

Smile and the world thinks you're older: Study

May 9 2017



Neutral face. Credit: University of Western Ontario

Turn that frown upside-down? Not if you're keen on looking younger, you shouldn't.

A new study shows that smiling can make you appear to be two years older than if you wear a poker face. And if you reacted to that finding with a look of surprise - well, that expression might just have dropped

years from your visage.

"We associate smiling with positive values and youth," said study co-author Melvyn Goodale, director of the Brain and Mind Institute at Western University. "Think of all the skin-care and toothpaste companies that sell the same idea every day."

But this study—in which researchers flashed images of people with smiling, neutral and surprised expressions—showed the opposite: participants perceived the surprised [faces](#) as the youngest and smiling faces the oldest.

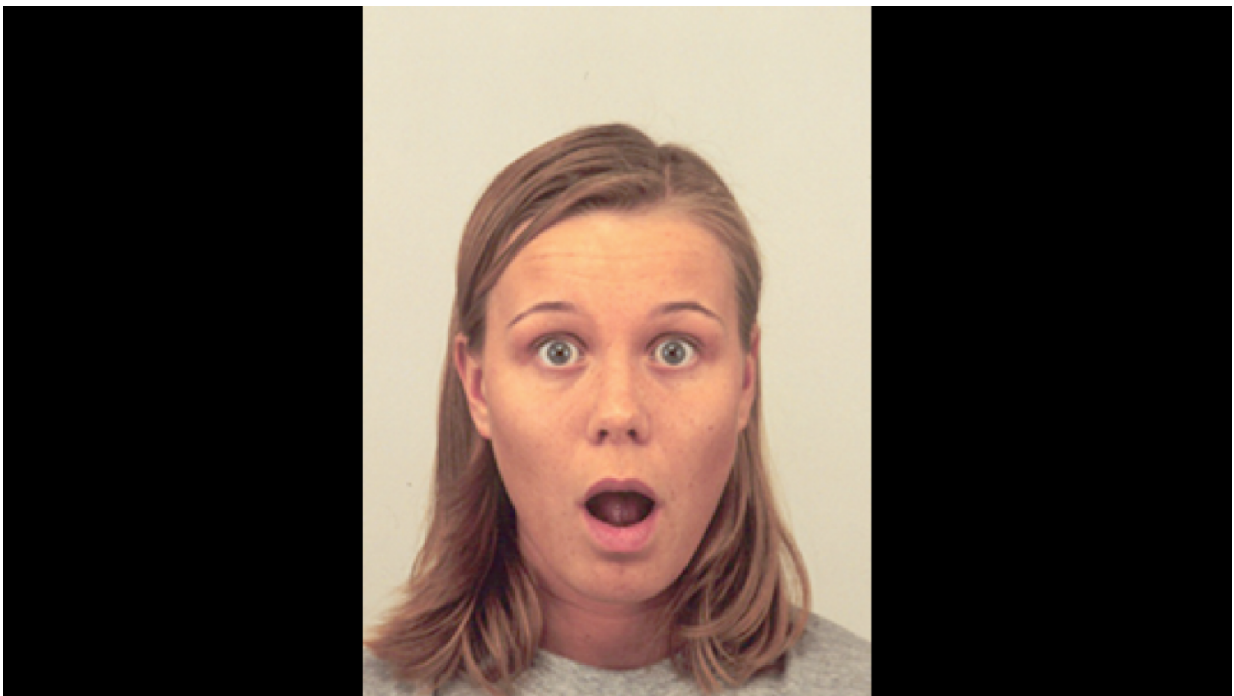
"The striking thing was that when we asked participants afterwards about their perceptions, they erroneously recalled that they had identified smiling faces as the youngest ones," Goodale said. "They were completely blind to the fact they had 'aged' the happy-looking faces. Their perceptions and their beliefs were polar opposites."



Smiling face. Credit: University of Western Ontario

Goodale said the aging effect of a [smile](#) stems from people's inability to ignore the wrinkles that form around the eyes during smiling. A look of surprise, on the other hand, smooths any wrinkles.

"It may seem counter-intuitive, but the study shows that people can sincerely believe one thing and then behave in a completely different way," Goodale said.



Surprised face. Credit: University of Western Ontario

The study, "The effects of smiling on perceived age defy belief" is newly published in the journal *Psychonomic Bulletin and Review*.

More information: Tzvi Ganel et al, The effects of smiling on perceived age defy belief, *Psychonomic Bulletin & Review* (2017). [DOI: 10.3758/s13423-017-1306-8](https://doi.org/10.3758/s13423-017-1306-8)

Provided by University of Western Ontario

Citation: Smile and the world thinks you're older: Study (2017, May 9) retrieved 6 May 2024 from <https://medicalxpress.com/news/2017-05-world-youre-older.html>

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