The Corporeal Marker Project (CMP): Teaching About Bodily Difference, Identity and Place Through Experience

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The Corporeal Marker Project (CMP): Teaching About Bodily Difference, Identity and Place Through Experience

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ABSTRACT  In response to recent articles and ideas for experiential learning activities in human geography, this paper outlines a particular approach to learning about the body, difference, mobility and geographic space through experience. The Corporeal Marker Project designed and implemented by the authors provides a spatial experience of difference for students who represent themselves as ‘the other’ by marking their bodies outside accepted ‘norms’ in public and private spaces. The authors include a detailed description of this assignment, two examples of its use at separate campuses and different human geography courses, and reflections on its use and effectiveness.

KEY WORDS: Critical pedagogy, experiential learning, othering, feminist geography

Introduction

In recent years, geographers have identified the body as an important site of inquiry and analysis (Longhurst, 2005) examining bodily differences and corresponding forms of authority, control and resistance in and across geographic spaces. These concepts offer students a new and at times alternative way to understand how spaces are lived, but they are challenging to introduce to those whose primary methods of reasoning remain largely abstract (Healey et al., 2005). In this paper, we offer an experiential learning activity, the Corporeal Markers Project (CMP) to foster understanding of ways in which bodies may be interpreted in public spaces. We incorporate Cresswell’s (1996) insights into transgression, resistance and ideology. We ask students to mark their bodies in a way that provides a temporally limited experience of marginality (broadly defined) in order to help them conceptually understand social ‘otherness’. We argue that this experiential activity provides an important, although at times contentious, forum for teaching human geography and expanding epistemologies of everyday life. Through this and similar activities, we seek to develop pedagogies that encourage students to reflect on the spatial processes at work in one’s experience of ‘othering’ or being ‘othered’.

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We begin our paper with a review of the relevant literature on corporeality within geographic research and on the pedagogical uses of fieldwork and experiential learning activities in the discipline. This is followed by an overview of our implementation of the CMP in different classrooms and campuses, and subsequent analysis and conclusions.

**Literature Review**

**Corporeality and Geographic Space**

Feminist geographers were instrumental in demonstrating how gendered spaces are the site of performance and negotiation of corporeal identity (Rose, 1993; Duncan, 1996; Nast & Kobayashi, 1996; Nast & Pile, 1998; Valentine, 2001; Moss & Dyck, 2003). The body represents a significant site for demonstrating one’s acceptance or rejection of social or political norms (see McCall, 2005). Bodily acts of resistance are frequently situated between competing expectations and representations of identity (Secor, 2002; Silvey, 2005; Sangtin Writers & Nagar, 2006; Gökärkisel & Secor, 2009). Social norms in place reinforce identity through coerced or voluntary performances of what is identified as normal or expected (Odeh, 1993).

The body is positioned as the medium of social control to which an individual may respond by conforming to or resisting hegemonic social narratives through appropriate or inappropriate appearances and behavior, respectively (Foucault, 1995). Bodies that are seen as ‘out of place’ challenge dominant social narratives and are often subject to coercive disciplining. Attempts to coerce individuals through harassment, verbal attacks or physical assaults reinforce an ideological corporeality of a ‘particular kind of body’ that conforms to existing power structures (Grosz, 1997). Critically understanding the social constructions of race and gender as well as the ways in which the distinctions between ‘the biological’ and ‘the social’ are constructed remain important for developing research (and for our pedagogical purposes) methods for ‘seeing’ the embodiment of race and gender (see Kobayashi & Peake, 1994, 2000). Social change movements and struggles for liberation must include a ‘decolonization of the self’ (Wane, 2008) that is often only possible through the creation of spaces for transgression and resistance (Freire, 1973).

**Critical Pedagogy and the ‘Other’**

In order to assist students with tackling the spatial and performative aspects of identities, we sought out various methods of critical pedagogy. Critical pedagogy incorporates a variety of discourses, practices and methods to teach about gender, sexuality and cultural difference (Boal, 1979; Luke & Gore, 1992; Weiner, 1994; Elder, 1999; England, 1999; Knopp, 1999; Shapiro, 1999; Hudak & Kihn, 2001; Oberhauser, 2002; Hooks, 2003). This form of pedagogy critically examines power and the production of knowledge by reorienting the focus of study away from hegemonic narratives (Rose, 1993).

