

1938

An Objective Experiment with a Clairvoyant (Mind-Readers)

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Recommended Citation

Emme, E. (1938) "An Objective Experiment with a Clairvoyant (Mind-Readers)," *Proceedings of the Iowa Academy of Science*, 45(1), 239-245.

Available at: <https://scholarworks.uni.edu/pias/vol45/iss1/64>

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AN OBJECTIVE EXPERIMENT WITH A CLAIRVOY-
ANT¹ (Mind-Readers)

E. EMMÉ

1. Will I be happy?
2. Will I be successful in what I undertake?
3. What am I fitted for?
4. Am I destined to become a great leader or just what?
5. How can I be popular?
6. What kind of a person will I marry?
7. Will I always have good health?

The above and other questions constitute some of the "unknowns" which concern many people. It is estimated that in a city the size of Des Moines, Iowa, \$1,000,000 is collected annually by "fakirs" who claim they can answer and explain all such questions.

ASSUMPTIONS

The assumption is that the clairvoyant (fortune-teller) can guess accurately personality facts concerning an individual. Readings are given in devious ways. The most common forms are crystal gazing, use of cards, use of tea leaves, and sometimes a combination with palmistry. Individuals are usually so curious, or in such an excitable or careless state of mind that reported findings from such persons are very inaccurate. In order to get at an analysis of the whole procedure as objectively as possible a plan was devised.

Three college girls plan to visit Madam X as an experiment

Three college young women above the average in intelligence, education, sociability, ability and skill in understanding people as well as a broad understanding of life in general agreed to go for a reading to Madam X. In preparation for the visit, step 1 was agreed upon.

1. Specific Plans for the visit to Madam X

- a. The desire to secure facts about themselves would be the aim. The whole procedure would be made as objective as possible.
- b. Accurate notes and stenographic records were to be taken of everything said. One of the women selected had a good record in taking dictation by shorthand.

¹ An experiment conducted under the supervision of the Psychology Department at Morningside College.

c. Each one was determined not to speak or by facial expression reveal any tips, leads, or suggestions to aid Madam X in her reading. The usual favorable or unfavorable facial expressions would be strictly omitted.

d. If requested to ask questions they would be such that requires definite answers.

e. They would arrange if possible to be together in the same or a nearby room with the reader, so more accurate record keeping could take place.

f. Follow up on "after effects." Each decided to keep a daily record of her questions, thoughts, and reactions for two weeks.

g. No previous appointment was made in advance so Madam X could not secure advance information about them.

2. *Conditions under which the reading was given*

Three young women, two sisters and a near friend, entered the waiting of Madam X. An elderly woman was there waiting when they arrived. She had evidently made an appointment and was taken into the regular reading room. After a few minutes, during which time she said she put the old lady in a trance, Madam X pointed to one of the girls to "Come on," but all three responded instead. They told the Madam that they were in very much of a hurry and could not come back so she then accommodated them by taking them into her own private reading room, leaving two of them behind a curtain which made it possible for them to hear everything that went on.

3. *Description of the Readers Room*

Madam X sat at a table with Carrie seated on the opposite side with her left hand upon the table. To the right and to the left were two 4-inch mercury-like crystal balls, through which perception was impossible. A strong odor of incense was quite evident. Many large, dark, flowery tapestries hung on the wall so that the room was attractively decorated.

The two women, one an expert stenographer, wrote down everything that was said. Immediately after Carrie paid the 50 cents, all three went to a quiet waiting room of a friend and compared their notes to make sure they had a complete record of just what had taken place. The record as verified follows:

4. *Verbatim report of the reading given Carrie Brown*

"Give me your left hand. You are very much an anemic. You tire easily and are very restless. You have a friendly disposition

and you have many friends, however, you do not enjoy your friends as you are very jealous.

"You come from a small family, probably four? Your folks live in a very small town or in the country. There is much happiness in your family and home, but you do not stay there. You have a brother who is either drinking or sick but there will be no deaths until 1938. You should not worry about the death situation until 1938.

"You are going to be married very soon; much sooner than you think. Your husband is going to be tall and large. Your married life will be spent in the country. Your health is going to fail. The first child will cause you much illness and wreck your marriage. You love your friend and he loves you, but neither let on.

