despite all the positive elements of Suicide Girls, there has still been some speculation about whether or not the website has the right agenda. A few blogs around fall of 2005 cited some discrepancy about models knowing that the company was co-owned by a man named Sean Suhl. This information caused many models to begin to question if the company was really a female collaborative pursuing a common feminist goal or if it was really just a clever money making strategy for Suhl. One blog by a professor from California stated, "Fellas like Suhl are out to make money off women's bodies in much the same way Flynt (Hustler) is, but in Suhl's case, greed seems hidden behind the rhetoric of edginess, alternative culture, and a rather shallow feminism." (Schwyzer). This issue caused many girls to leave the company and feel betrayed by the idea that a man could be profiting from their attempts at empowering themselves through pornography.

Another argument against Suicide Girls is that women are just becoming victims of a newly formed 'raunch culture'. In Ariel Levy's book *Female Chauvinist Pigs*, she explores how

in contemporary society women are confusing sexual power with actual power. She forms her agreements from exploring popular companies such as *Girls Gone Wild*, *Playboy* and the neo-feminist sex club *Cake*. Her interviews with the women who are part of these organizations or just partaking in the culture surrounding them, restates many of Naomi Wolf's concerns for women in 1990. Levy states, "Raunch culture is not essentially progressive, it is essentially commercial." (Levy 29). She wants to caution women of the commercial aspects of finding liberation and empowerment through sexual power. Levy's main concern is that women are selling themselves short by believing that they can enjoy sexual culture the same way that men can.

Many of the women that Levy interviews seem content in their raunch lifestyles, and do appear to be empowered by their acceptance of typical male activities: such as going to strip clubs or viewing pornography. Levy views this as a misunderstanding on their parts of what being an empowered woman really means when looking at the history of feminism, "They don't explain what radicalized means to them, so we are left to wonder if it is their way of saying "enlightened" or "sexually charged" or if to them those are the same things....The basic requirements are hot girls and small garments." (Levy 75). This 'requirement' may not be something that women feel as pressured by, but Levy does bring into question what effect our pornography influenced culture has on younger women who are in the process of determining their personal identities. Recent studies reflect what Wolf was concerned with in 1990, more girls are becoming prone to psychological problems due to concern about how they are measuring up in a sexually saturated society. (Sarracino 193).

Through cartoons, music, magazines, clothing, advertisements, toys, and a host of other images, girls are told indirectly and directly over and over that their only value is sexuality. Living with this cultural mantra, girls begin to self objectify; they begin to see themselves as others see them, as objects of desire. When a girl accepts sexualized images as personal ideals

she must live up to, and sees herself always through the eyes of others, she is in trouble. (Sarracino 193).

Although Levy neither officially condemns nor approves of pornography, the evidence she provides does suggest that there are still many concerns for women and their sexuality in society despite how comfortable things may seem.

Although there are many negative effects of pornography, there are still women who find pornography to be empowering from inside the industry. As a result of Suicide Girls encouraging women who are 'alternative' to be part of their pornography; they provide an interesting insight into the world of feminist friendly pornography. Suicide Girl, Anya, is a blonde, tattooed, twenty-four year old from Michigan whose main focus in life is her husband and raising her adorable daughter. She got asked to be a Suicide Girl while at a convention with her husband and decided to give it a try because she was impressed by Suicide Girl's mission. "I wanted to be part of a website that showed all the beauty that women with tattoos have, but even though we are fully naked I think Suicide Girls can keep it classy." (Anya). Anya had always questioned her own beauty and body before Suicide Girls, so it was a big step for her. She found the overall experience to be positive because of how supportive the feedback was on her photos and is now in the process of trying to schedule another shoot. Despite all the positive feedback, Anya has never pursued any other careers in the adult industry and still focuses primarily on her family. She proudly displays family photos below her nude photos, and leads a very normal life despite her involvement in the adult industry.

