Understanding the Psychological Significance of Astrology in Millennial Women's Lives

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UNDERSTANDING THE PSYCHOLOGICAL SIGNIFICANCE OF ASTROLOGY IN
MILLENNIAL WOMEN’S LIVES

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ABSTRACT

UNDERSTANDING THE PSYCHOLOGICAL SIGNIFICANCE OF ASTROLOGY IN MILLENNIAL WOMEN’S LIVES

By

Rachel June Floyd

November 2023

Dissertation supervised by Will W. Adams, Ph.D.

In North America, astrology has been experiencing a resurgence in popularity. This is immediately remarkable given that the United States and Canada are industrialized, modern societies where astrology is widely lamented as a pseudoscience. This dissertation presents a phenomenological exploration of the underlying reasons for this cultural trend, particularly among the demographic that uses it most: millennial women. Existing psychological literature on astrology is primarily dominated by correlational studies or historical analyses and lacks the depth and richness of direct experiences of individuals engaging with this phenomenon. This study sought to address this gap within psychological literature specifically, by conducting qualitative interviews with millennial women to uncover the meanings and functions of astrology in their lives. First, all participants expressed a defensive positioning regarding astrology that justified a complex reason for its use. Second, a theme of astrology being psychologically
beneficial emerged in that the use of astrology levies an intrapersonal, highly individualized sense of self-cohesion. Third, my participants expressed how astrology brings an interpersonal community or shared identity that is conducive to compassion and connection. Lastly, participants shared that astrology provides guidance and reassurance if not used in excess. This research contributes to the understanding of astrology's appeal among millennial women by providing a nuanced, qualitative exploration of their experiences and perspectives. The identified themes shed light on the significance of astrology in the lives of those representative of the demographic that uses it most, offering valuable insights for both scholars and practitioners. The findings underscore the need to consider the diverse functions astrology serves in contemporary society, transcending mere belief or skepticism, and emphasizing its role as a multifaceted tool that supports personal growth, emotional well-being, and compassionate connection.

*Keywords:* astrology, natal chart, horoscope, qualitative research, psychological growth, self-understanding
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In reflecting on how far I have come, I am reminded that success is rarely an individual endeavor. It is a collaborative effort fueled by the collective dedication and support of those around us. I thank each and every person who has played a part in helping me realize my calling.
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Chapter I: Introduction

We live in an era of extraordinary scientific and technological advancement. Consequently, it is surprising for many to learn that astrology has never been more popular (National Science Board, 2020). This is even more remarkable given its current status. Though once an integral part of the development of mathematics and modern science, astrology is now seen as an embarrassing relic of an earlier, less educated age with nothing to offer contemporary, rational men and women. This is emphasized in many introductory psychology textbooks (Larsen, 2005; Wade et al., 2014) – yet it persists. It begs the question of who or what is behind astrology’s revitalization, a pursuit so contrary to what is taught or perceived as acceptable by our education system and the public.

Further, upon closer inspection, one finds that it is the millennial generation\(^1\) that leads this renaissance, followed by Gen Z\(^2\) (YPulse, 2017). Examining even further, one learns that of these generations, it is millennial women that constitute the majority. Hypotheses abound in the popular media and scholarship, but I could not find any research studies in psychology that offer an examination of the phenomenon in an unbiased, curious way. Further, these studies don’t acknowledge the close affiliation and characterization of astrology in recent decades as a primarily feminine interest. The present research is inspired by these gaps within psychological literature and as such, is a qualitative, phenomenological study concerned with the meaning and function of astrology in millennial women’s lives. This line of inquiry immediately struck me as important, if only for the simple fact that such a pervasive phenomenon within our culture has not been thoroughly investigated by either quantitative or qualitative research within the psychological sciences. However, I also thought it would be a potentially rich source for

\(^1\) Millennial: generation of people born in the 1980s or 1990s (Merriam-Webster, n.d.)
\(^2\) Gen Z: generation of people born in the late 1990s and early 2000s (Merriam-Webster, n.d.)
investigating cognitive and emotional processes such as confirmation bias, locus of control, coping strategies, and self-esteem. I also thought it might contribute to scholarship and shed light on possible directions for future research regarding the power of media exposure, peer pressure, and identity formation. The results of this study may also help to reevaluate the potential benefits and risks of astrology for mental health and well-being, such as enhancing self-awareness, providing guidance, fostering hope, or reducing anxiety, guilt, or fatalism. Moreover, I appreciate that my study gives underrepresented voices a chance to be heard and an opportunity to complexify the current narrative about the validity, reliability, and ethics of using astrology as a form of knowledge, spirituality, or entertainment. It is my further hope that hearing these women will help to provide an answer for astrology’s remarkable endurance in the Western world. In the following pages, I believe I have accomplished this goal.

This study was designed using a qualitative, hermeneutic-phenomenological method and centered on the interpretation of interviews with volunteer participants who self-identified as regularly consulting natal astrology. When it comes to astrology, this is the most genuine form you can find outside of magazines and newspapers. Unlike entertainment horoscopes based only on one’s birth month, natal astrology (George, 2008) is based on the relative positions and placements of all the planets and other cosmic bodies at the time and place of one’s birth. Astrologers extract this information, or “snapshot” of the sky at the moment and location of one’s birth, into a map of these stellar relationships called “a natal chart.” The natal chart is a static profile that can be read for an overview of an individual’s character, personality, and potential biographical experiences. Birth-chart readings are often augmented by the study of the ongoing movements of the planets in relation to each other as they traverse the zodiac (an area of the sky through which the sun, moon, and most of the planets appear to move, divided into
twelve equal parts, each with a name and symbol, and each connected with an exact time of
year), using methods known as transits and progressions. These methods, captured under the
umbrella term of “reading one’s horoscope,” can be used to gain insight into the qualities of
particular periods of time – past, present, or future – and to understand the kinds of experiences
and events one might encounter at these times.

The question of whether astrology is valid or not continues to be the dominant discourse
on the subject. Again, that was not the intention of this study. Instead, my key questions
concerned the experience itself and aimed for detailed psychological descriptions of the function
and meaning of astrology in participants’ lives. How does consulting one’s astrology influence
one’s engagement with the world? What thoughts and feelings are generated? What relationship
exists between consulting astrology and how one makes meaning in one’s day-to-day existence?
How does one make sense of the information provided by astrology?

It was and continues to be my hope that the results of this research contribute to the fields
of humanistic, existential, and transpersonal psychology, to the mission of Duquesne’s
Psychology Department, and to those working to preserve and represent diverse voices. I
likewise hope that clinicians can use the findings for their clinical work, as the language of
astrology is something people are becoming increasingly exposed to and as a result, a system of
meaning-making we will be more likely to encounter in the clinic.

Clarification of Terms: Unless otherwise specified, “astrology” and “horoscope” will be used
with the understanding that they refer to how they were originally conceived – as in, relating to
the complex patterns of cosmic bodies, their positions in the sky over time or at the moment of
one’s birth, and their relationship to people and the Earth. Further, the astrology to which this
study is concerned is Western, with origins in ancient Babylonia, Egypt, and Greece. Complex
and sophisticated astrological systems exist the world over such as in Latin America (originating from the ancient Mayans and Aztecs) (Maffie, 2008) and China where its use is now banned under the Communist government (Pankenier, 2013). In contrast, astrology (especially predictive astrology) is still thriving in India (McCarthy, 2014), where it is common to have a natal chart drawn by matchmakers and for children on the day of their birth.

**Literature Assumptions**

Given the current popularity of astrology, there has been much written in mainstream media about the topic. I expected my participants to affirm and reiterate many preexistent insights into this phenomenon. However, I also hoped that through an investigative, phenomenological-hermeneutic approach, I would be uniquely equipped to attend to what is beneath the surface and glean potentially novel insights that are not as easily condensed into a blog or news article or summarily dismissed in unabashedly biased research. In sum, my intent with this study was to explore what quantitative scales might be failing to capture. My assumption was that if executed properly, I might succeed in doing so.

**Researcher Assumptions**

A foundational component of phenomenological research is reflection and subsequent disclosure of the primary investigator’s previous experience with the phenomena in question. An unfortunate expectation of quantitative research is that pure objectivity is attainable if enough variables are controlled for. This is often taken too far and rich data is missed from a desire to remove as much risk of personal bias from research as possible. The preference for surveys over interviews in quantitative research is a clear example. While the traditional value of objectivity is noble and admirable, efforts toward this ideal look different in qualitative research. In qualitative research, reflexivity is essential to ensure the validity and credibility of the findings, as well as to
acknowledge the researcher's role and positionality in the research process. In order to minimize the likelihood my personal biases would be unconsciously applied as I was interpreting my data, I engaged my reflexivity in a process called the “hermeneutic circle,” or “spiral.” The hermeneutic circle is a method of interpretation that involves moving back and forth between the parts and the whole of a text, a phenomenon, or a situation (Gadamer, 2013). It assumes that meaning is not fixed or static but rather emerges from the interaction between the interpreter and the interpreted.

I am a white, cisgender, heterosexual female millennial who uses astrology in careful, in-depth ways on a regular basis. I do not see my experiences with astrology or the experiences of others reflected in current academic literature. However, popular culture provides a rough outline of my general experience. My demographic is certainly more open to believing astrology is a valid and reliable way of understanding one’s self and the world, that it is compatible with rationality, that astrology is a personally empowering tool that helps one navigate life choices, relationships, and emotions, and that it can bestow a sense of agency and control. The social circles I move within often entertain it as a fun and creative form of self-expression, and it typically promotes connection. I am frequently exposed to presentations of astrology that are diverse, social justice oriented, inclusive, and respectful of different cultures, traditions, and perspectives. Even more specifically, astrology frequently emphasizes a language and culture that does not discriminate based on race, gender, sexuality, or class. Due to the simple fact and circumstance of my gender and association with the millennial demographic, I have experienced a greater openness and receptivity to it than the vitriol and concern over its veracity I’ve experienced in research, textbooks, and institutions of higher learning. In my experience with the lay public and amongst my peers, the concern about whether it is “true” or not is beside the
point. I have experienced it as a kind of secret, something women keep to themselves and murmur about excitedly when they feel safe to do so. Friends, family, employees, bosses, supervisors, wherever there is a group of women, there are few spaces astrology doesn’t manage to infiltrate.

However, I did notice that, at times, I was personally turning to it too frequently. I often felt like I was reading about the potential of my life and not living out fully the words I was reading. I wanted to squeeze out as much self-knowledge as possible before I felt ready to “do what I needed to do.” It was in this mindset that I first started formulating my research question. I expected issues of overuse, fixation, and inquiries related to one’s tendency toward either an internal or external locus of control.

The above reflexive disclosure of my history with the subject in question is an essential requirement of all phenomenological methods. It is to demonstrate that I have done my due diligence to identify what might be present in my own being that could influence my analysis and to help clarify my process of interpreting the data. I have a far better chance of minimizing the likelihood of unconsciously applying my personal biases when interpreting data and therefore the most accurate representation of my participants' thoughts and feelings, by acknowledging my own. In other words, for the entire duration of this study, from the planning stages to analysis and conclusion, I repeatedly and rigorously checked my emerging findings against my preconceptions and expectations.
Chapter II: Literature Review

The purpose of this qualitative study was to explore with four millennial women, their perceptions of the psychological significance of astrology in their lives. Specifically, I sought to understand how the experiences of these individuals might elucidate gaps in psychology literature surrounding this phenomenon.

This critical review was executed to survey how the phenomenon of astrology and my participants’ experiences of it are represented in popular culture and literature within the psychological sciences. In light of this, four major areas of literature were reviewed: (a) astrology’s influence in Western culture and psychology as relevant to the present study, (b) underlying philosophical worldview, (c) the media’s assessment of astrology, and (d) the dominant narrative within psychology literature on the subject. Though a thorough history of astrology’s relationship to Western culture is beyond the scope of this paper, a brief review of its development and eventual connection to psychology provides important context and is necessary for situating this research. The philosophical bedrock of astrology was included to better understand the longevity of astrology as a phenomenon. The media’s commentary on astrology was reviewed as this is the primary medium in which millennial women are exposed to the subject. The prevailing narrative in the scientific literature on psychology was reviewed to better position this study and how its results may contribute to academic scholarship.

To conduct the proceeding literature review, I restricted my search to the field of psychology and used multiple information sources including books, dissertations, internet resources, professional journals, and periodicals. These sources were accessed through PsychInfo, Google Scholar, JSTOR, and ProQuest. No specific delimiting time frame was used around which to conduct this research. Because of the nature of the literature reviewed, the
historical development of astrology and its interweaving with contemporary psychology, for
due, an arbitrary criterion, such as a time frame, might have precluded the inclusion of
substantial relevant material.

Throughout my review, I attempted to point out important gaps and omissions in
particular segments of the literature as and when they became apparent. The interpretative
summary that concludes the chapter illustrates how the literature has informed my understanding
of the material and how the material will contribute to the ongoing development of answering
my research question: What is the psychological significance of astrology in millennial women’s
lives?

Archetypal, Transpersonal, and Humanistic Psychology

Historically, astrology has been conceived as a way of working in harmony with nature
and what was understood as divine order. The serene beauty of the night sky was surely the
realm of the gods, the planets and stars personified as god-like puppeteers manipulating the earth
from above. Calculating the behavior of celestial bodies for what it might mean for events below,
including the inner life of human beings, is an exceedingly ancient practice and is found in
virtually all civilizations and cultures (Tarnas, 2006, 2010). This is evident in the practical use of
recording time through phases of the moon and in what has survived in our definition of
“lunacy,” which originally referred to temporary bouts of insanity brought on by the full moon
(Raison, 1999). Beyond the practical observations of cyclical cosmological activity and possible
causal influences on the human psyche, astrology developed over time as a highly complex,
organized system of meaning-making.

Until the late 1800s, astrology was used primarily for the purpose of prediction; the starry
heavens read in terms of mythology and the movements of its planetary bodies as determining
the quality of earthly life. The pervasiveness of this thinking resonates in our language today. The word “consider,” for example, is from the Latin *considerare* (to examine) which in turn is based on *sidus or sider*, meaning ‘star’ (Merriam-Webster, n.d.). And “disaster,” dis- for (expressing negation) and *astro*, also Latin for ‘star,’ altogether meaning ‘bad star’ (Merriam-Webster, n.d.). Astrology was not so much about self-understanding as it was for working with nature and accepting what your ‘stars,’ as messengers of divine will, intended for you. It wasn’t until the work of the psychoanalyst Carl Jung (1875 – 1961) and the philosopher/astrologer Dane Rudhyar (1895 – 1985) that astrological thinking and language became concentrated on personality and personal growth. Indeed, the culture and language of astrology as it is practiced and used today is a direct result of its integration with depth, transpersonal, and humanistic psychology. Jung is widely quoted for asserting that astrology is a premodern form of the psychological sciences and represents the sum of all psychological knowledge of antiquity. In a letter to Freud dated June 12th, 1911, Jung wrote:

> My evenings are taken up very largely with astrology. I make horoscopic calculations in order to find a clue to the core of psychological truth. Some remarkable things have turned up which will certainly appear incredible to you … I dare say that we shall one day discover in astrology a good deal of knowledge that has been intuitively projected into the heavens. For instance, it appears that the signs of the zodiac are character pictures, in other words, libido symbols which depict the typical qualities of the libido at a given moment (1974, p. 427).

While Jung used astrology to help explain a whole system of consciousness (elaborated on in the next section), he also saw the utility of astrology as a repository of the overarching themes of the human psyche that became systematized, outwardly projected to the stars. In this way, Jung saw
engaging with astrology as engaging in a living dialogue with ancient humanity. In other words, Jung perceived astrology as more evidence for archetypes\(^3\), a fundamental concept in his analytical psychology. Seeing the utility of astrology for accessing the unconscious mind, he deemed the horoscope as an adjunct to more conventional modes of psychological analysis and as a valuable tool for therapists. The development and systemization of this basic proposal was most notably taken up by James Hillman (1926-2011), an American psychologist who expanded on Jung’s ideas, consequently founding archetypal psychology. We know of Hillman’s appreciative involvement with astrology mostly by way of anecdotal stories quoted on blogs (Borda, 201) and recorded interviews (Hillman, 1997). Unfortunately, I could not find discussions of astrology in his published writing.

The sympathy between archetypal psychology and astrology resulted in a cross-pollination that led to an inevitable *psychologization* of astrology. The philosopher and astrologer most attributed with the formalization of this feat was Dane Rudhyar (1895-1985), who adapted aspects of not only the archetypal school but the humanistic school of psychology (Carl Rogers, Abraham Maslow, Rollo May, etc.) as well, to astrology. For him, the horoscope (natal chart) is a map to be used for the exploration of the complex inner world of drives and functions that together constitute the complete psychological potential of a person. The publication of Rudhyar’s *The Astrology of Personality* in 1936 was a milestone in psychological astrology. Carl Rogers (1902-1987) published his *Client-Centered Therapy* in 1951. Just a couple decades later, Rudhyar extrapolated Rogers’ ideas to what he styled as “transpersonal

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\(^3\) Universal, inherited, and symbolic representations or patterns in the collective unconscious. Jung believed that archetypes were innate psychological structures shared by all humans, representing fundamental themes, images, and motifs. He identified a variety of archetypes, such as the anima/animus, the shadow, the persona, and the Self. He saw these archetypes as powerful influences on an individual's thoughts, feelings, and behavior and that they are accessible through dreams, myths, and symbols. Jung's approach emphasizes the personal and collective unconscious and the individuation process, which involves integrating these archetypal elements to achieve psychological wholeness (Storr, 1983).
astrology” and published Person-Centered Astrology (1972). In this work, he redefines astrology as a language of symbols to be deployed as a diagnostic tool in the quest for psychological wholeness, integration, actualization, and personal fulfillment.

**Underlying Philosophical Worldview**

Classical astronomers such as Ptolemy (100 CE – 170 CE) did not see a contradiction between the predictive analytics of their astronomical observations and their potential relationship to the lives of human beings because of the Platonic idea of the *anima mundi* or *spiritus mundi* (the world soul and world spirit respectively), a philosophical worldview that conceives of the entire cosmos as existing in sympathy with all things (Beck, 2007). Historian Richard Tarnas (2006) elaborates on this perspective, arguing that astrology continues to be based on the latter view, the *anima mundi* or *spiritus mundi*. It is a holistic perspective of the surrounding natural world that sees the human subject as embedded in a world of subjects, with no absolute boundaries between or among them. Individuals imbued with this orientation see themselves as embedded within a world psyche that is intelligent, purposeful, and capable of communication:

> Spirits are seen in the forest, presences are felt in the wind and the ocean, the river, the mountain. Meaning is recognized in the flight of two eagles across the horizon, in the conjunction of two planets in the heavens, in the unfolding cycles of the Moon and Sun (Tarnas, 2006, p. 54).

Astrology, then, through *anima mundi* or *spiritus mundi* can be described as an extension of seeing the universe as a fundamentally and irreducibly interconnected whole, pervaded by patterns of meaning and order that extend through every level. Over time, astrology developed into a way of communicating with this pattern, or interconnectivity. The stars and planetary
bodies are like letters and astronomical events are like speech. Together they became a highly organized symbolic language to correspond with and interpret as a hermeneut might with a sacred text.

