

SOC 111a
Cognitive Sociology
SUMMER 2026

M/T/Th, 11:10 am – 1:40 pm

Prof. Chandler Rosenberger
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Rabb Graduate Center, room 366
Office Hours: Wed. 10 am-12 noon

Sociology is the study of societies, but what are societies made of? The institutions that we think of when we think of a society – the families, religious groups, farms, armies, etc – are not features of the earth's landscape. They may meet deep human needs but their specific form is not encoded in our biology – otherwise, we would never find such a great variety across a species whose members share a profoundly similar DNA. If these features of society are not geological or biological, where do they exist?

The answer, of course, is that they are creations of the human mind and are sustained by the beliefs of a society's members. Institutions will often have a profound physical presence: the third century Temple of Portunus, for example, still stands in Rome. The society that worshiped the god of keys, doors, cattle, and ports is, however, gone – not because its temples disappeared, but because the people living in their midst largely abandoned their old beliefs.

Societies live and die in the concepts that their members share. In the age of social media many concepts are reinforced by citizens' constant interaction with memes they generate. Conversations, whether in person or online, integrate people into networks of ideas. They also allows people to satisfy one of the brain's most powerful impulses: to maintain a sense of equilibrium and connection with the world around them.

This class examines how societies are formed in human minds and the consequences of depending on mental constructs for our social order. If our societies are in our minds, the health of our social life depends on the impressions and ideas we take for granted.

Success in this four-credit course is based on the expectation that students will contribute at least 9 hours of study time per week in preparation for class.

Learning Goals

By the end of the class students should be able to:

- Understand more about the relationship between the wiring of the brain and the formation of concepts in the mind;
- Discern how socially constructed concepts can affect perception, particularly its role in implicit bias.

- Design a brief experiment to identify socially constructed patterns of perception.

This course will fulfill the **Writing Intensive requirement**. It incorporates assignments designed to help students learn to write sociology texts effectively. Students will write weekly in-class essays but also a final research paper.

Evaluation and critical dates:

Grades will be determined as follows:

- Weekly reading quizzes; **30 percent**
- Experiment design and implementation: **30 percent**
- Final research paper (6-8 pages): **30 percent.**
- Class attendance and participation: **10 percent.**

In preparing their work, students are required to consult the writing instruction offered by the Writing Program's web site, especially the guidelines on academic writing for the social sciences. Please see:

<https://www.brandeis.edu/writing-program/resources/students/index.html>

Course Materials:

The following books will be available for purchase at the bookstore:

Barrett, Lisa Feldman. *Seven-and-a-Half Lessons About the Brain*. Mariner Books (2020). (ISBN-13: 978-0358157144).

Kahneman, Daniel. *Thinking, Fast and Slow*. (FSG, 2011). (ISBN-13: 978-0-374-27563-1).

Other materials will be available on Moodle.

Communications:

Students can write to me at crosen@brandeis.edu and should expect prompt replies to emails regarding administrative matters of the course, e.g. whether an extension might be granted. Students should not plan to engage in long discussions of course material over e-mail, but should instead save such questions for class or office hours.

I will communicate to the class as a whole via the messaging service on Moodle. These messages will be transmitted as e-mail.

Academic Integrity:

You are expected to be honest in all of your academic work. Please consult Brandeis

University Rights and Responsibilities for all policies and procedures related to academic integrity. Students may be required to submit work to TurnItIn.com software to verify originality. Allegations of alleged academic dishonesty will be forwarded to the Director of Academic Integrity. Sanctions for academic dishonesty can include failing grades and/or suspension from the university. Citation and research assistance can be found at LTS - Library guides.

Accommodations:

Brandeis seeks to create a learning environment that is welcoming and inclusive of all students, and I want to support you in your learning. If you think you may require disability accommodations, you will need to work with Student Accessibility Support (SAS). You can contact them at 781-736-3470, email them at access@brandeis.edu, or visit the [Student Accessibility Support home page](#). If you already have an accommodation letter from SAS, please provide me with a copy as soon as you can so that I can ensure effective implementation of accommodations for this class.

