

*Angelo Stagnaro's*

# SOMETHING FROM NOTHING: A GUIDE TO MODERN COLD READING

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*A Mentalist's Guide to Reading People's  
Minds & Futures for Fun & Profit*

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**Cold Reading** — *n* : a general means used by professional mentalists, stage magicians and charlatans to ascertain ostensibly secret information in order to simulate psychic abilities such as ESP, telepathy and precognition. They largely do so by relaying on experiences common to humanity in general. Also known as the *P.T. Barnum Effect*.

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## COLD READING

***"Intuition will tell the thinking mind where to look next."***  
**- Dr. Jonas Salk**

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The "P. T. Barnum Effect."

Cold reading is very simple and is easily learned by most people. However, once learned, it requires practice. The following suggestions are taken directly from Ray Hyman's classic book, "**The Elusive Quarry: A Scientific Appraisal of Psychological Research.**" These are the techniques "psychics" have been found to use to generate what seems like paranormal effects. Psychologists have identified these techniques as the "P. T. Barnum Effect" or the "Forer Effect." Despite what most people will claim, P. T. Barnum did not say "a sucker is born every minute" though, I'm sure, he firmly believed it. The expression was actually coined by his competitor, a banker named David Hannum, owner and perpetrator of the faked Cardiff Giant "Fossil."

Psychologist Paul Meehl, coined the term "Barnum Effect" due to the famed showman's reputation as a flimflam artist. P. T. Barnum is most often associated with circus sideshows but he also worked very hard at developing "psychics" from ordinary people who, though talented, had absolutely no preternatural skills. P. T. Barnum was first and foremost a business man and would not let a lie, or a series of them, get in the way of a profit. Like many other people in similar circumstances, he was an expert in human relations and marketing. He knew what motivated humanity and how to manipulate them for his own purposes. In keeping with this philosophy, I have produced an analysis herein of the principles of the P. T. Barnum Effect.

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**kinesics — 1** : the psychological science that deals with the movements of the human body and their interpretations as to interior and subsequently hidden motives and emotional states

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# BODY LANGUAGE

**"A thousand words will not leave so deep an impression as one deed."  
- Ibsen (1828-1906) Norwegian poet and playwright**

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If psychic powers truly existed, as some would purport, there would be no need for a book like this. As mentalists, we're continually challenged to delve into spectators' private selves. One way in which the private self is already standing up and screaming to be noticed is through body language. Information derived from body language is completely fair game as far as I am concerned and it would be beneficial for us to learn to recognize these body signals. I hope that after you read this book and digest it, you'll see that everyone, with only some minor exceptions, can learn to read the tell-tale signs of what is going on inside our spectators' heads.

How many times have we been in a discussion with someone who agrees to your request but will stand crossed-armed and tense while he speaks to you? Or who, alternatively, will smile gratuitously and act agreeably but still gives you the impression that he has absolutely no intention whatsoever of fulfilling his promise to you?

Body language is described by psychologists as a language of signals. These scientists believe that we unconsciously express our feelings and thoughts in gestures, movements, aspects and attitudes. All of which can be utilized by mentalists. Kinesics, the study of body movements and their interpretation, suggests that approximately ninety-percent of the total information given off by an individual is conveyed through body language, tone of voice, facial expressions, stance, gait, gestures and pupil dilation. Studying these largely unconscious behaviors reveal pertinent information about a person's inner thoughts and emotions.

Interpreting body language involves more than simply seeing a single body motion and giving a pat explanation for its existence. This thinking could lead you into mistakes. Instead, you need to interpret the entire gestalt. Examine the spectator's gait and his demeanor. Look at the style, fit and condition of his clothes. What does the condition and appearance of his hands suggest to you? What does your intuition tell you about this person? Look into the spectator's eyes. What do his eyes reveal about his personality? Is the person relieved, happy or angry? Does he have a spark of intelligence or is he uncaring? Are his eyes tired and bloodshot suggesting a recent night out on the town? Does he have a glazed-over look suggesting that he might be on medication?

