Task 1: Write a Feature Proposal

Electronic Arts Software Engineering Virtual Experience Program

Write a proposal for a gameplay feature that could be added to a life simulation game like The Sims.

Gender Expansion: a feature proposal for gender diversity in Sims

Overview

This feature, Gender Expansion, will enable Sims characters to explore a gender journey of the user's choosing. The feature will expand the options included in various aspects of gameplay, including clothing and body modification. This feature will provide all users with the opportunity to explore gender freely through gameplay and will eliminate the current exclusion of trans and nonbinary users who wish to see their experiences reflected in their characters like everyone else.

Value Statement

Currently, Sims characters are limited to the gender binary in terms of appearance, pronouns, and experiences. This is especially exclusive towards trans and nonbinary users, as evidenced by this 2021 article by Andre Wheeler, "Trans, Non-Binary Players Feel *The Sims* Doesn't Represent Them," and its associated petition with 24,316 signatures. These gameplay limitations are detrimental to Electronic Arts because of the negative attention it has garnered and its possible resulting loss in users. More importantly, exclusion in media and games impacts the lives of people in the physical world by reinforcing and perpetuating biases and systems of oppression.

Solution

Gender Expansion would involve the following changes and additions to the current Sims gameplay:
- Eliminate the binary choice between "male" and "female" body types: Instead, users would be able to customize all currently customizable body features across the entire spectrum. The chest options will also include post-top surgery chests with a selection of scar types, optional nipples, and chests with binders.
- Add pronoun customization: From the start of creating a new character, users will be able to choose the character's pronouns, including the option of "They/Them." Throughout gameplay, users can change the character's pronouns along with their name.

- Add gender transition experiences: Users will be able to select a variety of gender-related activities during gameplay, such as taking hormones and undergoing gender-affirming surgery.

Evaluation

The primary risk of integrating this feature is receiving backlash from anti-trans users, stakeholders, and other people. This feature could harm the reputation and capital wealth of Electronic Arts. However, the company would gain support and a positive reputation for being anti-oppressive and gender-inclusive. Most importantly, this feature would benefit the lives of a diverse group of marginalized people.