Welcome to “Language, Thought, and Identity,” a course designed to offer you a better understanding of the way we construct and maintain social identities (“male,” “Muslim,” “adult,” “American,” “conservative,” “Asian,” “gay,” “vegetarian,” “good student,” “Southerner,” “feminist”). Drawing on major sociological and linguistic theoretical traditions, we will examine how we come to (a) define what is “normal,” (b) set our cognitive “defaults,” and (c) establish what we can take for granted.

There is one required book for this course: *Peacocks, Chameleons, Centaurs* by Wayne Brekhus (ISBN 0-226-07292-4). It has been ordered through the University’s bookstores. All the other required course readings are posted on the course website on [sakai.rutgers.edu](http://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 12, (b) a 10-page term paper (due on November 21), and (c) a final exam (on December 15 at 8:00 am). 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 “Language, Thought, and Identity” in the subject line** so I can recognize your email quickly. Please remember to also **sign your name** in the email.
1. Introduction

   September 5

2. Cognition and Identity

   September 7


   September 12


   September 14


   September 19


   September 21


3. Markedness and Unmarkedness
September 26


September 28


October 3


4. Norms, Traditions, and Conventions

October 5


October 10

**October 12**

**MIDTERM EXAM**

**October 17**


### 5. Normality and Deviance

**October 19**


**October 24**


**October 26**

Celia Kitzinger, “‘Speaking as a Heterosexual’: (How) Does Sexuality Matter for Talk-
6. Semiotic Subversion

November 2


Zerubavel, *Hidden in Plain Sight*, pp. 82-85.

November 7


November 9  GUEST LECTURE  (to be announced)

November 14


Zerubavel, Hidden in Plain Sight, pp. 27-30.

November 16


Zerubavel, Hidden in Plain Sight, pp. 85-89.

November 21

TERM PAPERS DUE


November 28


7. Methodological Reflections

November 30
8. Student Presentations

December 5
Student Presentations

December 7
Student Presentations

9. Conclusion

December 12