

Psychics make many claims of success but are conspicuously unable to find missing persons.

By

Benjamin Radford, LiveScience

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Science



Image: Benjamin Haas/Dreamstime.com

Amanda Berry, a 16-year-old girl when she went missing in 2003, was rescued from an unassuming house in Cleveland Monday night, where she and others are believed to have been abducted and held captive for up to a decade.

Tragically, a [high-profile psychic](#) told Berry's mother in 2004 that she was dead, a phenomenon all too common when it comes to missing persons — psychics seem to have all the answers though they typically turn out to be completely wrong.

For nearly two years after her disappearance Amanda Berry's mother, Louwana Miller, held out hope that her daughter would be found alive and returned to her: Maybe Amanda ran away from home and would come back some day, or was in an accident and somehow lost her memory. Miller endured the terrible limbo of not knowing, holding out hope against the odds but not wanting to believe the worst.

Berry reportedly broke through a door where she had been held captive and called for help; two other missing women, Gina DeJesus and Michele Knight, were also rescued from the home. The home's owner, Ariel Castro, and his two brothers have been arrested in connection with the case. [[The 10 Most Destructive Human Behaviors Explained](#)]

But before the seeming miracle ending, "[Plain Dealer](#)" writer Stephan Hudak noted, "Desperate for any clue as to Amanda Berry's whereabouts, and tired of unanswered questions from authorities, Miller turned to a psychic on Montel Williams' nationally syndicated television show. The psychic said what the FBI, police and Miller hadn't. 'She's not alive, honey,' Sylvia Browne told her matter-of-factly. 'Your daughter's not the kind who wouldn't call.' With those blunt words, Browne persuaded Miller to accept a grim probability that has become more likely with each passing day."

Miller returned home devastated, and she died two years later, believing that her daughter was dead.

[Self-proclaimed psychic Sylvia Browne](#) was horribly wrong, telling a grieving mother that her child was dead when she was not. And it's not the first time: In an eerily similar situation in 2002, Browne told the parents of missing child Shawn Hornbeck that their son was dead, also on Montel Williams' show. His body, she said, would be found in a wooded area near two large boulders, adding that he had been kidnapped by a very tall, "dark-skinned man" with dreadlocks.

In fact, Hornbeck and another boy were found very much alive five years later on Jan. 16, 2007, in the home of a Caucasian, non-dreadlocked Missouri man named Michael Devlin who had kidnapped them. Every detail of Browne's psychic vision was wrong, including the most important: that Shawn was dead.

This horrific case also has many similarities to [Jaycee Dugard](#), the girl abducted at the age of 11 in 1991 and discovered living in a virtual prison in the backyard of a couple's home in Antioch, Calif., 18 years later.

She had been confined and horrifically abused, and raped, even giving birth to her captor's children. They were kept prisoners and were completely isolated, never having attended school or seen a doctor.

Hundreds of psychics gave information about Dugard's location while she was missing — and every one turned out to be completely wrong. Psychics make many claims of success, but are conspicuously unable to find missing persons and rescue innocent women from years of torture and imprisonment.



THE MOTHER DIED BECAUSE OF A FALSE READING



I GOT A "BAD" READING FROM A PSYCHIC AND IT SORT OF RUINED MY LIFE

When I fight with my boyfriend I wonder if this is the end -- since the psychic said I'd never have a lasting relationship. Sometimes when I get into my car I think "Is this the accident?"



Sarah McGregor

Oct 19, 2012 at 11:00am | 108 comments

I was not new to getting readings when I sat down in front of Julie* (name changed to protect us all) (also I don't remember it). My friends and I frequently shelled out \$5 and \$10 for readings at county fairs and the like when we were giggling, goody-goody teenagers. So when my good friend asked if I wanted to have a girls' night at a hip local bar that would have a psychic doing readings for \$20, I thought it would be fun.

And I really, really needed some fun.

I was in a terrible time in my life. I had just finished grad school and had zero direction. My job ended with school and I had no money and was this close to losing my apartment. I was borrowing money from my parents for cat food. My boyfriend had dumped me six months previous and I couldn't get over it and "dinner" was frequently a bottle of red wine from the local convenience store.

I was horribly, horribly depressed. So a night out with a girlfriend to go to a chic bar and get my palm read sounded awesome. I knew that dropping \$20 (plus another \$20 for drinks and the like) was super-irresponsible considering I wasn't sure how I was going to pay the next month's RENT, but a night out hiding from all those problems was irresistible. I wanted to dress up, have fancy drinks, laugh with a friend while doing something silly.

And frankly, I wanted some good news.



Think of all the ramen I could have eaten with that twenty!

