

Understanding Community, Identity, and Space: Adopt a Persona

During this term, we will be exploring and discussing the concepts of **community**, **identity** (within an urban setting), and the way(s) in which individuals and groups relate to the **built environment of the city**.

Each of us relates to the urban environment uniquely. For example, because I am short, I do not sit comfortably on any public seating -- in parks, restaurants, movies, on buses, etc. Also, because I am short, I am not easily noticed when I am in line at a department store, deli, etc. Some years ago, when I lived some distance from a bus stop, I avoided taking the bus late at night. When my children were in strollers, I was often frustrated by the hassle of having to find the one elevator in a public building (or, in some cases, finding out that there was no elevator and having to carry my children in their strollers up the stairs).

Each of us also perceives our own identity and our own sense of community uniquely. **There is no one, "right" sense of community, personal identity, and relationship to urban space. These perceptions of self and space depend on many factors. As we explore these topics over the rest of the term, I'd like you all to think about community, identity, and urban space in two ways:**

1. **As yourself** -- your everyday, real self
2. As someone else, a different person (a "**persona**") who may not perceive and experience community, identity, and space the same way as the real you. To do this, carry out the **Adopt a Persona** exercise, below:

Adopt a Persona

The purpose of this exercise is to give you the opportunity to experience the urban environment, role-playing as someone who is not necessarily like you. You will adopt a persona, assigned to you more or less randomly, and then keep a journal of what it's like "being" that person, getting around town, going to public places, associating with in the urban environment.

The primary goal here is for you to get a sense of what it feels like to be "**out of place in space**." People of color often feel "out of place" in spaces that are dominated by white people. Gay, lesbian, and bisexual people feel "out of place" in predominantly heterosexual settings. Short people feel out of place in public spaces where their feet don't touch the ground. Wheelchair-bound people feel "out of place in space" when the built environment can't accommodate them. Our world is not a one-size-fits-all world, but those who are members of the dominant majority group never really notice how the rest of the world doesn't fit a lot of people. I'm asking you to take on the challenge of trying to perceive/experience the urban physical, social, cultural, and psychological environment as someone other than yourself.

You will be given a "persona challenge" after a month or so of journaling your experiences as your other persona. This will ask you to do something challenging as your persona. You can either actually *do* the assignment (for example, physically go in person to a restaurant) or do the assignment "virtually" -- just imagining the process (e.g., imagining getting around the PSU campus in a wheelchair). You will receive the Persona Challenges on the date indicated on the syllabus.

Instructions

What to Do

1. Adopt a Persona (see below).
2. Read the description of your persona carefully.
3. Keep a journal regarding your experience in the role of your persona, as you experience the urban landscape. Include reflections on how you get around, how the environment accommodates you (or does not), how people react to you. In general, does the urban environment of Portland accommodate diversity enough to make it easy for you to be in this city? Your entries should be frequent, but just a few sentences or a paragraph each. They may be handwritten. Each entry should include the date. You will turn the journal in along with the Persona Challenge exercise.
4. About a month and a half into the term, you will be given a "special assignment" -- a challenge to your persona (for example, you are about to give birth and have to get to the hospital, but there is no one around to take you; you can't drive; you can't afford a taxi; it is pouring down rain: what do you do?)
5. On the date indicated in the syllabus, turn in a one- to two-page double-spaced paper describing your experiences as your personal and how you dealt with your Persona Challenge. Attach your journal to this paper. This entire exercise is worth **100** points.

The Personas:

These personas are based on amalgamations of real people I know. I have not made up any of the characteristics or circumstances. In other words, there are real people who are just like these personas. In fact, you may be one of them!

You are assigned to a persona based on the **first letter of your last name**. You may not choose a persona that seems more "interesting" (after all, in real life, most people don't get to choose to be someone else). However, you may choose another persona if you find the persona you are assigned objectionable to you on any grounds (see note below).

NOTE:

If the persona to which you are assigned is objectionable to you *on any grounds at all*, feel free to choose the Stefani Volinski persona as an alternate

(<http://www.marthabianco.com/Courses/Cities/volinski.html>)

Also, if the persona to which you are assigned seems pretty similar to the "the real you," please choose the Stefani Volinski persona.

If your last name begins with

A-B: your persona is Brittany Williams (<http://www.marthabianco.com/Courses/Cities/brittany.html>)

C-D: your persona is J.P. Hinkhouse (<http://www.marthabianco.com/Courses/Cities/hink.html>)

E-G: your persona is Jiande Ling (<http://www.marthabianco.com/Courses/Cities/jiande.html>)

H-K: your persona is L.N. Smythe (<http://www.marthabianco.com/Courses/Cities/l-n-smythe.html>)

L-M: your persona is Maria Delgado (<http://www.marthabianco.com/Courses/Cities/maria.html>)

N-P: your persona is Melinda Santiago (<http://www.marthabianco.com/Courses/Cities/melinda.html>)

Q-S: your persona is Michael Lawrence (<http://www.marthabianco.com/Courses/Cities/michael.html>)

T-Z: your persona is Miriam Habib (<http://www.marthabianco.com/Courses/Cities/miriam.html>)
