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Alfa Ramirez  
*Lindenwood University*

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## ASMR and Culture

*Alfa Ramirez*<sup>8</sup>

*The purpose of this study is to see if there are demographic descriptions that can be attributed to ASMR. My expected results are there will be more Caucasian males in the Western and European regions between the ages of 13-25 in middle class and their preferred viewing habits will be to watch whispering ASMR videos alone. They will be recruited through social media outlets like Reddit and asked demographic questions on an online Qualtrics survey.*

*Keywords:* ASMR, culture

Autonomous Sensory Meridian Response (ASMR) is a physiological response called tingles induced by triggers and may cause relaxation in individuals (Barrat & Davis, 2015). ASMR's rise in the scientific community begun recently, which means there is a lot of room for exploration on the topic, and there is still more to discover. Therefore, there is not a lot known about culture in the ASMR community. Primarily, ASMR is housed online and has been around since 2007, but was not coined autonomous sensory meridian response until 2010 by Jennifer Allen (Brenkman, 2017). Is ASMR universal to everyone, or predominantly felt by a select group of internet users? Is ASMR like music or shivers, or is it something else? ASMR has a lot of fascinating aspects and its application to the people around the world. To examine ASMR, which is primarily an audio trigger that induces tingles and relaxation, there must be a review of what we already know.

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<sup>8</sup> Alfa Ramirez, Department of Psychology, Lindenwood University. Correspondence concerning this project should be addressed to Alfa Ramirez, Department of Psychology, Lindenwood University, 209 S Kingshighway St, St Charles, MO 63301. Email: AMR905@lionmail.lindenwood.edu

The basics of ASMR is how it came to be and its internet identity. Grewe, Kopiez, and Altenmuler (2009), choose seven different pieces of music for 95 participants who rated how they felt, and measured their physiological state during each piece of music. They found that chills were most common in emotional peaks during the music. These chills are reported in ASMR as well, except they are called tingles.

In ASMR there are tingles, and there is not a known cause for this, but by looking at music's chills there may be the beginnings of an idea. Music is known to give chills and physiologically speed up the heartbeat, while tingles may give tingles and slow down the heartbeat. However, there is something happening to the brain and body that affects it different while listening to music versus ASMR. Silvia and Nusbaum (2011), also conducted a study on how often people felt these chills or shivers during music, with 188 participants who responded that they felt it daily, and that they often felt it during periods of high concentration and feelings of being touched. These shivers and chills are much like ASMR's tingles, where people experience feelings of being touched. There is even an idea that high flow may be a contributing factor to how people feel tingles (Barrat & Davis, 2015). Today's average teen has access to internet from their smartphone to their watch. Kraut and Buke (2015), points out that internet identity is hard to study because there have been significant problems with people generalizing common symptoms to the whole of the internet, when it is not true. For instance, not everyone who is on the internet has depression, but some people who have depression or depressive

symptoms may be more drawn to specific internet sites. There are ways in which we need to reword and change the way we study internet in general. Therefore, in the view of ASMR research, where can a person even begin to study? ASMR began on the internet itself and the most used websites to stream ASMR is on YouTube and ASMRReddit (Gallagher, 2016). The scientific community has used these resources advantageously in gathering participant samples for their ASMR research. However, the scientific community needs to reach out to a larger sample of all internet users, rather than restrict themselves to accessing those who already subscribe to ASMR.

Music and ASMR have some similarities and differences. The question is, how much do we know about music is generalizable to ASMR?

Recours, Aussaguel, and Trujillo (2009), did a study that examined how metal music changed the way people felt in France. It was mainly young adults in the study who had the same levels of depression and anxiety as the national average statistic. They found that people with levels of depression and anxiety leaned towards metal music more than other genres. This is like ASMR because people with depression and anxiety tend to lean towards ASMR (Barratt & Davis, 2016). On the other hand, ASMR is not just one category like metal music, so people can look up any video or trigger to their liking and feel better. They also found that people who did have elevated depression and anxiety scores were into arts and not the sciences (Recours, et al., 2009). This shows how audio can affect someone and if there may be a positive correlation

between negative feelings and audio. Much like ASMR has support that people with negative feelings are drawn towards the audio (Barratt & Davis, 2015). Shwates and McKinney (2010) did a study in Mexico with Mexican migrant workers that explored depression and anxiety with music therapy. The results were that the migrant workers felt more relaxed after music therapy, so they had less elevated feelings of depression and anxiety. This is interesting, because ASMR has support that it makes people feel relaxed, while the community does not know whether it really lowers a person's symptoms of negative feelings. The hip-hop community is mostly geared towards young people, and young people were recruited for this study. People in this study were already in music therapy positions with hip-hop music incorporation and it showed to help them (Travis, 2012). This is also interesting because if hip-hop could help a person, ASMR help a person as well.

