

M. A. IN CULTURAL ASTRONOMY AND ASTROLOGY

Bath Spa University

**Are Horoscopes Relevant, Meaningful, and Valuable for
Those Who Read and Write Them?**

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Statement of Originality

I declare that this dissertation represents my own work, except where source material is acknowledged, and that it has not been previously presented as a thesis or dissertation to this University or any other institution for a degree, diploma or any other qualification.

Signed _____

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Abstract

This study investigates horoscopes as they are found in newspapers, magazines, and on the Internet, in order to discover if they have relevance, value, and meaning for the individuals who write them and read them. Sixteen writers and twenty-four readers of horoscopes were interviewed. The readers were a small sample of a larger group of 546 regular readers of a particular weekly horoscope column on the Internet. A control group, believed to be representative of a random sample, also participated in the survey and responses between the survey groups were compared. Previous research related to the study was analysed. Results indicate that readers find the perspective and guidance provided by horoscopes meaningful, and therefore valuable. The writers of horoscopes indicated that they try to provide authentic advice. A significant finding is that reading horoscopes out loud creates a sense of community and enhances standard ways of communicating personal information.

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Section I: Introduction

Statement of Research Problem

Horoscopes, despite their ubiquitous presence and popularity in newspapers, magazines, and on the Internet, are a conundrum within the field of academic research. For the most part, academic information related to horoscopes must be gleaned from studies conducted on the validity of astrology in general, e.g., the 1997 study by Bauer and Durant.¹ The majority of these studies also contain the assumption that given a lack of accuracy or proved validity, the content of horoscopes can be dangerous, e.g., the 2001 study by Blackmore and Seebold – a tacit presumption that readers are incapable of discerning meaningful advice from meaningless drivel.² With the rare exception of Campion's study in 2004, few studies examine newspaper horoscopes without bias against either the reader or writer.³ As Markovsky and Thye have stated,

Influential writers from across the academic spectrum suspect that paranormal beliefs [including astrology] are symptomatic of more fundamental and potentially harmful lapses in perceptual capacities,

¹ Bauer, John and Martin Durant, 'British Public Perceptions of Astrology: An Approach from the Sociology of Knowledge', *Culture and Cosmos*, 1997, vol. 1, no. 1, [hereafter Bauer and Durant, 'British Public'], pp. 55-72.

² Blackmore, Susan and Marianne Seebold, 'The effect of horoscopes on women's relationships', at <http://www.susanblackmore.co.uk/Articles/Correl01.htm> [accessed on 13 March 2006], [hereafter Blackmore and Seebold, 'The effect'].

³ Campion, Nicholas, 'Prophecy, Cosmology, and the New Age Movement: the extent and nature of contemporary belief in astrology' (PhD Thesis, University of the West of England/Bath Spa University College, 2004).

critical thinking abilities, evidential reasoning, and more generally, the educational system...⁴

Research Questions

Several fundamental questions are posed by this research relative to the value of newspaper horoscopes.

- (1) What value, if any, is derived by readers of newspaper horoscopes?
- (2) If horoscopes are valuable to readers, how can that value be understood in readers' everyday lives? Related to questions of value and meaning are questions of practical application and utility: how are horoscopes used, and for what purposes?
- (3) What is the experience of horoscope writers, particularly as that experience relates to assumptions about their motives and about their perceptions of readers?

The purpose of this research is to contribute to the growing body of information about the role astrology plays in contemporary culture.

Background

The most notable academic research conducted on horoscopes, or sun sign columns, Theodor Adorno's *The Stars Down to Earth*, is over sixty years old.⁵ While Adorno's research was and continues to be considered a seminal analysis of astrology, specifically of newspaper horoscopes, it is primarily based on his assumptions about such columns

⁴ Markovsky, Barry and Shane R. Thye, 'Social Influence on Paranormal Beliefs', *Sociological Perspectives*, 2001, vol. 44, no. 1, [hereafter Markovsky and Thye, 'Social Influence'], pp. 21-44.

⁵ Adorno, Theodor, *The Stars Down to Earth* (London and New York: Routledge, 1994), [hereafter Adorno, *The Stars*], pp. 46-171.

rather than on the application of a rigorous methodology.⁶ Other existing research on sun signs and sun sign columns tends to be ancillary to larger studies conducted to test the accuracy and validity of sun sign astrology, which is the practice of categorizing human behaviour according to the twelve signs of the zodiac. These studies have not investigated issues of value and meaning relative to the habits of horoscope readers or to the motivations of writers.

Theoretical Framework

The phenomenological method seeks to reveal value rather than to impose it.⁷ Therefore, given that this study is primarily concerned with issues of meaning and value, phenomenology provided the philosophical foundation for this study and informed both the qualitative and quantitative methodologies used to gather and analyse research data. Grounded theory, or the practice of the continuous analysis of data as the research is taking place, supplied the theoretical and methodological framework for constructing this study and analysing its results.⁸ Further discussion on grounded theory is contained in the methodology section. A content analysis of *The Stars Down to Earth* examined specific categories, which, once identified, were used to create a structure for open-ended interviews of horoscope readers and writers.

⁶ Bernstein, J.M., 'Introduction', in Theodor W. Adorno, *The Culture Industry: Selected essays on mass culture* (London and New York: Routledge Classics, 2001), [hereafter Bernstein, 'Introduction', *Culture Industry*], p. 2.

⁷ Geertz, Clifford, 'On the Nature of Anthropological Understanding', in Russell T. McCutcheon, ed., *The Insider/Outsider Problem in the Study of Religion, A Reader* (London and New York: Cassell, 1999), pp. 50-63.

⁸ Glaser, Barney G. and Anselm L. Strauss, *The Discovery of Grounded Theory: strategies for qualitative research* (New Brunswick, 1967), [hereafter Glaser and Strauss, *Grounded Theory*], p. 6.

Scope and Significance of Study

As Campion points out, sun sign astrology emerged in large part due to the efforts of Alan Leo (1860-1917), an astrologer whose ideas were ‘profoundly influential’ in placing the emphasis on the sun ‘as the most important single feature of astrological interpretation’.⁹ Horoscopes began appearing as regular features of newspapers and magazines in the United Kingdom and the United States during the 1930s.¹⁰ Since that time, sun sign columns have become omnipresent; they can be found in most major print publications and they proliferate on the Internet. Yet despite their popularity, horoscopes are a contentious topic. Psychological researchers characterize readers as marginal members of society or as individuals highly susceptible to suggestion or unable to cope with their dependency needs, e.g., the 1976 study by Wuthnow.¹¹ Horoscope writers are criticized by those who claim the accuracy of astrological descriptions or predictions cannot be proven by scientific method, e.g., the 1978 study by Thagard.¹² Controversy also exists within the astrological community regarding the validity of sun sign astrology, and, therefore, of sun sign columns, and horoscope writers are criticised by colleagues for practicing a superficial branch of astrology, e.g., the 1996 article by Dean and Mather.¹³

⁹ Campion, ‘Prophecy, Cosmology’, pp. 139-141.

¹⁰ Campion, ‘Prophecy, Cosmology’, pp. 143-148.

¹¹ Wuthnow, Robert, ‘Astrology and Marginality’, *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion*, 1976, vol. 15, no. 2, [hereafter Wuthnow, ‘Astrology’], pp. 157-168.

¹² Thagard, Paul R., ‘Why Astrology is a Pseudoscience’, *PSA: Proceedings of Biennial Meeting of the Philosophy of Science Association*, vol. 1 Contributed Papers. (1978), pp. 223-234.

¹³ Dean, Geoffrey and Arthur Mather, ‘Sun sign columns: History, validity, and an armchair invitation’, <http://www.rudolfhsmi.nl/s-hist2.htm> [hereafter Dean and Mather, ‘Sun sign’]. An expanded version of this article was also published in the *Astrological Journal*, May-June 1996, vol. 38, no. 3, pp. 143-155.

This paradox of popularity and criticism seems worthy of investigation, for while previous studies have examined who reads horoscopes, there is no extant study that examines value and meaning from the perspective of horoscope readers, and asks them directly how they benefit from these columns. Additionally, this study asks authors of horoscopes to describe their experience – what their goals and aims are, and how they see their role in relation to the process of writing, and also in relation to their readers.

Regular readers of a specific sun sign column were asked to participate in a survey about their horoscope reading habits; this survey also tested several prejudicial characterizations found in the previous studies. A control group participated in a similar survey. The construction of these groups and the design of the survey are described in section III, as a part of the general description of research methods.

For the purposes of this research, *astrology* is defined as ‘the study of the movements and relative positions of celestial bodies interpreted as having an influence on human affairs and the natural world’.¹⁴ *Sun sign* astrology is a branch of astrology based primarily on the position of the sun within a specific division of the twelve signs of the zodiac. A sun sign column is comprised of twelve separate written paragraphs, one for each of the twelve signs of the zodiac, containing a message for individuals born under a particular sign. *Horoscope*, within the scope of this study, is defined as a ‘short forecast’

¹⁴ *Oxford Reference Online* (Oxford University Press, 2004), <http://www.oxfordreference.com/views/ENTRY.html?subview=Main&entry=t23.e3155> [accessed on 28 May 2006].

for someone ‘born under a particular [astrological] sign, especially as published in a newspaper or magazine’.¹⁵

Assumptions and Limitations

It should be noted at the outset that the intention of the current study is not to investigate the accuracy of horoscopes in particular or of astrology in general, nor is it to probe the validity of sun sign columns or a belief in astrology.

The personal position of the researcher as an astrologer and writer of horoscope columns is acknowledged. This position plays a crucial role in the study, influencing the decision to explore this subject as well as the gathering of data and its interpretation. The importance of that influence is discussed in section III under the headings of ‘emic and etic perspectives’, detailing the insider/outsider roles in research; ‘reflexivity’, or the practice of self-examination or self-reference with regard to the intention and goals of the researcher; and ‘autoethnography’, which provides further information regarding the researcher’s role.¹⁶

The twenty-four readers who participated in interviews are all regular readers of *The Aquarium Age*, a sun sign column authored by this researcher. That column differs from some standard forms of sun sign columns in that prior to specific information for each of the twelve signs, it contains a general overview that is related to all signs.

¹⁵ *Oxford Reference Online* (Oxford University Press, 2005), <http://www.oxfordreference.com/views/ENTRY.html?subview=Main&entry=t140.e36161> [accessed 1 January 2007].

¹⁶ Davies, Charlotte Aull, *Reflexive Ethnography: A Guide to Researching Selves and Others*, [hereafter Davies, *Reflexive Ethnography*], (London, New York: Routledge, 1999). p. 4.

Section II: Review of Literature and Previous Related Studies

Section Summary

As previously stated, the existing research on horoscopes, or sun sign columns, has generally been limited to ancillary research conducted as part of general studies in the fields of psychology and sociology. With the rare exception of Adorno's *The Stars Down to Earth* and research testing his findings, few studies have specifically focused on newspaper horoscopes. Therefore, in order to extrapolate the results most relevant to this study, the following section has been divided into three main groups: (1) Adorno's *The Stars Down to Earth*; (2) psychological studies, including the category of the paranormal, which are concerned with the validity and accuracy of astrology; and (3) cultural/social studies specifically related to astrology, the majority of which are also concerned with issues of validity and accuracy.

Adorno and *The Stars Down to Earth*

The Stars Down to Earth (hereafter referred to as *Stars*) is a study that Theodor Adorno conducted over several months between 1952 and 1953 examining newspaper horoscopes, specifically a daily column by Carroll Righter published in the *Los Angeles Times*. As previously noted, despite its acknowledged limitations, *Stars* continues to be referenced in academic studies related to newspaper horoscopes, e.g., the 1997 study by Bauer and Durant and the 1995 study by Svensen and White, discussed below.¹⁷ Whether its standing is a result of Adorno's enduring academic reputation and its position as one

¹⁷ Crook, Stephen, 'Introduction', in Theodor Adorno, *The Stars Down to Earth* (London and New York: Routledge, 1994), [hereafter Crook, 'Introduction', *The Stars*], pp. 25-28.

of the few academic studies on record, or a result of a prevailing negative attitude toward astrology in academic circles, or a combination of these factors, is unclear. Very little in the way of academic criticism can be found regarding Adorno's work on astrology. Nevertheless, as a consequence of its standing, *Stars* was the primary source utilized for a comparison and analysis of this study's findings. *Stars* contains many prejudicial assumptions about astrology in general, and newspaper horoscopes in particular, as well as negative depictions of both the writer and reader of such columns.

Before analysing those assumptions and correlating Adorno's critique of astrology to this study, it is essential to understand that Adorno was not actually concerned with astrology *per se*.¹⁸ While astrology is seemingly the subject of Adorno's examination, *Stars* was actually undertaken to validate his preexisting theories about the culture industry and its relationship to capitalism. Astrology was, from Adorno's perspective, a prime example of that relationship.

For Adorno there is a fundamental symmetry between mass-culture and fascism, both of which feed-off and reproduce immature character structures.... Radio soap operas, newspaper astrology columns and fascist propaganda share the characteristic that they operate by at once meeting and manipulating the dependency needs of the pseudo-individual.¹⁹

To fully appreciate Adorno's critique of Righter's column, to contextualise his criticism of astrology, and to make sense of his generalizations regarding newspaper horoscopes, it

¹⁸ Adorno, *The Stars*, p. 153.

¹⁹ Crook, 'Introduction', *The Stars*, p. 11.

is necessary to appreciate that *Stars* is a polemic against the culture industry, of which newspaper horoscopes are a small but proliferate example; ‘the overall aim of the study [*Stars*] is to gain a better understanding of the nature and motivations of large-scale phenomena that contain a distinctively irrational element...’.²⁰ In the complexity of Adorno’s worldview, the interplay between the rational and irrational is of utmost importance. However, given the parameters of this study, Adorno’s philosophical and political ideology is presented here in a condensed form.

Theodor W. Adorno (1903-1969) was a Marxist, philosopher, sociologist, and cultural theorist associated with the Frankfurt School, whose members also included Max Horkheimer (1895-1973), Herbert Marcuse (1898-1979), Eric Fromm (1900-1980), and Walter Benjamin (1892-1940). The school closed in 1934 as the Nazis came to power, and several of its leading members, including Adorno, emigrated to the United States, where they reestablished the school as the Institute for Social Research. Among other ideas, the school is famous for the notion of ‘critical theory’, which unlike other Marxist approaches of the time included the recognition of the social sciences, particularly psychology, as a necessary component of Marxist dialectics.²¹ Critical theory posited reason as both the ‘source of...knowledge’ and the ‘source of our common humanity’,

²⁰ Bernstein, J. M., ‘Introduction’, in Theodor W. Adorno, *The Culture Industry, Selected essays on mass culture* (London and New York, 1991), [hereafter Bernstein, ‘Introduction’, *Culture Industry*], p. 12.

²¹ Jay, Martin, *The Dialectical Imagination: A History of The Frankfurt School and the Institute of Social Research, 1923-1950*, (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1973), [hereafter Jay, *Dialectical Imagination*], p. 41. See also Honneth, Alex, ‘Critical Theory’, in Giddens, Anthony, and Jonathan Turner, eds., *Social Theory Today*, (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1987), [hereafter Honneth, *Critical Theory*], pp. 348-349; Bernstein, Richard J., ‘Reviewed Work(s): Axel Honneth, ‘The Critique of Power: Reflective Stages in a Critical Social Theory’, Kenneth Baynes, trans., *Political Theory*, Aug. 1992, vol. 20, no. 3, pp. 523-527.

and held that a ‘rational society’ was a society in which all members participated and made a contribution. Conversely, an irrational society was a society that prohibited or excluded certain groups from participation, or a society ‘which systematically [rendered certain] groups powerless...’.²²

Of particular interest to Adorno was the trend in modern industrial society toward the notion of ‘instrumental reason’, which views the world – its inhabitants as well as its resources – in terms of how it can be exploited. Instrumental reason ‘disregards the intrinsic properties of things, those properties that give each thing its sensuous, social and historical particularity...’.²³ This obscuration of value is related to the notion of commodity fetishism, a root concept of Marxism that posits money as a ‘medium of exchange [that] brings unequal, different objects into relations of equality with each other’.²⁴ Without the ability to discern differences and distinguish value, the production of goods is unrelated to human needs, and is only for the sake of profit...²⁵ For example, the works of Plato published in paperback and sold at a used bookstore could be valued at the same price as breakfast at McDonald’s. The market obscures real value differences and ‘we build our understanding of the world only on appearances’.²⁶ For Adorno, instrumental reason provided the basis for capitalism to transmogrify into fascism, and in *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, a collaboration between Adorno and Horkheimer, the

²² Scott, John and Gordon Marshall, ‘Critical theory’, *A Dictionary of Sociology* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005).

²³ Bernstein, ‘Introduction’, *Culture Industry*, p. 5.

²⁴ ‘Commodity fetishism’ *A Dictionary of Sociology* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), [hereafter ‘Commodity fetishism’, *A Dictionary of Sociology*].

²⁵ Bernstein, ‘Introduction’, *Culture Industry*, p. 5.

²⁶ ‘Commodity fetishism’, *A Dictionary of Sociology*.

insidious effect of instrumental reason is made clear through their explication of the culture industry, which both produces and controls consumers' needs.²⁷

The Culture Industry

The standardization of the individual is integral to the theory of the culture industry, and that homogeneity is effectual because the culture industry succeeds in 'removing the thought that there is any alternative to the status quo'.²⁸ This is a key and complex notion that underscores Adorno's criticism of astrology. Instrumental reason, or the loss of ascribing value to knowledge, ultimately silences self-reflection in order to maintain the illusion of universality: 'Instrumental rationality in the form of the culture industry thus turns against reason and the reasoning subject. This silencing of reflection is the substantial irrationality of enlightened reason'.²⁹ For Adorno, the culture industry was the ultimate defeat of self-reflection, as well as the triumph of the standardisation of the individual, and it was through astrology that Adorno attempted to illustrate that defeat.³⁰ The advice offered in Righter's astrology column, Adorno believed, allowed the reader to stop thinking.

While naïve persons who take more or less for granted what happens
hardly ask the questions astrology pretends to answer and while really
educated and intellectually fully developed persons would look through

²⁷ Horkheimer, Max, and Theodor Adorno, 'The Culture Industry: Enlightenment as Mass Deception', *Dialectic of Enlightenment* (New York: Continuum, 2002), [hereafter Horkheimer and Adorno, *Dialectic*], p. 144.

²⁸ Adorno, *Culture Industry*, pp. 10-11.

²⁹ Bernstein, 'Introduction', *Culture Industry*, p. 11.

³⁰ Bernstein, 'Introduction', *Culture Industry*, pp. 12-16.

the fallacy of astrology, it is an ideal stimulus for those who have started to reflect, who are dissatisfied with the veneer of mere existence and who are looking for a 'key,' but who are at the same time incapable of the sustained intellectual effort required by theoretical insight and also lack the critical training without which it would be utterly futile to attempt to understand what is happening.³¹

It is not the point of this paper to argue the plausibility of Adorno's theory regarding the defeat of reflection. However, the prescience of Adorno's claims relative to the triumph of the culture industry's standardization of the individual can be seen in the domination of the advertising industry and its assertion of global influence through brands and products. Perhaps advertising rather than astrology would have been a better choice to illustrate the insidious effect of instrumental reason and the loss of reflection. For, as Bernstein points out in his introduction to *The Culture Industry*, while there are objections to Adorno's theories 'on the grounds that no one is quite as manipulated or deceived by the claims of the culture industry' as Adorno would have us believe, the success of advertising is undeniable.³² 'The triumph of advertising in the culture industry is that consumers feel compelled to buy and use its products even though they see through them'.³³

For Adorno, astrology signified the transparency of 'seeing through and obeying', or 'not believing, and believing at the same time', and, more importantly, the popularity

³¹ Adorno, *The Stars*, p. 162.

³² Bernstein, 'Introduction', *Culture Industry*, p. 12.

³³ Horkheimer and Adorno, *Dialectic*, p. 167.

of astrology represented the specific danger of the irrational appearing to be rational.³⁴

What made astrology an example of a pre-fascist environment was its ability to couch the irrational in rational terms, i.e., the ‘practical advice’ offered in such columns, as well as the denial of scientific discovery in favour of superstition, albeit ‘secondary superstition’, a term described in greater detail below. Astrology represented the cultural objectification and commodification of the irrational.

