



Being Anonymous

Steve Schultze and Erin Reilly, Project NML

Facilitator's Guide

Lesson Overview (Grades 11-12)

This lesson is made up of three activities that focus on the power of non-disclosure of identity and the broader social and political potentials that individual and collective anonymity hold.

In the first activity, students explore situations in which they choose to disclose or hide their personal information. Students will discuss how they make these decisions in both online and offline contexts, and whether they feel that there are any guiding principles behind these decisions.

In the second activity, students consider questions of anonymity in a broader historical and social context. They are first introduced to the Federalist Papers, a series of anonymous essays that proved critical to the adoption of the American Constitution. They then work together to chart norms in different scenarios in which one might choose to be anonymous, and consider what conduct is appropriate in those situations.

In the third activity, students watch and discuss two short news clips about a group calling itself “Anonymous,” which hides its identity both online and in the “real world” (**NOTE:** these news clips describe controversial protests of the Church of Scientology), and practice navigating the tension between identifying themselves and anonymity.

Ethical thinking skills highlighted in this lesson:

- The ability to reflect on **roles and responsibilities** within a community.
- The ability to recognize the **community-level consequences** of individual decisions.

New media literacies highlighted in this lesson:

- **Judgment**—the ability to evaluate the reliability and credibility of different information sources.
- **Play**—the capacity to experiment with one's surroundings as a form of problem solving.



NOTE: While dealing with ethical dilemmas of anonymity, this lesson could also be used in a history or social studies class to explore the Constitutional era and the modes of argument that formed our government. In that case, a teacher/facilitator may wish to incorporate something like the “Factional Feud” activity described by the Delaware Social Studies Education Project’s Democracy Project here: http://www.udel.edu/dssep/lessons_and_resources/factional_fued.htm

During this lesson, students will:

1. Make judgments about disclosure of identity and personal information.
2. Engage in a discussion that examines and questions those judgments.
3. Evaluate and have the opportunity to revise their initial judgments.
4. Present and defend the ethical dimensions of their final judgments.

Learning Objectives

After this lesson, students should be able to:

- Understand that norms of privacy and disclosure vary across contexts.
- Describe reasons for disclosure or non-disclosure in different contexts, and the effects of those decisions on safety, trust, and persuasion.
- Weigh the risks and benefits (to themselves and others) of anonymity in different contexts.
- Make informed choices about whether to disclose or hide their personal information in

Materials Used

- **For Students:**
 - “Federalist Papers” Handout (included)
- **For Teacher/Facilitator:**
 - News video links (require Internet access):
 - <http://www.myfoxla.com/myfox/pages/Home/Detail?contentId=3894628&version=7&locale=ENUS&layoutCode=VSTY&pageId=1.1.1&sf1g=1>
 - <http://www.cnn.com/video/#/video/us/2008/05/08/wynter.scientology.online.war.cnn>
 - “Anonymous Scenarios” Grid (attached), Axis of Anonymity (attached)
 - Link to a free hosted message board site, e.g.:



- <http://invisionplus.net>
- <http://www.proboards.com>

Lesson Introduction

Ask students to define anonymity in their own lives. When is it used? Why is it used?

After defining the concept of anonymity, brainstorm and describe different contexts in which young people might choose to disclose their identity or personal information. Create a list as a group.

Through discussion, define:

- Anonymous: whose name is not known or not given; lacking individuality or distinctiveness; obscuring somebody's identity, or allowing somebody to go unnoticed.
- Pseudonymous: bearing or written under a name that is not the correct name of the person concerned.

Some conversation starters:

- At school, what medical or personal issues do you discuss? And with whom? If a friend confided in you a serious problem, when would you feel obligated to tell a trusted adult?
- In what situations do you tell someone your first and last name? How do you decide what information about yourself to share with people you meet, online and off?
- Are there any situations in which you prefer to remain anonymous? Why do you think police offer anonymous tip lines? Would you ever leave an anonymous note for someone?
- What information do you share on online social networks? Would there be a difference if teachers or parents were on the site? What information would choose to write on a friend's profile and what information would you put into a private message?