There is not much known about how ASMR affects different cultures such as different races and ethnicities, different socioeconomic standings, and regionally where most people who are listening to ASMR are. Therefore, one must delve into how music has affected people in general, because music and ASMR are closely related; both are audio stimuli that can affect people. Music has been correlated to chills, goosebumps, and even feelings of tension. What people call chills and goosebumps in music is what the ASMR community called tingles. These tingles are feelings like chills that go from the head down to the spine, but correlates to

relaxation (Baratt & Davis, 2015). If ASMR has tingles and relaxation, then music is its cousin that correlates with chills and feelings of tension.

Campbell, Connell, and Beegle (2007), Got 1155 students from middle to high school ages 13-18 to take part in self-reporting how they interpret music and make it important, which is called music meaning making. This relates to ASMR because people do not meaning make with it, but in the study, there was exceptional support for people to meaning make in their music. The participants in this study thought music formed their identity and let them have an emotional outlet (Campbell et al., 2007). In contrast, what does ASMR provide for people who listen to it constantly? Maybe it is the connection to the people they are viewing, or the relaxation and tingles they feel through the screen.

There are also views of music all over the world that goes hand in hand with ASMR and its slow rise to widespread popularity. Like music, ASMR will probably continue to rise. Juslin, P., Barradas, G., Ovsianikow, M., Limmo, J., & Thompson, W. (2016), speak about music differentiation from individualistic versus collectivistic cultures. They surveyed 668 participants to take part in the study of their music listening habits. They found that collectivistic cultures will listen to more nostalgic and love music than individualistic ones, who listen to less music in general, and will listen to different types of music (Juslin, et al., 2016). This is an interesting find because if people in a collectivist culture all listen to the same general genre of music, it is because collectivistic cultures tend to like the same music as a group, while individualistic

cultures will empower the self and this may be a reason why ASMR has been more prevalent among the western and European places of the world. If this is so, how can we account for how fast ASMR is growing?

Speaking of culture, there has been literature reviewed about music and culture. Jozuka (2016) did an interview with a woman named Yumijuku, who says ASMR has predominantly come from Western and European places. She presented a cross-cultural comparison between ASMR in Western cultures and in Japan This is explored in the article where people from Western and European places may not show anything but their hands, Yumijuku shows her face and does ASMR related things towards her culture, like playing traditional Japanese instruments. In the interview with Yumijuku she reports she does this because it appeals to her audience in Japan (Jozuka, 2016).

Herbst, Wet, and Rijdsdijk (2005), who studied music education in South Africa, where resources such as internet access is not as used, there is a low report of how many people come across ASMR. Ho and Law (2009), who surveyed 3,243 students and interviewed 20 teachers that focused on teaching only Chinese music versus those teachers who teach Chinese music and other music as well. Children are mostly taught one specific type of music; therefore, this is another reason we can account for ASMR not being around other places outside of European nations and the Western world, either, because of the lower amounts of musical freedom and choice selection.

My proposed study will focus on ASMR and culture, I hypothesize that there will be significantly more viewers of ASMR from Europe and the Western part of the world between the ages of 13-25 that prefer to watch ASMR alone. The fact that ASMR is so new may mean that what is learned today will be outdated even by the next two years, but this is no implication to stop questioning. The more places that are collectivistic and with less resources seem to be the ones that may not find ASMR as widespread as in the European and Western cultures.

#### Proposed Methodology

##### **Participants**

Participants will be recruited through the principal investigators, social media including: Facebook, Reddit, and Twitter using a recruitment statement (see Appendix A). An online Qualtrics survey was created for this study, and no one will be compensated for taking part in it. Participants who were a part of the ASMR community will complete extra preliminary questions about their ASMR viewing habits, while the participants who are not a part of the ASMR community skipped directly to rest of the survey that asks questions about their demographic and cultural background.



## Materials and Procedure

An online Qualtrics survey was made to gain descriptive data on who listens to ASMR. Questions including race, ethnicity, job, income, etc., will be asked in order to see who listens to ASMR based within and without the community (see Appendix B). The principal investigator will post an anonymous link on their social networking sites and whoever chooses to click it will be able to get to the study. If they choose to participate they will be asked their age, anyone from the age of 13+ will be able to participate in the study.

## Expected Results and Implications

I expect that the results of the demographics will be more Anglo-males in their teen years from 13-25, and that their preferred viewing habits would be to watch ASMR alone and would prefer whispering videos. Typically, Anglo-males have been attracted to ASMR more than any other demographic group. In the study done by Barratt and Davis (2015), they found people's preferred trigger video would be a whispering video, which is what I predict Anglo-males will be attracted to. The extensive cross-culture literature also reveals that there is a lack of ASMR in communities other than America and European places. This is why I believe that Caucasian people will be more inclined to watch ASMR videos. On top of that, the ages of 13-25 have been reported by numerous studies that have reported an age range. Adolescents who are into today's internet culture, such as Gallagher (2016) suggested, means that they are more inclined to watch and listen to ASMR. Though I am doing a demographic study of ASMR and culture, there are

implications that this could be potentially beneficial to society in the future. If it is true that these specific demographics are representative of the ASMR communities sample, then this could mean that ASMR is more of an Americanized idea, and that could lead to the question- why? On top of that, if it isn't representative of the expected results, then there is even more interest. Then there is the question as to why it isn't representative and who really are the people listening and watching ASMR. It would be interesting to see if the expected results were rejected because then this would mean this community was diverse and spreading their ideas of relaxation and tingles around fast, this could be implications for more and more people to feel the relaxation feeling.