Another Suicide Girl, Coralee, has had a lot of involvement with the company, and like Anya, she has had a very positive experience. She became a Suicide Girl after feeling disconnected and out of place after she moved from Chicago to a small town in Wisconsin.

Coralee was also struggling with an abusive relationship which caused her to feel very insecure about herself, but as soon as the pictures went up things changed.

I feel like SG has helped me feel more confident about myself than anything else (minus my own acceptance, of course). After my first set went live I got so many emails thanking me for sharing (which is kind of weird, but nice) and complimenting me for things I didn't expect (I.E. My eyes, my shoes, the theme). Once my positive self image increased, I realized I didn't need to be with that person who put me down so much and I gained the strength to leave him. (Coralee).

Unlike Anya, after appearing in Suicide Girls, Coralee has also appeared on another nude site and performs in burlesque shows. She has never wanted to be in any more explicit pornography and does not plan on it in the future. Coralee uses Suicide Girls as a form of personal empowerment and it is only the side as she focuses on getting her interior design degree. “There hasn't been too much negativity for me. There are of course the creepy guys who want to fly me out to Europe and 'play', people with strange fetishes wanting me to participate. Those kinds of things. It's all part of the business though.”

Both Anya and Coralee present interesting testimonials that validate the mission statement of Suicide Girls. Both girls have alternative looks and have greatly improved their self empowerment by entering the adult industry. It does not matter to either of them that a man might be making a profit off their willingness to model; they did it for themselves and at the end of the day they are happy. Although Anya and Coralee do not speak for all the models of Suicide Girls, they believe that it is feminist in its ideals.

Through the rapid evolution of pornography over the past decades there has been much for women to consider. Third wave feminism promotes that each woman find their own place in society and to discover for themselves how to successfully utilize their rights. In a recent interview from 2010 Naomi Wolf comments on how things have changed since she wrote the Beauty Myth, “I don't worry about the young women of the '80s and '90s because I think they

are in a different place. While they do pay attention to how they present themselves they are not torturing themselves, not feeling worthless or thinking, ‘If the scale goes up a pound I’m a bad person.’ (Maguire). Wolf is still concerned with how pornography is affecting society, especially with how it effects the sexual development of teenagers. When asked about the validity of feminist pornography, “...Thinking for yourself is a lot more liberating. I’m always going to return to asking a person how does it make them feel. What’s the last effect on their love life, their sex life.” (Maguire).

Women must be conscious of what it means to live in a society so saturated with pornography, and most importantly develop a strong understanding of their own personal values. The writing of both Wolf and Levy provide information about social values that are easy to look over, but very important to be conscious of. “Both feminism and porn can help liberate women from what society expects from us: to be good, quiet nice girls, not complaining, not arguing, not fighting, not enjoying sex, not being powerful and productive.” (Lee 23). If provided in the right context, pornography can be a tool of empowerment, but each woman must decide from themselves how they will use it.

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PORNOGRAPHY & FEMINISM IN THE 21ST CENTURY

Watch the Notebook & cuddle?
I prefer Star Wars & sex.



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your@ecards.com

Issues

- ① Where do women fall on the topic of pornography?
- ① Is there such a thing as feminist pornography?

Prior opinions

- ⦿ Second wave feminists had a much harsher critique on pornography
- ⦿ Pornography only for men
- ⦿ Women were abused
- ⦿ Victims of a harsh industry

Third Wave Feminism

- ⦿ No single explanation
- ⦿ Mistrust of previous notions of feminism
- ⦿ Invite women to create their own definitions
- ⦿ No such thing as a “good feminist”
- ⦿ Finding solution through debate and contradiction

Namoi Wolf

- *The Beauty Myth*



YouTube Video – Naomi Wolfe on *The Beauty Myth*

- http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kjKx_p5KwEk&feature=related 1:43

Naomi Wolf

- Direct correlation between women's increased social status and narrowing standard of beauty.
- Women vs. Men
- Pornography does promote free speech and a venue for women to explore sexuality.