The influential psychiatrist and psychoanalyst Carl Jung (1875 – 1961) understood astrology to work through his conceptualization of consciousness. He described the unconscious mind as a “field of experience of unlimited extent” (Jung, 1954, p. 184) and likened it to “the atmosphere in which we live” (Jung, 1973, p. 433), consequently equating it to *anima mundi*. As such, Jung believed it might be that the unconscious actually pervades the environment around us and is not an encapsulated realm located exclusively within the human mind, be it on an individual or collective level. This implied to Jung, in turn, that his theory of archetypes might be inherent to the universe itself, and not restricted to a separate, isolated psyche projecting its meanings into the external world and into the heavens. Jung’s thinking aligns well here with an axiom of esoteric thought that the human being is a miniature version or reflection of the entire cosmos – the celestial heavens existing within us all. James Hillman’s (1926 - 2011) archetypal psychology is also based on this premise, though rather than Jung’s universal, inherited, and foundational role for archetypes in the human psyche and collective unconscious, Hillman (1975) viewed them as autonomous and distinct agents with their own existence. He believed that archetypes were not merely templates for human experience but had their own intrinsic qualities and agendas. He emphasized the phenomenological exploration of the psyche and focused on the imagination, fantasy, and the symbolic nature of archetypes. He argued that this approach encourages a deeper, more subjective engagement with them and their manifestations in an individual's life. This perspective is in perfect alignment with *anima mundi* and thusly, an essential part of Hillman’s primary mission to return soul to psychology (Hillman, 2017) and in
so doing, return psychology to a world ensouled (Hillman, 1997). In this way, Hillman’s work not only resurrected Jung’s ideas about the *anima mundi* for the modern public, but also connected with other 20th century views regarding “the world soul.” One of these is the spiritual cosmology of Rudolf Steiner (1861-1925). The founder of Anthroposophy, a transpersonal philosophy centered on the physical, mental, emotional, and spiritual dimensions of human nature, he was highly influential for his views on education (Waldorf schools), agriculture (biodynamic farming), medicine, architecture, and psychology. While Steiner did not approach astrology in any traditional sense, he believed that the positions of celestial bodies had spiritual significance and could influence human development (Steiner, 1975). Thinkers like Jung, Hillman, and Steiner are essential to consider for present-day receptivity to astrology in North America as their ideas have developed in parallel to the empirical sciences and the increasingly concretized worldview of industrial people. Despite the advancement of modernity, the interrelatedness and interconnection of ourselves and our cosmos has been preserved in the West through depth psychology, and transpersonal philosophy and psychology. Therefore, it should come as no surprise that while neither Hillman nor Steiner emphasized astrology as a system per se in their written works, their popular theories are nonetheless compatible and sympathetic to the idea that star bodies could, in whatever capacity, reflect a part of our own being to us.

Joining the West’s early 20th-century zeitgeist of depth psychology and transpersonal philosophy, Dane Rudhyar (1895-1985), widely considered the father of psychological astrology (Boxer 2020; Tarnas 2006), developed a way of using astrology that harmonized well with Jung, Hillman, and Steiner’s theories of life and consciousness. Jung understood his theories as ultimately highlighting the baseline unity of all creation, his focus more on personal liberation. While Rudhyar agreed with the importance of personal liberation, or self-individuation, like
Hillman he was eminently concerned with how self-development relates to collective evolution, living in community with one another, and the health of the planet. He believed astrology could be used to overcome the ego-mind, our possessive, jealous tendencies, the part of us that sees ourselves as separate. Overcoming it opens us to the possibility of a different kind of world:

All this, needlessly philosophical and psychological as it may sound to many people who are merely interested in the set type of traditional doctrines which they call astrology, has nevertheless the most immediate bearing on the very practice of an astrology which could validly meet the needs of a New Age humanity — a truly humanistic, holistic and harmonic astrology. The purpose of such a type of astrology is, above all, to help the individual who is beginning to question his ego-attitudes and desires, to discover what his true self is — which means what he is as a total person and what his function in mankind is. Such a person wants to know the blueprint (or archetypal Form) of the individual that he is not yet, but would like to become. "What am I?" he asks. And the first answer Humanistic astrology should give him is, "This whole sky, the whole universe." The second part of the answer should be, "This whole sky seen from a particular angle of vision which defines the purpose and meaning of your existence from birth to death." The birth-chart defines the potentialities, but also the limitations which result from its being only a particular focal point for the operation of the universal Whole (or of Man) — one focal point among billions of them’” (Rudhyar, 1972, Ch. 5, para. 21).

In sum, Jung and Rudhyar played crucial roles in shifting the priority of Western astrology from prediction and determinism to personal insight and a relational stance that continues to be supported by concepts from antiquity such as anima mundi and carried forward into more
contemporary thought such as archetypal, transpersonal, and humanistic psychologies. Defined most basically, the majority of Western astrologers now deem astrology to be a tool for becoming a more holistically oriented human being. Clearly, this is deeply resonant with views from humanistic and transpersonal psychology.

**Media’s Assessment of the Phenomenon**

Though belief in astrology has been relatively consistent in the United States for nearly 50 years, it has been experiencing a striking renaissance. According to the most recent survey by the National Science Board (2020), one in two young people and 40% of adults in America believe in astrology. Documentation of astrology’s surge in popularity has fallen chiefly to the popular media. Chani Nicholas, a Los Angeles astrologer and creator of the CHANI astrology app that has over a million users (Khan, 2023), told *The Atlantic* “something’s happened in the last five years that’s given it an edginess, a relevance for this time and place, that it hasn’t had for a good 35 years. Millennials have taken it and run with it,” (Beck, 2018). The article continues to quote Bertram Mall, a social cognitive scientist at Brown University, who remarked “[astrology offers] a powerful vocabulary to capture not only personality and temperament but also life’s challenges and opportunities.” Focusing on the latter, the article assumes a connection between millennials’ attraction to astrology and their status as the most stressed generation (American Psychological Association, 2018). Though the correlation between looking for answers and meaning in times of stress is the dominant explanation in the media, there are a variety of other rationalizations as well. Below, an excerpt from *The New Yorker*:

It’s commonplace to say that in uncertain times people crave certainty. But what astrology offers isn’t certainty—it’s distance. Just as a person may find it easier to accept
things about herself when she decides she was born that way, astrology makes it possible
to see world events from a less reactive position (Smallwood, 2019).

Another common explanation for the millennial generation’s affinity for astrology is as a
replacement for religion. According to The Pew Research Center, millennials are less
conventionally religious than other age groups, but 60% believe in New Age spirituality
(Gecewicz, 2018). The statistics and trends seem to show that millennials are looking elsewhere
for community, meaning, and guidance (Roy, 2019).

All of the above are indicators of a generational trend but it should be noted that the ratio
of women interested in astrology is twice as much as men. This is reflected in consumer data
from one of the most popular access points for astrology today, the phones in our pockets. Co-
Star, an app that lets people read and compare their birth charts, has been downloaded more than
three million times (Griffith, 2019), and 87% of that number is female (Feldman, 2020).

Explanations outside of astrological circles blame patriarchy for astrology’s popularity among
women compared to men. Dr. Phil Zuckerman, an author and sociology professor at Pitzer
College, wrote in Psychology Today that women believe more in astrology for the same reason
that more women seek religion, “because they feel that they do not wield too much agency in
how their lives will shape up. There is an external locus of control, wielded by men. So women
turn to the cosmos for a sign of what their future will look like” (Krishnan, 2019). However,
disbelief or the desire to debunk astrology is also blamed on patriarchy:

Straight men in particular seem to dislike astrology. Would astrology be as polarizing of
a topic if it were something that men were primarily interested in? Difficult to say, but
it’s hard to ignore that many of the things young women do to make their lives and the
lives of those around them better are often mocked. Historically, America has always loved to hate the things young women love (Ghahremani, 2019, para. 20).

Within astrology circles, there is yet another take on the phenomenon – that increased interest in astrology among women can be directly attributed to fourth-wave feminism:

I think we’ve seen a rise in popularity in metaphysics, astrology and tarot because historically speaking, this was a space where female “witch types” could have access to their own autonomy that was never defined by, or connected to, a man. With the state of the world today, I feel like we’re in “the rise of the female” where a lot more women are taking their power back – whether this is at work, in relationships or fostering and chasing their own goals (Cornish, n.d.).

**Dominant Narrative in Psychology Research**

Astrology is considered a pseudoscience by the scientific community, as it does not conform to the principles of the scientific method. Further, belief in astrology is categorized as equivalent to those that believe in the paranormal, as interest in astrology tends to predict belief in other metaphysical ideas such as telepathy and feng shui (Lindeman, 2007). Additionally, the validity of these studies’ questions and their subsequent results are complicated by the variety of definitions of what qualifies as astrology. Studies often do not differentiate between types of astrology, such as horoscopes based on the month of one’s birth or the place and time of one’s birth, otherwise known as natal astrology. If they do, the differences are considered insignificant by the researchers and relevant only to note participants were more likely to consider astrology scientific if answering about natal astrology compared to sun sign horoscopes. Lastly, despite how ubiquitous astrology is in popular culture today, there is a dearth of research on the subject. Of what little is available, most make no effort to conceal a negative bias. The vast majority of
studies are designed to either demonstrate a relationship between low intelligence (Andersson et al., 2022; Hamilton, 2002), narcissism (Andersson et al., 2022; Hamilton, 2002), narrow-mindedness (Dambrun, 2004), and poor stress tolerance (Lillqvist & Lindeman, 1998; Tyson, 1982) with belief in astrology, or to provide evidence that astrology is a pseudoscience and unscientific (McPhee, 1999).

In 2001, Kallery was alarmed to find that 59% of early childhood education teachers in Greece viewed both astronomy and astrology as scientific. The author concluded that these teachers were mentally deficient. Because in Kallery’s mind, they did not clearly differentiate between science and pseudoscience, he surmised they were dangerous to society and needed to be re-educated. Tyson (1982) determined that the types of people attracted to astrology lack social skills and therefore consult astrology to cope with social roles and relational stressors. In a further connection to stress, Lillqvist and Lindeman (1998) found that the likelihood that someone will believe in astrology is proportional to the number of personal crises one confronts. Allum (2011) reported a relationship between scores on an authoritarian personality scale with belief in astrology. Higher scores on this scale positively correlated to one’s belief in astrology as a science on par with astronomy. Other findings, though inconclusive, also investigated the relationship between astrology and personal agency. One study suggests that engaging in astrological activities is associated with a belief that one’s fate is beyond one’s control (Sosis et al., 1980) and yet, in another, a positive correlation between free will and belief in paranormal beliefs (including astrology) is indicated (Mogi, 2014). Corroborating the theme of gullibility and passivity in the dominant narrative about the personalities of those that believe in astrology is the “Barnum Effect,” which asserts that people are more likely to agree with vague descriptions of themselves, whether positive or negative, though a greater effect is evident when
the vague descriptions are positive. In studies exploring the relationship between this phenomenon and belief in astrology, it’s been found that exposure to positive astrological portraits is enough to persuade the initially skeptical (Fichten, 1983; Glick et al., 1989; French et al., 1991) and that the more attractive the astrological self-portrait, the more likely one is to express belief in the validity of astrology (Hamilton, 2001). These results support the dominant consensus in psychology research that narcissistic traits predict belief and interest in astrology. Studies consistently portray users of astrology as selfish and astrology as contributing to an excessively self-centered worldview and its primary appeal as consisting in affirmation of a positive self-concept (Andersson et al., 2022; Hamilton, 2002). Not only is narcissism considered the strongest predictor for belief in astrology, but Andersson (2022) also reported that intelligence and belief in astrology are negatively correlated. The effort to demonstrate that lower intelligence is a predictor of belief in astrology is evidenced by the questions being asked in the academic community. Dambrun (2004) published results that indicated belief in astrology is a significant predictor of prejudice against stigmatized groups. The association of astrology with desperation, naivety, authoritarianism, gullibility, lack of social skills, high stress, narcissism, low IQ, and narrow-mindedness are collectively made even worse when researchers consider that people of this kind might be basing their behavior on what they learn from their horoscopes and natal charts. Hamilton (1995) found that astrology has long-term impacts on one’s self-concept. This study expressed concern in their discussion section that if astrology has long-term effects on one’s self-concept, it could be influencing users’ behavior. The researchers sounded an alarm that astrology is harmful and a danger to public health since users are basing their behavior on false information (Blackmore & Seebold, 2001). Beyond character defects, the best explanation in dominant research for why astrology has persisted in popularity is that astrology is
comforting in times of uncertainty (Glick et al., 1989) and that paranormal beliefs (including astrology) help individuals set behavioral goals and lead meaningful lives. It is theorized that this is possibly worth it to those who feel empty and adrift in a post-industrial age (Bauer & Durant, 1997; Betsch et al., 2020)

It is important to note that all research so far has been quantitative; based on drawing relationships between horoscopes/personal astrology reports and personality assessment scores, proving or disproving astrology, analysis of personality traits/intelligence levels of people that believe in astrology; or even in one instance – a textual analysis of how horoscopes are written in women’s magazines (Tandoc & Ferrucci, 2014). There are no qualitative studies asking open-ended questions of people who use astrology for their direct experience and direct examples from their lives on this topic. However, current research on astrology and “paranormal beliefs” in general, repeatedly ask for clarification in this regard within their discussion sections. One study asks if people change their behavior depending on what they read in astrology and if so, how? (Blackmore & Seebold, 2001). Another study (Hamilton, 2001) marvels at the level of credence granted to astrology, even in their Midwestern, non-urban sample which suggested to them that some degree of openness to astrology may be widespread in American society and that “further investigation of the determinants, and consequences, of that belief may be fruitful,” (p. 900). In a more recent study, Das (2022) recognized that while “considerable research has been conducted to understand the reasons for people's belief in astrology, there has been little effort to synthesize this information” (p. 925). This was interestingly followed by a suggestion that not only should further research be done to understand the social, cognitive, and psychological pathways that lead to an interest in astrology, but that it might also clarify the unhealthy
preoccupation that can develop with its use and to innovate appropriate preventative and therapeutic strategies in response.

**Summary**

The above literature review demonstrates the need for more research in scientific psychology on the use of astrology itself, natal or otherwise. The following study addresses this gap through careful phenomenological examination of the meaning and function of astrology for my volunteer participants. The above review has also identified crucial surface elements of astrology’s resurgence in popularity. Millennials and women have been the primary driving force, with Generation Z riding on the coattails of what was catalyzed before them. Given the intense amount of media focus on millennial women and statistical evidence demonstrating their engagement and financial investment in astrology, they are the population on which this study will focus its efforts. This study is not concerned with whether astrology is scientific or not. It is concerned with giving scholarly representation to a resilient cultural phenomenon through the voices most involved in the movement.
Chapter III: Method

The method of this qualitative research study is empirical, phenomenological, and hermeneutical. Briefly stated, it is empirical in the sense that all findings are based upon qualitative data that emerged from participants’ testimony about their experience, data that was collected and interpreted by way of rigorous procedures. It is phenomenological in that it was guided by careful, open, critically reflective attention to participants’ descriptions of their experience as lived in daily existence. It is hermeneutical in that the findings – the psychologically significant results – came into being via a careful interpretative process wherein I studied the descriptive evidence in depth, moving back and forth between participants’ verbatim testimony and my evolving understanding of its psychological meaning. Throughout this study, “I” refers to myself, the sole investigator, Rachel Floyd, M.A.

This study’s specific hermeneutical-phenomenological method is inspired by Clark Moustakas (1994), and is precisely what is called for by my research question; the meanings and functions of astrology in millennial women’s lives.

Preliminary Overview

I recruited four volunteer participants who were born and raised in North America, are in the millennial age range of between 21 and 40 years old at the time of recruitment, identify as female, and self-reported regularly consulting personality and predictive astrology readings based on their natal chart. After receiving informed consent, I conducted an approximately one-hour, audio-recorded virtual interview with each participant over Zoom. Interviews were transcribed verbatim, and the transcripts served as the study’s empirical data. Data was interpreted via a hermeneutical-phenomenological method (as mentioned above and described in detail in the “Procedures for Interpretation” section below). Distinctive constitutive themes were
discerned for each participant and articulated in a coherent, individually situated narrative. Consistent themes shared more generally, by most or all participants, were also determined and articulated (if the data indicated the presence of such general findings). Situated findings for each individual were shared in writing with each participant, and participants were asked to respond in writing with comments clarifying, disconfirming, confirming, or otherwise refining my interpretations. These written comments served as the basis for further consideration of the data and contributed to the final research findings that is constitutive of themes and their interrelationship presented for each individual participant, and more generally across the group of participants, if applicable. A summary of the results of this research was provided to each participant and a second interview offered should the participants have desired to clarify or add to their thematic summaries. However, all approved of their thematic summaries and therefore second interviews were not conducted.

**Participant Recruitment and Data Collection**

Before beginning the recruitment process or interviewing participants, I wrote a reflexive description of pre-existing ideas, presumptions, expectations, beliefs, and hopes regarding the future findings of this study.

1. I rigorously interpreted this reflexive description, discerning and articulating significant themes. This reflexive process aided in my interpretation of participants’ descriptions.
2. Volunteer participants were recruited via the following Reddit astrology boards; r/astrology, r/askastrologers, and r/astrologymemes.
3. Potential participants were instructed to contact me by e-mail in order to express their interest in participating in the study.
4. I contacted interested volunteers by e-mail, described the nature of the study, and screened potential participants according to the following criteria for inclusion: identification as female, in the millennial age range (21–40) by the time of the study; raised in the United States or in an equivalently modern, westernized country such as Canada or Australia; voluntary participation; a minimum of two years of reading their birth-chart and associated horoscopes for an average of at least three times a week; willingness to participate in an approximately one-hour, audio-recorded in-person or virtual interview, with the possibility of one follow-up interview in the same format; willingness for the study results to be publicly presented and/or published, including de-identified verbatim excerpts from participants’ descriptions. To the latter, participants were assured that the descriptive data from which these excerpts had been de-identified to ensure confidentiality. Before the consent form was signed, I made it clear that participation involved no greater risk than what might be encountered in everyday life. Benefits of the study were described as potentially including the intrinsic value of discussing meaningful experiences and themes in one’s life with an interested other person, and the awareness that one’s voluntary participation will contribute to the larger field of research in these areas. Issues of confidentiality were discussed thoroughly, with assurances that the participant’s identity, and that of anyone they talk about, would not be disclosed to anyone other than myself at any point in the research process. It was emphasized that participation is completely voluntary and that participants may withdraw from the research at any time for any reason. Participant’s questions, hopes, and concerns were also addressed at this time. After each screened participant agreed to take part in the study, I provided the option of signing the consent form (see Appendix A) digitally or by
hard copy through the mail. Electronic consent forms were saved on a password protected flash drive and stored in a locked file cabinet in my home. Hard copy consent forms were kept in the same cabinet.

5. Soon after the informed consent procedure, an approximately one-hour, audio-recorded, virtual collaborative research interview was scheduled through Duquesne’s encrypted Zoom account.

