

The Reactor

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A conspiracy or two

Conspiracy theories usually leave me cold. But on what can I blame some things that have happened while I was paying attention to other things?

In 1964 there was a story on the Society page of the *Tribune* that mentioned "the Mesdames Dale Emde...", listing Enid Emde, now of Periwinkle, and several other local women involved in some public-spirited event of the time. Each one was listed by her husband's name.

I was reminded how times have changed when I wrote a recent column and referred to "Mrs." Eshoo, County Supervisor Anna Eshoo. I was informed modern newspaper style doesn't include such titles as "Mrs."

It may not seem important whether we call someone Eshoo, Ms. Eshoo, or Mrs. Eshoo, but it reflects the same attitude that makes torn jeans a fashion item. It's why it's ok to wear Levis in a job serving the public. A teenager carrying a boom box at full volume on a public street is showing

the same attitude.

It seems to be out of fashion to show respect. There's no need to revert to Victorian forms of address, but courtesy and respect should never become unfashionable.

Some of this rudeness seems to be baggage from the women's movement. You can't call some people "ladies" without getting under their skin. Some married women insist on being known by what we used to call their maiden name. When I see a birth announcement from John Jones and Debbie Smith announcing the arrival of Ashley Jones, my nosy nature can't help but wonder whether the happy couple are married. It does seem to be almost quaint to think that's important, but I do.

Today the *Tribune*, like hundreds of other newspapers, doesn't have a Society Page. Instead there is a People Page. We don't group women as "mesdames" under their husband's names, but under their own names. And it's a no-no to call a woman Mrs.

Eshoo. Instead it's Eshoo. I feel like the guy in the army who's always getting out of step on dress parade. It seems perfectly correct to me to call a woman "Mrs. John Jones" instead of "Elvira Jones." I find referring to somebody as "Azevedo" is rude and abrupt. "Mr. Azevedo" or "Mrs. Azevedo" is much more civilized. Calling Supervisor Bill Schumacher "the Honorable William Schumacher" is a little too much, but "Mr. Schumacher" seems properly respectful.

It isn't because of their office that they deserve respect. Everyone deserves to be treated with respect. If your name is John Jones, and someone whose only knowledge of you comes from a two-minute phone conversation calls you John, doesn't that strike you as over-familiarity.

Civilization is fragile. Each time we skip a courtesy, or slap a vulgar bumpersticker on our car, or fail to use a title of respect like Mrs. or Mr., or mar a blank wall with graffiti, we erode the foundations of our civilization, just a tiny bit. Civilization is a group effort. We all need to be involved, or we might as well forget the whole concept.