Much of what I've written here is common sense. Angry looks suggest anger and nervous jittering suggest nervousness. I offer this insight into human behavior to help you develop a sensitivity toward people and a theatrical response to that behavior to help develop your reputation as a mentalist. The movements that are described are divided into the following categories. Each will be discussed in turn:

Hands/Arms  
Shaking hands  
Eyes

Posture & Stance  
Gait  
Seated Position

Miscellaneous  
Voice & Inflection

## BITING ONE'S LIPS

#	Description/Explanation	Try these lines:
1	This suggests embarrassment or a lack of self-confidence. People bite their lips to prevent speaking rash words. This can also be the reaction of someone caught unawares in an embarrassing situation while thinking of something to say.	<i>"You are a person who knows how to deal with people. Tactfulness is your best quality."</i>

## SMIRK

#	Description/Explanation	Try these lines:
12	Smirking expresses self-satisfaction, resoluteness, mischief and the joy of observing others.	<i>"You are a good judge of character."</i>

## STEEPLED FINGERS

#	Description/Explanation	Try these lines:
19	Hands in this position suggest an authoritative personality.	<i>"You are a gifted leader. You enjoy commanding others and have the ability to make others follow you."</i>

## CROSSED ARMS (hands hidden under armpits)

#	Description/Explanation	Try these lines:
23	This person is cautiously hopeful. This posture symbolizes defensiveness and emotional and social barriers.	<i>"You are not a person who willingly puts all of his eggs into one basket."</i>

## TOUCHING ONE'S NOSE

#	Description/Explanation	Try these lines:
35	Touching and rubbing one's nose is a sign of a lie.	<i>"You feel conflicted about a situation and feel guilty about a lie that is somehow involved."</i>

## SHAKING HANDS (TWO-HANDER)

#	Description/Explanation	Try these lines:
48	This person is seeking emotional control and/or intimacy.	<i>"You find yourself very lonely at times. Having others around you who are supportive is very important to you."</i>

## SHAKING HANDS (*FIRM GRIP*)

#	Description/Explanation	Try these lines:
49	This spectator is defensive, aggressive and generally angry.	<i>"Lately you have found that people are not meeting your standards in terms of their behavior."</i>

## CONFIDENT WALK (*men*)

#	Description/Explanation	Try these lines:
93	This walk suggests vitality and forcefulness which may or may not actually be present. Men who concentrate on their walking and the way in which they present themselves to the world are actually not truly confident at all. A truly confident man moves only his hips. A secretly unconfident man will move his shoulders in an exaggerated swagger.	<i>"Others perceive you as confident and you generally can behave that way but, secretly, you are worried that you might make a serious mistake from which you might not recover."</i>

## CONFIDENT WALK (*women*)

#	Description/Explanation	Try these lines:
94	A confident woman will walk with her shoulders held upright. Her walk is gently swinging and tensionless, relaxed and casual with a discreet swing of the hips.	<i>"You are a person who is self-confident and is largely sure of her plans in life."</i>

## KICKING BACK

#	Description/Explanation	Try these lines:
101	Spectators who sit with their hands clasped behind their heads and their legs crossed are supremely confident. They might suffer from an exaggerated sense of self-worth.	<i>"You are a confident and self-possessed person. With only minor exceptions, you feel life has been generous to you."</i>

## CROSSED LEGS (*with crossed arms*)

#	Description/Explanation	Try these lines:
104	This spectator's body is protected from all "attacks." He or she is stubborn, restricted, skeptical and disapproving. This person is also strongly motivated.	<i>"You can be stubborn when you need to be." "You are a very directed person."</i>

**intuition** *n* 1 : quick and ready insight 2 : the power or faculty of knowing things without conscious reasoning — **intuitive** *adj* — **intuitively** *adv*

# READING PEOPLE

*From a drop of water a logician could infer the possibility of an Atlantic or a Niagara without having seen or heard of one or the other.*  
- Sherlock Holmes, "A Study in Scarlet"

