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| |  | | --- | |  |  |  |  |  |  | | --- | --- | --- | --- | | [Christine Corcos](http://docs.google.com/bios.htm#corcos)     |  | | --- | | **Read other reviews:**  [Official site](http://www.nbc.com/Medium/)  [Internet Movie Database](http://www.us.imdb.com/title/tt0412175/)  [All Movie Guide](http://www.allmovie.com/cg/avg.dll?p=avg&sql=1:319139)  [Readers' comments](http://docs.google.com/user_feedback.htm) |       Might viewers, watching this show, be led to believe that psychics could actually help the police solve crimes by visiting crime scenes and handling evidence? | |  | | --- | | **"I SLEUTH DEAD PEOPLE" *-* NBC's *MEDIUM***  by Christine Alice Corcos  NBC has launched a new weekly series from Glenn Gordon Caron featuring Patricia Arquette as Allison Dubois, an Arizona housewife and former law office intern, who claims to communicate with the dead. In the pilot, Allison's husband Joe (Jake Weber) an aerospace engineer and skeptic, tries to help her come to terms with her odd abilities. She is unhappy with the way her life is developing. Approaching the ancient age of thirty, she feels too old to go to law school, the original plan, even though she has secured an internship at the local DA's office, where they seem to like her, and where apparently she can continue to work after she begins her law school career.  After Allison tells Joe about her latest visions, which come to her in a disturbing dream, he faxes an account of them to the Texas Rangers and they respond, saying they'd like to talk to her. Apparently, her vision is pretty close to a recent incident, and the Rangers think she "knows something."  The major creative problems with *Medium* are that is the writing and plotting are trite, and creator Caron leaves absolutely no mystery about whether Allison will actually finger the guilty party. Of course she will; she knows whodunit. That's the trouble with having a psychic as your detective. Indeed, in an interview with People magazine, the real-life Joe says, "When you're married to a medium, you don't lie." Anyone who has seen more than a few "psychic detective" or "medium" movies or television shows know that the psychic, if s/he is "genuine" is often disbelieved by the police, who think she has inside information; thus s/he loses valuable time while s/he establishes his or her bona fides. Real life psychic detectives claim they undergo the same scrutiny. Real life police officers claim they waste valuable time tracking down useless psychic leads, just as the assistant DA (Balinda Alexander) complains in the pilot episode's early scene.  In order to make *Medium* palatable, and interesting, to the audience, developer Caron (*Moonlighting*) has to give the television Allison many more powers than any real life psychic could ever deliver. For one thing the tv Allison has the ability to dream or picture very clear images. Real life psychic mediums (and not all psychics claim to be mediums) almost never claim to do so. Instead they tend to assert that their visions are figurative, partial, and must be interpreted. In the episode "Night of the Wolf" (aired January 24, 2005) Allison actually picks up and comforts a little boy who materializes as a physical being, and whom her six year old daughter can see though he has been dead for five years. Until now we have not seen either television or films make the claim that materialization or "trance" mediums could do such a thing. John Edward, James van Praagh, Sylvia Browne, and Rosemary Altea certainly don't. Yet here is the fictionalized Allison Dubois touching, holding a six year old ghost as material as her own daughter. Ectoplasm went out with the trance mediums of the fifties, but for purposes of Allison's credibility with the D.A.'s office we need to see truly supernatural abilities on Allison's part. As another medium tells Allison in the pilot, we need to see that Allison is a rare medium indeed.  And credibility is the point. Prosecutor Manuel Devalos (Miguel Sandoval) constantly bemoans the fact that he employs a psychic, even as he exploits her talents. He hides her away in a broom closet sized office, which she shares with a police sketch artist. Devalos cautions her not to tell anyone precisely what kind of consulting she does for him. That would spell doom, since he would lose all bona fides with his staff, with the judges, with the juries, with the press, with the public-it would certainly be a disaster. Yet every episode thumps us over the head with Allison's gifts, with her honesty, with her reliability, and with her ability to come through in a crisis. Her visions are dead on (sorry). Let's get some of those skeptical scientists in from the local University to test her. In real life, the nearest scientist available is Gary Schwartz, of the University of Arizona, who has actually tested the real Allison DuBois and considers her genuine. However, others who have examined the results of his tests consider his protocols flawed, partly because of researcher bias (see references, below).  