For each scenario, point out that there is a tension between withholding and sharing information. This lesson explores these tensions.

Activity #1: Anonymity in the Personal and Community Space

1. Lead a structured discussion of various scenarios in which people act anonymously to different degrees. Structure this discussion using the Axis of Anonymity (attached), which prompts students to consider whether particular actions are socially acceptable or socially unacceptable to the goals of the person who is speaking anonymously; and, as well, to consider whether those particular actions are appropriate from the perspective of a variety of groups, such as friends,



peers, adults – even the targeted subjects of the anonymous activity. There are no correct answers; instead, the goal is to see if the group can come to a consensus about how to judge each scenario in terms of:

1. Its appropriateness according to the goals of the person who is speaking anonymously.
 2. Its appropriateness according to the social norms of a certain group or institution.
2. Describe the Axis to the class.
- The horizontal axis asks you to consider whether the scenario is acceptable based on social norms of privacy.
 - Explain that they should consider the following questions when deciding where the scenario falls on the horizontal axis: Is the action acceptable by a certain group or institution? Or would the general public approve?
 - The vertical axis asks you to consider whether the scenario is acceptable based on the goals of the person who is speaking anonymously.
 - Explain that they should consider the following questions when deciding where the scenario falls on the vertical axis: Can you make a good argument for the acceptability of the users' choices? How and why might their responses be similar to or different from yours?
3. Use the axis to plot and discuss the scenarios brainstormed in the introduction.
 4. Distribute the Anonymity scenarios to the class, and briefly describe the situations. Break the students into groups and ask them to plot one of the scenarios. The groups should be prepared to show where they plotted each scenario and describe their rationale for their plotting choice.
 5. Lead the class in a larger discussion. Plot the scenarios together on the board, and ask the students to help plot the different scenarios with respect to the goals of the anonymous person and its social appropriateness.

During the discussion, you may wish to highlight questions such as:

- Why have some cases of anonymous speech become socially acceptable, whereas others have not?
- Should the ability to remain anonymous be absolute?
- Are there cases in which remaining anonymous is helpful to the individual but is not socially acceptable?
- Is it okay to speak anonymously in a socially unacceptable way in order to make a point?



- How does anonymity serve to protect the individual in question? How can it hurt others?
- 6.** Introduce the two video clips by explaining that anonymity is a consideration not only in terms of safety and trust, but also in terms of speaking freely or forming consensus. Regardless of what you might think about the particular messages of the people in the following clips, it is clear that they are using anonymity as a tool. As the students watch the videos, they should consider whether the tool is being used responsibly or not.

Play the videos (requires Internet access):

- Fox News story about Scientology and Anonymous:
<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8f4GQethVgk>
- CNN story about Scientology and Anonymous:
<http://www.cnn.com/video/#/video/us/2008/05/08/wynter.scientology.online.war.cn>

Additional scenarios to plot are available through these additional resources:

- University of Kansas' Michael Wesch's project on Anonymous:
 - <http://ksudigg.wetpaint.com/page/Anonymity+Project>
 - <http://ksudigg.wetpaint.com/page/Final+Videos>

7. Lead a discussion, addressing some of the following questions:

- Is "Anonymous" misusing anonymity?
- Do students use anonymous as a first or a last resort? Are students doing something illegal by using "Anonymous"?
- Why does "Anonymous" feel that it must speak anonymously? Does this seem like a legitimate argument?
- Is there a big difference between "Anonymous" in the first video and the second?
- How is anonymity different for a group united under a pseudonym like "Anonymous"? Does it mean that all of the members should take responsibility for anything that one of them says?
- Does anonymity give "Anonymous" more or less persuasive force?
- How should "Anonymous" be held accountable for unacceptable actions?
- How does "Anonymous" serve to protect the individual? How can "Anonymous" hurt others?