There is a pronounced pessimism in Adorno’s assumptions about the power of the culture industry, and as a consequence, he may have become a victim of his own form of standardisation. For in order for his theories to be substantiated, everything needed to be seen through a limited framework, a framework that left no room for alternative conclusions.³⁵ This was perhaps due to his experience of the horrors of the Nazis. It was, after all, Adorno who wrote, “[t]o write poetry after Auschwitz is barbaric”.³⁶ Giddens and Turner state that ‘Adorno’s thinking...was stamped with the historical experience of Fascism as a calamity for civilization’.³⁷

The Authoritarian Personality

Adorno’s critique of astrology is directly related to his concern about societal factors that contributed to the development of fascism. *The Authoritarian Personality*, a study conducted by the Institute of Social Research in collaboration with the Berkeley Public Opinion Study of the University of California, was developed for the purpose of

³⁴ Bernstein, ‘Introduction’, *Culture Industry*, p. 13.

³⁵ Bernstein, ‘Introduction’, *Culture Industry*, pp. 3-4.

³⁶ Rothberg, Michael, ‘After Adorno: Culture in the Wake of Catastrophe’, *New German Critique*, Autumn 1997, no. 72, pp. 45-81.

³⁷ Giddens and Turner, *Social Theory*, p. 358.

examining the question of prejudice, specifically the psychological roots of fascism.

Adorno authored those sections of the study that classified psychological characteristics, for the most part unconscious, from which psychological personality profiles indicative of individuals susceptible to fascist influence and behaviour were created.

The researchers created 'Opinion-Attitude' scales that were used to approximate certain tendencies toward prejudice. The 'A-S' scale, or anti-Semitic scale, charted quantitative degrees of anti-Semitism in the participants; the 'F' scale charted a propensity toward a fascist personality. Despite objections by critics of the study that the sample used was 'unrepresentative' of the general population or that the analysis of the study did not consider the 'important variable of formal education', *The Authoritarian Personality* is considered a seminal work on the roots of fascism.³⁸ The study classified its findings into a typology, or system of syndromes.³⁹ The rationale for this was 'the necessity that science provide weapons against the potential threat of a fascist mentality'.⁴⁰

The authoritarian personality emerged as several 'types'. Of special interest to the topic of this study is the 'Crank', who is drawn to the 'irrational and superstitious' in order to be 'in the know' and therefore, special.⁴¹ According to Adorno, 'Cranks fall as easily for astrology as for health food movements, natural healing and similar panaceas'.⁴²

³⁸ Madge, John, *The Origins of Scientific Sociology* (New York: The Free Press, 1962), [hereafter Madge, *The Origins of Scientific Sociology*], pp. 411-418.

³⁹ Adorno, *Authoritarian Personality*, p. 746.

⁴⁰ Adorno, *Authoritarian Personality*, p. 748.

⁴¹ Adorno, *Authoritarian Personality*, p. 765.

⁴² Adorno, *The Stars*, p. 114.

One of the major criticisms of Adorno's work generally, and one that was raised in connection with *The Authoritarian Personality*, was the notion of prior assumptions, or preexisting 'prejudicial' hypotheses, i.e., whether 'the personality syndrome finally identified as authoritarianism was in the minds of the investigators when they began to work'.⁴³ This same criticism applied to *Stars* and is examined in detail below.

The Stars Down To Earth

During a visit to Los Angeles for several months from the fall of 1952 through early 1953, Adorno analyzed the sun sign column in the *Los Angeles Times*, at that time written by Carroll Righter (1900-1988). Righter was a successful American astrologer, and his astrology column was syndicated in 166 newspapers worldwide.⁴⁴ Adorno also read several astrology magazines, 'such as *Forecast, Astrology Guide, American Astrology, World Astrology, True Astrology, Everyday Astrology* and other publications of the "pulp" type'.⁴⁵ This additional material was used to supplement his analysis of Righter's column. Content analysis of these assorted magazines and of the Righter column was the only method Adorno employed as part of his study, and while content analysis is a valid research methodology, it should be noted that Adorno never employed additional quantitative or qualitative methods as part of his investigation.

Limitations of Adorno's Methodology

⁴³ Madge, *Scientific Sociology*, p. 379

⁴⁴ Obituary of Carroll Righter, *New York Times*, 4 May 1988.

⁴⁵ Adorno, *The Stars*, p. 59.

Indeed, Adorno noted the limitations of his methodology, but given the pervasive presumptions contained in his interpretive rhetoric, it would be possible to characterize his acknowledgement of those limitations as disingenuous.⁴⁶ As previously noted, *Stars* maintains its academic standing without the use of research procedures such as fieldwork, interviews, questionnaires, and other tools of inquiry and investigation.⁴⁷ Crook addresses the problem in his introduction to *Stars*, referring to Adorno's ability to astutely analyse content, but noting that Adorno was 'less comfortable with empirical methods of analysis.'⁴⁸ Crook also points out that Adorno entered into his analysis of the Righter column with assumptions, an approach Crook recognized was 'spelled out in a rather peremptory way by Adorno in his introduction to "Stars"'.⁴⁹ 'We want to give a picture of the specific stimuli operating on followers of astrology...and of the presumptive effects of these stimuli'.⁵⁰ These presumptions nevertheless affected his analysis and interpretation of the material. For Adorno, astrology was 'nefarious' because it applied to the sociological/psychological typography delineated in *The Authoritarian Personality*. *Stars* was, therefore, another attempt to demonstrate the 'malignancy' of fascism that was to be found almost everywhere, even in the seemingly innocent advice of a newspaper horoscope.⁵¹

No sampling or surveying of readers occurred and, most importantly, 'extracts from the column [were] selected to illustrate themes whose representative character [was]

⁴⁶ Adorno, *The Stars*, pp. 52-55.

⁴⁷ Adorno, *The Stars*, p. 52.

⁴⁸ Crook, 'Introduction', *The Stars*, p. 25.

⁴⁹ Crook, 'Introduction', *The Stars*, pp. 25-26.

⁵⁰ Adorno, *The Stars*, p. 52.

⁵¹ Adorno, *The Stars*, pp. 46-59.

not established'.⁵² This lack of 'systematic sampling' coupled with his assumptions about psychology are not 'naïve' omissions on Adorno's part, but 'can be traced to a suspicion of the American empirical tradition of audience research', which Adorno came to believe 'isolated a single moment of subjective response' that privileged 'the conscious over the unconscious reaction'.⁵³ As Jay points out in *The Dialectical Imagination*, Adorno was more interested in group psychology than he was in the psychology of individuals.⁵⁴

Understanding that interest in group psychology makes it possible to view the psychological sociology used in *Stars* to analyze both the writer and reader as an amalgamation of Adorno's theories about the authoritarian personality, as well as an application of his concerns about the culture industry. As such, Adorno's psychological sociology may have been more a projection of his own ideology than a rigorous adherence to the discipline of the social science of psychology.

Nevertheless, for the purpose of this study, it is essential to address Adorno's assumptions about the writer's, as well as the reader's, unconscious psychological predisposition. For example, the reader is:

spoken to and given unreasonable promises like a child. Obviously the columnist figures out that the reader's wishes in this direction are so strong that he [the writer] can get away with even unreasonable

⁵² Crook, 'Introduction', *The Stars*, p. 26.

⁵³ Crook, 'Introduction', *The Stars*, p. 26.

⁵⁴ Jay, *Dialectical Imagination*, p. 197.

promises...though the reader knows in the depth of his heart that the promise will never be fulfilled.⁵⁵

Adorno also assumes that these unconscious patterns are due in part to social conditions;⁵⁶ the willingness of the reader to accept the fate of the stars is predicated on the cultural trend of the individual to accept his or her fate as handed down by the forces of society, a willingness Adorno sees as a consequence of capitalism.

In as much as the social system is the 'fate' of most individuals independent of their will and interest, it is projected upon the stars in order thus to obtain a higher degree of dignity and justification in which the individuals hope to participate themselves. At the same time, the idea that the stars, if one only reads them correctly, offer some advice mitigates the very same fear of the inexorability of social process the stargazer himself creates.⁵⁷

The reader is an uneducated, naïve, anxious individual who is struggling to survive and is incapable of analyzing the complexities of existence in a world of capitalist commodification, and therefore unable to challenge the power of the culture industry and its message of consumer conformity.⁵⁸

Inconsistency

⁵⁵ Adorno, *The Stars*, p. 117.

⁵⁶ Adorno, *The Stars*, p. 53.

⁵⁷ Adorno, *The Stars*, pp. 57-58.

⁵⁸ Adorno, *The Stars*, pp. 56-59.

Inconsistency and a pattern of contradictory statements impair a clear analysis of *Stars*. For example, the writer is presumed to have a clear vision of his audience: ‘we expect that the authors of our material know what they are doing and to whom they are talking’. But at the same time, Adorno posits the notion that the author’s primary message is subject to ‘innumerable requirements, rules of thumb, set patterns and mechanisms of controls...foisted upon him by the publication, and by implication, the political agenda of that publication’.⁵⁹ Adorno suspected that the actual language of the *Los Angeles Times* played a role in conveying messages hidden within its contents.⁶⁰ Further, ‘the authors of our material know what they are doing and to whom they are talking, though they themselves may start from hunches or stereotyped assumptions concerning their readers which facts would not bear out’.⁶¹ Adorno is ambiguous about the author’s conscious intent when he states that the writer had to meet the ‘set patterns’ of the publication.⁶² Yet, despite that assertion, Adorno was surprised at the tone of the column, which seemed out of sync with his assessment of the *Los Angeles Times* as a ‘right wing’ conservative newspaper, as the astrology was ‘moderate’.⁶³ Adorno contrasted the moderate tone of Righter’s column with a ‘more sinister’ tone he discovered in the various magazines. Compared to astrology magazines, Righter’s advice was level-headed, not dramatic, and astrology was presented as ‘something established and socially recognized, an uncontroversial element of our culture’. Adorno saw this innocuous tone as evidence that astrology, and thus Righter, was ‘somewhat bashful of its own

⁵⁹ Adorno, *The Stars*, pp. 54-55.

⁶⁰ Adorno, *The Stars*, p. 55.

⁶¹ Adorno, *The Stars*, p. 54.

⁶² Adorno, *The Stars*, p. 55.

⁶³ Adorno, *The Stars*, p. 56.

shadiness'.⁶⁴ Other inconsistencies in *Stars* are likely a result of Adorno's style of rhetoric and of the projection of his philosophy onto the material.

Moreover, while Adorno's view of an astrological newspaper column as an objectified cultural commodity was accurate within the confines of his philosophical and political perspective, it is unlikely that his presumptions about the motives of writers or his psychological profile of readers would stand the test of phenomenological inquiry.

The problem of phenomenological inquiry is not always that we know too little about the phenomenon we wish to investigate, but that we know too much. Or, more accurately, the problem is that our 'common sense' pre-understandings, our suppositions, assumptions, and the existing bodies of scientific knowledge, predispose us to interpret the nature of phenomenon before we have come to grips with the significance of the phenomenological questions.⁶⁵

Adorno presumes the psychology of the subject to substantiate conformity of his material and hypothesis. To actually query the writer or the reader would have opened up additional questions, questions which would likely have challenged the uniformity of Adorno's assumptions and the drama of his rhetoric.

⁶⁴ Adorno, *The Stars*, p. 56.

⁶⁵ Van Manen, Max, 'Human Science' in *Researching Lived Experience* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1990), [hereafter, Van Manen, *Lived Experience*], p. 46.

Rational and Irrational Forces

An examination of the interplay between the rational and irrational forces ‘within modern mass movements’ was the stated purpose of *Stars*.⁶⁶ The notion of tension and conflict between the rational and irrational within society and the consequential ‘historical fate of reason’ had already been presented by Adorno and Horkheimer in *Dialectic of Enlightenment*.

Irrationality, Adorno contends, need not be regarded as adopting policies wholly disconnected from individual and collective ego aims. On the contrary, it is cases where rational self-interest as normally understood is pushed to extremes so as to become irrational...that are to be studied. The surface rationality of the common sense advice proffered by astrology columns corresponds to this premise. Such columns are far from esoteric in what they advise: for example, today is a good day to avoid family arguments, sort out one’s financial situation...⁶⁷

This seemingly practical advice may be seen as how the stars come down to earth and the irrational becomes the rational. For Adorno, the content of newspaper horoscopes is an aggregation of ‘rational and irrational elements’ that conveys ‘direct or indirect messages’ to consumers. Righter’s column provided advice that was fundamentally practical, geared toward everyday matters, delivered authoritatively and ‘largely exempt

⁶⁶ Adorno, *The Stars*, p. 58.

⁶⁷ Bernstein, ‘Introduction’, *Culture Industry*, p. 13.

from the individual's own critical control'.⁶⁸ For Adorno, the authority by which this advice was offered – by the irrational and remote but pseudo-scientific interpretation of the movement of the planets – gave astrology an 'authoritarian cloak' suggestive of mental health columns.⁶⁹ From that point of view, both the astrology column and the mental health column evidence readers' dependency needs by trying to 'satisfy the longings of people who are thoroughly convinced that others (or some unknown agency)' know more about the individual reader's needs and therefore what those readers 'should do' than those readers 'can decide for themselves'.⁷⁰

Adorno also assumed that Righter was purposefully holding back the irrational elements of astrology. 'Irrationality is rather kept in the background, defining the basis of the whole approach: it is treated as a matter of course that the various prognoses and the corresponding advice are derived from the stars'.⁷¹ Here, Adorno raised the question of including the technical language of astrology, as that language described the workings behind the advice being offered in the column. To assume that the absence of technical language was a conscious deception on the part of the writer is also a broad assumption that may have reflected Adorno's lack of familiarity with the physical constraints of newspaper journalism; all columns are written to a specific and consistent word count, which often necessitates the elimination of anything other than what is absolutely necessary; technical language of any kind would be considered extraneous information by almost any editor seeking to manage column space in a newspaper.

⁶⁸ Adorno, *The Stars*, p. 51.

⁶⁹ Adorno, *The Stars*, p. 52.

⁷⁰ Adorno, *The Stars*, p. 52.

⁷¹ Adorno, *The Stars*, p. 56.

For Adorno, astrology keeps the source of its irrationality ‘remote’, ‘abstract’, and ‘impersonal’, the effect of which creates a ‘naturalist supernaturalism’ that presupposes an order to life, but presents that order as opaque and inscrutable.⁷² The stars reward the individual who adheres to a rational life, ‘i.e., who achieves complete control over his inner and outer life...’ and by so doing somehow cobbles together a sense of ‘doing justice to the irrational contradictory requirements’ of this obscure order.⁷³ Adorno believed that the schism between the rational and irrational, evidenced through the horoscope column, could be framed as an expression of ‘a tension inherent in social reality itself.’⁷⁴

To not acknowledge the ‘magical and irrational’ basis of the column, as he describes it, and to omit the language and workings of astrology, was to ‘be strangely out of proportion with the common sense content’ that was being offered to readers.⁷⁵ From Adorno’s perspective, this omission was not accidental, given that the column contained ‘pseudo-rational’ elements that needed to be backed up by ‘authority’ in order to appeal to the reader.⁷⁶ He stated that ‘in addition it will be proved during the course of our study that astrological irrationality has largely been reduced to a purely formal characteristic: abstract authority’.⁷⁷ The authoritarian personality wants to be somewhat informed but not responsible for actually knowing something; this personality type wants information that will help him or her to feel special and in the know.

⁷² Adorno, *The Stars*, p. 57.

⁷³ Adorno, *The Stars*, p. 58.

⁷⁴ Adorno, *The Stars*, p. 58.

⁷⁵ Adorno, *The Stars*, p. 56.

⁷⁶ Adorno, *The Stars*, p. 56.

⁷⁷ Adorno, *The Stars*, p. 51.

Adorno also contended that in an age of enlightened scientific discovery, too much was known about the actual physical solar system to ascribe any influence whatsoever to the planets and, therefore, that astrology was ‘utterly anachronistic’.⁷⁸ Adherence to archaic beliefs such as astrology could be seen as demonstrations of a less educated or less sophisticated intelligence, and therefore of an irrational mind.⁷⁹

Adorno also viewed astrology’s popularity as a ‘lack of intellectual integration’, and thus indicative of the problem of ‘semi-erudition’, a dangerous trend identified in *The Authoritarian Personality* as a societal precondition for the spread of fascism.⁸⁰ While Adorno argued caution against ‘evaluating astrology as a symptom of the decline of erudition’, he nevertheless used astrology as an example of how semi-erudition can be identified.⁸¹ Semi-erudition is defined a ‘state of mind’ that increasingly relies on facts and prefers information to the rigors of ‘intellectual penetration and reflection’.⁸² Most importantly, and related to the problem of semi-erudition, Adorno classified astrology as a ‘secondary superstition’, a term meant to describe the delimiting of an individual’s ‘primary experience’. The reader has no direct information about how astrology functions. The ‘mechanics of the astrological system are never divulged’; language, methodology, and other technical information were not included in the newspaper column; thus, the reader must assume what is being presented is accurate.⁸³

Adorno also made a distinction between astrology as a secondary superstition and the occult:

⁷⁸ Adorno, *The Stars*, p. 50.

⁷⁹ Adorno, *The Stars*, p. 50.

⁸⁰ Adorno, *The Stars*, p. 69.

⁸¹ Adorno, *The Stars*, p. 161.

⁸² Adorno, *The Stars*, p. 161.

⁸³ Adorno, *The Stars*, p. 49.

By this we mean that the individual's own primary experience of the occult, whatever its psychological meaning and roots or its validity, rarely, if ever entered the social phenomenon to which our studies are devoted. Here, the occult appears rather institutionalized, objectified, and to a large extent socialized.⁸⁴

Additionally, in an effort to defend his position on secondary superstition, Adorno admitted that all 'organized fortune telling' could be deemed secondary from the time that 'esoteric mystery' ceased to be the exclusive realm of the priest or religious oracle. But the crystallization of this half-knowledge is most evident in industrialized society, where the irrational has been 'institutionalised, objectified and...socialized'.⁸⁵ Here Adorno might be joined by critics of the divinatory application of astrology, including Cicero (106-43 BCE), who argued in *De Divinatione* that divination should be divided into two categories, 'artificial' and 'natural'.⁸⁶ Artificial divination was equated with fortune-telling, or what might be characterized in contemporary terms as newspaper horoscopes, and in Adorno's terms as the irrational objectified; natural divination was an understanding of omens as they occurred spontaneously in nature.⁸⁷ The merits of

⁸⁴ Adorno, *The Stars*, p. 48.

⁸⁵ Adorno, *The Stars*, p. 48.

⁸⁶ Champion, Nicholas, *The Great Year: Astrology, Millenarianism and History in the Western Tradition*, (London: Penguin Group, 1994), pp. 261-262.

⁸⁷ Cicero, 'Introduction', in *De Divinatione*, W.A. Falconer, trans. (Cambridge Mass., London: Harvard University Press, 1923), p. 217. See also Long, A.A., 'Astrology: arguments pro and con', in Jonathan Barnes, Jacques Brunschwig, Myles Burnyeat, and Malcolm Schofield, eds., *Science and Speculation, Studies in Hellenistic theory and practice* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1982), p. 170.

artificial or ‘socialized’ divination would continue to be debated by Plotinus, Augustine, and other critics of astrology throughout its long history.

As noted above, Adorno also read astrology magazines and contrasted the contents, style, and tone of those publications with Righter’s column, and he admits that while ‘no systematic study of this material could so far be undertaken, it has been perused to a sufficient degree to allow a comparison’ to Righter’s column.⁸⁸ The astrological magazines were also classified as ‘secondary occultism’, but it was noted that they contained far more ‘technical’ language than the newspaper column.⁸⁹ In Adorno’s opinion, while the writers whose work appeared in astrology magazines were more ‘sophisticated astrologers’, these writers also repeatedly asserted that they were not ‘determinists’, an assertion that mimicked an insidious pattern found in modern mass culture: the more mass culture praises the virtues of individualism and free will, ‘the more actual freedom of action vanishes’.⁹⁰ Adorno contended that columns contained in astrology magazines encouraged their readers to make their own decisions, but only in alignment with the stars; the freedom to make choices was, therefore, a false freedom because by aligning with the stars, the reader was volunteering for what was already inevitable.⁹¹

This contradiction between seeing through and believing is also indicative of the Crank, who, as previously mentioned, is a type of the authoritarian personality, whose ‘spurious “inner world,” semi-erudition, and pseudointellectuality’ incline toward a belief

⁸⁸ Adorno, *The Stars*, p. 59.

