

## HELP DESK

# How to Fight and Fix Your Car Like a Woman

By Judith Newman

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I am woman, hear me roar, blah blah blah. Who needs all these female-empowerment books? After all, we are a nation where almost half the work force is women, where we outnumber men in graduation from college and make only 18 percent less than they do in median weekly earnings and ... hmm. Well, the percentage of female chief executives leading Fortune 500 companies is at an all-time high! Of 6.4 percent. Wait, seriously? That can't be right. Perhaps these books aren't such a bad idea after all.

The tone of self-help books is generally gentle and supportive, urging us to use the book as we see fit. But the prefatory author's note of Claudia Chan's **THIS IS HOW WE RISE: Reach Your Highest Potential, Empower Women, Lead Change in the World (Da Capo Lifelong Books, \$26)** includes an italicized passage like this: "*It is important to read the book in chronological sequence, starting with the introduction, which sets the context for the rest of the chapters.*" O.K., Bossy Boots. Indeed, Chan is the boss and founder of S.H.E. Global Media, a company that holds symposiums around the world to foster women's empowerment in the workplace. The child of striving Chinese immigrants who imbued her with a "survival mode and scarcity mentality," Chan tells the story of her own transformation from a "me over we" to a "me for we" attitude, which helped her change her business as well as her life. Gender equality, Chan argues, is better not only for our personal lives and our communities, but also for the corporate bottom line. She cites a 2016 Morgan Stanley report that suggests gender-diverse companies yield more profits: "Among the stocks ranked at the top of their global stock selection, stocks with higher gender diversity outperformed those with lower gender diversity." Chan believes, too, that traditionally feminine traits are well suited to powering the world. "When we empower women," she writes, "we unleash their talent for compassion, collaboration and communication, which can then be applied to solving other issues in our communities." "This Is How We Rise" tells women how they can harness their femaleness for success. It's not the newest idea in the world, and the not-so-subtle suggestion that spirituality be a part of our lives ("You will not reach your highest potential without it") won't reach all of us where we live.

But it's certainly good to be reminded why women can and should make powerful leaders. Which is not to say that women leaders are incapable of brutal aggression like their male counterparts. Case in point: You wouldn't have wanted to be Protestant under the rule of Queen Mary I of England. Still, she inspired a tasty cocktail.

Does a dude have something to tell women about being more powerful and confident without the usual mansplaining? He certainly does if he's an expert in self-defense. In **THE NEW SUPER POWER FOR WOMEN: Trust Your Intuition, Predict Dangerous Situations, and Defend Yourself From the Unthinkable (Touchstone, paper, \$16.99)**, Steve Kardian, a former F.B.I. defense tactics instructor who now teaches self-defense specifically for women, explains how many crimes can be thwarted in the first seconds of an attack — which is approximately how long it takes for an assailant to size you up. Most of these men are extremely calculating, he says, and their biggest fears are getting hurt themselves or getting caught — so whatever you can do to convey you are the person who will ensure that one of these two things will happen can reduce your risk of being a target.

The book's explanations of how to "fight like a woman" are eye-opening, but of course there's no substitute for physical practice. The biggest takeaway is counterintuitive: At all costs, resist. Many women are taught from an early age that the best chance of survival in an attack is to obey. Not true, says Kardian (who co-wrote the book with A. Clara Pistek). Get in the car, follow him to the deserted apartment, do what he wants — and you're toast. Kardian is also a big believer in people *not* minding their own business. A third person barging into a situation that looks dicey is extremely likely to help avert a crime. So if you see someone who's listening a little too closely to a woman's room number at a hotel, tell her; if you think you saw someone slip something into her drink when she goes to the restroom, speak up. He cites a YouTube video called "Snack Man," in which two people on a New York City subway are having a brawl because the woman thinks the man is following her. There are punches and kicks. And then some big dude eating chips just kind of sidles between them, continuing to eat, saying nothing ... and the fight is over. Snack Man is my hero.

