

# White liberals dumb themselves down when they speak to black people, a new study contends

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You have recently joined a book club.

Before each meeting, one member of the literary collective sends an email to the club secretary offering a few thoughts on the assigned text. This month, it's your turn to compose the brief review.

A new study suggests that the words you use may depend on whether the club secretary's name is Emily ("a stereotypically White name," as the study says) or Lakisha ("a stereotypically Black name"). If you're a white liberal writing to Emily, you might use words like "melancholy" or "euphoric" to describe the mood of the book, whereas you might trade these terms out for the simpler "sad" or "happy" if you're corresponding with Lakisha.

But if you're a white conservative, your diction won't depend on the presumed race of your interlocutor.

This racial and political disparity is among the discoveries made by a pair of social psychologists in a paper forthcoming in the *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, a peer-reviewed scientific journal published by the American Psychological Association. [Cydney Dupree](#), an assistant professor of organizational behavior at the Yale School of Management, and [Susan Fiske](#), a professor of psychology and public affairs at Princeton, documented what they call a "competence downshift" exhibited by white liberals in interactions with racial minorities, and with black people in particular.