⁸⁹ Adorno, *The Stars*, p. 59.

⁹⁰ Adorno, *The Stars*, p. 60.

⁹¹ Adorno, *The Stars*, p. 60.

in astrology.⁹² Semi-erudition describes a personality that wants to be in the ‘know’ but has neither the intellect nor the will to develop knowledge sufficiently. The semi-erudite wants to understand and to feel superior, but is in no ‘position to carry through complicated and detached intellectual operations.’⁹³ From Adorno’s perspective, the same psychological factors that make it possible to believe in astrology also create a predisposition to racism; the Crank is described as having ‘a significant social trait [of] semi-erudition, a magical belief in science which makes [him] the ideal follower of racial theory’.⁹⁴ Astrology’s remote authority would satisfy the semi-erudite who, ‘excluded from educational privileges’, would still be ‘in the know’.⁹⁵

Yet another assumption made by Adorno in *Stars*, as well as by others who criticize the advice offered in astrology columns, is that the very act of seeking advice demonstrates a dependency need. The absence of a bona fide system for assessing the psychological reality of the writer or reader of newspaper horoscopes renders Adorno’s statements about their psychology as conjecture.

Adorno wrote that one of the magazine articles stated ‘with amazing frankness’ that within the field of astrology there was no uniform standard of interpretation, an admission Adorno interpreted as an ‘attempt to ward off attacks’ that would challenge astrology’s inconsistencies.⁹⁶ Had Adorno known more about astrology, he would have been able to contextualise that statement within the practice of astrological interpretation which in turn may have opened up a new understanding. His argument is likely to have

⁹² Adorno, *The Authoritarian Personality*, p. 766.

⁹³ Adorno, *The Stars*, p. 61.

⁹⁴ Adorno, *The Authoritarian Personality*, p. 765.

⁹⁵ Adorno, *The Stars*, p. 61.

⁹⁶ Adorno, *The Stars*, p. 62.

remained the same, but it would have been informed by actual practice rather than by a limited understanding of the subject from an observer's perspective.

Stars contains several categories chosen by Adorno to illustrate how astrological ideology aligned with the more 'sinister social potential' of totalitarianism.⁹⁷ He pays specific attention to the supposed split between work and pleasure, ruggedness and dependence, and to the notion of bi-phasic time, which characterizes Righter's style of dividing the day into two distinct time periods, a division that may have been a stylistic choice or an astrological one related to the phases of the moon. Because those divisions elaborate on Adorno's hypothesis about the 'true' nature of astrology, which by his own admission had nothing to do with astrology, they are not addressed in this study.

'Speaking in general terms, the astrological ideology resembles, in all its major characteristics, the mentality of the "high scorer" of the "Authoritarian Personality." It was, in fact, this similarity which induced this researcher to undertake the present study.'⁹⁸

Adorno extended his sweeping generalizations about Righter's column to all sun sign columns as they appeared in every newspaper. Such a broad-reaching conclusion, unsubstantiated by a reliable methodology, would not be considered a valid hypothesis regarding the nature of any social phenomenon. That such statements were made about astrology, and that such statements continue to go unchallenged, even by Adorno's critics, is indicative of an ongoing indictment of the subject, despite astrology's persistent popularity. Moreover, an analysis of Adorno's assumptions reveals that most, if not all,

⁹⁷ Adorno, *The Stars*, p. 164.

⁹⁸ Adorno, *The Stars*, p. 163.

of the theories contained in *Stars* were unrelated to the actual practice of astrology and to the actual experience of writing or reading such columns.

Previous Studies

While *Stars* specifically addresses the social reality of newspaper horoscopes, other studies are concerned with astrology in general; as previously stated, those studies are presented below in two categories: (1) psychological studies; and (2) cultural studies.

Psychological Studies

A large-scale study was conducted in 1978 by Mayo, White, and Eysenck to put to the test the ‘hypothesis that there [is] a link between’ an individual’s personality and his or her sun sign.⁹⁹ That research found that astrological predictions of personality related to extraversion and neuroticism were supported ‘at a high level of significance’.¹⁰⁰ In view of the fact that the current research is in no way concerned with the accuracy of astrological predictions or personality descriptions, the Mayo, White, and Eysenck study has no direct bearing on the design or analysis of this project. Nevertheless, because it is the basis for so many studies regarding the relationship between psychological personality characteristics and astrological personality characteristics, and because some

⁹⁹ Mayo, J., O. White, and H. J. Eysenck, ‘An Empirical Study of the Relation Between Astrological Factors and Personality’, *The Journal of Social Psychology*, Aug. 1978, vol. 105, no. 2, p. 229, [hereafter Mayo, White, and Eysenck, ‘Astrological Factors’]. See also, Eysenck, H. J., and D. K. B. Nias, *Astrology: Science or Superstition?* (Harmondsworth, New York: Penguin Books, 1982), p. 49; Smithers, A.G., and H. J. Cooper, ‘Personality and Season of Birth’, *The Journal of Social Psychology*, 1978, vol. 105, pp. 237-241.

¹⁰⁰ Mayo, White, and Eysenck, ‘Astrological Factors’, p. 229.

of those studies have a bearing on the current study, it is included in this section.¹⁰¹ A 1979 study by Pawlik and Buse challenged the Mayo, White, and Eysenck results, arguing that the participants in the study may have had knowledge of the personality characteristics attributed to their sun signs, an argument that became known as the self-attribution theory.¹⁰² In a 1983 study, Fichten and Sunerton probed horoscope reading habits to ascertain whether daily and weekly horoscopes were reliable and/or valid by investigating what effect knowledge of a zodiac sign had ‘on the perception of the usefulness of horoscope forecasts and on the accuracy of astrologically based personality descriptions’. Prior knowledge was said to have an effect on how participants rated the ‘usefulness and accuracy of the horoscopes’; the researchers termed that influence the

¹⁰¹ Clarke, Dave, Toos Gabriels, and Joan Barnes, ‘Astrological Signs as Determinants of Extroversion and Emotionality: An Empirical Study’, *The Journal of Psychology*, 1996, vol. 130, no. 2, pp. 131-140. See also Hientschel, Uwe and M. Kiessling, ‘Season of Birth and Personality: Another Instance of Noncorrespondence’, *The Journal of Social Psychology*, vol. 125, no. 5, pp. 577-585; Tasso, Jodi and Elizabeth Miller, ‘The Effects of the Full Moon on Human Behavior’, *The Journal of Psychology*, 1976, vol. 93, pp. 81-83; van Rooij, Jan J. F., Marianne A. Brak, and Jacques J.F. Commandeur, ‘Introversion-Extraversion and Sun-Sign’, *The Journal of Psychology*, 2001, vol. 122, no. 3, pp. 275-278; von Eye, Alexander, Friedrich Losel, and Roni Mayzer, ‘Is it all Written in the stars? A methodological commentary of Sachs’ astrology monograph and re-analyses of his data on crime statistics’, *Psychology Science*, 2003, vol. 45, no.1, pp. 78-91; Tyson, G.A., ‘Occupation and Astrology or Season of Birth: A Myth?’, *The Journal of Social Psychology*, 1980, vol. 110, pp. 73-78; Wendt, H.W., ‘Season of Birth, Introversion, and Astrology: A Chronobiological Alternative’, *The Journal of Social Psychology*, 1978, vol. 105, pp. 243-247; Saklofske, D.H., I.W. Kelley, and D.W. McKerracher, ‘An Empirical Study of Personality and Astrological Factors’, *The Journal of Psychology*, 1982, vol. 110, pp. 275-280. Smithers, A. G. and H. J. Cooper, ‘Personality and Season of Birth’, *The Journal of Social Psychology*, Aug. 1978, vol. 105, no. 2, p. 237.

¹⁰² Pawlik, Kurt, and Lothar Buse, ‘Self-Attribution as a Moderator Variable in Differential Psychology: Replication and Interpretation of Eysenck’s Astrology/Personality Correlations’, *Correlation*, 1984, vol. 4, no. 2, pp. 14-30. See also Fourie, David P., ‘Self-Attribution Theory and the Sun-Sign’, *The Journal of Social Psychology*, 1984, vol. 122, pp. 121-126; Standen, Anthony, ‘Is There an Astrological Effect on Personality?’, *The Journal of Psychology*, 1975, vol. 89, pp. 259-260.

‘Barnum Effect’.¹⁰³ Again, because this study is not concerned with accuracy, it did not test for the ‘Barnum Effect’.

Similar studies investigated possible correspondences between identifiable personality traits and characteristics attributed to sun signs. In 1975, Pellegrini examined the possibility of a correlation between astrological signs and ‘femininity’.¹⁰⁴ In 1976, Wuthnow conducted research on ‘Astrology and Marginality’ and examined the ‘social location of commitment to astrology’, and found that the ‘greatest amount of commitment’ to astrology was among ‘traditionally marginal social groups’.¹⁰⁵ Additionally, there was ‘some evidence’ that indicated astrology served as a substitute for conventional religious practices, such as church attendance.¹⁰⁶

The category of psychological studies also includes research into the paranormal. The 2001 study by Markovsky and Thye, ‘Social Influence on Paranormal Beliefs’, examined the ‘transmission of paranormal beliefs’ and tested the hypothesis that paranormal beliefs are a ‘natural consequence of social influence processes in interpersonal settings’.¹⁰⁷ In 2004, Danbrun looked at ‘Belief in Paranormal Determinism as a Source of Prejudice Toward Disadvantaged Groups: “The Dark Side of the Stars”’, a

¹⁰³ Fichten, Catherine S. and Betty Sunerton, ‘Popular Horoscopes and the “Barnum Effect”’, *Journal of Psychology*, 1983, vol. 114, pp. 123-134.

¹⁰⁴ Pellegrini, Robert J., ‘Birthdate Psychology: A New Look at Some Old Data’, *Journal of Psychology*, 1975, vol. 89, pp. 261-265.

¹⁰⁵ Wuthnow, ‘Astrology’, p. 157-168.

¹⁰⁶ Wuthnow, ‘Astrology’, p. 167.

¹⁰⁷ Markovsky and Thye, ‘Social Influence’. See also, Hughes, Mathew, Robert Behanna, and Margaret L. Signorella, ‘Perceived Accuracy of Fortune Telling and Belief in the Paranormal’, *The Journal of Social Psychology*, 2001, vol. 141, no. 1, pp. 159-160; Stewart, J.V., ‘What’s Your Sign?’, *Skeptic*, 1997, vol. 5, no 4; Zeidner, Moshe, and Benjamin Beit-Hallahmi, ‘Sex, Ethnic, and Social Class Differences in Parareligious Beliefs Among Israeli Adolescents’, *The Journal of Social Psychology*, 2001, vol. 128, no. 3, pp. 33-343.

study that explored the possibility of a connection between a belief in astrology and prejudice toward ‘significant stigmatised groups in France (i.e., Arabs, women, and overweight people)’. The Danbrun study found, ‘as predicted’, that prejudice increases when an individual believes in an ideology that promotes ‘the belief that personality and behaviour are relatively fixed and reflect internal dispositions’.¹⁰⁸ Danbrun’s study relates to Adorno’s vis-à-vis the theory that belief in astrology is connected to prejudice, but it does not refer to Adorno or the personality profiles identified in *The Authoritarian Personality*.

Lester’s study, ‘Astrologers and Psychics as Therapists’, touches on the subject of ethics in his exploration of the role of astrologers and psychics who have served clients in ways similar to psychotherapy.¹⁰⁹ Lester compares actual one-to-one encounters with an astrologer, a palmist, and a psychic to a counselling session with a psychotherapist. As previously noted, Adorno linked astrology column advice to psychology column advice, referring to both as evidence of dependency needs.¹¹⁰

The above-referenced studies are primarily concerned with proving what researchers consistently identify as astrological claims about psychological dispositions and personality types, a theme that continues through the literature of cultural and social studies.

¹⁰⁸ Danbrun, Michael, ‘Belief in Paranormal Determinism as a Source of Prejudice Towards Disadvantaged Groups: “The Dark Side of Stars”’, *Social Behaviour and Personality*, 2004, vol. 32, no. 1, pp. 627-636.

¹⁰⁹ Lester, David, ‘Astrologers and Psychics as Therapists’, *American Journal of Psychotherapy*, vol. XXXVI, no. 1, Jan. 1982.

¹¹⁰ Adorno, *The Stars*, pp. 71-73.

Cultural/Social Studies

The cultural and social studies related to astrology cover a broad range of concerns. Therefore, for purposes of organization, the related literature is presented chronologically.

In 1975, Truzzi held that astrology's popularity was due in large part to three decisive factors: (1) At the time he was writing, in America during the 1970s, the resurgence of interest in the occult which had begun in the late 1960s still prevailed. (2) Astrology was popular as a result of a broad cultural movement away from traditional religion, particularly Christianity, a separation that translated into an acceptance of astrology because it did not create an ideological clash. (3) The zodiac was public domain, which meant it could be freely exploited and easily commodified.¹¹¹ This notion of commodification is in keeping with Adorno's theory that astrology is the objectification of the occult through the culture industry, and is a recurring theme discussed below in several other studies.

In Feher's 1992 study, 'Who Looks to the Stars? Astrology and its Constituency', the author queried attendees at the 1989 United Astrologers' Congress held in New Orleans, Louisiana; her results evidenced that nonmarginal or 'privileged members of society', i.e., participants at a conference who were able to afford travelling to and attending such a gathering, also had an interest in astrology. Her research challenged Wuthnow's findings that astrology was primarily popular among marginalized members

¹¹¹ Truzzi, Marcello, 'Astrology as Popular Culture', *Journal of Popular Culture*, 1975, vol. 8, [hereafter Truzzi, 'Popular Culture'], pp. 906-911.

of society.¹¹² While Feher's study is not directly related to sun sign columns, it is connected to the current study by virtue of its examination of demographics.

Also in 1992, in 'Who Holds the Cards? Women and New Age Astrology', Feher analysed the same data gathered at the above-referenced conference, and while the second analysis was unrelated to horoscopes, it did find that participants appreciated astrology as a useful psychological tool.¹¹³ The use of astrology as a psychological tool reappears in the results of this study, discussed in the findings section below.

A study by Svensen and White in 1995, 'A Content Analysis of Horoscopes', tests Adorno's analysis of Righter's column. Using a computer-assisted content analysis software program, this study probed an astrology column in the *Brisbane Sun*, written by Kisha, an Australian astrologer.¹¹⁴ Their analysis covered thirteen weeks of columns published in 1989. The findings found 'some differences between the messages of the two astrologers' but it also 'confirmed many of Adorno's key observations'. They conclude that 'astrologers share a common agenda, one that promotes dependence, helplessness, obedience to authority, and irrationality' and suggest that research 'should be directed toward determining the extent to which consumers' behaviour is altered by reading this material'.

The Svensen and White study is related to this study in two significant ways: (1) it directly addresses Adorno's analysis, which few studies do; and (2) while it supports

¹¹² Feher, Shoshanah, 'Who Looks to the Stars? Astrology and its Constituency', *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion*, 1992, vol. 31, no. 1, pp. 88-93.

¹¹³ Feher, Shoshanah, 'Who Holds the Cards? Women and New Age Astrology', in Lewis, James R., and J. Gordon Melton, *Perspectives on the New Age* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1992), pp. 179-188.

¹¹⁴ Svensen, Stuart and Ken White, 'A Content Analysis of Horoscopes', *Genetic, Social & General Psychology Monographs*, Feb. 1995, vol. 121, no. 1.

Adorno's findings, it never questions the underlying purpose of his study, which was to demonstrate the insidious nature of the culture industry and its effect on the unsuspecting reader of newspaper horoscopes. Indeed, while Svensen and White go to great lengths to substantiate the rationale for their computer content analysis, they never question the presumption of Adorno's findings.

Dean and Mather's 1996 research, 'Sun sign columns: History, validity and an armchair invitation'¹¹⁵ is distinguished by the astrological knowledge of the writers, who, by virtue of that knowledge, are able to probe certain claims about astrology that a researcher unfamiliar with the system would not be able to recognize.

Several key points touched upon by Dean and Mather relate to the results of the current research. First, they point out the importance of the style of the horoscope writer as the reason people will read a particular column. Second, they address the issue of controversy regarding sun sign columns within the astrological community. The source of debate regarding the validity of sun sign columns focuses on the argument that sun sign astrology is a recent development within the history of astrology, and therefore deviates from traditional astrological practice. That deviation is seen as detrimental to serious astrological practices, which fortify themselves through historical precedent and mathematical calculation. Third, Dean and Mather argue that, given this controversy, sun sign column astrology could not 'be taken seriously when astrologers show such a major division of opinion on such a basic issue'. However, their argument presumes that in order for observations in a field to be valid, there must be complete agreement among the

¹¹⁵ Dean, Geoffrey and Arthur Mather, 'Sun sign columns: History, validity, and an armchair invitation', <http://www.rudolfhsmi.nl/s-hist2.htm> [hereafter Dean and Mather, 'Sun sign']; an expanded version of this article was also published in the *Astrological Journal*, May-June 1996, vol. 38, no. 3, pp. 143-155.

members of the group. This is a specious assumption, given that guidelines for practice in such fields as medicine include the acquisition of second opinions, which often differ, as standard procedure.¹¹⁶ Moreover, disagreement among experts within a field often stimulates intelligent debate and discourse.¹¹⁷

Dean and Mather's final major concern focused on the commodification of astrology that has occurred as a result of the proliferation of sun sign astrology and newspaper horoscopes. Dean and Mather are critical of auxiliary entrepreneurial opportunities for the authors of such columns to exploit their popularity, e.g., telephone horoscopes and syndication. The question of the commodification and exploitation of astrology is a recurring theme through many of the studies discussed in this section, as well as in Adorno.

The notion of astrology as an exploitable resource/commodity is explored at greater length by Wayne and Haggett in a 1997 study entitled 'Sun-sign astrology in market segmentation: an empirical investigation'.¹¹⁸ Their report delved into the possibilities of using astrology as a means of increasing sales in the 'leisure, tobacco and drinks markets'. Early testing found sun signs to provide reliable psychographic demographics. Psychographic demographics is a system for dividing the marketplace into groups differentiated on the basis of social class, education, career, and lifestyle choices. The

¹¹⁶ See <http://www.ama-assn.org/ama/pub/category/8475.html> [Accessed 9 December 2006].

¹¹⁷ See http://www.emory.edu/ACAD_EXCHANGE/2003/febmar/stewart.html [Accessed 13 December 2006].

¹¹⁸ Vincent-Wayne, Mitchell and Sarah Haggett, 'Sun-sign astrology in market segmentation: an empirical investigation', *Journal of Consumer Marketing*, 1997, vol. 14, no. 2, [hereafter Wayne and Haggett, 'Market segmentation'], pp. 113-131.

advertising industry widely believes psychographic market segmentation has the potential to offer greater insight into consumer psychology.

