

## EXPRESSIONS

# Girl power

*How to assert yourself as a young woman*

BY CASSIE POTLER ('10), JMU HerCampus.com editor

**F**or her birthday last year, JMU junior Liz LaHayne's mom got her a ring featuring a freshwater pearl. Just days later, the pearl fell out. Despite the fact that the ring had a warranty, Liz ('09) was turned down at the jeweler when she asked that they replace the pearl. The next day, her mother spoke with the same saleswoman and had the ring repaired, at no extra cost, no questions asked.

We've all been there. Maybe your landlord treats you differently than your adult neighbors, or waiters at a local restaurant think the table of professors downstairs deserves much more attention than you and your buddies on the deck. But just because you're a girl and/or student doesn't mean you don't deserve respect.

"Nobody can walk all over you unless you give them permission to do that," says Gail Evans, author of *Play Like a Man, Win Like a Woman*. "It's cultural, and the system isn't going to change itself," she says. "You have to control it yourselves."

We all want to be treated like adults, and we shouldn't have to have our parents step in to make it happen. Here are a few common scenarios and how to avoid being taken advantage of in each:

## Rude retail

Let's face it; it's true that you probably aren't going to spend as much at Macy's as the woman in the suit and stilettos looking at \$700 purses. However, the salespeople don't know that for sure, and they certainly shouldn't assume it.

When walking into a store, you set the tone. Have a mature attitude and be assertive (but not rude), and kind (but not timid) to the salespeople, and you'll be taken seriously. Also, present yourself as the type of shopper you would want to cooperate with if you worked in the store. "Learn how to speak up nicely, not flip," says Evans. "Be pleasant."

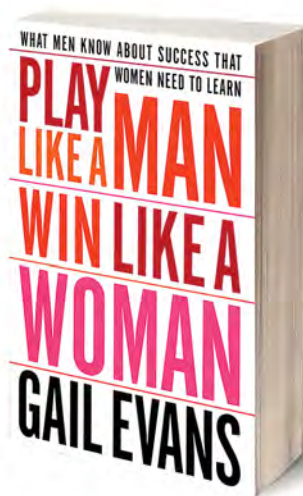
Don't be afraid to make requests, like asking the salesperson to check the back when there are no more boots your size on the floor.

If you're still having problems, find the manager. Somewhere in the store there's someone who (hopefully) understands good customer service and will help you to meet your needs. But beware: Never, never get into a childish argument with anyone. This will not get you anywhere.

**'Learn how to speak up nicely, not flip. Be pleasant.'**

— GAIL EVANS, author, *Play Like a Man, Win Like a Woman*

However, if a store's employees are consistently not nice, stop shopping there — and let everyone know why. "That's how things change. Blog about it, tell your friends, and make it public," Evans says.



## Lackluster landlords

"From the landlord's perspective, college students are temporary residents," says Evans. "So set the precedent from the start that you are good tenants and you want to be treated the same way any permanent residents would."

Earlier this year, my roommates and I were dissatisfied with the management at our brand new, super-expensive apartment building. We wrote a lengthy, levelheaded e-mail to the building's owners describing each issue and how we felt it violated our lease. Within a couple of weeks, all problems were fixed and we have been treated with the utmost respect ever since.

Girls, no one — not even the sandy-haired boy from Calculus you've been subconsciously urging to ask you out — can read your mind. So communicate your needs in an appropriate way, and the person you're working with will have a much easier time serving you.

## Take yourself seriously

These situations, although common, are by no means the only times you will face unequal treatment as a young woman. Poor and unfair customer service in society has been around forever, but it's up to us to change that. If you want things to change, then voice your issues. "You can't just walk out unsatisfied," Evans says. "Let the manager know why you're leaving. That's how they'll learn." We are capable of being strong and powerful; we must be treated with respect to be taken seriously as young women, and in order to be treated with respect we must treat ourselves with respect.

## General tips for asserting yourself

- Approach the situation with the expectation that you will be listened to and treated with respect.
- Understand that no one can read your mind and that you need to communicate your needs confidently and maturely.
- Hold your head high and try not to slouch or look intimidated.
- Take 10 deep breaths before any confrontational situations so you are calm and have collected your thoughts in an organized way.
- Connect with the people who serve you. Be friendly.
- Be respectful, but persistent.
- Stop frequenting businesses that exhibit poor customer service. ❌

\* Read Cassie Potler's entire article at <http://hercampus.com/dormlife/girl-power-how-assert-yourself-young-woman>. Learn more about Potler on Page 14.

**About the Author** Cassie Potler ('10) is a School of Media Arts and Design major with a concentration in print journalism and a minor in art. After graduation, she will join Teach for America and work in Washington, D.C. In addition to writing for HerCampus.com, she is an editor for JMU's journal of first-year writing, eVision, and is a photographer for "PictureIt! JMU." Potler grew up in Glenwood, Md., where she was raised to be a devoted Ravens football fan. Read more about Potler on Page 14 and see her work at <http://hercampus.com/search/node/potler>.