

A Careful Whisper: Neoliberalism, Roleplay ASMR Videos¹, and ‘Innocent Intimacy’

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Inception

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Abstract

This paper works to understand the rhetorical operations at work within the recent and growing phenomenon of roleplay ASMR videos on YouTube. Specifically, using generic criticism, it argues that roleplay ASMR constitutes a rhetorical genre that operates through an ordering principle of ‘innocent intimacy’, made possible by modern technology and facilitated by the isolating and disaggregating influences of neoliberalism. Roleplay ASMR presenters work rhetorically to invoke disarming, comforting, and calming feelings of intimacy that are reminiscent of an idealized childhood experience. Generic criticism is employed on a set of seven videos to substantiate this argument. This paper thereby

¹ A cautionary warning: if the reader wishes to look at any of the ASMR primary source material, they are advised to do so through a ‘in private’ or ‘incognito’ mode on their web browser, so as not to provide the YouTube suggestion algorithm with reason to believe they wish to see such videos recommended (in droves) to them for months to come.

concludes that the rhetorical action found in roleplay ASMR videos is novel insofar as it represents generic rhetoric supplanting organic dialogical intimacy, something that is only recently been made possible through online media such as YouTube.



ASMR (Autonomous Sensory Meridian Response) is truly a brainchild of the 21st century. Originally a pseudo-scientific term created in online chatrooms to describe a pleasant tingling sensation felt at the back of the head and neck in response to certain auditory stimuli, the term has since been taken up in psychological studies as scientists attempt to grapple with the phenomenon (Fredborg et al. 1). This same online community that identified ASMR has, since 2008, grown and developed on YouTube in the pursuit of creating material that stimulates the experience (Andersen 684; 688). ASMR content comes in various video forms: audio-focused recordings of sounds such as tapping, interacting with slime, eating visually brilliant food, reading or drawing, and so-called ‘binaural triggers’, wherein the ASMR performer uses two microphones to heighten sensations through directional sound. There are also ASMR videos that involve visual and auditory situational roleplay, which may mix together object manipulation sounds and emphasize directional sound through this roleplay (Gallagher 2). Roleplay ASMR videos like these generally involve an ASMR presenter acting things out, while whispering soothingly, a scene involving the viewer/listener that would require close physical proximity in real life. It is this latter category of videos, roleplay ASMR, that this paper examines. Roleplay ASMR has been studied in several capacities in existing literature. Some have considered its creation of “distant intimacy” through reliance on “heteronormative gender roles” in conjunction with emotional associations, as well as the importance of the YouTube forum in casting intimacy “as public and communal” (Andersen 685), while others have argued that in fact ASMR

confronts gender norms (Iossifidis, 2017). Scholars have also analyzed aspects of genre, focusing on its implications for online media (Gallagher, 2016), including the ways the internet has both enabled and shaped ASMR (Smith & Snider, 2019). However, what concerns this examination is how roleplay ASMR videos operate rhetorically.

Neoliberalism² is key to the existence of this genre, not least because individuals in a neoliberal circumstance are disciplined and socialized to pursue their own betterment, in competition with others, through the acquisition of privately-owned commodities. Neoliberalism is thereby instrumental to roleplay ASMR both through its facilitation of the technology, via economic policies, that makes it possible, and through its degradation of social bonds through its singular promotion of the individual that stimulates a demand for this genre. An audience of YouTube viewers thereby become a set of individual consumers of content.

