

# GETTING STARTED IN SEX ADDICTS ANONYMOUS

A Beginner's Packet for Recovering Sex Addicts

*From Shame to GRACE*

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# QUESTIONS OFTEN ASKED BY SEX ADDICTS SEEKING RECOVERY

## **1. *What is sex addiction and how can tell if I am a sex addict?***

Sex addiction can involve a wide variety of practices. Sometimes an addict has trouble with just one unwanted behavior, sometimes with many. A large number of sex addicts say their unhealthy use of sex has been a progressive process. It may have started with an addiction to masturbation, pornography, or a relationship, but over the years progressed to increasingly dangerous behaviors. The essence of all addiction is the experience of powerlessness over a behavior, resulting in unmanageability. The addict is out of control and experiences tremendous shame, pain, and self loathing. The addict may wish to stop acting out - making promises and many attempts to stop - yet repeatedly fails to do so. The unmanageability of an addict's life can be seen in the consequences suffered: loss of relationships, difficulties with work, arrests, financial troubles, a loss of interest in things not sexual, low self-esteem, and despair. Sexual preoccupation takes up tremendous amounts of energy. As this increases, for the sex addict, a pattern of behavior - or ritual - follows (for some it is flirting, looking at pornography, or driving to a park) which usually leads to acting out. When the acting out happens, there is a denial of feelings usually followed by despair and shame or feelings of hopelessness and confusion.

We have found the following questions to be useful for self-assessment:

- a. Do you keep secrets about sexual or romantic activities from those important to you? Do you lead a double life? Yes No
- b. Have your needs driven you to have sex in places or situations or with people you would not normally choose? Yes No
- c. Do you find yourself looking for sexually arousing articles or scenes in newspapers, magazines or other media? Yes No
- d. Do you find that romantic or sexual fantasies interfere with your relationships or prevent you from facing problems? Yes No
- e. Do you frequently want to get away from a sex partner after having sex? Do you frequently feel remorse, shame or guilt after a sexual encounter? Yes No
- f. Do you feel shame about your body or your sexuality, such that you avoid touching your body or engaging in sexual relationships? Do you fear that you have no sexual feelings, that you are asexual? Yes No
- g. Does each new relationship continue to have the same destructive patterns which prompted you to leave the last relationship? Yes No
- h. Is it taking more variety and frequency of sexual and romantic activities than previously to bring the same levels of excitement and relief? Yes No
- i. Have you been arrested or are you in danger of being arrested because of your practices of voyeurism, exhibitionism, prostitution, sex with minors, indecent phone calls, etc.? Yes No

- j. Does your pursuit of sex or romantic relationships interfere with your spiritual beliefs or development? Yes No11. Do your sexual activities include the risk, threat, or reality of disease, pregnancy, coercion, or violence? Yes No
- k. Has your sexual or romantic behavior ever left you feeling hopeless, alienated from others, or suicidal? Yes No

## **2. What is SAA?**

- \* Sex Addicts Anonymous is a fellowship of men and women who share their experience, strength, and hope with each other so they may overcome their sex addiction and help others recover from sex addiction.
- \* The Third Tradition of SAA states: Membership is open to all who have a desire to stop addictive sexual behavior. There is no other requirement. SAA is open to all people regardless of age, race, religion, and gender or sexual preference.
- \* Our common goals are to become sexually sober and to help other sex addicts achieve freedom from addictive sexual behavior.
- \* SAA is supported through voluntary contributions from members. We are not affiliated with any other Twelve Step program, nor are we part of any other organization. We do not support, endorse, or oppose outside causes or issues.
- \* Sex Addicts Anonymous is a spiritual program based on the principles and traditions of Alcoholics Anonymous. We are grateful to AA for this gift which makes our recovery possible.
- \* Sex Addicts Anonymous recognizes that peoples' needs are different and thus individual recoveries are different. SAA empowers individuals to choose a program that will lead to a self affirming expression of sexuality.

