

The Lurker and group dynamics

July 5th, 2006

What is a lurker like?

That person who joins an internet discussion group and then says nothing.

That person who sits on the sidelines and just listens to others talk.

How do you find out about this strange organism? What is the psychology of the lurker? You can't really know, because to find out they would have to say something. It would be like taking a role call in a classroom and asking all those who are not there to put up their hands.

However, I do belong to the International Transactional Analysis Association discussion forum and that has many lurkers on it. I once posted all their names on the forum and this brought some responses from them to me. I have listed them below and this gives a sneak preview into the psyche of this odd person.

LURKER ONE

"I am not going to give you my psychological profile for lurking (very big grin). I am quite a happy lurker and you know what you can do with your psychological profile"

LURKER TWO

I have to come clean and admit to being one of the 'Lurkers' in the ITAA group. LOL I am studying TA with ***** and I have completed 5 modules so far. I don't think I am quite up to the stage of adding my two cents worth yet but you never know in the future - I may become an ex-Lurker!! I have learnt a lot from some of the posts - a couple of yours have been especially informative, so I hope I can continue to be a 'Lurker' for the time being.

LURKER THREE

Admirable research. I am one, I admit it-but not even a very active one. Weeks go by and I don't read the list. It just isn't a priority. Yet, I do like to know what is happening every once in a while, so I will occasionally read a bunch of posts at one sitting. I do appreciate your contributions.

LURKER FOUR

The purpose of outing those of us who lurk would be?? I am in that group because I am deep in the throes of the all-consuming black hole of doctoral internship and am feverishly rewriting my comprehensive assessment (defending my TA orientation to a CBT zealot -yikes!) and working on dissertation while juggling the duties of *****. My parents are also aging

and ill and regularly need my help in driving to doctors' appointments, etc. Many days the experience is not unlike trying to balance spinning china plates from sticks perched atop my forehead while juggling chainsaws & flaming rabid porcupines and attempting to ride a unicycle without a seat down a poorly maintained country road. All this so I can add 3 extra letters to my signature, haha. I can do it though, because somebody once told me that the task was not possible. Not for me, anyway. My *Rebellious Child* (the same one who helped me get in so much trouble in first grade by pointing out to the teacher that Columbus in fact did NOT discover America if there were already people here) responded with a hearty "Oh yeah? Just watch me!" I've now been in doctoral study a little over four years and now have only six months remaining on my internship and wrapping up my dissertation and I'll be Ph.inisheD. I do plan to participate more in this group when the dust settles a bit. Not that it has anything to do with anything but I took my TA training from Gene Kerfoot and John Gladfelter, who took their training from the Gouldings on Mount Madonna wayyy back in the day. Follow the yellow brick road...haha. Have a wonderful week!

LURKER FIVE

I did not sign on for a personality analysis when I signed on to the Forum. Is this treatment without a contract? What's the point anyway? Who cares if there are Lurkers and participants? Are we attempting to solve a problem? Regards, *****

LURKER SIX

My name is ***** and I am one of the "lurkers" out there. The reason for not posting is that I am not familiar with this ITAA-forum, but i like what you write about TA and i am interested in finding out more about it. Satisfied?

LURKER SEVEN

Sometimes I lurk in hope of learning something from the masters of TA that I did not know before. And there are times I am not sure that I know enough to jump in-a little AC there.

The Group Lurker

July 6th, 2006

I have made a previous posting about lurkers. Those people who join a group and then say nothing. It can be an internet discussion group or a therapy group. In my previous Blog posting about lurkers, my comments related to the

lurkers on the International Transactional Analysis Association discussion forum.

Since that time I have been fortunate enough to be able to conduct some ad hoc research on this strange beast - the lurker - because some have been willing to come forward and tell me about them selves, of course never in public. Only with the anonymity of email.

Over the past three weeks I have been running a therapy group and there are two people in that group who would normally be considered lurkers. These people said very little and it is highly likely that if left they would have said very little over the whole group. But with my new knowledge of lurkers I have engaged them more than I would have before.

My early training in Redecision Therapy, with the Gouldings at the Western Institute for Group and Family Therapy the approach was very much - let people be and if they want something they will speak up. So with that approach lurkers are left to lurk in peace. They are not engaged.

But in my current therapy group I have initiated contact with the two lurkers and it has been quite successful. Initially it was very rudimentary contact with a mere "How are you going?" question from me, and a response of "I'm fine thanks". Perhaps it is because I have made them the 'special' client in the group. I have not asked anyone else that - so why them? No one has asked that question - yet!

However I have been surprised at how the two lurkers have engaged myself as group leader, and the group. They have been much more outspoken than I expected. The prior theory was that I have imposed myself on them and then I would never see them again after week one. They would just not return. This has not been the case, the opposite has happened and they have worked a number of times on their own issues and have become part of the group and thus made the group dynamics a more positive thing.

However I need to be cautious as this is only a sample size of two people, but I am glad that I have sought a new path of engagement with this elusive creature - the lurker - and I will continue my ad hoc research as I run more groups.

The anonymous blogger

July 6th, 2006

So why does one Lurk.

Anonymity?

Maybe not.

Yes anonymity would be part of the equation. But I think there is more and it is a thing called catharsis. The need to get what is inside us, out of us. We have a need to tell other people what we have done and what we think and feel. Once one does that then most people feel more at ease with themselves. Don't ask me why it just seems to be the way it is.

This is a key to many a police investigation. In fact there are good deal of similarities between the police interview of a suspect and the counselor interview with a client. Don't try and beat it out of the person, instead provide a sympathetic environment for the person and with a bit of time they will tell you anyway. People know when they have done something "wrong", either in the eyes of the law or in their own eyes. Then they will feel troubled. One solution to that is to tell others about it and then most people feel less troubled.

The catholic church also discovered this many years ago and they devised a system that is now know as the confessional. Really one of the first talking psychotherapies. People could say out to another individual (anonymously) what was troubling them and people felt relief afterwards.

Well perhaps blogs are the same thing. It is a way of telling 'others' what we are thinking and feeling and what is troubling us. Once we have done that we feel some sense of relief. Teenagers have used diarys for the same reason for many years. Perhaps bloggers are really just a bunch of teenagers trying to get their act together?