

Dark whisperers

Description

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â??Hush! Hush! Whisper who dares! â?¦â?• I wrote about relaxation videos based on ASMR in the previous post â?? peculiar videos featuring whispers, combinations of phonemes in succession (t t t t), and non-oral substitutes: fingers tapping, fabric brushing, scraping, etc.

At the right time and place such sounds can be relaxing and mesmerising for some people (or annoying most of the time for some others).

The ASMR meme

Guided relaxation is not new as a personal practice and in clinical and therapy contexts. But by most accounts ASMR belongs to the Internet. In fact ASMR provides an interesting case study of how ideas emerge and spread online.

Here are some of the means by which videos and audio recordings reputedly induce ASMR, and have popularised ASMR as a *thing*.

1. Support networks

Some of the specialists (referenced via links in my previous post) think that the Internet has allowed people with similar (unusual) experiences to discover one another, band together and grow a community of like minds. That reminds me of those people zapped by aliens who eventually discovered one another in *Close Encounters of the Third Kind.*

Apparently only a minority of people experience the ASMR effect (tingling in the scalp and a sense of extreme relaxation) triggered by intimate whispers, etc.

The ASMR experience went undetected by psychologists. ASMR individuals were embarrassed to talk about their experience. Nor did the experience have a name â?? until someone badged it ASMR. (I gleaned this narrative from the documentary called *ASMR Documentary [road trip]*.

That argument follows the long-standing claims that social life on the Internet encourages the formation of special interest groups, support networks and self-help groups.

2. Meditative media

Techniques for mediation and relaxation have been around for many years, and were available as vinyl records, tapes and CDs. They have also proliferated online with the advent of streamed video and audio.

According to a *Vox* article and several documentarians (see previous post) thereâ??s a link with meditation. A counsellor, clinician, guide or coach would whisper calming instructions: counting, directing attention, suggesting soothing imagery, etc.

So whisper videos emerged as a sub genre of relaxation videos, alerting listeners to the relaxing properties of whisper and whisper-like sounds.

3. Always available

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ASMR videos are available more readily than the circumstances in which the triggers might ordinarily occur. The right person with the patience or aptitude is not always available to whisper in your ear to help you feel good, nor are friends and significant others always so accommodating.

ASMR inducing videos are available any time online, and for free. Of course, this detachment from actual human contact feeds into concern over the use of simulated human intimacy as a substitute for actual sociability. But ASMR videos are not the only, or the most severe, sources of such concerns â?? a charge dominated by online gaming and social media communications.

4. Experimentation

By most accounts not all relaxation triggers work all the time. You need choice. The videos that provide the triggering effect are available for users to test and experiment with. You can stop and start a video at any time, or try another ASMRtist.

Affordable sensitive microphones and recording technologies have advanced such that itâ??s possible pick up quiet sounds and manipulate them in ways that are not possible with a therapist in the flesh. So ASMR videos are arguably more intense.

Artists and audiences alike can experiment to find what works best, and there are many ASMRartists to choose from, and with a range of techniques.

5. Personality plus

Popular Youtube videos are highly personal â?? delivered by people with the manners, quirks, and personalities that appeal to their niche audiences. ASMR videos tap into the insatiable demand for YouTube vloggers, streamers, life-style gurus, and key opinion leaders.

This is not a medium for detached, anonymous, co-producing teams of creatives â?? thatâ??s on Vimeo. YouTube ASMRtists are personalities with fans and followers.

6. Risk avoidance

We are more likely to accommodate the intimate whisperings of a stranger if experienced remotely, as a recording. Recordings are selective, involving visual images and sound, filtering out smell, taste and touch.

Thereâ??s no possibility of unwanted attention, assault or contamination. (In at least one ASMR video the artist whispers in your ear that he has a bod cold today.) The medium operates in one direction. So the person in the recording (hopefully) wonâ??t know who is watching and listening.



7. Hidden persuaders

Amongst the claims encouraging people to consume ASMR videos, four stand out:

- People use them to get to sleep. Thatâ??s often how they are promoted.
- They enable people to reproduce and amplify particular pleasurable sensations.
- They reinforce positive moods.
- They reduce stress.

Various therapies work by inducing a state of relaxation and then delivering suggestions that encourage positive thinking, affirm a sense of personal control and strength, or offer long term relief from specific phobias. They work by bringing people to a mental state where they are more receptive to such beneficial suggestions.

In this respect, the popular ASMR videos I have viewed deliver therapy light: words of support, friendship, gratitude, worth, and attentiveness.

Similar to other online content, they also encourage, with subtlety, loyalty to the offerings of that particular YouTube channel or artist. They want you to subscribe, comment, like or become a patron.

Less subtle is cunning product placement (tapping on an empty Pringles tin) or the case I observed where an ersatz first class flight attendant offered the viewer a free set of headphones (in role play)

explaining in calming tones the virtues of the brand. Iâ??ve yet to hear of outright consumer exploitation in ASMR videos.

Whatâ??s so funny? ASMR parodies

- Colbert: YouTubeâ??s Most Adorable A.S.M.R. Boyfriend Will Help You Get To Sleep (2019: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=oR2T0ITGeG8
- The Most Disturbing ASMR Video (2014): https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ycgSzc4Grdo&feature=youtu.be

Notes

- The introductory quote in full: â??Hush! Hush! Whisper who dares! Christopher Robin is saying his prayersâ?• from the poem *Vespers* by A.A. Milne.
- Coincidentally, Iâ??m on holiday in Luxembourg and today visited the town of Echternach. The Peaceful crypt in the abbey was suffused with the gentle slurping and gurgling from St Willibrordâ??s Spring.

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Category

1. Voice and text

Tags

1. ASMR
2. crypt

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