The core of our program is the Twelve Steps as described here:

## **OUR PROGRAM**

### ***The Twelve Steps of SAA***

Attending SAA meetings starts us on a new way of life. But while the SAA fellowship supports our recovery, the actual work of recovery is described in the Twelve Steps. Meetings are forums for learning how to integrate the steps into our lives. Working the Twelve Steps leads to a spiritual transformation that results in sustainable relief from our addiction.

When we start attending meetings of Sex Addicts Anonymous, many of us are surprised to meet people who are enjoying life and experiencing freedom from the painful, compulsive behaviors that had brought them to SAA. Listening to other members share about their recovery, we gradually realize that in order to make the same kind of progress, we need to be willing to do whatever it takes to get sexually abstinent, and to stay abstinent. We have learned from hard experience that we cannot achieve and maintain abstinence if we aren't willing to change our way of life. But if we can honestly face our problems, and are willing to change, the Twelve Steps of SAA will lead to an awakening that allows us to live a new way of life according to spiritual principles. Taking these steps allows

fundamental change to occur in our lives. They are the foundation of our recovery.

## The Twelve Steps of Sex Addicts Anonymous

1. We admitted we were powerless over addictive sexual behavior – that our lives had become unmanageable.
2. Came to believe that a Power greater than ourselves could restore us to sanity.
3. Made a decision to turn our will and our lives over to the care of God as we understood God.
4. Made a searching and fearless moral inventory of ourselves.
5. Admitted to God, to ourselves, and to another human being the exact nature of our wrongs.
6. Were entirely ready to have God remove all these defects of character.
7. Humbly asked God to remove our shortcomings.
8. Made a list of all persons we had harmed and became willing to make amends to them all.
9. Made direct amends to such people wherever possible, except when to do so would injure them or others.
10. Continued to take personal inventory and when we were wrong promptly admitted it.
11. Sought through prayer and meditation to improve our conscious contact with God as we understood God, praying only for knowledge of God's will for us and the power to carry that out.
12. Having had a spiritual awakening as the result of these steps, we tried to carry this message to other sex addicts and to practice these principles in our lives.

These steps are the heart of our program. They contain a depth that we could hardly have guessed when we started. Over time, we establish a relationship with a Power greater than ourselves, each of us coming to an understanding of a Higher Power that is personal for us. Although the steps use the word “God” to indicate this Power, SAA is not affiliated with any religion, creed, or dogma. The program offers a spiritual solution to our addiction, without requiring adherence to any specific set of beliefs or practices. The path is wide enough for everyone who wishes to walk it.

There is no one correct or SAA-sanctioned way to complete the Twelve Steps. Most of us learned how to work the steps from our sponsors. Many of us have also gained insight from books or adapted methods from other Twelve-Step programs. In this book we suggest ideas for how to work each step, based on approaches that have worked for many of us.

Each step presents a significant action, with each action linked to the other steps, in a process that establishes our new life of recovery on spiritual principles. The steps are numbered because they are meant to chart the course of our spiritual progress. We work the Steps in order, as each step creates a foundation for the steps that follow. The actions of the steps often involve the completion of specific tasks, such as writing lists,

that require an honest examination of ourselves and our way of life. Each action also takes place within us, as we gradually let go of old ways of thinking and establish conscious contact with our Higher Power.

No step is done well in isolation. We work the steps with someone who understands our problem and cares about our recovery, preferably a sponsor. A sponsor will help us prepare for each step, give us guidance and suggestions, and listen to us as we share the experiences and insights we gain.

But the steps are more than a series of exercises. They provide basic principles for living. Most of us find opportunities on a daily basis to apply one or more of the steps to some challenge in our life. Over time, the spiritual principles in the steps become integrated into our thoughts, feelings, and behavior. We find that we are not only working the steps - we are living them. -Sex Addicts Anonymous, page 20-22

### ***3. What is meant by the term "Higher Power?"***

Higher Power for many means their own vision of God. However, for those who are troubled by the concept of God, many find that the group becomes their Higher Power. Logically, a group of recovering sex addicts is a resource and does constitute a power greater than the addict.

Some kind of Higher Power is necessary. Many of us tried to recover on our own and failed miserably. In turning our lives over to our Higher Power and in reaching out, we admitted that we cannot do it alone. This becomes both the surrender and the hope - the paradox of recovery. This is a paradox which blends action, faith, receptivity, and willingness.