Just like the teenage girls we used to be, we giggled maniacally as we shot surreptitious looks at the psychic in the back of the bar. We dared each other to go first. We might have even rock-paper-scissored. Her rock must've crushed the hell out of my scissors, 'cause over I went.

Julie was lovely and absolutely Portland. Hot, tattooed, funny, and hip. I laughed at myself for how nervous I'd been -- this was all for a good time! And surely she was going to tell me that everything would be fine, that I'd have a long life and a hunky husband and a fulfilling career! I mean, that's what they always say, right?

Uh, no.

I won't bore you with the banter, but here were the high points of my reading:

- 1) I would live a long life, but only after overcoming some horrible disaster in my early 30s (she was really into this one -- kept grabbing my hand and pointing at some invisible thing and saying "This really worries me").
- 2) I don't have a love of my life. I'll have a series of brief, passionate affairs and a short-lived marriage, but no lasting happiness.

Yay. So glad I came here for a good time.



Apparently you can re-arrange the lines in my hands to spell DOOM.

I wanted to write her off as a fraud. I mean, I don't even believe in psychics! I'm a grown adult! I'm a skeptic! An agnostic! I don't believe in MAGIC!

Except that I totally do. After she said all this to me, I burst into tears. She shrugged and said she was sorry she didn't have better news for me. And then she tried to mellow the blow by saying I'd have "some" career recognition. Well, that's....good.

I bitterly handed her my \$20 (you would think she would comp me after making me cry, but whatever) and slunk off to the bathroom where I could cry in peace before re-applying my "We're having fun" face and re-joining my friend.

That was over three years ago. And it hasn't left me. It's not quite an obsession, but it pops up in my thoughts way more often than I'd like. When I fight with my boyfriend I wonder if this is the end -- since the psychic said I'd never have a lasting relationship. Sometimes when I get into my car I think "Is this the accident?" or if I get the flu I think "Is this the disease?" always wondering if it's the "disaster" she spoke of.

And I know, I know that it's all bullshit. Of course it is. But unfortunately for me, some of her smaller predictions turned out to be correct. She asked if I modeled at all. I said no, and then 4 months later I started working as an artist's model for a photographer. She asked if I was a writer, again I said no, and then 2 years later I discovered that I love to write.

And so I make bargains with myself 00 maybe the fender-bender I had last year that left me with some chronic physical problems was the "disaster" she predicted! Maybe the worst is over! Things like that.

Sometimes I consider going to another psychic, just to contradict her. But if, IF the second psychic agrees with the first one, I'll probably go absolutely crazy and move to a cave in the mountains or something.

As comforting as it would be to have someone tell me she was a fraud (I don't know why, but I find comfort in the idea of a psychic telling me another psychic is a fraud), it's not worth the risk of having the scary stuff confirmed.





Crystal Ball Paperweight says everything's going to be ok.

The ancient Greeks had some strong ideas about trying to outrun or change your fate, and how you shouldn't do it ever. Maybe I should make like the ancients and sit back and try to accept it?

Maybe I should get down on my knees and pray to the God I don't believe in to give me a better future. Maybe I need to invent some kind of cleansing ritual I can do in my bathroom early one morning before my boyfriend wakes up to exorcise her curse (sorry to hyperbolize, but it feels like it) from my head.

Or maybe I can keep living my life, making art and making mistakes and loving and hating and singing and screwing and buying more vintage dresses. After all, this life is the only one I get. And I

don't want to waste a minute more of my time worrying about the predictions of a two-bit-hack bar psychic.

But, ladies, please take my advice. Don't go visiting psychics. They can fuck you up good.

My Psychic was Wrong — Am I Being Scammed?

Mackenzie Wright



A lot of people are skeptical of psychics and warn that they're all frauds. Thus, when you get a psychic reading that turns out to have little accuracy, you might get worried that it's true. You might consider dropping your psychic and swearing off readings forever— but should you? Before you become a total skeptic yourself, consider some things you need to remember.

Were You Open to the Reading?

Some people are a bit frightened of psychics, afraid that the psychic can essentially see right into them and all the things they've thought and done. Some people are a bit frightened about their own situation and don't really want to know what's going on—they're afraid of being told that they're a bad person for things they've thought, or of being told that the nagging back pain is really a deadly disease.

Having these types of fears instinctually causes the subconscious to cry out, "shields up!"

Psychics can sometimes pick up on things long before you're aware of them. Just because you can't verify something right away doesn't mean it's wrong.

Fear causes you to close yourself off from the reading. If you're not open to it or cooperative, you're giving a psychic very little to go on—they'll get fragments, but they can be more puzzled by the information and have trouble piecing it together until you're able to relax and let your natural guards down a bit.

Redirected Course

The future is not set in stone; between a reading and the time an event was predicted to happen, a lot of things can take place to change the outcome. For example, let's say you're very shy and timid, but really longing for love.