In the late 1990s, geographers identified the lack of strategies for teaching about the ‘other’ and the ensuing challenges associated with subverting privileged subject positions in authentic and effective ways (Kobayashi, 1999; Sanders, 1999). Domosh (1996) called on geographers to engage their students in critical thinking in order to broaden their understandings of race and gender. Monk (2000) underscored the importance of teaching about ‘the other’ to inculcate feelings and ideas of empathy rather than sympathy.
More recently, geographers have responded to these concerns. Howitt’s (2001, p. 164) courses on indigenous rights incorporate an ‘applied peoples’ geography’ that engages students with community groups as a technique for ‘decolonizing geographic imagination’. Other pedagogical methods destabilize students’ preconceived notions about gender and place through classroom activities, community integration and role-play (Dowler, 2002; Oberhauser 2002; Maddrell, 2007). Experiential learning has also been adopted to create opportunities to involve students as critical producers of knowledge (Elwood, 2004; Gallaher, 2004). Nairn’s (2005) critique of field-based experiences that engage students with the other argues that they are highly problematic and potentially reinforce existing beliefs about others or reproduce racist attitudes. Conversely, Hope (2009) recognizes this critique while defending fieldwork and engagement with the other as both a challenging and a valuable pedagogic method in human geography (also see Boyd et al., 2008; Dummer et al., 2008; Hovorka & Wolf, 2009).

The CMP

The CMP provides a unique approach to ‘fieldwork’ and experiential learning. Students create ‘the field’ by presenting themselves as ‘the other’ in their daily spaces of interaction on and off campus. By requiring students to mark their bodies and traverse public spaces in ways that are visibly different from their own perception of ‘normal’, they subsequently embody and perform an experience of being ‘othered’. The activity provides a method for students to experience difference and ‘othering’ in an attempt to challenge and destabilize their current understanding of the ‘norm’. It aims to place students in positions of transgression so that they can experience public space in a way that displaces their ‘normative’ representation of their own corporeal identity. We contend that spaces of marginality are products of interaction and ultimately a relational experience and subsequently we use the CMP to help students to link abstract concepts with a concrete and embodied experience. The success of this project requires: (1) students to represent and perform difference based on their own conceptualizations and definitions of what is ‘the norm’; (2) extensive classroom discussion and debate; (3) for the professor to work with students to address the ethics of adopting certain forms of bodily representation; and (4) incorporation of the course readings with the CMP. Prior to carrying out the CMP, each of us included different texts and articles that discuss the social, political and economic dimensions of corporeal markings and geographic spaces. Fluri, for example, chose texts and articles that discussed the politics of the Muslim veil, while Trauger’s class read materials that discussed intersectionality, the Indian Caste system and the concept of ‘Untouchability’.

It is relatively common for our students to dress ‘differently’ during certain celebrations and campus functions. This assignment provided an opportunity to discuss these practices with our students and engage them in critical reflection about the various ways in which difference is conceptualized as part of such activities. We also addressed the myriad ways in which individuals experience both belonging and marginalization in different social situations on campus.

Open classroom discussions with students prior to their use and implementation of CMP are essential for both the success of the assignment and to ensure student self-reflection and understanding of the ethical issues and concerns associated with how they define the ‘norm’ and seek to represent ‘difference’. These discussions address the choice of a
particular marker, students’ conceptualizations of its meaning, the divergent ways in which it is (or may be) perceived or experienced by non-marked individuals and the complexities associated with multiple and situational forms of knowledge, understanding and meaning. We discuss our respective uses of this activity in the following sections. A detailed description of the CMP assignment is included in Appendix 1. It offers examples of bodily markers that have been used in the United States and elsewhere as forms of ‘othering’ and provides instructions for students to implement the activity as well as questions for reflection on their experiences.

