

Barrier or Bridge?

A journey of struggles and hope

Play it [here!](#)



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01 My Rubric



Documentation <ul style="list-style-type: none">- Well-written premise and introduction- Values- Learning- Feedback & Iterations	40%
Packaging <ul style="list-style-type: none">- Design a good cover art or website	15%
Improvement of game mechanics / aesthetics <ul style="list-style-type: none">- Use lots of illustrations to make the game aesthetically pleasing compared to pure reading	25%
Improvement of emotions and compulsion in the writing	20%

02 Introduction, Premise & Values



Refinement Plan

Since I got a decent grade for P2 (full marks for Learning Goals, Story Craft, and Playability), I plan to focus on making my game aesthetically pleasing. I will add illustrations of my character that follow the storyline and explore other ways to incorporate visual elements. Using DALLE to create illustrations instead of drawing by hand might be an excellent idea to speed the process up, though I need to explore how to keep the image styles consistent. In addition, I will either design a cover art or a website for the game.

Besides, one main feedback from the P2 peer review is that I should deepen the nuances of a crisis using more emotions. Correspondingly, I will make my writing more complete by including more descriptions of mental activities and the environment around the character.

Refinement Plan

More changes might include

- Link references to the statistic I used.
- Cite actual quotes by powerful women in engineering and arts.
- Adding more interesting attributes that will affect what the player sees later.

Premise

You are Aria, a female college student studying English literature and computer science. You are deciding your future career path. After researching, you learn that misogyny is a huge barrier for women in many fields. You discover narrative gaming as your dream career, but your job application gets rejected.

Not wanting to give up your dream, you use your after-work time to investigate what makes young women quit the film and tech industries, and you create your own narrative game based on the findings. **Along the journey, what skills do you learn, what people do you meet, and how do these bridge you to different endings?**

Values

- **Equality**

- Unfortunately we never reached true gender equality, and I wanted to deliver this message clearly.

- **Community**

- An individual has limited power, but helping each other out in a community may have a huge impact on one's success.

- **Perseverance in the face of adversity**

- A woman as perseverant as Aria still encounters systematic sexism and misogyny.

Cover Art

Since I used Twine's Chapbook format to develop the game, my playtesters said that they had an experience of reading a book. Therefore, the intention of my cover art design is to give sense of a book cover.

On the cover is the protagonist, a young woman with red long hair called Aria. The clouds in the background represent Aria's space of searching for a meaning in this story. Locked by chains, Aria staggers on her way of growing and finding a passion.

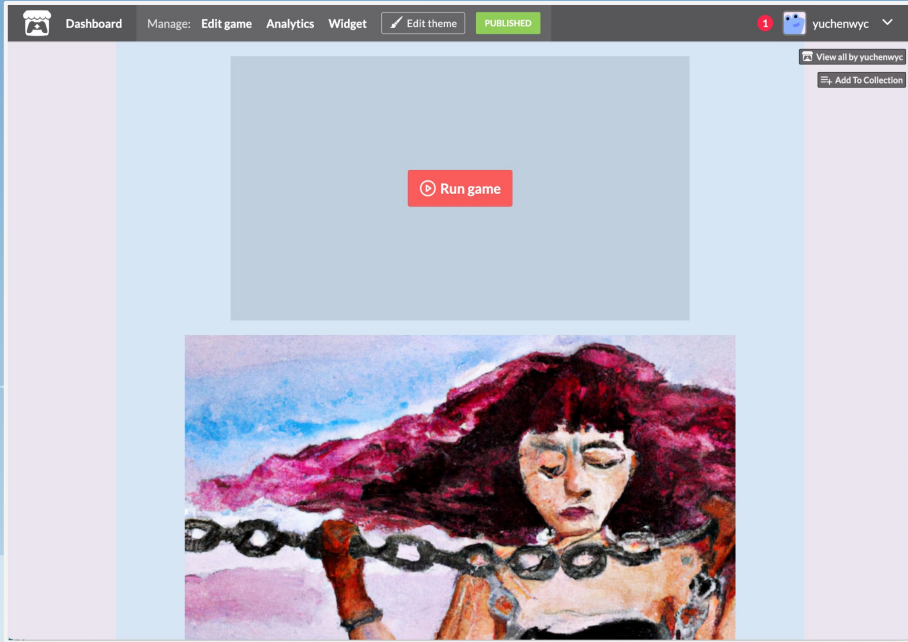


BARRIER OR BRIDGE?