"You are going to be married twice, you will have two children by your second marriage. You are a business girl; you do something with your hands, perhaps work in an office? You are very, very independent. You are fond of music. You are a spend thrift — money goes right through your hands. You will not have to worry about money as it will be handed to you.

"Now, ask me three questions," said Madam X.

Question 1. "Is there going to be a change made in our family?" asked Carrie.

"No great changes. Your folks own land and will sell this, but only in money matters will there be a change."

Question 2. "How soon will I be married?" asked Carrie.

"Much sooner than you think; I would say August," Madam replied.

Question 3. "Will I ever make a beauty operator?" Carrie asked.

"You've graduated, but because of your health you are not satisfied and will later move to the country."

"Your health is bad, do not drink or smoke. Build up your blood. I would suggest taking light treatments from my husband. Here is his card. You can overcome this by purifying your blood with these light treatments."

5. *Carrie Brown Herself*

Carrie has had two years of high grade work at a State University. In accord with her vocational choice, she worked at the best known beauty parlor near the State University campus and is happy in this work. She has many friends and interests, but was interested to know what Madam X might tell her, while on her vacation. She is an active leader in one of the large city churches

adjoining the campus where she directs the social and recreational program of that church. It is a church where many students attend. She is a woman who does her own thinking, so she took an objective attitude toward this whole procedure.

6. *Analysis of Madam X's Guesses on Carrie Brown*

The writer went over the analysis with Carrie and one of her friends who knows her very well. Each statement (fortune-teller's guess) was considered in the light of the facts in her total situation. An analysis of the above fortune-telling situation is made below, *Right* meaning that the guess was accurate or nearly so, and *Wrong* meaning that the guess was completely wrong. Three of the guesses were right and fourteen were wrong.

Guesses	Right	Wrong
1. <i>You are anemic</i> — but is very healthy		x
2. <i>You tire easily</i> — but is at work from 7 a.m. to 5 p.m.		x
3. <i>You have many friends</i> — is always entertaining	x	
4. <i>You are very jealous</i> — wholly untrue		x
5. <i>Come from a small family</i> — but there are ten		x
6. <i>Lives in small town or in country</i> — right but very general guessing	x	
7. <i>Do not stay at home</i> — lives where she works, away from home	x	
8. <i>Brother drinking or sick</i> — entirely wrong		x
9. <i>Going to be married very soon in August</i> — they have broken off and he will not return until October (3 months)		x
<i>Several relate to the future and so any degree of accurate guessing is impossible at this time.</i>		
a. No deaths until 1938.		
b. Husband will be tall and large.		
c. Health is going to fail.		
d. First child will cause you ill health.		
e. Both love each other but neither will let on.		
f. You will be married twice.		
g. You will have three children.		
h. You do not need to worry about money.		
10. <i>You perhaps work in an office</i> — but she is a Cosmetologist		x
11. <i>You are very, very independent</i> — four girls live together beautifully and her friends disprove this statement.		x
12. <i>You are fond of music</i> — but cannot play an instrument, nor sing, nor goes to concerts of any kind.		x
13. <i>You are a spendthrift</i> — is very business-like, monthly budget always balances.		x

<i>Three questions were asked by Carrie at the suggestion of Madam X.</i>		
14. (Ques. 1) Is there going to be a change in our family	— No chance of selling the land because son living on 40 acres nearby will move on the entire farm if any change takes place.	x
15. (Ques. 2) How soon will I be married?.....	— Her reply was August (less than one month away) — but Miss Carrie never does things in a hurry and she wants a big church or home wedding when it does take place.	x
16. (Ques. 3) Will I ever make a beauty parlor operator?	— “You’ve graduated” does not answer the question.	x
17. Your health is very bad.....	— but she passed a complete physical examination six months previous in order to get her present position and seems very healthy.	x
18. Suggests that she take light treatments from her husband. (Propaganda).....		
	—	—
	3	4

7. What of the above analysis?

The above ratio of 3:14 is merely the accurate result of one reading or fortune-telling, so no general inference can be drawn from this that all such readings miss the truth by that much. However, a very good “guesser” should be able to get a better result. As indicated before the patient is usually so excited, and having no opportunity to take notes on what is said, it is impossible for the individual to give a correct report at a later time on just what took place. This explains why so many say, “Why he (or she) told me my life perfectly.”