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## **Appendix A**

### **Recruitment Statement**

Please consider taking my anonymous survey on Autonomous Sensory Meridian Response (ASMR) and Culture. I'll be asking demographic questions. You will not need headphones for this survey. This is my research project for my Psychology Research Lab class at Lindenwood University and shouldn't take more than 15 minutes of your time. Your participation is completely voluntary and you may stop at any time. Thank you!

## **Appendix B**

What is your age in years?

Have you ever listened to Autonomous Sensory Meridian Response (ASMR)?

Yes

No

When do you listen to ASMR the most? (Mark all that apply)

During the day

During the afternoon

During the night

How often do you listen to ASMR per week?

How do you usually listen to ASMR?

Alone - For example, in a room alone, not around others

Around others- For example, around family and or/friends, in a crowded area, on the bus/train/ or any public area

What is the primary reason you listen to ASMR?

What are your top 3 favorite ASMR video triggers to watch? (For example - whispering, carving, no talk, soap, personal attention, etc.)

When was the first time you've heard of ASMR?

What is your relationship status?

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How do you currently describe your gender identity?

Man, male, or masculine  
 Transgender man, male, or masculine  
 Transgender woman, female, or feminine  
 Woman, female, or feminine  
 Gender nonconforming, genderqueer or gender questioning  
 Intersex, or two-spirit  
 I prefer not to answer

---

What is your nationality? (Example: Colombian, American, Nigerian, etc.)

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Which ethnicity describes you best? Select all that apply to you.

American Indian or Alaska Native- For Example, Navajo Nation, Blackfeet Tribe, Mayan, Aztec, Native Village of Barrow Inupiat Traditional Government, Nome Eskimo Community  
 Asian- For example, Chinese, Filipino, Asian Indian, Vietnamese, Korean, Japanese  
 Black or African American- For example, Jamaican, Haitian, Nigerian, Ethiopian, Somalian  
 Hispanic, Latino or Spanish Origin- For example Mexican or Mexican American, Puerto Rican, Cuban, Salvadoran, Dominican, Colombian  
 Middle Eastern or North African- For example, Lebanese, Iranian, Egyptian, Syrian, Moroccan, Algerian  
 Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander- For example, Native Hawaiian, Samoan, Chamorro, Tongan, Fijian, Marshallese  
 White- For Example, German, Irish, English, Italian, Polish, French  
 Some other race, ethnicity, or origin, please specify:   
 I prefer not to answer

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What languages do you speak at home? (This is in alphabetical order and you may click more than 1 belief using the SHIFT key)

What languages do you speak?

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With which belief do you identify yourself with? (This is in alphabetical order and you may click more than 1 belief using the SHIFT key)

- Agnostic
- Amish
- Ancestor Worship
- Animism
- Asatru
- Atheism
- Bahá'í Faith
- Brahma Kumari
- Buddhism
- Celtic Paganism

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What is the highest education level you have?

---

What is your occupation? (if you're a student a student please put student)

---

What social class group do you identify with?

- Poor
- Working class
- Middle Class
- Affluent

---

How many people do you live with at this moment?








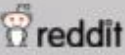


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Who were/was your primary caregiver(s) when you were growing up? (ex: babysitter, mom, and brother)



What social media pages do you use daily? (almost every day)

Items

 Facebook	<p>Click to write Group 1</p> <input type="text"/>
 Twitter	
 Instagram	
 Pinterest	
 YouTube	
 LinkedIn	
 Tumblr	
 Reddit	
 Snapchat	
 Other	

Where do you reside currently ? (Please specify which state in write in box, example: Midwest:MO)

- Midwest- Illinois, Indiana, Iowa, Kansas, Michigan, Minnesota, Missouri, Nebraska, Ohio, North Dakota, South Dakota, Wisconsin
- Northeast- Connecticut, Maine, Massachusetts, New Hampshire, New Jersey, New York, Pennsylvania, Rhode, Island, Vermont
- South- Arkansas, Alabama, Delaware, District of Columbia, Florida, Georgia, Kentucky, Louisiana, Maryland, Mississippi, North Carolina, Oklahoma, South Carolina, Tennessee, Texas, Virginia, West Virginia
- West- Alaska, Arizona, California, Colorado, Hawaii, Idaho, Montana, Nevada, New Mexico, Oregon, Utah, Washington, Wyoming
- Puerto Rico or other U.S. territories
- Other, please specify

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Please click where you were born.



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Please click all places where you have lived for a substantial amount of time (2+ years)