In an ideal world, the holy grail to marketers wishing to benefit from psychographics would be to identify a variable which was simple to measure, was valid and reliable and above all cheap to collect, but which provided significant insight into the psychology and lifestyles of consumers. In this paper, we propose that such a variable exists in the form of date-of-birth, when this is interpreted through the psychographic framework of astrology.¹¹⁹

In 2000, a study by Kwak, Jaju, and Zinkhan, 'Astrology: Its Influence on Consumers' Buying Patterns and Consumers' Evaluations of Products and Services', extends the idea of astrology as a category within the field of psychographic demographic marketing. The paper, presented at the 2000 Winter Conference of the American Marketing Association, explores two ways of creating marketing categories within the astrological system; the research tested 235 undergraduates to measure buying patterns, specifically impulsive and compulsive habits, as well as how participants evaluated products and services. The results provided 'some evidence to link astrology with marketplace perceptions' and called for additional research into further classification models.¹²⁰

¹¹⁹ Wayne and Hagggett, 'Market segmentation', p. 2

¹²⁰ Kwak, Hyokjin, Anupam Jaju, and George M. Zinkhan, 'Astrology: Its Influence on Consumers' buying Patterns and Consumers' Evaluations of Products and Services'. See also Cortex, John P., 'Times Herald, GTE join forces for classified ad', *Advertising Age*, 12 Dec. 1991, vol. 62, no. 33, p. 28; 'The Internet Unplugged', *Fortune*, Winter 2001, vol. 142, no. 12. 'GIZMO', *New Scientist*, 8 April 2006, vol. 190, no. 2546; Vascellaro, Jessica E., 'The Times They Are a-Changin'', *Wall Street Journal* eastern edition, 18 Jan.

‘British Public Perceptions of Astrology: An Approach from the Sociology of Knowledge’, a study conducted by Bauer and Durant in 1997, investigated ‘several different hypotheses’ regarding why people believe in astrology.¹²¹ The first hypothesis was that astrology was ‘attractive to people with intermediate levels of scientific knowledge’, a theory related to Adorno’s notion of semi-erudition.¹²² Second, Bauer and Durant investigated whether a belief in astrology was due to ‘metaphysical unrest’, an idea related to Truzzi and Wuthnow, both of whom held that popular interest in astrology was due in part to the diminishing popularity of mainstream religion. The third hypothesis examined by Bauer and Durant was directly connected to Adorno, who held that ‘belief in astrology is prevalent amongst those with an “authoritarian character”’ – the authoritarian personality hypothesis.¹²³ Their research sampled 2,009 respondents, ‘designed to be representative of the population of Britain over the age of eighteen’, and was conducted ‘by means of face-to-face interviews lasting between forty minutes and an hour’.¹²⁴

The results of Bauer and Durant’s study demonstrated a correlation between an interest in astrology and ‘knowledge of science up to a certain level of scientific knowledge’.¹²⁵ The second hypothesis also tested true, inasmuch as belief in astrology was statistically connected to low religious integration. In an unexpected discovery, the study found that the highest belief in astrology was related to an intermediary level of integration. The authors were clear that in order to explore the sources of such

2006, vol. 247, no. 14, PD1-D4.

¹²¹ Bauer and Durant, ‘British Public’, pp. 55-72.

¹²² Bauer and Durant, ‘British Public’, p. 1.

¹²³ Bauer and Durant, ‘British Public’, p. 1.

¹²⁴ Bauer and Durant, ‘British Public’, p. 3.

¹²⁵ Bauer and Durant, ‘British Public’, p. 3.

metaphysical unrest, 'qualitative and biographical research' would have been needed.¹²⁶

The survey utilized by Bauer and Durant contained 'a standard battery of psychological items' intended to measure 'authoritarianism-egalitarianism' and 'social efficacy', or 'a personal sense of control over the social world'.¹²⁷ This was necessary in order to test their third hypothesis, Adorno's belief that the mentality of someone who believed in astrology would resemble that of 'high scorers of *The Authoritarian Personality*'. Those personalities tended toward 'narcissism, self-absorption, naïve empiricism and fatalism of astrology', as well as the need to 'attribute everything negative in life to external, mostly physical circumstances'.¹²⁸ Bauer and Durant found that

there is no significant tendency for belief in astrology to be greater among those who score higher on the authoritarianism scale. We find, however, that belief in astrology is stronger amongst those who score low on social efficacy....Astrology, it would seem, is indeed particularly attractive to persons with certain characteristics, namely those who have little sense of control over their lives. Thus, Adorno's hypothesis is not supported by our data, while the fatalism element was confirmed.¹²⁹

They concluded that there were three diverse ways of investigating what they deemed 'the problem of popular belief in astrology'.¹³⁰ The first perspective would classify

¹²⁶ Bauer and Durant, 'British Public', p. 12.

¹²⁷ Bauer and Durant, 'British Public', p. 12.

¹²⁸ Bauer and Durant, 'British Public', p. 12.

¹²⁹ Bauer and Durant, 'British Public', p. 12.

¹³⁰ Bauer and Durant, 'British Public', p. 17.

astrology as ‘an anachronistic survival of a pre-scientific world-view’. The second would approach astrology anthropologically, as ‘an alternative world-view deserving attention and respect in its own right’. The third would regard astrology sociologically, as one of many ‘potential compensatory’ activities that enable individuals to cope with the ‘uncertainties of life in late modernity’.¹³¹ They choose the latter. In contrast to that choice, the current study is more closely aligned with the idea of approaching astrology anthropologically, a perspective that could offer those for whom astrology is a social reality both attention and respect.

A 2001 study by Blackmore and Seebold, entitled ‘The effect of horoscopes on women’s relationships’, focused on how seriously readers took the information provided by horoscopes. That study probed the validity of horoscopes, specifically the accuracy of information contained in such columns, particularly how that accuracy involved ethical considerations. The underlying rationale for this research was the assumption that people reading their horoscope might be ‘potentially basing their lives on false information’.¹³² Further, the authors asserted that ‘astrology is often promoted as an aid to personal growth’ and that therefore, ‘it should be given serious consideration, particularly in light of how seriously people tend to identify with the descriptions provided by sun sign astrology and sun sign columns’.¹³³

Blackmore and Seebold also cite susceptibility to suggestion as a concern. Their study tested female undergraduate psychology students whose average age was twenty-six years. Citing Adorno and Svensen and White, Blackmore and Seebold noted that the

¹³¹ Bauer and Durant, ‘British Public’, p. 17.

¹³² Blackmore and Seebold, ‘The effect’.

¹³³ Blackmore and Seebold, ‘The effect’, p. 2.

dependency needs of readers posed a problem, particularly given a susceptibility to suggestion.¹³⁴ For the most part, all these studies imply or suggest that this susceptibility is dangerous because the astrological basis for horoscope advice cannot be corroborated by empirical methods.

The underlying assumption of reader susceptibility is that readers are not able to read their horoscope with proper discernment and thus require supervision. Glick, in 1987 study, 'Stars in our eyes: research on why people believe horoscopes', addresses the idea of reader susceptibility. 'People who believe in astrology have a greater need for a simple system to understand themselves and to predict the behaviour of others. However, all of us, including sceptics, appear to have tendencies that may lead us falsely to lend credence to astrology'. The reason cited for this susceptibility is that people tend to 'test theories by looking for information that will confirm' those theories, a hypothesis that supports the Barnum Effect.¹³⁵

What is clear from the above-referenced studies is that an individual who reads his or her horoscope is not considered capable of making an informed choice about what to believe. The reader is marginal, uneducated, susceptible to suggestion, looking to confirm his or her own self-image, and so on. Readers are not intelligent, aware, and able to make an informed decision on their own. This pervasive negative view of readers is implied in virtually all the research regarding newspaper horoscopes.

Section III: Research Methods

¹³⁴ Blackmore and Seibold, 'The effect', p. 6.

¹³⁵ Glick, Peter, 'Stars in our eyes: research on why people believe horoscopes', *Psychology Today*, Aug. 1987, pp. 6-7.

Section Summary

This section summarizes the philosophical and theoretical basis of the current study. Limitations of space do not allow for a thorough discussion of the origin and history of these sources, therefore what follows is only what is necessary to substantiate the rationale for their application. The methodology used to design and conduct this study, including interviews, survey instruments, and the related categories of reflexivity, autoethnography, Internet research, and ethical considerations, are discussed as they relate to the research process.

Theoretical Framework

As addressed previously, the primary questions asked by the current research are questions of value and meaning: Are newspaper horoscopes meaningful to readers, and if so, how is that value to be understood within the context of a reader's everyday life? Therefore, phenomenology, or the study of lived experience, provided the philosophical and theoretical foundation of this study. The discipline of phenomenology requires the researcher to set aside or bracket personal beliefs and value systems in order to investigate other value systems. That bracketing supports the attempt to understand individual or group experience from the inside out with as little judgment or bias as humanly possible. Further, phenomenology supports an 'empathy [that] allows the researcher to develop what one might term a deep understanding of the actors' intentions and meanings – literally sharing their feelings and emotions.'¹³⁶ It would seem that

¹³⁶ McCutcheon, Russell T., 'Can You Climb Out of Your Own Skin?', in Russell T. McCutcheon, ed., *The Insider/Outsider Problem in the Study of Religion: A Reader*

objectivity was lacking in Adorno's content analysis of Righter's column, where the negative status of astrology was assumed from the start: 'we take up the study of astrology, not because we overrate its importance as a social phenomenon *per se*, nefarious though it is in various respects.'¹³⁷ From a phenomenological perspective, when astrology is deemed archaic or anachronistic, or labelled invalid because it cannot stand the test of empirical science, or when there is an assumption that people who believe in astrology are superstitious, lazy, or marginal, those presumptions delimit the range of research as well as the possibility of making any sense of astrology's value and meaning. Therefore, phenomenology, with its adherence to neutrality and acknowledgement of the potential influence of a researcher's perceptions, provided the basis for this study. Phenomenology describes experience and asks what 'makes a some-"thing" what it *is* – and without which it could not be what it is.'¹³⁸

Methodology

The research for this study utilised both qualitative and quantitative methodologies to gather information. A combination of these two methodologies can be appropriate in certain instances.¹³⁹ One occasion would be the study of a 'discrete social collectivity.'¹⁴⁰ This study qualifies as such an instance, given that the parameters of the investigation were limited to the specific social collectivity of newspaper horoscopes, and only

(London and New York: Cassell, 1999), [hereafter McCutcheon, ed., *Insider/Outsider Problem*], p. 3.

¹³⁷ Adorno, *The Stars*, p. 48.

¹³⁸ Van Manen, *Lived Experience*, p. 10.

¹³⁹ Bryman, Alan, *Quantity and Quality in Social Research* (New York: Routledge, 1988), [hereafter Bryman, *Quantity and Quality*], pp. 93-126.

¹⁴⁰ Bryman, *Quantity and Quality*, p. 129. See also Champion, 'Prophecy, Cosmology', pp. 17-18.

included writers and readers of such astrology columns. The consistent writing and reading habits of the research participants indicated that the current study would benefit from a combination of qualitative and quantitative methodologies. Grounded theory, described below, provided the requisite phenomenological structure for combining both methodologies, as well as the perspective for analysing its results.

Qualitative Methods

Qualitative research, phenomenologically based and grounded in a consistent practice of reflexivity that examines bias and motive, is generally considered to provide the appropriate methodologies through which to study questions of belief, and is applied extensively in the study of religion.¹⁴¹ While this study does not classify astrology as a religion, for the purpose of establishing an unbiased basis for research into participants' habits relative to the writing and reading of horoscopes, astrology is deemed analogous to religion. The precedent for this analogy can be found in Primiano (1995), 'Vernacular Religion and the Search for Method in Religious Folklife':

One of the hallmarks of the study of religion by folklorists has been their attempt to do justice to belief and lived experience.... They have done this

¹⁴¹ Hufford, David J., 'The Scholarly Voice and the Personal Voice: Reflexivity in Belief Studies', in McCutcheon, ed., *Insider/Outsider Problem*, pp. 294-310. See also Campion, Nicholas, 'Prophecy, Cosmology'; Smart, Ninian, 'Within and Without Religion' in McCutcheon, ed., *Insider/Outsider Problem*, pp. 221-234.

not by psychologizing beliefs and believers, but by taking seriously what people say, feel, and experience.¹⁴²

As previously stated, this study is not concerned with the proof or validity of either astrological claims or of the information contained in newspaper horoscopes, and ‘belief’ as it is used in the context of the current research is defined as having to do with the status of knowledge claims, regardless of the ability to prove those claims through practical experience or empirical observation. This does not imply that astrology should be considered a religion; the rationale for equating astrology and religion is only intended to demonstrate the similarity of the subject matter of belief and personal experience, and therefore the appropriacy in using the same criteria for the application of qualitative methods to this research.

Etic and Emic Perspectives

Etic and *emic* are terms used to delimit and also to illuminate the problem of bias in qualitative studies that focus on belief or belief systems of an individual or a group. *Etic* describes the position of the outsider, who does not share the same or similar beliefs with the individual or group being studied. *Emic* describes the position of the insider, who does share the same or similar beliefs as the individual or group being studied.¹⁴³

However, these positions are complex, in that they imply observation and analysis from

¹⁴² Primiano, Leonard Norman, ‘Vernacular Religion and the Search for Method in Religious Folklife’, *Western Folklore*, Jan. 1995, vol. 54, no. 1, pp. 37-56.

¹⁴³ Pike, Kenneth L., ‘Etic and Emic Standpoints for the Description of Behavior’, in McCutcheon, ed., *Insider/Outsider Problem*, pp. 28-36.

either position, and thus a process rather than a fixed stance.¹⁴⁴ As Campion states, ‘the emic-etic, insider-outsider relationship is therefore not a polarity but a constantly shifting set of ideas and experiences which may vary with time and location.’¹⁴⁵

Fontana and Frey have stated: ‘To learn about people we must remember to treat them as people, and they will uncover their lives to us.’¹⁴⁶ My insider role had several facets that would prove useful over the course of the research in helping interviewees ‘uncover their lives.’ First, my insider position allowed me to identify benefits and challenges faced by the writer of a sun sign column, and it was those initial categories, positive and negative, that led me to structure the interview process as I did. Second, as an astrologer who writes a sun sign column, I was able to appreciate the specific references to the challenges and benefits of writing as those qualities of experience emerged through the interview process. The interviews were semi-structured, and the questions general enough to allow the interviewee to expand on the subject if she or he were so inclined. In semi-structured interviews, ‘respondents are encouraged to expand on a response, or digress or even go off the particular topic and introduce their own concerns.’¹⁴⁷

My position as an author of sun sign columns deepened my insider perspective, allowing me to empathize with certain responses. For example, when writers were asked about the challenges of writing a sun sign column, the subject of deadlines was one of the

¹⁴⁴ McCutcheon, Russell T., ‘Introduction’, in McCutcheon, ed., *Insider/Outsider Problem*, p. 17.

¹⁴⁵ Campion, ‘Prophecy, Cosmology’, p. 12.

¹⁴⁶ Fontana, Andrea, and James H. Frey, ‘Interviewing, The Art of Science’, in Norman K. Denzin and Yvonna S. Lincoln, eds., *Collecting and Interpreting Qualitative Materials* (London: Sage Publications, 1998), p. 73.

¹⁴⁷ Davies, *Reflexive Ethnography*, p. 95.

first categories to emerge. From my emic position, I was able to convey empathy, as well as note the ‘reality’ of deadlines as a category specific to the writing process of horoscopes and distinct from the subject of attitudes to astrology encountered by the writers. Finally, as an insider, I had the unique experience of asking myself the same questions I was asking others, with the result that my writing changed, my attitude toward my work changed, and my appreciation for the process of writing horoscopes deepened.

My etic position was primarily defined by my role as an ethnographer, particularly in the design of interviews, in the survey instrument used to test categories, and the analysis of data contained therein.

Grounded Theory

Based on the notion of process and analysis, grounded theory begins with gathering data through a variety of means, such as interviews and fieldwork, which are analysed through ‘explicit guidelines.’¹⁴⁸ There was and continues to be debate in the fields of anthropology and sociology about whether grounded theory is a pure qualitative process;¹⁴⁹ yet one of the advantages for qualitative researchers who utilise grounded theory is the ability to ‘add new pieces to the research puzzle or conjure entire new puzzles – *while we gather data* – and that can even occur late in the analysis.’ [Author’s

¹⁴⁸ Charmaz, *Constructing Grounded Theory*, p. 3.

¹⁴⁹ Cohen, S., ‘The Discovery of Grounded Theory: Strategies for Qualitative Research, by Barney G. Glaser and Anselm L. Strauss’, *The British Journal of Sociology*, June 1969, vol. 20, no. 2, pp. 227-228. See also Scott, John, C., ‘The Discovery of Grounded Theory: Strategies for Qualitative Research, by Barney G. Glaser and Anselm L. Strauss’, *American Sociological Review*, April 1971, vol. 36, no. 2, pp. 335-336; Loubser, Jan J., ‘The Discovery of Grounded Theory: Strategies for Qualitative Research, by Barney G. Glaser and Anselm L. Strauss’, *The American Journal of Sociology*, May, 1968, vol. 73, no. 6, pp. 773-774.

emphasis]¹⁵⁰ Thus, grounded theory affords the researcher opportunities to examine and re-examine the existing data, a vantage point that permits the inclusion of emerging categories, and therefore hypotheses, as the research deepens and expands.

The purpose of grounded theory, as espoused by Glaser and Strauss (1967), was to discover theory from data rather than to verify existing theories. ‘In this book we address ourselves to the equally important enterprise of how the discovery of theory from data – *systematically obtained and analyzed in social research – can be furthered.*’¹⁵¹ [Authors’ emphasis]. The authors considered grounded theory ‘phenomenological’ rather than ‘logical’, and therefore able to provide a flexible structure capable of including data derived from both qualitative and quantitative sources.¹⁵² ‘Grounded theory is an iterative process by which the analyst becomes more and more “grounded” in the data and develops increasingly richer concepts and models of how the phenomenon being studied really works.’¹⁵³ Various stages of coding provide the means by which categories are identified and developed. Language choices made during the research process reflect the ‘views and values of the researcher.’¹⁵⁴ Thus, during this study, attention was paid to the words used to code the categories of data; as new perspectives emerged through

¹⁵⁰ Charmaz, *Constructing Grounded Theory*, p. 14.

¹⁵¹ Glaser, Barney G. and Anselm L. Strauss, *The Discovery of Grounded Theory: strategies for qualitative research*, (New Brunswick: Aldine Transaction, a Division of Transaction Publishers, 2006), [hereafter Glaser and Strauss, *Grounded Theory*], p.1.

¹⁵² Glaser and Strauss, *Grounded Theory*, p. 6.

¹⁵³ Ryan, Gery W. and H. Russell Bernard, ‘Data Management and Analysis Methods’, in Norman K. Denzin and Yvonna S. Lincoln, eds., *Collecting and Interpreting Qualitative Materials*, 2nd ed., (Thousand Oaks: Sage Publications, 2003), [hereafter Denzin and Lincoln, eds., *Collecting and Interpreting*], p. 279.

¹⁵⁴ Charmaz, *Constructing Grounded Theory*, p. 47.

interviews with writers and readers, the language of certain categories was refined in order to provide a better understanding of the participants' point of view.¹⁵⁵

Interview Design

Semi-structured interviews were conducted with sixteen authors of sun sign horoscope columns, as well as with twenty-four regular horoscope readers; all interviews were carried out through a set of questions designed to gather information related to the research problem: Are newspaper horoscopes valuable? And if so, how are we to identify that value?¹⁵⁶ Both writer and reader were encouraged through a series of questions to express their experience and opinions about the writing of newspaper horoscopes or the experience of reading them.¹⁵⁷ Additionally, several questions were specifically designed to address Adorno's assumptions about the intentions and motives of the writer, as well as assumptions about the readers, i.e., dependency needs or other characteristics indicative of attributes described in *Stars*. The list of questions used to guide the interview was modified as the research process unfolded; questions were changed and categories added according to the principles of grounded theory described above. The writer interview questionnaire is attached as Appendix 1. This same questionnaire was adapted and used as the reader interview. The reader questionnaire is attached as

¹⁵⁵ Charmaz, *Constructing Grounded Theory*, p. 47.

¹⁵⁶ Davies, *Reflexive Ethnography*, pp. 94-116.

¹⁵⁷ Davies, *Reflexive Ethnography*, p. 96. See also Cresswell, John, 'Data Collection', *Qualitative Inquiry and Research Design* (London: Sage Publications, 1998), pp. 109-137.

