
Contemporary Media Forum

Internet Mailing Lists

John R. Suler^{1,2}

This forum will discuss contemporary media useful for researchers, clinicians, and teachers who are interested in applied psychoanalysis. It will cover newly released audiovisual materials, software, and especially resources on the Internet. If you have a suggestion for the forum, contact me at the Department of Psychology, Rider University, Lawrenceville, NJ 08648. Or send e-mail to suler@voicenet.com

In this issue, I would like to discuss e-mail groups, sometimes called "mailing lists" or "listservs." These lists—which work through the Internet e-mail system—provide a forum for a group of people to share information and discuss topics of mutual interest. Currently, there are thousands of mailing lists covering a wide range of interests. Communication among the members of the lists is controlled by a server software program located on a computer on the Internet. Some of the well-known servers are Listserv, Majordomo, and Listproc.

When you subscribe to a list, your name and e-mail address is automatically added to the list of participants. The server will then send you a standard e-mail message that confirms your subscription and provides basic information about the list. From that time on, the server will automatically send you all e-mail (called "postings" or "posts") sent to the list by its members. Usually there are several different discussions ("threads") occurring simultaneously on the list, which is indicated by the different titles in the subject lines of the e-mail messages. You may simply read the discussions without participating ("lurking"). If you decide to participate, you send an e-mail to the list server—either by clicking on "reply" in response to a message that interests you or by sending a message that

¹Department of Psychology, Rider University.

²Correspondence should be directed to John R. Suler, Ph.D., Rider University, Department of Psychology, 2083 Lawrenceville Rd., Lawrenceville, NJ 08648.

introduces a new discussion topic. When the server receives your message, it automatically distributes your message to everyone on the list. You also have the option of sending a private e-mail to anyone on the list. But be careful! Don't make the mistake of sending off an e-mail that you intend as a private message to one person, when you actually sent it to the entire list! It can be an easy mistake to make...and potentially very embarrassing.

By sending specifically formatted messages to the server, you also can receive a listing of all the participants and their e-mail addresses. Some lists have a web archive where you can review past messages posted to the list. Some archives can be searched using keywords. At any time, you can unsubscribe from a list.

Information about the mailing lists that are currently available, as well as how to join and use them, can be found on various web site directories, including:

Catalist—<http://www. lsoft.com/lists/listref.html>

Internet Mailing Lists—<http://www.nlc-bnc.ca/ifla/I/training/listserv/lists.htm>

The List of Lists—<http://catalog. com/vivian!interest-group-search.html>

Liszt— <http://www.liszt.com/>

Some of these directories have search engines enabling you to search the database for keywords that reflect the type of list you are interested in joining. If you are interested in lists pertaining to psychoanalysis, you might enter the keyword "psychoanalysis" or "psychoanalytic." After doing so at Catalist, The List of Lists, and Liszt, I found the following e-mail discussion groups:

Psychoanalysis (wide-ranging discussions of psychoanalytic topics)

Psychoanalysis and Education

Psychohistory

Cyber-Mind (subjectivity and phenomenology in cyberspace)

Human Relations, Authority and Justice (applying psychoanalytic theory to group, institutional, cultural, and political processes)

Psychoanalysis and the Public Sphere (sponsored by the Department of Applied

Psycho-Social Studies, University of East London)

Psychoanalytic Studies (scholarly discussion of all aspects of psychoanalysis)

Psychomedia

PsyArt (psychoanalytic discussions of art and literature)

Child-Psychoanalysis (NEIPS discussion list)

Freud-L (Bilingual group for Freud-Lacanian psychoanalysis)

Child-Psychoanalysis (NEIPS discussion list)

Lacan-list

In addition to providing a place to share information and ideas, mailing lists offer a unique opportunity to develop collegial relationships and friendships with people from around the world. They also are a fascinating phenomenon to study. As in investigating in-person groups, psychoanalytic principles can be applied to understanding the dynamics of an e-mail list, including such topics as developmental stages, interaction patterns, group

identity and boundaries, and the intriguing effects of transference and countertransference reactions when people communicate only with typed text. In some ways, e-mail groups are very much like in-person groups, and in some ways very different. Some e-mail lists—such as Psyber-L (see the archives at <http://home.ease.lsoft.com/archives/psyber-l.html>)—serve as an experiential, self-analytic group where the list members explore their own group process. Self-help and support groups devoted to various health related issues also are being conducted through e-mail lists (see Mental Health Net for information, <http://www.cmhc.com/>).

Creating your own e-mail group is relatively easy. Some system administrators on the Internet allow you to apply to use their servers to set up a list, often for free. See Catalist, Liszt, and The List of Lists for information about this process. Using such programs as Eudora and Claris E-mailer, it is also possible to set up a mailing list that you run from your own computer. Essentially, you configure your e-mail program to work like a server. This works fine for a relatively small list of a dozen or so members, but it requires you to do all the work that a server like Listserv or Majordomo would do automatically. For larger lists, where there is a high traffic of mail, you're better off using a server on the Internet.