

Goff, Phillip, Claude Steele, and Paul Davies. 2008. "The Space Between Us: Stereotype Threat and Distance in Interracial Contexts." *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology* 94:91-107.

PRIMARY ARGUMENT: The authors argue that the fear of appearing prejudiced might lead to racial distancing and deter white people from seeking out interactions with Black people.

IMPORTANT DEFINED CONCEPTS:

- Stereotype Threat: individuals feel at risk of confirming negative stereotypes about their social group, which can lead to anxiety, self-doubt, and underperformance in relevant tasks.
- Social Distance: perceived psychological or emotional distance between individuals or groups based on their social or cultural differences.
- Stereotype Activation: a methodological approach where students are implicitly "primed" to think about stereotypes of their group by picking white-stereotypical words ("bigoted", "slavery") from a list that also included alternatives ("bearded", "society") to complete a supposedly innocuous word-stem completion task (e.g., "b ___ ed", "s ___ y").

PRIMARY FINDINGS:

1. Under conditions of stereotype threat, White participants distance themselves from Black partners. This distancing behavior is correlated with the activation of a "White racist" stereotype.
2. White people's interracial distancing behavior is not explained by (i.e., correlated with) explicit or implicit prejudice. Instead, interethnic anxiety was predictive of distancing behavior between White participants and their Black partners.
3. If White people think of interactions with Black people as opportunities to learn something, they may be less affected by the fear of living up to a racist stereotype and pursue such interactions
4. In the study that looked at one-on-one interactions with actual partners, participants revealed that they could (consciously) access their subjective experiences of stereotype threat in ways that reduced the impact of threat on social distance.

KEY QUOTE: "A stereotype threat approach to interracial contact does not locate racial problems in the 'hearts and minds' of prejudiced agents. Rather, it suggests that certain features of an interracial context can create identity threats that lead to distancing." (105)

QUESTIONS: Could this experiment be replicated with different race combinations? Would the results be similar or do other races not feel the need to "not look racist"? Do Black people distance themselves from White people like this? For example, in the reverse, do Black people have stereotypes about White people that would them nervous and then create physical distance in a conversation about "white privilege"?