

## Project Statement

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For as long as I can remember, my bedroom has been a space that has brought me solace and comfort. It sheltered me from the bullets that riddled my then-war-torn home country and protected me from the violent dystopian realities that I was exposed to in the country that I spent my adolescent years in.

My Unit 1 research surrounded the maladjustment of women in contemporary society, focusing on their exclusion from design processes. With the aims of challenging, dismantling and restructuring the current fabric of society in a way that would promote gender equity and intersectionality, the project worked on raising awareness about the dangers of androcentrism and its effects on every life.

That body of work began with an introduction to the different modes of discrimination and privilege that factor into an individual's everyday life. Whilst some of these factors involve the tangible and corporeal (physical ability, race, height, sex and physical appearance), the other factors are manifested in a non-physical manner (mental ability, class, gender and faith). These factors are far from being mutually exclusive and my practice is particularly interested in their overlap. Regardless, they play an important role in placing an individual within the hierarchal structure that is the patriarchy.

Much like other primates, at their core, humans are tribal (Bazalgette, 2018). They naturally lean towards grouping up with other humans in lieu of navigating through life on their own. In fact, in its worst iterations, loneliness is said have effects on humans' life expectancy (Mann, 2017). That being said, Social Media has become an indispensable tool that's quickly embedded itself in our societal structure. It allows for people to connect with others who might belong to the same tribe, who might share the same *otherness*.

Back to the bedroom. As I grew older, I sought comfort in online spaces and found myself immersed in communities that housed individuals who were like me. These spaces offered me tools that encouraged self-expression and that, ultimately, helped me craft my AFK<sup>1</sup> world. As Russel puts it, 'the production of these selves, the digital skins we develop and don online, help us understand who we are with greater nuance.' (2020, p.31) As a queer, muslim-born, Arab individual who was brought up in a cisheteronormative, sexist, homophobic, and transphobic part of the world, I wish my child-self were exposed to representation, or at the very least, had more friends that understood or shared my otherness. Queering the Map is a project that has continuously inspired me over the years <<https://www.queeringthemap.com>>. It is an interactive and collaborative tool that allows for queer individuals to pin and archive their

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<sup>1</sup> Theorist Nathan Jurgenson advocates for the use of AFK (Away from Keyboard) 'in lieu of IRL as AFK signifies a more continuous progression of the self, one that does not end when a user steps away from the computer but rather moves forward out into society away from the keyboard (Russel, 2020, p.30-31).

stories on a World Map. The project has the capacity to bring people together despite their physical distance and can aid people of queer-unfriendly cities in feeling less alone. According to the Merriam-Webster dictionary, a safe space can be defined as 'a place intended to be free of bias, conflict, criticism, or potentially threatening actions, ideas, or conversations.' I'm interested in seeing how safe spaces manifest themselves in the online realm and how — as Legacy Russel states it in her 2020 book *Glitch Feminism* — the digital can be used as a means of world-building (2020, p.12) that could subsequently restructure the offline world. This project could be deemed a success if it helped even one person feel less alone in going through their hardships or journey to self-acceptance.

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## Bibliography

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