

Ala Ebrahimi

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Research Interest

- Game design methods
- Documentary and autobiographical games
- Representation of marginalized groups
- Empathy and player experience

Education

PhD in Interdisciplinary Design and Media

Northeastern University, Boston, MA

- Expected: May 2027
- Advisor: Dr. Bob De Schutter

MSc. Game Science and Design

Northeastern University, Boston, MA

- September 2016 – May 2018

BSc. Software Engineering

Islamic Azad University, Alborz, Iran

- June 2013

Project

Catch the Butterfly – Unity, 2D Game

- Designed a game based on the lived experiences of immigrants using interview data
- Integrated metaphorical mechanics to evoke empathy

Publication

ASSESSING EMPATHY ACROSS GAME FIDELITY LEVELS: A CASE STUDY OF 3D AND TEXT-BASED VERSIONS OF BRUKEL – DiGRA 2025

This paper investigates how different levels of game fidelity influence players' empathy by comparing a 3D version of Brukel with a text-based demake. The goal of this paper is to examine whether lower-fidelity formats can evoke similar empathetic responses, offering insights for designers interested in creating impactful experiences with accessible tools.

HIDDEN HEROES: A THEMATIC ANALYSIS OF A GAME JAM DESIGNED AROUND AUTHENTIC STORIES – FDG 2024

Hidden Heroes was a game jam that allowed developers to create games that share the untold personal stories of their heroes. This paper explores the experiences of these developers throughout the game jam to provide insight for future game jam organizers and developers who are interested in designing personal narrative games.

CATCH THE BUTTERFLY: USING GAMINISCING TO DESIGN A SERIOUS GAME ABOUT IMMIGRANTS – IEEE CoG 2023

This paper explores the use of gaminiscing method in the design process of the Game, Catch the Butterfly. The aim of this paper is to offer insights for game designers who are interested in applying this method to develop personal narrative games.

CATCH THE BUTTERFLY: A GAMINISCING GAME ABOUT IMMIGRATION – IEEE CoG 2023

This demo paper explains the design process of Catch the Butterfly using the gaminiscing method. The goal of this paper is to provide a perspective to game designers who are interested in designing personal narrative games.

CARDISTRY: EXPLORING A GPT MODEL WORKFLOW AS AN ADAPTED METHOD OF GAMINISCING – FDG 2024

Cardistry is an application that allows players to share their personal stories and get an AI-generated card designed based on their personal story. This paper explores the use of GPT models in application that use gaminiscing as their design method.

BRUKEL VS BRUKEL: IMPACT OF GAME FIDELITY ON PLAYER EXPERIENCE IN GAMINISCING GAMES – IEEE CoG 2023

This paper examines the impact of game fidelity on player experience by comparing two versions of Brukel developed through the gaminiscing method. The goal of this paper is to understand how differences in fidelity shape players' engagement and experience.

Research Assistant / Teaching Assistant

Northeastern University, Boston, MA

- September 2022 – Present

Research Assistant

- Conducting qualitative research (rhetorical and content analysis) on autobiographical and documentary games, focusing on authenticity, metaphor, and player engagement in lived-experience narratives
- Designing research game prototypes in Unity, including Catch the Butterfly and Cardistry

- Conducting research investigating developers' experiences creating documentary and autobiographical games through oral histories and intergenerational storytelling
- Conducting literature reviews, qualitative coding, interview analysis, and synthesis of research findings using NVivo and thematic analysis methods
- Designing and implementing human-subject studies, including recruitment, semi-structured interviews, IRB-related materials, and qualitative data collection

Teaching Assistant

- Design Perspectives
- Foundation of Game Design
- Public Speaking