

# VS. RHETORIC

know who I am? I wear work shirts.

You can identify yourselves in many ways. But the main point is that these labels allow people to avoid having to be somebody. And in a certain this makes it easier, because we don't have to worry about each other.

Like, I know you by, "That's the guy with the silk shirt, and silk tie in that fraternity, or that is the girl who is the history major. Or she is going out that guy and looks like that." And of course, looks are very important, because we all know we are living in a society where what things look like are considered more important than what things really are.

And so we see how certain things begin to be built in; about how we look at people, how we look at ourselves.

## HAPPINESS IS AN 85?

O.K. I went back to a second semester. I started making little charts. "Well, if I get a ninety in this, no a 95 then I can afford a 70 in this, no a ninety in this and I can afford 75 in this. That will give me an average of 85. Boy that sounds good. I think I'll get an 85 this semester.

So I worked out my projected goal, and I had the fantasy that this time things were going to be different. I remember that my first average was 79.8.

Now at Cornell, 79.8 was a very dangerous average to have because 80 was the lowest possible grade to have because they made you sort of smart. With anything below 80 you were then the run of the mill. At 80 they would say, "Hey he's a pretty good student." Now I went through a big identity crisis wondering if I should tell people that my average was really 79.8, because 79.8 was very different from 80. 80 is smart and 79.8 is "Oh I see".

So sometimes I would say to people very bravely, "I got 79.8" and just imagine that they were looking at me very differently or sometimes I would say "80" and then feel differently inside. And so either way I felt that I had lost.

And either way I felt that somehow a set of numbers had been developed to define who I was. So now once again I was being defined. I was Eric Mann, Tah Delta Fi, 79.8. Now the second semester was worse than the first.

In the second semester, it was warm, and somehow I couldn't get into that 5 or 6 hours a day. Somehow I really liked the springtime. I really liked to walk around. But there is a problem with that 5 or 6 hours if you like to walk around, and that is one of the most amazing things about college is that you're never finished.

Plus there is always additional books to read, additional course material and often the course material is more than you could read in one week.

There's no such thing as leisure. In fact the week is just one big treadmill. So that you find, at least many of you, I think will find, that there's no such thing as being finished with your work.

You're always ahead in this and behind in that. You finally get caught up in this and you find out that you're behind in that and when you get caught up in that, you're behind in something else. You have to figure out, "Well, let's see. If I don't show up for this, and I say I'm sick, then I can have the time to catch up on that." and the process continues. And if you don't work, which happens frequently, you find that you can't enjoy your leisure.

You find that when you take an afternoon off, there's this cloud hanging over your head. "I am three weeks behind in Ec-101."



Well that's o.k. If you're not going to do your work, at least enjoy your afternoon off. "Sure. But I'm three weeks behind in Ec-101. What am I going to do? So I found that I never enjoyed either work or leisure."

## ESCAPE LIES IN SLEEP?

So I did the only logical thing. I went to sleep. I found myself sleeping eight, then eight and a half and then ten hours. Then ten hours plus a nice two-hour nap in the afternoon.

I found myself so tired that I was tired when I woke up.

You know, I would wake up in the morning after having ten hours sleep; I would think about my work, think about what was ahead of me, and plan on having my afternoon nap. It was really very scary. What I was beginning to find was that I was beginning to feel less and less proud of myself.

And soon, after freshman year, because I had been president of my dorm, my fraternity told me

that it was good for the house for me to run for Treasurer of Inter-Fraternity Council.

Now Treasurer of I.F.C. is a very important position. What the treasurer actually does; well, I forget actually, but I remember it was very important because I was told to run for it.

I think, in fact, what's important about being treasurer for I.F.C. is that you go up to people and say "I'm treasurer of the I.F.C. In fact that's about the only thing important about being treasurer for I.F.C."

Again, it's a substitution for being a person. I was now Eric Mann, Tah Delta Fi, 79.8, Treasurer for I.F.C. I was building up a series of things that again were trying to compete because on one hand I was weighing those things, on the other hand it was something that was much more basic, which was with all those numbers and all those titles I still didn't like myself very much. And not only that I began to like myself less.

After Treasurer for I.F.C. I ran for President of I.F.C. the next year. I lost but luckily enough I won Vice-President for I.F.C.

Vice-President is not as good as President, but it's better than Treasurer. The most important thing about being Vice-President of the I.F.C. is

it gets you into quill and dagger.

A lot of you won't know what quill and dagger is. Quill and dagger results when the Vice-President of I.F.C., football players and other people who do meaningless work all get together and create an honorary society.

Now why do you need an honorary? It will clearly decide who's cool. And without an honorary, who would know who's cool?

And so, I found myself going to these parties.

We all walked around with quills and daggers in our ties and went with girls who were sort of extensions of the quill and dagger.

## WHO'S COOL AND WHO'S NOT?

We all walked around saying "I'm cool, you're cool, how's it going?" You know?

Now about this time, I got pretty proficient at sleeping — I had it worked out pretty much to a size — but every once in a while I would have little academic spurts.

I remember going to some professor who would say to me stuff like, "Look, you're doing good work. You just showed up for two straight classes, why don't you start coming more often?" "I mean like it's not too late. You still have five weeks left in the semester. I'd really like to help you. Why don't you do your work. I mean if you'd start doing your work, I think you could come out with good grades. And if you pulled good grades I think you could get into a good graduate school."

And I remember on one of those rare instances when I was talked to by a faculty person feeling fantastically exhilarated, running home — I mean literally running — back to the fraternity, picking up a book, saying "Man, I'm really gonna do it this time," and I would read.

I'd read the first five or six pages and then read the next nine, this is really fantastic. And then about the 37th page I'd start getting sleepy again. And I couldn't figure out what it was. You know?

Well, after a couple of those starts it became clear that the same basic theme was developing that I couldn't face...I don't like school.

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