Finn Finds a Way: An online gender-affirming and age-appropriate video game for transgender, nonbinary, and intersex children and youth

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Purpose:

In this project, we are studying the role of online resources/ computer games and how best to provide a "safe space" for gender-independent, intersex, non-binary, or transgender (GIaNT) youth to explore and experiment with their gender identities and to articulate further questions about their experiences of puberty.

Background:

- Sexual education curricula have historically focused on the experiences of cisgender boys and girls thereby excluding GIaNT youth [2, 5, 11, 12].
- Comprehensive sexual education programs that are inclusive to various genders and sexualities have the potential to replace narrow existing education curricula and support GIaNT youth to explore and manage cognitive, physical, and social aspects of their gender identities and sexualities [5, 6].
- Inclusive puberty health education, along with gender-affirming care, and access to these resources can be life-saving [1, 8].
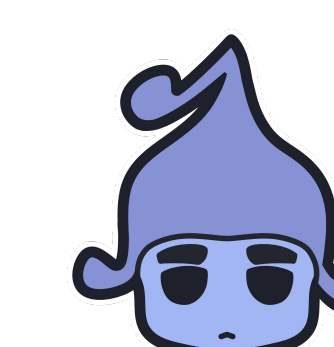
Description:

Game development students from Centennial College have collaborated with researchers to develop a demo of a gender-affirming, age-appropriate video game that provides a platform for GIaNT youth or gender-questioning youth to articulate their gender experiences in their own words and expressions.
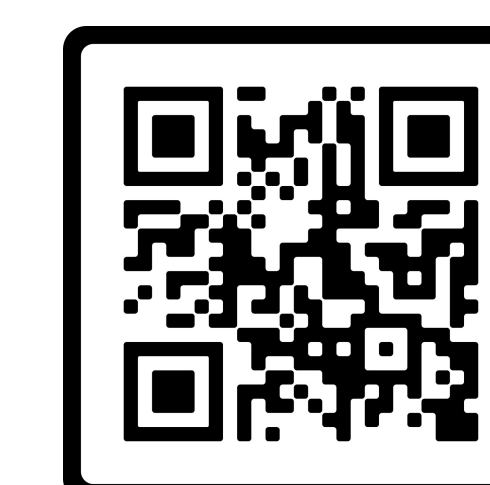
Research Approach:

- This research is a collaborative practice in developing a game for GIaNT youth.
- GIaNT youth have expressed that online platforms are their preferred format for such education curricula [2, 3, 4, 7, 9, 10, 12, 13].
- Online games that cater to gender diverse experiences are typically perceived as "safe" by such youth, as they are free to express themselves in individualized, intrapersonal ways [3, 7, 9, 10, 13].
- Our aim with our game is to test whether a role-playing video game (RPG) offers youth an agentic means of exploring their feelings about puberty, gender and identity affirming puberty education through gaming and role play.
- Our team plans to accompany the game with a scoping review and literature review with the goal to learn more about and compile existing texts on GIaNT youth's puberty health education desires in a gaming format.

Game: Finn Finds A Way

- *Finn Finds A Way* acts as an outlet and sandbox for youth interested in learning about/experimenting with their own gender expression.
- Finn Finds A Way game does this by providing a space where they can safely explore expression, determining what they like, do not like, and need to see represented.
- The demo's story allows for this sandbox- or outlet-like exploration through putting players into the shoes of Finn, a gender-ambiguous child that is exploring their own gender through their dreams.
- On a few occasions in the demo, players are allowed to choose how Finn responds to questions about their gender, and make positive changes to Finn that reflect the users desired expression.
- Players are able to explore an otherwise tricky part of life and puberty through these elements of the demo's story.

Next Steps:

- Test usability of the demo game through in-formal participation
- Conduct data collection with youth in user testing
- Dissemination of findings
- Seeking partner to adopt and support this project

Partnership: This research project is a collaboration of Centennial College, Action Canada for Sexual Health and Human Rights (ACSHR), and Flamingo Rampant.

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