

Pittsburgh Post-Gazette®

What's in a smile? More, and less, than you know

With the holiday season arriving, expect a national surge in forced smiles as we interact with people we seek to avoid the rest of the year.

The only thing worse than suffering through use of our own put-on plastic expression at a Christmas party is the realization that someone we're talking to is faking pleasantries for our benefit. ("What's this, Charley from accounting finds me boring? Me? But I found him dull first. Of all the nerve.")

There are ways to determine whether that person smiling as you approach is truly happy to see you or has silently begun calculating an exit strategy (whichever's closer between the bathroom and bar, usually). Researchers say the eyes are more telling than the mouth, as a polite, perfunctory smile involves just the lips. A truly happy smile will create little creases around the eyes and eyebrows and change the position of the brows.

Body language expert Patti Wood believes there are four different personality types that can be revealed by how someone smiles. A test, using an uploaded photo of yourself at the Web site www.whatyoursmilesays.com will determine which of the four categories you fit: driver, supporter, influencer or analyzer.