### ***4. What is an SAA group? A Sex Addicts***

Anonymous group consists of two or more individuals who, using the Twelve Steps and Twelve Traditions of SAA, meet together regularly for the purpose of recovering from their addictive sexual behavior. An SAA group is self-supporting, and is not affiliated with any other organization. It is a gathering of equals who keep confidences, refrain from judgment, and support one another through sharing our experience, strength, and hope in seeking a common goal. The principle of anonymity insures that who we meet and what is said in meetings is treated respectfully and not discussed with non-group members. Anonymity is the spiritual foundation of SAA where principles are placed over personalities. In practical application, this means that who we are outside of the meeting is irrelevant - last names are not shared, it is our common bond as addicts that is important. There are no dues or fees for membership, though most groups usually pass the hat at each meeting.

The Seventh Tradition of SAA states: Every SAA group ought to be fully self-supporting, declining outside contributions.

## **5. What might I consider in choosing an SAA group?**

As with all Twelve-Step organizations, there are two basic types of groups, but within those two types, there are some important regional differences regarding meeting membership and the introduction of newcomers.

**Open Group:** A walk-in meeting open to anyone interested in finding out about SAA: they need not have admitted that their sexual behavior is problematic.

**Closed Group:** A meeting that is open to those who have a desire to stop their compulsive sexual behaviors.

### According to the Fourth Tradition.

Each group should be autonomous except in matters affecting other groups or SAA as a whole. Therefore, some different conventions have evolved in different areas about meeting types and methods of introducing newcomers. In some parts of the country, most meetings are open to both men and women. In other places, it is more common to have separate men's and women's meetings. In some areas, public announcements are used to inform people about the time and location of the meeting. Other areas choose to simply post a phone number or a P.O. Box number and then give out the information in a formal "TwelfthStep call" which is a meeting between two of the group members and the newcomer. An explanation of a Twelfth-Step call is contained in Question 6. Some closed groups have established the practice of twelfth-stepping only people who are brand new to the program, while other closed groups choose to twelfth-step everyone new to their meeting, including current SAA members. In the Group Guide those meetings are called Closed-12 New, and Closed-12/All, respectively. Finally, there are also a few special interest groups that have established different customs

## **6. What is meant by getting "twelfth-stepped" into a group?**

Some groups choose to "twelfth-step" their new members. Within 48 hours of receiving notice that someone wants to join or needs more information, a group member calls the newcomer to arrange to get together at a mutually convenient time and place. The meeting or call is beneficial for all people involved. The two group members doing the Twelfth-Step call are benefited because it is only by giving away our recovery that we are able to keep it. The meeting benefits the newcomer by providing a way for them to hear from two SAA members about their addiction: what it was like before they came to the program, what happened as they got started, and what it is like now. The newcomer has an opportunity to ask questions, get more information about the program, and further assess their interest and need. They have an opportunity to share their story and be accepted by the SAA members. If they choose to

## ACTING OUT BEHAVIOR SLIP/RELAPSE

### BOUNDARIES

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Masturbation while watching TV.

No solitary TV viewing.

- No TV at all.
- Contracting with a Sponsor to turn off the TV after watching one show.

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Having sex with someone you do not know or care about.

- Stay away from places where you have picked people up for sex.
- Specify a certain period of time in relationship before considering being sexual.
- Do not read romance novels, advertisements or newspaper articles that trigger sexual fantasies.
- Leave a situation when you feel the urge to act out.

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Indecent exposure.

- No public masturbating.
- Stay away from places where you have exposed yourself.
- Wear underwear. Throw away or don't wear clothes that make it easy for you to expose yourself.
- Draw shades and close doors when undressed.

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Exchanging sex for money, prestige, or favorable treatment with people who have power over you.

- Don't have flirtations or intimate relations.
- Do not accept money, clothes, or dates for sex
- In dating situations, be clear about finances.

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Sexually abusing a child, incest.

- Avoid contact with your victims, even if it means leaving your home or job.
- Avoid contact with children you don't know.
- Avoid playgrounds, schools and other places children congregate.
- If contact with children is unavoidable, make sure other adults are present.
- Avoid literature, movies and advertisements that portray children in a manner that triggers your fantasies.