And thus, this article asks: what are ASMR presenters doing rhetorically in roleplay ASMR videos, and given that these presenters are responding to a fixed rhetorical situation, does roleplay ASMR thereby constitute a rhetorical genre? That is, what do presenters use roleplay ASMR videos to accomplish vis-à-vis the consumers of their content and is there an identifiable pattern to these aims? In the following pages, specific examples and close readings of roleplay ASMR are analyzed to highlight the implications of these texts upon broader rhetorical theory. Using the model of generic criticism, this paper argues that roleplay ASMR constitutes

² Neoliberalism, beyond being an institutional framework proclaiming access to the good life through steadfast dedication to private property and individual rights through deregulation, manifests as a dominant discourse which celebrates the individual as abstracted and disconnected from society. To paraphrase Margaret Thatcher, neoliberalism admits to no such thing as society, for there are only individuals.

a genre that operates through an ordering principle of ‘innocent intimacy’, made possible by modern technology and neoliberalism, whereby ASMR presenters work rhetorically to invoke feelings of intimacy reminiscent of childhood that are disarming, comforting, and calming.

Methodology

Generic criticism takes a different path than most other forms of rhetorical criticism, as it “seeks to discover commonalities in rhetorical patterns across recurring situations” rather than study isolated rhetorical acts in an effort to understand how rhetoric operates (Foss 179). This form of rhetorical criticism is thus prefaced on the assumption that “certain types of situations provoke similar needs and expectations in audiences and thus call on particular kinds of rhetoric” (179). This paper conducts a generic description to identify these common elements among a set of artifacts that respond to the shared rhetorical situation, that is, as Lloyd Bitzer describes it, the exigence, audience, and constraints to which a rhetorical act responds (Lundberg & Keith 31). These common elements should not be purely coincidental, but rather “grounded in the rhetor’s perception of some aspect of [the rhetorical] situation” (Foss 188). Consequently, a genre can only be said to exist if “each element is fused to or intertwined with the other elements” such that its absence would alter the overarching form, or so-called “organizing principle” (188). In other words, a genre is more than the sum of its parts: it is an observable pattern of identifiable attributes in a group of rhetorical artifacts that emerges by virtue of all such artifacts having a common purpose within a common situation between the rhetor and the audience.

A rhetorical genre is therefore found at the confluence and fusion of three components: (1) situational requirements, which refers to the shared type of rhetorical situation rhetors of a genre are responding to, (2) the shared substantive and stylistic characteristics which

artifacts of a genre possess as a result of this response, and (3) an organizing principle, which is an “internal dynamic” or logical which connects these shared characteristics to the rhetorical situation (Foss 179). In this way, rhetorical genre operates as a “large-scale typification of rhetorical action,” in that genre is “interpretable by means of rules” which “occur at a relatively high level on a hierarchy of rules for symbolic interaction” (Miller, “Genre as Social Action” 163). Thus, the aim with generic criticism is to identify these higher-level rules that operate as “a rhetorical means for mediating private intentions and social exigence” (163). Rhetorical genre, in practice, thereby serves as a medium, a set of guidelines for rhetors in a given sort of rhetorical situation, providing the stylistic and substantive elements to their rhetoric via an organizing principle, whether they are conscious of it or not.

Identifying genre thus allows the rhetorical critic to understand rhetorical practices within a given context, while nevertheless understanding that genres are themselves inherently dynamic over time just as social contexts are (Miller 163). This point is particularly salient for this article, insofar as the context of YouTube and the internet more broadly are concerned, since roleplay ASMR emerged through these recent technological developments that grant a novel and easily-accessible means of rhetorical action for both rhetors and audience, carrying implications for the development of a genre. A genre, itself a medium, is dynamic not only in terms of its substantive and stylistic characteristics, but also in terms of the medium of communication it uses. Still, these changes in technological mediation are “not determining” by themselves, but rather operate in conjunction with “exigence and cultural context” (Miller, “Revisited” 64). Consequently, in considering genre with respect to roleplay ASMR videos, it is necessary not only to consider how a common rhetorical situation begets common characteristics through an organizing principle, but also how the medium of YouTube interacts with these components.

