

FAME & FORTUNES

From TikTok tarot readings to ChatGPT predictions, the future is trending. Amy Molloy asks, why are psychics so hot right now?

Melbourne-based PR consultant Sarah Katsavos was 30 years old when she visited a psychic for the first time. She didn't plan to have a tarot card reading that day; she spotted a sign – a real one, not a mystical one – and made the spontaneous decision to walk in.

"I had been through a significant breakup and I was at a very low point in my life," she recalls. "Without me giving her any information, she told me I had just done something that felt like taking off a very heavy coat and that, although it was difficult, it was right, and that's all I needed to hear as it really helped me to move forward."

Today, Katsavos is one of many women who includes a psychic in her emotional toolkit. Her go-to is Teymara Antonio-Wright, who describes herself as a "transformation coach". She offers "intuitive/soul readings" where numerology and astrology are used to "provide key life insights for the future, including what aspects of your life you should focus on". One of her most famous clients was Michael Jackson.

"The first session, I was in tears within the first 10 minutes," says Katsavos. "The thing that really got to me was when she calculated my 'personality number' and she just froze and looked at me and said, 'The person sitting in front of me is not the person

reflected in these numbers – you are not who you are meant to be.' It resonated with me so strongly."

Now, Katsavos has an annual reading to understand what the year ahead may bring, along with check-ins when necessary. "Sometimes she will also call me out of the blue with a seemingly random message," says Katsavos. The week before our interview, the message was work-related. "She said [the client] will ask me to submit a proposal for less money," says Katsavos. "And on this occasion it will be worthwhile doing because it will lead to something else."

To Katsavos, a psychic is just another resource. "I have my psychologist, my doctor, my friends, my family ... and my psychic," she explains. "Since Covid, a lot of us are re-evaluating how we want to spend our time and what we're passionate about. This can mean major shifts in careers, relationships, friendships, where you live and how you live. These are big decisions and I think the more help we have to figure it out, the better."

BACK TO THE FUTURE

In America, the "psychic services industry" was valued at \$US2.3 billion in 2023, with more than 99,000 registered businesses, and it's expected to keep growing. The same is true in Australia, where the "online psychic reading market" it is predicted to be worth \$11.5 million by 2032, driven by growing social acceptance and "digital penetration".

With growth, there comes growing pains. ScamWatch noted that the amount extorted from Australians via psychic scams more than doubled between 2020 and 2022, rising from \$230,273 to \$555,240. And even "legit" psychics are being targeted by impostors who are setting up fake Instagram accounts in their names, and cold-messaging customers.