The wrong guesses do even more damage to personality planning than the supposed right ones, because many will keep thinking on some of the wrong guesses as if they should be true or should come true. Upon this motivation the thinking continues, followed by something being done about it. Thus the individual tends to put into practice some of the unfortunate and unfounded advice that is given.

8. The After-Effects of Mind-Reading

This study was carried further. Carrie was asked to keep a brief record of just what thoughts came to her concerning this experience over a period of two weeks. A brief statement merely suggesting the beginning of a conversation or a lengthy discussion with a near friend, or a trend or thought or anxiety which persisted for some time, is given in the following report of Carrie’s reactions.

The Reactions of Carrie Brown over a two-week period to the Fortune-Telling Experience

Day	Objective Statement made in Presence of Friends	Intensity of Reaction		
		Some	Very Much	Serious
1. Sun.	"This thing bothers me, so I am going to get another medical examination as soon as I get home"			x
2. Mon.	"I am much concerned over this getting married prophecy." Long discussion followed	x		
3. Tues.	"Maybe after all I should have been a stenographer"		x	
4. Wed.	"Well, kids, next time I see you (six weeks) I'll be Mrs. _____"	x		
5. Thurs.	"I know my brother is not drinking, for I went home and investigated"			x
6. Fri.	"I can't get over who is to die in 1938"			x
7. Sat.	"Now that the boy friend has written I am all worked up over this marriage situation. Only a few weeks left"		x	
First week total		2	2	3

Second Week Following (July 25-31)

Day	Objective Statement made in Presence of Friends	Intensity of Reaction		
		Some	Very Much	Serious
1. Sun.	"Saw Dad to see if he was going to sell the farm. It worried me"		x	
2. Mon.	"She said I wouldn't be a beauty operator, but here I am at work as one again. It makes me wonder"		x	
3. Tues.	"If I will marry in August, he'd better come soon. (In serious mood)"		x	
4. Wed.	"Was too busy to think about my fortune today except a very little"	x		
5. Thurs.	"I told my manager I was going to a doctor but she told me I did not need a medical examination"			x
6. Fri.	"Madam X's reference to the country made me lonesome for it today, but I am sure I will not live there"		x	
7. Sat.	"While I was balancing my monthly budget, I thought, What if I am poor today? Madam X thinks I will be rich"	x		
Second week total		2	4	1

9. Carrie Sums It Up This Way

"This whole experience with Madam X has been very disturbing to me. I have always been happy in my work but these past two weeks have found me emotionally upset. Even at our home we were all excited. As time went on the excitement seemed to lessen somewhat.

"But there are some things about the future which are likely to

bother me for some time or at least will cause me to wonder. For example I am to have three children; my health; deaths in the family. These are all factors which cause me deep concern. As for my brother drinking, I was certain this was untrue, but I was ill at ease until I could see him about it. And this love interest, and jealousy in my life — all these have me very much worked up.

“I hope I can eventually forget this whole experience. I should have known better. I have a near friend who will not go to a fortune teller simply because of the tendency of whatever is told one to remain for a long time. My two years at the State University, my present vocation, my satisfying friendships among young people of both sexes have all been so enjoyable that I regret that I was ever persuaded during my vacation to go and see Madam X. My college study about personality gave me such a good understanding of human nature. I learned of motives that impel us to act, the nature of emotion, the nature and use of intelligence, how we adjust to life, etc., that I am going to review these important psychological considerations and try to forget this disturbing experience with Madam X which is not based upon fact.

“I am determined to have facts about myself and human nature in general. Psychology and various sciences help. After this my planning is to be based upon facts about personality that are reliable.”

10. *November 1 Telephone Call*

Almost four months later a long distance telephone call from Carrie's cousin was as follows: “Carrie writes she is no nearer the prophesied marriage and has lost all faith in what the clairvoyant told her four months ago.”

11. *March Telephone Call*

Ten months later, another phone call: “Carrie wrote no change in gaining any respect for the mind-reader. No development to substantiate the reading given me.”

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