Roleplay ASMR on YouTube

YouTube has become the core home for ASMR videos (Anderson 688). While its earlier audio-focused (i.e. *non*-roleplay) antecedents were singular in their pursuit of triggering the “physically tingling sensation” of ASMR, often described as a sort of “relaxed euphoria,” through identifying diverse “triggers” experienced by different consumers of ASMR via “small and otherwise mundane noises,” the ASMR presenter community has since diversified substantially to appeal to other senses as well (Smith & Snider 41). At a base, “ASMR calls attention to the noises produced by everyday objects and creates the capacity for an affective response in the viewer” (45). But as the community has developed, it has expanded into the realm of ‘whisper roleplay’, which serves as a means of “framing and exaggerating the unnoticed sounds that often accompany everyday, micro-social interaction[s],” arguably not to be “convincing,” but rather “to serve as a vehicle for aural triggers” (45). Here, ASMR presenters use both visual and auditory elements to “perform ritualised and stylised interactions as doctors, flight attendants, beauty therapists, librarians or receptionists,” focusing “on personal attention with a stylised overemphasis on the other sounds that accompany these interactions” (42). In short, roleplay ASMR has emerged ‘organically’ through a form of ‘trial and error’ on YouTube, whereby proven ASMR-generating sounds have come to be incorporated into carefully crafted visualized roleplay scenarios that facilitate a rhetorical emphasis on these ASMR triggers in conjunction with a focus on private interactions.

And yet, roleplay ASMR presenters still largely describe their work in terms of achieving these ‘tingles’. The presenter Gentle Whispering ASMR (1.84 million subscribers), as one of the ‘old guard’ of roleplay ASMR often referred to in older literature, simply describes ASMR as a euphoric sensation, “a pleasant tingling feeling that you experience when you hear unique soft voices or hear certain soothing sounds such as tapping, or both,” which is sought

in the ASMR community by finding the right trigger(s) for you (“What is ASMR?” 2014). Presenter Gibi ASMR (2.53 million subscribers), who does ‘tingles’, roleplay, and cosplay videos, in her description of ASMR calls it “an extremely positive genre aimed to aid others” (“What the H*ck is ASMR!?”). She contends that while ASMR videos are aimed to “intentionally help trigger that ASMR sensation in people” and “a big part of the ASMR community is figuring out which triggers work for you,” ASMR videos can be used for a diverse set of purposes beyond seeking ASMR sensations, including “sleep aid, daily relaxation, study aid/alternative to music, calming down from anxiety, helping with depression or loneliness, or simply entertainment.” And finally, presenter ASMR Darling (2.47 million subscribers), the final member of the ‘big three’ roleplay ASMR YouTube channels, describes “the main point of ASMR” as being “to trigger those tingles,” even if people watch for a variety of reasons, as fundamentally “it’s all meant for relaxation” (“What is ASMR?” 2017).

This notable fixation on relaxation, comfort, and euphoria has certainly garnered the ASMR community significant exposure in recent years.³ On the one hand, it has in some respects gone mainstream: major companies such as IKEA⁴, Lindt⁵, and Apple⁶ have all unveiled ASMR-style commercials, *W Magazine* has an

³ There is not much scholarly data on the demographics of the consumers of ASMR, and what information may be found through other sources is either out of date or sold as marketing data. Nevertheless, the ASMR audience seems to include both men and women, and is more popular among younger adults.

⁴ “Oddly IKEA”: *IKEA ASMR*, 8 Aug 2017, 2.8 million views, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=uLFaj3Z_tWw

⁵ *Lindt Excellence ASMR*, 23 Jan 2020, 600 thousand views, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1grFIM55qO0>

⁶ *Apple ASMR – Satisfying woodshop sounds*, 7 Aug 2019, 700 thousand views, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=t0hk9CHR1d0>

impressive set of videos of ‘Celebrity ASMR’⁷ on YouTube, and as a cursory search on YouTube unveils, there are thousands of ASMR videos of all sorts, each with hundreds of thousands to millions of views. Yet despite what is arguably a normalization, mainstreaming, and ubiquity of ASMR today, roleplay ASMR videos in particular have garnered attention for another reason still: alleged sexual undertones.