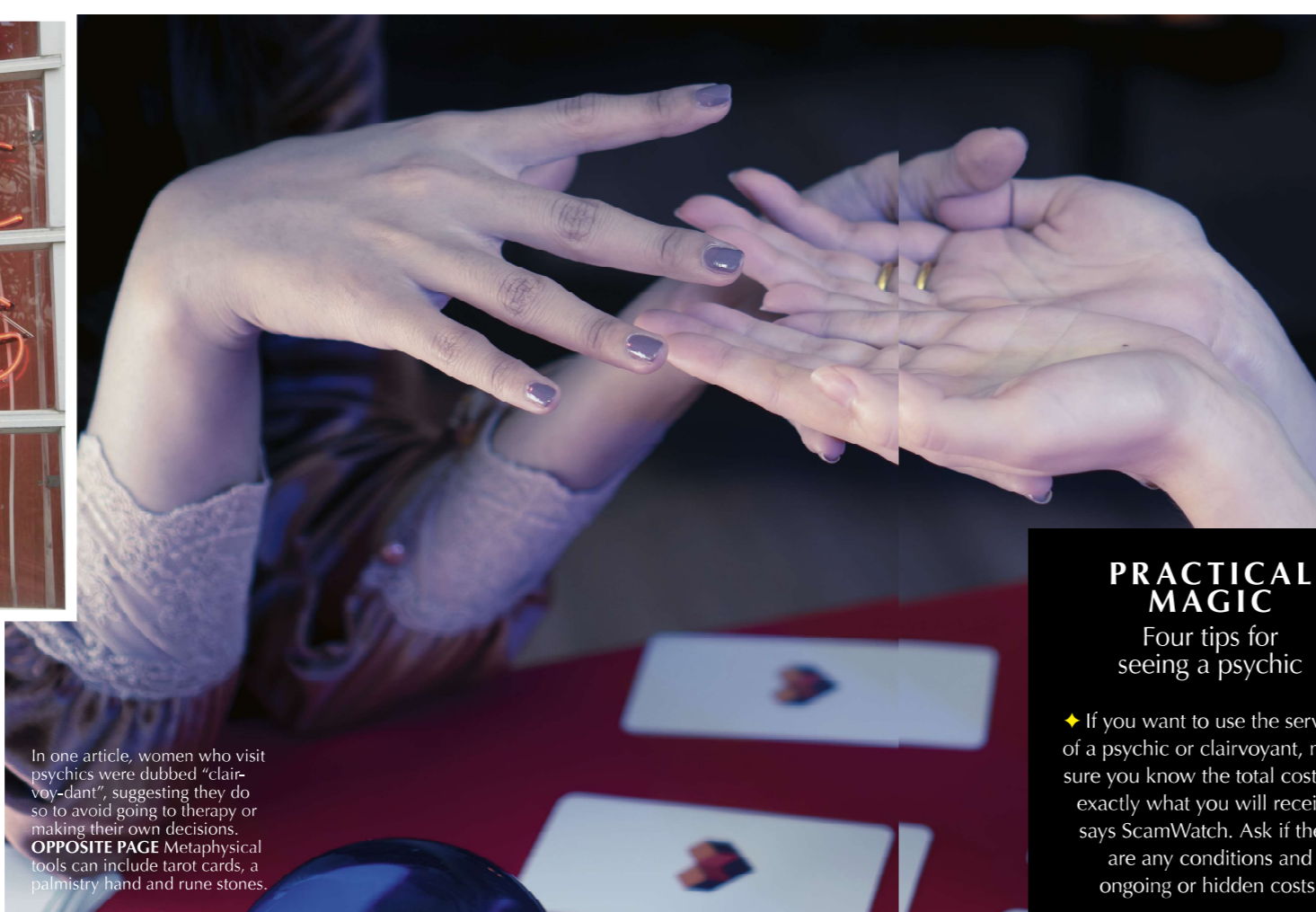
When you look back on the past four years, it's no surprise that we're eager to look forward. "Psychics are barometers of social anxiety," explains Thomas Rabeyron, a professor of clinical psychology and psychopathology at the University of Lorraine in France, who also conducts research on the paranormal.

One former astrologer, who spoke to *The Guardian*, said millennials "grew up with Harry Potter and



“Let’s say goodbye to the clichés of purple tablecloths and crystal balls, and instead embrace real healers”

– Jessica Lynne, psychic medium



In one article, women who visit psychics were dubbed “clairvoy-dant”, suggesting they do so to avoid going to therapy or making their own decisions. **OPPOSITE PAGE** Metaphysical tools can include tarot cards, a palmistry hand and rune stones.

graduated into a precarious economy, making them the ideal customers” for the psychic services industry.

In many ways, our preoccupation with the future is nothing new. In Australia, fortune-telling took off at the start of the 20th century, albeit illegally at first. The difference is that technology has taken the psychic industry and cast a spell on it. On TikTok, the category “Australia Tarot Readings” had more than 3.2 million views at the time of writing this article.

It’s never been easier to access a psychic, thanks to platforms like Mysticsense, an online marketplace where you can arrange a call with a global psychic (for a premium per-minute rate).

Even ChatGPT is being used as a crystal ball, with AI being coded to, supposedly, generate horoscopes and tarot readings. Yes, I tried it. It told me: “I advise you to remain open and receptive, for love often arrives when we least expect it.” I sent my prediction to my husband; he didn’t seem too worried.

Here’s where I have to declare my conflict of interest. I have visited a psychic. I liked her and, yes, some of what she told me “came true”. I even trained as an “Akashic Records reader” during lockdown. The idea is there’s a “vibrational library” that holds all of our memories of our past, present and

future, and you can learn to tap into it. I read about it on Goop; it seemed better than baking banana bread.

Most of my friends – smart, educated women – dabble in some kind of future-forecasting activity, whether it’s oracle cards (the trendy version of tarot cards) or visiting a clairvoyant. But is it all harmless fun? Or is there a dangerous downside?

WHO KNOWS YOU BEST?

Jessica Lynne is one of Australia’s most popular psychic mediums. She has more than 113,000 followers on Instagram (94 per cent are female). She drops f-bombs, talks about her own troubled childhood and is the reason my kids sleep with sliced-up limes next to their beds (she says it cleanses your space of “dark” spirits, and I’ll do anything to get my toddler to sleep soundly).

Sadly, she has also experienced the darker side of the industry. In fact, during one session with a psychic, Lynne – who is happily married to a woman – was told that she is not actually gay. “The so-called ‘healer’ claimed that my wife and I are ‘soul sisters’ waiting for the right man to come along,” she recalls. “She emphasised that I was broken and I wouldn’t heal until I was with a man. I wish I was joking.”