6. Upon meeting, before beginning the formal research interview, the nature of the research, the participant’s responsibilities and rights, risks and benefits and confidentiality were all reviewed. Time was also provided to address any remaining questions or reservations the participant might have before starting the interview.

7. During the interview, I created conditions for participants to explore and address the phenomenon via a semi-structured interview conversation. The structure consisted of pre-established questions and instructions to each participant, with each response initiating an open-ended, shared, conversational exploration. The specific questions and instructions – “access questions” – were designed to provide access to the phenomenon under consideration, by way of participants’ in-depth descriptions elicited through the collaborative conversation. The access questions and instructions were similar to the following example, with each question serving as a point of departure for further collaborative inquiry:

**Researcher:** To get us started with this shared exploration, try to remember one of the recent times astrology was directly relevant to your life and tell me anything you can about it, what you felt, did, or thought. Take your time before responding. Let yourself remember this experience as vividly as you can,
returning to the actual experience right now. Be aware of everything that arises for you with this memory – all the details of what happened, all your feelings, images, thoughts, bodily sensations, actions, and so forth – and then speak from the fullness of your present experience. Please share everything that comes to mind regarding your experience, even if it doesn’t seem to make sense or you think someone else might not understand. Go slowly here, give yourself some time to reconnect with the experience, and see what comes up for you.

The participants responded and we explored the above together via a collaborative conversation.

8. Interviews were transcribed verbatim by Zoom’s automated transcription service and were available immediately afterward as a downloadable file and saved onto a secure and password-protected hard drive. Transcriptions were de-identified and checked against their recordings for accuracy. After the transcript was de-identified and checked for accuracy against the audio file, the encrypted and password-protected flash drive on which the audio file was stored was moved to a locked file cabinet in my home. All de-identified data was password-protected and stored on a password-protected computer. Password information was written on paper and kept in a separate lockbox. I will delete all data within five years after the data analysis process. This will ensure a sufficient amount of time for using the data sources toward further analysis, dissemination of findings, and possible publication.

9. The de-identified transcript was interpreted by way of a rigorous hermeneutical-phenomenological method, as described in detail in the “Procedures for Interpretation”
These de-identified transcripts served as the primary source of data for this research study.

10. Findings from the participant’s interview(s) were shared in writing with each participant, and written comments in response from that participant were solicited. All participants approved of their interview summaries and gave their consent for me to continue analysis without further input from them, despite a second interview being offered if needed.

11. Situated thematic findings were articulated into individual narratives and more generally across participants into global themes. All global themes were identified as shared across participants.

**Procedures for Interpretation**

After the interview data was collected, the de-identified transcripts were interpreted using a hermeneutical-phenomenological method that builds upon and revises Moustakas’ (1994) phenomenological approach. Below is a step-by-step description of the procedure that was carried out:

1. I read through the interviews two or three times to begin developing an overall sense of each participant’s experience of the phenomenon under consideration. In this step, and in all that followed, the interpretative focus was on participants’ testimony as it conveyed, specifically, the psychological significance of their experience of astrology.

2. I coded the qualitative data, interpretatively assigning a different code to themes as they emerged.

3. Situated Findings: For each participant, I discerned, interpreted, and articulated various significant themes that constituted the experience for the participant (as evidenced in the
verbatim data), and the coherent interrelationship among these, if such an interrelationship is present. Each specific constitutive theme is supported by at least one verbatim quote from the participant.

4. I returned to the original transcript (of each participant), carefully re-considering it in light of the following questions, and revised my interpretation accordingly:

   A) Regarding my earlier, reflexive articulation of themes depicting assumptions and expectations about the phenomenon, how have these pre-existing views distorted, enhanced, or otherwise influenced my interpretation of the actual empirical data?

   B) Does this further review of the data confirm, disconfirm, or refine my interpretation in any way?

   C) Are there significant themes that I overlooked?

   D) Does this further review of the actual data support my interpretation, or does it call for further refinement?

5. I shared with each participant their preliminary interpretation of that participant’s description and solicited written comments in response. Participants approved of the thematic analysis of their interviews and did not provide feedback other than to encourage me to continue with the research and to share the completed study.

6. I studied the situated findings for each participant, endeavoring to discern if more general findings could be discovered across participants. In other words, constitutive themes that
are shared in common across some or all participants. If there was evidence to support this, a more general interpretative statement was articulated.
Chapter IV: Findings

The purpose of this study was to explore with a sample of millennial women, the psychological significance of astrology in their lives. This chapter presents the key findings obtained from the thematic analysis of four in-depth interviews. To honor each participant’s experience and ensure that no possible contribution to answering the research question would be missed, the participant interviews were coded and analyzed for themes, then preserved in individual narratives. The individual themes were then sorted and categorized into the four major findings that emerged from this study:

1. All participants felt a need to justify their interest in astrology.
2. All participants found astrology to be overwhelmingly mentally and emotionally beneficial.
3. All participants experienced astrology as helping them feel more connected to themselves, other people, and the world around them.
4. All participants stated that astrology is not helpful when used to excess.

Following is a discussion of the findings with details that support and explain each finding. By way of ‘thick description’ (Moustakas, 1994), I set out to better understand the reality of my study’s participants and to let them speak for themselves. Illustrative quotes taken from interview transcripts attempt to portray participants’ perspectives and capture some of the richness and complexity of the subject matter.

Individual Narratives

In the individual findings below, you will find a distillation of the most important elements of each participant’s interview. A resolute attempt was made to convey as accurately as
possible what each participant felt was most important to their experience while remaining faithful to presenting data relevant to answering my research question.

Please take note that the findings contained in the following narratives highlight critical themes in bold and provide illustrative verbatim quotes from participants.

**Joan**

Joan is a white nurse in her mid-thirties who works in a rural area outside a large city in Canada. Throughout our interview, it was clear that Joan uses astrology in a way that is more **subtle and deep than how astrology is portrayed in popular media**:

I probably take in two to three hours of some kind of educational astrology material a day. It's like anything else. You know, working full time and having my daughter so it's a huge commitment to even begin to, it's like I said – it’s the same as speaking a language, you know, if you studied French once a week you're not going to speak French for a couple of years. Right? Whereas if you study it every day then it's going to come a lot quicker.

It has been worth it for Joan to continue her studies. The benefits outweigh the cost of at times, **feeling like a social outcast**. Outside of the astrological renaissance brought on by millennials, Joan recognizes that most of the time:

…[my interest in astrology] makes me sound crazy, nine times out of ten, but I was a yoga teacher for years so I know what it’s like to sound crazy to people [laughs].

Obviously with people who are into it, it's easy to talk about, but most people, because it takes so long to understand on a deeper level than just your sun sign astrology, I don't have the time. I know people who practice tarot and stuff like that and I can talk about
this stuff with them. They love hearing it because they're already into that way of thinking.

By “way of thinking” Joan is indicating that astrology is associated with the occult or the counterculture. She remarked on ways that astrology can be used narcissistically, that using it to find out when one will get a promotion or whether one’s “boyfriend is going to be a perfect match…devalues what astrology can do for people”:

…in the past hundred years people have become very obsessed with the natal chart, obviously because, especially Western society, we're very involved with how unique we are. People are constantly asking, “Tell me what's special about my chart,” and it's like, well, all our charts have all the same houses and all the same planets, and there's no person who has one extra planet. We've made it very much about just figuring out, you know, how you're special.

Astrology is first and foremost a philosophical worldview for Joan. She sees astrology as inseparable from life on Earth and empirically observable in natural phenomena. A tangible example of this is how she perceives the cycle of the moon. She shared that at work, it is common to hear nurses speaking to expectations that the full moon will exacerbate patients’ symptoms. They will say things like “Oh, it’s a full moon tomorrow…get ready!” She noted that astrology seems to be more accepted in female spaces, citing her fellow nurses’ acceptance of the moon as an explanation for especially challenging days with patients as due to the predominance of women in her profession:

I think in [female dominant] cultures, they tend to be more willing to consider cycles…it’s the Yin form of thinking. People who have more feminine energy would
have more cyclical energy, whereas people who tend to have masculine, dominant, energy tend not to notice these cycles.

In other words, the plausibility of astrology depends on one having a cyclical worldview⁴, a viewpoint she explained as naturally more accepting of interrelationship. When one holds such a view, it is not as inconceivable to entertain the notion that a relationship between us and interstellar bodies could exist, even if it isn’t as obvious as our dependence on water, oxygen, or gravity. She was careful to specify the importance of viewing astrology as a coordinated system of interrelationship, not using astrology from the hierarchal perspective that the planets have power over us. If she were to maintain this perspective, she admitted that she wouldn’t like it very much. She added that meditation and her spiritual practice are helpful as well, stating: “I don’t think I’d enjoy astrology very much” if she didn’t meditate or use astrology for the purpose of seeing a larger picture separate from cause and effect. This relationship is cyclical and not hierarchal:

The planets are in the pattern with us. The real problem with astrology is that people think the planets are doing something to you… but it's more like a dance. Like if you've ever watched synchronized ballet. Everyone’s doing exactly what they're supposed to be doing, at the exact same moment. So, the problem is, we think big planets must be in charge, because we have a God-mind, the biggest thing is in charge of us so it must know what's going on, but realistically, Jupiter isn't any different than me, or you know, a cricket. They're all dancing at the same time and they're all making the pattern exactly that they're supposed to make at the same time, so it looks like it's cause and effect but

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⁴ Common to indigenous peoples and many other cultures, holding a cyclical worldview means that one sees existence as continuous, uncertain, recurring, and fluid. All events are connected, regardless of when the event occurs. “Life is a Great Circle of Relations between all beings” (Sioui, & Brierley, 2007)
really it’s just that everything is a perfect dance at the exact same moment so yeah, it's an interpretation that we think things happen to us but realistically, like the saying, ‘As within, so without.’

In Joan’s view, the connection between all things can be intelligibly deciphered by astrology as its essential function is as a symbolic system comprised of meaningful “patterns” that can “speak to our suffering,” give this suffering meaning, and be a learning tool for personal evolution or development. “Astrology speaks to the suffering we're going to experience but the purpose of the suffering is our evolution. Recognizing that is part of astrology. It’s a spiritual practice if you're practicing it that way.” The dance of life will continue no matter what, astrology can help us feel a little less entirely at the effect of it and to connect more deeply with spirit. She described it as “oscillating between two perspectives, like big world, small worldview”:

… the point of realizing all these patterns [inherent in life and reflected by astrology] and seeing these repetitions, and these ebbs and flows is simply to realize that underneath all that is what really matters…it’s recognizing that there’s an inevitability, there is a flow to everything, there is a pattern to everything, and yet at the same time, none of them are happiness. Astrology helps me because I realize that there is not one specific pattern that will make me happy…there has to be something underneath that pattern that’ll do it…the spiritual practice [possible with astrology] is going so deep that you are the stillness that exists beneath the dance. So, yeah, that's the two sides of it, knowing what's going to happen, but also realizing that you're bigger than anything that's happening anyways.

In this way, Joan is saying there is no pattern to “unlock” in astrology that will make a person permanently happy and free of suffering. Instead, “seeing the pattern frees you of the pattern.”
Joan reported that the planets are “karmic\(^5\)” just as we are, but they can provide contextualized self-knowledge that can show us where we are stuck and where we need to grow. Joan explained:

…your natal chart is essentially your karma, the lens you see the world through. Your chart is how you view the world and then how the world interacts with you back through that. So, transits are what's happening to your chart, but it'll still act through your karma…astrology is for dealing with karma really. If you experience your karma long enough from a perspective from the edge of the river [big picture perspective], then you start to realize it doesn't matter that much. So, yeah, it's a weird practice in that it makes your brain work too much sometimes but it also helps you realize that what your brain is focused on is not that important. There are bigger things.

Realizing that her problems can be extrapolated from cosmological bodies above expands her perspective to such a degree that Joan feels humbled and ultimately more identified with spirit than her own personal karma. She realizes that her life is one small junction in an infinity of space and time, patterns, and potentialities. She acknowledges that as useful as astrology is for psychological insight and when used predictively, for softening the impact of adverse transits, she sees the ultimate purpose of astrology as increasing her sense of choice and agency in how she responds to the patterns of her life – with the eventual goal of being released from their effects.

\(^5\) The doctrine of karma appears in major religions around the world and integrates belief in reincarnation with the belief that people’s actions—good or bad—lead to valence-congruent outcomes at a later point in time, with the implication that individuals eventually get what they deserve. Within the karmic belief system, the connection between moralized actions and karmic consequences is often causally opaque and may manifest across supernaturally-long timescales, such as when individuals’ health, economic outcomes, or morphology (e.g., gender, animal form) is determined by their prosocial or antisocial behavior in previous lifetimes (White, 2019)
With this strong philosophical disclaimer, Joan noted that on a day-to-day basis, she appreciates astrology because it “forces [her] to self-assess.” She further explained that the story of her natal chart validates the "restrictive," "controlling," and "highly emotional" environment she grew up in. According to astrology, this is a dynamic Joan can expect to be vulnerable to throughout her life. Joan uses this knowledge to respond more skillfully and reduce this influence. She expanded on this by sharing that despite having left her family home, her chart indicates that struggles to establish a home that feels safe and nurturing is a strong theme in her life experience, or “karma.” She elaborated in our interview how she has found ways to provide a beautiful home for herself that feels much healthier but nonetheless, are still indicative of the qualities of her astrological placements. Joan added that “aspects” in astrology are of further help because they let “…you see the subconscious stuff a lot more easily.” By this, Joan was referring to the parts of her natal chart that provide insight into patterns of thought, emotion, and behavior that she is not consciously aware of.

In addition to making sense of herself and her environment, she also uses astrology for understanding others and through that understanding, has felt an increased ability to respond empathically to others. She gave an illustrative example of how astrological knowledge has impacted her parenting in particular:

"Obviously, my daughter’s chart is very useful. I don’t dig into it too much but when you read someone's moon sign it'll tell you how they cope with things. So, what's interesting is that my daughter is an Aries moon, which is a fire moon, and when she was younger, you know all the kids books, like psychology books or whatever, if your kid is having an emotional outburst they say try to give their anger a name or try to talk about it afterwards, but if you look at my daughter's chart you know - one, she will never ever
talk about her emotions which is true because every time I’ve brought them up she looks at me like, “What the heck are you talking about?” which is weird because she's hugely emotional. Fire moons actually feel better if you do something, either martial or usually creative, expressive, like crazy, or battling - so the joke is, if my daughter's in a horrible mood, the easiest way to cheer her up is literally to wrestle with her for like three minutes and suddenly her mood is 100% improved. All this parenting advice is still good advice, I'm sure for lots of kids, but I find using that kind of stuff [the astrological approach] to relate to people especially helpful.

While the psychological aspect of astrology gives Joan insight and a feeling of being more effective in her interactions, Joan uses the predictive side of astrology to reduce possible negative outcomes and to formulate adaptive responses to potential loss and difficulty. Joan will often begin and end her day by checking transits against her chart and others’. She reported that this enables her to see what “kind of energies” there are for the day or the week or the month, “things that are going to be focused” and to confirm “there's nothing super negative coming [laughs].” She said if she notices a significant transit is coming up, she will go back to her previous journals to see what happened during the same transit in the past. This helps her to feel prepared for the future:

…actually studying natal charts and stuff, it's just been the past few years, and it's a shame because when I go back and look at old transits when I wasn't even studying this stuff I go, “Oh [laughs], that would have been nice to know back then,” just because it makes it less stressful. When you know the timespan you have to go through and how long you have to tough it out for, when the height of the challenge will exist and stuff. I
don't know why it makes it easier but it tends to, if you know it's not a permanent thing, you know?

Currently, the predictive way that Joan uses astrology is through writing reflections in her journal about what she is seeing in others’ charts, as well as her own, and how it interacts with upcoming transits. This practice is a clear way that Joan uses astrology with *sensitivity toward and care for others:*

My journal is in my actual astrology app. I can look and go “Okay, what's coming next.” Daily, I’m looking at planets that don't move that fast, the moon does [move fast] but I don't find it has that big an impact on me. It depends on the person. Your chart will choose which planets tend to have an impact on you…eclipses I check regularly, to make sure to know when the eclipses are coming, because they have a huge impact, especially if they hit certain points in your chart.

Further, Joan has access to her patient’s birthdates so she will check the signs that the slower moving planets were in on the day the patient was born “just to know what I’m getting into [laughs].” When I asked Joan how she made use of knowing this much in advance, she gave the following example:

…if my sister's going through a hard transit or something like that, I'll be more likely to be in touch with her, just to check on her. I know this is happening or that's going to be happening, so just checking in more regularly with certain people.

However, during times of particular strain, Joan *steps away from using astrology* for predictive purposes:

I get tension sometimes if I know something tough is coming…especially if I have bad transits all at the same time. Sometimes I just want that break…if I'm overwhelmed, I
will actually avoid astrology because realistically you can't change what's going on, you can't change the big things that are going to happen anyways. So sometimes if I’m already overwhelmed, it's like you know what, I'll just be surprised [laughs] – see what happens. I’ve noticed that in my journal sometimes I'll have a gap of a few weeks or a month or two here and there and if I go back and I see the transit, I'm like “Oh yeah, that was rough.” Gaps in my journal just means it was a rough [laughs]. It’s like anyone else, I get overwhelmed sometimes with life and I have to step back from thinking all the time.

On this last note, Joan shared that this is a risk for her, that a “hard part of being into astrology” is that it can be **addictive**, it’s easy to “think about it all the time.” When Joan is feeling less drained, she sees it as a beneficial opportunity for **letting go**. She reflected that:

…there are a lot of things I can release if they’re allowed to flow through me naturally. If I’m not fighting against them. So, astrology is kind of like that, in the sense that I learn to know the next wave is going to hit me and I’m just kind of, “Okay here comes,” [laughs]. So relax! Similar to how they say drunk people never get half as injured in a car accident, because they’re relaxed. Compared to others who didn’t relax into the accident, and they have whiplash and everything. So yeah, astrology is like being drunk. No, [laughs], it's like relaxing into the accident [laughs], I guess.

As for herself, she emphasized that she **doesn’t get into as many bad situations as she used to** since studying astrology. She explained that:

[Since using natal astrology] I’ve noticed I don't get into bad situations, nearly as often. Because when I realize something is negative, is karmic, in my chart, when I start to realize that this is my habit, or my instinct, I’m less likely to step into that karma. I think that's the difference I've noticed in my life. Less likely to get into bad relationships or
friendships. Better boundaries, for sure. And then I just find my relating with people is healthier because I don’t hold the same stuff against them because I recognize that that’s their way of coping, or their way of relating simply based on, you know, their moon or some other signs in their chart. I'll be like, “Oh, this is how they do things,” and if they're not aware of it, they're not gonna be able to change it so there's no point, you know, shake your fists at them all you want [laughs].

Lastly, it was important for Joan to share her rationale to defend astrology to those that dismiss it, especially the scientific community:

It used to be the Earth was flat, then it was round, it was the center of the universe, the Earth was going around the Sun and it was just us, but now it's a whole universe and everything. No one eknows where everything's going. But at no time did the Earth ever change, just our perspective. So, you know, science, religion, magic, it’s all just us slowly evolving our understanding of what exists.

