**SEPTEMBER 21, 2008 THESKEPTICARENA.COM**

**[Argument # 16: "Psychics and mediums use a technique called cold reading to amaze you with accurate hits, not psychic powers.](http://www.victorzammit.com/skeptics/winston.html%22%20%5Cl%20%22top)**

**This is a common skeptical argument against professional and non-professional psychics and mediums. Skeptics claim that psychics and mediums use cold reading to pick up clues about clients and amaze them. First, let me explain what cold reading is. Then I’ll explain why it does not account for all psychic readings. Cold reading is an umbrella term for a series of techniques used by magicians and mentalists (specialists in mind reading tricks) to employ a variety of methods to gain information and clues about a client for a reading. These methods include but are not limited to: fishing for clues by asking questions, listening to everything a client says to get clues, making general or vague statements that most people interpret as hits, observing facial expressions and body language as you make statements, analyzing clues from a person’s dress and demeanor, and other mentalist tricks, etc. (despite what politically correct people say, it is a fact that there are many things you can tell about a person based on their looks, even from a photograph) Even the smallest things can give a trained cold reader important clues about you. In conjunction with cold reading, another technique known as "hot reading" can also be used. Hot reading is the technique of investigating a person’s background and records prior to a psychic reading to obtain specific information about them. Mentalists performing in stage shows often use hot reading to obtain prior information about audience members beforehand, such as maiden names, former addresses, etc. Cold reading can be used both consciously and unconsciously. Some cold readers knowingly use and develop their cold reading techniques like a skill or art. Others may subconsciously use cold reading techniques, attributing it to intuition or psychic abilities, thus deluding themselves as well as their clients.**

**WINSTON, I’M IMPRESSED. THAT WAS A VERY EXCELLENT DESCRIPTION. I’LL ADMIT THAT SOMETIMES YOU DO SURPRISE ME.**

**Although it is true that there are many frauds out there who use cold reading the way mentalists and magicians do, it doesn’t mean that every psychic is a fraud.**

**THAT’S RIGHT WINSTON, AS YOU JUST MENTIONED - MANY OF THEM ARE DELUDED.**

**That would be like finding some counterfeit money and concluding that all money was counterfeit.**

**BAD ANALOGY WINSTON. LET’S GET BACK TO THE SUBJECT.**

**Magic tricks and genuine psychic abilities are two separate fields, rather than the same as skeptics like Randi would have you believe.**

**WINSTON, THAT IS TRUE. BUT MAGIC TRICKS ACTUALLY EXIST.**

**Of course, frauds and con artists are part of every kind of business, not just in the psychic medium field. The problem with the cold reading/hot reading explanation is that for many accounts of psychic readings (including some of my own) the techniques do not account for the specific information attained.**

**WINSTON, YOU WOULD HAVE BEEN BETTER SERVED BY SPENDING YOUR MONEY ON A SUBSCRIPTION TO CSICOP RATHER THAN ON A PSYCHIC READING.**

**For example, some psychics can tell you very specific things about you without asking you any questions, which rules out the "fishing for clues" technique.**

**WINSTON, YOU’VE BEEN DUPED. YOU JUST DIDN’T REALIZE IT.**

**If neither they nor any of their accomplices talked to you beforehand, then that would also rule out the same technique. If the clues they gave could not have been gained from anything in your appearance, then that would rule out the "visual clues" technique as well. For instance, if you were told the location you grew up in, your former last name, or an event in your past that doesn’t show in your appearance, then the visual clues technique could not account for it.**

**THAT’S TRUE WINSTON. THAT WOULD REQUIRE A DIFFERENT METHOD.**

**In addition, if the psychic who told you these things didn’t know you were coming beforehand, as in a walk-in psychic fair, then that would rule out hot reading too.**

