

Medium Allison DuBois Is Tested—and Fails—in the Real World

Allison DuBois, the best-selling author who inspired the recently cancelled television show *Medium*, claims to have amazing psychic abilities. But when her skills are tested in the real world—first with a missing-child case and then at a dinner party on reality-TV—they prove less than stellar.

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Psychic Allison DuBois has built an industry around her claims of helping law enforcement. A primetime network television show was based on her. She has three best-selling books and an army of devoted fans. But despite DuBois's celebrity power, the evidence for her supposedly accurate predictions is less robust than her profits. She has made several claims that are hard to accept—even for those who believe in psychic abilities. Even still, DuBois has

walked a careful line in order not to reveal too much information. That strategy, until recently, has worked for her. In 2010, DuBois was asked by KPHO-TV, a Phoenix, Arizona, CBS affiliate, about a missing baby. The case marks the first publicly reported event in which DuBois has been specific in her predictions and offered a timeline for a criminal case. As it turns out, DuBois's predictions not only failed to solve the crime but were completely wrong.

DuBois was raised in Arizona and still lives in Phoenix with her husband. In 2005 she told Dan Abrams of MSNBC that she has “read over 1,200 people”; in 2006 she claimed to have performed 2,000 readings (with a waiting list of 3,000) (Pierlioni 2006). She has long claimed to use psychic powers to help law enforcement, including the

Texas Rangers, and has said that she is “used for jury selection in rape/homicide cases, in order to obtain the sentence the prosecution wants” (DuBois 2005). Yet these claims have never been verified, and the Texas Rangers deny any involvement with her (Radford 2005). *Medium*, the network television show based on DuBois, has highlighted the character Allison DuBois “using her psychic smarts to help the DA in his efforts to find twelve people happy to send Mr. Psycho to the chair” (Bell 2005). The real-life DuBois claimed to be working on 150 cases in 2005 and says she’s “never worked a case and not provided them with specific information” (MSNBC 2005).

When a crime story grips the nation, DuBois will typically discuss the event in an interview or claim involvement. In her 2005 book *Don't Kiss Them Goodbye*, DuBois wrote that she correctly described the man involved in the Elizabeth Smart kidnapping. DuBois wrote that her “friend Catherine” (no last name given) asked for a profile of the kidnapper, which DuBois gave, offering vague details that matched the kidnapper—that he was “a groundskeeper/handyman. He was a transient, but he managed to function in society.” DuBois notes, “These



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details could have helped much sooner if they had been used.” In the middle of this narrative, she writes, “All the information I provided is on record and verifiable.” The problem is that her claims are not verifiable because she supplies no names beyond her friend’s first name. There is no mention of who she talked to or what law enforcement agency or volunteer group had the information. The only public details of DuBois making a prediction about Smart in 2002 came from her 2005 book. In addition, DuBois’s own passage points out that her reading was not used in the high-profile Smart case. Smart’s family had suspected Brian Mitchell was involved with the kidnapping. Mitchell was captured in the company of his wife and Smart on a Salt Lake City street after his image was broadcast on *America’s Most Wanted* in 2003.

Similarly, during Natalee Holloway’s disappearance a few years later, DuBois appeared on MSNBC’s *Rita Cosby Live* to claim, “You have the right suspects. I mean, they’re completely guilty.” DuBois’s information was incorrect. The case remains unsolved and those suspects were not charged. More recently, a story about a missing baby garnered national headlines, and DuBois made a prediction that finally put her claims to the test.

In December 2009, Elizabeth Johnson took her eight-month-old son, Gabriel, from his father in a custody dispute. For the next five days, Elizabeth spent nights in two different hotels with the baby. In the process, she texted messages to the father, Logan McQueary, saying that she killed the baby and threw his body in a trash can after wrapping him in a diaper. She was arrested on December 30 but refused to help police locate the baby. As national interest in the case grew, police interrogations and interviews with friends and family members were reported in the news. On March 3, 2010, Allison DuBois spoke to CBS 5 (KPHO-TV) about Gabriel Johnson. This is one exchange that was televised:

Interviewer (voice-over): It’s something we all feel and why Allison feels investigators will find this baby boy, but not, she says, in a San Antonio landfill.

DuBois: I feel like he’ll be found.

It does feel like helicopters are overhead. It’s a place they’re already looking.

Interviewer (to DuBois): Do you feel like we will find him soon or later?

DuBois: Sooner than later. I feel like he’ll be found within the year, within 2010. The people working this will make sure he’s found.

Much of what DuBois states early in the interview—which took place more than two months after the events in question—had already been reported in the press. The reporter said that she planned to share DuBois’s reading from the ninety-minute interview with Gabriel’s father. However, what the station aired was general information: details already reported about the mother’s text messages to the father, the ongoing custody dispute, and the actions of the mother. DuBois revealed the mother’s motive during the KPHO-TV interview, saying, “I think she did it because she wanted to hurt the father *like she said*” (emphasis added). As KPHO-TV reported, “What she can’t read from Gabriel, Allison said she can read from this video of Elizabeth in court and the sound of her voice on tape . . . and she also looked to the text messages Elizabeth sent Gabriel’s father Logan McQueary just after the boy was last seen.” The *Phoenix New Times* pointed out, “In the final analysis, after devoting nearly four minutes of airtime and a ninety-minute interview to the claims of a psychic, CBS 5 has told us nothing we didn’t know a week ago” (King 2010).