In this way, Joan is positing that there is something to astrology that is true to her experience and is perhaps even quantifiable one day but is not currently available to us.

In summary, when astrology is working best for Joan, it is a method to learn more about herself and work effectively with the conditions of her life.
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Elaine

Elaine is a 38-year-old, Latina woman who currently lives in California. She works to pay the bills but identifies most with being a writer. She is in the middle of finishing her first book and shared with me that astrology had given her the confidence to pursue writing in earnest. She hadn’t allowed herself to consider it seriously until she was laid off in 2020 during the pandemic. It was an opportunity for her to seriously reevaluate her life path. She realized that writing was something she could no longer put on the backburner as she feels that she has an important story to share with the world. However, it has not been Elaine’s experience to feel this part of herself celebrated or encouraged. She was raised by parents that advocated for a more structured, conventional pathway to success. This had a decisive formative impact on Elaine despite intuitive inklings that a more creative professional life would be far more fulfilling. She has been writing since she was a child, accumulating a pile of journals by the time she graduated high school. Despite her sense that creative writing would be the most authentic expression of her true interests, she wanted to make her parents happy and followed their advice instead.

Elaine noted that the conventional route had worked out well for her siblings, adding that her sister had recently bought a house. That she hasn’t yet found financial prosperity and job stability used to be a source of shame and insecurity for Elaine. Within the past couple of years though, Elaine stated that it occurred to her she might not be thriving because the choices she had been making were counter to her nature. She was basing her values and decisions on what had been passed down to her through her parents and family culture, not what would be a more natural fit for her temperament and gifts. Elaine had thought that if she just worked hard enough, she would become what they wanted and win her parents approval. Elaine couldn’t pinpoint when she first discovered astrology, but she didn’t start studying it more proactively until the pandemic when she had to reassess what she wanted to do with her life moving forward. Elaine
mentioned multiple cosmological placements in her natal chart that validate what she had felt deep down to be her purpose, saying it “reflected back to me what I feel my soul already knew.” As powerful as this has been for Elaine, she admitted that sometimes she’ll need reminding as she will become disheartened by the delayed gratification of her calling to become a writer. She recently posted her natal chart on an astrology Reddit board for reassurance about her life direction. Multiple people commented that she has “a very good chart for a writer”:

Most people that post on Reddit are not aware of how their placements function and that's why they post. I feel like I had already found for myself, with my own abilities, that I had a chart that was meant to be a writer but I think I was feeling down that weekend. It was recent, maybe four weeks ago, six weeks ago, that I was really tired and I was just…I've no carrot in front of me you know. I was tired and I think that was my little, short-term carrot, I wanted to see if I was delusional [laughs]. If I was interpreting my chart properly or not.

When I asked Elaine how it felt to receive feedback that affirms her chart is good for a writer, she admitted to still feeling doubt. Elaine emphasized that astrology is not helpful when looking for certainty:

I cannot sit here and deny the fact that I still have some skepticism [about what her natal chart shows about her being a good writer], you know, that's why I feel like, you know, I still have that little bit inside of me that's just like, “Well how successful?” is it just going to be like, I'm going to publish this one book and then that's going to be it and I'm gonna have to go back to my menial jobs? I mean it's like, how guaranteed? How guaranteed is a guarantee?
Even though Elaine still experiences self-doubt, astrology gave her the courage to break away from how she had been living to adjust her work conditions to accommodate and prioritize the amount of time she needs to finish writing her book. Part of her regrets not dedicating herself to writing sooner, but why this has been difficult for her is also explained in her chart. In addition to validation of her purpose, astrology also validates her subjective experience. She noted that the authority she gave her family to dictate what she should and shouldn’t do is explained by her north and south node, or nodes of the moon:

So, my north node sits in the 10th house, and basically they say that those with a 10th house – 4th house axis, they have had very difficult childhoods. It could have been a number of things, it could have been sexual abuse, it could have been verbal, mental manipulation. It doesn't always have to be the most or worst extreme because you also need to look at what planets sit in your 4th house but the thing for me that was very relevant, is that people who have a 10th house – 4th house axis, they feel this desire to prove themselves to their family. I always felt like that in my family, that I always needed to prove myself...so my north node and that 4th house – 10th house axis, I feel that it vindicates how I felt growing up.

Elaine emphasized throughout our interview that astrology doesn’t gloss over negative aspects or qualities of her chart. She expressed appreciation for this as it allows her to see her positive and negative qualities objectively. In this way, she uses astrology for self-acceptance which empowers her to make changes:

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6 Nodes of the moon. In the sky, the two nodes, also called the lunar nodes, are the invisible points at which the moon’s orbit intersects the Earth’s orbit around the sun, called the ecliptic—which happens both in the northern hemisphere (at a point called the north node) and the southern hemisphere (at a point called the south node) (Rootjes & Brennan, 2020).
I have realized now, that it's helped me to look at the ugly parts of myself and to accept them for what they are. And then if I want to go forward and continue to make the same wrong decisions, well then, I can do that…but I have no desire to return to that and so it's helped me to reflect and see that ugliness about myself and to be like, well, you can continue to do this, or you can change it.

She also shared that she has, on occasion, used astrology to influence her decision making:

I don’t consult the transits so much. It's kind of nice to have a surprise. Maybe I live on the edge and that's my Aries nature, or my 8th house - I've been through so much I'm not really fearful of a lot of things as most would be… but I will admit that earlier this year when I left my customer service job, I was on that edge. My intuition was like, “I should get out of it,” because it was becoming so distracting from my writing and I've been spending two years writing this book. I want to do it fully and so I was going back and forth “Should I stay, should I go?” When I had tried leaving, some managers tried to talk me out of it. And so finally I came across this article that said there was going to be an eclipse. It might have been a solar, could have been a lunar, I don't know, but it was occurring soon and it said “This is the time when you close doors and you will not return to them.” It didn't specify per se, but just whatever position you were in, in that moment in life. It was like, it could close doors for two years. I was like, “Oh, no, mm mm, I'm leaving.” I left once I read about that eclipse that was coming and it hadn't quite happened yet. I think it was a week prior, but I was really fighting internally with myself. I intuitively wanted to leave and felt like it was the right thing, even though my brain was just like, “You're going to be with no money, you're going to be without money. And this is going to be tough,” but once I…saw the effect that it could possibly have. I'll admit
that was one transit that I did allow to push me. You know, forward, and basically close the door on that job.

Though Elaine provided this example, she emphasized that she is careful to not use astrology too often for reassurance around specific desires or decisions. She understands that astrology can only provide clues, not certainty and is therefore primarily an opportunity for self-reflection:

People are always like, “When am I going to get married, can you see when I'm going to get married? Or why are none of my relationships working out?” instead of looking at the bigger picture. Like, maybe you're meant to do something else, you know? Maybe you're meant to have a different path and that's why those doors close. So, yeah, I think when we get away from using astrology for prediction, it can help with self-reflection a lot more.

Elaine elaborated that self-reflection as prompted by astrology is naturally nested within a larger context. It enables her to witness her life from an expanded perspective. Elaine reported that this is especially helpful during emotionally difficult circumstances. She shared that she used to have strong reactions to things that would become overwhelming and difficult to tolerate. She mentioned that in 2017, her feelings had become so unbearable that she attempted suicide. She expressed gratitude that it didn’t work and credits astrology for being able to regulate her emotions more capably in that it not only gives her insight into her purpose but facilitates seeing the big picture:

I'm not gonna sit here and say that I'm perfect in that astrology has totally wiped away my ability to feel human emotions. I still do feel them. The outside perspective has just made the emotion behind [them] a little bit easier, to not have [them] basically spiral me down into a rock bottom. I still feel human emotions, even though I understand my soul's
purpose. But most people who can't see [how they feel] from the outside, they get more attached to that human emotion. So, astrology has helped me to keep my emotions more in check.

It was important to her to share in the final moments of our interview what she wishes people could know about astrology; that instead of using it for predictive purposes or using it to further one’s self-absorption, she believes astrology is most effective if used as “a reflection for seeing the not good side about ourselves, or the parts we don’t understand.” It was also crucial to her to comment on astrology’s holistic, spiritual premise and why it is not incompatible with science:

The good things of religion; those like, spiritual, energetic connections, I believe exist. Now the rules, not to offend anyone, I can probably do without. But I do feel like everything's intermingled. Like, I still believe in aspects. I still believe in science. I think we can all cohesively live together, but others don't believe that. A lot of people more on the science front are like, “Oh no, this doesn't exist,” but I believe it all exists, I believe it's cohesive. I think astrology is cohesive and connects with spirituality and psychology. I really feel like astrology backs up the psychological issues of individuals.
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Table 2: Elaine
Kelly

Kelly is in her early 30s and is an engineer for an energy company in Canada. She feels no cognitive dissonance between empirical science and her fascination with astrology:

Think about meteorology. It's basically the exact same; weather patterns like clouds, they're inside the atmosphere. Astrology is outside but it's the exact same weather pattern. It is the exact same! It’s weather patterns. And how do meteorologists predict weather patterns? They look at the history of the same conditions…the application is the exact same, the method is the same. The subjects are different. Astrology isn’t accepted, meteorology is. And how often are they wrong? I feel like astrology is more right [laughs].

She continued to explain astrology as a system and a language that is more consistent, logical, and advanced than how it is conveyed in popular media:

I don't “believe” in astrology any more than I do a pipe wrench. It's a system of measurement. It’s a language. It's the physical positions of the planets in our solar system…you should question the shit you’re reading on Facebook and Instagram and Co-Star because it's social media but if you're properly practicing astrology, it should just be matter of fact. I like that. Especially the science part of me, because it's like, here's the structure. So, what is there to believe in? If you give a chart to 10 different astrologers, they should all give you pretty damn close to the same reading.

It was over ten years ago that Kelly first started studying astrology, which was also around the time her brother got into a motorcycle accident that put him in the ICU. She assured me that she has since received therapy to process her grief and shock but at the time, she reached out to astrology for answers. She was not, and is still not, versed in predictive astrology but analyzing
his natal chart helped her feel closer to him and like she had a better idea of how to help him. She reported that back then, she couldn’t understand all the terms, but she could see that his chart, most notably, his sun, moon, and ascendant are dominated by the sign of Virgo – the sign most associated with cleanliness and order. Kelly affectionately shared that the prominence of Virgo in her brother’s chart fits because he is a “neat freak.” This is one of many examples Kelly gave of how the legitimacy of astrology is repeatedly confirmed through her direct experience in the world:

I remember one day watching him painstakingly curl his headphones back up with the wire and putting them perfectly away and I was just like…none of the rest of us are like this, I live in chaos [laughs]. And he puts toilet paper down over the toilet in any public toilet. He's an ultra-germaphobe and I've always been confused by that until astrology was like, “Triple Virgo.” Anytime any reference [in astrology] comes around about germophobes, or neat freaks, or anything - it’s Virgo. And that is one of the uncountably many things that like, I always say to myself, “Here’s another coincidence for astrology,” like, how many coincidences are there before you have to admit to yourself that there is absolutely something there?

Further, testing her perception against a body of knowledge like astrology is entertaining to Kelly, “…it's fun because it's pretty reliable. People can think I'm crazy, but I can, you know, wig them out pretty easily.” She added “Sometimes I watch people and I wonder what their sun might be or what’s strong in their chart just because I'm curious. I’m kind of addicted.” Kelly noted that part of what makes incorporating astrological considerations into her perception of others so addicting is that she is a curious person and every time she is correct, it increases her comprehension of the world and makes her want to learn more. She likes how a natural outcome
of this has been that she’s **become more observant** and **appreciative of differences in people**.

Before astrology, this is not how she was used to being in the world, explaining “I only saw things from my perspective.” Astrology challenges Kelly’s pre-existing notions and introduces her to concepts about how people work that she feels would not have occurred to her otherwise.

Kelly offered how she relates to her fiancée, a “Gemini Moon,” as exemplary of this:

> Astrology has helped me understand that people function differently. There's no reason that he might be the way he is other than some people are just different. It took me a couple of weeks of reading charts, all kinds of people's charts, but people close to me, and reading different traits and kind of just bashing my head up against - the language…it's super difficult, and the words that describe him are not “disconnected” but aloof and friend-based, he needs to be connected. He needs to be tuned in. Also, the idea that there's different types of people and the way they interpret emotion is different. So, me for example, an Aries moon. I react emotionally and instantaneously and usually kind of crazy and then I also come down like, just as fast. Gemini is air, air thinks mentally, intellectually about it. So, if air signs have an emotion, they're much more likely to be like, “Hm, here's a thought. Why is this thought here? Why do I have this thought? Or why is this feeling here? What is it doing here? They analyze with their mind, instead of expressing their emotion immediately and then analyzing later which is what a fire sign would do. Once I had that idea in my head about my partner, in this book – saying he was aloof, naturally aloof – still connected and friendship-based but…just like, an analytical person, it made me so much more accepting of stuff that used to really frustrate me before with him where something would happen and I didn't think he seemed upset or something, and I was like “Be upset!” When I discovered that my partner interprets
emotion on a polar opposite, just like, other planet from me, now that I understand that, it did make me a happier and more peaceful person because I'm not taking it personally.

This is especially meaningful to Kelly because throughout her life she has suspected that she responds to people and events more strongly than most people. She has also doubted that others provide her with honest feedback given that her intensity may make people reluctant to share. What she has suspected to be true about herself and her sense for how others’ have historically perceived her are affirmed, named, and made addressable by astrology. It has helped her develop her reflective capacity:

What astrology has enabled me to do is to give myself my own feedback, like, “Yeah, okay, you are intense.” Almost like this external validation of “this is what you think you have been dealing with,” this problem you think you have. If nobody tells you this stuff it’s like, “Well what, what went wrong?” I love that astrology gives you something else to lean on other than human nature, or just reality, honestly, especially lately [referring to the pandemic]. I'm like, “Okay, oh, so I'm crazy because I have strong Scorpio in my chart.” It's not, “Why am I so crazy?” Understanding your chart suddenly gives you something else to like, maybe put that guilt? I don't know if that's the right word, but I do find myself thinking “It's not me, it's my chart.” It's just the way I am and now, once I started appreciating astrology for that, I thought, okay, well, then that kind of helps me accept who I am a little bit easier. Right? Because it's not my fault. It's a lot easier to accept something I don't like if I don't think it's my fault. And then there’s also things in astrology that can help you kind of learn to navigate and work with it.

Astrology has helped Kelly observe herself and others objectively. The opportunity to witness herself with more acceptance and objectivity that astrology provides, paradoxically, gives her the
correct premise to feel empowered to change, should she decide to do so. Further, astrology not only describes her strengths and vulnerabilities, but it also provides advice for how to use her will to bring greater balance or harmony to imbalances she sees in her personality. It helps Kelly problem-solve what she finds challenging or hard to accept about herself. It gives her hope that seeing herself accurately, she can learn or become wiser. Kelly elaborated that astrology is “a neutral source to assign why things are the way they are, or people are the way they are.” The benefits of astrology outweigh any perceived loss of credibility. Kelly continues:

It’s a much bigger big picture perspective. And same thing with understanding why people are the way they are too, which I didn't really start to see until I was two years in. But yeah, that side [of astrology] is one of the things that I keep it around for, even though I feel like people think I'm a crazy person.

Kelly acknowledged that the greater understanding she has gained about herself and her fiancée may have been possible through other avenues such as couples therapy, but she emphasized that what makes astrology effective for her, is the objectivity and acceptance it bestows. She can accept herself and others as they are without blaming herself for their behavior. She further elaborated that the objectivity astrology enables is doubly true because she wasn’t looking for answers when she found astrology. She “stumbled upon it” and continues to be surprised by the insight it provides:

I think the objectivity of astrology…and also something to it being accidental? I'm coming into it from kind of the back end with astrology, like instead of seeking help. It was just like, “Holy shit! People are different!”…it’s made me a lot more receptive. I’m a lot more curious about things instead of judgmental because I didn't realize before, that
people were different or there were even different ways of feeling a situation. I guess I should’ve but **astrology gave me the language for those differences.**

Astrology feels like a bridge between her experience and others. It’s affirmed the feedback she has received from others, aspects of herself she has suspected to be true, and the inner workings of people “make more sense” to her as well. Kelly added that as she’s become increasingly observant, receptive, and curious – she has also become **more friendly.** She has further found that the alternate viewpoints and language astrology provides to be therapeutic, by which Kelly meant “**validating** of my behavior, others’ behavior, and events.” Regarding herself, Kelly explained:

> …astrology has given me **perspective** and allowed me to see myself, like, “Okay, I am this way because there's Scorpio in my chart.” Not because I'm needy, clingy or insecure. Maybe I'm just an intense person. So, I can kind of **take a little bit of the negativity away** and look at who I am and why I am the way I am a little bit more objectively. More healthfully? But it has kind of reinforced that yeah, I am intense, much more than the average person, and that explains the, the things that I, you know, say breakups that I haven't understood. It helped me understand them a little bit better.

In addition to the benefits of using astrology for psychological growth, Kelly also acknowledged when astrology has the opposite effect. She notes that astrology is **systematic but interpretive** and therefore influenced by the bias of who is reading it. Below, she addresses this in terms of both psychological and predictive astrology:

> In my chart - it says that I'm supposed to have recurring themes of death and rebirth in partnership and love. I could interpret that as, like, being a widow repeatedly. Or, I could not [laughs]… I always mention this theory, my own theory maybe, that it's probabilities,
it's like you’re playing the lottery. Another astrologer once said something that stuck with me. It’s like a movie. The astrology will say, maybe that your life theme or whatever is going to be a comedy, or an action movie, or maybe a horror movie, but it doesn't determine the storyline. It determines the genre but you can still play out the storyline and so that's where the probability is - it's like okay, so, there’s a good chance it’s going to be a horror movie, and a good chance there’s going to be some shit that goes down at the beginning you're gonna have to get out of and it's gonna be a little hairy. And then, chances are, it'll calm down, and then probably something's going to come back. So, like, it gives you the rough plot, but the outcome is not predetermined, and it can be expressed differently. So, for example, there was somebody’s chart. It's a story that I heard a while ago so it’s going to be hard for me to remember, but it was something like an actress's chart that had some kind of health problem coming up. There was a transit that indicated terminal illness, and so the astrologer didn't say anything. Blah blah blah blah. Fast forward to the next year. That astrologer sees the person again, and the terminal illness transit is happening. Well, the actress is playing a character who has a terminal illness, so, it’s still being expressed but you can't say exactly how it's going to play out. You have to remain open. That's something I remind myself a lot of, so that I can stay like, enjoying it.

Kelly also spoke to her understanding of predictive astrology as “genres” in a broader context. She recalled how at the beginning of 2021, she felt more prepared for what was to come while everyone she knew was celebrating that 2020 was over. When she consulted astrologers:

They were like, it's not going to be a whole lot better, but the summer will be pretty good. Mask rules will probably go away, and then when Jupiter goes back into Aquarius, mask
rules will come back, and then Jupiter will leave Aquarius and go back to Pisces and things will chill back out. So, at the beginning of the year, I was like okay, mentally prepared for garbage here, where everyone else around me was like, “Yay! 2020 is over.” And I was just like, “cool.” Buckling up for 2021 when everyone else was thinking it's over. I honestly felt bad for people because they were excited and I was like, you know, I was just not thinking anything was going to change, and it really didn't and I'm fed up with it, but I'm not surprised. And I think that has helped me.