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Paying for sex.

- Stay out of places where you have paid for sex.
- Do not flip through publications or visit websites for telephone numbers of prostitutes or phone sex lines.
- Do not cruise down streets where prostitutes hang out.

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Illicit sex.

- Do not contact a person with whom you have had unhealthy sex.
  - Do not have intimate conversations with casual acquaintances to whom you are sexually attracted.
  - Do not spend money that you can't afford to enhance your sexual attractiveness.
  - Do not string someone along as a way to keep sexual options open.
  - Do not avoid telling someone that you're in a significant relationship
  - Do not act seductively.
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Acting out within a relationship, using euphoric recall or behaviors which are against your values, while being sexual with a partner.

- Do not choose to be sexual when feeling strong negative feelings.
- Do not stuff or avoid expressing feelings for the purpose of acting out later.
- Stop sexual activity when beginning to have addictive fantasies.
- Do not be sexual when feeling unloved.

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Having sex with a partner after having committed to not being sexual.

- Do not start to be sexual.
- Be honest about feelings of anger, pain, emptiness, or resentment.

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Using pornography.

- Do not buy a magazine or video tape or visit websites with which to masturbate.
- Stop once you have begun looking at visual images which stimulate you.
- Avoid listening to music that triggers euphoric recall Avoid places where pornography or materials you find arousing can be purchased.

join the group, they know at least two people when they come to their first meeting. Usually the two members will serve as temporary sponsors.

While some people ask "Why can't I just come to the meeting?," most come to find that the attention, care, and consideration of the Twelfth-Step call provides a valuable transition that eases the introduction to SAA.

### **7. Why do we call ourselves sex addicts?**

Referring to ourselves as sex addicts or recovering sex addicts didn't come easy for many of us. We resisted the idea and found it distasteful. We feared the label. Members are not required to call themselves sex addicts, but most of us have found peace in saying "My name is \_\_\_ and I'm a sex addict." It is a way in which we take the First Step by admitting our powerlessness over our sex addiction. In the past we diagnosed ourselves as crazy, sick, perverted, and many other disparaging labels. The old shaming labels held one thing in common - they meant we were hopeless. The old labels were misdiagnosed because there were untruthful. Accepting our sex addiction brings hope by acknowledging the truth and begins the spiritual journey of TwelveStep recovery

### **8. What is sexual sobriety?**

Sexual sobriety is living without engaging in addictive sexual behavior. Our experience is that behaviors that are addictive for some individuals are not addictive for others. Sobriety in SAA does not refer to the elimination of sexuality from our lives, although there are some who choose celibacy for long or short periods of time. Sexual sobriety means not engaging in addictive sexual behaviors which are destructive to ourselves or others. We abstain from specific sexual behaviors which caused our lives to become unmanageable.

Sexual sobriety begins with the first day free of addictive sexual behavior. The sobriety date is an important tool to help gauge progress in recovery. Not only do we gain wisdom and strength with the passage of time in sobriety, but the number of days, months, and years is a gift and an investment in continued sobriety. However, we must be ever mindful that recovery is one day at a time.

For many members of SAA there is an evolution towards sexual sobriety. Some of us go further to define sobriety as abstinence combined with spiritual growth. Continuous long-term sobriety is the goal and foundation of this program. SAA works! For those who experience difficulty in gaining sobriety, we encourage them to do whatever it takes to gain sobriety, because there is no recovery without sobriety.

### **9. What is abstinence?**

For many members of SAA, abstinence means the same thing as sexual sobriety

## **10. What are some suggestions SAA offers to beginners?**

- Go to meetings.
- Go to meetings . Go to meetings
- Find a home group
- Establish some limits or boundaries for your behavior. For ideas about how to do this see the section on sexual sobriety.
- Identify and stay away from environments and people that have been part of your acting out behaviors.
- Begin to practice the Twelve Steps of recovery.
- Seek out and get support from a temporary sponsor.
- Begin to view yourself as a recovering, sober person.
- Ask for help from your Higher Power.
- Become willing to help others as a way to get the focus off yourself
- Read SAA and other recovery literature, consider it a portable program.
- Telephone group members.
- Familiarize yourself with some of the slogans and prayers, as they may be especially useful in crisis situations.

