Welcome to our seminar on “Language, Thought, and Identity”! The seminar brings together the sociology of language and the sociology of thinking (cognitive sociology) to gain a better understanding of the way we construct and maintain social identities (“male,” “Muslim,” “adult,” “American,” “conservative,” “Asian,” “gay,” “vegetarian,” “good student,” “Southerner,” “feminist”), and of the role played by the act of “othering” in that process. Drawing on the linguistic concepts “markedness” and “unmarkedness,” we will examine how we come to (a) define what is “normal,” (b) set our mental “defaults,” and (c) establish what we can take for granted. We will draw on various theoretical traditions (symbolic interactionism, social constructionism, social phenomenology, semiotics, structural linguistics, ethnomethodology) to examine the way we construct social identities.

There is one required book for this course: Social Mindscapes by Eviatar Zerubavel (ISBN 0-674-81390-1). It has been ordered through the University’s bookstores (the Douglass one as well as the Barnes & Noble by the train station). All the other required course readings are posted on the course website on sakai.rutgers.edu. Students are expected to read all the required material prior to the class for which it is assigned.

The course’s learning goals are to help you gain (a) an understanding of the way our social environment impacts the way we identify ourselves as well as others; (b) an improved understanding of major intellectual debates over essentialism and constructionism; and (c) an ability to communicate complex ideas effectively to a general audience. By the end of the course, students are expected to be able to articulate sociological theories, review disciplinary literature, synthesize information and ideas from multiple sources to generate new insights, produce a well-written paper, and present their work orally. In addition, they will also be able to demonstrate multicultural sensitivity as well as global awareness.

The course assignments include (a) a midterm exam on October 8, (b) a 15-page term
paper (due on November 17), and (c) a final exam (on December 17). Each of these assignments will count for one third of your final course grade, and no extra credit will be permitted. Late assignments will be penalized, so make sure that your work is submitted on time. No late papers or make-up exams will be permitted without a valid written excuse such as documentation from your doctor or dean.

Class attendance (including arriving on time and staying until the end of the class period) is required. **Students are expected to attend all classes.** If you expect to miss a class, please use the University absence reporting website [https://sims.rutgers.edu/ssra/](https://sims.rutgers.edu/ssra/) to indicate the date and reason for your absence. **Poor class attendance will affect the grade.**

It is acceptable to use other people’s ideas in your written work as long as you give credit to the original author. You act professionally and ethically when you do this, and it is considered dishonest to pass others’ ideas or words as your own. Such behavior constitutes plagiarism and can result in failure in the class and potentially dismissal from Rutgers. Students are required to follow current Rutgers’ Academic Integrity Policy as indicated in the website [http://academicintegrity.rutgers.edu/files/documents/AI_Policy_9_01_2011.pdf](http://academicintegrity.rutgers.edu/files/documents/AI_Policy_9_01_2011.pdf). For further information on how to avoid plagiarism in your work, see [http://www.libraries.rutgers.edu/rul/lib_instruct/instruct_document.shtml](http://www.libraries.rutgers.edu/rul/lib_instruct/instruct_document.shtml). To give credit to the original author of ideas you present and protect yourself from charges of dishonesty, always cite in your text the sources you used and list all of them in a bibliography at the end of your written assignment.

The Department of Sociology encourages the free exchange of ideas in a safe, supportive, and productive classroom environment. To facilitate such an environment, students and faculty must act with mutual respect and common courtesy. Behavior that distracts students and faculty during class is therefore not acceptable. Such behavior includes cell phone use, surfing the internet, checking email, text messaging, listening to music, reading newspapers, and leaving early without informing your instructor beforehand. If a student engages in disruptive behavior, the instructor, following the University Code of Student Conduct, may direct the student to leave class for the remainder of the class period.

The Rutgers Sociology Department strives to create an environment that supports and affirms diversity in all manifestations, including race, ethnicity, gender, sexual orientation, religion, age, social class, disability status, region/country of origin, and political orientation. We also celebrate diversity of theoretical and methodological perspectives and seek to create an atmosphere of respect and mutual dialogue. We have zero tolerance for violations of these principles.

The best way to reach me is by email. **Please write “Soc 421” in the subject line** so I can recognize your email quickly. Please remember to also **sign your name** in the email.
1. Welcome

         September 1

2. Introduction: Language, Thought, and Identity

         September 3


         September 10


         September 15

Zerubavel, Social Mindscapes, pp. 53-67.

         September 17


3. Markedness and Unmarkedness

September 22


September 24


4. Semiotic Traditions and Conventions

September 29


October 1

Zerubavel, *Social Mindscapes*, pp. 35-52.

October 6


October 8

MIDTERM EXAM
5. The Politics of Normalcy and Deviance

**October 13**


**October 15**


**October 20**


**October 22**


**October 27**

October 29


6. Semiotic Resistance

November 3


November 5


November 10


November 12


November 17

TERM PAPERS DUE


7. Student Presentations

November 19
Student Presentations

November 24
Student Presentations

December 1
Student Presentations

December 3
Student Presentations

December 8
Student Presentations

8. Conclusion
December 10

Conclusion