Many emotions are universal, but some countries have culture-specific perceptions for certain facial expressions. For example, smiling isn’t interpreted as positive everywhere: In India and Indonesia, smiling can make someone seem less honest, according to research by Kuba Krys at the Polish Academy of Sciences. The reason, Krys speculates, is that smiling simply isn’t trustworthy in nations with high levels of corruption. And in countries where the economy or government is unpredictable (such as Russia or Iran), smiling makes you seem less intelligent; People are less likely to smile because they may view their situations as uncertain—at any moment they may not be able to afford food or medicine, so smiling is seen as foolhardy. In other countries, including Germany, the United Kingdom, China, Nigeria, and Brazil, the perception flips: Smiling makes you seem more intelligent.

**Vibes Vary**

Work by Stanford professor Jeanne Tsai has found that in Asian cultures, expressions of excitability, such as a wide and intense smile, can come off as negative, whereas expressions of calm and patience are interpreted as positive. In European and American cultures, the opposite is true. In one 2017 study that looked at interactions between physicians and patients, Asian Americans preferred doctors who were calmer, and they remembered the health information more readily when doctors who were subdued delivered it compared with those who were excitable. In contrast, European Americans rated the enthusiastic and dynamic doctors more highly and retained more information compared with when they interacted with low-key physicians.

**Expressions of anger also differ across cultures. In one 2010 experiment, a rude instructor commented on mistakes students made during a stressful task. European-American students expressed more visible anger at the reprimand than Asian-American students did. Researchers theorize the difference is likely because cultures that prize independence and expressions of uniqueness, such as Western countries, value spontaneous expression more. In Asian cultures, a premium is placed on social harmony, so expression of anger from a single member is inhibited for group cohesion.”