

Astrologers fail to predict proof they are wrong

Last Updated: 12:01am BST 17/08/2003

Good news for rational, level-headed Virgoans everywhere: just as you might have predicted, scientists have found astrology to be rubbish.

Its central claim - that our human characteristics are moulded by the influence of the Sun, Moon and planets at the time of our birth - appears to have been debunked once and for all and beyond doubt by the most thorough scientific study ever made into it.

For several decades, researchers tracked more than 2,000 people - most of them born within minutes of each other. According to astrology, the subject should have had very similar traits.

The babies were originally recruited as part of a medical study begun in London in 1958 into how the circumstances of birth can affect future health. More than 2,000 babies born in early March that year were registered and their development monitored at regular intervals.

Researchers looked at more than 100 different characteristics, including occupation, anxiety levels, marital status, aggressiveness, sociability, IQ levels and ability in art, sport, mathematics and reading - all of which astrologers claim can be gauged from birth charts.



Starry eyed: Grant

The scientists failed to find any evidence of similarities between the "time twins", however. They reported in the current issue of the *Journal of Consciousness Studies*: "The test conditions could hardly have been more conducive to success . . . but the results are uniformly negative."

Analysis of the research was carried out by Geoffrey Dean, a scientist and former astrologer based in Perth, Australia, and Ivan Kelly, a psychologist at the University of Saskatchewan, Canada.

Dr Dean said the results undermined the claims of astrologers, who typically work with birth data far less precise than that used in the study. "They sometimes argue that times of birth just a minute apart can make all the difference by altering what they call the 'house cusps'," he said. "But in their work, they are happy to take whatever time they can get from a client."

The findings caused alarm and anger in astrological circles yesterday. Roy Gillett, the president of the Astrological Association of Great Britain, said the study's findings should be treated "with extreme caution" and accused Dr Dean of seeking to "discredit

astrology".

Frank McGillion, a consultant to the Southampton-based Research Group for the Critical Study of Astrology, said of the newly published work: "It is simplistic and highly selective and does not cover all of the research." He added that he would lodge a complaint with the editors of the journal.

Astrologers have for centuries claimed to be able to extract deep insights into the personality and destiny of people using nothing more than the details of the time and place of birth.

Astrology has been growing in popularity. Surveys suggest that a majority of people in Britain believe in it, compared with only 13 per cent 50 years ago. The Association of Professional Astrologers claims that 80 per cent of Britons read star columns, and psychological studies have found that 60 per cent regularly read their horoscopes.

Despite the scepticism of scientists, astrology has grown to be a huge worldwide business, spawning thousands of telephone lines, internet sites and horoscope columns in newspapers and magazines.

It seems that no sector of society is immune to its attraction. A recent survey found that a third of science students subscribed to some aspects of astrology, while some supposedly hard-headed businessmen now support a thriving market in "financial astrology" - paying for predictions of trends such as the rise and fall of the stock market. Astrology supplements have been known to increase newspaper circulation figures and papers are prepared to pay huge sums to the most popular stargazers.

Some of the most popular figures in the field, such as Russell Grant, Mystic Meg and Shelley von Strunckel, can earn £600,000 or more a year.

A single profitable astrology website can be worth as much as £50 million.

When the Daily Mail discovered that its expert on the zodiac, Jonathan Cainer, was about to leave the newspaper in 1999, it reportedly offered him a £1 million salary and a £1 million bonus to stay. He still preferred the offer at the Daily Express: no salary but all the money from his telephone lines.

The time-twins study is only the start of the bad news for astrologers, however. Dr Dean and Prof Kelly also sought to determine whether stargazers could match a birth chart to the personality profile of a person among a random selection.

They reviewed the evidence from more than 40 studies involving over 700 astrologers, but found the results turned out no better than guesswork.

The success rate did not improve even when astrologers were given all the information they asked for and were confident they had made the right choice.

Dr. Dean said the consistency of the findings weighed heavily against astrology.

"It has no acceptable mechanism, its principles are invalid and it has failed hundreds of tests," he said. "But no hint of these problems will be found in astrology books which, in effect, are exercises in deception."

Dr. Dean is ready for a torrent of criticism. He said: "I'm probably the most hated person in astrology because I'm regarded as a turncoat."

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