**WINSTON, WITH ALL THE MONEY YOU COULD SAVE BY SKIPPING THOSE PSYCHIC FAIRS, YOU COULD BUY YOUR OWN VIDEO ARCADE.**

 **Unfortunately for skeptics, there are many cases of psychic readings where all of the above were ruled out.**

**WINSTON, THAT IS NOT UNFORTUNATE FOR SKEPTICS. THEY ARE NOT THE ONES WHO HAD THEIR MONEY PILFERED - THAT WAS YOU, WINSTON.**

**Therefore, cold/hot reading cannot account for every case. In such cases, the skeptic is left without explanations, but often continue to insist that the client must have given away some kind of clue, and demand that this be disproved first before imposing any claim of genuine psychic ability at work.**

**NO WINSTON, THAT IS NOT HOW SKEPTICISM NOR SCIENCE WORKS. THE BURDEN OF PROOF LIES WITH THE CLAIMANT. THEY MUST PROVE UNDER SCIENTIFIC CONDITIONS THAT THEY CAN DO WHAT THEY CLAIM THEY CAN DO. NOT ONE OF THEM HAS EVER BEEN ABLE TO DO THIS, ANYWHERE ON THE FACE OF THE EARTH. THAT IS WHY SKEPTICS DON’T BELIEVE THEM.**

**Let me give some examples of psychic readings that I know of where cold reading was either impossible or too unlikely:**

**IN OTHER WORDS WINSTON, THESE ARE EXAMPLES WHERE YOU WERE FOOLED.**

**1) One of my own examples is from a psychic reading I got from my acting teacher’s mom about a year and a half ago.**

**WINSTON, I’M IMPRESSED AGAIN! DRILLIN THE TEACHER’S MOM - NOT BAD.**

**During rehearsals one time, I heard that my teacher’s mom, Pearl, did psychic readings as a personal favor to people.**

**WINSTON, YOU WERE A FLY IN THE SPIDER’S WEB.**

**A fellow student mentioned that she was amazed because Pearl told her that she had a certain tragedy when she was 5 years old. Curious myself, I decided to go up and ask for a reading too just for fun to see what would happen. Up until then, none of the psychics I went to before impressed me with anything specific. And since she was not a professional psychic, I didn’t think she would have any incentive to use any fradulent cold reading tricks. Pearl agreed to it and we sat down. All she asked me for was my birth date (a common question by psychics to supposedly open up the Akashic records that contain your karmic history),**

**JESUS CHRIST WINSTON. NEVER MIND - GO ON.**

**then she looked at my palm for a while. She did NOT ask any leading questions or fish for clues. To my astonishment, she said that she sensed that I had a tragic period in my life when I was 9 years old. Somehow she could feel the emotional scars there, not from my palm lines she said, but from the vibrations she felt. This was very true because that year was the worst year of my life, besides the year that I was 16. Random guessing, although possible, was unlikely because if she had guessed any other year beside 9 and 16, she would have been wrong. By guessing, she would have had a 2/25 chance of being right. Furthermore, guessing was even more unlikely since she guessed the tragic year of the girl before me correctly too. Generalized guessing was also unlikely because if Pearl had guessed the age of 5 like she did for the girl before me, it would have been wrong.**

**The day after this occurred, I wrote an account of it on a message board post, asking the skeptics to explain this. They insisted that either cold reading or chance guessing was used. When I mentioned that all I was asked was my birth date, they insisted that facial expressions and body language were part of cold reading too. But when I challenged them to explain how my facial expressions or body language told her that I had a tragedy at 9 years old, they had no explanation except to repeat the same thing again and dodge the question. They were stumped! What the odds that Pearl gained such hits from guessing for both me and the girl before me?**

**More recently, a skeptic suggested to me that since this occurred a year and a half ago, my memory of the events might not be accurate. However, I debunked his false memory theory on the spot by stating that I still had the message board post I wrote right after the event, which contained the SAME details that I remember now. After his case was blown, he suggested that if they were a school, they would have records of my past. When I told him that it was not an actual school, but a community theater acting class that had no records on me, (and didn’t need them either) he was at a loss for explanations and challenged me to prove that I had an accurate memory of every detail that happened, including the color of the drapes, chairs, etc. and that I had a detailed transcript of the whole thing, or else I could not rule out that all other possible non-psychic explanations. This was of course ridiculous because it would be like asking someone to remember the license plate number of every car that they drove by this morning, or what they did 257 days ago at 3:15pm, for instance. He was obviously getting desperate for explanations here and to go so far as to challenge me to prove trivial things to put the burden of proof on me. This was obviously the work of a closed and biased mind.**