She likens what is helpful about it to being on a boat at night and being handed a map. What exactly is in front of you isn’t visible but “you have a direction point.” It braced her to “weather all the stuff that has happened” during the pandemic. This reassurance or confidence felt in being more prepared for the future led Kelly to reflect on how astrology might be especially appealing to women. She shared:

I think us girls, especially in our, the generations you're looking at, we're all a little more open-minded I find than like, anyone else. [laughs] We're just kind of more receptive and maybe…also a little more creative, so our open-mindedness is a little softer you know what I mean? And I also think we have an intuition…there's some kind of mental bridge that we have, that others don't, that let us look at astrology, in a more constructive way than other people and maybe find more meaning. I also think because it is comforting. And we need comfort. [sighs]

Kelly went on to express this feeling of comfort as stemming from a feeling of being seen and acknowledged for who they are outside of social norms and pressures:

Like, there’s some, there are some things that people expect of us and we don't fit those expectations, we don't fit them and we can’t, they’re not realistic and, yeah, the thing we
all can really appreciate about astrology is the validation. Yeah, I don't know if it's just me. Sometimes I think it's just me. I need, I need a lot of validation. In every category. And we’re not set up to be given validation, it's not out there for us. And I think we do need some validation, right? So, yeah, there's validation in astrology for us [women].

Definitely.

Kelly also noted women’s attraction to New Age or spirituality in general. On humanity’s desire to form religion and other concepts of the divine, she urged, “there’s obviously something.” She feels that astrology is an aspect of what humankind as a collective has been looking for:

I sometimes feel that astrology is maybe that “thing” that we that we've been needing maybe? Not as a religion, but as our map, or, not informant…guide? Something. You know? And then it kind of helps everything else. Then you're more, I don't know, mentally prepared and just open minded and I think if astrology was more widely understood, which is really difficult. A really difficult ask. But if it was, I think the world would be a very different place.

There is a relationship between insight into the self and learning about others that presents as part of astrology’s allure as well. She finds the process of using astrology as opening her up to new ways of being and for **deepening her empathy** or ascertaining an approximation of others’ subjectivity:

I can see their [other peoples’] side of the story which makes me more willing to be **sympathetic**. If it’s [astrology] making me think about how somebody’s approaching a situation, it's still making my brain do the exercises of thinking through all these things and so, I think whether astrology is real, which it is [laughs], or not, there's definitely value in, in “the practice,” let's call it.
She names the complexity of astrology as one reason it is so easily dismissed. The premise that the planets may be involved in how people present to the world can seem absurd if taken at face value:

I would love to help convince people that it's not um, “hocus pocus” I guess. It's such a shame that it hangs out with the wrong crowd...[laughs]...with all the hippies. The scientific community or whoever the communities are that we want to accept astrology more - they think astrology is hanging out with the wrong crowd. The wrong crowd for them. So, astrology gets a bad rap. It's so complicated to really understand what it can do and to find it reliable. I think you really do need to be invested.

Kelly expressed wishes that people could see astrology as the *practical*, life-enhancing tool it is instead of immediately dismissing it. She was mindful to mention her assessment that “There's something here for everyone, not just us girls. *I also think that there is a physical mechanism, but we don't have the instrumentation to measure it.*”
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Individual Themes</th>
<th>Global Themes</th>
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<tr>
<td>No Cognitive Dissonance Between her Interest in Empirical Science and Interest in Astrology</td>
<td>Justification Feels Necessary</td>
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<td>Used More Depthfully Than How its Portrayed in Popular Media</td>
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<tr>
<td>Legitimacy of Astrology is Confirmed by Direct Experience in the World</td>
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<td>Systematic but Interpretive</td>
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<tr>
<td>Complicated to Understand and Find Reliable</td>
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<td>Physical Mechanism that We Don’t Have the Instrumentation Yet to Measure</td>
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<td>Attractive to Women in Particular</td>
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<tr>
<td>Benefits Outweigh Any Perceived Loss of Credibility</td>
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<tr>
<td>Entertaining</td>
<td>Psychologically Beneficial</td>
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<td>Increases Her Comprehension of the World</td>
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<td>Has Helped Her Become More Observant</td>
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<td>Has Helped Her Develop her Reflective Capacity</td>
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<td>Helps Her to Accept Herself</td>
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<td>Has Made Her a Happier More Peaceful Person</td>
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<td>Helps Her Navigate and Work with What She Experiences as Her Negative Qualities</td>
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<td>Helps Her Be More Objective in Her Self-Regard and Regard of Others</td>
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<td>Validating</td>
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<td>Has Helped Her Appreciate Peoples’ Differences</td>
<td>Fosters Compassionate Connection</td>
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<td>No Longer Takes Others’ Behavior Personally</td>
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<td>Big Picture Perspective</td>
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<td>Helped Her Become More Receptive</td>
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<td>More Curious</td>
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<td>Less Judgmental</td>
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<td>More Friendly</td>
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<td>Astrology is a Language for Understanding Difference</td>
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<td>Helpful for Developing Empathy</td>
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<td>Must Remain Open to Enjoy It</td>
<td>Provides Guidance and Reassurance if Not Used in Excess</td>
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<tr>
<td>Addicting</td>
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Lisa

Lisa is a 23-year-old, white, female who works as a public health researcher at a large hospital. Lisa couldn’t pinpoint when she first became interested in astrology but mused it was after she left home:

I think when it [astrology] really started to sink in was in college. I think that's honestly because I had the space and time to pursue interests that I actually wanted to and get exposed to different things. So yeah, in college, especially toward the end. There were a lot of people talking about it and a lot of people interested in it and maybe that's because I spent lot of time in predominantly female spaces. There was a whole community around it, and I liked that [laughs].

When I inquired about what Lisa meant by “predominantly female spaces,” she elaborated by saying that if she brings up astrology in “predominantly male spaces,” that “it's not happening [laughs].” Even if other women are there. She further noted:

Most people [in the millennial or younger generation] are accepting of talking about it, at least a little bit now, except for, for the most part, and in my experience, a lot of men do not like talking about it at all. I don't know if you want to like get into that [laughs] but, yeah [laughs].

When I asked her for further thoughts on why this might be, Lisa replied:

I feel like men are a little bit defensive because they think…women use astrology as a means to reject them for certain qualities. There are jokes all the time on Tiktok like, “Pisces men are problematic,” and it's supposed to be funny [laughs]. I think they see those things and they're like, “I'm getting judged for something I can't control” which, I don't know [laughs], it just feels a little bit defensive when they get like that. And they
also - it's always the science thing, like “It's not proved by science,” and all of that

[laughs]. I think those are the two biggest things.

Lisa went on to say that she has tried to engage men with astrology by offering to read their chart and the response has been “You're just judging me.” Lisa wondered aloud if she is interpreted as “woman-splaining,” and men would be more receptive if they were to receive a natal chart reading from a man.

After her comments on her experiences with men and astrology, Lisa was careful to note two clarifying points about the circles of people she moved within that were open to astrology:

My major was psychology so that’s probably why, but I was in the maths and sciences too because I wanted to be pre-med and I feel like that’s important [to mention] because I did have a lot of “science-y” friends who you’d think wouldn’t be into astrology as much.

She also commented on the commonly held assumption that astrology is incompatible with religious contexts or religious people, “Even though my college was Christian, I'd say a lot of people there were still accepting of astrology, at least the people I knew.”

In the above excerpts, Lisa is emphasizing that women across disciplines and regardless of religious beliefs are attracted to astrology, that their major and/or religious affiliation does not necessarily preclude their interest. For herself, Lisa stated:

What initially drew me to astrology and I think a huge reason why I keep coming back to it too, is the *compatibility* aspect of it. Obviously, I like to learn about myself with my chart…but I feel like one of the biggest things is looking at my chart and then comparing it with the charts of people that I know and seeing how we're compatible based on if we have overlapping signs, like, for example, a lot of my friends. Their moon sign overlaps with my sun sign and I'm like, “Oh my gosh, that's why we're compatible” or they’re a
fire sign and I'm an air sign and so I get this feeling that we're like combustible [laughs].
And so, I love that aspect of it that, you can assess how your personality is meshing with other people's.

Lisa went on to describe it as a social shortcut to bond with others:

It's like a community and I think that's a huge reason why it's so big on Tiktok too – there’s all this like, “Air signs do this” and funny things about other signs too and so you get this feeling that you're in a community of people who have similar characteristics chart-wise. I think that's why I like it so much [laughs]. It’s really nice and fun.”

In addition to TikTok, Lisa went on to describe the astrology apps she uses like Co-Star and The Pattern. Once again, it is the compatibility part of these apps that she finds the most rewarding:

In a lot of apps, they have a section where you can see what areas you're compatible [with friends] and certain areas of your life and yeah, I just think that part is really fun [laughs].

When I asked Lisa how discovering compatibility through the shared language of astrology was fun, she replied:

I did a chart for my co-worker. It was exciting to see her face light up when something resonated with her, like “This is your sign” and “Sometimes this means this” and she's like “Oh my gosh, that makes sense” and I'm like, “Oh my gosh!” too. I'm seeing someone else engage with it. Or I’m like, “This means that we're compatible for this reason,” and we're both so excited about it. It's electric, just - very high energy, high vibration. It's like a celebration.

Lisa is strongly motivated to use astrology as a shared language that fosters a sense of fellowship and connection. Lisa importantly noted that as much pleasure as she derives from using astrology
to connect with others, the **self-understanding** it can impart also plays a key role in how she experiences compatibility and community:

> It feels safe and like you’re known - feeling a little bit more understood by yourself. And then you can share that with other people like, “I discovered this about myself” and other people can understand you more [because of it.] So, I guess it's just like, secure. I’m trying to think of a better word than secure…full and whole I guess? Feeling like the parts are starting to come together and make sense. And **respecting yourself**. I think it [astrology] does help with all that too. Yeah [laughs]. Because when I learn more about myself, I think I start to respect the parts that I learn about, and then I can kind of get further on this journey that everyone is on to **love** themselves which is really hard. I like astrology because it **humanizes you to yourself** - you're sitting down and thinking about all these different things, how you interpret them and what they mean…

Lisa was mindful to mention that at times, astrology can impart a little too much information, that it can “**overstimulate and overwhelm**” me a little bit” but if she paces herself and doesn’t read astrology to excess she is able to continue enjoying it. She continued to elaborate on how using astrology enables a simultaneous growth of self-knowledge and **knowledge of others** that result in greater self-acceptance and fellowship with other people in the process:

> …I’m able to see these aspects of myself, what they all come together to make, and how they all fit together and then on the larger scale - I can see how other people are also affected by these things and have those traits. And so, I’m not lonely or feeling down about myself either.

What Lisa is articulating is **self-acceptance** that comes from an increase in self-knowledge but is doubly impactful because she experiences it as connected to a larger system or pattern that is
shared or universal in human experience. In knowing herself through astrology, Lisa feels less alone or different from others. She feels less self-criticism through this connection to others.

Lisa’s use of astrology expanded during the COVID-19 quarantine in 2020. She started to follow more astrologers online and to use astrology for the purpose of manifestation. Lisa tracks the phases of the moon, especially the new moon to focus her prayers, or intentions, in alignment with the sign of the new moon\(^7\). She does this in a way that “makes sense for [her] chart” and what’s currently going on in her life:

I didn't really manifest or do any of that stuff until we went into quarantine, and we were all just sitting around not doing anything. I had just graduated so I didn't have anything going on [but] I wanted to manifest things for the future. It was a really comforting thing to do, especially when I couldn't do anything else. I think a lot of people were feeling the same way, honestly. So Tiktok has had and still has, a lot of manifesting tips and spiritual things that often intersect with astrology like, “how can you manifest this if you're an air sign” which I like.

Lisa later expressed that her way of manifesting is similar to how she prayed with her family growing up, but it feels more “customized and personal”:

I was raised Catholic. And so, in the South, that's where I am, South Carolina, Christianity is woven pretty deeply into culture here. Say what you want about that, but as I got older I moved away from that strict type of religion, and I think that's when astrology honestly found me and I feel like the beliefs that are aligned with astrology are…more geared toward the natural world rather than, like, books, [pauses] I mean you can read books, but like sitting in a church, the Bible, things like that. And so, I feel more

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\(^7\) If the new moon is in Aries, one’s intentions would be best suited to leadership goals, personal agency, and new projects (George, 2008).
connected to it because I can go outside and sit in the grass and look at a full moon [laughs]. I feel more connected to that and comforted by that type of spirituality, natural spirituality, if that makes sense.

Astrology is like “a medium” or “means” for Lisa to access the sense of what for most of human history has been referred to as God and for her personally to call “the source.” Lisa tracks the phases of the moon and considers what “makes sense for [her] chart” to help focus her prayers, or intentions, for manifesting. The crossover for Lisa between astrology and spirituality is evident in Lisa’s description of astrology as “a medium” or “means” for her to access the sense of what many call God and for her personally to call “the source”:

…it’s everything and nothing at the same time, um, [laughs], which is so vague and impossible to define, but I think it’s nature, the universe, the thing that you manifest to and that cares about you and is making all of these things happen. That's what I see the source as…astrology is a way to connect to something on that spiritual level, whatever “the source” is for you.

Lisa continued to explain that astrology is a tool for her to directly experience what she had previously only understood abstractly, “Going to the source is this feeling that you have a little bit more of a taste of something to work with, and a sense of meeting what all the religions are talking about.” She further suggested that using astrology in this way is no different than other belief systems:

I think a lot of the people I've talked to have come to terms with the fact that astrology is like any other belief system. If you believe in it, it impacts your reality, regardless of if the moon is actually making things happen because of when you were born. And so, if I
believe in it, regardless of if it's actually quote-unquote “real,” it is still real because of the changes that I make to my behavior.

In consideration of the above, she commented that whether astrology is scientific or not doesn’t matter, “[Astrology] is not fully scientific, but what belief system is?” This led to remarks on her newfound comfort in balancing the irrational with the rational in her personal experience of the world:

…astrology is rational. It “makes sense” but I think it is more interpretive. As I got older, probably again, when I got to college, that's when I really found my identity. I think when I got there I let go of stress over everything having to like, be perfectly rational. And then I think astrology became more interpretive. I take what I want out of it and make changes based on what I see and then astrology works for me, or at least, my experience or my chart. If I don't feel like it makes sense to me, I can still learn things from it and introspect based off of that.

While Lisa qualified her statement by beginning with “[Astrology] is rational, it ‘makes sense,’” she has become more comfortable with forms of knowledge that are less deterministic. “…once I realized that astrology can be what you make of it and what you want it to be, it got a lot easier to interpret and be a part of.” She further sees astrology as giving “…a really good basis for thinking about who you are as a person.” It prompts her to, “…take the time to go out into ‘the source’ [laughs]. Spend time with it, to have these thoughts, rather than like, in front of a computer all day, not thinking about myself and introspecting at all.” Because of astrology, Lisa feels “more self-assured” and “known” to herself than she did before. This is a result of astrology making her “more reflective.” She also reports that this increase of reflection brought upon by studying her chart has made her more comfortable with being alone. Astrology quiets
the negative thoughts Lisa has about herself and helps her spend time on her own in “a healthier way.” Because of how helpful astrology is with this, Lisa has noticed that she leans on it when she is feeling lonely or bored. Immersing herself back into astrology and the community associated with it helps her feel less isolated but it also helps to reconnect her to herself. Even when astrology shows her an aspect of her personality that is interpretable as negative, she feels comforted by those described in the same way by astrological interpretation. She first asks herself, “… is that something that I do?” And if so, “At least there's a community [laughs] we're all kind of in it together.” All in all though, Lisa shared, “I do think the more negative things, I’m not focusing on as much.”
### Table 4: Lisa

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Individual Findings</th>
<th>Global Themes</th>
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<tr>
<td>Predominantly Female Spaces</td>
<td>Justification Feels Necessary</td>
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<tr>
<td>Like Any Other Belief System</td>
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<tr>
<td>Rational but Interpretive</td>
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<td><strong>Self-Understanding</strong></td>
<td>Psychologically Beneficial</td>
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<td>Self-Acceptance</td>
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<td>Respecting Herself</td>
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<td>Self-Love</td>
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<td>Humanizing</td>
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<td>Quiets Negative Thinking</td>
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<td>More Self-Assured</td>
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<td>Known to Herself</td>
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<td>More Reflective</td>
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<td>Made Her More Comfortable Being Alone</td>
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<td>Spends Time on Her Own in a Healthier Way</td>
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<td><strong>Compatibility</strong></td>
<td>Fosters Compassionate Connection</td>
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<td>Social Shortcut</td>
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<td>Community</td>
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<td>Fun</td>
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<td>Shared Language</td>
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<td>Knowledge of Others</td>
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<td>Manifestation</td>
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<td>Customized and Personal Spirituality</td>
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<td>Natural Spirituality</td>
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<td>Leans on It When She is Feeling Lonely or Bored</td>
<td>Provides Guidance and Reassurance if Not Used in Excess</td>
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<td>Overstimulate and Overwhelm</td>
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Uses Astrology in a Way That Is More Subtle and Deep Than How Astrology is Portrayed in Popular Media Makes Her Feel Like a Social Outcast Can Be Used Narcissistically More Accepted in Female Spaces Cyclical Worldview Spiritual Practice Meaningful System That Can Speak to Our Suffering Oscillation Between Two Perspectives; Big Worldview and Small Worldview Self-Knowledge Identification With Spirit Validates Insight Increased Ability to Respond Empathically to Others Doesn’t Get Into As Many Bad Situations Uses to Reduce Possible Negative Outcomes Feeling Prepared Sensitivity Towards and Care for Others Has to Step Away From Astrology When Overwhelmed Letting Go Rationale to Defend Astrology to Those That Dissim It Does In To Deep Analyze to Those That Developed Joanne Table 5: Individual Themes – Listed in Order of Appearance Validates Her Purpose Reassurance Not Helpful When Looking for Certainty Validates Subjective Experience Allows Her to See Her Positive and Negative Qualities Objectively Self-Acceptance Has Influenced Her Decision Making Helpful for Emotion Regulation Seeing the Big Picture Spiritual Not Incompatible With Science Legitimacy of Astrology Is Confirmed by Direct Experience in the World Entertaining Addicting Increases Her Comprehension of the World Has Helped Her Become More Observant Has Helped Her Appreciate People’s Differences Has Made Her a Happier More Peaceful Person No Longer Takes Others’ Behavior Personally Has Helped Her Develop Her Reflective Capacity Helps Her Be More Objective in Her Self-Regard and Regard of Others Helps Her Accept Herself Helps Her Navigate and Work With What She Experiences as Her Negative Qualities Helps Her Be More Objective in Her Self-Regard and Regard of Others

Lisa

Help

Elaine

John

Table 5: Individual Themes – Listed in Order of Appearance
Global Themes

Stated concisely, four main themes were identified across all participants: **Justification Feels Necessary, Psychologically Beneficial, Fosters Compassionate Connection, and Provides Guidance and Reassurance if Not Used in Excess.** All themes were discovered based on evidence in each participant’s narrative that they experienced each theme, though in different ways. Most compellingly, all themes affirm aspects of the dominant narrative within current psychology literature while offering answers to their questions for further research. This will be further addressed in the Discussion section.