	Clue	Culture
African	A curved scar on a cheek	<i>Western African</i>
	Small cross tattooed on the right hand	<i>Coptic (Egyptian) Christian</i>

	Clue	Culture
Asian & Middle Eastern	Asian who speaks French or speaks with a French accent	<i>Vietnamese (Laotian are a less likely possibility)</i>
	Mizpah, mezuzot, chai, Star of David symbols	<i>Jewish, Israeli</i>
	Blue evil eye pendent	<i>Turkish or Armenian</i>
	Steel/Silver bracelet on a man	<i>Sikh</i>
	Reversed swastika	<i>Buddhist sigil</i>
	A split coin pendant	<i>Jewish (It can also denote a romantic love interest.)</i>
	"Om" symbol	<i>Hindu</i>
	Hamsa pendant	<i>Southern Mediterranean cultures (principally Arab or Jewish)</i>

	Clue	Culture
European	Claddagh Rings	<i>Irish</i>
	Maltese Cross	<i>Maltese</i>
	Red twisted horn pendant	<i>Italian</i>
	A ring or pendant with an inscribed Maltese Cross	<i>Maltese (or a professional firefighter)</i>
	Germanic-looking but speaks Italian perfectly	<i>Tyrolean</i>
	Celtic Cross	<i>Irish</i>
	Person speaks a language reminiscent of Italian and Spanish but is neither	<i>Rumanian</i>
	Surname rhymes with "Armenian"	<i>Armenian</i>
	An Orthodox cross	<i>Eastern Europe</i>
	Crucifix	<i>Crosses are worn by all Christian denominations but crucifixes are usually worn by Roman Catholics.</i>
Rosary beads <i>or</i> Rosary Ring	<i>Roman Catholic</i>	

	Clue	Culture
Latin & Caribbean	Hispanic person who speaks with an Italian accent	<i>Argentinean</i>
	Latin but doesn't speak Spanish	<i>Brazilian</i>

## LOVE & ROMANCE

This category of concerns is exclusively those of a romantic nature. Specifically, lovers, boy/girlfriends, fiancées/ fiancés and spouses. If love is not present in the spectator's life, he will be concerned with when and how it will finally make its appearance. If love is already present, then his concerns will be primarily on maintaining it despite problems such as infidelity and diminished interest/affection. Other problems include jealousy, sexual dysfunction, suspicions, arguments, making choices between possible lovers, unplanned pregnancy, unrequited love, career/relationship conflicts and the possibility of divorce.

## FAMILY

Concerns about family are specific to the "Family of Orientation." People, in general, all too frequently disregard their marriage vows. Divorce is frequently due to a sexual problem or severe conflict of opinions. Money is the second most likely cause.

The pressure to produce children in Western society is very great especially for women of a certain age. Conflicts with a career add to this pressure.

Family concerns usually revolve around maintaining family cohesion despite severe external problems. Alternatively, the problems that result from the alienation of family affection. Parents, siblings, in-laws, children, grandchildren and other extended family are all possibly sources of conflict.

Parents and grandparents, understandably, worry about their children. It is not uncommon for them to wear jewelry with multiple colored stones representing the birthmonth of each child or grandchild. The two most important concerns in a women's life are her children and her love life, in that order. Again, the concern for children might very well be the hopeful and eventual anticipation of children and not *actual* children.

## MONEY/CAREER

Power and fame are subsumed under this category. Because of the structure of Western society, money is important and necessary to live. Because of the structure of human society and, in part to our genetic makeup, men are the principle bread-winners in a family. Though women make up fifty-percent of the Western world's workforce, they are not as concerned with the furtherance of their careers as are men. Women are now by far more independent financially than they were prior to the second half of the twentieth century but, despite this, it is not uncommon for a woman to give up her career to develop her family and home life or to at least be emotionally conflicted as to whether or not to do so.