In my own research into the work of psychics and trance mediums, and their interactions with the law, I have yet to come across contemporary practitioners who claim to have visions of nearly the quality that the tv Allison has, especially when she is awake. She talks to dead people constantly. Her dead people are just like the live people I see every day, maybe even more animated. They have substance. Their messages are amazingly clear. If real life mediums could deliver on such claims, they need never fear fraud charges and we need never worry that our police departments might hire them to solve cold cases. Indeed, we'd never have cold cases at all. We'd never have mistaken verdicts. We'd never have innocent people on death row. We might not need lawyers or judges or courtrooms, or Innocence Projects. But, according to the People magazine interview cited below, the Texas Rangers refuse to "confirm they even worked with DuBois." Not exactly a ringing endorsement. Compare the insights TV Allison has with the ones People magazine quotes. TV Allison works with spirits who appear in specific places who point her toward actual clues. But according to that People magazine piece, when she worked with the Texas Rangers, she described the suspect and accomplices and predicted the body would be found within 5 years; it was found 4 years and 10 months later. Many bodies do eventually turn up, given enough time. Psychics aren't the only people able to predict such eventualities.  The big legal roadblock Allison's employer has is finding an independent source for some, if not all, of her clues. The need for "proof", that is, real life evidence, as opposed to what we see through Allison's eyes, once again holds the legal system, the defense bar, and sometimes the protections of the Constitution, up to ridicule. In one episode, DA Devalos tells Allison that he can't get a search warrant based on her certain knowledge that a witness is describing the wrong suspect. Of course he is correct, but he goes ahead, obtains the search warrant, citing an anonymous and completely fictitious informant (probably trading on his own credibility with the local neutral and detached magistrate), and the case proceeds to trial. The defense attorney attacks Allison on the stand, since she is the person who provided the information justifying the warrant. The attorney asks her who was her "anonymous source", since she has only been working in the DA's office a few months. How could she have developed a trusting relationship with anyone to the extent that that person would give her such information? In a low tone of voice, Allison speaks a name from his past-the name of the person he paid to take his bar exam for him. She blackmails him into ceasing his line of questioning. Hooray! A victory for the saintly prosecution and a defeat for the evil defense. The real killer is eventually convicted, we assume. But the D.A. should never have gotten his search warrant to begin with, and the defense attorney was right to try to get the evidence suppressed. Is this the message we really want to see promulgated? More bashing of the Fourth Amendment? The heroine's blackmail of opposing counsel? The prosecuting attorney's lies? Should psychics be putting their gifts to use by any means possible for the ends they identify? Are they the sole judges of what is best?  This problem is only one of the legal and policy issues I see imbedded within *Medium*. Another is the active promotion of the notion that tax money might profitably be spent on the use of psychic detectives and psychic consultants on crime solving. Might viewers, watching this show, be led to believe that psychics could actually help the police solve crimes by visiting crime scenes and handling evidence? Some current psychics claim to do so and those claims are the basis for at least some of the activities presented on this program. But law enforcement officials who allow non-law enforcement trained personnel to participate as Allison does are putting both the cases and their jobs at risk. The fact is that few, if any, police departments actually admit to using psychics. Most officials that psychics simply waste time predicting that bodies or missing persons will be found near water, or trees, or buildings with red roofs. Experienced detectives combing particular areas, can do as well, and will not raise false hopes among the families and friends of the victims.  *Mediu*m is moderately well-acted, adequately written and will be around in Fall, 2005 for a second season. Its success indicates psychic phenomena and magical thinking continues to fascinate the U. S. public. I continue to despair.  **References**  Allison DuBois [website](http://www.allisondubois.com/default.htm)  Encounters with the Paranormal (Kendrick Frazier, ed., Prometheus Press, 1998).  Carla McClain, [Varied Readings on Arizona Psychic](http://www.azstarnet.com/dailystar/relatedarticles/57187.php), Arizona Daily Star, January 17, 2005  Medium [website](http://www.nbc.com/Medium/)  Gary Schwartz, The Afterlife Experiments (2002).  Alex Tresniowski, Natasha Stoynoff, and Rebecca Paley, She Sees Dead People, People, January 31, 2005 at 81.  Posted March 4, 2005 |   **Would you like to comment on this article? 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