Laura Bates has written the book that you should give your teenage daughter this Christmas — or your teenage son, for that matter. **GIRL UP: Kick Ass, Claim Your Woman Card, and Crush Everyday Sexism (Touchstone, paper, \$16)** is a manifesto for maintaining your sanity and dignity in today's social media quagmire, where "suddenly our lives, our looks, our relationships, our meals and our cats are open to scrutiny." (Bonus points: Bates, the founder of the Everyday Sexism Project, is as funny and sex-positive as early Cynthia Heimel.) A bracing antidote to self-consciousness — Bates reminds us constantly that no one is scrutinizing us a tenth as much as we scrutinize ourselves — "Girl Up" offers practical steps to overcoming stereotypes and not letting the world define you. The chapter titles say it all: among them, "You Aren't Your Body," "Sluts, Unicorns, and Other Mythical Creatures," "Porn ≠ Sex" and "The F-Word" — that word being "feminist." The book is filled with tap-dancing vaginas, clever comebacks to ridiculous pickup lines and all sorts of handy translation guides, notably of tabloid-magazine language pertaining to women. For instance: "flaunts" means "has body part"; "shows off" means "has body part"; "goes makeup-free" means "is human."

In a chart with two columns — “Ten Things Every Girl Should Know How to Do According to Magazines” vs. “Ten Things Every Girl Should Know How to Do in Real Life” — she compares the magazine imperative (“How to kiss in a way that communicates perfectly what you would and wouldn’t like to happen next”) with what would actually be useful: “How to use your words and have an actual conversation, in the event that your partner doesn’t, in fact, turn out to be a lip psychic.” All of us, and young women especially, need to maintain our humanity and kindness while not giving a hoot what other people think, as long as we’re not hurting anyone. And that’s what makes this book special. Well, that and the tap-dancing vaginas.

While Bates is empowering a young girl’s psyche, Tasneem Bhatia is here to give our health a boost. **SUPER WOMAN RX: Discover the Secrets to Lasting Health, Your Perfect Weight, Energy, and Passion With Dr. Taz’s Power Type Plans (Rodale, \$26.99)** is a perfectly traditional self-help guide, which works on the premise that while everyone is a lovely individual snowflake, we all fall into certain emotional and physical categories, and if we figure out our category we can determine the best diet and fitness and psychic-energy plan to empower ourselves. In other words: Quizzes! I had to find out if I was a Gypsy Girl, a Boss Lady, a Savvy Chick, an Earth Mama or a Nightingale. Turns out I was a Savvy Chick, like the author, and I have to say that the ills Savvy Chicks are prone to (anxiety, migraines, infertility, eczema) are pretty much precisely the ones I’ve had. The solutions are quite involved but perfectly sensible. I also happen to be incapable of sticking to any regimen. But that doesn’t mean I won’t spend money on vitamins, probiotics and various warm broths while I try.

Speaking of quizzes, I took the pop quiz about car care at the beginning of Patrice Banks’s **GIRLS AUTO CLINIC GLOVE BOX GUIDE (Touchstone, paper, \$25)** and scored my personal best: zero. I did not get a single answer right. I can’t be excused for being a car-less New Yorker, because I have actually owned a car. In most areas of life I am keen on understanding what I’m doing. But when it came to the car I somehow felt a penis was necessary to deal with it. And I am not alone, despite the fact that women are more frequently the purchasers of cars in a family. Explaining that a woman’s relationship to her car should be like a relationship to her partner — heavy on the communication and the commitment — Banks gives us the basics here: the parts, how they operate, what you can fix yourself, and perhaps most important, how not to be cheated (by knowing how much various repair jobs should cost). It’s simply written, it’s not condescending or cutesy, and it removes the mystery from something that many of us find a little scary. “Girls Auto Clinic” is not about how we feel about our cars; it’s about what we can learn to do. And that’s some pretty excellent roaring right there.