Roleplay ASMR presenters and community members are often at pains to express how ASMR is not inherently sexual or erotic (Anderson 692; Gallagher 2; Smith & Snider 46). Presenter ASMR Darling, herself, emphasizes precisely this point in her introductory video, stressing that “ASMR itself is not sexual; it is biological not sexual” (“What is ASMR?” 2017). Nevertheless, there exist quasi-sub-genres of roleplay ASMR that are explicitly sexual to varying degrees, from ‘girlfriend roleplay’ ASMR to explicitly erotic or pornographic ASMR. Indeed, Pornhub Insights⁸ reports a 1085% increase in the use of ‘ASMR’ as a search term between August 2014 and January 2016. Their “2019 Year in Review” furthermore names ASMR as one of the “searches that defined 2019,” noting that searches for it in the USA grew by 763%. Something about the “emotional connotations of intimacy” involved in roleplay ASMR therefore make for contentious grounds, since it “makes public a kind of intimacy that, in heteronormative culture, is exclusively the private experience of the couple” (Anderson 692). Yet, given that roleplay ASMR maintains a strong presence on YouTube, having not migrated over to porn sites, with both its creators and consumers distinguishing it from sexual pursuits, it seems that there is something distinctive going on in roleplay ASMR videos. That is,

⁷ ‘Celebrity ASMR’,

https://www.youtube.com/playlist?list=PLeV2Z0bkqSgs-Xhmf2hXv__3XoqR2SAIq

⁸ Pornhub Insights is a NSFW content-free part of Pornhub.com that reports statistical data about the activity of Pornhub.com users on the site.

insofar as popular elements of western culture conflate personal and emotional intimacy with sexuality and eroticism, they blind observers as to what roleplay ASMR presenters, and arguably their audiences, experience through these videos.

Still, this suggests an important point for this rhetorical analysis: despite the attestations to the contrary by roleplay ASMR presenters, there are more than just auditory triggers involved in ASMR. As Anderson observes, “ASMR may seem to be pure affect, directed by the distant vocal impression of a body, but its meanings of relaxation are clearly colored by emotional content, where memories of intimacy, care, and attention are linked to the whisper itself” (697). This is built on the premise that “by seeking out these videos in a quest for pleasure” the consumers of ASMR videos “predispose themselves” to the desired responses (686). As ASMR Darling explains:

“You have to really... get into the role play. When I watch ASMR videos, it’s like I’m in another reality, I’m in another dimension, like I’m not even a part of this world I’m living in. There’s nothing to worry about, no problems, no anything. No stress, no worries; I’m just in that moment that I’m in. And that’s why there are so many ASMR roleplays, because I feel like that is the most personal you can get” (“What is ASMR?” 2017).

There is thus an established rhetorical situation that exists in roleplay ASMR, where the audience comes expectantly to the videos, neither for realism nor for mere auditory stimulation, but for a particular emotional element rooted in human connection, personal attention, or intimacy.

This intimacy is, however, distinctly mediated through technology, thus Anderson’s label of “distant intimacy” (685). This current technological and cultural context enables this intimacy by providing the unique medium of YouTube for easily accessible content that is organically created by diverse presenters for a community that can

provide feedback *en masse* through online forums. Since YouTube is primarily a video-based platform, it is no doubt encouraging roleplay ASMR to go beyond mere audio elements and utilize visual elements as well. Further still, this context also makes roleplay ASMR possible by invoking a need for intimacy. The emotional content that roleplay ASMR videos provide seems to speak to the current neoliberal reality, where society is increasingly disassembled into isolated individuals. The destruction of society and the reconstitution of citizens into consumers of government seems to have made audiences into consumers of content more than social creatures, who are connected ever more through commercialized technological mediums rather than direct personal interaction. While community and social capital diminish, the desire for human connection remains. Thus, the elements of relaxation and personal intimacy, audience expectations within a 21st century neoliberal context, as well as both audio and visual elements, must be considered when analyzing roleplay ASMR as a genre.

