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July 25, 2017

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

Dear Mr. Newell:

We are writing to bring to your attention the pornographic and sexually exploitive video games available on the Steam® platform, *House Party* and *Porno Studio Tycoon*. These games promote the dangerous misconception that sexually exploiting others is harmless and fun. Furthermore, they are in direct violation of Steam's own policies against "pornography" or "patently offensive" content, and should be removed from the Steam store. We at the National Center on Sexual Exploitation (NCOSE) request that you remove these games and that you institute more robust policies to reject sexual exploitation on your platform.

The new game, *House Party*, is animated pornography and gamified sexual assault. The game includes disturbing features that allow users to increase their odds of 'having sex' with the women in the game by blackmailing them with nude pictures, increasing their alcohol consumption, impersonating their friends through text, and jamming cellphone reception to isolate women in a room away from other party goers, essentially teaching users how to rape and exploit someone in real life. The sexual encounters themselves are blatantly pornographic, featuring genitalia, ejaculation, and more.

The developer of *House Party* released a letter defending the game as a "parody" and a "joke" and dismissed concerns about the game being harmful and misogynistic, but the reality is that if anyone were to apply actions from the game in real-life situations, they could inflict

immeasurable harm to others and potentially be in violation of state or federal law.

Porno Studio Tycoon is also offensive for a number of reasons. It glamorizes the exploitive industry of pornography and promotes it as harmless fun while ignoring the real physical and emotional trauma that porn performers frequently experience on- and off-screen. Although there is no full nudity in the game in its original format, it includes sexual sounds, hypersexualized characters, and generic depictions of sex acts. This game is insensitive and potentially triggering to anyone who is trying to overcome a pornography addiction or past traumatic experiences.

Both of these games violate Steam's own content rules and guidelines, which prohibit pornography and "content that is patently offensive or intended to shock or disgust viewers." *House Party* is indisputably in violation of these policies, and although *Porno Studio Tycoon* boasts that there is "no sexually explicit content" in the game, it is still highly sexualized and highly offensive for promoting and gamifying an industry that profits from the sexual exploitation of others.

These games are easily accessible to anyone of any age. As of right now, no age verification is required to view the preview videos and images for *Porno Studio Tycoon*, nor is age verification required for purchase. *House Party* asks for a birthday before the preview videos and images can be viewed, but allows the user to re-enter their birthday until the age is above 18. After that, there is no age verification when returning to the page and no age verification before purchasing the game.

Exposure to and participation in these 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.¹ 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.²

However, even if the age verification was 100% effective, these games would still be problematic.

¹ 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.

² 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.*

Are we telling our children that before you sexually coerce someone by intentionally intoxicating them to gain their impaired consent, you need to be 18? Are we telling them that it is acceptable to participate in revenge porn, blackmail, or public masturbation, as long as you are legally an adult?

Each of these activities is illegal in most states; however, *House Party* rewards players with interactive animated pornography for doing them.

One gamer reviewed the *House Party* game, and these were his words:

*First I walked Stephanie out of her dress. That was fun. Then I blackmailed Madison into giving me a wonderful show. She hates me for it. She probably should. Then I made her blow me. Yup. Then I made Ashley walk around without any clothes. She hates more for it. I don't blame her. Nice boobs though. Madison loves me now. Then I got Katerin or whatever her nerdy ***** name is to let me take pictures of her topless. I gave the photos to Frank. What an***** that guy is. Got some booze. I got her drunk and had sex with her. Twice. While her boyfriend listened in. I got Rachel to do ALL KINDS of *****. Then I nailed her. Flipped her over. Nailed her some more. Britney is a lesbian. I'm gonna hit that one way or another. Trust me. And that is why this whole review should be covered in [*'s]. YAY STEAM! 300/10 would **** on angry Rachel's face again!*

This game does not merely have mature themes. It is a game that not only normalizes but instructs its users as a virtual how-to manual of sex crimes and misogyny.

With college sexual assault rates likely surpassing 20% of women³ and sexting among children reaching epidemic levels,⁴ our society cannot afford the normalizations of these toxic behaviors.

House Party and *Porno Studio Tycoon* trivialize the most tragic crimes committed against so many. By distributing these games, Steam not only exposes children to pornography and pornographic-themes, but it also normalizes sexual assault and manipulation.

The National Center on Sexual Exploitation urges Steam® and its parent company Valve® to remove *House Party* and *Porno Studio Tycoon* and to enforce a more robust policy against selling games that normalize or glamorize sexual exploitation in the future.

³ Cantor, David, Bonnie Fisher, Susan Helen Chibnall, Reanne Townsend, Hyunshik Lee, Gail Thomas, Carol Bruce, and Westat, Inc. Report on the AAU campus climate survey on sexual assault and sexual misconduct. Washington, DC: Association of American Universities, 2015.

⁴ Temple, Jeff R., Jonathan A. Paul, Patricia van den Berg, Vi Donna Le, Amy McElhany, and Brian W. Temple. "Teen sexting and its association with sexual behaviors." *Archives of pediatrics & adolescent medicine* 166, no. 9 (2012): 828-833.

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 video games and form community.

Respectfully,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "Patrick Trueman". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a large initial "P" and "T".

Patrick Trueman, Esq.
President & CEO
National Center on Sexual Exploitation