AI

You are expected to do your own work. Using an AI-content generator such as Chat GPT to complete an assignment violates academic integrity.

Week One: June 1 – 4: Introduction to the Brain

Barrett, Lisa Feldman. *Seven-and-a-Half Lessons About the Brain*. Ch. 1-4.

Barrett, Lisa Feldman. *Seven-and-a-Half Lessons About the Brain*. Ch. 5-8

Liah Greenfeld, “Premises” and “The Mind as an Emergent Phenomenon,” in *Mind, Modernity, and Madness: The Impact of Culture on Human Experience*. (Harvard, 2013).

Thursday in-class essay.

Week Two: June 8 – 11: Ways of Thinking

Kahneman, Daniel. *Thinking, Fast and Slow*. Intro and Part I: Two Systems. Ch. 1-9 (pp. 3-108).

Kahneman, Daniel. *Thinking, Fast and Slow*. Part II: Heuristics and Biases. Ch. 10-14 (pp. 109-198).

Workshop on planning social science research

Earl Babbie, *The Basics of Social Research*. 7th edition. Cengage Learning, 2016. (ISBN: 978-1305503076). pp 2-8, 12-20, 233-7.

Booth, 2008, *The Craft of Research*, Chapter Three.

Thursday in-class essay.

Week Three: June 15 – 18: Culture and the Social Self (and research methods workshops)

Brekhus, Wayne. *Culture and Cognition*. (Polity, 2015). Ch. 3. “Meaning-Making, Metaphor, Frames of Meaning.” (pp. 88-110).

George Lakoff and Mark Johnson, *Metaphors We Live By* (Chicago: Univ. of Chicago Press, 1980). Selections.

Brekhus, Wayne. *Culture and Cognition*. (Polity, 2015). Ch. 4. “Identity Construction.” (Pp. 111-146)

DiMaggio, Paul. 2010. Culture and Social Psychology: Converging Perspectives. (With Hazel Markus.) *Social Psychology Quarterly*. (2010).

Burns, T. R., & Engdahl, E. (1998). The social construction of consciousness. Part 1: Collective Consciousness and its Socio-cultural Foundations. *Journal of Consciousness Studies*, 5(1), 67-85.

Submit research question and research design (1-2 pages).

Week Four: Historical Narratives and Social Cohesion: June 22 - 25

Jerome Bruner, “The Narrative Construction of Reality.” *Critical Inquiry* 18 (Autumn, 1991). pp. 1-21.

Jerome Bruner, “Self Making and World Making.” *The Journal of Aesthetic Education, Spring, 1991, Vol. 25, No. 1, Special Issue: More Ways of Worldmaking (Spring, 1991), pp. 67-78*

Brekhus, Wayne. *Culture and Cognition*. (Polity, 2015). Ch. 5. “Memory and Time” and Conclusion (pp. 147-193).

Jerome Bruner, “Life as Narrative,” *Social Research*, SPRING 1987, Vol. 54, No. 1, Reflections on the Self (SPRING 1987), pp. 11-32

Steven J. Heine, “Self as Cultural Product: An Examination of East Asian and North American Selves,” *Journal of Personality*, Volume 69, Issue 6 p. 881-905.

Thursday in-class essay.

Week Five: Culture and Social Perception: June 29 – July 2

Takahiko Masuda and Richard E. Nisbett, “Attending Holistically versus Analytically: Comparing the Context Sensitivity of Japanese and Americans,” *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology* 81 (2001): 922-34.

Gish Jen, *The Girl at the Baggage Claim: Explaining the East-West Culture Gap*. (Vintage, 2018). Selections.

John Sonnett, Kirk A. Johnson and Mark K. Dolan. “Priming Implicit Racism in Television News: Visual and Verbal Limitations on Diversity.” *Sociological Forum*. Vol. 30, No. 2 (JUNE 2015), pp. 328-347

Ngo, H. (2016). “Racist habits: A phenomenological analysis of racism and the habitual body.” *Philosophy & Social Criticism*, 42(9), 847–872.

During Week: Present Research Results

Write-up of results due on July 2.