Appendix 2. As the interview questions were refined, those interviewed prior to the modifications were contacted by email and asked to comment on additional questions.¹⁵⁸

Grounded theory provided the framework for designing, conducting, and analysing all interviews conducted by this study; interviews were regarded as ‘directed conversation’ that ‘permits an in-depth exploration of a particular topic with a person who has had the relevant experiences.’¹⁵⁹ Every effort was made to create a relaxed interview environment that would facilitate ‘significant statements.’¹⁶⁰ All the interviews were recorded, transcribed, and then coded into categories according to the grounded theory process. ‘Qualitative coding, the process of defining what the data are about, is our first analytic step. Coding means naming segments of data with a label that simultaneously categorizes, summarizes, and accounts for each piece of data.’¹⁶¹ In addition to establishing ‘analytic categories’ and ‘conceptual categories’, memo writing was used to facilitate ongoing analysis of the data, and that consistency permitted an increased level of ‘abstraction’ about emergent themes in the research.¹⁶² Portions of those memos are used in the Findings and Analysis Section to delineate several theories regarding the writer’s and reader’s experience. Sample pages of those memos are attached as Appendix 3 and 4.

¹⁵⁸ Fontana, Andrea, and James H. Frey, ‘The Interview, From Structured Questions to Negotiated Text’, in Denzin and Lincoln, eds., *Collecting and Interpreting Qualitative Materials 2nd ed.*, (Thousand Oaks: Sage Publications, 2003), pp. 61-106. See also Stake, Robert E., *The Art of Case Study Research* (Thousand Oaks: Sage Publications, 1995), pp. 64-67.

¹⁵⁹ Charmaz, *Constructing Grounded Theory*, pp. 25-35. See also Davies, *Reflexive Ethnography*, pp. 91-116.

¹⁶⁰ Charmaz, *Constructing Grounded Theory*, p. 26.

¹⁶¹ Charmaz, *Constructing Grounded Theory*, p. 43.

¹⁶² Charmaz, *Constructing Grounded Theory*, p. 42.

Writer Interviews

All the writers interviewed for this study were informed before the interview process began that the purpose of the study was to explore their experience in writing a sun sign/horoscope column; in accordance with standard ethical procedures, each writer was asked to sign a release form granting permission to use portions of their comments within the text of this paper.¹⁶³ They were also informed that the interview was being recorded and a transcript would be made available to them if they so desired. That form is attached as Appendix 5. Each interviewee was assigned a number and is identified by that number throughout the following pages.

My insider position as an astrologer and horoscope writer permitted an understanding of technical terminology as that language was used during the interviews with writers and readers. That familiarity with the subject also allowed increased empathy, which in certain cases encouraged the writer to share information that might otherwise have been withheld. Nevertheless, there were times within the interview process when it was clear that the writer had a specific agenda to get across, regardless of what question was being asked. This tendency was also prominent in the survey conducted as part of this study, where instead of answering the question, readers used the question as a platform for voicing an often unrelated opinion. In the case of the survey, that tendency could be categorised as a flaw within the structure of the survey. In the case of the interviews, the need of some writers to put forth an agenda was a prominent unanticipated result, discussed in detail below.

¹⁶³ Bell, Judith, *Doing your Research Project* (Berkshire: Open University Press, 2005), [hereafter Bell, *Research Project*], pp. 43-60.

The writer interview contained the following two questions: (1) What benefit do you derive from writing the column, as a writer, an astrologer, and as a human being? (2) How does writing a sun sign column challenge you as a writer, astrologer, and as a human being? The purpose of this question was to initiate a discussion of the writer's individual experience, and was designed to test several of the stereotypes found in Adorno and other previous studies, as well as to glean new information. Answers were then coded into categories such as 'financial benefits', 'increased creativity', 'burn out' and so on.

Reader Interviews

Twenty-four regular readers of a specific sun sign column were also interviewed through a semi-structured format. These readers were chosen in several ways: (1) they had contacted the researcher regarding the pilot survey; (2) they had heard about this study from other readers; (3) a notice was posted on the researcher's website and the readers who responded first were chosen; and (4) a notice asking for volunteers was sent out to subscribers of the weekly sun sign column newsletter. As previously mentioned, the questions used for the writer interview were utilised for the reader interview but with several modifications relative to reading habits. Interviews with readers were conducted over the phone and in person. Prior to the interview, each participant was informed about the purpose of the study, although not given specific information about a prevailing attitude characterizing readers as marginal members of society, or other descriptions given in Adorno's research.¹⁶⁴ Some interviewees were familiar with Adorno, but not

¹⁶⁴ Davies, *Reflexive Ethnography*, p. 109.

much discussion took place regarding his work. In accordance with standard ethical procedures, all interviewees were informed the interview would be recorded; they were also sent a release form granting permission to use portions of their interview as part of this research. At the close of the interview, each interviewee was given an opportunity to ask specific questions about the research, and that discussion took place off the record.¹⁶⁵

Just as writer interviews were coded according to grounded theory, reader interviews were also coded and those categories were used to facilitate an analysis of the data. Memos were also kept on reader interviews, and information contained in those memos was used to interpret data.

Similar to the writer interview, the reader interview was designed to open up a discussion about the reader's experience of reading her or his horoscope on a regular basis. Questions were also included to test several of the characterisations of readers found in Adorno and other previous studies, as well as to glean new information regarding readers' habits. For example, (1) Readers were asked directly to comment on the benefits derived from reading their horoscope: 'How do you benefit from reading sun sign columns?'; (2) Readers were asked how they thought the writer perceived her or his audience: 'How do you think you are perceived as a reader?'; (3) The last question of the interview asked demographic questions regarding gender, age, education, and household income.

¹⁶⁵ Charmaz, *Constructing Grounded Theory*, p. 31.

Quantitative Methods

Quantitative methodology in the form of a survey instrument was also utilised by this study, and was conducted through an online survey site, SurveyMonkey.com.¹⁶⁶ From 25 October to 6 November 2006, 2,200 regular weekly readers of *The Aquarium Age* were asked to participate in an additional survey; a link from that weekly horoscope column led them directly to the survey site. The survey was anonymous, and no participant was able to take the survey twice. That survey is referred to as the 'Web site Survey' in which 546 readers participated.

Within the guidelines of grounded theory, it is necessary to test emergent categories through a comparative analysis with another group.¹⁶⁷ As explained by Glaser and Strauss, 'The researcher chooses any groups that will help generate, to the fullest extent, as many properties of the categories as possible...'.¹⁶⁸ Therefore, a random sample group whose horoscope reading habits were unknown to the researcher was created through a network of personal contacts.

Glaser and Strauss remind us, 'The principal point to keep clear is the purpose of the research, so that rules of evidence will not hinder discovery of theory.'¹⁶⁹ A link to the survey site was sent in an email; recipients were asked to pass it on to family and friends, with explicit instructions that the researcher was in no way interested in participants who would be friendly toward astrology. However, if a researcher creates a group, the researcher must be clear that the group is 'an artefact of [the] research design' and as

¹⁶⁶ <http://surveymonkey.com/home.asp?Rnd=0.1097528>

¹⁶⁷ Glaser and Strauss, 'Theoretical Sampling', *Grounded Theory*, pp. 45-77.

¹⁶⁸ Glaser and Strauss, *Grounded Theory*, p. 49.

¹⁶⁹ Glaser and Strauss, *Grounded Theory*, p. 51.

such does not possess the same properties ‘possessed by a natural group.’¹⁷⁰ This second survey, almost identical to the Website Survey, is referred to as the ‘Control Group Survey;’ both surveys ran concurrently.

Bryman explains that ‘survey instruments are used regularly to produce “quantifiable data” or “to test theories or hypotheses”’.¹⁷¹ The survey instrument employed for this study was designed to test both previously gathered data as well as to gather information on emergent categories.

Data and categories derived from a pilot survey

Glaser and Strauss state, ‘The sociologist may begin the research with a partial framework of “local” concepts, designating a few principal or gross features of the structure and processes in the situations that he will study.’¹⁷² A previous pilot survey was conducted in April 2006 that asked 2,075 regular readers of a specific sun sign column, *The Aquarium Age*, to answer a variety of questions; 446 readers responded. The final question of that survey invited participants to share their opinion in an open-ended fashion about the value of that column, as well as the value of sun sign columns in general; 365 responses were received.

For the purposes of this study, those previous answers were coded and analysed according to the framework of grounded theory; categories of value were identified. Those categories were incorporated into this study and tested through a new survey instrument. Categories were culled from Adorno’s descriptions of both the writer and the

¹⁷⁰ Glaser and Strauss, *Grounded Theory*, p. 52.

¹⁷¹ Bryman, *Quantity and Quality*, p. 11.

¹⁷² Glaser and Strauss, *Grounded Theory*, p. 45.

reader of horoscopes. Several additional open-ended questions were included to further probe the meaning and value of horoscopes. For example, Question 5 of the survey instrument is a multiple-choice question designed to (1) describe people who read horoscopes and (2) to test Adorno's descriptions, as well as other stereotypical descriptions of horoscope readers. Adorno describes the reader as susceptible to suggestion by virtue of superstitious leanings, and as having dependency needs;¹⁷³ the reader is also naïve and uneducated.¹⁷⁴ Thus, respondents were given choices such as 'superstitious', 'uneducated', 'disillusioned', and so forth; positive options were also provided.

Another example of survey design relates to the question of astrology and popular culture. The idea of popular culture as a product of the culture industry is implicit in Adorno's analysis of astrology. All methods of research in this study, including the writer and reader interviews and both survey instruments, asked participants to comment on the relationship between astrology and popular culture. Survey Question 7 in both the Website Survey and the Control Group Survey asked the following: 'Do you think astrology plays a role in popular culture?' Question 8: 'Please feel free to share your opinion about astrology and popular culture using 25-75 words.'

Reflexivity

In *Becoming a Reflexive Researcher: Using Ourselves in Research*, Etherington states:

¹⁷³ Adorno, *The Stars*, pp. 153-155.

¹⁷⁴ Adorno, *The Stars*, p. 162.

Reflexivity is the ability to notice our responses to the world around us, other people and events, and to use that knowledge to inform our actions, communications and understanding. To be reflexive we need to be aware of our personal responses and to be able to make choices about how to use them. We also need to be aware of the personal, social and cultural contexts in which we live and work and to understand how these impact on the ways we interpret our world.¹⁷⁵

The process of reflexivity is a key element in maintaining a phenomenological perspective as the research process unfolds. It implies not just a practice of awareness regarding personal values or beliefs, but also a discipline by which a researcher can gauge how the data is affected by those values or beliefs. Reflexivity is particularly important when the subject under investigation is a subject the researcher is close to.¹⁷⁶ In that instance, the memo-writing discipline of grounded theory was helpful in maintaining an ongoing reflexivity; memo writing 'is the pivotal intermediate step between data collection and writing drafts of papers' because it prompts an ongoing analysis of the data as it emerges.¹⁷⁷ During the course of this study memos were kept on each interview after the interview was conducted; those notations allowed me to reflect on and sort through personal feelings, as well as to consider ideas about how to categorise the information contained in that interview.¹⁷⁸ For example, after seven interviews with sun sign column

¹⁷⁵ Etherington, Kim, *Becoming a Reflexive Researcher: Using Ourselves in Research* (London: Jessica Kinsley, 2004), p. 19.

¹⁷⁶ Davies, *Reflexive Ethnography*, pp. 3-25.

¹⁷⁷ Charmaz, *Constructing Grounded Theory*, p. 72.

¹⁷⁸ Charmaz, *Constructing Grounded Theory*, pp. 72-95.

writers, I realized I was holding back regarding Adorno's main thesis in order to keep from coming across as too academic. I restructured my interview to include several questions more directly aimed at his core thesis: 'What do you feel the relationship is between astrology and popular culture?' 'Do you feel that writing a horoscope column classifies you as a cultural commodity?' 'Do you feel there is a relationship between astrology and popular culture?' Memo writing also facilitated my ability to stay aware of the recurring themes in each of the interviews as they emerged, as well as to isolate, particularly in the instance of reader interviews, any piece of information that had not presented itself before, and that no one else had thought of. Most importantly, memo writing also assisted in maintaining an ongoing dialogue within the confines of this study relative to both my insider and outsider positions.

Autoethnography

Strict adherence to a phenomenological discipline also requires the inclusion of autoethnography within the theoretical framework of this study. 'The open admission of the involvement of ethnographers with the subjects of their research' can help to address 'ethical concerns'.¹⁷⁹ While bracketing is essential to maintaining phenomenological integrity, and reflexivity is necessary to support the process of bracketing, autoethnography can also deepen the researcher's link to the subject being studied.¹⁸⁰

¹⁷⁹ Davies, *Reflexive Ethnography*, p. 178.

¹⁸⁰ Davies, *Reflexive Ethnography*, pp. 178-189.

‘Autoethnography is an autobiographical genre of writing and research that displays multiple layers of consciousness, connecting the personal to the cultural.’¹⁸¹

While it seemed clear to me from the inception of this study that I was not gathering information about myself, but rather about a social reality in which I participate from a variety of perspectives, it was not until starting to analyse the results that I began to understand how close I am to the material. Two negative side effects of autoethnography can be self-indulgence and narcissism. Therefore, interview questions as well as survey questions were designed to reveal meaningful data about the research rather than to create camaraderie based on shared personal experience with the writer being interviewed, or to gain special attention from the reader.

Utilizing the Internet for Qualitative Research

The questionnaire was specifically designed to be administered through the Internet. The Internet can be defined as a qualitative research tool when it allows ‘a unique discursive milieu’ through which to gather data.¹⁸²

Ethical Considerations

As already mentioned, participants were informed of the nature of the research from the start, and the parameters of the study were repeated prior to each interview. Interview release forms were sent to each participant, asking for permission to use portions of the

¹⁸¹ Ellis, Carolyn and Arthur P. Bochner, ‘Autoethnography: Personal Narrative, Reflexivity, Researcher as Subject’, in Denzin and Lincoln, eds., *Collecting and Interpreting*, pp. 209.

¹⁸² Markham, Annette N., ‘Internet Communication as a Tool for Qualitative Research’, in David Silverman, ed., *Qualitative Research, Theory, Method and Practice*, 2nd ed., (Thousand Oaks: Sage Publications, 2004), pp. 95-124.

interviews within the context of the study. All interviewees were assigned a number in order to guarantee anonymity. The survey was also anonymous and no participants were asked to identify themselves. All participants were informed the interview was being recorded.¹⁸³

Section IV: Findings and Analysis

Section Summary

The following section presents the findings and analysis of the data gathered by this study in three categories: (1) general findings and analysis of survey instruments; (2) findings and analysis derived from reader interviews; and (3) findings and analysis derived from writer interviews. Additionally, specific findings related to previous studies are also noted. In order to distinguish among the forty interviews of readers and writers, each has been numbered and is referred to as, for example, Reader No. 1 or Writer No. 13. A list of these interviews is in the Appendix Nos. 6 and 7.

Overview

As previously mentioned in section III on research methods, this study combines qualitative and quantitative methodologies, and the data as well as the results are analysed through the framework of grounded theory; interviews were coded for categories, memos were relied upon to establish preliminary concepts, and a process of analysis took place as new data was added to the study. Sampling to saturate categories was not possible, in part as a consequence of the preliminary nature of this study, e.g., semi-structured interviews with readers and writers regarding their experiences represent initial findings, and testing those findings outside the scope of this study in order to saturate categories was not possible. However, this omission of

¹⁸³ Bell, *Research Project*, pp. 164-166.

saturated categories is not unique. As Bryman notes, ‘the sampling process [described by Glaser and Strauss] is probably cited far more frequently than it is used.’¹⁸⁴ Moreover, as Davies points out, while grounded theory supports the ‘comparatively unstructured techniques of qualitative data’, as it relates to the actual construction of theory, the principles set forth for that construction are frequently ‘too mechanical to allow for general application to ethnographic research.’

Findings

The overwhelming finding of this study is that readers value horoscopes because they provide perspective, context, and guidance – for regular readers, horoscopes are utilized as a ‘weather report’ and, in fact, are often described in that language. Reader No. 1 said, ‘I always see horoscopes...as weather maps.’¹⁸⁵ Another reader commented,

I think of astrology as the weather report of the energy in the universe. To the skeptical people who ask me [what makes you believe in astrology?] I often respond that I believe in gravity. I think it is the same thing. Real definable energy.¹⁸⁶

A demographic analysis of the survey results and of the twenty-four reader interviews indicates that readers are discriminating, selective, educated, and mostly affluent. They are not, as Wuthnow finds, ‘marginal’, nor are they, as Adorno finds, naïve, semi-erudite ‘Cranks’, as described in detail earlier in the section on *Stars*, and thus, prone to be duped by a fascist leader.¹⁸⁷ The readers in this study appear capable of discerning the difference

¹⁸⁴ Bryman, *Quantity and Quality*, p. 117.

¹⁸⁵ Reader Interview, No. 1, p. 1.

¹⁸⁶ Survey Question 11, Written Response No. 310.

¹⁸⁷ Adorno, *The Authoritarian Personality*, p. 765.

between good and bad advice. Moreover, these demographics challenge the negative descriptions of dependency needs put forth by Adorno and others. While it is true that readers are often actively looking for help, how to judge those needs and whether or not they are healthy is beyond the scope of this study. Most importantly, these demographics need further testing. The education and income levels reported in this study may be particular to horoscope readers using the Internet or to readers of *The Aquarium Age*, and therefore not representative of horoscope readers in general.

Survey Results

It was not surprising that the majority of participants in both surveys were female; women have been found to read their horoscopes in greater numbers than men do¹⁸⁸. However, no statistically significant differences in responses between genders could be found within either survey, therefore the findings for both the Website Survey and the Control Group Survey were not analysed according to gender. An analysis of the findings shows a similar lack of statistical differences regarding distributions for income levels and age. Education levels in each group are statistically higher than average, as demonstrated in Table 1.

	Website Group	Control Group	Interview Group
Number of respondents with MA degree or higher	27.2%	26.6%	20.9%
Number of respondents with BA degree or higher	68.5%	72.6%	62.6%
Number of respondents graduated from high school	100%	100%	100%
Total number of responses	530	113	24

¹⁸⁸ Bauer and Durant, 'British Public', p. 67.

TABLE 1: *Analysis of respondents in the Website Survey and Control Group, plus the smaller Interview Group (which is a subset of the large Survey Group) for level of higher education.*

Compare these statistics with the latest US Census data collected in 2004, which shows that of all adults over the age of twenty-five, 28% have bachelor or higher degrees and 85% are high school graduates. These numbers vary by location and race but are still much lower than those of survey participants in either group in this study.¹⁸⁹ Additional demographic questions related to income and education were asked at the end of both surveys and those details are summarized at the end of this section.

An overall analysis of survey responses, including multiple-choice questions and open-ended essays, reveals two trends within both instruments: (1) A tendency to ignore the specific topic of the open-ended questions and, instead, to share opinions about the value of astrology in general; (2) A general discomfort in both survey groups with ‘negative’ descriptions contained within the multiple-choice possibilities for Questions 4, 5, and 6.