As for the artifacts to be used for this rhetorical genre description⁹, there are seven in total, all of which feature female presenters. Roleplay ASMR is women-dominated, especially by younger, physically attractive, and often white, women. This may be influenced by the video-centric nature of YouTube and likely adds to the association of roleplay ASMR with sexual themes. While male roleplay ASMR presenters do exist, their videos do not achieve nearly the same view-count as female presenters. Since the seven videos selected for this analysis were chosen based on having among the highest view counts among roleplay ASMR videos, their exclusion was inevitable. It is possible that there exists a sub-genre of male roleplay ASMR, but the videos selected for this analysis are arguably the best representatives of overall roleplay ASMR given their 'rhetorical success' demonstrated through their view counts.

⁹ Please see the Appendix for a full list of the seven roleplay ASMR videos used.

Each video is from a different presenter to ensure diversity of content. They range in length from 30 to 60 minutes. Only ASMR videos which are explicitly marked as roleplay were selected. These particular videos feature roleplay involving a haircut, clinics, a lice check at a school nurse's office, a sci-fi themed robot repair, a spa treatment, and a head massage. They range in view counts from 19.6, 10, and 9.7 million on the high end, to 6.3, 5.5, and 5 million on the low end. Each of the presenters examined has made hundreds of ASMR videos, which regularly garner hundreds of thousands to millions of views.

Findings from Analysis

As outlined in the methodology section, a rhetorical genre can be established where there can be said to exist (1) a common rhetorical situation that artifacts of the genre respond to through (2) shared substantive and stylistic characteristics that (3) relate to the situation through a fixed and determinative organizing principle (Foss 179). The previous section outlined key elements of the rhetorical situation that ASMR presenters respond to. These include the expectations of emotional connection and intimacy on behalf of roleplay ASMR consumers, social norms governing relational intimacy and relaxation including their connection to relationships and sexuality, as well as a neoliberal context which provokes a desire for personal intimacy through online media, that it also provides, such as YouTube. The following section will outline the observed common substantive and stylistic characteristics of roleplay ASMR, followed by a defense of 'innocent intimacy' as the governing ordering principle.

Each of the roleplay ASMR presenters examined has their own idiosyncrasies, such as finger tapping, finger swiping, hand gestures, peculiar word choice and emphasis, etc., which seem to constitute their personal approaches to stimulating ASMR for the consumer. Still, there are common elements in this set of roleplay

ASMR videos, the most obvious of which are stylistic: the whispering, the framing of the video shoots, the continuous eye contact, the stereophonic sound, the smiling and pleasant tone, the use of a gentle yet authoritative voice, and the presence of a role that the consumer of the video is meant to respond to. ASMR videos, regardless of form, never involve speech louder than a whisper, though this element is particularly important for roleplay ASMR videos, as it facilitates a feeling of proximity to the presenter. The camera shot framing plays a similar role: the presenter's face is abnormally close to the camera for much of the video, making them appear quite close to the viewer. By frequently looking directly into the close-up camera and whispering, the presenter conveys a feeling of closeness, and therefore an intimacy, with the consumer. This all operates in conjunction with the use of stereophonic sound, which allows voice directionality as if the presenter were whispering in one of the consumer's ears, adding even more to the feeling of closeness. A smiling and pleasant tone remains throughout the video, which helps to establish this intimacy as relaxing and soothing, rather than intense. Indeed, every video begins with some variation of a kind greeting with a smile. Finally, these ASMR presenters maintain an authoritative, but never commanding or unkind, tone of voice. This is especially the case as they ask the consumer (effectively rhetorical) questions or narrate details about what they are doing or using. Nevertheless, all of these stylistic elements are brought together by a presenter who takes on an explicitly defined role that the genre consumer is meant to respond to accordingly.