Implementation of CMP

We implemented the CMP on each of the campuses where we teach, Dartmouth College and the University of Georgia. They differ in their student composition and settings. We first report on the experiences at Dartmouth and then those at Georgia.

Example 1. The Dartmouth Experience in Fluri’s Classes

Dartmouth is an undergraduate private liberal arts institution where the student body comprises equally of men and women. Of the domestic students, 66.4 per cent are white and 33.4 per cent are students of color; 9.1 per cent are international students. The campus is located in a small rural town within the northeastern USA and the majority of this town’s residents are white and upper middle class. The areas that surround this ‘college town’ include an overwhelming white racial majority with a significant amount of socioeconomic diversity.

Fluri has used this assignment in a number of different human geography classes which have ranged in size between 25 and 40 students. In one class, a group chose to wear surgical masks with shirts that read, “I am safe”. This group experienced both fear from onlookers who questioned why they wore a surgical mask if they were actually ‘safe’ or questioned what were they safe from. Another group painted their faces blue and wore only blue clothing, and experienced a spatial distancing of (non-blue) students from them when they moved as a group. This group discussed the transition from feeling ‘different’ to comfortable in their marker and at times ‘powerful’ when with their group, versus the feeling isolated and estranged when wearing it outside of their group. Other examples include gender bending (such as male students wearing clothes, nail polish or jewelry that they identified as feminine), and the use of uniforms or banners to mark their bodies.

In one example, students marked their bodies by wearing orange jump suits, black-mesh hoods and handcuffs—(the students included the hoods and handcuffs in order to appear similar to inmates at Guantanamo Bay). Several of them identified this as a visual attempt to illustrate US hegemony, geopolitics and the embodiment of legal exception through the imprisonment of accused 9-11-01 ‘terrorists’ without due process or the writ of habeas corpus. While some students interpreted their markers as a political space none viewed this assignment or their participation as a ‘stunt’. However, they remarked on how representing their bodies both outside the norm and with political implications communicated a variety of different reactions and assumptions from onlookers.

These students’ experiences varied from receiving curious questions from onlookers to being accosted by fellow students, including having their hoods forcibly removed, being yelled at, pushed and touched. Several groups were asked to leave public establishments,
and an anonymous onlooker called the police about students who were entering a public building. A campus staff member also asked one group of marked students if they had “bombs hidden under their jumpsuits”. The class was labeled the “terrorist class” by some students on campus and it became the topic of a parody in the school newspaper.

Representation: Opportunities and Limitations

The majority of students who enacted the ‘jumpsuit’ marker expected that their performance would generate a campus-wide dialog about imprisonment, freedom, accountability, humanity, rights, due process and repression. Instead they received hostile treatment, fear or apathy from onlookers. One student summarized the reactions she received as follows: “We were restrained in handcuffs and disoriented in hoods, yet outsiders still thought we were creating a display of threat” (Student D3). They were surprised that their corporeal markers were also continually associated with men and Islam, rather than with power regimes or imprisonment. This was particularly unexpected by students who assumed their bodies were communicating a ‘clear message’. As the project progressed, students began to refer to their corporeal markers as an expression of their freedoms or rights, particularly when they were asked to leave a public establishment.

After participating in this assignment, the students’ ability to recognize and articulate the complexities and complications of corporeal representations of ‘being Muslim’ in the United States (in a post 9-11-01 political climate) increased exponentially. Additionally, the assignment helped students to discuss their own preconceived notions about head and face coverings and the stereotypical and dichotomous tropes associated with terrorism (hooded man) and oppression (veiled woman).

Within the class, the students’ experiences and learnings also varied based on their own subject positions and on their level of interest in the course materials as they further discussed and debated corporeal difference. The following quotes from two female students in follow-up evaluations exemplify several in and out of class discussions among the students during and after this assignment.

Being an African American woman. I know how it feels to be marked and feel like the ‘other’…one thing I think when I consider the implications of this project’s marker is that when the project is over we will be able to take off the orange jumpsuits, but some of us can’t just ‘step’ out of our marker and must deal with the issues that come from it on a daily basis (Student D1).