Your psychic may foresee that you have the opportunity to meet a possible love interest in the near future at a social gathering and encourages you to accept any party or dinner invitations. You accept a couple of invitations, but you become even more quiet and withdrawn than usual due to nervousness. Because of your behavior, someone who had been eyeing you thought you were closed off and unapproachable, and decided to mingle with others instead, never getting the opportunity to talk to you.

Remember that psychics can only tell you what's possible; it's your own actions and inactions that are going to determine if you stay on that course.

Missing Information

Another possibility is that your psychic was not necessarily wrong; you just didn't have all the information at the time. If your psychic asks you if a friend is ill, you might say "No, you're wrong." But there's a good possibility that you have a friend who has not told you about an illness—or who does not himself know he's ill yet. Perhaps he hasn't visited a doctor yet.

Psychics can sometimes pick up on things long before you're aware of them. Just because you can't verify something right away doesn't mean it's wrong.

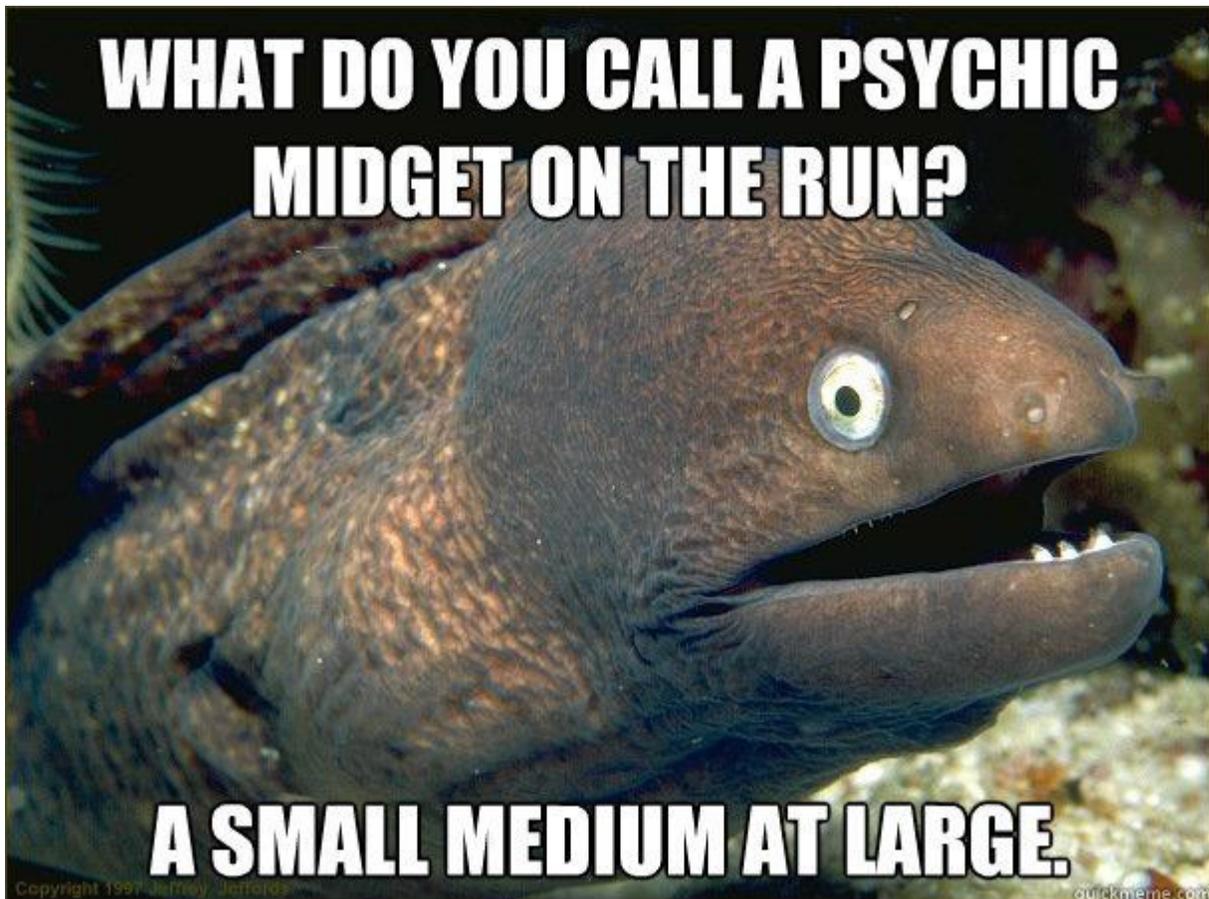
Psychics are Human

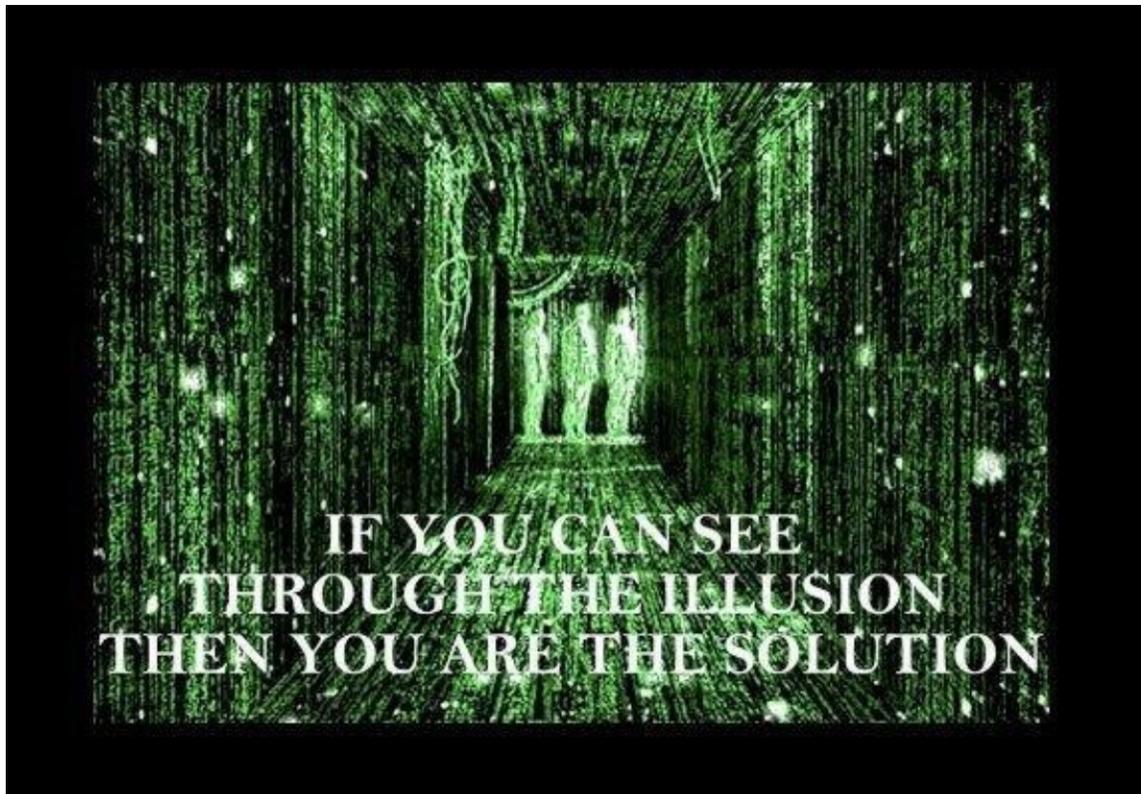