Money is the main goal of most men. Their problems are principally caused by a lack of money. Men are frequently impatient in this regard. They seek out, more often than not, immediate gratification. They desire the things that money can procure including progress, recognition, prestige, comfort, security, wealth, fame and physical possessions.

## HEALTH

Health is a dominant concern for everyone. The spectator is concerned for either his own health or that of someone close to him. Consider your spectator's physical aspect; does he seem healthy? A perceptive mentalist can even distinguish between symptoms of some diseases and disorders (pg. 71)

If the spectator is not concerned about his own health, chances are that he is concerned about someone in his family, probably his parents. If the spectator is past a certain age, his parents are most probably not alive any longer and is therefore concerned for the health of his children.

Many people, and certainly most women and the elderly, complain about their health with or without cause. Catering to their concerns, even if completely delusional, will help you with your performance.

# Men

Men's concerns are partially determined by their genetic nature and partly because of the rights and responsibilities afforded men in Western society. Men are required by society to have a job, be successful in their career, to be generous with their earnings and to provide for their partner and family. Ambitiousness is certainly a male trait and so is a preoccupation with independence and financial concerns. Men are generally less concerned with their own health, both physical and emotional. Friendships are very important for men. In many cases, male friendships are by far more emotionally intense than are many marriages.

Men are less emotionally demonstrative than women even if they are from cultures and family backgrounds that promote emotional displays. Men will more quickly reveal their true emotional states and concerns to their male friends before they do so to their wives and girlfriends. This will always be accompanied with an internal struggle between the need to relieve oneself of a secret and society's pressures for men to remain stoic, strong, independent and "manly." This is evidenced by the fact that men rarely visit physicians. Men usually disregard their health until it is too late or nearly too late. None of this is meant to suggest that any particular spectator is somehow trapped in an unhappy or unfulfilling marriage. It's just the nature of male bonding that men can communicate better with each other than they can with women.

The principle concern of men is money and all of its ramifications. The second most important concern is love followed by family and finally, health. Though male anxieties largely center on financial concerns, men rarely seek after money for its own sake. More often than not, money is desired because it represents something else including comfortable living, conquest, external validation, prestige, manhood, independence, stability, the ability to support a family, materialism and sex.

Men will seldom reveal personal weaknesses and will be uncomfortable discussing their problems with others. Men more easily change the life conditions in which they find themselves than do women. Men forget a past mistake more quickly and rarely become embittered. Men prefer to forge ahead rather than become mired in past events.

# Women

Women principally want love, affection, children and a home. Having achieved these goals, they frequently want to expand their lives financially (i.e., a career) and/or in terms of education. Most women complain about their health whether from imaginary or real causes. This is evidenced by the fact that most men simply don't visit their doctors unless it is an absolute emergency whereas women make up the bulk of any physician's patients.

They trust their intuition more often than men in their general life. They are more trusting and gullible than are men. More women believe in psychic phenomenon than do men. This is partly because women are more comfortable with their emotions, less secure and more at ease seeking out people in whom they can confide. Women tend to dwell on the past more so than do men.

Love, and all of its permutations, is the principle concern of women. The second most important would be family. The third is health and finally money. Most love problems in a woman's life include alienation of affection, unrequited love, hatred, jealousy, infidelity and betrayal. Health concerns include the spectator's health and that of significant others, her children and her parents.

Women enjoy a more developed and exercised emotional life than do men. They can wax fatalistically. Women seek out relationships especially marriage, more often and more easily than do men.

Women value love, communication and relationships. Whether they are mothers or not, they seek out opportunities to act "maternally" by helping and nurturing others. Their sense of self is defined by the depth of their emotions and the quality of their relationships. They are fulfilled by developing relationships through sharing and relating their feelings. This is, in general, more important to them than personal power and success.