A JOURNEY OF STRUGGLES AND HOPE

AGE 10+
🕒 30 min

Packaging



I added the cover art, the premise, and a disclaimer (for the use of image generation AI) to the launching page, and I edited the background colors to match what are on the cover. These will be served as the packaging of my game.

The background features a light blue gradient with stylized, darker blue waves at the top. Several dark blue silhouettes of birds are scattered across the scene, appearing to fly over the waves. The overall aesthetic is clean and modern.

03 Iterations

Changes

Before the first playtest, I have revised $\frac{1}{3}$ of the story by

- Adding illustrations to the passages (credit to OpenAI's DALLE-2)
- Adding mental activities of the character
- Adding references to statistics

See the next page for screenshots of the version after these changes.



As you sink deeper into the comfortable cushions of your dorm room chair, you look around your cluttered dorm room. With piles of books and papers scattered haphazardly around you, you feel a deep sense of longing.

You've always had a natural talent for crafting captivating stories and characters, and the thought of sharing your creations with the world brings an indescribable excitement to your heart. Your dream is to become a Hollywood movie writer since you were six years old, because developing compelling characters and storylines that can captivate audiences worldwide is so cool.

There are so much things for you to learn! In the past year alone, you've devoured an impressive 237 books, exploring different genres of fiction, poetry, and scripts, constantly seeking new inspiration and ideas to fuel your passion.

Next

Despite your excitement about pursuing a career in the film industry, it seems very difficult because the longstanding misogyny and gender inequality continue to plague the field.

The statistics are staggering. According to a *Celluloid Ceiling* report from San Diego State University, 88 percent of the top 250 films of 2017 had no female directors. And it's not just directors who are underrepresented - 83 percent of those films had no female writers, and a staggering 96 percent had no female cinematographers. Earlier versions of the survey found that more than 90 percent of major studio films have no female assistants on set, including gaffers, key grips, or supervising sound editors.

Feeling frustrated and disheartened, you begin to question whether it is worth pursuing a career in Hollywood at such a young age. The idea of entering an industry that has such blatant and systemic gender inequality seems daunting, and you wonder if there are other career paths that would allow you to make a difference in the world and give your identity a stronger voice and representation.

The room around you is dimly lit, with only the soft glow of your laptop screen illuminating the space. With uncertainty and hesitation, you are unsure of where to turn next.

Research the career path of a software engineer

Next

* * *

Reference

<https://www.theatlantic.com/business/archive/2018/01/the-brutal-math-of-gender-inequality-in-hollywood/550232/>

Playtest 1 - March 14th

Feedback from Charlotte Feng

Pros

1. The illustrations, together with the Twine format, make it feel so consistent and give me an experience like reading a book.
2. The story is polished. It might encourage young girls to pursue their dreams.

Cons

- Some paragraphs are kind of abrupt and lack transition.
 - How did Aria get her software engineering internship?
 - If Aria ends up in SWE, what about her narrative game?
 - Aria seems like a top performer in everything, and it is too easy for her to achieve anything she wants. Maybe show more of her struggle/ difficulty along the way.
- Maybe announce attribute change early in the introduction, giving the player a better expectation. Also, consider whether to show the attribute change explicitly.
- Stereotypes are powerful for changing one's mindset. The player wonders if Aria had self-doubt when the teachers told her that STEM is not for girls.
- Conversations with NPCs are long, and the player didn't want to read them. Breaking them into shorter ones might be helpful.

Reflection & Changes

- I totally agree with the player that many paragraphs lack transition from one to another. To address this, I added more details and transitions to all these places so the story is more polished.
- The player wants to see more of the protagonist's self-doubt in the face of the adversity. I adopted the suggestion (see the right) because I think that would help rooting the character more.
- I cutted the conversations with the mentors in the story, or splitting long scripts into multiple passages. Hopefully this helps with the readability.