Dominance

- ⦿ Pornography promotes male dominance over women
- ⦿ .
- ⦿ Sexual saturation has caused men to pursue harder pornography
- ⦿ Argument of 1980s
- ⦿ Effects of sadomasochism
- ⦿ *Deep Throat*
- ⦿ Censorship

Candida Royalle

- ◉ http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=l5Snwt2_c2s 8 min
- ◉ Starts off in pornography in 1970s
- ◉ Women's right to enjoy pornography
- ◉ Accommodate female sexual desires
- ◉ Femme Productions

Alt Porn

- Men and women in sub genres
- Aesthetics not found in mainstream pornography

Suicide Girls

- Most popular Alt Porn
- Co produced by man and woman
- Mission
- Break away from stereotypic sexism
- Online community\Social networking

Suicide Girls

- ◉ <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Gh7SOpCa5eg>

Suicide Girls

The screenshot shows the SuicideGirls website in a Firefox browser window. The browser's address bar displays "suicidegirls.com". The website's navigation menu includes links for "GIRLS", "PICS", "VIDEOS", "INTERVIEWS", "NEWS", "SHOP", "BOARDS", "GROUPS", "MEMBERS", "LIVE", "ARMY", "MODEL", "CHAT", and "HELP". The user "kmoore25" is logged in, with "MYSG" and "LOGOUT" options. A search bar and "Models" link are also visible.

The main content area features a "SET OF THE DAY" section with a large image of a woman with red hair and tattoos, labeled "Krito TOUCHE D'ELEGANCE". To the right, a "PREVIOUS SETS OF THE DAY" section displays four smaller images with names and dates: "MATA" (1 day ago, 1970), "AETERNA" (2 days ago, 1461), "ROURKE" (3 days ago, 1816), and "LEVAL" (4 days ago, 2488).

Below the main set, there is a "Talena" section with 1996 comments and a 98% love rate. A "GROUPS" section follows, featuring a group named "SGNY" with a description: "Just don't be an asshole, please, and we'll all get along just fine. WHINING e-mails will NOT get you in. - This is a social group local to NYC. You must socialize online and IN PERSON. - You're not getting in without pictures and journals. Come to an open event, which usually happens...". Below this, there are three group listings: "Hirsute" (1 min), "weight loss" (1 min), and "SGAZ" (1 min).

A "FEATURED BLOG" section highlights "Phecda's blog" with a post from Monday, April 16, 2012, at 08:43 AM. The post begins with "Hi everyone! I'm doing much much better. I'm on what seems like 17".

The browser's taskbar at the bottom shows various application icons, including Windows Explorer, Internet Explorer, and several social media and utility programs. The system tray on the right indicates the time as 8:47 PM on 4/16/2012.

Suicide Girls

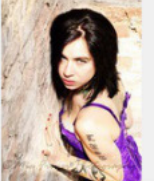
The screenshot shows a Firefox browser window with the address bar at `suicidegirls.com/members/Katianna/`. The website header includes navigation links for **GIRLS PICS VIDEOS INTERVIEWS NEWS SHOP** and **BOARDS GROUPS MEMBERS LIVE ARMY MODEL CHAT**. The user **Katianna** is shown with a profile picture, a bio, and a recent blog post.

suicide girls **SG** **kmoore25** **MYSG** **0** **4** **0** **LOGOUT** **Search** **Models** **Suicidegirls.com** **HELP**




Katianna Show me your teeth..... **HOPEFUL** **I'm offline**
[Send a Message](#) | [Friend Request](#) | [Bookmark Profile](#) | [Ignore Member](#)