Women seek out harmony, community, love and cooperation. Talking and relating to one another is a source of tremendous fulfillment. Women seek to develop their intuitive side and liberally involve themselves in others people's emotions. For women, it is important to be considerate of the needs and feelings of others

## *Concerns for the Average Male*

	Young Man	Young Adult	Middle Age	Senior
Money/Career	spending fast	needs money for a major purchase	wishes to live well/time for a change	needs money for his retirement
Love/Romance	his girlfriend	his wife	infidelity	loneliness in his old age
Family	his parents	reconciling with family	children's decisions & future	grandchildren
Health	<unconcerned>	his children	his parents	his own mortality

## *Concerns for the Average Female*

	Young Women	Young Adult	Middle Age	Senior
Love/Romance	boyfriend and/or future marriage	husband	her husband	her grandchildren
Health	of a friend	her own	her parents	her own
Money/Career	<unconcerned>	making career decisions	possibility of a second career	for her retirement
Family	future children	her children	her parents/her children's future	her children

### *Things that Motivate Men*

Wants/Desires	Fears
Men want money. Money is power. Power is domination, authority and/or superiority over others, conquest, prestige and material gain	Loss of possessions, destitution, powerlessness, loss of affection
Men want to get ahead; to progress	Fear of not keeping up with other men
Freedom; independence	Fear of having to rely on others
Sexual conquest	Sexual complications: physical and emotional

### *Things that Motivate Women*

Wants/Desires	Fears
Peaceful and productive home life	Husbands/boyfriend's infidelity
Social activities and personal expression	Women seek independence but are fearful of the problems that freedom may produce
Domestic stability	Jealously concerned that others will attain more than they will
Family life	Fear of getting pregnant; fear of not getting pregnant

# Intuitive Observation

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## Developing Your Character Intuitively

It would be a matter of course for an actor playing Hamlet to project a brooding but regal bearing when he comes on stage. He cannot convince his audience that he is, for the duration of the play, the very spirit of revenge and the embodiment of a tortured spirit hounded by his past actions.

Court intrigue, murder, betrayal and adultery, then he is not committed to his craft nor will he be a success as an actor.

### Primary Physicality:

Face, Body, Stance, Gait, Aspect, Behavior, Gesticulations, Health

### Secondary Observations:

Clothing, Grooming, Voice, Language, Inflection,  
Grammar & Vocabulary

### Tertiary Observations:

Reactions, Responses, Emotional State

# Determinations

## Primary Physicality:

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Face

General Aspect

Body

Behavior

Stance

Gesticulations

Gait

Health

## Secondary Observations:

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Clothing

Signs & Symbols

Jewelry

Language

Grooming

Inflection

Voice

Grammar & Vocabulary

## Tertiary Observations:

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Reactions

Emotional State

Responses

# Ruminations About Your Partner

## Accent

Does your character have an accent? Is it because he was born in a different country or region? Is the accent more an educated affectation? Has he used his accent to his advantage before? Does he speak other languages?

## Other Physical Clues

Glasses? Why? Is it because of a fascination with learning and reading when he/she was a small child? A congenital sight problem? An environmental accident?

Does he smoke? Is he trying to give it up?

Does he chew his nails? Why? How many sugars does he take in his coffee?

What's a typical free night like for your character? At home alone pouring over ancient tomes written in dead languages? A theater premier with a stunning companion as arm candy

Describe his/her sense of humor

Political orientation?

Religion?

Married?

What historical or contemporary figure does your partner most respect?

What kind of movies/plays does your partner enjoy?

Any ailments?

How does your partner celebrate the holidays?

What are your partner's vices?

What is his/her main goal in life?

What is your partner's strong point?

What is your partner's weaknesses?

Which ones will he/she not admit to himself?

What was his/her childhood like?

Cultural/ethnic Background?

Describe his/her parents

Right or left-handed?

Good eyesight, glasses or contact lenses?

Tastes in clothing

Favorite vacation spot

What are your partner's pet peeves?

What are his/her hobbies?

Is he/she currently in love? Why not?

Best physical feature?

Social Class?

Typical daily schedule?

Size of family?

What do your partner hands say about him?