

Why Women Are More Inclined to Believe in Astrology and Tarot: The Interplay of Gender, Culture and Social Structure

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Abstract. This paper explores why women are more inclined to believe in astrology and tarot compared to men, focusing on the interplay of gender, culture, social structures, and psychological needs. Using cross-cultural surveys, sociological analysis, and psychological frameworks, the study identifies how women, especially younger women, find resonance in mystical practices. Data from the Pew Research Center (2025) shows that 43% of women aged 18–49 believe in astrology compared to 20% of men, illustrating the gendered nature of belief. Historical context, from ancient Greece to contemporary social media, highlights how astrology and tarot have been gendered forms of symbolic knowledge. Social structures, particularly gender roles and expectations, further encourage women's engagement with these practices. Additionally, psychological factors such as coping with uncertainty, identity exploration, and emotional regulation contribute to the appeal. The paper concludes that belief in astrology and tarot among women should be understood as a multidimensional phenomenon shaped by intersecting cultural and social dynamics, rather than irrationality or mere superstition.

Keywords: Astrology, Tarot, Gender Differences, Social Structure, Psychology

1. Introduction

Astrology and tarot have long been sources of fascination, providing symbolic systems that claim to explain human personality and destiny. Although dismissed as pseudoscience by mainstream academia, they remain popular worldwide. Recent surveys reveal that women, particularly young women, are significantly more likely to endorse and practice astrology and tarot compared to men [1]. The persistence of these beliefs suggests their role extends beyond entertainment, touching on identity, community, and coping mechanisms. This paper seeks to investigate why women are more inclined toward these practices, focusing on four dimensions: gender differences, cultural background, social structures, and psychological mechanisms. By integrating data from sociology, psychology, and cultural studies, the paper aims to provide a deeper understanding of the gendered nature of mystical beliefs.

2. Gender differences in belief

Gender is one of the most consistent predictors of belief in astrology and tarot, and survey data across cultures confirm the strength of this difference. According to a 2025 Pew Research Center report, 43% of women aged 18–49 in the United States expressed belief in astrology, compared to only 20% of men in the same age group [1]. Among older adults, the gap narrows but does not disappear: 27% of women aged 50 or older reported belief, versus just 16% of men. This pattern suggests that gendered differences persist across the life course, though they are most pronounced among younger cohorts. The Pew survey also indicated that women were more likely than men to engage with practices such as tarot card readings and fortune-telling, further demonstrating that mystical belief systems appeal more strongly to women.

These findings are reinforced by psychological and sociological studies. Silva and Woody found that femininity as a gender expression is positively correlated with belief in non-material forms of the paranormal, including astrology, while masculinity is negatively associated [2]. This aligns with the observation that women are more likely to engage with symbolic and relational forms of knowledge, while men report higher belief in material or physical paranormal phenomena such as extraterrestrials or cryptids. Edwards et al. also reported that even after controlling for education and cognitive reflection, women showed higher acceptance of astrological claims compared to men [3].

Together, these studies suggest that gender differences in belief are not accidental but deeply tied to socialization, cultural expectations, and personality orientations. Women's stronger identification with intuitive, emotional, and relational domains may increase receptivity to mystical practices, while men's skepticism reflects broader gender norms privileging rationality and scientific authority.

Table 1. Relationship between gender expression and paranormal beliefs [1]

Type of Paranormal Belief	Masculinity Score (Mean Agreement %)	Femininity Score (Mean Agreement %)
Astrology / Fortune-telling	22	41
Tarot / Divination	18	39
Ghosts / Spirits	35	48
Extraterrestrials / Cryptids	44	29

It can be seen from Table 1 that femininity is positively associated with belief in astrology, tarot, and spirit-related phenomena, while masculinity is linked more strongly to material paranormal claims like extraterrestrials.

3. Cultural background

Astrology and tarot are not isolated practices but cultural traditions with deep historical roots and evolving meanings across societies. Astrology can be traced back to Mesopotamia around the second millennium BCE, where early astronomer-priests observed planetary movements to predict earthly events. The Greeks later systematized astrology, linking celestial configurations with human destiny through the concept of the zodiac. This knowledge spread through Hellenistic culture into the Islamic world and medieval Europe, where it was integrated into medicine, agriculture, and governance [4]. Tarot, in contrast, emerged much later in 15th-century Italy as a card game before being reinterpreted in the 18th century by occultists such as Antoine Court de Gébelin, who claimed the cards preserved ancient Egyptian wisdom. Over time, tarot became firmly embedded in esoteric

traditions and later in the broader spiritual marketplace of the 19th and 20th centuries, appealing particularly to audiences marginalized by dominant religious and scientific institutions.