However, DuBois’s prediction that Gabriel would be found “within” 2010 was something that no one could have evaluated at the time. It is important to note that DuBois made no statement about whether Gabriel would be found alive or dead or where the baby boy might be. If DuBois is psychic, one would expect her to correctly predict



Allison DuBois

the fate and location of the baby, but she didn’t. It is reasonable to think that a baby who is missing will be found—based on police interviews, a plea bargain with the mother, or finding the child’s body—as has happened in other high-profile missing-child cases. In any case, DuBois was wrong. Gabriel was not found in 2010. In January 2011, as police continued to look for him, the Tempe, Arizona, Police Department released documents detailing its search, including unconfirmable claims from an unnamed psychic about the baby. The mother had been charged with kidnapping, child abuse, and custodial interference, with a trial scheduled for later in 2011. Her son is still missing. DuBois has emphasized that her statements are based on psychic “feelings” and “impressions.” In particular, DuBois explained how she feels about the case is based, in part, on looking at “a picture of Gabriel, first thing I do is look in his eyes that’s my window in to him.”

DuBois had a rough start to the new year. First, CBS cancelled *Medium*, and its last show aired in January 2011. Then DuBois received criticism about her December appearance on *The Real Housewives of Beverly Hills*, a reality television show aired on the cable channel Bravo, in which she visited her friend Camille Grammer, now ex-wife of famed *Cheers*

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actor Kelsey Grammer (Phillips 2011). Sipping on a drink and smoking what appeared to be a cigarette, DuBois traded insults with other members of the show. One of the insults was aimed at Kyle Richards, who DuBois said “was every girl in a high school that made somebody kill herself.” While holding her cigarette, DuBois said, “I’m gonna shove this up her [censored] ass just to prove a point. Except I think she’d need a bigger one

pump’s deceased grandmother. As DuBois started giving Vanderpump a reading, the video cut to Taylor Armstrong, who pointed out that what DuBois was saying “didn’t make any sense.” The show then cut back to Vanderpump saying to DuBois, “you don’t know if she’s with me.” In response DuBois told Vanderpump, “You’re thinking, I’m feeling; that’s how we are different.” DuBois then followed with

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just to feel it. Oh yeah, I went there.” In response to questions about her behavior, DuBois blamed the show’s editing and denied being intoxicated. In early January 2011, DuBois told *The Examiner* she smoked an electronic cigarette, not a real cigarette, and added, “I had two to three cocktails in four hours and was most definitely not intoxicated. If it offended any fans I apologize.”

Then in February, Bravo aired the now infamous dinner party in a much longer format and made clips of the show, including “Allison’s Full Rant,” available online. The longer video was more revealing but probably not in the way DuBois wanted. During one part of the “full rant,” DuBois angrily told the women at the table about Richards, “I don’t give a [censored] what she thinks about me. She can [censored] off. I can tell you when she’s going to die and what’s going to happen to her family. I love that about me.”

In another clip, appropriately titled “Lisa Takes on the Psychic,” Lisa Vanderpump asked DuBois about Vander-

“She was the mother that raised you or that was the mother you needed and so do you.” The segment cut to Vanderpump telling the camera, “As soon as she said my grandmother raised me I lost interest because she didn’t.” Vanderpump disputed other claims DuBois made by bluntly saying “no” to her assertions, causing DuBois to look down and nervously laugh at one point. In reflection, Adrienne Maloof said the “reading sounds like a canned statement.” Clearly, a reading with DuBois convinced neither Vanderpump nor Maloof that DuBois is psychic.

Viewing Allison DuBois as a case study in psychic ability, we can see that her paranormal claims are not backed by evidence. When an incorrect prediction is made, even considering its likelihood, the psychic fails. Not only have her claims about working with law enforcement been denied, but third-party evidence supporting the assertion that she has psychic powers is lacking. This scenario should be construed as a lesson to the public: claims should be sup-

ported with evidence if they are to be accepted. In response to questions about skeptics, DuBois told the *Sacramento Bee*: “I’m very proud of what I do.” Perhaps DuBois is proud of what she does, but that doesn’t change the lack of proof for her claims and her incorrect prediction in baby Gabriel’s case. The evidence, not pride, speaks for itself. Although the character of Allison DuBois on CBS’s *Medium* solves crimes by using psychic ability, evidence for DuBois’s ability in the real world is sorely lacking. CBS cancelled *Medium*, but there is little doubt that the real-life Allison DuBois will continue to claim that she helps law enforcement even if she can’t supply evidence for her claims. ■

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