

In the last issue, the subject of referring to women as "Ma'am" was raised by Sonny Bishop.

The question: To Ma'am or not to Ma'am? The responses were abundant. Without further adieu, I give you Part II:



I hate being called Ma'am, because I am not married and I feel young still...but I have found myself using 'that Word' when I am trying to get the attention of a woman I do not know that is 'senior' in rank to me. It's obviously a derivative of Madam (which you use to address a married woman in France, right??). I have certainly found it to be a 'southern thing,' you don't hear Ma'am much in the north. – D.B.

Thank you for asking my opinion. I come from a very strict and formal education and had to take grammar classes every year. We were supposed to use Miss, Mrs., and Mr. We were not allowed to use the word Miss unless we used it with a last name. We did not say Miss Cheryl, for example. We would say Miss Cheryl White or Miss White. As far as 'Yes, Ma'am and No, Ma'am', it appalls me to hear a southern educated person call someone Ma'am, when they have a name they were born with. It simply sounds like they are servants. – Bonnie W.

Well, I used to hate it, but then I grew up and looked around to see a very impolite society. So now having my eyes opened by terrible rudeness in the world, I really appreciate the courtesy of being called "Ma'am," I think its respectful in this rude world. – Mari

I prefer a formal address from a stranger. Most languages have a formal and an informal address used in quick informal exchanges, i.e. at a checkout, paying gas, etc. So, I don't see the big deal about the use of Ma'am. My first language is Italian and we have a formal address and informal address to distinguish between a woman and a girl. Obviously, If you meet someone on a regular basis, or for a lengthy exchange (i.e. a dinner), and you haven't exchanged names, and/or they continue to call you Ma'am then you have to wonder if they are playing with a full deck. What I find problematic, if anything at all, about the Ma'am issue relates

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not to the formality, but to my own ego, realization, and horror of no longer being perceived of as a 'Miss.' – Grace

I think it's terrific to be addressed as Ma'am....I know immediately it's a person from the south, I think it shows respect and politeness, good "breeding" by the parents. – Ziggy

I feel like being called Ma'am is being respectful most of the time if it's coming from a service attendant; but if it is Ma'am coming from someone in a bar, say, or a social situation - I think OMG I'm old! I hate it when some young, or younger, man calls me Ma'am - it's like really formal and makes me feel matronly. But I like it if it's from someone who's a waiter, or at the airport, or things like that. – Linda

I consider the word "Ma'am" a form of respect, overall, when a nice person is addressing me in the grocery store, post office, etc. It depends on how it is said and who is addressing me on how I feel about it. If it is a nice, young individual that is making a comment about my age it feels somehow offensive. I usually tease with respect and say something like, "I am not old enough to be a "Ma'am"; I frequently say "Thank you kind sir," when a gentleman opens a door for me. – Jenn

And then, just to be fair, I did ask some men, and here's what they said:

As far as the southern thing, I have mixed emotions. A lot of time, when it is used in the south, especially to a northerner, it feels like I am being patronized. The Sirs and Ma'ams are many times insincere and too sugary to be genuine. – Dave W.

As one who, since high school, has been a strong believer in, but not always a practitioner of, the art of etiquette, I think the use of Sir and Ma'am is still appropriate. I believe that etiquette is roughly defined as the art or practice of making others comfortable... a code of courtesy. I still subscribe even here in the Maine woods. Ayah! – Dave H.

My goodness, Mr. Bishop, did you expect such a lengthy answer? Hope it helps, but I suspect the above responses leave you in the same quandary in which you began. What it seems that

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you can extrapolate is that women still have that age old ability to change their minds on a whim. They/we like the respect, but perhaps not the connotation of being old(er); Ma'am is our mother, or maiden aunt, but never us.

Sincerely,

L.A. Plume