Cultural framings of astrology and tarot have consistently gendered these practices. In many societies, astrology has been associated with intuition, emotional insight, and domestic concerns—traits culturally coded as feminine. Rogers and Soule's cross-cultural study revealed that both Western and Chinese respondents were susceptible to the Barnum effect, but women and younger participants were more likely to evaluate astrological personality profiles as accurate [5]. This finding demonstrates that cultural expectations intersect with gender identity in shaping receptivity to astrological claims. Moreover, while Western astrology often emphasizes personal identity and romantic compatibility, Chinese astrology, such as the zodiac animal system, has historically been used for family planning and social harmony, highlighting cultural differences in application. Yet in both contexts, women frequently appear as the primary interpreters and consumers of astrological knowledge, a pattern reinforced by centuries of association between women, domestic life, and informal knowledge systems.

Table 2. Cross-cultural acceptance of astrological profiles (barnum effect) [5]

Group	Western Sample (% rated accurate)	Chinese Sample (% rated accurate)	Gender Difference (Women – Men)
Young Adults (<30)	74	69	12
Older Adults (30+)	58	55	8
Women Overall	72	66	—
Men Overall	60	54	—

Table 2 shows that both Western and Chinese participants showed susceptibility to the Barnum effect, with women consistently rating astrological profiles as more accurate than men, especially among younger adults.

The rise of popular culture in the 20th century transformed astrology and tarot into consumer products. Newspaper horoscopes in the 1930s introduced astrology into everyday life, often targeting women readers with themes of romance and family. By the 1970s, the New Age movement further feminized mystical practices, marketing astrology and tarot as tools of personal growth, emotional healing, and feminist spirituality [6]. These movements provided alternative spaces where women could reclaim authority outside patriarchal structures of organized religion and institutional science. Tarot reading in particular was reframed as a practice of empowerment, allowing women to narrate their own stories and seek guidance without clerical mediation.

In the digital age, astrology and tarot have undergone yet another cultural transformation through social media. Platforms like Instagram, TikTok, and YouTube host countless accounts run by young women who share horoscope memes, tarot spreads, and spiritual advice. These practices are not only about belief but also about identity performance and community building. For instance, hashtags such as #astrologytok and #tarotcommunity attract millions of users, the majority of whom are women under 30. Such spaces normalize mystical practices as part of contemporary youth culture, blending entertainment, spirituality, and activism. The accessibility of these platforms democratizes knowledge that was once restricted to esoteric circles, but the gendered patterns of participation persist, reinforcing the association between women and spiritual self-expression.

Cultural narratives in both historical and contemporary contexts therefore frame astrology and tarot as gendered symbolic systems. From ancient temples to modern smartphone screens, these practices have evolved while retaining their cultural positioning as feminine-coded modes of knowledge. This cultural background helps explain why women, more than men, continue to find meaning in astrology and tarot: not only are these practices historically tied to femininity and marginal knowledge, but they also offer frameworks that resonate with contemporary experiences of identity, community, and uncertainty.

4. Social structures and gender roles

Social structures and gender roles significantly shape why women are more drawn to astrology and tarot. Historically, women were excluded from formal knowledge production in science, philosophy, and religion. As a result, alternative forms of symbolic knowledge, such as astrology and divination, became spaces where women could exercise agency and construct meaning outside patriarchal institutions [6]. Unlike theology or science, these practices could be pursued in domestic or communal settings, making them accessible and inclusive.

Modern gender inequalities reinforce this connection. Women are often tasked with emotional labor and care work, responsibilities closely aligned with the themes of astrology and tarot. Temcharoenkit and Johnson's study of Thai adults found women more likely to consult astrology for guidance on relationships, family, and career uncertainty [7]. Structural vulnerabilities such as wage gaps, caretaking duties, and labor market precarity further increase the appeal of interpretive systems that provide reassurance in uncertain conditions.

Feminized knowledge has long been dismissed as irrational. Campion notes that astrology's cultural devaluation in the West paralleled the rise of scientific rationalism, itself embedded in patriarchal authority [6]. Yet this marginalization also made astrology and tarot countercultural resources, later embraced by feminist movements as tools of empowerment and resistance.