Survey Limitations

An analysis of the results reveals several survey flaws. (1) Questions 4, 5, and 6 are all multiple-choice questions that should have included ‘none of the above’ as a possible answer. (2) The second flaw consists of a discrepancy of word usage in Question 6, related to personality characteristics of horoscope writers. The Website Survey states ‘committed to being of service’ while the Control Group survey states ‘desires to be of

¹⁸⁹ <http://www.census.gov/Press-Release/www/releases/archives/education/004214.html>

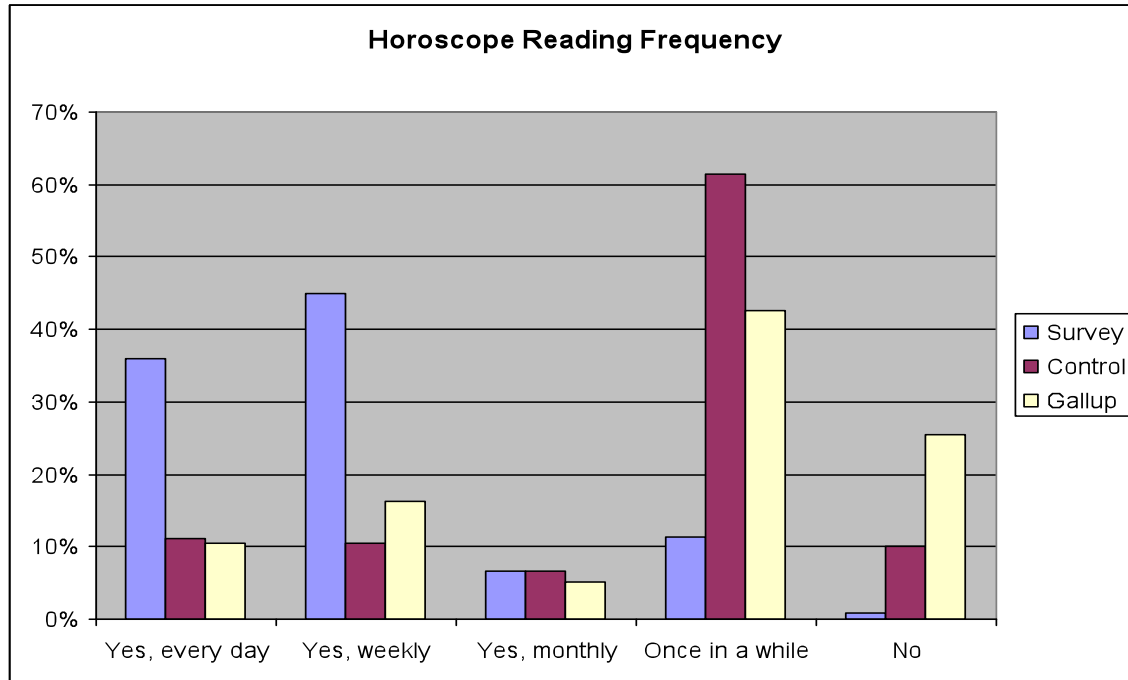
service.’ It is not believed the difference in meaning between those two words is enough to affect a comparison of the answers. (3) Question 15 asked for details about education and was a write-in response. This question sought to remedy a flaw in the pilot survey, which did not delineate specific postgraduate educational levels, but instead contained the category of ‘additional education after college’, a choice that led to answers such as ‘massage school’, or ‘various classes in continuing education’. While this study was able to gather specific educational demographics, it did so through another write-in answer for that specific question, which did not remedy the problem and should have been a multiple-choice question instead.

Question-by-Question Analysis

Questions 1, 2, and 3 enquired:

1. Do you read your horoscope?
2. How often do you read your horoscope?
3. Where do you read your horoscope? Newspapers, magazines, or on the Internet? Please feel free to choose as many as are applicable.

Nearly 88% of participants in the Website Survey regularly read their horoscope; 81% of respondents indicated that they read their horoscope daily or weekly, a finding that was to be expected from readers who frequently and consistently visit the same astrology website.



A smaller number of Control Group participants, 28.4%, read their horoscope regularly, 61.4% read it sometimes, whereas 10.1% do not read their horoscope. Nearly 61.4% read it randomly, a finding that was interpreted to indicate that horoscopes are not something Control Group participants read regularly because they think they should or because they expect to derive some recognized benefit from doing so. A Gallup Poll in 1990 asked a similar question, i.e., whether people read their horoscope and, if so, how often. Of the 2,006 people polled, 32% read horoscopes regularly (at least once a month), and nearly 43% did once in awhile.¹⁹⁰ A comparison between these groups indicates that the Control Group is a representative sample. One-hundred percent of the

¹⁹⁰ 'Gallup Poll', at <http://brain.gallup.com/search/results.aspx?SearchTypeAll=horoscope%20newspaper%20or%20magazine&SearchTypeExa=&SearchTypeAny=&SearchConType=1&SearchDateBef=True&SearchDateBMo=6&SearchDateBDa=20&SearchDateBYe=1990&SearchDateAft=True&SearchDateAMo=6&SearchDateADa=1&SearchDateAYe=1990&SearchResuNum=10&SearchResuOrd=dated&SearchOpenNew=False&Advanced=1&Place=A> [accessed on 5 January 2006]

participants in the Control Group who read their horoscope randomly read it in newspapers, an indication that the Control Group is looking for a quick, fun moment of entertainment. Ninety percent of Website Survey participants read their horoscope on the Internet, an indication of a deliberate and consistent effort on the part of regular readers to access specific information.

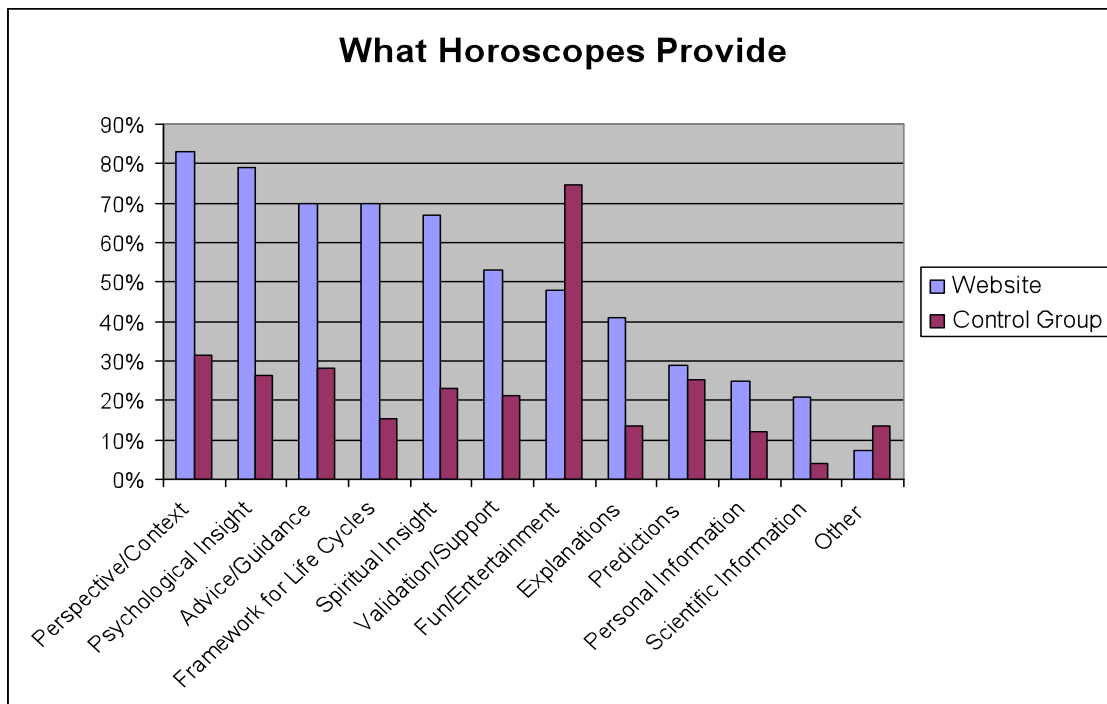
Question 4 of the research survey enquired:

4. Horoscopes provide... (Please choose as many as you like.)

- Scientific Information
- Psychological Insight
- Fun/Entertainment/Amusement
- Advice/Guidance
- Predictions
- Spiritual Insight
- Perspective/Context
- Explanations
- Framework for Life Cycles
- Validation/Support
- Personal Information
- Other (please specify)

Question 4 accomplishes three tasks: (1) to question readers directly about how they benefit from reading horoscopes; (2) to test answers derived from the pilot survey; and (3) to establish a basis for comparison between the two survey groups.

The pilot survey had asked ‘what feature of astrology do you like the most?’ and readers were asked to choose between four categories: ‘psychological insight’, ‘prediction’, ‘a framework for understanding life cycles’, and ‘other’, which allowed them to submit their own choice. This study narrows the category to specifically refer to horoscopes. An analysis of the pilot surveyed revealed several main categories to be tested: ‘spiritual insight’, ‘advice/guidance’, ‘fun/entertainment/amusement’, and ‘validation/support.’



The regular readers of horoscopes who participated in the Website Survey are clear that horoscopes provide perspective and context above all. They also value horoscopes for

psychological insight; two categories scored identical percentages: (1) advice and guidance, and (2) framework for life cycles.

The Control Group responded that horoscopes provide ‘fun’, ‘entertainment’, and ‘amusement’, a response that might be expected from a random sampling. While they also chose ‘perspective’ and ‘context’ as their second largest response, the overwhelming choice of ‘fun’ may indicate that whereas the Control Group respondents consider horoscopes to be enjoyable reading, they do not necessarily take them seriously.

Both groups chose ‘prediction’ in similarly low numbers, a percentage that indicates several significant possibilities: (1) Readers, regular or random, did not make prediction a priority when reading their horoscope, either because their horoscopes did not contain predictions, they were not looking for predictions, or they did not find the horoscope predictions to be useful; (2) The finding that prediction is not a priority contradicts the prevailing consensus that people who read their horoscopes are doing so to seek information about the future, e.g., Dean and Mather, who critique the validity of horoscopes on the basis of inaccurate prediction.¹⁹¹ As previously stated, this study is not concerned with horoscope accuracy or validity. What is significant, however, is that prediction is not important to readers.

Question 5 asked the following:

5. People who read horoscopes are... (Please choose as many as you like.)

- Superstitious
- Spiritual

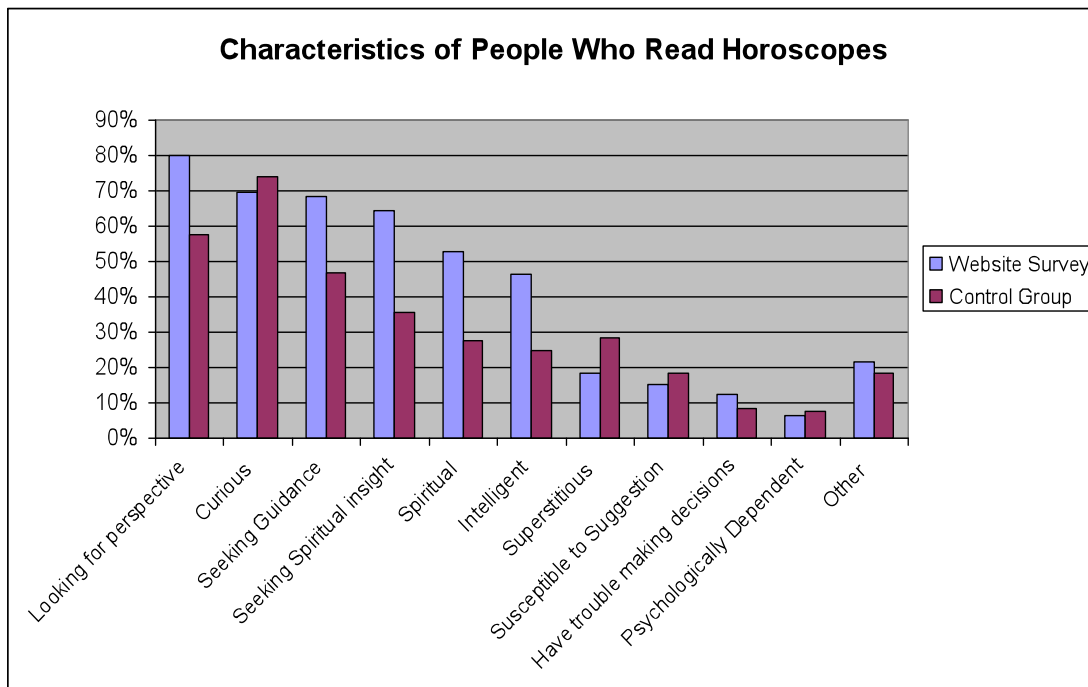
¹⁹¹ Dean and Mather, ‘Sun sign’, pp. 10-12.

- Uneducated
- Have trouble making decisions
- Disillusioned
- Naïve
- Psychologically dependent
- Curious
- Susceptible to suggestion
- Seeking spiritual insight
- Lazy
- Intelligent
- Enjoy feeling superior through information
- Like being told what to do
- Looking for perspective
- Seeking guidance
- Other (Please specify)

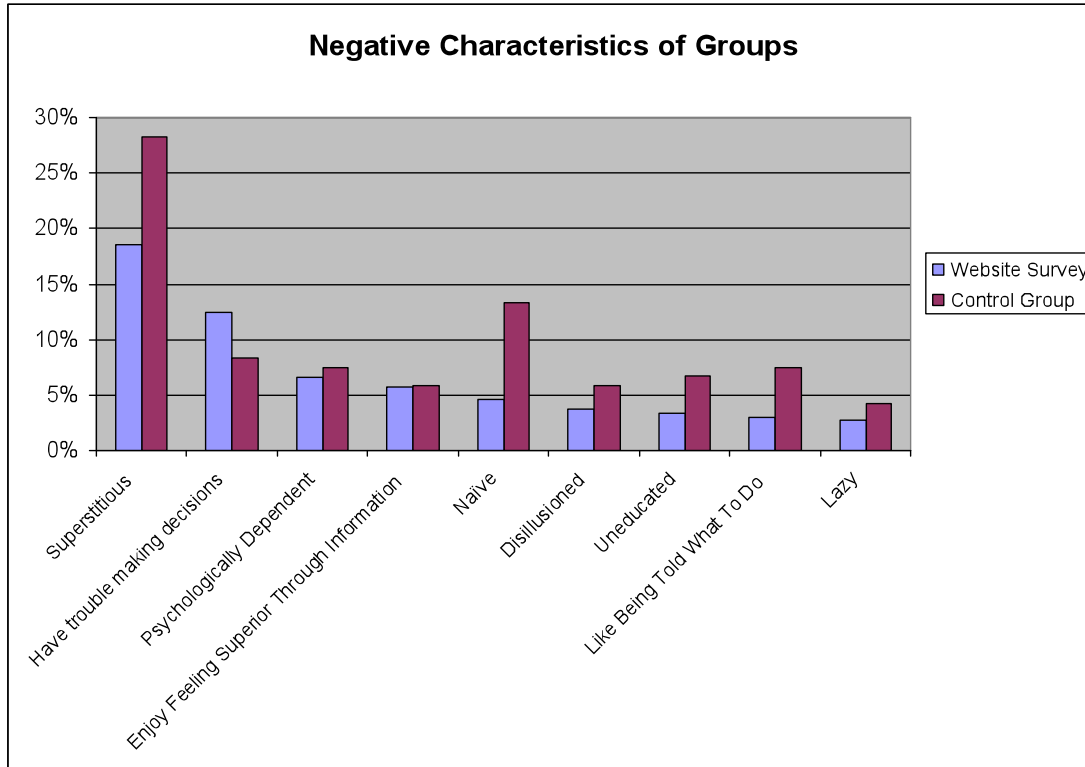
Question 5 asks participants to choose from a selection of multiple-choice options those characteristics that best describe people who read horoscopes. Negative attributes were culled directly from Adorno.¹⁹² Participants were also given positive descriptive choices. The positive personality descriptions ranked high in both survey groups. Website Survey participants ranked positive characteristics in the following order: ‘looking for perspective’, ‘curious’, ‘seeking guidance’, ‘seeking spiritual insight’, and ‘spiritual’.

¹⁹² Adorno, *The Stars*, pp. 160-166.

Control Group participants responded: ‘curious’, ‘looking for perspective’, ‘seeking guidance’, ‘seeking spiritual insight’, and ‘spiritual’. While a positive response is to be expected from those in the Website Survey group, who have an active interest in reading their horoscopes, it might not necessarily be anticipated from the Control Group.



Negative descriptions scored low in both groups, except for ‘superstitious’, which was the highest category for both the website and control groups.



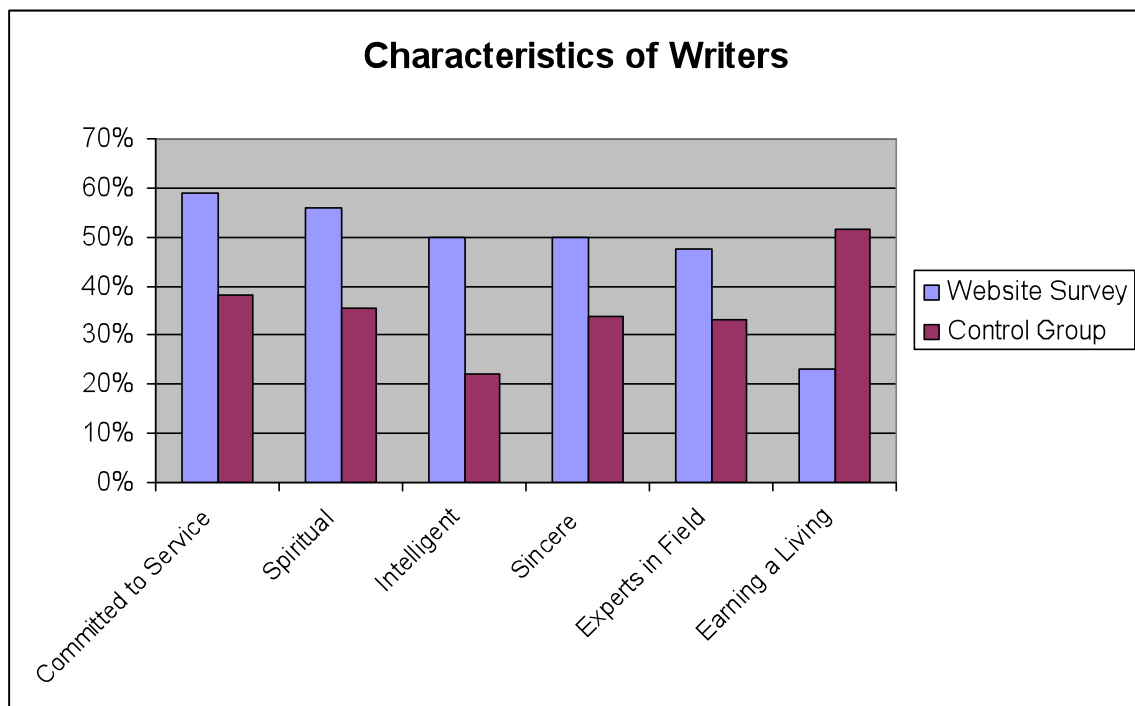
Question 6 enquired:

6. People who write astrology columns are...(Please choose as many as you like.)

- Bossy/Domineering
- Just earning a living
- Experts in their field
- Sincere
- Spiritual
- Superstitious
- Committed to being of service
- Intelligent
- Manipulative

- Like to be in control of information

Adorno characterised the writers of astrology columns as manipulative, domineering types who were desirous of being in control. This did not seem to be the perception of the Website Survey respondents nor of the Control Group Survey respondents. Scores on the negative characteristics were negligible. In fact, the Control Group's first choice in describing horoscope writers is that they are 'just earning a living' (51.7%). It is important to note that earning a living is not a negative characteristic; it simply means writing horoscopes is a job.



Questions 7 and 8 were stated as follows:

7. Do you think astrology plays a role in popular culture?

8. Please feel free to share your opinion about astrology and popular culture using between 25-75 words.

The connection between horoscopes and popular culture is clear-cut for Adorno: horoscopes are a product of the culture industry, which manufactures entertainment as part of a capitalist propaganda machine that aims at the standardization of the individual, and therefore at a marketplace that dictates desire and demand for products. 'In the culture industry, the individual is an illusion not merely because of the standardization of the means of production. He is tolerated only so long as his complete identification with the generality is unquestioned.'¹⁹³

Seventy-nine percent of participants taking the Website Survey thought there was a connection between astrology and popular culture. Sixty-four percent of participants in the Control Group agreed. However, when asked to share their opinions and to articulate that relationship, most of the readers gave open-ended answers that had more to do with the value of astrology in general, or how astrology could or should be used, than with how astrology is seen in popular culture.

While approximately half (259) of the Website Survey participants shared their opinions about the relationship between astrology and popular culture, no one significant category dominates those responses. Half (61) of Control Group participants also shared their opinions and, again, no one significant category emerged. 'Entertainment/fun' is the only category that scored any noticeable percentage in either survey. This same question

¹⁹³ Horkheimer and Adorno, *Dialectic*, p. 154.

was posed in the individual interviews with regular readers, and those responses are discussed below.

Questions 9, 10, and 11 were presented as follows:

9. Do you believe in astrology?

10. If your answer is 'yes,' please take a moment to tell us why.

You can use between 25-75 words to express your opinion.

11. If your answer is 'no,' or 'undecided' and you read your horoscope anyway, please take a moment to tell us why. You can use between 25-75 words to express your opinion.

