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**PSY 324 Transcript for the Barnum Effect - Why People Believe In Astrology and Psychics**

[00:00:00.404] SPEAKER: A 2015 YouGov survey asked participants in the U.S. and Britain about their beliefs in astrology and horoscopes. 14 percent of Americans and 8 percent of Brits said that they believe horoscopes can tell you something about what will happen in the future. This might seem like a small minority, but that equates to roughly 50 million people.

[00:00:22.003] 30 percent of Americans and 20 percent of Britons also believe that star science can tell you something about yourself. That's 109 million people. Whether astrology or horoscopes, fortune tellers or psychic mediums, there is a long history of people claiming to possess paranormal insight, with an even longer line of believers wanting their advice. But why might someone believe in such claims? One explanation is known as the Barnum effect, a psychological phenomenon which we have all likely fallen for at some point.

[00:00:58.001] [MUSIC PLAYING]

[00:01:08.498] The Barnum effect describes the tendency for people to accept generalized personality descriptions as accurate descriptions of their own unique personality. In a famous experiment, psychologist Bertram Forer asked 39 of his students to take the diagnostic interest blank test.

[00:01:25.696] Following the test, each student received an individual personality sketch based on their test results and were asked to rate on a scale of 0 to 5 how accurately it revealed basic count-eristic of their personality. They were also asked to rate how effective they thought the test was in revealing personality.

[00:01:44.097] The students were convinced. They gave their personality sketches an average accuracy rating of 4.26. While scoring the effectiveness of the test an average of 4.31. What the students didn't know, however, was that they all received exactly

the same personality sketch. Not only were they all the same before I had taken the statements within the sketch from a newsstand astrology book, and had absolutely no correlation with the student's test results.

[00:02:14.501] They included statements such as, “You have a great need for other people to like and admire you.” “You have a tendency to be critical of yourself,” and “You pride yourself as an independent thinker and do not accept others' statements without satisfactory proof.” These are Barnum's statements, statements which are vague, true for most people, and often describe positive desirable qualities which almost anyone can relate to.

[00:02:40.298] For his experiment was concerned with the validity of personality assessments, but the Barnum effect is equally relevant in understanding beliefs in astrology in horoscopes. Here is my actual daily horoscope I found online. See how it uses vague statements, which leaves the reader to fill in the blanks with their own meaning. It also ends on a positive note, another typical trait of Barnum's statements.

[00:03:05.289] This may all seem obvious, but horoscopes are big business and can influence people into making poor decisions. So if we understand why we fall victim to the Barnum effect, maybe we can be better at avoiding it. In a 1972 study, Snyder and Larson told one group of test subjects that their personality sketch was created specifically for them, and the second group was told that their sketch was generally true of people.

[00:03:35.196] Those who had received the personality sketches labeled specifically for them rated them as being a more accurate description of their own personalities compared with the generally true group. In another study, test subjects were presented with twelve sun-sign personality descriptions and asked to choose the four which best matched their personality.

[00:03:55.415] When the descriptions were merely numbered, the test subjects had no tendency to pick the description which matched their own sun sign. However, when the descriptions were labeled with star signs, subjects were more likely to pick

the description which matched with their star sign.

[00:04:13.893] A study by Norman Sundberg presented subjects with two different personality sketches, a genuine one and a fake one made up of Barnum's statements. The Barnum sketches had five times as many socially desirable statements compared with the genuine sketches. The test subjects were asked to rate the accuracy of the two personality sketches, with 59 percent rating the Barnum sketches as more accurate.

[00:04:38.308] No one likes their faults being pointed out to them, and this is perhaps the most important tactic of psychics and fortune tellers, tell people what they want to hear. The Barnum effect is just one reason why people might believe in those who claim to know our deepest personality traits or what awaits us in the future.

[00:04:56.191] But if we stay vigilant, we can spot when someone is trying to use this trick on us. Have you ever fallen prey to the Barnum effect? Whether it's by an online personality test, daily horoscope, or a fortune-teller, let me know down in the comments.

[00:05:10.293] [MUSIC PLAYING]

[00:05:16.788] Thanks for watching. If you haven't subscribed already, now would be a great time to. You can watch my previous video on why humans evolved to walk upright by clicking here, or you can watch some more psychology videos by clicking over here. See you next time.

[00:05:30.904] [MUSIC PLAYING]



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