**WINSTON, YOU JUST GAVE EVERYONE AN INSIGHT INTO HOW THE IRRATIONAL MIND FUNCTIONS. YOU ADMITTED EARLIER THAT NONE OF THE MANY PSYCHICS YOU HAD VISITED HAD SUCCEEDED IN THE PAST. THEN WHEN YOU FOUND ONE THAT FINALLY GUESSED RIGHT YOU FELL FOR IT LIKE A TON OF RUBBER DUCKIES.**

**YOU IGNORED ALL THE MISSES UNTIL YOU FINALLY GOT A HIT. THAT WAS ALL IT TOOK TO MAKE YOU A TRUE BELIEVER. THIS SCENARIO HAS BEEN PLAYED OUT SO MANY TIMES BEFORE. AN AUDIENCE IS GIVEN A COLD READING BY A PROFESSIONAL PSYCHIC. THEY RECORD THE SESSION. THE PERCENTAGE OF HITS IS USUALLY IN THE LOW-SINGLE-DIGIT RANGE (LESS THAN 5%). BUT WHEN THEY INTERVIEW THE AUDIENCE INDIVIDUALLY AFTER THE SHOW, THEY DISCOVER THAT MOST PEOPLE BELIEVE THAT THE PSYCHIC TRULY HAD THE ABILITIES CLAIMED. THAT IS BECAUSE PEOPLE FORGET ALL THE MISSES, BUT REMEMBER THE HITS BECAUSE THE HITS ARE SO IMPRESSIVE.**

**IT HAS WORKED THIS WAY FOR HUNDREDS OF YEARS AND AS YOU JUST PROVED, YET AGAIN, IT WORKS JUST AS WELL TODAY. YOU FORGOT ALL ABOUT THE MANY FAILED PSYCHICS, BUT THREW YOUR RATIONALITY AWAY AS SOON AS THE FIRST ONE GOT LUCKY.**

**IF THAT WOMAN COULD REALLY DO WHAT SHE CLAIMED, SHE WOULD NOT BE DOING IT FOR FREE.**

**Besides, Pearl was the kind sincere simple next door granny type and anyone who met her would laugh if they heard the claim that she was a cold reader.**

**WINSTON, SO NOW YOU’RE ABLE TO USE PSYCHIC POWERS TO READ PEOPLE? DID HER POWERS RUB OFF ON YOU? YOU COULDN’T POSSIBLY KNOW IF SHE WAS KIND, SINCERE, OR SIMPLE; NOR WOULD THAT HAVE ANYTHING TO DO WITH WHETHER OR NOT SHE HAD PSYCHIC POWERS.**

**2) These next two accounts were recently related to me from my dad.**

**OH BOY. I HAVE THE FUNNY FEELING THAT WE ARE ALL ABOUT TO SEE THE TRUTH IN THE OLD SAYING “THE NUT DOESN’T FALL VERY FAR FROM THE TREE.”**

**The first one involves a psychic that he, my mom, and her friend met a long time ago back in Taiwan (I think it was during the early 70's, before I was born)**

**WINSTON, BE THANKFUL. THEY DIDN’T HAVE VIDEO GAMES BACK THEN.**

**While they were passing through a city that they rarely visited, they came upon a line of people waiting for a reading from this blind psychic who gave readings based on voices he heard. My mom decided on the spur of the moment to get a reading from him too.**