As Campion (2004) points out, 'astrology is widely treated as a matter of "belief"', which is defined by the Oxford English Dictionary as 'the acceptance that something exists or is true...'.¹⁹⁴ As previously stated, this study is not concerned with issues of belief, and the sole rationale for using the word 'believe' was pragmatic. It would have been awkward to ask, for example, 'Do you think astrology is valid?' That question would have led to another series of questions: As what? A lifestyle? A superstition? A belief system? Posing the question with the word 'believe' was a calculated decision, and participant responses were varied. Four percent of participants who responded that they believe in astrology took issue with the word 'believe'. For example, one Control Group participant wrote: 'I always bristle at the question of belief when applied to astrology. I consider

¹⁹⁴ Campion, 'Prophecy, Cosmology', p. 154.

astrology another tool for objectifying experience and not something ‘to believe in.’¹⁹⁵

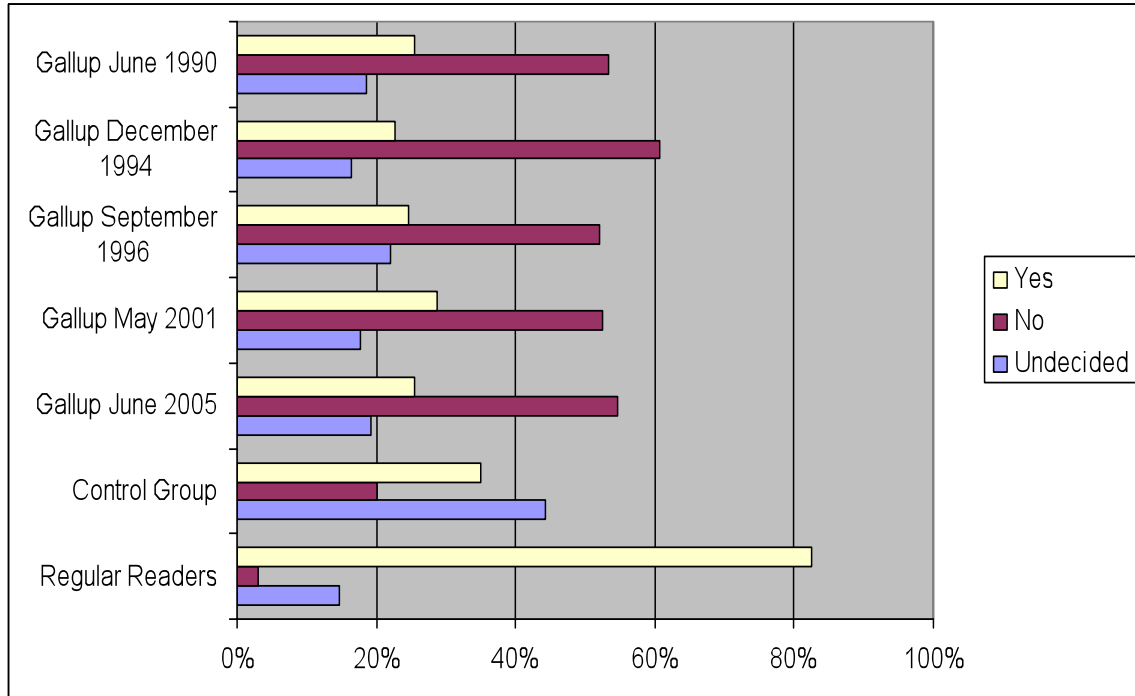
Another said, “‘believe in’ is such an enormously inclusive word! I believe that guidance and timing are of great value and can be found in “real” astrology as practiced by wise astrologers.’¹⁹⁶

Approximately 80% of participants in the Website Survey answered ‘yes’, they believe in astrology, and within that group, approximately 20% answered that astrology is congruent with their life experience. Other answers in this category include ‘astrology provides context/perspective’, ‘it speaks to me’, ‘astrology influences everything’, and ‘people are a part of the cosmos, too’. No written response specifically used the word ‘prediction’, indicating that it was not a primary consideration.

Approximately 25% of Control Group participants responded ‘yes’, they believe in astrology; nearly 25% also answered astrology is ‘congruent with their life experience’. No other significant category from those responses presents itself.

¹⁹⁵ Answer 10, Question 11, Control Group Survey.

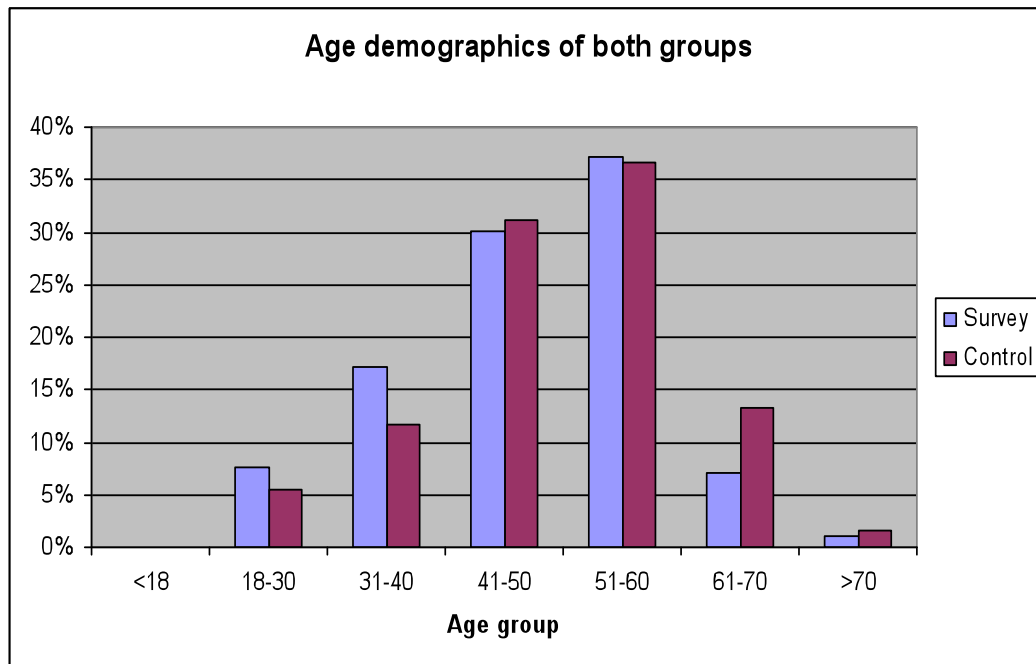
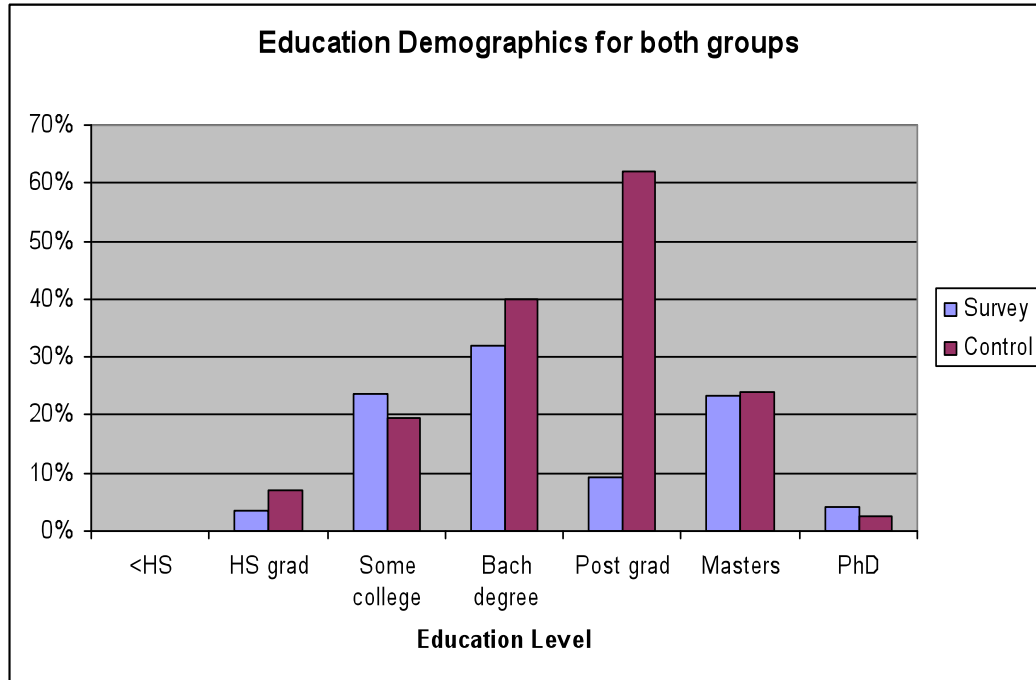
¹⁹⁶ Answer 60, Question 11, Website Survey.

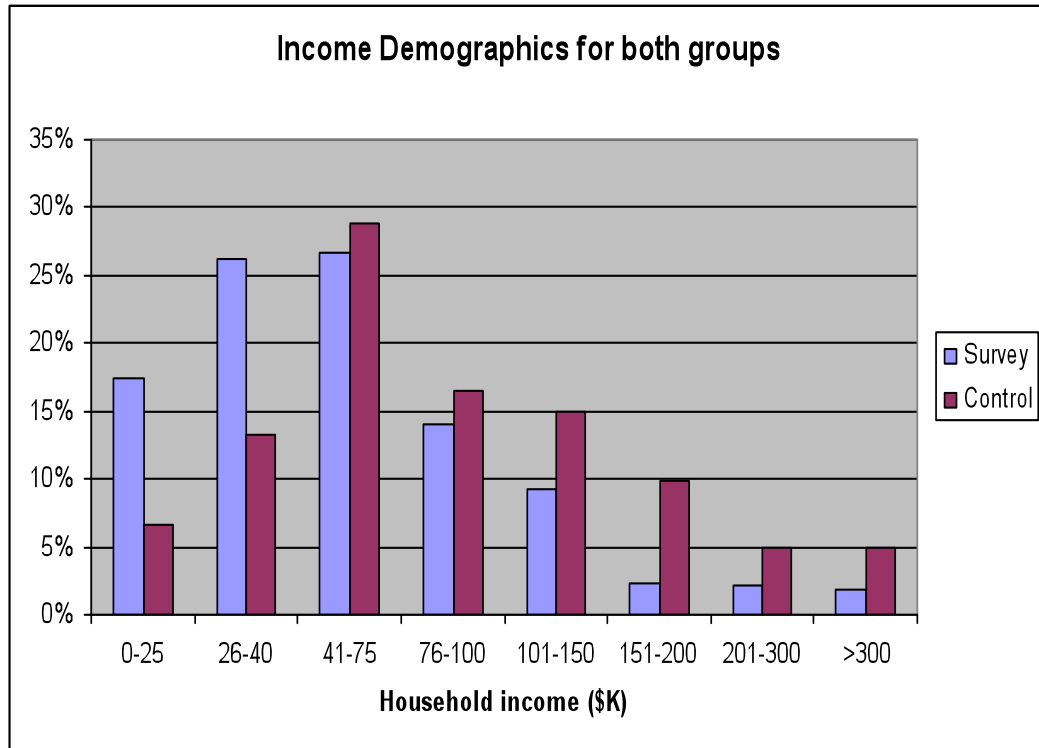


This question also provided an opportunity to query random readers of horoscopes, represented by the Control Group, to find out whether skeptics read horoscopes, and if so, why they read them. This study found that nearly 50% of the Control Group participants read their horoscope for fun. However, one comment stands out:

Comment 9: I find it entertaining. I am a Christian and don't feel that astrology is where true answers lie. But sometimes my horoscope is dead on.

Questions 12, 13, and 14 relate to demographics. Those findings are contained in the tables below.





As previously stated, these demographics may not be representative of the general population and may only be unique to participants in this study. Further research is necessary to verify whether the data definitively challenges the consensus that people who read their horoscopes are marginal.

Interviews with Horoscope Writers

As previously stated, sixteen writers of sun sign columns participated in semi-structured interviews that were conducted, either by telephone or in person, over a period of approximately five months, between June and October 2006. Each writer is currently published, and their combined venues cover a wide range of publications, including newspapers, magazines, radio, television, and the Internet, with an audience of millions of readers.

As evidenced through the survey instrument and through interviews with readers, ‘guidance’, ‘perspective’, and ‘entertainment’ are the three major conceptual categories that emerge from the data of this study. However, writers were not asked directly about those categories; instead, each writer was encouraged to speak about his or her individual experience of writing horoscopes, and as the interview unfolded, specific queries related to the research questions regarding meaning and value were posed. This was done to maintain candor during the interview process, and also, in accordance with the principles of grounded theory, to facilitate the creation rather than the imposition of categories; ‘...qualitative interviewing fits grounded theory methods particularly well.... [It permits an]...open-ended but directed, shaped yet emergent, and paced yet flexible’ approach.¹⁹⁷

Benefits and Challenges

Writers were asked to describe the benefits as well as the challenges of writing horoscopes from three different perspectives: (1) as a writer, (2) as an astrologer, and (3) as a human being. These three categories were designed to illuminate the multifaceted

¹⁹⁷ Charmaz, *Constructing Grounded Theory*, p. 28.

role of the horoscope writer. From Adorno's perspective, the writers of horoscopes are the mouthpiece of the culture industry, 'who can read the phony signs of the stars' and 'believe they are in the know', which likens them to members of a 'sect' with 'sinister social-potential' akin to that of totalitarianism.¹⁹⁸ As might be expected, no writer interviewed as part of this research regards planetary movement as 'phony', and while some writers do see their columns as a platform for astrological awareness, and one of them even understands astrology and horoscopes to be a social construct, overall this study finds that the motives and goals of horoscope writers are not in accord with Adorno's descriptions.

Challenges

The interviews disclose several overall challenges that can be identified as conceptual categories. However, the majority of these challenges are not particularly related to horoscopes or astrology, but rather are primarily writing challenges.

(1) Translating technical language into ordinary parlance. This challenge emerges consistently throughout the writer interviews. There is a repetitive focus on how to translate complexity into simplicity, i.e., the technical language of astrology into practical advice. Writers are also concerned with how to translate the general into the specific, or how to make the universal particular to the individual. Writer No. 12 states, 'When you're writing for the masses and millions of readers [who] would read the *Enquirer* each week, you have to be very specific, which is contradictory'.¹⁹⁹ Writer No. 13 finds that 'as an astrologer, you have to be able to globalize [astrological data] and make [it]

¹⁹⁸ Adorno, *The Stars*, p. 166.

¹⁹⁹ Writer Interview No. 12, p. 4.

extremely personal at the same time'.²⁰⁰ Each writer is aware that words carry a lot of responsibility; as one writer put it, 'what you say to someone could become a self-fulfilling prophecy'.²⁰¹ The notion of translating what the writer/astrologer perceives as negative astrological indications is also a related theme. Writer No. 9: 'How do you state the condition of things. And, you know. Offer up some sort of hope?'.²⁰² Another author expressed the challenge of translation as 'staying true to the [meaning of the astrological] symbol while writing for different audiences'.²⁰³ This challenge may be faced by translators in general, and it would therefore merit future study to see whether this is indeed a shared experience, and whether translators experience other difficulties that horoscope writers would identify with.

(2) Also, as might be expected, 'the pressure of deadlines' emerges as a conceptual category. Seven writers specifically cited the pressure of deadlines as a consistent challenge. Most, if not all, newspaper or magazine writers have specific deadline requirements; therefore, this conceptual category is not related to astrology as much as it is an 'occupational hazard'.

(3) Horoscope writers experience other pressures related specifically to writing an ongoing column, for example, 'keeping it interesting' and 'engaging the reader', or 'maintaining discipline'. Several less-mentioned challenges also fall into this category: 'burn out', 'flexibility', 'rhythm', and the 'transience of the medium'. Writer No. 4 expresses the challenge of repetition as 'writing in a style that leaves a window open to

²⁰⁰ Writer Interview No. 13, p. 8.

²⁰¹ Writer Interview No. 16, p. 8.

²⁰² Writer Interview No. 9, p. 9.

²⁰³ Writer Interview No. 1, p. 15.

the imagination'.²⁰⁴ As one horoscope writer quoting another states, 'A friend of mine who is a writer put it so wonderfully. He said it's like having to write eighty-four haikus a week.'²⁰⁵ It would be interesting to test these challenges against those identified by columnists writing in other specialised fields to see if these categories are particular to astrology or are general categories associated with consistently writing to deadline on a specific subject over a long period of time.

One specialized conceptual category consistently emerged throughout the interviews: that of time distortion. Most writers experienced a sense of displacement or distortion of time as a result of having to write horoscope columns in advance to meet deadline requirements; they are writing future forecasts and therefore are often out of step with the current astrological day, week, or month.

My insider role prompted the decision to ask about how writing a sun sign column challenged each writer as a human being; part of the basis for that question was an understanding of the tension that can exist between a popular writer and fans, as well as a temptation to become identified with the success of a column. This question indirectly addresses Adorno's assumption that the writer is confident in his superior knowledge and 'lives on a kind of narcissistic island'.²⁰⁶ This study did not test for narcissism; what it attempts to probe, however, are issues of self-importance or vanity. Not every writer answered the question; several ignored it. One writer said that he didn't recognise a

²⁰⁴ Writer Interview No. 4, p. 21.

²⁰⁵ Writer Interview No. 14, p. 11.

²⁰⁶ Adorno, *The Stars*, p. 166.

differentiation between being an astrologer and a human being: ‘The borders are so merged, so fused, that the one can’t exist without the other, I don’t think’.²⁰⁷

As Adorno points out, the ‘writer’s position of authority forces him to talk as if he knows and as if the constellations of the stars provided him with satisfactory, sufficient and unequivocal answers’.²⁰⁸ While the risk of overconfidence or arrogance is a serious challenge, none of the writers addressed it directly, nor did this study probe the issue, an omission discovered only through the process of analysing the results. The writers interviewed were all keenly aware of their responsibility and approached their task with humility, which, while rarely discussed, pervaded each interview, particularly when writers expressed an awareness of how seriously readers take the advice offered in horoscope columns: ‘It’s the way [readers] have faith in what you do [that] is really quite humbling’.²⁰⁹ Thus, humility emerges as a remedy for dealing with the temptation of ego inflation that can result from dispensing advice for a living. Further research, designed to identify specific aspects of ‘advice-giving’ or ‘counselling’ between horoscope writers and writers of psychology columns might help to identify additional categories.

‘Humility’ also emerges as a benefit. For example, fourteen writers shared the common experience of ‘loving what you do, doing it well, and getting paid for it’. Each writer may be proud of his or her profession, but no writer seems to take it for granted. Several writers even expressed one of the benefits of writing horoscopes as providing a sense of connection with the divine.

²⁰⁷ Writer Interview No. 2, p. 12.

²⁰⁸ Adorno, *The Stars*, p. 70.

²⁰⁹ Writer Interview No. 1, p. 16.

Benefits

Several conceptual categories emerged as benefits relating to the role of astrologer.

(1) The first benefit is financial, and, as mentioned above, all the writers acknowledge that through their writing they are able to increase their income. Some writers have columns in several magazines; others only write for one paper. However, even the writer who writes for a small newspaper acknowledges the financial benefit of writing a column, viewing it as advertising for additional services, such as giving personal astrology readings.

(2) Writing horoscopes improves astrological skill. Many writers experience an increased awareness of astrological movements as a result of writing horoscopes. This category also includes the notion of flexibility, a word used by three writers to describe the consistent challenge of what they call 'zodiac yoga', or the ability to 'keep looking at things through twelve different perspectives'.²¹⁰

(3) The ability to reach large numbers of people is also a conceptual category. 'Turning people on' to astrology is an idea shared by several writers. Writer No. 6 states, 'I view my role as...I have an opportunity that's been given to me to educate the wider masses.'²¹¹ This third category is also used as a defence against the controversy about sun sign columns, which appears limited to a small group within the larger field of astrology, but nevertheless is a controversy that Dean and Mather cite as a reason to discount or invalidate horoscopes entirely.²¹² All of the writers interviewed as part of this study are comfortable with their work and are confident they are serving a purpose. Some see their

²¹⁰ Writer Interview No. 7, p. 5.

