

Social Networks and Online Anonymity for AA

Below are several excerpts concerning anonymity from two sources: AA pamphlet "Understanding Anonymity" P47 and the AA Guideline: 1) Internet; and 2) MG-18:

1. AA Pamphlet: Understanding Anonymity, P-47

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"Anonymity is the spiritual foundation....." page 5

- *At the personal level, anonymity provides protection for all members from identification as alcoholics, a safeguard often of special importance to newcomers.*
- *At the level of press, radio, TV, films and new media technologies such as the Internet, anonymity stresses the equality in the Fellowship of all members by putting the brake on those who might otherwise exploit their A.A. affiliation to achieve recognition, power, or personal gain. Anonymity on a person-to-person basis.*

"Anonymity at the media level" page 6

- *The arrival of new media technologies such as the Internet has offered new vehicles to carry the A.A. message to the public. A.A. members continue to preserve their anonymity in these new public media.*

"Some questions and answers about anonymity" page 7

Q. I maintain an Internet Website and also belong to an online meeting. At what level should I protect my anonymity on the internet?

A. Publicly accessible aspects of the Internet such as Web sites featuring text, graphics, audio and video ought to be considered another form of "public media." Thus, they need to be treated in the same manner as press, radio, TV and films. This means that full names and faces should not be used. However, the level of anonymity in e-mail, online meetings and chat rooms would be a personal decision.

From the Spring Edition of Box459 Anonymity and the International Convention

The Internet: In keeping with the long form of A.A.'s Eleventh Tradition, which says "Our names and pictures as A.A. members ought not be broadcast, filmed, or publicly printed,"

posting recognizable photos of identifiable A.A. members on Web sites accessible to the public, including unrestricted pages on social networking sites, is something to be avoided. Whatever the medium, when it comes to personal anonymity, no disclosure of a member's affiliation with A.A. can rightfully be made by anyone but the individual him or herself. As Bill W. wrote in the January 1946 Grapevine, "It should be the privilege of each A.A. to cloak himself with as much personal anonymity as he desires. His fellow A.A.s should respect his wishes and help guard whatever status he wants to assume."

2. AA Guidelines: Internet MG-18:

The complete version is available by clicking on this link: [A.A. Guidelines](#)

Only those parts relating to Anonymity are included below:

A.A.® Guidelines Internet MG-18

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A.A. Guidelines are compiled from the shared experience of A.A. members in various service areas. They also reflect guidance given through the Twelve Traditions and the General Service Conference (U.S. and Canada). In keeping with our Tradition of autonomy, except in matters affecting other groups or A.A. as a whole, most decisions are made by the group conscience of the members involved. The purpose of these Guidelines is to assist in reaching an informed group conscience.

Anonymity—*As anonymity is the "spiritual foundation of all our Traditions," we practice anonymity on public A.A. Web sites at all times. Unless password-protected, an A.A. Web site is a public medium, and, therefore, requires the same safeguards that we use at the level of press, radio and film. In simplest form, this means that A.A.s do not identify themselves as A.A. members using their full names and/or fullface photos. For more information on anonymity online, see the section of this Guideline, "Guarding Anonymity Online."*

GUARDING ANONYMITY ONLINE

Modern communication in A.A. is flowing from one alcoholic to another in ways that are high-tech, relatively open-ended and evolving quickly. Protecting anonymity is a major concern for members, who are accessing the Internet in ever-growing numbers. A guiding resource of shared A.A. experience regarding Web sites is the G.S.O. service piece "Frequently Asked Questions About A.A. Web Sites," question seven:

Q. What about anonymity?

We observe all A.A.'s principles and Traditions on our Web sites. Since anonymity is "the spiritual foundation of all our Traditions," we practice anonymity on A.A. Web sites at all times. An A.A. Web site is a public medium, which has the potential for reaching the broadest possible audience and, therefore, requires the same safeguards that we use at the level of press, radio and film.

GENERAL SOCIAL NETWORKING WEB SITES

MySpace, Facebook and other social networking Web sites are public in nature. Though users create accounts and utilize usernames and passwords, once on the site, it is a public medium where A.A. members and non-A.A.s mingle. As long as individuals do not identify themselves as A.A. members, there is no conflict of interest. However, someone using their full name and/or a likeness, such as a full-face photograph, would be contrary to the spirit of the Eleventh Tradition, which states in the Long Form that, "...our [last] names and pictures as A.A. members ought not be broadcast, filmed or publicly printed." Experience suggests that it is in keeping with the Eleventh Tradition not to disclose A.A. membership on social networking sites as well as on any other Web site, blog, electronic bulletin board, etc., that is not composed solely of A.A. members, is not password protected or is accessible to the public.