

Sylvia Browne's Failed Amanda Berry Prediction Returns To Haunt Her

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Psychic Sylvia Browne is under fire after incorrectly claiming years ago that kidnapping victim Amanda Berry was dead.

Celebrity psychic Sylvia Browne is doing damage control over a prediction made nearly 10 years ago [claiming Ohio kidnapping victim Amanda Berry was dead](#), but her actions may represent a watershed moment in how Americans view psychics.

"The [Ariel Castro abduction] is a test case for all psychics," said Joe Nickell, editor of [Skeptical Inquirer](#), a magazine that encourages science-based analysis of paranormal and fringe-science claims. "Why didn't one psychic wake up in the middle of the night and know where they were?"

Browne told Louwana Miller, the mother of Amanda Berry, on "The Montel Williams Show" in 2004: ["She's not alive, honey.](#) Your daughter's not the kind who wouldn't call," The Atlantic Wire reported. Berry was kidnapped 10 years ago and was found alive on Monday.

[Browne responded with an official statement to The Huffington Post earlier this week](#) that included this line: "Only God is right all the time." For more than 50 years as a spiritual psychic and guide, when called upon to either help authorities with missing person cases or to help families with questions about their loved ones, I have been more right than wrong. If ever there was a time to be grateful and relieved for being mistaken, this is that

time. Only God is right all the time. My heart goes out to Amanda Berry, her family, the other victims and their families. I wish you a peaceful recovery.

Browne has estimated an 87-to-90 percent success rate with cold cases, but Skeptical Inquirer did [a 2010 analysis of 115 predictions](#) she made on "The Montel Williams Show" and put her success rate at zero.

Nickell has also headed projects researching the success rate of psychics working on police investigations, and found no substantial evidence of their effectiveness. However, he concedes that some investigators will accept psychic assistance as a very last resort.

"One detective, a homicide commander, told me, 'you can be skeptical, but when you have a distraught family and a psychic has convinced them they have clues, it's hard to refuse,'" Nickell told HuffPost.

Problem is, according to Nickell, many of the so-called "clues" offered by the psychics are too vague to be of use. Once the police find out the answers through legitimate police work, the vague clues might seem to fit after the fact, a process he calls "retrofitting."

[Parapsychology researcher Ben Radford](#), a deputy editor at Skeptical Inquirer, said that anytime there is a high-profile, missing-person case, psychics and mediums come out of the woodwork.

"We call them 'grief vampires'," he told HuffPost. "But every single time, the psychics fail to find the person."

Browne is also drawing criticism from other psychics like Craig Weiler, who said Browne's callous prediction to Berry's now-deceased mom crossed a line, possibly doing "harm to the family." He advises mediums to use disclaimers.

"They need to say, 'this is my impression' or 'this is my truth,'" Weiler told HuffPost. "Something like 'this is what I feel' is OK ..."

[Weiler runs a blog that attempts to explain scientific studies](#) of parapsychology in layman's terms, but said off-the-cuff predictions make things harder for people like him who are trying to demonstrate psychic ability is real.

"Failed predictions that are so high-profile are a pain in the ass," Weiler said. "There's a public perception that psychics are fake. They're not, but it hurts."

Weiler said it's just as unfair to judge psychics by one big failed prediction as it is to judge them by one successful one. "That's the problem scientifically," he said. "In order to tell how good she is, you need both success and failures."

Browne is attracting comments to her Facebook and Twitter pages like, "What do you have to say for yourself? What a horrible horrible thing to say to a family holding on to nothing but hope and faith" and "[Can you admit that you're a hack now?](#)" according to RawStory.com

D.J. Grothe, president of the [James Randi Educational Foundation](#), an organization that works to stop paranormal and pseudoscientific frauds and has long criticized Browne, said this latest psychic scandal is even more reprehensible than others.

"It's not just her lack of success that bothers me. It's that she deigns to give so-called psychic or spiritual advice to people when they're at their lowest and hurting most," he told HuffPost by email. "How reprehensible for this TV psychic to disrupt criminal investigations or cause a family to lose hope about their missing loved ones like that."

Grothe said he wouldn't have as many problems with psychic performers if they would tell people their predictions are "for entertainment purposes only" and if they refused to offer spiritual guidance or psychic advice in any form.

One personality who does that is the [Amazing Kreskin](#) who has done hundreds of performance art shows similar to magic for more than 40 years.

Kreskin said he has helped the police with 84 crime cases, but acknowledges that he was only helpful one-third of the time. "I can help potential witnesses uncover information they didn't realize they had," Kreskin said.

However, Kreskin said that any mentalist, psychic or medium who suggests someone is dead without physical evidence is on shaky ethical ground. "It's the height of irresponsibility and it indirectly aids the criminal because the people who believe the psychic may have less of a reason to continue to search for the victim," he said.

Sherry Cole, Amanda Berry's cousin, told HuffPost that the family "in no way blames Sylvia," but Weiler still believes anyone claiming to be psychic needs to be responsible about how they use their abilities.

"They need to be truthful," he said. "They're not 100 percent. They should say, 'this is what I feel is happening,' but that's it."

CORRECTION: An earlier version of this story incorrectly stated that D.J. Grothe would be OK with psychics if they said their predictions were "for entertainment purposes" only. Grothe stresses that they shouldn't offer spiritual or psychic advice either.