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ASMR Erotica

What Is It and Should I Be Concerned?

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Autonomous Sensory Meridian Response (“ASMR”) is a sensory phenomenon that occurs in response to low-volume audio stimuli, comprising a tingling sensation in the scalp, and sometimes including the neck or the back along

the spine, along with a trancelike state of deep relaxation. ASMR can be composed of gentle whispers, crinkling paper, tapping fingers, or buzzing sounds that are intended to elicit a pleasurable or relaxing response (dictionary.com). Benefits of ASMR can be relaxation, relief of stress and anxiety, better sleep, positive mood, increased focus, and pain relief.

As with many things on the Internet, there are ASMR audio files and videos designed to elicit erotic and sexual sensations, also known as ASMR erotica. According to a January 2020 article from WIRED entitled “The Strange, Subtle Matter of ASMR Erotica”, “ASMR erotica is a gendered space, and much of the explicit ASMR content is posted by white women who fit into roles: the sexy girlfriend, the mistress, the badly behaving nurse, the hot teacher.” This content is not only readily available on pornographic sites like PornHub and XVideos, but also on mainstream sites like YouTube. ASMR erotica videos include simulated masturbation and other sexual acts, and often the individuals featured are scantily clad in lingerie, etc.

The use of ASMR erotica for sexual purposes can be very risky for the sex offender, based upon the individual circumstances of each case. In addition, this activity presents challenges to the probation/parole officers, clinicians, polygraph examiners and technology professionals responsible for applying the unique supervision strategies these cases demand.

While ASMR erotica is specifically created to arouse, provide a “braingasm” or enhance fantasies, other audio files not specifically designed or marketed as ASMR could also be used for such purposes. In one example, a sex offender under community supervision was found, via data collected by computer & Internet monitoring technologies, to be repeatedly searching for and downloading audio files of crying babies. Around the same timeframe, the sex offender was also searching the web for content on how to make a homemade sex toy. Upon detection of this information, the sex offender was interviewed by the supervising officer and ultimately admitted to using the audio files and toy for masturbation. This raised a number of treatment-related issues as the sex offender had not reported any inappropriate thoughts or fantasies.

Polygraph exams have been used as a therapeutic tool in the treatment of sex offenders since the late 1960's, and gained popularity in the decades that followed with the introduction of the Containment Approach. The primary function of these tests, referred to as PCSOT (Post-Conviction Sex Offender Test) exams, is to verify self-reported activities presented by the examinee to his/her therapist and supervising officer. In turn, the supervision and therapeutic process is tailored to the individual needs of each case. These self-reported activities include sexual contact, masturbation patterns, contact with minors, use of erotic material and computer/Internet use. The polygraph process begins with the examinee's completion and review of a test questionnaire in

the weeks leading up to the exam. This provides an opportunity to report all of the aforementioned activities. Exam issues are reviewed with the examinee prior to administering the polygraph. Many of these issues will include use of the Internet for sexual gratification, or use of specific material for sexual stimulation. Predominantly, this material has been defined as visual, but not auditory. During polygraph preparation and the polygraph exam, the examinee should be questioned about the specific use of audio files for sexual stimulation.

Clinicians in the field believe use of computers and the Internet to view or listen to material for sexual gratification could present issues, especially if the original offense involved the use of an Internet-capable device. However, some therapists feel appropriate sexual stimulation can be achieved using audio files, depending on case risk factors. It is imperative for a treatment professional to be aware of any material, including ASMR content and other audio files, used for sexual stimulation. This helps create a balance in the development of healthy relationships and self-sexual gratification. With the growing popularity of ASMR, it is critical for the community supervision team to remain cognizant of the use of auditory means for sexual stimulation.

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