

"Long before it's in the papers"

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## Study: recognition of facial expressions not universal

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Courtesy University of Montreal  
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Caucasians and Asians don't examine faces in the same way, according to new research.

Caroline Blais, a doctoral student in psychology at the University of Montréal, has published two new studies on the subject in the research journals *Current Biology* and *PLoS One*.

Previous studies have shown that people collect information by mostly studying the eyes as well as the mouth of a face. "The problem is that these studies always used Caucasian test subjects," said Blais.

Blais said she had questioned the universality of facial recognitions after studies showed that Asians study faces in an overall fashion, while Caucasians break down faces into distinct parts.

Blais used a camera designed to track eye movements to study 14 Caucasian and 14 Asian participants in her research. The subjects were shown 112 Caucasian and Asian faces and asked whether had seen the face before and to name the dominating trait. The study confirmed that Caucasians study the triangle of the eyes and mouth, while Asians focus on the nose, Blais said.

Caucasian and Asian subjects excelled at recognizing someone of their race, yet both had similar trouble identifying someone of another ethnic group, she added. According to Blais, also reflects the analytical approach of Caucasians and the holistic approach of Asians.

In a second experiment, test subjects had to pinpoint an emotion: surprise, fear, disgust or joy. Asians mostly focused on the eyes and not enough on the mouth, which meant some emotions were wrongly identified, Blais contends. "Asians had particular problems with negative emotions. They confused fear and surprise as well as disgust and anger," said Blais. "This is because they avoided looking at the mouth which provides a lot of information about these emotions."

Cultural or biological causes, Blais said, might explain why humans don't read faces in a universal fashion.