

“Photopsychology”

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Photopsychology, will trace the extensive points of contact between photography and psychology through history leading to a clear understanding of the etiology of current practices based on the use of photography in psychological settings and an appreciation for future prospects.

Photography and psychology emerged together during the middle and late nineteenth century, developed in parallel for decades yet became entwined in mutually influential ways. Like precocious siblings, each matured to become powerful forces shaping contemporary culture. Studying the issues that brought them together in their early years deepens our understanding of the essential elements of each specialty. This presentation is an extension of a very well attended program presented at the 115th APA Annual Convention in San Francisco titled *Photography on the Couch*.

In one of history's remarkable coincidences, photography and psychology burst upon the European scene within close temporal proximity. If 1837 is used as the date origin for photography, because of the technical prowess of L.J.M. Daguerre, then only nineteen years later in 1856, records show that Dr. Hugh Diamond, head physician at Surrey Asylum, England, presented a paper to the Royal Society titled: “On the Application of Photography to the Physiognomic and Mental Phenomena of Insanity.” Since then there have been continual efforts to apply photography to diagnostic and psychotherapeutic purposes in psychiatry and, fortunately, many of those early practices are well documented. Viewing and describing images from several of those little known, nascent projects are central goals of this presentation.

Photography and psychology were drawn together in their formative years by a growing curiosity embedded in the zeitgeist of that era: the relationship between outward appearances and internal mental states. In 1790 Franz Joseph Gall proposed phrenology as a means of measuring personality and intelligence by feeling peoples' heads. Soon thereafter Johann Kasper Lavater outlined the principles of physiognomy; how character and personality are revealed on the face. For different reasons and from different perspectives those notions exerted influence on photography and psychiatry simultaneously. Photographers, for example, reveled in the exactness and accuracy at the essence of their medium. Daguerreotypes completely redefined the art and meaning of portraiture.

Collaboration between art and science was underway in non-photographic fields as well. The painter Géricault, for example, while himself institutionalized in a mental hospital in the 1820s, painted portraits of patients with whom he most likely shared a ward. Those paintings, together with engravings, drawings and sculpture collections were available to physicians who incorporated them in lectures and books they prepared on the subject. For example, such significant historical persons as Alexander Morison and J.E.D. Esquirol, emphasized the relationship between personal appearance and psychopathology using photographs and drawings. Hugh Diamond was a participant in that tradition and this presentation includes his photographs from the Surrey Asylum and a discussion of their purposes as a dramatic starting point.

During the twentieth century psychological influences on photography became pronounced as Freud's descriptions of the nature of our hidden mental lives took Europe by storm. Artists in nearly all media were profoundly affected by these developments and they began to explore ways to objectify private, unconscious states of mind. For photography this trend shows through the emerging respectability of photographs that were less representational and more introspective. A critically important proponent of that new trend was Alfred Stieglitz, who as a leader of the American Photo-Secession movement championed the status of photography as an art form. Attention slowly shifted away from photography's inherent accuracy and exactness to an emphasis on and appreciation of its capacity for personal expression.

The psychological community in the early twentieth century meanwhile, held fast its fascination with photography as an instrument for diagnosis and treatment and as a result, there is an interesting record of images taken in asylums from 1919 to modern times which is available for exposition and analysis. *Photopsychology* features two such sets of images from Germany's Prizhorn collection; one from 1905-14 and the other from 1982. These photographs reveal the attitudinal changes in their makers advancing from scientific curiosity, to institutional management and also modern empathetic revelation.

In modern times there are many examples of clinicians using photography for both diagnosis and treatment. In 1973 R.U. Akeret published *Photoanalysis* explaining how to use family photographs to analyze interpersonal dynamics in families. Other psychotherapists used ambiguous photographs as projective targets to elicit penetrating protocols (Walker Visuals.) Still others use photographic portraits of clients to confront issues of self-image and self-acceptance. Those approaches are called names like Therapeutic Photography and Phototherapy. These and others are described in *Photopsychology*.

In spite of the affinities between them, few psychologists have made picture taking itself the subject of deliberate, systematic study. A curious exception is in a little known publication by social psychologist Stanley Milgram who in 1975 wrote "The Image Freezing Machine" for the *Bulletin of the American Society of Magazine Photographers*. Contemporary photographers on the other hand, generally understand their images to be about things in the world and about the inner world of their makers simultaneously. Understood in this way, every photograph is a type of mirror reflecting the consciousness of the photographer.

Reading Pictures, the concluding topic in this presentation, is a system this presenter has been developing for more than 25 years. It differs from the preceding applications because it uses photographs made personally by the client or subject regardless of content. While there is little debate today on the assertion that personal information finds its way into photographs there is very little work being done to devise workable processes for extracting that imbedded information. *Reading Pictures* is meant to fill a gap in the continuously expanding story of the relationship between psychology and photography.

The General Psychologist, a publication of APA's Division One, featured a related article by this author in the Winter/Spring 2007 edition and another, highlighting the very popular 2007 APA Convention symposium *Photography on the Couch* in the current Fall 2007 edition.