



REACT: RESPECT IN ACTION ZINES

[Metropolitan Action Committee on Violence Against Women and Children (METRAC)]

People who experience violence are often called “victims,” but these youth-centric zines use the term “survivors” to acknowledge the strength and courage it takes to carry on after experiencing abuse. Created with the input of numerous youth voices, *Many Paths to Healing*, *End the Silence*, and *End the Silence on Violence at Home* are incredibly empowering guides that give survivors the tools to continue. The zines were created by Respect in Action (ReAct), a Toronto-based youth education program, originating in 2001, that addresses issues surrounding youth violence. ReAct is part of the Metropolitan Action Committee on Violence Against Women and Children (METRAC), a not-for-profit organization working to prevent violence against women and youth.

The zines dispel myths around violence and recognize that even though violence against youth isn’t always talked about, that doesn’t make it okay. In fact, the media tends to normalize violence and exaggerate youth crime when rates are actually dropping. The reality is that young women, youth of colour, Aboriginal, new immigrant, disabled, poor, working-class, lesbian, gay, bisexual, trans, queer, and two-spirited youth are at higher risk of experiencing violence. But because young people aren’t often taught how to deal with violence in their lives or in the lives of their friends, these experiences can remain bottled up, sometimes leading to internalized blame.

That is why these zines are so important, because they inform survivors that, although it can be scary and intimidating, opening up

is the first step to recovery. Survivors are told that they have a right to feel angry, to feel safe, to be loved and to love themselves. They are encouraged to consider what they need to do to heal, and exactly what they want to get out of the healing process. That can involve talking to someone they trust, pressing charges, or holding an abuser accountable in other ways. Designated areas are provided in one of the zines for readers to write down or draw their thoughts on topics like these.

Each issue focuses on a specific aspect of youth violence, from violence at home to how to start the healing process. Supportive quotes are scattered throughout, like the following words from bell hooks: “No matter how broken, how lost we are, we can be found. Our wounded souls are never beyond repair.”

A section in *Many Paths to Healing* that I find particularly powerful addresses the importance of self-care: regularly doing meaningful activities that contribute to one’s own well-being. These activities also allow survivors to release emotions in healthy ways. A self-care checklist includes activities like talking to a friend, family member or guidance counsellor, praying, writing in a journal, exercising, resting and listening to music. There is even a suggested playlist of songs to listen to if you’re feeling pissed off or upset.

On the flipside, one zine sensitively addresses behaviour that can bring temporary relief but can also cause long term damage, like self-harm, substance abuse, self-hate or stuffing away emotions, and advises youth to carefully consider the risks these activities pose to themselves and others.

Another constructive tool is a safety plan guideline that helps readers assess how to protect themselves even if they are not yet ready to seek support. Youth are also advised how to support a friend who is experiencing violence and given extensive resource lists of support groups and help lines.

ReAct is currently working on their fourth zine, slated for April, about transformative and alternative justice. And, over the next few months, youth from the ReAct program are contributing to the *Shameless* blog, talking about violence and healthy relationships.

Born out of collective experience and knowledge, ReAct zines offer survivors a safe space to explore their emotions and recognize their rights, making them invaluable and incredibly well-rounded resources for all youth. **ADRIANA ROLSTON**

ReAct zines are available at various Toronto youth organizations and ReAct workshops. You can book workshops and order or download zines at metrac.org.

BOOKS

LOVE CAKE

Leah Lakshmi Piepzna-Samarasinha

[TSAR Publications]

Massachusetts-born, honorary Torontonian, Bay-area activist, community organizer, disability warrior and self-proclaimed (and acclaimed) femme shark Leah Lakshmi’s

Love Cake is a masterpiece of quirky love in the midst of war, trauma, organizing and self-discovery. Situated in-between chili-growing -35

