

June etta downey



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A Biography of June Etta Downey South Georgia Technical College August 20, 2010 June Etta Downey (1875-1932), Psychologist. Born on July 13, 1875, in Laramie, Wyoming. June came from a pioneer family that contributed a great deal to the development of the state. Her father, Colonel Stephen W. Downey was one of the first territorial delegates to the United States Congress from Wyoming, and it was largely through his efforts that the University of Wyoming was established. Downey, like many other females pursuing professional careers, had to face many odds in order to achieve her goals.

In early 1900's the image of a professional woman was an unusual sight, particularly in a small place like Laramie. Most professional females were destined to become school teachers if they were not married. Downey avoided marriage in order to continue her higher education and being free to work in the field she always wanted experimental psychology. Downey graduated from the University of Wyoming in 1895. After a year of teaching at the University of Chicago, where in 1898 she took a master's degree in Philosophy and Psychology.

In that year she joined the faculty of the University of Wyoming as an instructor of Philosophy as well. In the summer of 1901 she studied Psychology under Edward Bradford Titchener at Cornell University. She was promoted to assistant Professor of English and Philosophy in 1902 and to Professor in 1905. In 1904 she published a volume of poems titled Heavenly Dykes. After a sabbatical year of further study at the University of Chicago, she was awarded her P. H. D. in 1908, and on her return to the University of Wyoming she became head of her department.

Downey soon gave up the teaching of English to concentrate on Philosophy and Psychology, and the title of her professorship was changed formally to that in 1915. A gifted and often ingenious experimenter, Downey followed her principal interest in the Psychology of aesthetics into many areas of the arts and the mental processes associated with them. Downey's work in muscle muscle ready, handwriting, handedness, color perception, and such topics led to deeper investigations into personality and creativity.

Her work resulted in more than 60 articles in professional journals and several books, including *Graphology and the Psychology of Handwriting*, 1919; *Plots and Personalities*, with Edward E. Slosson, 1922. Downey was greatly interested in the creative arts. She wrote poems, plays, and stories throughout her life. She even wrote the school Alma Mater for the University of Wyoming. In 1911, she published the Imaginal Reaction to poetry, one of the most important experiments involving arts. This study examined the images people had in response to ready poetry.

Downey believed that variation in such images revealed differences in character. Downey's preliminary work personality led her to the creation of the Downey Will-Temperament Test. *The Will-Temperament and Its Testing*, a report on her attempt to test clinically aspects of personality other than intelligence, 1923; and *Creative Imagination: Studies in the Psychology of Literature*, 1929. She also published *Kingdom of the Mind*, a book on the experimental psychology for young readers, in 1927.

Although the report presented several limitations itself, it brought the attention of several influential psychology exponents. Although highly valuable in intent and originality, the Downey tests also possessed great

weaknesses. Downey continually pointed to the importance of the intra-individual relationship of the subtests, but did not provide any norms for comparisons. The tests had poor reliability, the subtests were very short and those subtests that supposedly measured similar traits did not correlate highly with each other.

The tests also possessed poor validity, at least when the results were compared to personality ratings. In addition, there were complaints that the administration was complicated and the scoring was too subjective. All of these weaknesses prevented the tests from being more widely accepted, and Downey was planning to revise the tests at the time of her death. Despite her visibility, Downey never craved the spotlight. As she grew older, she concentrated on her teaching and left Laramie.

Downey was recognized as an outstanding scholar in her field by election to the Society of Experimentalists and membership on the council of the American Psychological Association in 1923-1925. In the last decade of her life she received many forms of recognition, including appointment to APA Council, membership in the Society of Experimentalists, and election as a Fellow of the American association of the Advancement of Service. She was also an inspiring teacher and a valuable asset to her university in its early years.

Downey became ill while attending the Third International Congress on Eugenics in New York City. She died two months later of cancer at the home of her sister in Trenton, New Jersey on October 11, 1932. She was 57 years old. The University held a memorial service for her and a bronze plaque was unveiled in her honor. References 1. Uwadmnweb. Uwyo.

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