MAIN **PROFILE** **BLOG** **PICS** **VIDEOS** **FRIENDS** **FAVES** **GROUPS** **COMMENTS** **TESTIMONIALS**

PROFILE **VIEW PROFILE**


AGE: 28 (Jun 26, 1985)
MEMBER SINCE: February 2012
LOCATION: Sergeant Bluff, IA
HOMETOWN: Fernandina Beach, Florida!
YAHOO: jeni685
MSN: Jynigraves@hotmail.com
FACEBOOK
OCCUPATION: Domestic Engineer Full
Time Nursing Student
GETS ME HOT: Ask
HEROES: Mv dad

MAKES ME SAD: When my kids are sick...
BODY MODS: Tattoos! Bottom lip piercing
FANTASY: I'm a fang banger....what do you think?
SIGN: I am a Cancer.
MAKES ME HAPPY: A lot of things, especially the little things

SEE ALL MY PICS   

BLOG **ALL** **BLOGS** **PAST**

Monday
APRIL 16, 2012 @ 05:32 PM | 2 COMMENTS

Good news! No 8am psych tomorrow!

APRIL 2012

1	2	3	4	5	6	7
8	9	10	11	12	13	14
15	16	17	18	19	20	21
22	23	24	25	26	27	28
29	30					

ADD A COMMENT

Windows Taskbar: 8:51 PM 4/16/2012

Suicide Girls

Firefox

suicidegirls.com/girls/LizaRose/

Ask.com

Most Visited Getting Started 2012 Smart Festival Re... Latest Headlines Project Free TV - Watc... Pin It Brain Pickings

LizaRose Are you a good witch, or a bad ...

LizaRose Are you a good witch, or a bad witch?
Send a Message | Friend Request | Bookmark Profile | Add to Favs

I'm offline

MAIN PROFILE BLOG PICS VIDEOS FRIENDS FAVES TESTIMONIALS

PROFILE VIEW PROFILE

GENDER: SG
AGE: 34 (Oct 20, 1977)
LOCATION: Washington, USA
HOMETOWN: the Light
OCCUPATION: Milk Maid. Urban Fertility Goddess. Objet d'Art.
CRUSH: Naveen Andrews. Annika.
MOST HUMBLING MOMENT: All of them.
FANTASY: All the time.
SIGN: libra (scorpio cusp). air trine. in other words: "Mwahahaha"

INTO: simplicity, flying, falling, truth, gods and goddesses, circuses, seekers, lovers, seekers who are lovers (:)), spiritual warriors, handstands, oren, ami, time and who i spend it with, tea, my grandmother's suede overcoat, the significance of names, your morality issues, my very own ruby slippers, getting awesome, hiking boots, my new entrepreneurial tendencies, not waiting tables ever again, impermanence

HEROES: Athenais de Montespan, Mary

SEE ALL MY PICS

SG PICS ALL 4 SETS

Nov 4, 2007 2884
Apr 22, 2007 2348
Jul 2, 2006 1601
Dec 3, 2005 1745

BLOG PAST

Monday
AUGUST 1, 2011 @ 11:14 AM | 6 COMMENTS

FEBRUARY 2012

	1	2	3	4		
6	8	7	8	9	10	11
12	13	14	15	16	17	18
19	20	21	22	23	24	25

8:52 PM
4/16/2012

Controversy

- ⦿ Company run by a man
- ⦿ Debate validity of truly feminist agenda
- ⦿ Profit of man

Airel Levy

- *Female Chauvinist Pigs*
- Raunch culture
- Restates concerns of *the Beauty Myth*
- Commercial aspects
- Misunderstanding of empowerment

