

ASMR

Finger tapping, cups clinking and whispering. These are a few of the thousands of pleasure inducing sounds. ASMR in the form of videos and audio clips has been a growing trend in recent years, with people discovering more and more euphoric sounds. These sounds are meant to help people relax after a stressful day or even just to help them have fun listening to stimulating sounds.

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Meaning

ASMR (Autonomous Sensory Meridian Response), as defined by the National Sleep Foundation, is “a feeling of euphoric tingling and relaxation that can come over someone when he or she watches certain videos or hears certain sounds.” Although a large trend on the internet, the concept of ASMR is still relatively new. Various people may experience ASMR derived from different stimuli. The most common sources of ASMR include whispers, white noise, lip smacking, having a person’s complete attention (scenarios like a hairdresser doing someone’s hair), as well as brushing, chewing, tapping, scratching, whispering and crinkling.

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Science Behind ASMR

ASMR has attracted millions of individuals around the world. Researchers have finally been able to answer the major question of why people are so addicted to the tapping of a book or the folding of oragami. Neuroscientists have been experimenting with electroencephalography along with surveying about ten thousand people. There was a recurring pattern from the survey, proving that ASMR may relieve some symptoms of stress, depression and insomnia.

In 2018, professor Stephan Smith and his colleagues at the University of Winnipeg placed 22 subjects into scanners. What surprised them was that the brain’s “default mode network” and parietal lobes above the back of the earlobes which are supposed to work together, was not. Instead, the brain’s “default mode network” associated itself with other sensory associations.

ASMR videos tended to help individuals focus on a task. The simple breathing into the mic, tapping on the table or even whispering helps calm their stressed nerves down. It triggers a “tingling sensation” which alleviates tensions and generates happiness.

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History

There is currently little evidence for the evolutionary origin of ASMR. Professors such David Huron from the School of Music at Ohio State University, have theorized that ASMR is similar to the physical grooming of primates due to the euphoria that comes with it. There have also been instances where similar parts of the brain are stimulated during grooming and ASMR.

Other occurrences of ASMR have been featured in novels such as Mrs. Dalloway by Virginia Woolf which was published in 1925. An excerpt from the novel provides a detailed description of a woman speaking to her patient. This placed emphasis on the human whisper as a trigger for ASMR.

The issue of ASMR reappeared in 2007 on an internet health forum. A 21-year-old netizen had submitted an internet post with a description of a certain experiences in their childhood describing the sensation they felt from an ASMR trigger. These experiences were triggered by the tracing of fingers along their skin, watching puppet shows or listening to someone reading a story.

Many netizens replied to the individual’s post which proved that various people had the same experiences. Exchanges between the users resulted in the creation of many ASMR based forums and websites.

Today, there are various forms of ASMR throughout the internet and social media. Thousands of content creators have made an occupation out of ASMR videos and their viewers. In 2009, “WhisperingLife” posted the first ever video on YouTube intended to trigger listeners. Years later in 2015, a scientific survey was conducted and concluded that viewers yearned either the euphoric feeling of relaxation, an aid to anxiety or something to help them fall asleep. In 2016, synaesthesia was linked with ASMR which is known as a stimulation disorder.

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ASMR and Media

ASMR has grown popular through the years on media such as Youtube and Instagram targeting young age groups. Several YouTubers and social media content creators make a suitable income with ASMR videos.

Videos that trigger ASMR fall into two categories on media: unintentional and intentional. Unintentional videos are made with other purposes, which were more common before this phenomenon was publicized. An example of unintentional ASMR is Bob Ross’s series “The Joy of Painting” where the sound of his tools and paint with the volume of his voice caused the effect on his audience. Intentional ASMR has gained traction on all social media platforms due to many people’s interest in this subject. This has caused many to experiment with ASMR and try it out creating a snowball effect.

Many people post videos of them eating or of crushing slime to create sounds that feel pleasant to their audience. A common technique ASMR creators use on social media and other networking sites is binaural recording videos to mimic the acoustics of a three dimensional environment. ASMR is expected to grow even more famous throughout the years and may reach all age groups. Its popularity is increasing significantly on most social media platforms.

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MOOR graphic by Leanne Ang