Some of our favorites are

*One day at a time,*

*Easy does it,*

*Let go and let God, and*

*the Serenity Prayer:*

*God, Grant me the serenity to accept the things I cannot change, the courage to change the things I can, and the wisdom to know the difference.*

- Find meaning in your life through your recovery.
- Begin to realize that recovery occurs in relationships, and that hope springs from the connection with other recovering sex addicts.

By seeing the success of others, and by extending yourself, you increase the connection which ends self loathing and isolation. Remember that sharing your struggle and asking for help benefits both persons.

## **11. What is sponsorship?**

It is important that the recovering addict seeks out a long term sponsor. In looking for a sponsor, it is imperative that sexual attraction is not an issue. We look for people we can relate to and who are further along in the program. Many benefits come from the relationship with a sponsor. Some of these are: clarity through sharing, establishment of boundaries, instruction in understanding and applying the Twelve Steps and Twelve Traditions, and an opportunity to realize that being open and honest is helpful. One of the benefits of identifying and relating experiences with the sponsor is that this helps the addict to feel less isolated and alone. The newcomer demonstrates a desire for recovery by initiating and

maintaining a relationship with a sponsor.

## **12. How do SAA members develop a recovery program?**

We did not do it alone! The home group provided an environment for honest disclosure. As newcomers we let go of shaming secrets and broke out of isolation - connections with other recovering addicts, including a sponsor, assisted us in getting a sense of the pattern involved in our addictive sexual behavior.

After grounding ourselves in the First Step - "We admitted we were powerless over addictive sexual behavior – that our lives had become unmanageable" – we found several actions necessary to develop a clear, workable program:

- The first action was to identify patterns of sexual behavior. Thoroughness and honesty were essential for revealing those patterns. We made a sexual history of our lives, which included looking at our family background and early events that influenced our sexuality. Our history revealed patterns and progressively destructive changes in our behavior.
- Second, we told our sponsor and our group about these behaviors.
- Third, we defined and wrote down the behaviors that were, for us, acting out. We refer to these behaviors as slips, or relapses. Acting out changes our sobriety date.
- Fourth, we established and wrote down the boundaries which identify dangerous behaviors that lead to relapse. Crossing boundaries does not change our sobriety date, but since it jeopardizes our sobriety, we choose to tell our sponsor and group about it.
- Fifth, we abstained from addictive sexual behavior.

Here are some examples of possible slips and boundaries which, if crossed, lead to relapse. We have included several boundaries, many others are possible.

## **13. What can I do if I get the urge to act out?**

There are definite actions that the recovering addict can take before entering a state of insanity – which we call the bubble" - when the addict no longer cares about consequences or recovery, and relapses into addictive sexual behavior. The crucial point is that the action has to come before insanity takes hold - before entering the bubble. Actions can take many forms. Here are a few:

- Pick up the phone - call your sponsor or other group member and disclose the urge. Receive support from the other person. The power and effectiveness of this course of action cannot be overstated. Don't think about it; dial the numbers until you reach another recovering addict.
- Think the fantasy through to the pain and consequences.
- Ask your Higher Power for help and wait for the answer

- Go to a meeting.
- Review the boundaries you have written down. • Read SAA Literature.
- Recite slogans -

Keep it simple Let go and let God

Progress not perfection

Easy does it

This too shall pass

Live and let live

One day at a time

Stick with the winners

#### **14. What can I do if I have had a slip?**

If you act out/slip relapse, here are some suggestions you can use to get sober again.

A. Progress not perfection!

This is a program of spiritual progress, not spiritual

B. Break the cycle by making a connection with the program. Call someone, go to a meeting, read your plan of recovery, read the Twelve Steps. Do something as quickly as you can to reconnect to the program. We believe that almost every slip occurs when we isolate ourselves from the program and others in the fellowship Without a connection, the likelihood is great that the shame and isolation will build and you will be in another slip. The process is cyclical. Break the cycle by connecting

C. Break the secret! Talk it over with your sponsor, another group member, or your group. It is important to break the secret. Most of the time this breaks the power of the addictive pull, and begins to moderate the same as you find the loving acceptance from others in the program who have been there too.

