

Researchers show that white people react in surprising ways to body language

# Whites' secret fear — other whites

TANYA FARRER

WE'VE seen it in the movies and in neighbourhood watch groups on social media: white people reacting in fear to the "bravo male", or black man.

But now a ground-breaking study has shown that white people's brains light up with early-warning activity far more in response to angry white body language than to angry black body language.

Maastricht University researcher Beatrice de Gelder, who is also an affiliate of the University of Cape Town, said: "Up until now, people have exclusively used faces to investigate how people from different races perceive each other."

"The trend was to conclude that 'white people react more with fear to black faces than to other white faces'."

The new study, which used photographs as stimuli and brain scans to assess responses, provided "the first clear evidence" that race has a great influence over how we read body language.

"Many characteristics of a person can already be seen from a distance when we do not yet clearly see the face of the other person," said de Gelder.

She said studies into body language were "essential" when looking at automatic racial reactions.

Researchers also showed their white subjects pictures of black people signalling happiness with their body language — and found that "black joy" had a stronger positive impact on them than "white joy".

Consciously or not, people "read" cues from other people's faces and bodies — and race

plays a big part in this. The crude face of racialisation is the likes of Penny Sparrow making derogatory remarks about black people on beaches, or Liam Lacey expressing happiness at the death of rugby icon Joss van der Westhuizen, because he was white.

But the spectrum is broad and includes the subtle act of "checking people out" when you walk past them.

Liton Chitepo, a Zimbabwean living in a predominantly white pocket of Wynberg, Cape Town, said: "I have had one or two times where the police

**I am strongly against racial profiling. But you have to go on a primal response**

stopped me. That might be a foreign national thing. But what happens the most is the way people respond in silence. They kind of scan me with their eyes, as if they are trying to work out my role in this area."

Chitepo said this was amusing, up to a point. "It also gets tiring. Once someone actually followed me with their car to see if I was going to enter a house or not. When they saw I had the key to the house, they drove off."

Julia de Lange\*, who lives in the US after growing up in South Africa, was attacked by a man when she was in her early 20s.

"The crazy thing is that I read the guy's body language before he attacked me. Every part of my body sent a signal to my brain that I wasn't safe."

"But then I second-guessed

myself. I told myself I was being a racist and I mustn't run away. So, I ignored my gut instinct."

"To this day, I am strongly against racial profiling. But danger is danger and body language is body language. You have to strip away the racial stuff you've grown up with and just go on a primal response to any situation."

Despite the extreme and subtle racialisation of everyday life, the Institute of Race Relations released a survey this week which found that most South Africans report that they do not experience blatant racism in

their day-to-day interactions. "We simply asked, 'If you do notice racism in your daily life, in what ways do you notice it?'"

The answers are striking, for 72% of respondents said they experienced no such racism at all. The proportions of blacks (71%) and whites (74%) who gave this answer were roughly the same," said the report.

IRE media head Mienie Mari Steytler said: "Despite the damaging vitriol so often found on social media, race relations in South Africa remain sound."

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BODY POLITIC: Researchers have found that body language, and not just faces, affect people's perceptions of one another across races

Picture: iSTOCK



REALITY CHECK: The Facebook page with graphic images

## Ex-cop snubs racist 'save whites' page

MATTHEW SAVIDES

THE pictures are brutal. Bleeding faces, open wounds, pained expressions on victims' faces — each one white.

This is the trend on right-wing Facebook pages. They claim that there is a genocide of white South Africans, who are disproportionately affected by crime. Any assertion that the pages are racist will be countered with a backlash from the pages' founders.

Jack Haskins, retired head of the police's search and rescue unit in Pietermaritzburg, does not agree.

He asked to be removed from one such page, "Save the white people of South Africa", after graphic photos were posted.

"I do not want this on my Facebook," he said. "Crime affects everybody. I've seen it myself."

The South African Human Rights Commission expects the debate over whether the groups fall under freedom of expression to form part of a racism and social media conference tentatively scheduled for next week.

"We cannot predict what submissions we will receive.

However, the issue of racism and hate speech online is a global phenomenon, which is exercising the minds of many ... so no doubt it will form part of the discussion," said spokesperson Gail Smith.

She said these Facebook pages could not automatically be regarded as racist.

"Section 16 of the constitution provides for freedom of expression, but does not extend to hate speech."

"No people can say what they want, provided it is not hateful, hurtful or an incitement. Any Facebook page thus needs to be viewed through this lens."

"Pages such as these might be offensive to some sectors of society, but the question that needs to be asked is: does this extend to hate speech?" said Smith.

Ingrid de Jager, founder of the "Save the white people of South Africa" group, which has about 9 000 members, said she was justified in posting what she did — even the most graphic of images.

"My page is not a racist page. It is there to show the world the reality of what is happening to the minority of South Africa."

## In the US, an entire demographic in need of Prozac

TANYA FARRER

If "angry white man" body language is lighting up brains all over with early-warning activity, grid your loins for the next four years: US President Donald Trump is being touted as the quintessential AWM.

In December, former president Bill Clinton raised

Trump's already-inflamed ire when he said: "Donald Trump doesn't know much, but one thing he does know is how to get angry white men to vote for him."

Trump lashed back on Twitter by saying that he didn't call Bill Clinton a racist and that he (Bill) did not know very much.

In November, CO magazine carried a strongly worded editorial which said: "Not only did an army of angry white guys wrest America back from a black man they never considered American, they did it by defeating a woman who would have, undeniably, forced them to compromise on reproductive-health care."

sexual-assault law, and workplace inequality. That's a win-win-win in their book." The Washington Post wrote an editorial saying that Trump's chief advisers had one thing in common: they were all angry white men.

Trump supporters have responded to the jibes with ... anger.

## Goodwill . . . for now

THE IRR's field survey of public opinion on racial issues shows that only 3% of South Africans see racism as a serious unresolved problem.

Most are "far more concerned" about joblessness (cited by 46%), service delivery (34%), housing (18%), crime (15%) and education (15%).

But, there has been "a heightened political and media focus on racism and colonialism

over the past year". It suggests that ordinary people are increasingly buying into the ANC/EFF ideology that puts the blame for poverty on white privilege; and

For now, however, racial goodwill is still so strong it gives the country major reason for hope. It also provides a strong foundation on which to tackle the key problems."

Tanya Farrer



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