**Finding One: Justification Feels Necessary**

All participants demonstrated full awareness that astrology's credibility is often disputed within conventional culture, and in response, had premeditated explanations and arguments for their continued interest in the subject. A common theme in their reasoning was an effort to convey that their “belief” in astrology does not preclude their belief in science. Rather, participants argued that astrology is an empirical and experiential phenomenon that’s compatible with their critical reasoning. It is systematic, predictable, and makes sense to them. It does not need proof beyond what can be ascertained through one’s direct experience. Therefore, it does not require belief:

*I don't “believe” in astrology any more than I do a pipe wrench. It's a system of measurement. It's a language. It's the physical positions of the planets in our solar system...you should question the shit you’re reading on Facebook and Instagram and Co-Star because it's just, social media but if you're properly practicing astrology, it should just be matter of fact. I like that. Especially the science part of me, because it's
like, here's the structure. So, what is there to believe in? If you give a chart to 10 different astrologers, they should all give you pretty damn close to the same reading. (Kelly)

Moreover, the participants felt that astrology offers a larger, holistic orientation to life. They don’t need concrete evidence of its mechanisms or for it to cohere with science’s current body of knowledge. It “feels” rational that the interrelationship between all life would transcend what human instruments can currently identify or measure. Beyond this, some participants were comfortable with relaxing their explanation and stated that in their day-to-day use of astrology, what is most important to them is the difference in how they feel and consequently, how they engage with the world:

...astrology is rational. It ‘makes sense’ but I think it is more interpretive. As I got older, probably again, when I got to college, that's when I really found my identity. I think when I got there, I let go of stress over everything having to be perfectly rational. I take what I want out of it and make changes based on what I see and then astrology works for me. If I don't feel like it makes sense to me, I can still learn things from it and introspect based off of that....I think a lot of the people I've talked to have come to terms with the fact that astrology is like any other belief system. If you believe in it, it impacts your reality, regardless of if the moon is actually making things happen because of when you were born. And so, if I believe in it, regardless of if it's actually quote-unquote “real,” it is still real because of the changes that I make to my behavior. (Lisa)

The good things of religion; those like, spiritual, energetic connections, I believe exist. Now the rules - not to offend anyone, I can probably do without. But I do feel like everything's intermingled. Like, I still believe in aspects. I still believe in science. I think
we can all cohesively live together, but others don't believe that. A lot of people more on the science front are like, “Oh no, this doesn't exist,” but I believe it all exists, I believe it's cohesive. I think astrology is cohesive and connects with spirituality and psychology. I really feel like astrology backs up the psychological issues of individuals. (Elaine)

My participants’ experiences suggest that, despite astrology’s controversial reputation and disrepute within science, it captivates and intrigues because it offers a deeper, more personal, and relational understanding of the world around us. This finding also offers an important counterbalance to reductionistic and patriarchal culture, which has a tendency to suppress relational perspectives toward the world.

**Finding Two: Psychologically Beneficial**

While findings three and four below address other kinds of psychological benefits that come from practicing astrology, I named this theme “Psychologically Beneficial” because it specifically addresses the positive intrapersonal effects. All participants spoke to astrology encouraging introspection and self-awareness, leading them to explore their personalities, strengths, and weaknesses with less judgment than before their use of astrology. They universally reported that the study of astrological material can catalyze a process of self-discovery that fosters a deeper understanding of oneself. This self-understanding is nested within a larger astrological framework through which participants interpret and understand events in their lives. The consistency of interpreting one’s experience through an astrological framework gives participants a sense of coherence and purpose. By identifying with astrological traits and tendencies, participants reported that they feel validated for their unique experiences and perceptions, thereby enhancing their sense of self-worth and identity. Participants were all careful to clarify that astrological insights include “the good and the bad.” By exploring both
positive and negative traits attributed to them through their natal charts, they developed a more balanced and objective view of themselves and others:

*I think reviewing past relationships is how it’s been most useful. I was married for 10 years so if I go back and look at the chart of the day we were married. It cleared up a lot of stuff. I was like, “Oh that’s why that didn’t work. And then obviously, knowing more about aspects…it lets you see the subconscious stuff a lot more easily, plus it lets you see your [behavior] patterns more easily. (Joan)*

*It’s [astrology] helped me look at the ugly parts of myself and to accept them for what they are. And then if I want to go forward and continue to make the same wrong decisions, well then, I can do that but I have no desire to return to that. It's helped me to reflect and see that ugliness about myself as well. And to be like, well, I can continue to do this, or I can change it. (Elaine)*

*What astrology has enabled me to do is to give myself my own feedback, like, “Yeah, okay, you are intense.” Almost like this external validation of “this is what you think you have been dealing with,” this problem you think you have. If nobody tells you this stuff it’s like, “Well what, what went wrong?” I love that astrology gives you something else to lean on other than human nature, or just reality, honestly, especially lately [referring to the pandemic]. I'm like, “Okay, oh, so I'm crazy because I have strong Scorpio in my chart.” It's not, “Why am I so crazy?” Understanding my chart suddenly gives me something else to like, maybe put my guilt? I don't know if that's the right word, but I do find myself thinking “It's not me, it's my chart.” It's just the way I am and now, once I started appreciating astrology for that, then that helps me accept who I am a little bit easier. Right? Because it's not my fault. It's a lot easier to accept something I don't like if
I don't think it's my fault. And then there are also things in astrology that can help me learn to navigate and work with it. (Kelly)

It feels safe and like you’re known - feeling a little bit more understood by yourself. And then you can share that with other people like, ‘I discovered this about myself’ and other people can understand you more [because of it.] So, I guess it's just like, secure. I’m trying to think of a better word than secure...full and whole I guess? Feeling like the parts are starting to come together and make sense. And respecting yourself. I think it [astrology] does help with all that too. Yeah [laughs]. Because when I learn more about myself, I think I start to respect the parts that I learn about, and then I can kind of get further on this journey that everyone is on to love themselves which is really hard. I like astrology because it humanizes you to yourself - you're sitting down and thinking about all these different things, how you interpret them and what they mean. (Lisa)

Increased exposure to and practice of observing oneself and others' characteristics objectively helps participants feel less reactive and defensive when thinking of themselves and how they show up in the world. They feel more equipped to regulate their emotions and to forgive others and/or not take others' behavior personally. This is due in part because astrology encourages shifting from a self-centered worldview to viewing oneself in relationship to a broader cosmic context, which is deeply humbling and aids participants in feeling less alone in their problems. All participants reported that for all the reasons described above, astrology has influenced their behavior and how they participate in the world. Participants reported that they make more decisions that align with their perceived strengths and awareness of their impact on others. Astrology has brought fun, play, and curiosity about the world into their lives. They observe and reflect on themselves with less seriousness and judgment, opting more often for a lighthearted
and receptive attitude. They feel happier and more peaceful. Because learning about astrology feels good, they are motivated to learn, observe, and reflect more – leading to a feeling of greater competence to comprehend and interact more effectively with others than they did before. Participants were all careful to emphasize that regular contemplation of astrological knowledge paid dividends in that it naturally encourages self-reflection, which is a supportive stepping-stone to personal growth and more satisfying relationships.

Finding Three: Fosters Compassionate Connection

The study participants engaged in candid discussions about their personal encounters with astrology, illuminating a recurring motif of heightened connectivity. This thematic thread was particularly evident in their accounts of deepened connections with their authentic selves. As one participant, Elaine, put it, "It [her natal chart] reflected back to me what I feel my soul already knew," underscoring the sense of self-recognition and affirmation that astrology can offer.

This sense of enhanced connection extends not only to themselves but also to the broader world around them, including other individuals and the natural environment. The participants shared anecdotes of feeling a stronger resonance with others and a newfound appreciation for the interconnectedness of all living beings. Moreover, their narratives unveiled notable improvements in their relationships, characterized by elevated levels of unity, sensitivity, and compassion. As a direct consequence, they found themselves more readily inclined to extend empathy and support to those around them:

...if my sister's going through a hard transit or something like that, I'll be more likely to be in touch with her, just to check on her.” (Joan)

...it’s [astrology]made me a lot more receptive. I’m a lot more curious about things
instead of judgmental because I didn't realize before, that people were different, or
there were even different ways of feeling a situation. I guess I should’ve but
astrology gave me the language for those differences. (Kelly)

Lisa underscored a heightened sense of affinity with others and a more immersive connection to
her spirituality as a direct outcome of her engagement with astrology. She conveyed a profound
transformation in her ability to forge connections, both with individuals around her and with her
inner spiritual journey. This newfound sense of communion has significantly ameliorated her
tendency towards self-criticism and mitigated feelings of isolation in solitude:

I’m able to see these aspects of myself, what they all come together to make, and how
they all fit together and then on the larger scale - I can see how other people are also
affected by these things and have those traits. And so, I’m not lonely or feeling down
about myself either.

When alone, Lisa doesn’t feel “lonely” because she feels more awareness of the mutual impact
and interrelationship between herself and the ecosystem in which we are all embedded:

“I was raised Catholic...as I got older, I moved away from that “strict type” of
religion, and I think that's when astrology honestly found me. I feel like the beliefs
that are aligned with astrology are more geared toward the natural world...I feel more
connected to it because I can go outside and sit in the grass and look at a full moon
[laughs]. I feel more comforted by that type of spirituality like, natural spirituality, if
that makes sense.”

The study's participants revealed that their engagement with astrology transcends the realm of
self-discovery, evolving into a profound experience of interrelationship. This sense of
connection encompasses a deep understanding of their inner essence, a rich bond with others,
and a heightened attunement to the rhythms of the natural world. As a result, their interactions with others became marked by a heightened sense of unity and empathy, culminating in an increased propensity for offering care and support.

**Finding Four: Provides Guidance and Reassurance if Not Used in Excess**

All participants exhibited a keen awareness of astrology's limitations and were proactive in offering instances where it may not yield valuable insights. Their collective perspective underscored that fixating excessively on the future, seeking unwavering certainties, and becoming consumed by concerns over impending astrological transits could potentially trigger anxiety and distress. This nuanced perspective revealed a well-rounded understanding of both the benefits and potential pitfalls associated with overreliance on astrology.

The participants demonstrated a conscious effort to strike a balance between the advantages they gleaned from astrology and the potential drawbacks. Kelly drew attention to the potentially addictive nature of astrology, while Joan candidly acknowledged her personal tendency to become absorbed in astrological contemplation. Their candid reflections illustrated an introspective approach, acknowledging the possibility of overindulgence while navigating astrology's influence.

A unanimous consensus emerged among the participants regarding their preference for utilizing astrology as a tool for envisioning potential future scenarios, while still embracing the element of surprise. This balanced outlook highlighted their recognition of astrology's role as a guide rather than an absolute predictor, emphasizing a willingness to remain open to unforeseen twists in their life journey:

*If I'm overwhelmed, I will actually avoid astrology. Just to take a break because realistically I can't change what's going on, I can't change the big things that are going*
to happen anyway. So sometimes if I’m already overwhelmed, it’s like you know what? I'll just be surprised [laughs] – see what happens. I’ve noticed that in my journal, I'll have a gap of a few weeks or a month or two here and there and if I go back and I see the transit, I'm like “Oh yeah, that was rough.” Gaps in my journal means it was rough [laughs]. It’s like anyone else...I have to step back from thinking all the time. (Joan)

I cannot sit here and deny the fact that I still have some skepticism. I still have that little bit inside of me that's just like, Well, how successful? Is it just going to be like, I'm going to publish this one book and then that's going to be it? And I'm gonna have to go back to my menial jobs? It’s like, how guaranteed? How guaranteed is a guarantee? (Elaine)

I don't want to have anxiety with astrology because it’s too much fun for me to feel anxious about. I don't think about stuff that makes me anxious but I think that's a potential there too. It's a fine line...you can be the best astrologer ever, but you still can't say exactly how it's going to play out. I have to remain open so that I can stay enjoying it. (Kelly)

If there's a lot of information...yeah, it [astrology] does overstimulate, and overwhelm me a little bit. (Lisa)

It was evident that the participants were circumspect about idealizing astrology or portraying a skewed perception of its impact on their lives. Their honesty and self-awareness showcased a commitment to maintaining a realistic understanding of astrology's role, appreciating its benefits without losing sight of its limitations. This discerning approach contributed to a holistic portrayal of their engagement with astrology, enhancing the integrity of their insights.
Summary

This chapter unfolded with the individual narratives of the participants, capturing the essence of their experiences, and unveiling the core discoveries extracted from this study. The findings are organized into both individual and overarching themes. The data collection process encompassed four in-depth and comprehensive interviews, providing a platform for the participants to share their personal history with astrology. In keeping with the standard practice of qualitative research, significant quotes from these interviews were included in the explication of each theme. By using the words of the participants, the aim was to ensure the fidelity and precision of the findings.

One of the primary revelations of this study revolves around the felt necessity for justification, a feeling that resonated across all four participants. Each articulated a compelling rationale for why their interest in astrology does not equate to intellectual or interpersonal shortcomings. This discovery emerged as a collective response, demonstrating their conviction in substantiating their engagement with astrology against potential skepticism. Further, implicit and explicit in this finding is a critique of the reductive, oppressive, and shaming aspects of the dominant scientific and patriarchal culture.

The second salient discovery revolves around the unanimous assertion that astrology furnishes psychological benefits. Each participant attributed personal growth and improvement as inevitable outcomes of serious astrological study. Whether through the enhancement of their self-concept or the refinement of specific qualities, the participants' narratives affirmed the mental and emotional advantages derived from their engagement with astrology.

The third pivotal finding encapsulates the participants' shared perception of astrology as a catalyst for connection. Their experiences highlighted an increased comfort in solitude,
accompanied by a deep sense of belonging within a broader community. This sense of belonging underscores astrology's role in fostering self-acceptance and a shared cosmic connection that supports feelings of compassion and care for others. This finding is immediately striking given that loving care for others is unanimously celebrated as a strong indication of psychological health, yet the dominant narrative in psychology research represents astrology use as narcissistic and detrimental to one’s mental health.

The fourth essential insight arose from the participants' candid reflections on the limitations of astrology. Even amid the benefits they attributed to it, they consistently acknowledged instances when astrology is not helpful. These moments ranged from information overload to excessive rumination. All participants advised the importance of taking breaks and not letting astrology overly determine your life or influence your decisions.

In short, this chapter offered detailed individual narratives for each participant, which became further enriched by the identification of four common themes that were shared between their unique experiences.
Chapter V: Discussion

It was not the primary intention of this study to directly address the common questions found in the current psychological literature on this topic. It is with great surprise that my findings not only complicate or contradict the main findings in the majority of scientific studies, but they also seem to contribute answers to the questions posed by many of the articles’ discussion sections.

At present, the dominant narrative regarding those who pursue astrology as an interest is that they are motivated by a desire for meaning in a soul-less, post-industrial age (Betsch et al., 2020) and to assuage feelings of uncertainty when stressed about immediate life circumstances and/or the future (Tyson, 1982; Lillqvist & Lindeman, 1998). Research further concludes that to be drawn toward or persuaded that astrology is a viable resource for meaning-making or anxiety relief, one is likely to be constituted with the following characteristics: narcissism (Andersson et al., 2022; Hamilton, 2002), authoritarianism (Allum, 2011), prejudice (Dambrun, 2004), interpersonal deficits (Tyson, 1981), and low intelligence (Andersson, 2022; Hamilton, 2002).

In the following discussion, I present a dialogue with the above research outcomes. The main findings are organized by theme, and each was compared and contrasted with findings from other studies to create a deeper understanding of the psychological significance of astrology for millennial women.

Finding One: Justification Feels Necessary

Each of my participants offered a rationale for their willingness to accept the plausibility of astrology as a legitimate system of meaning-making. In tandem with these explanations, each participant offered memories of being judged as “crazy” for their interest. I was struck by the consistency in which each participant conveyed that astrology felt logical to them, and even
further – that it is logical to assume or at least be open to the possibility that all life is
interconnected, and that this interconnection is easily imaginable as being composed of elements
that human instruments are not yet sophisticated enough to measure. This belief might seem
ignorant or immature from contemporary science’s point of view, but cosmic interrelationship is
one of the oldest beliefs known to humankind. A concept that captures this well is *anima mundi*
or “soul of the world” (Tarnas, 2006). The central concept that *anima mundi* proposes is that
there is a living, interconnected, and conscious spirit that animates and connects all living
beings, elements, and phenomena within the universe. Plato (2000) is the most well-known
philosopher to explore the idea, most notably in his dialogue, the Timaeus, but it is of such
ancient origin and has appeared in so many systems of thought that historians cannot say for
certain.

In indigenous and in spiritual beliefs, there are many variations of the *anima mundi*
concept that recognize nature as inherently comprised of a spiritual essence that is directly
related to our own. It follows that the world seen in this way is not a lifeless and mechanical
system but rather a living organism that deserves our respect and contains elements or patterns in

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8 In Hinduism, there is a belief in the interconnectedness of all life and the idea of a universal consciousness, or
Brahman, that underlies and unites the entire universe. This universal consciousness is often associated with the idea
of a cosmic soul (*anima mundi*), which permeates everything in existence. The concept of Atman (the individual
soul) merging with Brahman reflects this interconnectedness (Gough, 2013). **Buddhism:** While Buddhism does not
have a concept of anima mundi per se, it teaches interconnectedness and the idea that all sentient beings share a
common condition of suffering. Buddhism emphasizes the interdependence of all phenomena and the need for
compassion and mindfulness in recognizing this interconnectedness. **Taoism:** Taoism, particularly in its
philosophical form, holds the belief in the Tao (the Way) as an all-encompassing principle that governs the universe.
The Tao can be seen as a manifestation of a world soul or anima mundi, guiding and harmonizing the natural order
(Tzu, 1991). **Pantheism:** A philosophical and theological perspective (rather than a distinct religion) popularized in
the West by Baruch Spinoza. It holds that everything in the universe is divine, and the entire universe is seen as a
manifestation of the divine (akin to anima mundi). (Harrison, 2013). **Indigenous and Animistic Religions:** Many indigenous and animistic belief systems across the world hold the idea
that the natural world (including animals, plants, and elements) possesses spiritual qualities and is interconnected
through a shared spiritual essence. While not explicitly using the term anima mundi, these traditions emphasize the
sacredness of nature and the belief that all living beings are part of a larger cosmic web (Astor-Aguilera, 2018).
**Neoplatonism and Hermeticism:** These philosophical and mystical traditions, which emerged in the Hellenistic
and later periods, drew on ideas from Plato, including elements of anima mundi, and explored the concept of a
universal soul or spiritual force that unites all of existence (Wallis, 1972).
its makeup that reflect our own life and consciousness.

