

H A R L A N   R I C H A R D S

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Lurkers or True Seekers?

I was talking to my cousin on the phone the other day and we were discussing her web surfing habits. She is what has been referred to as a "lurker", i.e., she visits lots of sites but never posts comments or leaves messages.

I think "lurker" is a misnomer. A better name would be "true seeker." People have no duty to speak out on forums they visit and if they choose to read and not respond that does not make them any less worthy than a person who speaks out at every opportunity.

There are countless readers of books but a limited number of authors, just as there are many people who will attend a scheduled speech but very few willing to get up and speak before the audience. It is a common trait of many people that they do not want to be in the spot light - either on stage or on the internet. I applaud those who are willing to take the time and expend the effort to seek out the truth wherever it may be found. I think a better term for this is true seeker as it more accurately describes what they are doing. Lurker has a negative connotation, no doubt coined by an active blogger/poster.

It's funny, because in face-to-face interactions, it is the good listener who wins the respect of others while the motor-mouth is barely tolerated. It is reversed online where the talker (writer) has the clout and the listener (reader) is denigrated.

Of course my opinion is based on second-hand information, having never been online or had direct contact with the web. Maybe I'd view it differently if I was directly accessing chat rooms and blogs.

Also, I get occasional comments on my blog and when I do, I'm ecstatic. So I guess I can see why people who post content regularly would prefer that true seekers give them feedback or start a dialogue. And I have been blessed in that no one has flamed me. For that, I am thankful as my feelings can get hurt just as easily as anyone else.