I needed this assignment, I am white, I grew up in a white neighborhood, I have never been othered and therefore before doing this, I never understood how my whiteness was a marker of my privilege (Student D2).

In several examples about racial markers this project provided an opportunity for white students (who are in the racial majority on campus) to experience ‘othering’. It is not the intention of this project, however, to privilege the experiences of white students or assume that only or all white students experience privilege and not marginalization. Other issues such as class, religion, politics and sexuality were further discussed as part of this assignment. Students embodied knowledge and observations of ‘the norm’, and ‘difference’ opened up a space for frank discussion about the social and political
manufacturing of accepted or unaccepted bodies. This included conceptual and embodied knowledge about the ways in which individuals are mapped with particular meanings, signs and signifiers in particular places and social and political contexts. We also discussed the ethical aspects of using a marker as a form of ‘othering’ or difference.

Although students’ experiences and markers varied, this project consistently provided them with concrete examples for understanding the social and political constructions of acceptance and difference. Students grew in their sophistication and articulation of what constitutes a ‘normal’ corporeal representation and how this shifts and changes over time and across geographic spaces. The assignment consequently provided pedagogical opportunities for investigating the students’ daily performances and experiences of privileged acceptance ‘in place’.

Example 2: The Georgia Campus and Trauger’s Classes

The University of Georgia is a research-oriented state university in the Southeastern United States. It has a student population of over 34 000 of whom 8700 are graduate students. Sixty-one per cent of the student body is female reflecting the feminization of higher education across the United States: 22 per cent of the enrolled students participate in a fraternity or a sorority. Only 6 per cent of the students come from a foreign country and over half of those are graduate students. Of the domestic students, 78 per cent are white and 17 per cent are students of color. Of this population approximately one-third are Black/African-American and another one-third indicate Asian ethnicity. The vast majority of students come from within the state reflecting the existence of a special scholarship program for state residents. In the town associated with the university, the population is 66 per cent white and 28 per cent African-American revealing the dramatic disparities between town and gown. The town population also has poverty rates exceeding twice the national average, a situation that was the focus of a great deal of student activism.

The students in my class had just finished reading Playing with Fire by the Sangtin Writers and Richa Nagar (2006), during which we focused on the concept of ‘intersectionality’. They expressed disbelief, contempt and outrage at the caste system, and especially at how women marginalized other women on the basis of caste even within an overtly feminist movement. Especially at issue for them was the continued marginalization of scheduled caste women within the Sangtin Writers collective, and the upper-caste women’s struggles to address their own deeply ingrained sense of ‘being in place’ in their community through treating scheduled caste women as subordinates.

One instance in the book, which involved the (self-reflexive) reluctance of upper-caste women to eat the food prepared by lower-caste women, perplexed the students and they earnestly sought an explanation for this tension. While being clear that ‘Untouchability’ is widely viewed as a human rights violation, I attempted to give them some sense of how caste evolved around notions of hygiene as they related to professions, and subsequently to the genetic ‘purity’ within segments of the population.

Comparisons were also made to the American racialized class system, with reference to how the ‘dirtiest’, most menial and lowest paid jobs, including those at their own university, are reserved for the least empowered groups in society, usually minorities and immigrants. The caste system was also contextualized as one that evolved a greater degree of fixity through British imperialism which used the caste system (and communalism) to divide and conquer the Indian nation. The students grasped why certain jobs might be
reserved for certain groups of people (in normative acceptance of US notions of race and class), but they consistently could not understand why people were trapped in their caste.

While there was initially not a clear relationship between the choice of public ‘dirt’ as transgression and ‘Untouchability’, the coincidence of these events created a valuable educational opportunity. Two groups of students went into public space with a conspicuous degree of soil on their bodies and clothing. They went to a variety of public spaces, including a public library, a shopping mall, a local bus and a restaurant. They experienced extremely negative reactions and were by far the most marginalized of all the groups in the class. A male student was asked to leave a shopping mall by a security guard, and presumed that his appearance marked him as homeless. Other students were asked not to touch books in the library or stores, and students on the bus experienced extreme avoidance behavior as people rapidly moved away from them and refused to sit next to them.