This last point fuses with the more substantive common elements of roleplay ASMR videos: a narrative focus on the consumer's face, an emphasis on the presenter's hands and their touching of the consumer in the roleplay, the trivialization of conflict, and rich description by the presenter. The roleplay serves as a vehicle for these ASMR triggering elements, providing the elements with an embodied context. The narrative focus on the consumer's face in the

roleplay facilitates many of the stylistic elements above that create a sense of closeness and intimacy, while also focusing on subject matter, governed by the chosen role, that will feel personal and intimate to the consumer. The roles notably always require physical touch between the role-player and the consumer. Emphasis on hands and touching thereby furthers this sense of intimacy, as hands kindly touching another person, especially their face, always implies a feeling of closeness and trustful exposure to another. The trivialization of conflict manifests through either its effective absence from the video, or its constant minimization by the presenter, who will assure the consumer that ‘it’s nothing to worry about’ and can easily be rectified. This adds a relaxing and comforting tone to the intimate interaction unfolding. This also implies that roles are carefully chosen to be ones which do not present threats or challenges, but rather provide narrative grounds for offering comfort to the ASMR consumer. Finally, the rich description by roleplay ASMR presenters plays a key role. It works in tandem with the authoritative but gentle voice they employ to articulate a unique calming environment that sets the consumer at ease. The presenters rattle off details about what they are doing, what they are using to do it, and why they are doing it, in a slow whisper that nevertheless conveys they are invested in what they are saying. This combines with the other elements to provide a distinctive experience for the roleplay ASMR consumer: an intimate, calm, and problem-free environment, grounded in a relationship between the presenter and the consumer governed by a carefully selected role, which encourages the relinquishing of defenses to trust the presenter.

These elements coalesce to form a singular core idea, which constitutes the ordering principle of this roleplaying ASMR genre: an ‘innocent intimacy’ reminiscent of childhood. While intimacy is, as previously discussed, generally considered part of the realm of the romantic relationship, these roleplay ASMR videos are decisively not recreating that sort of intimacy. Romantic or sexual undertones

are misapplied in these YouTube iterations.¹⁰ The situations chosen for roleplay are those of casual intimacy; a level of exposure to others that is “clearly linked to the emotional associations created through the experience of public intimacy,” the kind found when speaking with a medical professional, having one’s hair cut, or answering personal questions (Andersen 685). But further still, this intimacy bears a likeness to that intimacy which exists between a parent and a child.

Yet, it is not that the intimacy of the scenarios roleplay ASMR portrays is meant to parallel parent-child intimacy, but rather that through its carefully selected embellishments and exaggerations in the roleplay, it strives to convey something reminiscent of child-parent intimacy. That is, that roleplay ASMR brings out the notes of childhood ‘innocent intimacy’ found in public intimacy through unrealistic ‘recreations’ of these interactions. The roleplay ASMR consumer is given unnecessary detail in a calming whisper, with an affectionate tone that minimizes worries, all while in implied close personal proximity and contact. Questions may be asked of the consumer, to which kind and affirmative answers will be given. All efforts are made to imply a peaceful closeness, not for sexual excitement, but for personal attention, for a sensation of ‘innocent intimacy’. Such an interaction parallels a mother interacting with their child: holding them close, whispering lovingly in their ear, soothing their worries, and patiently explaining in a gentle, authoritative voice.

¹⁰ It is worth observing, however, that YouTube’s Terms of Service, as well as ASMR presenter concerns about attracting advertiser revenue, *may* help to discipline the genre on YouTube, discouraging overtly sexual elements from appearing in mainstream roleplay ASMR videos. This does not change the analysis here, but it does suggest another way in which YouTube (technology) interacts with the cultural context in forming the rhetorical situation.