**JESUS WINSTON - YOUR MOM TOO? YOU NEVER REALLY HAD A FAIR CHANCE DID YOU? NOW I’M FEELING A LITTLE GUILTY FOR ALL THE THINGS I’VE SAID TO YOU. BUT ONLY A LITTLE GUILTY, BECAUSE ONCE YOU GROW UP (MEANING ADULTHOOD), YOU HAVE TO TAKE RESPONSIBILITY FOR YOURSELF. YOU DON’T GET TO BLAME YOUR PARENTS YOUR WHOLE LIFE.**

**Without fishing for any clues, one of the first things that he told her was that when she was a child, her mom tried to give her away for adoption to another family, but she later ran back home, which was TRUE! My mom was very amazed at the time, and her friend was so amazed that she tried to push my mom aside to get a reading too. He also told her other things that were true too. Now, being given away for adoption and then running back home is not a generalized guess that would fit anybody, only a few people. Both my parents and my mom's friend can confirm this story, so it’s not like it was made up out of obscurity. Furthermore, since this reading was on the spot and not prearranged, there was no possibility of hot reading or background checking. And since this was in a city where she rarely visited, there wouldn’t have been people who knew her there that could have told the psychic about her beforehand. The skeptics I related this to tried to claim that since this occurred decades ago, the memories of the three people involved can’t be counted on to be reliable. However, as mentioned in the rebuttal to Argument # 6, since this was a shocking event, the memory of it is the same it was at the time it happened (as in my own example above). Furthermore, since these type of amazing psychic readings already occur in modern times anyway, why couldn’t they have occurred back then as well?**

**WINSTON, THERE ARE MILLIONS OF SUCH CLAIMS. TRUE BELIEVERS THROW THESE STORIES AT SKEPTICS ALL THE TIME AND SAY “EXPLAIN THIS!” SKEPTICS MAY NOT KNOW THE MECHANISM EMPLOYED IN EACH CASE. WHAT SKEPTICS DO KNOW IS THAT THERE HAS NEVER BEEN ANY PSYCHIC ON EARTH WHO HAS BEEN ABLE TO PROVE THEIR ABILITIES UNDER CONTROLLED CONDITIONS. IF AND WHEN THAT DAY EVER ARRIVES, ALL SKEPTICS WILL SINK TO THEIR KNEES AND WORSHIP THE POSSESSOR OF SUPERNATURAL ABILITY. BUT UNTIL THAT DAY, WINSTON, WE STILL REQUIRE THE ONE THING THAT NOT ONE OF THEM HAS EVER BEEN ABLE TO PRODUCE: PROOF.**

**3) Here's the second story that happened more recently. A few years ago, my dad and a coworker, Eileen, went to a psychic fair.**

**WINSTON, I THINK WE ALL ARE GETTING THE PICTURE OF WHAT A REUNION AT THE WU RESIDENCE WOULD BE LIKE.**

**They picked one of the psychics there for a reading and sat down. Immediately the psychic told Eileen that "You are in the process of moving" which was true because Eileen had already sold her house and was in fact in the process of moving. Struck with amazement, they arranged for a personal reading later on with the psychic. Skeptics I told this to claimed that the phrase "You are in the process of moving" was vague and could be interpreted in many ways related to changes in life. However, whenever I’ve heard that phrase used, it usually referred to moving residence. In either case, even if it was a general phrase, that still doesn’t mean that it was just a guess.**

**WINSTON, EVEN WHEN YOU ARE TOLD HOW THEY DO IT, YOU STILL DON’T GET IT. WHY? BECAUSE YOU DON’T WANT TO. YOUR MOTTO COMES STRAIGHT FROM THE X-FILES “YOU GOTTA BELIEVE.”**

**4) This recent case I heard on my email discussion list is probably the most extraordinary one yet. A wise lady named Edith, who has a history of giving good spiritual advice, related this story:**

**"I went to a Psychic fair in Chicago, all by myself, on the spur of the moment, then looked around and saw a little old man sitting all by himself, a bit away from all others. I walked over to him, asked him how much he charges, and sat down. He did not even ask my birth date or any other question, and began to talk about my children.**