Activity #2: Excerpts from the Federalist Papers

8. Introduce the historical context of the Federalist Papers by reviewing the Excerpts from the “Federalist Papers” Handout. In short:

- The United States was in a formative period, and many were calling for a Constitution.
- Various groups felt strongly about this issue, and there was heated debate between the *federalists* and the *anti-federalists*.
- Starting in 1787, several essays appeared in newspapers and elsewhere, written under the name “Publius” —a group of writers (Alexander Hamilton, James Madison, and John Jay) advocating for a constitution.
- This collection of essays later became known as the Federalist Papers, and is seen as one of the critical reasons that the United States Constitution came to be.
- Additional Information on the Federalist Papers:
 - <http://www.foundingfathers.info/federalistpapers/>
 - http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Federalist_Papers
 - <http://www.gradesaver.com/the-federalist-papers/study-guide/>

9. Lead a discussion of the *Federalist Papers*, including (similar questions to above):

- How and why did the people involved stay anonymous?
- Was “Publius” misusing anonymity?
- Why does “Publius” feel that it must speak anonymously? Does this seem like a legitimate argument?
- How is anonymity different for a group united under a pseudonym like “Publius”? Does it mean that all of the members should take responsibility for anything that one of them says?
- Does anonymity give “Publius” more or less persuasive force?
- How should “Publius” be held accountable or argued against?

10. You may wish to ask the students to discuss the following statement by the Supreme Court in a 1995 Supreme Court ruling (McIntyre v. Ohio Elections Commission):

- “Protections for anonymous speech are vital to democratic discourse. Allowing dissenters to shield their identities frees them to express critical, minority views....”



Anonymity is a shield from the tyranny of the majority.... It thus exemplifies the purpose behind the Bill of Rights, and of the First Amendment in particular: to protect unpopular individuals from retaliation ... at the hand of an intolerant society.”

- 11.** In the context of the above discussions and the statement by the Supreme Court, **conduct a discussion that revisits the various scenarios** (and other additional scenarios suggested by students) raised at the start of class. Using the Axis of Anonymity, lead the class in the process of revisiting the “charting,” where different scenarios belong. Encourage students to voice different opinions, using this as an opportunity to highlight varying justifications.

Activity #3: Debate as Anonymous, Pseudonymous or Yourself

This part involves student engagement with the above issues and allows students to practice navigating tensions related to privacy and anonymity. In this activity, the teacher/facilitator sets up a message board on which students can discuss and debate issues—anononymously, pseudonymously, or under their real names. This activity is best conducted over several days, during which students have the ability to post messages in their free time.

NOTE: It would be good to review Our Space, Our Guidelines: Recommended Guidelines as some of the material discussed in this activity could be controversial and requires negotiating norms of the group and establishing a safe space for discussion.

- 1.** Begin by setting up a new forum for your class, using one of the free web services such as <http://invisionplus.net> or <http://www.proboards.com>.
 - You may wish to first spend some time browsing forums created by other users to familiarize yourself with the system.
 - You may also wish to review some of the documentation for the forum system.
 - You should also create at least one “anonymous” account, which is really just a normal account for which you share the password with your students. For example, you might create an account with name “publius” and password “publius.”
- 2.** Choose the area(s) of discussion for your class and create sub-forums for these areas. Alternatively, you might leave this up to your students to choose three discussions from the list of relevant topics for teens.