Yes, psychics can make mistakes. They intuit information, but then they have to interpret what it is they're getting. Sometimes the interpretation can be off base, so when the psychic presents it to you it may not make sense.

A common instinct is to dismiss what appears to be a mistake out of hand—what you should really be doing is asking more details about the information coming to the psychic. It's possible that the information coming in simply threw the psychic for a loop, and she couldn't see how the piece fit into the puzzle. By knowing more, you may help her figure it out.

If your readings from this person are generally accurate, or if you've gotten good recommendations about this psychic from friends with satisfied readings, there's no reason to panic and assume the worst. Psychics are not gods—and they never claim to be omnipotent. Like anyone else at work,

they can have an off day and make mistakes. Take their entire reputation into account, not just one reading gone wrong.





The Fower of the
Human Mind is
Unknowable



Still the most popular topic on TV, but not an Absolute Science

PSYCHIC DETECTIVES

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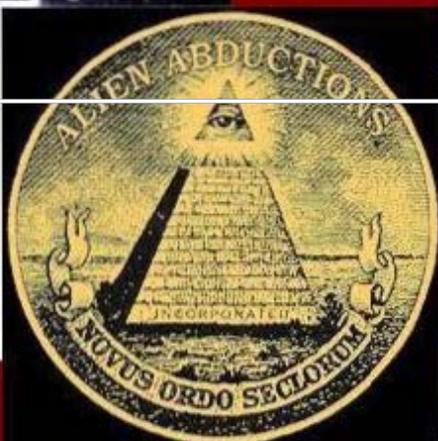


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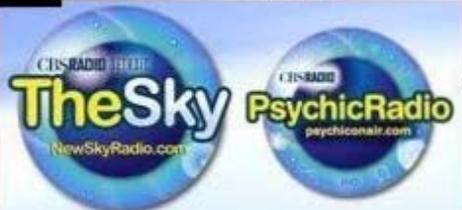
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