



NATIONAL CENTER ON SEXUAL EXPLOITATION

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January 22, 2019

Mr. Gabe Newell
Valve Corporation
10900 NE 4th St Suite 500
Bellevue, WA 98004

Mr. Gabe Newell:

We are writing to address Steam's facilitation of sexually exploitive games on its platform. In June of 2018 Steam instituted a new policy to "allow everything onto the Steam Store, except for things that we decide are illegal, or straight up trolling."ⁱ As soon as this new policy launched, the number of games tagged for "nudity" doubled from approximately 700 games to around 1,400 in just four months—and now there are over 2,000 games with this tag.

Many of these titles not only contain "nudity" but also contain graphic sexual acts, sexual violence, sexualized child-like characters, and/or stripping and prostitution.

Steam has become callous to the growing problem of gamified sexual violence and pornography on its site, and so the National Center on Sexual Exploitation is placing Steam on the 2019 Dirty Dozen List—which names 12 leading mainstream facilitators of sexual exploitation.

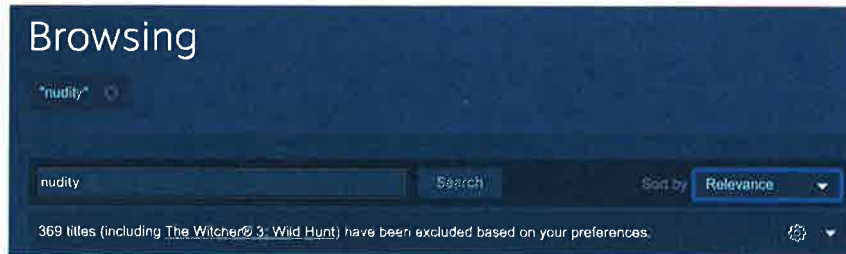
We at the National Center on Sexual Exploitation (NCOSE) request that you remove games with sexually exploitive content, and that you institute better protections for young gamers on your platform.

At the minimum, Steam needs to create lockable parental controls for its platform. Currently, Steam provides "filters" to remove "mature content" but these filters are little more than initial speedbumps on the way to sexually graphic content.

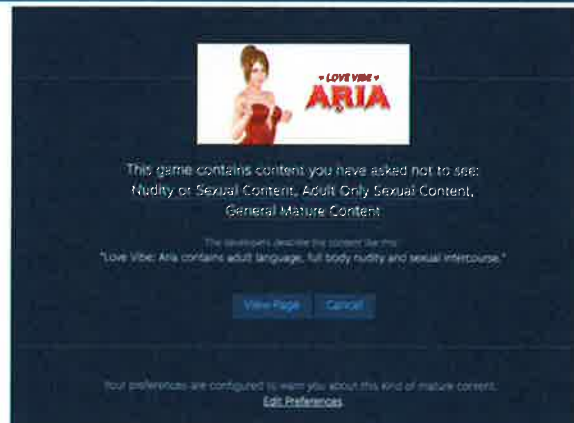
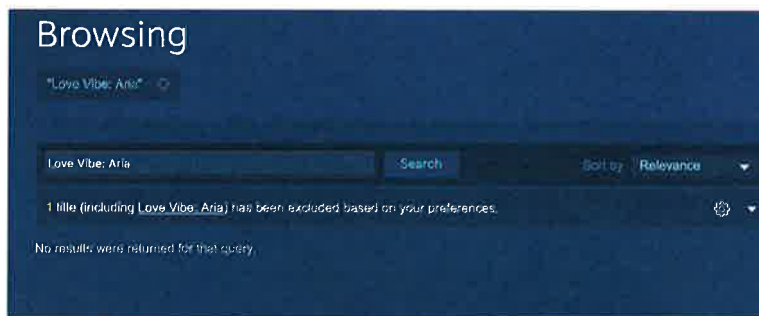
When an individual signs up for a Steam account, they are not prompted to enter their age, making it impossible to gauge what age-appropriate content to display. "Adult Only" games are not automatically included in their products—but other games with

“Nudity” tags are included. Currently, the Steam Store does a poor job at defining “adult only” as all games with nudity should be classified as “adult.”