Students in other groups chose to wear hijab and others cross-dressed. These groups received stares and some comments, but no questions. All of the ‘dirty’ students were questioned by onlookers (from strangers to police). When they presented their experiences in class, they generated discussion about the ideas and practices of ‘Untouchability’. The experience of marginality in public space helped the students grasp how the ideas of hygiene and social status are constructed in place and space. In particular, they addressed the un-self-reflexive disgust that most people experience when confronted with dirt.

In the case of these two groups, more so than the others, students experienced an intense sense of shame about their presence in public space. Reflections such as those below highlight the sense of shame and discomfort that is associated with being radically ‘out of place’.

I kept wanting to put my head down and not meet the stares of those we saw because I felt like that was the acceptable way to show that I was aware of how I was disrupting space and that I was sorry for it (Student G1).

The students discussed how this sense of shame and discomfort would make it difficult to go about daily life, to even participate in the most mundane rituals of life such as eating in public.

In particular, the way I was treated and stared at by the other diners and waiters in the restaurant was almost unbearable; it was difficult to eat amidst the whispers (Student G2).

The discussion then turned toward the behavior of those who were watching, and most students agreed that they would feel the same way about a stranger who was perceptibly ‘dirty’ in their presence in public. The associations that students (and the general public) have between hygiene and acceptability in public space were made evident by the way they were treated.

While sitting on a bench, a woman came up to me and offered to give me money or to buy me food, however I had to deny the offer. I told the kind woman about this
project and that she helped me with a realization I had yet to experience. The woman was the first person to treat me like a human being (Student G3).

This discussion generated a greater understanding about ‘Untouchability’. Throughout this assignment students were able to tangibly view a ‘dirty body’ as fully human but also ‘out of place’. They could also understand how the sense of ‘rightness’ about cleanliness was difficult to change even with conscious effort. The ideology that cleanliness is the ‘normal’ state of being is enforced and upheld in public space and holds intact a certain social order through avoidance, discrimination and ultimately removal.

The problem of subhuman treatment was discussed by way of their own feelings of shame and a reluctance to provoke people when appearing in public space, and without their fellow group members. They all expressed feelings of comfort among their ‘own kind’, and this provided an opportunity to return to the discussion of the struggles of lower-caste women in the Sangtin Writers to achieve equality, as well as the struggles of upper-caste women to overcome their own internalized prejudices.

Discussing this difference as an embodied experience of shame and disgust provided a profound opening for understanding. Experiencing feelings of discomfort remained a critical first step toward greater awareness of the performance of identity, as illustrated by this student:

My overall experience with this project was of an overwhelming accomplishment. I felt a sense of exhilaration when it was over. I had experienced something that pushed me past my comfort zone, transgressing boundaries of my own social expectations. I now move through space with a stronger awareness of the social dynamics involved (Student G5).

Most students valued this uncomfortable experience, and many experienced new feelings and insights about themselves and others. They also were able to empathize with the isolation of difference without the presence of similar ‘others’ and the desire to be with people like them.

I do feel as though being different by yourself is a lot more awkward than being different with a group of people even though being different does not feel good at all (Student G4).

In general, the students found this experience to be ‘eye-opening’ about normative expectations in public space and the performance of identity.

This exercise was not, however, without debate. One student pointed out that framing this exercise as an experience of ‘othering’ is something of a ‘problematic assertion’ (Student G6). She argued that attempting to “walk in someone else’s shoes probably cannot tell us what it is like to be really ‘othered’”. Following the objection she raised, the class discussed the limitations of the exercise. For them, the exercise could not teach them about the experience of being an ‘other’ for a lifetime, or how being ‘other’ could result in violence, even from one’s own family. They argued that the experience of feeling ‘out of place’ could not be an accurate facsimile for being marginalized involuntarily.