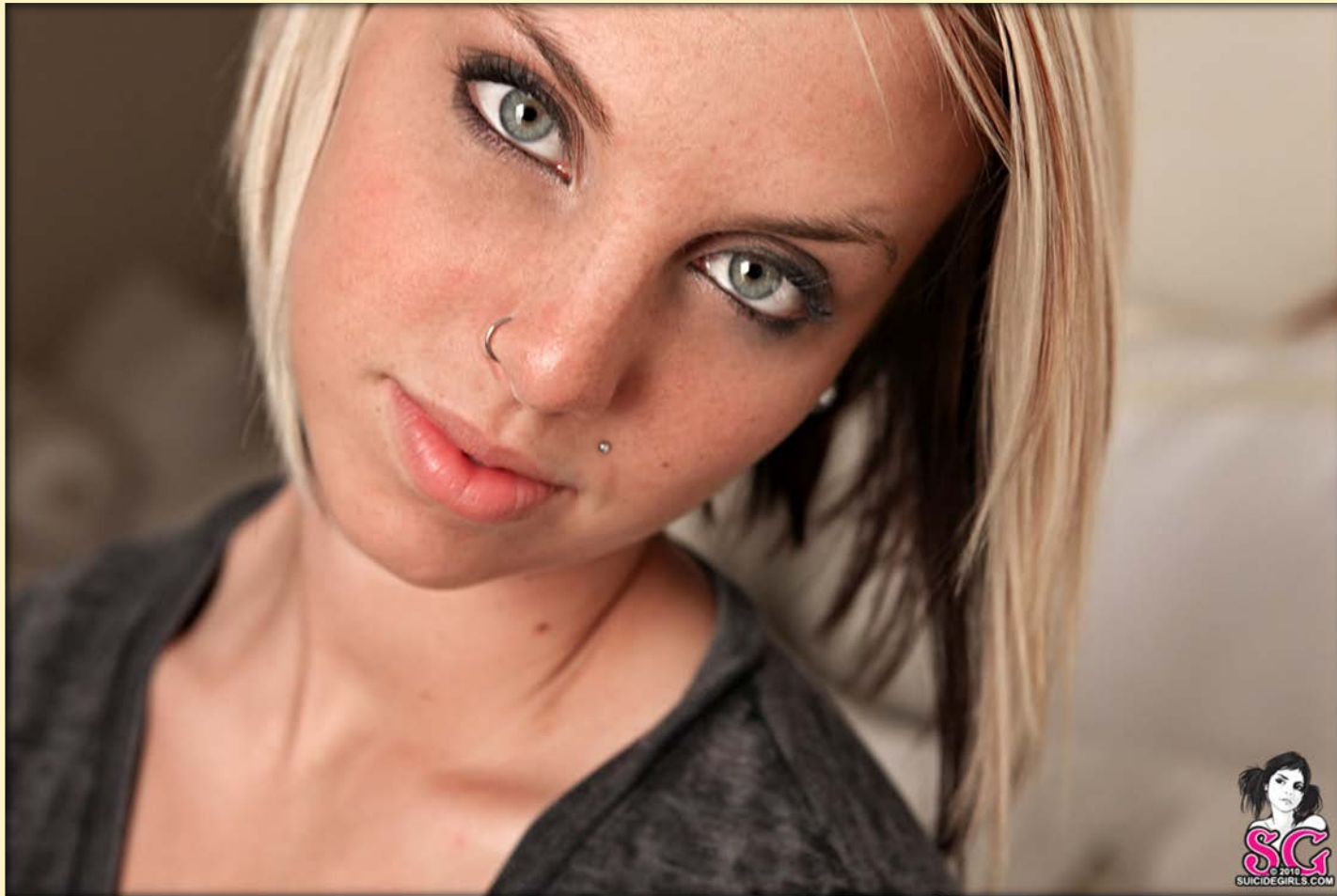
Airel Levy

- ⦿ Negative effects of pornography on youth
- ⦿ Psychological problems

Airel Levy

- ⦿ Does not condemn pornography, but provides evidence against it
- ⦿ Good warning
- ⦿ Leaves out opinions of girls content with pornography

Anya



Anya



Coralee



Coralee



Conclusion

- ① Women should discover for themselves
- ① Develop personal values
- ① Consider points made by both Levy and Wolf

- ◎ “Both feminism and porn can help liberate women from what society expects from us: to be good, quiet nice girls, not complaining, not arguing, not fighting, not enjoying sex, not being powerful and productive.”