**He said I had two children, a boy and a girl. I told him that this is not true, that I have two girls. He said that he knows different, which really upset me. He went on saying that the boy died right after his birth, and that my girl had died a few years back in a tragic incident, and that the second girl is not my own girl, but is adopted. He was right, because I had to admit that I no longer thought of my little boy any longer as a son.**

**( he was born 37 years earlier, prematurely in the 6th month of pregnancy, and had only lived 25 minutes.)**

**He then told me that I am writing a Novel, and began to outline the story, naming the character in the Novel by name, their roles, and how they related to each other, and the time frame of the story. He was right in the smallest detail, better than I could describe myself, having written it.**

**He told me that I would be teaching many people, and that people will come to my house to ask for lessons, but it would be out of the State, in the South.**

**(The South was the last place on earth I would want to live at that time. Neither would I want to leave my job, or my dream house that I had purchased only a short time before. It was months later that my husband was suddenly transferred to Georgia. Here I had an Art exhibition in Atlanta, and people had approached me to teach Art, especially oil painting.)**

**There were many other events he told me from my childhood, early adulthood, my former marriage, all accurate in every aspect and every little detail. He described the house I was born in, a house I had never again seen in over 46 years, and I had to look on an old photograph to check the details he described, of which I was no longer aware of.**

**He was correct. He took a pen and wrote my father's name, in my father's handwriting. (The old German script, which is no longer in use, called: Hohe Stolze.)**

**Now, I don't expect you to believe me, and I don't care one way or another, whatever explanation you come up with for all that, it does not change one tittle.**

**Just remember one thing: I had never been in Chicago before, other than driving through. Chicago was 45 miles from where I lived, and I knew NO ONE in that city, nor did anyone know that I would be going to Chicago that day, and I had no idea that there was a Psychic Fair to begin with, but rather stumbled on it in one of the Malls.**

**But most of all, that it was I who chose this particular Psychic among all others.**

**I had been to other Psychics, at different times, in different States and different countries, all without appointments, and without recommendations by anyone I knew, who had been most accurate in everything they said, three of which described the same Novel I spoke of earlier, one spoke of a book I had written many years earlier, even how many pages the manuscript was, how many chapters, and the general contents of it."**

**WINSTON, IF I’VE SAID IT ONCE, I’VE SAID IT A THOUSAND TIMES: YOU ARE A SALESMAN’S DREAM.**

**As you can see, the facts in these incidents don’t suggest in any way that cold/hot reading was involved. Psychic reading accounts like this are abundant and come from people of all walks of life. Anyone who does a little research could come up with accounts like these.**

**AND WINSTON, IF YOU DID THE RESEARCH YOU WOULD BE MAKING A LIST OF THE MOST COMPLETELY DISHONEST PEOPLE IN THE COUNTRY.**

**WINSTON, WHY DID YOU EVEN BOTHER GOING TO COLLEGE? IF YOU ARE GOING TO ALLOW YOURSELF TO BE FOOLED THIS EASILY? WHY WASTE THE TUITION MONEY? THAT MONEY COULD HAVE GONE TO A CHILDREN’S HOSPITAL OR SOME OTHER WORTHY CAUSE. IT OBVIOUSLY DIDN’T DO YOU ANY GOOD.**

**A LITTLE OLD GRANNY-NEXT-DOOR TYPE (PROBABLY WITH NO EDUCATION) WAS ABLE TO HUMILIATE YOU WITHOUT EVEN BREAKING A SWEAT. SHE PROBABLY BRAGGED TO HER FRIENDS AFTERWARDS ABOUT HOW BIG A FOOL SHE MADE OUT OF THIS GULLIBLE “COLLEGE BOY.” WINSTON. WINSTON.**

**Just recently some famous mediums were tested under controlled conditions by Dr. Gary Schwartz of the Human Energy Systems Laboratory at the University of Arizona, which revealed some astonishing results.**