D. Learn from it! Look carefully at the things that led to acting out. Good things can come from a slip if we use the experience to learn more about ourselves, our addiction, and how to work the program.

- Am I working the Twelve Steps? It helps to go through them systematically and do what they say. If the step says make a list, make a list.
- Am I consistently working to be in contact with my Higher Power?
- Am I connected to the fellowship? There is an old recovery adage that says, "No one else can recover for us, but we can't do it on our own."
- Do I have a sponsor? Am I using him or her fully?
- Are my boundaries clear? Is this a situation where I've crossed an identified boundary or do I need to establish a new boundary to strengthen my program? Have I written them down, shared them with my sponsor or group, and gotten feedback from others about them?

Are they too severe, too fuzzy, too flexible? Make modifications in them if they are needed. Remember, half measures avail us nothing.

- Am I getting good program food on a daily basis? Meditation, literature, Step discussions, Step guides, connecting with others, doing service, and going to meetings are good ways to feed recovery.

E. Work the First Step around the issue. Focus on your powerlessness and its consequences rather than your guilt or shame. Try to identify ritual behaviors, feelings, and things that set off your addictive behaviors. Sometimes these are called triggers. Discussing this kind of First Step in your group is very helpful. Use the power of the group. SAA is not an individual program of recovery - it is a group program

F. Make a plan to increase your connection with the program. Phone calls, reading literature, attending more meetings, and going out with someone in the program between meetings are just some of the ways you can increase your connection. Try being of service.

G. Get with a winner! If you have recurring slips or are stuck in not knowing what to do, look around your group for the best sobriety you can find. If your group is all people new to recovery, explore finding a sponsor in another group or a telephone sponsor or pen sponsor from another city. Talk it over with them. You both need each other.

H. Become willing! Willingness is the opposite of willfulness. Pray for it. "God, help me to be willing.

I. Ninety meetings in ninety days. This is a tried and true method of getting going in recovery. Getting to a meeting everyday, whether you feel like it or not, is an awesome piece of doing. Doing something tangibly different is a big step in recovering and changing our pattern of living. We have said a lot about the need to connect. It takes some willingness to go when you'd rather do something else or when it might mean missing out on something. Perhaps, for awhile, you will need to be as aggressive about your recovery as you were about acting out. If there are few or no SAA meetings in your area, attend other Twelve Step program meetings, or contract to call a group member every day and have a meeting on the phone. The point is to act on the belief that nothing is more important than your recovery.

### ***15. Can I recover and become sexually healthy?***

Yes! Freed from the delusion that destructive behaviors are appropriate expressions of our sexuality, we begin to explore new ways of being intimate that are nurturing, respectful, and spiritual. This process takes time and requires honesty, openness, and willingness. By accepting - not fearing - our sexuality, we learn that we can weave intimacy and sexuality back into our lives in a self-enhancing way.

## ***How We Live***

Practicing these principles in our lives means applying program principles at home, at work, and wherever else we gather with others for a common purpose. As we grow spiritually, we find opportunities for service in virtually any situation. Our closest relationships may offer the most challenges to our honesty, compassion, and integrity but we are often rewarded beyond our expectations. We find that spiritual principles can guide us in the everyday challenges of life, and they can help us face even loss, grief, and death with fortitude and grace. What we gain in this program is a blueprint for full and successful living, whatever may come.

*We maintain our recovery by working a daily program, in the knowledge that although we can never be perfect, we can be happy today. We can live life on life's terms, without having to change or suppress our feelings. Our serenity and sobriety grow as we continue to live according to spiritual principles. We enjoy the gifts that come from being honest and living a life of integrity. We ask for help when we need it, and we express our love and gratitude every day. We realize that everything we have been through helps us to be of service to others. We learn that the world is a much safer place than we had ever known before, because we are always in the care of a loving God.*

-Sex Addicts Anonymous, page 61

