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Personology

What is Personology?

Personology is a form of science, or some may say pseudo-science, that claims the ability to determine individual attributes and characteristics through the observation of certain physical features; some call it a behavioral profiling method, others a form of physiognomy. Similar to phrenology, a known to be pseudo-science, personology determines features through sight, touch and measurements. These features fall into five trait areas: Physical, Automatic Expression, Action, Feeling and Emotion, and Thinking. Among these five trait areas there are 68 behavioral traits. Each trait is placed into a trait area due to its location and relationship with a certain part of the brain. The assessment of these traits yields a behavioral analysis that is unique to each individual.¹ Personologists say that an understanding of a person's behavioral tendencies can help them in their business life and social relationships and help them to break predictable reactions in a given circumstance thereby

¹ Whiteside, Bill. People Reading: Mapping Human Behavior. Bill Whiteside.
<http://www.ireadfaces.com/ovrview7.htm>.

placing the individual more fully in control of their actions.

History of Personology

Edward Vincent Jones, a Los Angeles judge, created the field of personology in the 1930's.² He claimed that he could tell what crimes a victim was being charged with just from watching him/her in his courtroom. After many years of observation and interest in the topic he compiled a list of traits that he eventually attributed to specific human characteristics. "He tried to the best of his ability to disprove these correlations, finally accepting only those which seemed infallible."³

Personologists claim a foundation for personology in physiognomy practices dating throughout world history, especially in Greek and Roman antiquity, with a falling out in the 18th and 19th centuries but coming back in the 20th century with the work of Edward Jones and his following of personologists.⁴

² Carroll, Robert Todd. Personology. The Skeptics Dictionary.
<http://skepdic.com/personology.html>.

³ Physiognomy: Personology (Face Reading). The Personology Foundation of the Pacific.
<http://www.users.totalise.co.uk/~tmd/person.htm>.

⁴ Ibid.

Science or Pseudo-Science?

Is this practice of "Face Reading" founded in scientifically provable data and experiments? There are those that would say it is a form of sympathetic magic (relating like to like) or intuition. Others, like the personologists themselves claim their observations to be the product of true scientific study and free from bias. A major critique of the theory of personology is that it, like many other behavioral sciences like astrology, falls subject to the Forer effect.⁵

The Forer Effect

The Forer effect believes that it is possible to give a behavioral analysis that is so typical of all humans that it is believable by about 84% of the population while still sounding specific to the individual.⁶ The term comes from the study done by psychologist Bertram R. Forer. He gave a personality test to his students, ignored their responses and gave them all the same analysis. He asked them to rate the accuracy of the analysis on a scale of 0 to 5 with 5 being the most accurate and 4 meaning good. The average result was 4.2 showing the analysis was 84% accurate among

⁵ Carroll, Robert Todd. Personology. The Skeptics Dictionary.

<http://skepdic.com/personology.html>.

⁶ Ibid.

college students in a psyche class in 1948.⁷ His conclusion was that many behavioral sciences use language that is meant to be very open to personal interpretation while sounding concrete.

Other Critiques

Some other common critiques are those often found when defining a pathological or pseudo-science. For example, the creator was subject to experimental bias and looked for and paid attention to certain results while conducting the study. Furthermore, once he got "results" he did no further tests to determine that those results were infallible.

Conclusion

There are some studies showing correlations between an individual's facial features and how others perceive their personality. For example, a more feminine face is considered to be more extraverted and friendly. While it is known that women are more attracted to very masculine faces during their menstrual cycle.⁸ This is not to say

⁷ Ibid.

⁸ Face Value: About Face. The BBC online.
<http://www.bbc.co.uk/science/humanbody/mind/articles/emotions/faceperception1.shtml>. (October 30, 2006).

that the features have a direct effect on the one who possesses them, but on those interacting with them and therefore a social influence on the personality of the individual. Features of the human body may tell us things about social relationships and the way one may be perceived but they do not seem to have any provable correlation to individuals' behavioral patterns.