²¹¹ Writer Interview No. 6, pp. 6-7.

²¹² Dean and Mather, 'Sun sign', p. 6-7.

role as an introductory one – horoscopes are generally the first encounter someone has with astrology. Exposure to astrology may be deemed controversial by some, but the actuality of horoscopes is not controversial for the writers. Another writer framed the matter in the perspective of larger issues, pointing out that concerns such as ‘environmental disasters in...local communities’ are what is truly controversial.²¹³

Writers’ Perceptions of Readers

In all instances, readers are held in high regard by writers, even by those who write for ‘down-market’ or ‘tabloid’ publications. Again, this finding challenges Adorno and takes some wind out of the Barnum characterisation attributed by some researchers to writers’ attitudes about their readers. In this study, horoscope writers consistently describe their readers as people searching for perspective and meaning, who are open-minded, curious, intelligent, hungry for spiritual content, and possess a keen intuition for identifying what is genuine. ‘I feel the public has a third eye. They know when something is resonating and they know when it’s not.’²¹⁴

With one exception, all the writers are clear about readers having needs, but do not see those needs as negative. The exception, however, describes the problem in cultural terms, a description Adorno might appreciate:

The fact is people are accustomed to being infantilised by church, state, government and parents. And that’s why they think predictive astrology is beneficial. It is actually not. Because it only

²¹³ Writer Interview No. 4, p. 15.

²¹⁴ Writer Interview No. 16, p. 20.

continues the belief that someone else is going to tell you what's gonna happen to you.²¹⁵

'Perspective' emerges as a conceptual category for writers as well as readers. Twelve of the sixteen writers interviewed named perspective as a major benefit to readers. From the writers' point of view, horoscope readers are seeking guidance and information about how to navigate life. Writer No. 3 said, 'I'm hoping that it helps them find meaning, and um, just that it sort of acts as a container. I would think it acts as an emotional container. I think that's one of the things astrology can do.' That writer continued, 'I think [a horoscope] kind of touches the spot that religion doesn't touch these days...something more meaningful.'²¹⁶

Astrology and Popular Culture

The writers interviewed for this study have many varied and thoughtful ways of describing the relationship between astrology and popular culture, and those descriptions cover a wide range of possibilities, from horoscopes as advertising, to a section of the culture that provides a sense of meaning, to a moment of pleasure akin to reading the cartoon section of the newspaper. That horoscopes appear widely in newspapers is evidence to horoscope writers that astrology has become a part of popular culture. A number of readers also mentioned the publication of horoscopes in newspapers as evidence of astrology's relationship to popular culture. Several writers noted that astrology mirrors the zeitgeist, citing that when psychology became popular, astrology

²¹⁵ Writer Interview No. 13, p. 1.

²¹⁶ Writer Interview No. 3, p. 11.

moved away from prediction and predestination toward the language of introspection and then later, in the late 80s and early 90s as the zeitgeist embraced the notion of personal power, horoscopes began to speak to issues of empowerment. Writer No. 6 corroborated that idea and suggested that column content is currently more about context than fate.

‘Horoscopes used to be predictive; now they are about choices that can be made’.²¹⁷

Writer No. 4 suggests that horoscopes are gathering places; they are a social construction meant to fill an existential void – we give horoscopes, rather than the actual influence of the stars, meaning. ‘I think that the improbability of astrology working adds an element of intrigue and that intrigue implies meaning.’²¹⁸ For this same writer, horoscopes fill the storytelling void he perceives in popular culture.

I think that astrology, especially horoscopes, fills that storytelling void that we have in our culture...and I think that if we can loosen up a little bit about thinking astrology is supposed to be some kind of a perfect psychologist, and just let it be a story, then it can be a lot more meaningful and a lot more fun.²¹⁹

The suggestion that horoscopes are gathering places or that they provide a way to tell stories relates to the readers’ description of horoscopes as a secret community that permits intimacy through reading horoscopes out loud.

²¹⁷ Writer Interview No. 6, p. 23.

²¹⁸ Writer Interview No. 4, p. 2.

²¹⁹ Writer Interview No. 4, p. 7.

In addition to the categories listed above, one other conceptual category emerges, a category that combines the task of translating technical information and creatively interpreting that data into an entertaining, engaging, but transient bit of advice capable of providing perspective – how to make the ordinary extraordinary. If horoscopes attempt to make the inexplicable understandable, or to provide perspective that is calming or empowering, and those words have to be inspiring and illuminating – as readers have described – what is a writer to do when nothing much is happening with the planets and everything is just ordinary? How is the writer to handle the pressure to make each day or every week exciting? Writer No. 9 resists the pressure of supposed drama by acknowledging that ‘some days are just ordinary days [and] that might be good information for some people’.²²⁰ Writer No. 9 was the only writer to express the idea of horoscopes needing to be dramatic in order to satisfy a real or imagined pressure for drama and excitement in the lives of readers.

Section V: Conclusion

Purpose of research

The purpose of this study was to investigate whether horoscopes as they are found in newspapers, magazines, and on the Internet have relevance, meaning, and value for the individuals who read them and write them. As part of that investigation, readers and writers were asked questions regarding the practical application and utility of horoscopes in the context of everyday experience. How do readers use the information contained in horoscopes? What are the motivations and intentions of writers? Are there correlations

²²⁰ Writer Interview No. 9, p. 12.

among these groups? Most importantly, can we arrive at categories of experience that allow us to expand research in this area, so that the ubiquitous presence and popularity of horoscopes can begin to be understood?

Also of interest to this study was the paradox of popularity and criticism that characterises attitudes toward horoscopes. An understanding of this contradiction was sought through three avenues of research: (1) a review of previous literature regarding sun sign columns; (2) interviews with readers and writers, during which writers were asked to describe the process of creating horoscopes and readers were asked to describe the experience of reading them; and (3) a survey instrument was used to test emergent categories of value.

Much time has been spent analysing Adorno's *The Stars Down to Earth* because, as stated from the beginning, although sixty years old, this work is still used to assess the merits of horoscopes relative to readers and writers of horoscopes. This study shows that while Adorno's basic premise regarding the culture industry and its effect on the general public may be valid, the generalisations made by Adorno regarding sun sign columns do not apply. This assessment is substantiated by Bauer and Durant's study in 1997, which, as discussed in section II, did not support Adorno's hypothesis regarding belief in astrology and the authoritarian personality. As stated in section II, this study supports the idea of viewing the popularity of horoscopes from an anthropological and phenomenological perspective that might afford a basis for contextualising experiences of both the reader and the writer.

In order for Adorno's critique of astrology to make sense, it needs to be contextualised in terms of his philosophy and politics. Thus, to continue to use his study

as a standard of measurement for the role of horoscopes in Western society is to agree with Adorno's underlying presumption that horoscopes only have a negative effect on the lives of readers; and further, that horoscopes are written with malicious intention.

Furthermore, this study does not agree with the findings of the 1995 study by Svensen and White, a study that supports Adorno's hypotheses, including negative attributes such as the dependency needs of readers, because the researchers have not addressed Adorno's underlying premise regarding the culture industry.

However, this study does support Truzzi's proposal that astrology is the perfect public domain vehicle for the commodification of the zodiac, and, therefore, a subject that lends itself well to exploitation. As Wayne and Haggett demonstrated in 1997, the advertising industry is already attempting to use sun signs as a means of psychographic marketing. Forty years after Wuthnow found his subjects to be marginal members of society, advertising agencies have a different perspective. Whether this new viewpoint is the result of astrology's role in popular culture or is in keeping with Adorno's assessment of the advertising industry in general is not known.

The 1996 article by Dean and Mather also addresses the commodification of astrology, particularly opportunities for authors to exploit the popularity of their columns through other media venues, e.g., phone lines. This study contains no data that reveals those entrepreneurial opportunities in a necessarily negative light.

While it is acknowledged that the demographic findings of this study, particularly income and educational levels, may be unique to the readers of the website that formed the basis of this study, and that those demographic results would benefit from additional testing, this study agrees with Feher's findings that not all those who follow astrology are

marginal. This study also supports the findings by Feher in 1992 that astrology is useful as a psychological tool. Both the survey and the interviews with readers indicate that one of the major qualities readers of horoscopes appreciate about sun sign columns is psychological insight. This conclusion regarding psychological insights challenges the 2001 study by Blackmore and Seebold regarding the dependency needs of readers. This study does not find readers to have negative dependency needs or a heightened sensitivity to suggestion, as Blackmore and Seebold also suggest.

Further, the findings of both survey instruments – regular readers as well as the control group – do not support the negative descriptions of horoscope writers or readers as put forth by Adorno. Readers are not, according to the findings of this study, interested in being told what to do, nor are they interested in prediction – they are overwhelmingly clear that guidance and perspective is what they are after, and respondents in the control group support that finding.

The most significant finding to emerge from the reader interviews was the idea that horoscopes provide the basis for a ‘secret community’. Readers were asked if they viewed astrology columns as part of a community and, if so, to describe that community. Their answers revealed a surprising conceptual category: reading horoscopes out loud allows the creation of a ‘secret community’ that permits an intimacy that is not commonplace in a work environment, and further, the reading of horoscopes out loud creates a way of transmitting personal information outside the standard forms of communication. The implication is that horoscopes provide information about the self and others, considered to be a valuable utility by readers, and further, that when that information is shared, it has the potential to create shared experience beyond the

immediate environment. The suggestion by one of the writers that horoscopes are ‘gathering places’ also indicates that the notion of horoscopes as community would benefit from future research. If a social reality can be defined as patterns of behaviour within groups that constitute a group reality, then the action of reading horoscopes out loud merits further research.²²¹

As already noted in section IV in a discussion of the findings, the research into horoscope writers’ motives and process is preliminary. This study concludes that possible correlations can be found between the challenges that horoscope writers face and challenges faced by writers in other specialized fields, and that this is an area that would benefit from additional research. Of particular interest within a comparison of writers’ experiences would be a comparison between writers of advice columns, particularly beyond psychological columns to a wide spectrum of subject areas that could reveal facets of interaction among writer and reader that are generic to advice columns in general, not just to astrological or psychological columns, e.g., home repairs, pet care, or gardening, to name but a few.

Each writer was asked to choose five words to describe his or her role as a sun sign column writer, and readers were similarly asked to choose five words to describe how they felt after reading their horoscope. No statistical analysis was done to compare their answers, but the similarities between what the writer intended and what the reader felt are striking. For example, ‘encouraging/encouragement’, ‘entertaining/entertained’, and ‘inspiring/inspired’ occurred several times. This correlation between intention and outcome is perhaps one of the reasons horoscopes are popular – writers and readers create a community of shared interests and values. As a result, this study finds that within the

²²¹ Collin, Finn, ‘Introduction’, *Social Reality* (London: Routledge, 1997), pp.1-22.

context of the readers' and writers' experience, there is no paradox of popularity: readers find meaning in the content of horoscope columns they have identified as providing perspective and guidance, as well as find them entertaining. Similarly, horoscope writers find their work meaningful, and while in many cases also financially lucrative, an altruistic intention is a strong motivation. However, this study acknowledges that these are preliminary findings and, as such, need to be tested before any general conclusion can be asserted.

Finally, one category emerges as paradoxical—entertainment. The survey results, the reader interviews, and the writer interviews all mention entertainment as an important component of horoscopes. That entertainment is valuable to readers and writers seems at odds with the disclaimer found at the bottom of most newspaper horoscopes warning readers that horoscopes are for entertainment only and therefore should not be taken seriously. The juxtaposition between a warning that horoscopes are only for purposes of amusement and the value readers and writers place on fun, humour, and entertaining style is an interesting paradox reflective of the ambiguity of how publishers may view the relevance and value of horoscopes. This study demonstrates that regular readers of horoscopes want those missives to not only provide guidance and perspective, but that they also want their horoscopes well written and therefore, entertaining to read.

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Appendix No. 1

Writer Interview:

1. What kind of sun sign column do you write and where is it published?
2. How did you get started and how long have you been writing a sun sign column?
3. What benefit do you derive from writing the column? As a writer? As an astrologer? As a human being?
4. What benefit do you think your readers derive from it?
5. How do you deal with such a controversial profession?
6. How do you handle the criticism from both the skeptics, as well as the believers?
7. How does writing a sun sign column challenge you as a writer, astrologer, and human being?
8. How do you perceive your audience?
9. Do you feel it's important to use the technical language of astrology?
10. What are five key words that describe how you perceive your role as a sun sign column writer?
11. Do you view astrologers as part of a community? If so, what kind?
12. In relationship to that community, what is the intention of your work?
13. How would you describe the relationship between astrology and popular culture?
14. Do you think astrology has changed over the last five decades? And if so, how?
15. Do you feel your work can be characterized as a cultural commodity? And if so, how do you feel about that?
16. What do you feel is the social impact of your work?
17. Anything you would like to add?
18. Anything you would like to ask me?

Appendix No. 2

Reader Interview:

1. What kind of sun sign columns do you read? Dailies? Weeklies? Monthlies?
2. Where are they published? Newspapers? Magazines? Internet? All of the above?
3. Do you have favorites? Who? What makes that author a favorite?
4. How do you think you are perceived as a reader?
5. How long have you been reading horoscopes and was there an initial moment or experience that kept you coming back?
6. How do you benefit from reading sun sign columns?
7. Do you think the writer(s) derive any benefit?
8. How do you feel about the technical language of astrology?
9. What are five words that best describe what you take with you after you've read your horoscope?
10. Do you think astrology/horoscopes/sun sign columns are controversial? If so, why? And if not, why?
11. How do you deal with the criticism of skeptics?
12. Do you view astrology columns as part of a community? And if so, what kind?
13. Do you think astrology has a social impact? And if so, what is it? And if not, why?
14. How would you describe the relationship between astrology and popular culture?
15. Do you think astrology has changed over the course of the last five decades? And if so how?
16. Do you consider sun sign columns exploitive or a "cultural commodity?"
17. Anything you would like to add?
18. Any questions for me?
19. Gender_____ Age_____ Education_____ Household Income_____.

Appendix No. 3

Sample of Writer Memo

August 15, 2006

(Interviewee No. 10)

Sandra was a good find for this interview process given her 20 years of experience writing a sun-sign column, and given that she has written that column for one paper, which also syndicates her column in lots of small papers around the Northeast of Ohio. **As part of her interview she referred to the disclaimer carried at the end of her column that says this is for “entertainment” purposes only. [Her emphasis on that disclaimer made me realize I had to touch on it briefly in my paper.]** She was embarrassed about how long it takes her to write the column—not long at all, 35 minutes to an hour, glad to get paid for it, but is not making money on the column per se. Sandra takes her responsibility as a counselor seriously, and sees her role as a philosopher/teacher. Significantly, she loves her audience and sees them as open-minded people who believe in an unseen world that influences our lives, just like she does. (p. 11) She doesn't see herself as a cultural commodity.

August 18, 2006

(Interviewee No. 11)

Although the interview process didn't include age as a category, it was clear from interviewing Jennifer that she was the youngest among the group—she described herself as a Gen-Xer who is more interested in writing for a young audience. And while others, Eric Francis, Jeff Jawer, Maria Shaw, are writing for a specific age demographic, Jennifer is clearly targeting that market. **Jennifer also touched on the issue of secondary superstition, when she describes the “sheer numbers of ...average folk...[that] are interested in something that's so very occult and esoteric, even though it's obviously been diluted...”** (p. 2) She also experiences a deep sense of responsibility for what she says and how her words affect her readers.

Because she started as a psychic counselor, Jennifer has enjoyed moving away from the one-on-one model of counseling. [This is similar to Babs.] Controversy within her community and within the astrological community is problematic; first, because she has to conceal what she does, and second, because of the jealousy of fellow astrologers. Some of that conflict could be categorized as age related and also due to where Jennifer lives—her physical community may not be as tolerant. (p. 7) **“You're facilitating an energy of connection that may be nowhere else in the paper—you know everybody's gonna read the horoscopes.”** (p. 14)

Appendix No. 4

Sample of Reader Memo

Reader Interview No. 5:

PR is a 76 –year old who has been reading horoscopes for most of her life, and significantly has the perspective to notice how astrology columns have changed over the last several decades. She has a PhD in comparative literature. Most importantly, she made the most startling obvious observation about astrology and popular culture: **“Well, it’s certainly part of the social outlook in the sense that it’s always on the page with the funnies.”** Of course it is a part of popular culture.”

Reader Interview No. 6:

II Also contacted me during the pilot survey and was willing to participate in this current study. She is 59-years old, has Master’s in Clinical Holistic Health Education, and was quite emphatic that **“perspective”** is what makes horoscopes/sun sign columns valuable. Somehow her description of controversy triggered an awareness in me, that **readers were not addressing the notion of controversy within the astrological community at all.**

October 18, 2006

I put a notice on my website this afternoon asking for volunteers for in depth interviews; I also asked for male volunteers, not because I wanted to skew the results, but because 9 of the writers are male and I wanted to have a similar balance for readers. The conventional wisdom that more women than men read horoscopes still holds true, and I was in no way trying to manipulate the score. I simply wanted to see if there would be similarities or differences in what woman and men gleaned from reading horoscopes and if those differences could be related in some fashion to the gender of the author. Within five hours, several men had responded with a willingness to be interview; women also responded.

Reader Interview No. 7:

LM is a psychiatric nurse, specializing in the treatment of addictions, and has authored a manual for running groups in treatment centers. **Two significant contributions: horoscopes are like gossiping—they enhance conversations; at first glance is the notion that people who read horoscopes are part of a secret community that gets people talking to each other, particularly in offices, in ways they might not have otherwise communicated.** Also does not think that the writer would perceive her as needy or dependent.

Appendix No. 5

Interview Release Form

Name: _____

Address: _____

Telephone Number: _____

Email: _____

This form has been created to respect and to ensure that the material contained in your interview with Ralfee Finn is used only in accordance with your wishes.

1. My contribution/interview can be used for...

- | | | |
|---|---------|---------|
| a. Research purposes | Yes ___ | No ___ |
| b. Public Reference, such as magazine articles or on the Internet | Yes ___ | No ___ |
| c. Academic Presentations, as part of seminars or lectures | Yes ___ | No. ___ |
| d. Research material which may be published at a future date | Yes ___ | No ___ |

All material for which anonymity was requested in the interview will remain anonymous. If you would like any other material to be anonymous, please let me know what topics or sections are covered by your request.

Signature of Interviewee _____ Date _____

Signature of Interviewer _____ Date _____

Appendix No. 6

Reader Interviews

<u>Reader</u>	<u>Date</u>
Reader No. 1	October 7, 2006
Reader No. 2	October 7, 2006
Reader No. 3	October 8, 2006
Reader No. 4	October 15, 2006
Reader No. 5	October 15, 2006
Reader No. 6	October 15, 2006
Reader No. 7	October 18, 2006
Reader No. 8	October 19, 2006
Reader No. 9	October 22, 2006
Reader No. 10	October 22, 2006
Reader No. 11	October 22, 2006
Reader No. 12	October 24, 2006
Reader No. 13	October 24, 2006
Reader No. 14	October 24, 2006
Reader No. 15	October 24, 2006
Reader No. 16	October 25, 2006
Reader No. 17	October 27, 2006
Reader No. 18	October 27, 2006
Reader No. 19	October 28, 2006
Reader No. 20	October 28, 2006
Reader No. 21	October 28, 2006
Reader No. 22	October 29, 2006
Reader No. 23	October 29, 2006
Reader No. 24	October 29, 2006

Appendix No. 7

Writer Interviews

<u>Writer</u>	<u>Date of Interview</u>
Writer No. 1	June 22, 2006
Writer No. 2	June 26, 2006
Writer No. 3	July 10, 2006
Writer No. 4	July 23, 2006
Writer No. 5	August 2, 2006
Writer No. 6	August 4, 2006
Writer No. 7	August 7, 2006
Writer No. 8	August 8, 2006
Writer No. 9	August 12, 2006
Writer No. 10	August 15, 2006
Writer No. 11	August 18, 2006
Writer No. 12	September 26, 2006
Writer No. 14	September 30, 2006
Writer No. 15	October 18, 2006
Writer No. 16	November 8, 2006