

# Challenge the way you think

*Loud Women Book Club fosters change 1 book at a time*

BY KRIS TONKENS

THE very first meeting of the Loud Women Book Club was in March of 2019. Three of us sat around the table discussing *Not That Bad*, by Roxane Gay. Strangers to each other, we discussed our own histories with sexual violence and how reading the essays in the book had made us look differently at those experiences. It was a very open, raw, and powerful conversation, and I left that night knowing that it was the beginning of something really special.

For me, the journey to where I am now had started years ago when I read *Shrill*, by Lindy West. In her essay, 'You're So Brave for Wearing Clothes and Not Hating Yourself,' she talked about filling her social media feed with fat people to normalize fat bodies and how it changed her life.

I immediately did this. I filled my feed with fat activists. I can't express to you how refreshing it was to see women of all different sizes, colours and abilities just living their truth. Days passed. Months passed. Over time, that nasty little voice inside my head got very quiet. I looked at others, and myself, through a new lens.

I started to battle the racism within myself the same way.

I filled my feed with women of colour. I expanded the range of books I was reading. I didn't want to be the kind of feminist that primarily read books by white feminists. I felt that by reading mem-



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**The Thunder Bay's Anti-Racism and Respect Committee and Diversity Thunder Bay produce this monthly column to promote greater understanding of race relations in Northwestern Ontario.**

oirs and essays by women who's lived experiences were different from my own, I could better understand and be more equipped to fight the fight alongside them.

The more I read, the more I felt a strong desire to surround myself with other women who were doing the same work that I was, and if they weren't yet, maybe I could inspire more women to join me. I started the Loud Women Collective.

The women at that table the first day, and the women in the room now, come from such different places and times that we might never have found ourselves together if not for the space we have made. The group, the room is a safe space where you can say anything and everything. It's a room with lots of "aha!" moments where we read or discuss something and think: "I've done that. I did that. I don't want to do that

anymore. I don't want to think that way anymore. I'm going to push myself to do better."

We admit our mistakes, the harm we have done, and the things we still think in our minds despite how hard we're trying to grow. It takes time to unlearn the things that are deeply ingrained in us from growing up in a very racist and sexist society. It takes work — important work, ongoing work — but we're up for the challenge, and we hope you will join us.

The Loud Women Book Club meets on the third Thursday of every month and reads non-fiction feminist books published in the previous or current year.

The first five books that we will read in 2021 are: *Home Body*, by Rupi Kaur; *Hood Feminism (Notes From The Women That a Movement Forgot)*, by Mikki Kendall; *Rebent Sinner*, by Ivan Coyote; *Disability Visibility (First-Person Stories From The 21st Century)*, by Alice Wong; and *Mediocre (The Dangerous Legacy of White Male America)*, by Ijeoma Oluo.

Find the full list on Facebook and Instagram @loudwomenscollective.

*Kris Tonkens is a musician, barista, and founder of the Loud Women Collective. She moved from Melbourne to Thunder Bay with her family in 2019. The views and opinions expressed in this column are those of the author.*