Upon reflection and from class discussions, the effectiveness of this exercise manifest in a number of ways. The first involves the way in which students discover how they
performed their identities truly through the marking of the body. For the students in this class, body marking is no longer a normalized and taken-for-granted exercise in adornment and fashion. They also discover how normative expectations about place, belonging and identity (as communicated by the appearance of the self) then frame agency (what is allowed and when and how and where), as communicated through looks, stares, questions, verbal abuse, physical removal, etc.

The students also realized how they are complicit in the construction and reinforcement of social norms, and how this is a barrier for creating solidarity across difference. Conclusions from these two realizations can then lead them toward understanding how normalized assumptions about cultural differences, i.e. race, gender, ethnicity, etc. can create social expectations in space and place that are exceedingly uncomfortable to resist or transgress, both for the transgressor and for those around him or her. This was a key insight for students who understood how creating solidarity across difference requires undoing their own individual ideologies about social norms in public space.

Summary and Conclusions

This performative and experiential activity provides a significant reference point for discussing (in and outside of class) the ways in which bodies are marked socially, culturally and politically. The examples are provided as a way of illustrating both the challenges and opportunities of this assignment and its ability to link abstract with experiential forms of learning. After the implementation of this project both authors found an increase in students’ ability to articulate the ways in which a corporeal marker in a particular place and historical moment may exist as an ordinary or banal extension of the social, political or cultural order; and conversely in another place or time that same marker may be laden with much different social, political and cultural meanings.

Students present themselves to the world in particular ways often without critical reflection about their ‘choice’ of dress. Few understand that the self can be presented to the world in a variety of ways and very often cling to their idea of ‘normal’ as the only normal (Monk, 2000). Their understandings of difference can be highly political, reactionary and defensive. They may also view differences based on their conceptualization of morality and subsequently see ‘the norm’ as innate, given and immutable. Many may be unwilling to view the ‘other’ as just one of many possibilities for human becoming. In consideration of these pedagogic challenges, the CMP does not focus on any one particular dimension of difference, rather this assignment asks students to mark their bodies in a way that is outside their own conceptualization of ‘normal’. Therefore, our students adopted a visibly altered representation of their bodies based on their own particular perceptions and conceptualizations of something ‘outside the norm’. It is also important in implementing the project that students’ choices of a corporeal marking were also presented and discussed prior to implementation in order to address questions, concerns and ethics. These discussions are vital and have in several cases resulted in a group changing its chosen marker.

Differences often intersect (Collins, 2006) in ways that make gender or race alone a meaningless category of identity and marginalization, and this can include differences (such as sexuality or religion) that are not so visible, but yet are tacitly understood to be critical for knowing one’s ‘place’ in the social order. For example, Trauger’s students often questioned whether it was their gender or their dirtiness, their race or their performed sexuality that was creating the tension around their ‘out of place’ appearance in public
space. This questioning created an opportunity to discuss how the identity is performed to comply with multiple regimes of power in different ways and in different places.

Conceptualizing borders and boundaries as demarcated by bodies provides another pedagogical opportunity for students’ experiential learning. For example, students expressed an increased level of understanding and articulation of spatial boundaries and borders associated with or created by certain corporeal representations, meanings, signs and signifiers. CMP offers students an opportunity to practice spatial epistemologies of difference and experience them on their bodies and through their movements in public space.

We strongly believe that this form of experiential learning is most successful when accompanied with texts, articles and discussion about corporeal markers and their meanings—at different times and in various places—and in consideration of markers that can be removed (i.e. dress) versus permanent or less easily altered markers (i.e. race and gender). The project helps to open up a pedagogical space from which to engage students in critical self-reflection of their own preconceived notions of places and people. As some scholars have noted, student knowledge of people and places outside their experiences is often defined as ‘those people over there’ and these attitudes subsequently present an important challenge for geography classrooms (Unger, 1996; Dowler, 2002). This project continually seeks to encourage students to engage in experiential learning about the ways in which privilege and normality are also marked onto the body. The seeming invisibility of racial, social or class privilege (or majority status) becomes visible to students and opens up a space for critical self-reflection and discussion.