3. The forums could be seeded with contentious questions or simply have a set of suggested guidelines. Consider what topic areas might provoke debate. You might want to incorporate a debate from another area that you are currently studying or refer to the attached handout: Sample Debate Topics.
4. Introduce the forum software to the class, explaining the idea that this is a place in which they can debate anonymously, pseudonymously, or under their real names. In order to encourage their participation, you may wish to assign individual students to write initial calls to debate (similar to *Federalist 1*) or to write one yourself.
5. Ask your students to participate in the three discussions. However, have them choose out of a hat at random which discussion they will enter as anonymous, pseudonymously and using their real name. This random choice will allow for a balance of all three voices in each discussion. You may also choose to structure it so that students must assume a different role (as anonymous, pseudonymously, and using their real names) each time.
6. Set aside time in class over the next several days to review and discuss the forum posts as they appear.
7. In a follow-up class, discuss the benefits and disadvantages of anonymous posting. Discussion questions include:
 - Does posting anonymously allow more freedom in what you say? Is this a good thing?
 - Did posting anonymously change what you wrote? The tone of what you wrote?
 - When you read anonymous comments not written by you, what did you think of them?
 - How does one build credibility in an anonymous environment?
 - If students have posted under their real names or pseudonyms, has this helped or hurt their arguments?
 - Anonymity allows expression without clear accountability. Are there norms that one should follow despite the lack of accountability?
 - When posting as part of a pseudonymous group, what if someone posts something that you disagree with using a name you have used?
 - Does anonymity allow you to protect yourself from personal attacks? Is that a good thing?
8. **Optional low-tech version**—Put a box in the classroom, and ask students to write a stance/message/opinion about the debate question each day and put that into the box. Use the same rules about being anonymous or using pseudonymous or real names as you have



described. Each day, aggregate and summarize these opinions for the class. This can go on for a week's time, and then use the discussion questions listed above.

Concluding Takeaways

The new media landscape gives rise to new issues related to privacy and disclosure. This lesson asks students to consider their own “take” on privacy. What is privacy? What are different forms of privacy? What are the benefits and risks of anonymity? When might anonymity be a means for responsible social conduct? What reasons might a person have for disclosure or non-disclosure? Through use of an Axis of Anonymity, students are given the chance to develop a framework for thinking about the consequences—for the individual and for the wider society or community—of withholding or sharing information.

Assessment

Through participation in class activities and discussions and/or answers to optional assessment questions, students should demonstrate they can:

- Understand that norms of privacy and disclosure vary across contexts.
- Describe reasons for disclosure or non-disclosure in different contexts, and the effect of those decisions on safety, trust, and persuasion.
- Weigh the risks and benefits (to themselves and others) of anonymity in different contexts.
- Make informed choices about whether to disclose or hide their personal information in various online and offline contexts.

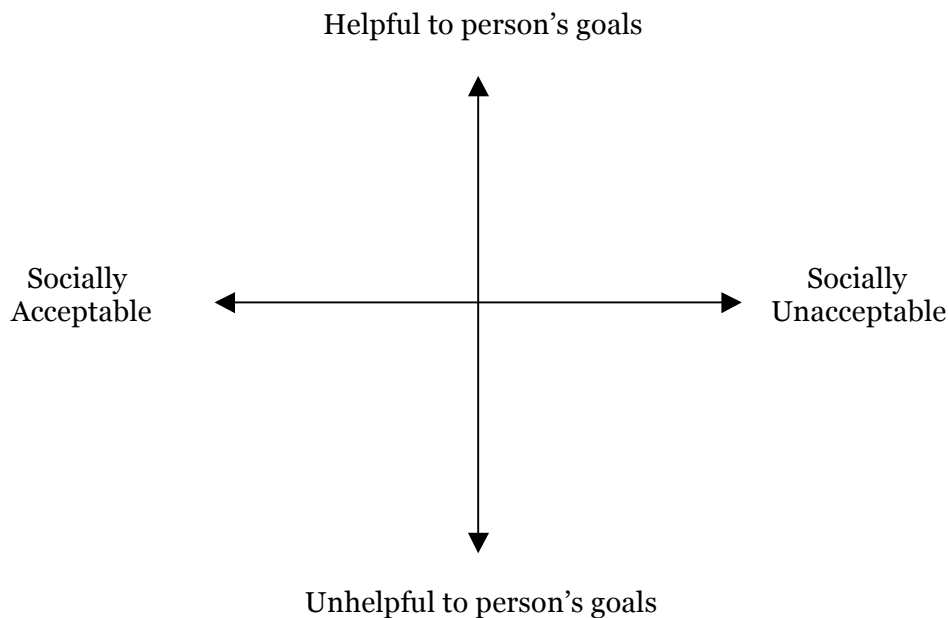
Assessment Questions (Optional)