**WINSTON, THOSE “ASTONISHING RESULTS” ALWAYS MAGICALLY DISAPPEAR WHEN ATTEMPTED UNDER ACTUAL CONTROLLED CONDITIONS.**

**The experiments involved a group of mediums and sitters who were not told each other’s identities beforehand. Separated by a cloth screen, the mediums were only allowed to ask a few yes or no questions before giving their readings. Their readings turned out to average between a 70 to 90 percent accuracy rate, far above the chance level of 33 percent! The odds of this happening by chance, according to Dr. Schwartz, are one in trillions!**

**WINSTON, THAT SHOULD BE YOUR FIRST CLUE.**

**Even more astonishing, in the second experiment involving a different group of mediums and sitters, the mediums were not allowed to ask anything at all, yet they STILL retained the same level of accuracy as the mediums in the first experiment!**

**SO THE FIRST GROUP, EVEN THOUGH THEY WERE ALLOWED TO ASK QUESTIONS COULD DO NO BETTER THAN THE PSYCHICS WHO DIDN’T EVEN NEED TO ASK QUESTIONS. SO WHAT WAS WRONG WITH THE FIRST GROUP? SHOULDN’T THEIR ACCURACY RATE HAVE BEEN MUCH HIGHER SINCE THEY HAD THE ADVANTAGE OF ASKING QUESTIONS?**

**A report on these experiments was published in the January 2001 issue of the Journal of the Society for Psychical Research.**

**WINSTON, THAT IS BECAUSE NO REPUTABLE JOURNAL WOULD PUBLISH IT.**

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**THE SCIENCE SEGMENT**

**INTERESTING HUMAN FACTS:**

**Humans are least active between 1 and 3pm.**

**Maximum walking efficiency is achieved at 5 mph.**

**Ears and noses grow continuously through life because they are made of cartilage, not bone.**

**Population %**

**Asia 57**

**Europe 21**

**West 14**

**Africa 08**

**white 30**

**non 70**

**Education**

**literate 30**

**illiterate 70**

**college 01**

**Wealth**

**malnurished 50**

**substandard**

**housing 80**

**1/2 wealth belongs to 6% (almost all in the US)**

**Blood Types %**

**O 45**

**A 42**

**B 10**

**AB 03**

**max g-forces: a little over 11**

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**THE ARENA GOES ABROAD**

**SAUDI ARABIA**

**The Guardian (U.K.) reportsThe highest judge in Saudi Arabia says “it is permissible” to murder owners of satellite TV networks that broadcast questionable material during Ramadan. When a caller to his radio show asked about channels featuring “bad programs,” Sheik Saleh al-Lihedan responded, “What does the owner of these networks think, when he provides seduction, obscenity and vulgarity? … Certainly it’s permissible to kill them.”**

**I HAVE A COMMENT:**

**THIS MAN IS A JUDGE. THIS IS NOT SOME INSIGNIFICANT LITTLE GAS STATION ATTENDANT IN RIYAD, BUT IN FACT, THE HIGHEST JUDGE IN SAUDI ARABIA.**

**FOR THOSE OF YOU LIVING IN A DELUSIONAL DREAM WORLD, YOU BETTER WAKE UP AND START GETTING INVOLVED IN DOING SOMETHING, ANYTHING, TO FIGHT THIS KIND OF SICK RELIGIOUS SHIT, OR ELSE 9/11 WILL SEEM LIKE A WEENIE ROAST.**

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**FAMOUS QUOTES**

**Clarence Seward Darrow (April 18, 1857 – March 13, 1938) 80 Years.**

**He was an American lawyer and leading member of the American Civil Liberties Union, best known for defending teenage thrill killers Leopold and Loeb in their trial for murdering 14-year-old Bobby Franks (1924) and defending John T. Scopes in the so-called "Monkey" Trial (1925), in which he opposed the statesman William Jennings Bryan. He remains notable for his wit, compassion, and agnosticism that marked him as one of the most famous American lawyers and civil libertarians.**

**HIS QUOTE**

**"I don't believe in God as I don't believe in Mother Goose."**