

YASMEENE MONET HENDERSON, GEANNA SAMOL, TERRON CROWDER, IOANNIS BAKODIMOS, DEBRA HULL, JOHN HULL. Psychology Department at Bethany College. What do we hear and say? Trigger words and race

Our research examined words or phrases often found to elicit strong emotional responses about race—known as trigger words—in order to uncover differences in responses to those words in Black and White students. Undergraduate research participants, 22 identifying as Black and 61 as White, individually read 14 words or phrases regarding race and racism, for example: White supremacist, bigot, equality, and Black Lives Matter. Participants evaluated words on four 1-5 scales assessing negative-positive emotional response, comfort in hearing them in a virtual class, in a face-to-face class, and using them in private conversation. Independent samples *t* tests showed that White participants had significantly more positive emotional responses to stop and frisk, White person, and “Make America Great Again!”, and a significantly more negative response to riot than did Black participants. Black participants were significantly less likely than White participants to feel comfortable using White History Month and “Make America Great Again!” in casual conversation. There were no significant differences regarding comfort in hearing any of the terms in a virtual class compared to a face-to-face class. Additional independent samples *t* tests showed that female participants were less likely to feel comfortable using the terms illegal immigrant, White History Month, bigot, and “Make America Great Again!”, and to feel significantly more negative about the term illegal immigrant than male participants. Future research should expand participant groups beyond Black and White, to include Latinx and Asian participants, and expand the pool of race-specific trigger words.