Rather than ignorance, I propose that holding a system of belief that endorses or encourages a more intimate relationship with the world is a natural, intrinsic yearning for many human beings that survives modernity because it merges both objective and subjective truths. The immensely complex balance that is necessary to sustain life make interrelationship superficially obvious. However, it takes a greater degree of attention and attunement to become conscious of our psychological connection with the world around us. We witness schools of fish swimming in unison, the tireless efforts of bees, the playful yips of adolescent wolves, the blissful purrs of a mother cat with her newborn kittens, the fury of a volcanic eruption, the focus of an owl in flight searching for prey, a tranquil butterfly resting on a flower, the might of a mountain, a lopsided houseplant reaching towards a window and away from the shade – as humans, we hold these diverse facets of existence within us. Whether or not other forms of life share an amygdala or only a nervous system or merely a collection of atoms devoid of an obvious growth and reproductive cycle, such as stone – they hold meaning for us, and we carry representative states of them within ourselves. When we see fish leaping out of water and flashing silver in the sunlight, we experience the satisfaction of working as a team, moving in harmony with others. When we watch blazing wildfires and hurricanes ripping down trees, we have a sense of what it’s like to become dysregulated and destructive. *Anima mundi* explains this mutuality in the diversity of our biosphere as originating from a single source, or “spiritual essence” that we all share. We are fortunate to not only participate in this dance of creation but also to recognize versions of it within ourselves. If one deeply accepts this personal and familial relationship to our blue planet, it might not seem so strange to connect that relationship beyond it and into the vast cosmos in which we are held. This vast interrelationship is not only
scientifically valid but also crucial for our overall health and that of the natural world. The philosopher-psychologist, James Hillman (1997) wrote:

…what psychology has had to call “projection” is simply animation, as this thing that spontaneously comes alive, arrests our attention, draws us to it. This sudden realization of the thing does not, however, depend on its formal, aesthetic proportion…it depends upon the movements of the *anima mundi*, animating her images and affecting imagination. The soul of the thing corresponds and coalesces with ours. The insight that psychic reality appears in the expressive form or physiognomic quality of images allows psychology to escape from its entrapment in “experience”…For centuries we have identified interiority with reflexive experience. Of course, things are dead, said the old psychology, because they do not “experience”(feelings, memories, intentions)…Not only does this view kill things by viewing them as dead; it imprisons us in that tight little cell of ego. (pp. 104-105)

All participants disregarded the need for scientific proof of astrology and used the concept of interconnection to support it. Granted, each participant was open enough to the idea of interrelationship (to varying degrees of abstraction) to embark on the study of astrology in the first place. However, participants reported that when they study astrology, they feel greater psychological contact with this intuition or felt *sense*. Astrology then, appears to be a way to experience a relationship to “the soul of the world,” *anima mundi*.

As technology advances, people are losing touch with nature. The idea of *anima mundi* can help fill the void left by declining religious beliefs and reduced exposure to the natural world. David Abram, an American philosopher, cultural ecologist, and author known for his work on the relationship between humans and the natural world, is a notable proponent of this
theory. While he does not use the term "anima mundi" explicitly, his writings and his ideas are closely related to the concept. In his influential book "The Spell of the Sensuous: Perception and Language in a More-Than-Human World" (2012), Abram explores the idea that the natural world, including animals, plants, and the Earth itself, possesses a kind of sentience or consciousness. He argues that humans have become increasingly disconnected from the more-than-human world and that this disconnection has resulted in ecological and spiritual crises. Abram argues for a deeper appreciation and respect for nature and all living beings, emphasizing the importance of interconnectedness and the need to protect the Earth as a living entity. While anima mundi has sound principles when applied to ecology, its application as the philosophical bedrock of astrological belief might be more difficult to accept. Anima mundi in the astrological sense is intangible and operates in the psychic dimension, suggesting that there is an embodied empathy between creation and human beings, that external phenomena have an invisible psychological relationship with us from birth and throughout our lifespan. Nonetheless, all my participants named ideas and beliefs that closely mirror those of anima mundi. My intention for connecting their reasoning with this perennial human concept is to elevate it to its proper place. It is not elementary or soft-minded to see oneself as influenced by and connected to the world in more or less obvious ways. This interconnection was the single most common justification and rationale for why astrology “made sense” to them. It was the dominant response for how they justified their interest. Out of all the results, I felt this was one of the most important as there is much noise made about astrology being a replacement for religion, yet nary a description of the nuances of astrology for how it functions as a “substitute religion.” Lastly, but importantly, this holistic way of thinking was often correlated with coming more naturally to women. While the concept of anima mundi is universal and ancient, two out of four of my participants directly
correlated this more relational, holistic style of thinking to be “feminine” or more common among women than with men. This is a strong indication that my participants’ interest in astrology acts as an important counterbalance to the pervasive encroachment of reductionistic, objectifying tendencies of patriarchal values into our wider culture. This is especially important to note as research on astrology often suggests that those interested tend to be of low intelligence. This is similar to studies on belief in pseudoscience and the paranormal. Articles repeatedly state how pervasive supernatural beliefs are in “feminine” culture and then infer believers are less intelligent. It is worth noting that in one such study (Andersson, 2022), the only intelligence test used was the three-dimensional rotation items (R3D) from the International Cognitive Ability Resource (ICAR). It is a test of spatial reasoning and 87% of their 264 participants were women. Using this test is highly suspect as the most consistent sex differences in cognition are found for spatial ability, in which men, on average, outperform women (Hromatko & Tadinac, 2006; Koscik et al., 2009). That a spatial rotation task, of all IQ tests, was used on a majority female sample is unfortunate. The data would inevitably confirm any study’s assumption that believers in astrology are less intelligent and serves as an important reminder of the importance of looking more deeply at the premises and methods of investigation that study conclusions are built on.

Although no intelligence tests were administered as part of this phenomenological study, my participants' insightful testimony demonstrated they were clearly not of low intelligence.

Finding Two: Psychologically Beneficial

Current research on astrology maintains that it is a poor coping mechanism at best (Bauer & Durant, 1997; Lillqvist & Lindeman, 1998; Tyson, 1981) and a danger to public health at worst (Blackmoore & Seebold, 2001). The Barnum Effect is frequently cited as a key
determinant for these conclusions. The Barnum Effect is a phenomenon based on the tendency for people to believe a description of themselves the more vague or universal it is, especially if it’s positive. It follows, that if someone is under stress and needs reassurance, astrology will provide a vague and positive description of themselves or a situation to make them feel better. At first glance, my data seems to confirm this finding. My participants acknowledged that astrology can be reassuring. However, they also reported that it’s not because it verifies their positive perception of themselves – it’s because their experience of themselves, and the world, feels validated. They feel less alone. It seems to me that this perceived objective “mirroring” through their natal charts might have a similar effect to “unconditional positive regard,” an affective stance first named and formally introduced into the psychological lexicon by the humanistic psychologist Carl Rogers (1951). According to Rogers, for a person to “grow,” they need a relationship or relational environment that provides them with genuineness (openness and self-disclosure that are congruent with one’s direct experience), acceptance (the intersubjective state of unconditional positive regard), and empathy (being listened to and understood). Without these qualities, relationships and healthy personalities will not develop as they should. Though first identified and explicated as a concept for use by psychotherapists, Rogers was clear about its benefits in all human relationships, especially during development and in conflict resolution. If parents, friends, significant others, and/or surrounding community members, offer acceptance and love toward a person for who he or she is – and refrain from any judgment or criticism, there is a much higher probability for that person to develop self-esteem and confidence to be the best person they can be and live up to their full potential. It is imperative to emphasize here that unconditional positive regard does not ignore what is challenging about someone interpersonally. It is acceptance of a person, for both their positive and negative behaviors, without reproach.
According to Rogers, this is essential for the formation and maintenance of a healthy “self-structure.” It appears that the participants in this study use their natal charts as a resource they trust for an honest but non-judgmental “mirror” that prompts less reactive and defended self-reflection.

My findings contradict the current literature’s notion that people turn to astrology solely for temporary comfort. I would like to further explore that the validation astrology offers is similar to the more formal psychological concept of “organization.” This term is borrowed from the most recent Psychodynamic Diagnostic Manual (PDM) (Lingiardi & McWilliams, 2017) and is a fundamental psychodynamic construct used to describe the overall structure and quality of an individual's psychological functioning. It refers to the level of integration and coherence within the person's personality, mental processes, and emotional experiences. According to the PDM, the following criteria are what must be considered in assessing healthy personality functioning:

1. Capacity for regulation, attention, and learning
2. Capacity for affective range, communication, and understanding
3. Capacity for mentalization and reflective functioning
4. Capacity for differentiation and integration (identity)
5. Capacity for relationships and intimacy
6. Capacity for self-esteem regulation and quality of internal experience
7. Capacity for impulse control and regulation
8. Capacity for defensive functioning
9. Capacity for adaptation, resiliency, and strength
10. Self-observing capacities (psychological mindedness)
11. Capacity to construct and use internal standards and ideals

12. Capacity for meaning and purpose (p. 20)

All of my participants provided ample evidence that the above capacities were enhanced through the use of astrological information. Paramount among these enhancements was the notable amplification of their capacity for introspection. They reported that the study of astrology is inextricable from the development of self-knowledge. As they have delved deeper into their astrological charts and associated materials, they have discerned a gradual improvement in their ability to regulate their emotions, perceive the perspectives of others (theory of mind), navigate social interactions, and cultivate an overarching sense of purpose and meaning in their lives. The greatest volume of data from the participants of this study was by far the utilization of astrological insights for greater understanding and personal growth. It is noteworthy to reiterate that while prevailing research often attributes the inclination to believe in astrology to the Barnum Effect—where individuals are more prone to believing in astrology when they identify with vague, especially positive, descriptions—my research contests this reductionistic premise. The perspectives of my participants consistently stated that their "belief" in astrology stems from its specificity and the objective feedback it provides. Their growing ability to identify and grapple with aspects of themselves, even the challenging ones, through their astrological insights led to tangible improvements in their lives. This transformative process not only bolstered their belief in astrology but also motivated them to deepen their studies.

Essentially, my participants collectively demonstrated that their engagement with astrology was instrumental in fostering a heightened introspective capacity and in driving personal development. Instead, their testimonies emphasized the profound value of astrology's specificity and practical impact. Their perspectives enrich our understanding of the
psychological underpinnings behind astrology's appeal and suggests the necessity for a more nuanced approach in astrology research.

**Finding Three: Fosters Compassionate Connection**

Loneliness is an increasing public health crisis in modern, industrialized, first-world countries (Office of the Surgeon General, 2023) that was exacerbated and brought to light by the pandemic. In a pre-COVID survey conducted by The Pew Research Center, only 16% of Americans report that they felt attached to their local community (Parker, 2018). In a 2020 report funded by the Making Caring Common Project at the Harvard Graduate School of Education, the roughly 950 Americans polled frequently felt lonely, or felt this way almost all the time (Weissbourd et al., 2021). This level of loneliness was reported by 61% of young adults aged 18-25 and 51% of mothers with young children. The consequences of loneliness are substantial. Multiple studies (Hemberg et al., 2022; Kandola et al., 2023; Kayaoglu et al., 2022; Kunst et al., 2011; Shahir et al., 2021) have shown it is associated with premature mortality and a range of severe physical and emotional issues, such as depression, anxiety, heart disease, substance abuse, and domestic violence. The report concludes with recommendations for how to alleviate this social issue, emphasizing the following:

Loneliness is a bellwether not only of our country’s emotional and physical but moral health. In this age of hyper-individualism, the degree to which Americans have prioritized self-concerns and self-advancement and demoted concern for others in many communities has left many Americans stranded and disconnected. We need to return to an idea that was central to our founding and is at the heart of many great religious traditions: We have commitments to ourselves, but we also have vital commitments to each other, including to those who are vulnerable. We describe key practices in families,
schools, and other institutions that can help restore this sense of moral responsibility (Weissbourd et al., 2021, p. 2).

Given the above, it strikes me that any research study, such as the present one, that shows “compassionate connection” as a result of the phenomena under study is worth our attention. Research and lived experience all show that community and relationship are powerful buffers against the psychological stress caused by the demands of modern life. All of my participants shared that astrology has been supportive of thoughts and behaviors that promote understanding, compassionate, and caring responses to others. This is in stark contrast to the current scientific literature, which characterizes those interested in astrology as follows: authoritarian leaning (Allum, 2011), narcissistic (Andersson et al., 2022; Hamilton, 2002), prejudiced (Dambrun, 2004), socially inept (Tyson, 1981), and of low intelligence (Andersson, 2022). Of these traits, narcissism was by far the most mentioned and discussed across studies. My research clearly complicates this finding. While my participants directly acknowledged that astrology can be used narcissistically, they also stressed that it is an underutilization of what it can offer. How astrology is best used was frequently highlighted in terms of meaning, purpose, and psychological growth. Indeed, on the surface, astrology and narcissism would seem conceptually related. Astrology does provide a context where one feels a special connection to an omnipresent force, the grand universe that can speak with authority about one’s character. However, narcissism is often steeped in a grandiose self that corrects for a lowly sense of self at the cost of healthy relationships and at the cost of a more coherent and integrated self-understanding.

Again, in contrast to narcissism, astrology as portrayed by my participants, appears to be used in the service of coherent self-understanding, compassionate connection in relationships, and meaning-making – all traits that correspond with psychological growth, maturity, and positive
mental health outcomes. We first achieve a sense of meaning in relationship to our caregivers, who interpret our crying and fussing as potential for hunger, tiredness, or a dirty diaper. Over time, this allows us to communicate that we are hungry, tired, or need to go to the bathroom. This yearning for another to explain and interpret our lives in ways we can integrate persists into adulthood (i.e., therapy; astrology; online personality quizzes; psychological assessment). In this respect, the use of astrology as narrated by my participants appears to offer a sense of meaning and purpose to those seeking guidance, self-awareness, and direction, which again, are levied in the service of psychological growth. The natural extension, or ripple effect, from using astrology in this way, the way my participants all professed to do, was to feel more connected to themselves, others, and nature. While my data does not directly address the remaining traits, the pervasiveness of connection is worthy of note as a strong dissident data point. Participants consistently described feeling less alone, more open-minded, more curious, and therefore more compassionate toward themselves and others. Again, this stands in contrast to what narcissism does to people. The reported psychological benefits of using astrology naturally grew to include a greater understanding of and appreciation for the uniqueness of others.

My study’s finding that astrology fosters compassionate connection is additionally intriguing given the concerns surrounding its impact on public health. Research on astrology is often driven by the belief that it is harmful (Hamilton, 1995; Dambrun, 2004). Horoscopes and natal charts are deemed to be false, therefore those who base their actions on them may not be true to themselves and could potentially cause harm to themselves and others. My findings clearly dispute this premise or at the very least remove it from the foreground as a credible leading assumption of astrology’s impact in the lives of those that use it.

According to Blackmore and Seebold (2001) there is a need for further research to
determine if individuals alter their behavior based on their horoscope or natal chart and if they do, then research should explore in what way their behavior changes as a result. Within my very small sample, the answer to the question of whether people change their behavior based on astrology or not is a resounding yes. Moreover, the behavior change is inseparable from transformative shifts in perspective that include an abundant increase in positive qualities most succinctly identified by Kelly and Lisa. Kelly felt she had become more observant, reflective, forgiving, peaceful, happier, objective, appreciative of differences in others, open-minded, curious, friendly, and empathic. Lisa reported many similar feelings with the addition of feeling less “lonely” when alone and spending time apart from others in a healthier way. Joan’s behavior changed so she felt more effective in her ability to support others, such as her sister and her daughter. Elaine felt braver to act on something she had wanted to do for a long time but had been avoiding out of low self-esteem and insecurity. When prompted to outline the ways in which astrology has benefited them, it is quite notable how each of my participants expressed rewarding, pro-social behavioral shifts and adjustments. What current research is lacking is patience to consider that astrology can be a tool that is conducive to insight and positive change. Instead of the premise that astrology is false and therefore any psychological change or action based on astrological information is potentially harmful, my data would argue that what astrology essentially provides is a prompt that challenges users to develop a more authentic relationship with themselves and others, and a more sensitive attunement to their motivations and values. Recognizing the utility of this within our irreligious, modern context would be worth exploring in future research.

Finding Four: Provides Guidance and Reassurance if Not Used in Excess

In addition to being an alternative system of meaning-making, the guidance found in
astrology is often named by the current body of literature as one of the key reasons it is trending as a substitute for religion in post-industrial society. Instead of consulting with a religious leader, the symbols found in astrology feel like a source of wisdom one can consult in times of stress. This latter point dominates current findings. It is presented as an immature coping mechanism and a desperate last effort to reduce stress after everything else has failed to work. I find this to be an unfair and unrealistic assessment. It is a deeply innate, human need to feel not only understood, but also to seek and keep the company of knowledgeable others that we trust have our best interest at heart. This is known in mentalization literature as epistemic trust; the faith in the authenticity and personal relevance of interpersonally transmitted information (Fonagy et al., 2019). It is our basic hope in relationships as children and we carry it with us into adulthood.

Lisa identified feeling safe and known as part of what feels so comforting about astrology. Kelly expressed that astrology provides explanations that feel validating and help her feel more equipped to handle difficult periods of her life. This also seems to parallel the dynamic of an in-need subject reaching out for guidance from an all-powerful, all-knowing, nonjudgemental other, most commonly found in the child-parent dyad. Historically, this relationship has been most closely replicated in adulthood through spiritual beliefs and practices, as well as more directly through the teachers and leaders in religious and/or contemplative communities. A psychologically significant function of astrology for my participants then, aptly described by Lisa and Kelly above, is to use it as a trustworthy source of feedback and wisdom. If astrology is used in this way, it is not only comforting but it also increases insight and personal responsibility for one’s life and choices. This is especially valuable resource in today’s culture which is plagued with superficial values and broken families. The comforting aspect of astrology use was mentioned in a recent, but representative, study on fortune-telling addiction (Das, 2022) through
an admission that “belief or interest in astrology, in moderation, may not usually have major negative consequences and can provide some reassurance and stress-relief at difficult times like the Covid-19 pandemic,” (p. 925). However, astrology was still framed as being insufficiently helpful and therefore likely to lead to deteriorating mental health outcomes and compulsive overuse (Das, 2022). The study went on to advocate for further research into the social, cognitive, and psychological pathways that lead to an unhealthy preoccupation with astrology so “appropriate preventative and therapeutic strategies can be developed” (p. 931). It is important to note that Das’ study defined astrology as divinatory and failed to include its other applications, such as psychological insight through one’s natal chart.

My data supports the conclusion that some people rely too heavily on astrology because they believe it can improve their life outcomes and provide a sense of control. However, my data also elaborates on this conclusion and perhaps helps to answer Das’ more specific question regarding what would turn a belief in astrology into a detrimental fixation. For example, in her individual narrative, Elaine shared that astrology enabled her “to look at the ugly parts” of herself with less shame which made her less defensive and more open to improving her behavior. Joan also shared that astrology helped her assess the positive and negative aspects of her life without judgment, and that astrology only becomes unhealthy for her if she uses it as an attempt to control the future or avoid suffering.