Also, games with all forms of sexual content from nudity to graphic sex acts are still advertised and made available with an easy click in the browsing results, as seen in the screenshot below.



Even pornographic videogames with clearly portrayed penetrative sex acts are accessible with a mere **two clicks**, despite having filters turned on.



The Steam Curators feature has also been abused as a means to recommend pornographic games to others. Several Steam Curators solely review “hentai” games and recommend games based on their sexual content. Some profiles even contain external links to email addresses and group chats where users can receive other sexual content. Proper filtering would also remove access to these Curator pages and any group pages they may administer.

Such content is degrading and harmful to users of all ages, but especially the millions of minors who regularly use Steam. Exposure to and participation in these pornographic and objectifying games can be especially damaging to children. Research has demonstrated that children are more susceptible than adults to addictions and to developmental effects on the brain, making them especially vulnerable to pornography addiction.ⁱⁱ Internet pornography use has been linked to increases in problematic sexual activity at younger ages and a greater likelihood of engaging in risky sexual behavior, such as hookups, multiple sex partners, anal sex, group sex, and using substances during sex as young adolescents.ⁱⁱⁱ

Recommended Policy and Platform Improvements

The National Center on Sexual Exploitation urges Steam® and its parent company Valve® to create parental controls that are lockable, so that children are unable to see and access content their family determines inappropriate.

We also ask that Steam creates an 18+ category on its website in which all games with any amount of nudity or sexual content are stored. All accounts should have this 18+ category disabled by default, and require an extensive opt-in to view it, so that children are no longer automatically exposed to this content.

Finally, we also call for Steam to reverse its “allow anything” policy, and to reject selling games that normalize or glamorize sexual violence and exploitation in the future, no matter the age of the user.

We welcome a meeting, or conference call, to discuss how Steam, Valve, and the National Center on Sexual Exploitation can work together to ensure Steam’s platform a safe environment for user of all ages to buy videogames and form community.

Respectfully,



Patrick Trueman, Esq.
President & CEO



Dawn Hawkins
Sr. Vice President and Executive Director

ⁱ <https://steamcommunity.com/games/593110/announcements/detail/1666776116200553082>

ⁱⁱ Frances E. Jensen with Amy Ellis Nutt, *The Teenage Brain: A Neuroscientist's Survival Guild to Raising Adolescents and Young Adults*, (New York: HarperCollins, 2015); Tamara L. Doremus-Fitzwater, Elena I. Varlinskaya, and Linda P. Spear, "Motivational Systems in Adolescence: Possible Implications for Age Differences in Substance Abuse and Other Risk-Taking Behaviors," *Brain and Cognition* 71, no. 1 (2010): 114–123.

ⁱⁱⁱ Debra K. Braun-Courville and Mary Rojas, "Exposure to Sexually Explicit Web Sites and Adolescent Sexual Attitudes and Behaviors," *Journal of Adolescent Health* 45 (2009): 156–162; Peter and Valkenburg (2007); C. Marston and R. Lewis, "Anal Heterosex among Young People and Implications for Health Promotion: A Qualitative Study in the UK," *BJM Open* 4 (February 4, 2016): 1–6; Emily R. Rothman, et al., "Multi-Person Sex among a Sample of Adolescent Female Urban Health Clinic Patients," *Journal of Urban Health: Bulletin of the New York Academy of Medicine* 89, no. 1 (2011): 129–137; E. Häggström-Nordin, U. Hanson, and T. Tydén, "Association between Pornography Consumption and Sexual Practices among Adolescents in Sweden," *International Journal of STD & AIDS* 16 (2005): 102 – 107; Svedin, *ibid.*