It was hard enough for a teenager to figure out where their passion lies and what they want. These stereotyped and experiences, which suggested you to question your intelligence just because of your gender, was just too heavy for one aged fifteen.

You asked yourself,

Am I really that bad? If not, why would they say those mean words?

Do I belong here? If not, where is my outlet?

...

Painfully, you felt invisible chains blocking your wings, preventing you from reaching higher and further.

Facing misogyny in high school STEM classes, this is what Aria would think.

- To help players understand the game better, I included the attribute change mechanism in the introduction page. To encourage people to replay the game, in each ending I included the conditions of achieving that ending.

HOW TO PLAY

The game is adapted from a true story of a good friend of mine.

In this interactive fiction, most of the choices are meaningful. They will change values of different attributes, which leads you to different endings. You also have a motto at the end that depends on who you choose to interact with. Along the journey, what skills did you learn, what people did you meet, and how will they lead you to different endings?

Recommended Age: 10+

Estimated reading time: 30 minutes

* * *

[Start Playing](#)

The introduction after after revision

ENDING II - EXPERTISE



Programming Skill ≥ 30 , Courage < 25

You deploy your narrative game onto Steam, and continue extending it.

Conditions for achieving each ending are displayed explicitly to encourage replays.

Playtest 2 - March 16th

Feedback from Lucy Lu

Pros

- The player thinks that the story is very reflective to what she experienced in high school and realistic.
- The players likes the illustrations.

Cons

- The ending make the gender inequality look like personal struggles (that can be overcome) but did not mention that the bias in environment is always going to exist. Blind positivity does more harm than good.
- Include family and friends in the decision making process (supportive?)

Other Feedback

- When playing games, people tend to take higher risk than in the real world and choose an option that seems more “right” to them.
- To strongly resonate with the story, a player would need to be dedicated and knows clearly what they want to do in their lives. But this is often not the case (for the player). However, on the flip side, the story shows that even a woman this good still faces sexism and microaggressions, which makes sense.

Reflection & Changes

- I agree with the player that it makes more sense not to give good endings that seem to result purely from the protagonist's personal efforts. To address this, I tried my best to expand the endings to project that protagonist will continue to face gender bias but she decides to join the community and contribute to making a difference. (see the bottom right)
- While including family and friends into this story is an attractive suggestion, it is difficult given the time constraint. I also want to keep the story concise, and deliver the message by depicting three major scenes (with high school teachers, university peers, and a senior role model separately) was my deliberate choice.

Sure, you will inevitably face more of misogyny and bias in the future as a reality, and it sucks. Luckily, you have discovered female communities supporting each other, forming a powerful voice to be heard, and trying to get a seat at the table. You will unhesitantly join the wave, building bridges for peers and younger girls.

You keep these words in mind: "Don't be afraid to be yourself and tell the stories that matter to you. It's the uniqueness of our experiences that make for the best stories."

04 Learnings



Learnings

- Playtesting improved the storytelling
 - I learned that every game reflects the developer's unique perspectives and values. This interactive fiction is like my child, with my genes and identities deeply embedded. However, since a game has a broader target audience than the developer, getting feedback through playtesting is essential for understanding what the potential players (in my case, young people aged 10-25) expect and what values they can resonate with. I could not identify the flaws in my narrative and message delivering as easily without a second pair of eyes, and every playtest made my story significantly more complete and rooted.
- Visual components are crucial
 - Besides, I learned the essence of the visual components of the game, as they can significantly impact the player's experience and enjoyment of the game. Once I added illustrations to my IF chapters, it felt like I had set a tone and atmosphere through the color and depiction of the pictures (e.g., what I think the protagonist looks like, and the use of clouds and chains as metaphors). My playtesters all loved how the illustrations helped them with immersion and communicated essential emotions such as depression in adversity and excitement about the future.

**THANKS FOR
READING :)**

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