She has also heard stories from clients who’ve been told their loved one will be “stuck in limbo” because of their sexual preferences and will never find fulfilment in this lifetime. “It’s disappointing to see how some ‘healers’ in the spiritual community bring others down with negative and fear-based information,” says Lynne, who studied psychology at university.

In an article in a Chinese newspaper on the rise of Asian women using astrology apps, one woman claimed “psychics slut-shamed me”. It was all because she was having sex, instead of waiting for her “soulmate”.

Given her profession, Lynne does believe in the benefits of seeing a psychic – just make sure they’re progressive. “Like many others, I am working towards changing the perception of psychic mediums,” she says. “Let’s say goodbye to the clichés of purple tablecloths and crystal balls, and instead embrace real, authentic healers who are on their own journey just like everyone else.”

Her advice if you’re visiting a psychic for the first time? “Have your wits about you and only take on the advice that resonates.” The problem is, we often visit a psychic (or any kind of wellness expert) when we’re feeling vulnerable. It’s the reason “fertility psychics” are growing in popularity, with ads on Facebook and Etsy.

PRACTICAL MAGIC

Four tips for seeing a psychic

- ◆ If you want to use the services of a psychic or clairvoyant, make sure you know the total cost and exactly what you will receive, says ScamWatch. Ask if there are any conditions and ongoing or hidden costs.
- ◆ Decide on your “psychic budget” for the year, and make it sensible.
- ◆ Look for testimonials and recommendations from trusted sources.
- ◆ Work on exploring your own intuition through meditation – no-one knows you better than you.

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“Everyone has some level of psychic skill – gut instincts – so don’t discount your abilities”

– Rhiannon Hasjim, owner of *The Spiritual Toolbox* in Sydney

The reviews are mixed. I spoke to one woman from Melbourne who, after experiencing infant loss twice, was told she would be pregnant again within a month, and this baby would be born healthy. “It gave me hope,” she says, “and the strength to keep trying, with the support of my doctor.” Ten months later, she gave birth to her daughter with no complications.

However, a New York woman writing on the forum Mumsnet recently shared: “I had a miscarriage in December and it was traumatic. I was fragile, so I had a psychic reading ... about my fertility. I am massively regretting this.” The psychic said there was an “issue” with her womb lining and that she would need to see a “specialist” to conceive. But then she conceived naturally. Now, instead of enjoying her pregnancy, she is stressing about her womb lining not being right for the baby. “I am embarrassed but cannot stop worrying because of what she said,” she wrote. “Please knock some sense into me.”

It’s interesting that the same person who saw a psychic is now reaching out to strangers on the internet for reassurance. We’ve all been there, but is this part of the problem? Should we be seeking answers from the abyss instead of trusting our own intuition?

ARE YOU CLAIR-VOY-DANT?

Rhiannon Hasjim is the owner of The Spiritual Toolbox. With a bricks and mortar store in Sydney selling “ethically sourced metaphysical items and witchcraft tools” it has no shortage of customers both here and overseas. Its bestselling products include the Psychic Shield Spray, which promises to “protect your energy field from outside energies”, and the Release the Soul Ritual Balm, which “supports the physical body in shifting stagnant energies”. The “phallus candles” – which frequently sell out – are used for attracting and keeping a lover (“with free will and consent”, says Hasjim). She refers to all these as “bridging products” because they give people a taste of DIY mysticism. The next step for many customers is one of its online classes, in topics such as “cord cutting” and “love magick”.

Hasjim’s customers are lawyers, accountants, counsellors and educators, many of whom are just curious. “Everyone has some level of psychic skill – gut instincts – so don’t discount your own abilities,” she says. This isn’t about escaping reality, it’s about feeling more in control of it.

In an article in *The New Statesman*, women who visit psychics were dubbed “clairvoy-dant”, suggesting they do so to avoid going to therapy or making their own decisions. The women I spoke to say it’s not the case. “I see this as another way to do ‘the work’ and learn more about myself,” says Sarah, a teacher from Sydney, who brings her oracle cards to coffee with her girlfriends. “We sit around, pull our cards for the following week, and try to guess what they might mean for us – we don’t take it too seriously.”

Perhaps the answer is to approach psychics with the same detachment as most of us have long had with astrology, simply dabbling in it for entertainment value, and sometimes a little nudge if we’re at a crossroads. So what does the future hold for the psychic industry? It’s fair to say that nobody knows.