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Who Feels the Tingles? The Emotional Side of ASMR

Daniela Beckelhymer, Emily Thompson, and Carin Perilloux
Southwestern University

Introduction

- ASMR is a radiating sensation involving tingling or goosebumps that produces a calming or euphoric feeling, usually in response to audiovisual stimuli (such as repetitive sounds, soothing visuals, and simulated personal attention).
- Although there is very little empirical research on ASMR, what we know so far is that people who consume ASMR content tend to score higher on empathy, mindfulness, awareness, curiosity, openness, and fantasizing (Fredborg, Clark & Smith, 2017; 2018; McErlean & Banissey, 2017).
- In our study, we collected data from a very large, worldwide sample of ASMR users to replicate some of these effects but also to test which predictors of ASMR experience would be strongest.

Method

- We recruited participants ($N = 26,930$) through online ASMR communities and social media, including ASMR YouTube channel posts.
 - Ages 18 to 99 ($M = 26.39$, $SD = 8.32$)

| | |
|--------------------|--------|
| Women | 20,442 |
| Men | 5,775 |
| Nonbinary or Other | 607 |



| | |
|---------------------------|--------|
| White | 21,691 |
| Hispanic/Latino | 3,504 |
| Other | 1,668 |
| Asian | 1,522 |
| Black or African American | 609 |

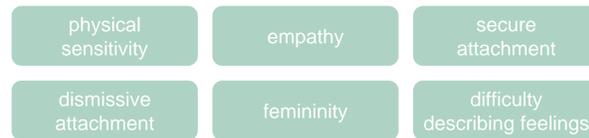
- As part of a more extensive online survey about ASMR, participants completed the following measures:

| | | |
|---|--|--|
| ASMR-15 <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Altered consciousness Sensation Relaxation Affect | Ten Item Personality Inventory [TIPI] <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Big 5 | Highly Sensitive Person Scale [HSP] |
| Brief Perceived Social Support | Toronto Empathy Scale | Toronto Alexithymia Scale <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Difficulty identifying feelings [ALEX-DIF], Difficulty describing feelings, Externally oriented thinking [ALEX-EOT] |
| German Extended Personal Attributes Questionnaire <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Masculinity Femininity | Vividness of Visual Imagery | Attachment Style Questionnaire <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Secure Fearful |

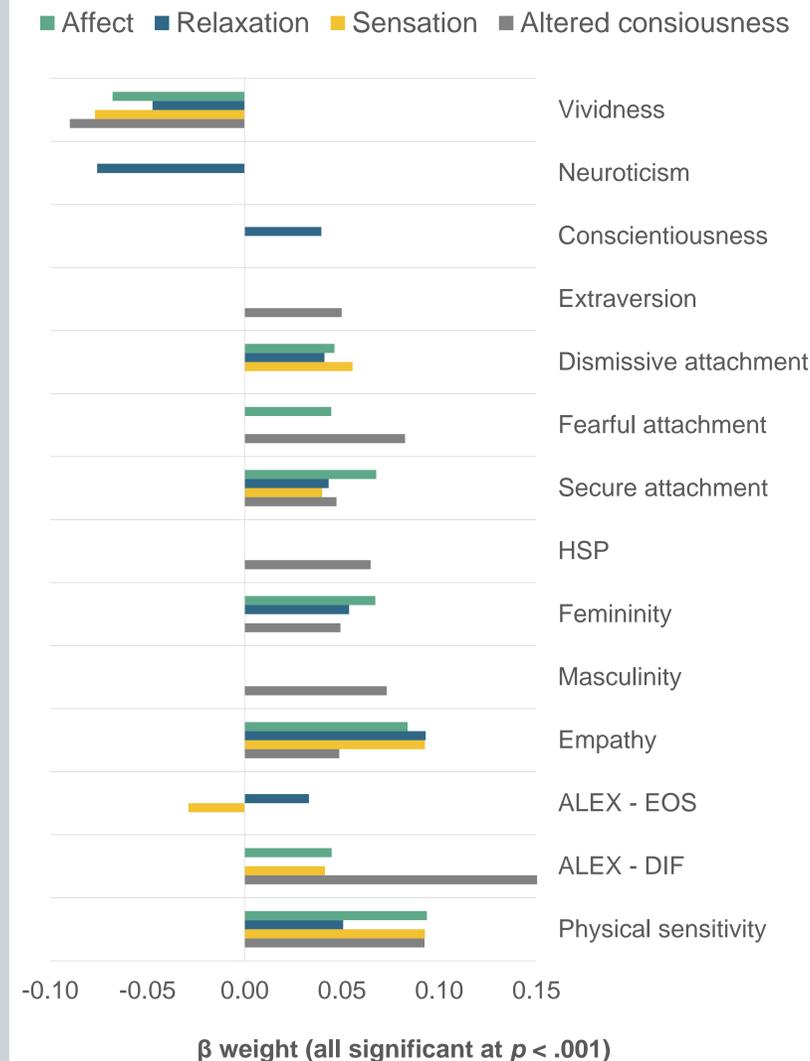
Results

Backward regressions predicting ASMR-15 scores

As anticipated, several predictors were associated with higher scores on ASMR subscales:



Surprisingly, vividness was a consistent predictor of lower scores on all ASMR subscales.



Self-perceived social support

Self-perceived social support was positively correlated with three of the ASMR subscales:

- Altered Consciousness $r(18278) = .01$, $p = .19$, n.s.
- Sensation $r(18278) = .07$, $p < .001^{***}$
- Relaxation $r(18278) = .09$, $p < .001^{***}$
- Affect $r(18278) = .07$, $p < .001^{***}$

but negatively correlated with actual ASMR consumption:

- Days per week $r(17922) = -.04$, $p < .001^{***}$
- Time per sitting $r(18250) = -.04$, $p < .001^{***}$

Discussion

- Our regression analyses demonstrated quite a bit of similarity and consistency predicting the four facets of ASMR.
 - The most consistent predictors were **empathy**, physical sensitivity, femininity, and vividness.
 - But, counter to prior research, vividness was associated with **lower** ASMR scores.
- We replicated the positive correlation between ASMR and **empathy**, likely reflecting ability to easily simulate emotions.
 - As we predicted, related measures such as sensitivity (physiological response to sensory input) and femininity (e.g., ability to relate to others) also predicted higher ASMR scores.
- People who reported **more social support** scored higher on the ASMR-15 but consumed less ASMR.
 - Perhaps people who have social support tend to be more empathetic and relatable: thus simultaneously more likely to experience ASMR but less likely to need simulations.

Take home message

People who are emotionally intelligent might be more likely to experience ASMR

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