A prime objective of the CMP includes generating geographic knowledge about and across difference through critical self-reflection. Participation in the exercise is as much about process as it is about pedagogical progress. Students’ understanding of socially mediated identities and belonging in space and place remains a crucial step in this process. Another step engages students in experiential knowledge about the social (or political) construction of difference and how this contributes to marginality. Through this understanding they can see how difference is not innate, and that the differences that divide groups are often arbitrary, mutable and powerful tools for gaining and maintaining power or privilege. Ethical issues, discussions and debates about this project and various forms of bodily markers must be included prior to, during, and after the implementation of CMP. Thus, it is imperative to allow time for continual discussion about this project while the students are actively engaged in the exercise as well as after its completion.

The embodied feeling of marginality, while not the totality of the experience, allows students to forge a visceral bond with those who are different and thus, begin to develop a shared understanding. This project incorporates, but also broadens student understanding of critical methods and methodologies in human geography through discussions and experiences of difference that are placed on or lived through the body. The link between these corporeal differences and geographic space provides students with clear and experiential method for understanding the body as a geographic space and its centrality (or marginality) in place.

References


The body represents and acts as its own geographic space as well as a social, political and economic marker in public (and private) spaces within various societies. Some groups such as the Amish religious sect in the United States, use dress as a method for identifying themselves as part of a specific community and to create a spatial and corporeal boundary between members of their community and the ‘English’ (i.e. individuals outside this community). Governments have also used corporeal markings to categorize particular groups; for example, the marking of Jewish people with a yellow star, and homosexuals with a pink triangle during the Nazi regime in Germany. In this case, body markings were used to identify and categorize certain groups based on government-led controls over bodily life, integrity and mobility. Racialized divisions of geographic space are another example of the corporeal as a political site and social signifier in public space. Conversely, corporeal markings are also used as a method for identifying the accepted or ‘wanted’ citizens in a country or ‘acceptable’ members of a community. Thus, certain groups were spatially marginalized and segregated based on their racialized corporeality. This subsequently illustrates the power (or lack thereof) of certain corporeal identifiers in public space.

The CMP provides a method for you to experience a form of difference marked on your body while traversing public spaces (on and off campus). For this assignment, you will
work in groups. Each group will create a visible and identifiable corporeal marker, which is also clearly identifiable as ‘out of place’ in comparison to what you consider ‘normal’ forms of dress and bodily representation on and off campus. Your corporeal marker must be worn for significant periods of time and include some form of physical mobility in a minimum of 10 different public locations both on and off campus (over the course of two weeks). Your task includes recording your experiences and observations in a journal during this two-week period. Think about how this ‘marker’ changes the way you are treated in different places. Also, attempt to engage the ‘non-marked’ in conversations with you and about your marker. Take time to observe any spatial distancing of individuals from you and other ‘corporeally marked’ classmates.

Corporeal Marker Assessment Requirements

1. As a group choose and create a visible corporeal marker.
2. Bring in a prototype of your corporeal marker to class.
3. Wear this corporeal marker in at least 10 different public places for significant time periods both on and off campus over the course of two weeks.
4. Wear this corporeal marker both individually and with your group. For example, wear the corporeal marker on the way to meet your group or on the way home from being with your ‘marked’ group members. Observe any differences in how you feel and the reactions you receive from others based on your presence in public spaces as a corporeal marked individual and in comparison to when you are with your corporeally marked group. You will be graded based on your individual journals, reflection papers, on the design and implementation of this activity, and responses to the following questions:
   • Explain the ways in which your corporeal marker experience created a spatial boundary?
   • What were the reactions of individuals (who were not marked) to your presence in public spaces on and off campus?
   • Compare and contrast your experiences when you were marked and alone versus marked with your fellow group members?
   • Imagine your corporeal marker as something you either cannot or choose not to change, and one that is considered socially, politically or economically abhorrent in public space. How would you negotiate through public space?
   • Consider the implication of this corporeal marking if it were used to identify you as a member of specific group and subsequently monitor and/or control your mobility in public space.
   • Discuss this assignment in relation to the course materials.