This may well be the true cause of the popularity of female roleplay ASMR presenters. But this could be considered problematic insofar as it reinforces conservative notions of women as caring and motherly. Certainly, given the popularity of younger, physically attractive, white female roleplay ASMR presenters, this article's conclusions may suggest that consumers of this genre connect trust, intimacy, and innocence with a certain sort of female body. The connection between an idealized conservative vision of motherhood and roleplay ASMR seem quite strong. But again, these videos do not seek to recreate a parent/child dynamic, and they certainly avoid any outright infantilization. Rather they recreate an air of this sort of bond, the kind of innocent intimacy that only a child may have, prior to the sexualized undertones that adulthood seems to write into intimacy. In this way, roleplay ASMR could also be considered a progressive challenge to the predominant understanding of adult intimacy and human connection as inherently sexual. That is, insofar as the conventions of roleplay ASMR facilitate an 'innocent intimacy' between its presenter and consumer, it serves as a counterpoint to the vision of 'intimacy' projected through pornography, with its problematic objectifications and power dynamics. Indeed, it may be that it is this connection to childhood 'innocent intimacy' in roleplay ASMR that helps to stimulate 'tingles' in the consumers of the genre.

Conclusions

Consequently, in terms of the rhetorical action within roleplay ASMR videos, it can be argued that genre rules are in operation, shaping their form in style and substance. Responding to the desire for relaxation, comfort, and personal connection among their consumers, which is rooted in social and neoliberal realities, roleplay ASMR videos use various approaches to create an experience of 'innocent intimacy' within their audience, invoking a calmness, closeness, and sense of trustful exposure that, together, invoke the feelings of an idealized childhood experience. This exchange is made possible by YouTube, where users may search out and

consume content which appeals to their taste on an individualized basis, while also participating in a wider community. In this way, one can experience personal intimacy through rhetorical content that is designed for public consumption according to genre rules. This brings to light not only the possibility of rhetorical genres in personal communication in various forms of relationships, but also how personal intimacy can come to be found in mass-consumed rhetorical action. The disaggregating and individualizing powers of neoliberalism, combined with the tools of modern technology, thus facilitate the reconstituting of personal intimacy through designed rhetoric by breaking apart old communal bonds and replacing them with genre-shaped content designed to persuade roleplay ASMR consumers of an intimate connection, which is then personalized by the individual who 'gets into the roleplay'. Studies of rhetorical genre must then consider how these forces of neoliberalism and technology not only change existing genres, but also expand rhetorical genre into realms hitherto thought of as personal and idiosyncratic.

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Appendix: List of Roleplay ASMR Videos Examined

- Video 1: “✂ Sleep-inducing Haircut 🧑 ASMR | Shampoo | Page Flipping | Scissors.” YouTube, uploaded by Gentle Whispering ASMR, 9 April 2018. www.youtube.com/watch?v=gf_MqDBBMPI.
- Video 2: “[ASMR] Sleep Clinic Roleplay - Trigger Test (Whispered).” YouTube, uploaded by Gibi ASMR, 22 July 2017. www.youtube.com/watch?v=19nvOC1Cu_c.
- Video 3: “ASMR Drawing Features On Your Face - The Face Clinic Roleplay.” YouTube, uploaded by ASMR Darling, 15 August 2017. www.youtube.com/watch?v=G2O1UFiKHZI.
- Video 4: “School Nurse Lice Check 💖 ASMR.” YouTube, uploaded by Latte ASMR, 1 September 2019. www.youtube.com/watch?v=b2MS4lyITk8.
- Video 5: “ASMR Fixing You Whispered Roleplay (Gloves sounds, Face Brushing, Scratching sounds and +).” YouTube, uploaded by ASMR Glow, 18 November 2016. www.youtube.com/watch?v=mm6-oVEsvi4.
- Video 6: “An Esthetician Visit - Binaural Role Play - ASMR - Face Massage, Water Sounds, Soft Speaking.” YouTube, uploaded by ASMRrequests, 5 July 2014. www.youtube.com/watch?v=LMS-VIbc_48.
- Video 7: “ASMR Ultimate Head and Scalp Massage Role Play: Realistic Binaural Sounds For Relaxation.” YouTube, uploaded by Heather Feather ASMR, 3 May 2015. www.youtube.com/watch?v=mWnpMTCtNSc.