- Your health teacher has set up an online discussion forum for students to ask her questions and talk to one another about various health-related topics. She lets students decide whether to post anonymously, pseudonymously, or using their real names. What are the advantages and disadvantages of each?
- Name 1 online space and 1 offline space in which you spend a fair amount of time (e.g., friend's house, homeroom, Facebook, YouTube). What are the norms of privacy and



Axis of Anonymity

Directions: **Plot the different scenarios** with respect to the goals of the anonymous person and the social appropriateness.



Understanding the Axis:

- The **horizontal axis** asks you to consider whether the scenario is acceptable based on **social norms of privacy**.
 - Consider the following questions when deciding where it falls on the horizontal axis: Is the action acceptable by a certain group or institution? Or would the general public approve?
- The **vertical axis** asks you to consider whether the scenario is acceptable based on **the goals of the person who is speaking anonymously**.
 - Consider the following questions when deciding where it falls on the vertical axis: Can you make a good argument for the acceptability of the users' choices from a social- and/or participatory-media perspective? How and why might their responses be similar to or different from yours?



Excerpts from the Federalist Papers

<p>Federalist #1</p>	<p>“After an unequivocal experience of the inefficiency of the subsisting federal government, you are called upon to deliberate on a new Constitution for the United States of America.... I propose, in a series of papers, to discuss the following interesting particulars...” – <i>Publius</i></p>
<p>Federalist #9 <i>The Union as a Safeguard Against Domestic Faction and Insurrection</i></p>	<p>“A firm Union will be of the utmost moment to the peace and liberty of the States, as a barrier against domestic faction and insurrection.... The proposed Constitution, so far from implying an abolition of the State governments, makes them constituent parts of the national sovereignty, by allowing them a direct representation in the Senate, and leaves in their possession certain exclusive and very important portions of sovereign power. This fully corresponds, in every rational import of the terms, with the idea of a federal government.” – <i>Publius</i></p>
<p>Federalist #38 <i>The Conformity of the Plan to Republican Principles</i></p>	<p>“What, then, are the distinctive characters of the republican form? ... It is essential to such a government that it be derived from the great body of the society, not from an inconsiderable proportion, or a favored class of it; otherwise a handful of tyrannical nobles, exercising their oppressions by a delegation of their powers, might aspire to the rank of republicans, and claim for their government the honorable title of republic.” – <i>Publius</i></p>
<p>Federalist #47 <i>The Particular Structure of the New Government and the Distribution of Power Among Its Different Parts</i></p>	<p>“The accumulation of all powers, legislative, executive, and judiciary, in the same hands, whether of one, a few, or many, and whether hereditary, self-appointed, or elective, may justly be pronounced the very definition of tyranny. Were the federal Constitution, therefore, really chargeable with the accumulation of power, or with a mixture of powers, having a dangerous tendency to such an accumulation, no further arguments would be necessary to inspire a universal reprobation of the system. I persuade myself, however, that it will be made apparent to every one, that the charge cannot be supported, and that the maxim on which it relies has been totally misconceived and misapplied.” – <i>Publius</i></p>
<p>Federalist #78 <i>The Judiciary Department</i></p>	<p>“There is no position which depends on clearer principles, than that every act of a delegated authority, contrary to the tenor of the commission under which it is exercised, is void. No legislative act, therefore, contrary to the Constitution, can be valid. To deny this, would be to affirm, that the deputy is greater than his principal; that the servant is above his master; that the representatives of the people are superior to the people themselves; that men acting by virtue of powers, may do not only what their powers do not authorize, but what they forbid.” – <i>Publius</i></p>



T H E
F E D E R A L I S T :
A D D R E S S E D T O T H E
P E O P L E O F T H E S T A T E O F
N E W - Y O R K .