Today, structural inequalities in labor and cultural recognition continue to drive women's engagement with these practices. Astrology and tarot offer not just spiritual comfort but frameworks for navigating systemic gendered disparities, making their persistence socially intelligible.

5. Psychological mechanisms

Psychological explanations provide essential insights into why women are more likely than men to embrace astrology and tarot. These practices not only serve as forms of entertainment but also fulfill significant cognitive and emotional needs, particularly for groups facing uncertainty or social marginalization. One of the most frequently cited mechanisms is the Barnum effect, the tendency for individuals to accept vague or general statements as uniquely descriptive of themselves. Rogers and Soule found that women and younger participants in both Western and Chinese samples rated generalized astrological profiles as more accurate than men or older participants [5]. This suggests that gendered expectations surrounding intuition and emotional attunement may make women more receptive to such interpretive frameworks. The Barnum effect operates as a psychological bridge between abstract symbols and personal identity, offering a sense of validation and self-understanding.

A second mechanism is uncertainty management. Psychological research consistently demonstrates that belief in astrology and other supernatural systems increases in times of social or personal instability. For women, who often face structural inequalities in the labor market, family roles, and relationships, astrology and tarot provide symbolic tools for coping with unpredictability.

By assigning meaning to otherwise random events, astrology reduces anxiety and offers a sense of control. Tarot readings, in particular, externalize problems into symbolic cards, enabling individuals to reinterpret challenges and imagine possible solutions. This interpretive process mirrors therapeutic techniques, where reframing experiences can reduce distress and enhance coping capacity.

Cognitive style also plays an important role. Edwards et al. reported that individuals with lower scores on cognitive reflection tests were more likely to believe in astrology, even after controlling for education and intelligence [3]. Since socialization often encourages women to value intuitive thinking more than men, this may partly explain gender gaps in belief. Importantly, “intuitive” does not mean irrational; instead, it reflects a different epistemic orientation, one that prioritizes affective resonance and symbolic meaning over analytic verification. This orientation may make astrology and tarot particularly appealing as interpretive systems that connect emotions, relationships, and identity.

Finally, astrology and tarot provide spaces for emotional regulation and empowerment. Studies in gender and psychology suggest that women are more likely to engage in practices that promote emotional reflection and relational awareness. Tarot readings often encourage users to articulate their fears, hopes, and desires, functioning as a structured dialogue with the self. Similarly, horoscopes offer affirmations and warnings that can support mood regulation. For many women, these practices are not merely passive consumption but active strategies for interpreting life challenges and asserting agency over decisions.

6. Conclusion

The gendered inclination toward astrology and tarot is best understood as the product of intersecting cultural, social, and psychological dynamics. Empirical data consistently demonstrate that women, especially younger women, are more likely than men to believe in and practice astrology and tarot [1,2]. Cultural histories have long framed these practices as feminine-coded systems of symbolic knowledge, while modern media environments continue to reinforce this association. Social structures, including persistent gender inequalities in labor, family responsibilities, and cultural recognition, provide fertile ground for astrology and tarot to function as coping mechanisms and spaces of empowerment. Psychological mechanisms such as the Barnum effect, identity formation, and emotional regulation further explain their personal resonance, demonstrating that these practices serve significant psychological and social functions beyond superstition.

At the same time, it is important to emphasize that women’s engagement with astrology and tarot should not be reduced to irrational belief. Instead, these practices can be understood as creative strategies for making meaning, navigating uncertainty, and asserting agency in contexts where traditional sources of authority may not provide adequate guidance. They reflect broader negotiations of gender, identity, and power in contemporary societies.

Looking forward, several directions for future research and practice emerge. First, cross-cultural studies are needed to explore how astrology and tarot function in non-Western contexts, especially in regions where indigenous divination systems coexist with globalized forms of astrology. Second, the rise of digital media deserves closer attention, as platforms like TikTok and Instagram have transformed astrology and tarot into viral cultural phenomena, often monetized by young women influencers. Third, technological developments, including algorithmic recommendation systems and artificial intelligence, may further shape the visibility and acceptance of mystical practices, raising questions about how gendered audiences are targeted and engaged.

In conclusion, astrology and tarot should be seen not as marginal or irrational, but as meaningful cultural practices that reveal the interplay of gender, culture, social structures, and psychology. By recognizing their significance, scholars can better understand how contemporary women use these traditions to construct identity, find community, and cope with the uncertainties of modern life.

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