In summary, while all of my participants shared that astrology can be greatly beneficial, including predictive astrology in moderation, it was actually for this reason that they noticed becoming overly reliant on it in the past. At different times, each of them found themselves thinking of astrology to excess because it was fun, they felt they were becoming better people, and they were hopeful about maximizing positive outcomes for their future. However, they all
eventually recognized that astrology has limited ability to alleviate worry over specific future outcomes and emphasized that it's best used for self-growth and reflection rather than control. This insight is missed in the current psychological literature.

Future research on astrology use would do well to consider astrology’s function as a safe, honest, and compassionate mirror for users when trustworthy, objective feedback from others isn’t unavailable.

**Summary**

The above synthesis of my findings, true to the principles of qualitative research, was conducted with an emphasis on simply understanding. I did not seek to determine any single, causal explanation for millennial women’s use of astrology or to predict and generalize my results to everyone who uses it. Instead, it was my aim to tell a detailed story that connects my participants’ experiences to the larger phenomena of astrology of which they are a part. It is my hope that my discoveries offer some crucial, democratizing perspectives to psychology literature’s and popular media’s discussion of astrology.

The theme, *Justification Feels Necessary*, confirms contemporary findings that astrology is a substitute for religion in a post-industrial age. It details that the psychological significance of astrology in millennial women’s lives is also potentially a continuation of the perennial philosophical concept of *anima mundi* in the modern world. The emphasis on interconnectedness is strongly represented in astrological rules and languages. Justification for being interested in astrology rests on the idea of being connected to the world in subtle ways, and further, the willingness to consider the world in this way was identified as something women are more inclined to believe.

The theme, *Psychologically Beneficial*, strongly suggests that studying astrology
enhances self-knowledge and self-reflective capacity. Participants reported improvements in emotional regulation, social interactions, and overall purpose and meaning in life. Belief in astrology was based on its specificity and objective feedback, rather than the Barnum Effect. Participants believed in it more as they identified difficult aspects of themselves and improved their lives through what they learned.

The theme, *Fosters Compassionate Connection*, demonstrates that astrology can be a tool for positive change, helping people develop a more authentic relationship with themselves and others and a more sensitive attunement to their motivations and values. Research lacks the patience to consider this, instead assuming astrology is false and potentially harmful but the results of my analysis show that it can lead to healthier behavior and increased effectiveness in supporting others.

Finally, the theme *Provides Guidance and Reassurance if Not Used in Excess*, reports that astrology can be comforting and helpful for finding one's purpose, but relying on it for specific answers about the future can cause stress and anxiety. It should be used as a tool for self-development and navigating challenges, not for certainty about the future.

The overwhelming consensus from the above themes seems to be that the significance and function of astrology in millennial women’s lives, as described by my participants, is that it is not just a tool to cope with stress – it is life-enhancing. Their justifications for believing in astrology are part of a larger network of beliefs that encourage self-knowledge and promote care for others. Participants unanimously reported that not only did their lives feel more meaningful, fun, and fulfilling – they felt like better people after discovering astrology. They have more patience, compassion, and curiosity toward themselves and others. The benefits would naturally incur an excess of enthusiasm. Participants were forthcoming about moments when they felt they
were thinking about astrology too much or becoming overly dependent on it.

**Revising Assumptions**

After conducting this research, I have found that astrology is viewed by its users as a legitimate and dependable method of gaining insight into oneself and the world. It can be used alongside rational thinking and is seen as an empowering tool for making important decisions, managing relationships, and coping with emotions. Additionally, participants noted that astrology is enjoyable, allowing for creative self-expression and fostering connections with others. Furthermore, it was noted that women tend to be more interested in astrology than men (Ewens, 2018). The findings of my research align with popular beliefs in astrological circles but have yet to be formally documented in scientific literature. However, there are notable distinctions that set my data apart from either commentary on the psychological significance of astrology. Initially, my investigation centered on the probable tendency for overreliance on astrology to predict the future and alleviate anxiety. I wondered about excessive use, fixation, and whether those who use astrology might be more inclined toward a sense of control from within or outside themselves. However, I discovered that using astrology as a coping mechanism in this way was not as prevalent an issue as I had hypothesized. While some participants acknowledged feeling overwhelmed with the amount of information provided by astrology and occasionally took breaks from it, they all expressed awareness that using astrology in this manner is not advisable.

Completely novel results from my research that were unexpected include the changes in participant worldviews through engagement with astrology. Each participant noted that in some way, they felt like better people since incorporating astrology into their lives. It should come as no surprise then, that this extended to participants reporting that astrology feels good.
Implications

The identification of possible gender biases in astrological literature prompts us to reevaluate our research methods, theoretical frameworks, and assumptions. As clinical psychologists, we are compelled to adopt a critical lens that examines the ways in which such biases can perpetuate harmful stereotypes and impact individuals' self-concept and well-being. By recognizing and addressing these biases, we have an opportunity to contribute to a more equitable and inclusive understanding of human behavior and belief systems. Through this research, I have reason to believe there is potential gender bias in how current research on astrology is conducted.

My findings also highlight the importance of situating research on astrology within a larger sociological context. Astrology does not exist in isolation but is intertwined with broader cultural, social, and historical narratives. Exploring the sociocultural factors that influence individuals' adoption of astrological beliefs offers a richer understanding of why certain segments of society are drawn to this form of meaning-making. By considering astrology through a multidimensional lens, researchers can contribute to a nuanced and comprehensive understanding of human psychology and belief systems.

One intriguing avenue for exploration lies in recognizing the possibility that individuals' interest in astrology could be a manifestation of a broader movement to seek belief systems and ways of living that are equitable and inclusive. In an era marked by increasing skepticism towards traditional religious institutions, astrology offers an alternative channel for individuals to connect with a sense of purpose and meaning. It offers an expansive, accessible community where one can seek insight, guidance, and comfort without feeling unworthy or unwelcome due to one’s gender, race, sexual orientation, or dietary choices. Further, its emphasis on self-
improvement, personal empowerment, and empathy aligns with contemporary values of individual agency and collective well-being.

If future research could take astrology seriously as a new form of spiritual expression, it could open new avenues for understanding the evolving landscape of belief in the modern world. As clinical psychologists, we are tasked with recognizing the value that astrology holds for many individuals and exploring its potential contributions to psychological well-being. This would include conducting research that delves into the psychological processes that underlie the positive effects of astrology, such as increased self-awareness, enhanced coping strategies, and improved interpersonal relationships through love, compassion, and care.

In sum, there is a need for a more critical and comprehensive understanding of belief systems and their impact on individuals and society. It is my hope that future research on astrology can embrace a sociological perspective and recognize astrology as a reflection of broader cultural trends instead of a virus that has infected otherwise rational minds. Moreover, considering astrology as a quest for equitable and inclusive belief systems allows us to explore its potential to meet the spiritual needs of individuals in the modern world and alternative pathways for individual and collective well-being.

**Challenges and Future Directions**

While this exploratory study has yielded valuable insights into the psychological significance of astrology for millennial women, it is important to acknowledge its inherent limitations. The findings of this study have provided a preliminary understanding of the topic, yet the limited participant pool of only four women and the focus on a specific demographic prevent the drawing of broad generalizations. Interviewees responded to my postings voluntarily, potentially forming a participant pool of interviewees that are naturally more open, independent,
and assertive, leading to limited generalizability. This further applies to the small sample size. Fortunately, generalizability was not the goal of this study. By way of rich description, as well as detailed information regarding the context and background of each participant, I anticipated that any discovered knowledge could be assessed for its applicability and applied appropriately in other contexts.

This study successfully highlighted the necessity for continued research into how individuals seek and uphold structures of meaning. Building upon this study’s findings, future investigations should extend beyond female millennials to encompass larger and more diverse samples to capture the breadth of experiences and perspectives related to astrology. Given the burgeoning popularity of astrology within Generation Z and the LGBTQ+ community, it is imperative to explore how astrology resonates with and influences these cohorts.

Crucially, it is my hope that this research also sets the stage for a paradigm shift in the study of astrology. Rather than solely scrutinizing the phenomenon, future research should adopt a more curious and open-minded stance to uncover the underlying motives for individuals' engagement with it. The current trajectory of astrology research prompts us to question why there persists a tendency to condemn a phenomenon that appears to yield predominantly positive social outcomes.

The data from this study implies that the growing interest in astrology might symbolize a positive societal shift towards increased empathy and interconnectedness. By embracing a more inclusive and inquisitive approach, researchers can shed light on the deeper motivations driving individuals' engagement with astrology and unveil its potential contributions to personal growth and societal well-being.
Conclusion

The purpose of this qualitative study was to explore, with four millennial women, their perceptions of the psychological significance of astrology in their lives. Specifically, I sought to understand how the experiences of these individuals might elucidate gaps in the psychology literature surrounding this phenomenon.

I did not expect my results to provide so many elaborative, clarifying points to the current literature. I have been most surprised at the consistent warning of participants not to use predictive astrology when anxious as this offers the clearest counterpoint to the dominant narrative within research on this topic. I also appreciated how participants addressed that astrology can be used narcissistically, but that to do so is an underutilization of what astrology is capable of offering: e.g., meaning, purpose, and personal growth. Moreover, participants felt that astrology offers a larger, holistic orientation to life. This suggests that, despite its controversial reputation and disrepute within science, astrology continues to captivate and intrigue many individuals who seek a deeper understanding of the world around them.

The phenomenon of continued media attention toward astrology underscores the persistent fascination that society holds for systems of meaning-making that extend beyond the boundaries of empirical science. This dissertation has examined the intricate relationship between astrology and its followers, shedding light on the factors that contribute to its enduring popularity. As clinical psychologists, it is incumbent upon us to explore and comprehend the underlying psychological dimensions that motivate individuals to seek solace, guidance, or insight through systems like astrology.

The increasing traction of astrology within mainstream discourse necessitates our ongoing investigation into its various dimensions. One promising avenue for future research
involves exploring potential gender differences in the adoption and interpretation of astrological beliefs, unraveling how societal constructs may intersect with individual psychological profiles. Additionally, probing into the intricate ways in which astrology influences relationships can offer valuable insights into the dynamics of interpersonal connections and the impact of shared or contrasting belief systems.

Furthermore, understanding the depth in which astrology interacts with one's life is contingent upon the degree of involvement in the practice. It becomes essential to consider the spectrum of engagement, from casual curiosity to deep commitment, as this undoubtedly influences the extent to which astrological beliefs shape perceptions, behaviors, and decision-making processes.

In the face of the evolving landscape of belief systems and social media's role in perpetuating their popularity, psychologists are challenged to maintain an open-minded yet critical stance. Our role extends beyond the confines of diagnosis and treatment, encompassing a responsibility to comprehend the intricate interplay between societal trends and human psychology. By striving to unravel the complexities surrounding astrology's allure and influence, we contribute to a richer understanding of the human experience and the myriad ways individuals navigate the quest for meaning and connection in an ever-changing world.
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CONSENT TO PARTICIPATE IN A RESEARCH STUDY

TITLE:
Understanding the Psychological Significance of Astrology in Millennial Women’s Lives

INVESTIGATOR:
Rachel Floyd, M.A., doctoral candidate in clinical psychology, Duquesne University, 503-467-9594, floydr@duq.edu

ADVISOR: Dr. William Adams, PhD Duquesne University, 412-396-6520, adamsw@duq.edu

SOURCE OF SUPPORT:
This study is being performed as partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree in clinical psychology at Duquesne University.

STUDY OVERVIEW:
Astrology is currently experiencing an unprecedented surge in popularity, in particular within the millennial generation and especially among its women. This has caught not only the media’s attention but the market as well. Astrology apps alone are a multi-billion-dollar industry. There are many hypotheses for why millennials are providing much of the fuel for this growing trend, such as it being a replacement for religion or simply a desperate bid for meaning and clarity from a generation defined by anxiety and uncertainty. The purpose of this pilot study is to take the first steps in exploring whether there is something more complex going on here that might be uncovered or illuminated by a more in-depth, psychological research and scholarly analysis.

PURPOSE:
You have been asked to take part in a research study sponsored by Duquesne University. The purpose of this study is to find out the significance of astrology in millennials’ lives, millennial women in particular.

In order to qualify for participation, you must:
• Identify as female.
• Be in the millennial age range of 21-40 by the time of the study.
• Participate voluntarily.
• Have a minimum of two to three years of sustained interest in natal astrology demonstrated by any of the following at least three times a week; checking natal
horoscopes, reading natal charts, consulting with an astrologer, exposure to astrology themed social media, and regular interaction with others similarly invested in astrology.

- Must be willing and able to participate in an audio-recorded in-person or virtual interview, with the possibility of one follow-up interview in the same format.
- Willing for the researcher to publicly present and/or publish an interpretation of the research interview, including verbatim excerpts from participants’ descriptions. To the latter, participants will be assured that the descriptive data from which these excerpts will be taken are de-identified to ensure confidentiality.

PARTICIPANT PROCEDURES:
The discussion will be audio recorded to ensure that we have accurately captured the comments of each individual. Your privacy will be protected. The audio-recording is automatically transcribed by the online meeting platform, Zoom. Both the transcript and the recording will be password protected and stored on a password protected computer. Only the research team will see the transcript before de-identification. After the PI makes sure the transcript is accurate to the recording and it has been de-identified, the recording will be deleted. No names will be used in any report and discussion will be kept strictly confidential.

RISKS AND BENEFITS:
We do not think any risks are involved in taking part in this study, but it may include risks that are unknown at this time. There are no personal benefits for taking part in this research, your insights and that of others may be helpful to researchers as they seek insights on this topic.

COMPENSATION:
There will be no compensation or cost to you for participating in this study.

CONFIDENTIALITY:
Your participation in this study, and any identifiable personal information you provide, will be kept confidential to every extent possible, and will be destroyed five years after the data collection is completed. This will ensure a sufficient amount of time for using the data sources toward further analysis, dissemination of findings, and possible publication. All written and electronic forms and study materials will be kept secure. Direct identifiers of participants will be removed and given a pseudonym of their choosing as soon as possible before analysis. All de-identified data will be password protected and stored on a password protected computer. Password information will be written on paper and kept in a separate lockbox. The researcher will delete all data within five years after the data analysis process. This will ensure a sufficient amount of time for using the data sources toward further analysis, dissemination of findings, and possible publication.

RIGHT TO WITHDRAW:
The discussion is voluntary you do not have to take part if you do not want to. If any questions make you feel uncomfortable, you do not have to answer them, and you may leave the group at any time for any reason.

SUMMARY OF RESULTS:
A summary of the results of this study will be provided to at no cost. You may request this summary by contacting the researchers and requesting it. The information provided to you will not be your individual responses, but rather a summary of what was discovered during the research project as a whole.

**FUTURE USE OF DATA:**
Any information collected that can identify you will have the identifiers removed and will not be used for future research studies, nor will it be provided to other researchers.

**COVID-19 CONSIDERATIONS:**
I understand that the researcher(s) running this study have put in place the following guidelines to address concerns related to COVID-19:

- Depending on public health conditions at the time of the interview, the interview’s format is flexible and can be conducted virtually instead of in-person.

**VOLUNTARY CONSENT:**
I have read this informed consent form and understand what is being requested of me. I also understand that my participation is voluntary and that I am free to withdraw at any time, for any reason without any consequences. Based on this, I certify I am willing to participate in this research project.

I understand that if I have any questions about my participation in this study, I may contact [Rachel Floyd, 503-467-9594, floydr@duq.edu]. If I have any questions regarding my rights and protections as a subject in this study, I can contact Dr. David Delmonico, Chair of the Duquesne University Institutional Review Board for the Protection of Human Subjects at 412.396.1886 or at irb@duq.edu.

This project has been approved/verified by
Duquesne University’s Institutional Review Board.

Proceeding to the next page indicates your voluntary consent to participate in this project.
Appendix B

General Interview Guide

Opening Prompt:

“To get us started with this shared exploration, try to remember one of the recent times astrology was directly relevant to your life and tell me anything you can about it, what you felt, did, or thought. Take your time before responding. Let yourself remember this experience as vividly as you can, returning to the actual experience right now. Be aware of everything that arises for you with this memory – all the details of what happened, all your feelings, images, thoughts, bodily sensations, actions, and so forth – and then speak from the fullness of your present experience. Please share everything that comes to mind regarding your experience, even if it doesn’t seem to make sense or you think someone else might not understand. Go slowly here, give yourself some time to reconnect with the experience, and see what comes up for you.”

If a participant’s story has not tapped into the experience qualitatively and with sufficient meaning and depth, broad questions such as the following may be drawn from to facilitate the acquisition of rich, vital, substantive descriptions of the participant’s experience.

1. Describe how you use natal astrology in your life.
2. How does consulting your natal astrology effect you? What changes do you associate with consulting it?
3. Does reading your natal astrology affect significant others in your life?
4. What feelings are generated by reading your natal astrology?
5. What thoughts about reading your natal astrology stand out to you?
6. What bodily changes or states are you aware of before, during, and after reading your natal astrology?

7. How do you make sense of the information provided by your natal astrology?

8. Describe one or two times in your life when reading your natal astrology was particularly important to you.

9. Are there times in your life you read your natal astrology more or less?

10. Have you shared all that is significant in reference to your experience? Have we missed anything? Is there anything we should have talked about but didn’t?
Appendix C

Reddit Recruitment Post

Research Study on Astrology's Resurgence of Popularity

Hi all,

My name is Rachel Floyd, and I am a Ph.D. candidate in Clinical Psychology from Duquesne University. I am posting here in the hopes that members of this forum might be interested in an opportunity to participate in a research study about the recent resurgence of astrology’s popularity in modern western culture, particularly among millennial women. There is no monetary benefit for participating in this study but interview participants in similar research often enjoy their involvement and learn things about themselves in the process. Further, participants’ voices will contribute to the understanding of a social phenomenon that is spoken of frequently in the media but underrepresented in academic literature.

In order to qualify for participation, you must:

· Identify as female.

· Be in the millennial age range of 21-40 by the time of the study.

· Raised in the United States or in an equivalently modern, westernized country such as Canada or Australia.

· Participate voluntarily.
· Have a minimum of two to three years of sustained, active interest in Western astrology demonstrated by any of the following at least three times a week; checking birth chart horoscopes, reading natal astrology, consulting with an astrologer, exposure to astrology-themed social media, and regular interaction with others similarly invested in astrology.
· Must be willing and able to participate in an audio-recorded in-person or virtual interview, with the possibility of one follow-up interview in the same format.
· Willing to read the written analysis of their interview data and provide written feedback
· Willing for the researcher to publicly present and/or publish an interpretation of the research interview, including verbatim excerpts from participants’ descriptions. To the latter, participants will be assured that the descriptive data from which these excerpts will be taken are de-identified to ensure confidentiality.

If you are interested or know someone that might be, or would like to learn more, please don’t hesitate to contact me at floydr@duq.edu to set up a preliminary phone conversation. Note that agreement to be contacted or a request for more information does not obligate you to participate.

I look forward to hearing from you!

Rachel Floyd, M.A.
Ph.D. Candidate in Clinical Psychology
Duquesne University