N U M B E R I .

Introduction.

AFTER an unequivocal experience of the inefficacy of the subsisting federal government, you are called upon to deliberate on a new constitution for the United States of America. The subject speaks its own importance; comprehending in its consequences, nothing less than the existence of the UNION, the safety and welfare of the parts of which it is composed, the fate of an empire, in many respects, the most intersting in the world. It has been frequently remarked, that it seems to have been reserved to the people of this country, by their conduct and example, to decide the important question, whether societies of men are really capable or not, of establishing good government from reflection and choice, or whether they are forever destined to depend, for their political constitutions, on accident and force. If there be any truth in the remark, the crisis, at which we are arrived, may with propriety be regarded as the era in which

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Sample Debate Topics

- **Sexting**—The practice of teens taking naked photos of themselves and sending them to friends via cell phones, called "sexting," has alarmed parents, school officials, and prosecutors nationwide, who fear the photos could end up on the Internet or in the hands of sexual predators. But some legal experts say the definition of sexting has expanded to such an extent that it could be setting a dangerous precedent. Is this violating teens' rights to freedom of expression?
- **The death penalty**—This is a controversial topic that tries to answer the question: how can we balance the safety of the public against the rights of the individual? Many feel that no one has the right to take the life of a fellow human being, while others insist that the punishment must fit the crime.
- **Violent video games**—The question of censorship and the role it plays in our society is always a hot-button issue. Do violent video games encourage young people to become more violent? Or are video games a harmless pastime? Are there levels of acceptable violence, and if so, what are those levels?
- **Standardized testing**—Should schools use standardized testing? Proponents on both sides of the debate energetically defend their beliefs. One side believes that standardized tests don't actually test how smart youth really are. The other side asks: If not standardized tests, then what? How will we assess how well children are doing in school?

NOTE: Students are likely to enjoy brainstorming their own controversies to debate.



Anonymity in Different Scenarios

Anonymous	Banksy	OpEd	MySpace	Unabomber
				
<p>An online group calling itself “Anonymous” has taken up protests against the controversial Church of Scientology. When protesting, many members wear masks to hide their identity. They claim that this protects them against retaliation. They also coordinate on the web, often posting to message boards anonymously or pseudonymously. In July 2008, Anonymous placed its signature Guy Fawkes masks on statues throughout Boston.</p>	<p>Pseudonymous graffiti artist “Banksy” has spread his art on buildings worldwide—often with a theme of social commentary. The organization “Keep Britain Tidy,” says that Banksy’s work is vandalism. He has said, “If you have a statue in the city centre, you could go past it every day on your way to school and never even notice it, right—but as soon as someone puts a traffic cone on its head, you’ve made your own sculpture.”</p>	<p>Many newspapers have an opinions page, on which anonymous authors state their opinions—unedited by the newspaper’s editorial staff. Inventor of the “Op-Ed” concept Howard Bayard Swope is credited as saying, “It occurred to me that nothing is more interesting than opinion when opinion is interesting, so I devised a method of cleaning off the page opposite the editorial, which became the most important in America... and thereon I decided to print opinions, ignoring facts.”</p>	<p>When creating a MySpace account, users must decide on a username as well as how much information to reveal about themselves. This might affect their ability to gain friends, or to gain credibility with others. Sometimes people reveal much of their information to everyone, and at other times they restrict information to friends. Some people have created accounts claiming to be other people and even use those accounts to criticize others.</p>	<p>Theodore Kaczynski is an anarchist anti-technologist who mailed bombs to various targets from 1978 to 1995. He signed the accompanying letters with the initials “FC” (which stood for “Freedom Club”). The popular press referred to him as the “Unabomber.” He wrote a manifesto, demanding that the New York Times and the Washington Post publish it. Later that year, his brother identified him and the FBI raided his remote cabin.</p>