

ZINE

EMBODY OUR ACTIVISM

a collective exploration with activists from
Kampala, Uganda



Sustaining women's leadership

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WELCOME.

Before we dive into the content, we invite you to take a few glorious minutes to settle your body and mind. To fully arrive into this zine-space.

Healing Practice #1 - Belly Breaths

(suggested time: 5 minutes)

If it's comfortable for you, lie down on your back and rest your hands on your belly. Or, if you prefer, you can remain seating...

Breathe in and out through your nose as best you can. As you inhale, can you feel your stomach expanding like a balloon, perhaps pressing gently into your hands? As you exhale, can you feel your belly move towards the floor, releasing?

Repeat this 6 to 8 times. Remember to breathe in and out of the nose. Try to deepen your breath, feeling it rise and fall at your bellow....

Notice how you feel — in your mind, your body, and your whole being — as you complete this practice.

Why we gathered

Collectively as activists, far too often we de-prioritize ourselves. Too often we over-work, and under-play. Too often we (re)experience our own traumas and those of the communities we support. Too often we get sick, we burn out. We overlook our fundamental birthright . . . to flourish. And yet, we deserve to be safe, rested and resilient. The very sustainability of our activism to end gender based violence demands that we **BE WELL.**

So we gathered together for two days of participatory workshops. To learn, un-learn, and collectively imagine another reality.

Our aim: To create a shared vision for what it means to 'embody our activism.' To gain practical ideas on how we get there. And to inspire ourselves and other activists in connecting to our bodies (and each other) so we can strengthen our movements from the inside out.

"THE WOUNDS
WE CARRY IN
OUR BODY DROP
DOWN TO THE
COMMUNITIES WE
ARE SERVING."

"THE MORE YOU
ARE WOUNDED,
THE MORE YOU
WOUND OTHER
PEOPLE."

How we explored

Thirty activists gathered for participatory workshops in Kampala, Uganda (5–6 March 2024). All of us had previously participated in [‘Move with HaRT’](#) – a twelve-week journey using mindfulness and movement to find Safety in the Body, Radical Self Love, and Compassion in Action. In Day 1 we identified what prevents us from loving our bodies. We considered how limiting beliefs and unjust systems (patriarchy, capitalism, etc.) oppress our mind, body and soul. In Day 2, we set out to imagine a new way forward . . .

Workshop Guiding Principles

- Show up as our authentic selves – leaving status, labels, judgements behind.
- Establish a brave container to foster community and support for sharing experiences.
- Bring our bodies – minds – hearts – skills to the table to name and unlearn barriers to embodiment.
- Create and “relearn” a path to get back to our bodies.
- Establish clarity amongst ourselves to share and influence others



Central questions

Co-creation requires collective engagement and input. We chose to use a question-based approach that invited everyone to contribute ideas and lived experiences. We unpacked these questions by moving, singing, dancing, talking, shouting, laughing, drawing, journaling –letting creativity drive the process.

- What's stopping us from loving ourselves?
- How does it feel like to deny our bodies? To feel shame about our bodies? To live outside the present moment?
- How does our capitalistic, patriarchal culture impact our body? Our ability to rest, trust, and experience pleasure?
- How does it feel like when we come into our bodies? Listen to our bodies? Love our bodies?
- How does it feel to move and breathe together, as a sisterhood and collective?
- How does our activism shift when we are truly embodied?
- What around us needs to change so we can be more connected to our bodies?



Emerging insights

The insights were too many to fit these pages. Here we share 3 ideas that surfaced time and again amongst us.

1. Healing ourselves – including our bodies – is vital in our work to support others.

"WHEN I AM SEEING MYSELF AS A HEALED BODY, THEN I AM ABLE TO REFLECT AND SHARE THE SAME ENERGY TO OTHER BODIES. EVEN WHEN THEY ARE DAMAGED OR HURT, THEY WILL FIND THEIR OWN HEALING, BECAUSE I AM A LIVING EXAMPLE..."

2. Too often we are encouraged to showcase our suffering, and yet turning our attention towards healing brings optimism and possibility.

"I REALIZE THAT TALKING ABOUT YOURSELF AS A HEALED PERSON IS SO EXCITING... AND YET WE LOVE THE WOUNDS, WE CARRY THEM, WE ENJOY THEM... WE SPEAK ABOUT THEM WITH PRIDE... WE ENJOY THIS SUFFERING, EVEN THOUGH IT DOESN'T SERVE US..."

3. Programs like Move with HaRT help us unlearn patriarchal ideas and create lasting changes in how we relate to our bodies.

"AS A WOMAN WITH A DISABILITY, I USED TO LOVE MY UPPER PART BUT NOT MY LOWER PART. I AM SO GRATEFUL TO HART, BECAUSE THINGS HAVE CHANGED. NOW I CAN LOOK AT MYSELF FROM THE INSIDE, RATHER THAN THE OUTSIDE. WHAT I BRING OUT FROM THE INSIDE... IT MATTERS A LOT. NOW I CAN SHARE SOMETHING DIFFERENT."

Healing Practice #2 - A Love Letter To Me

(suggested time: 20 minutes)

Find a quiet space. Center yourself, returning to the Belly Breaths from Practice #1. Now, write a self-love letter to yourself, in a language directly from your heart. Consider writing from the perspective of your future self – a more trusting, secure, and spiritually connected version of you in this moment.

First, think about who most needs to hear the message you're sending? Is it the current you? The you of 5 to 10 years back, who was going through a rough patch? Or is it your inner child, who feels scared and unsure?

In your love letter, address what's been bothering you. Only you know yourself truly, fully, authentically. Hold space to get honest and explore what's been on your mind and heart. Then gently acknowledge what's been weighing you down.

In your love letter, gently embrace yourself (at whichever age you selected) with words of encouragement. Tell yourself that whatever storms you are having—just like all storms—they are going to pass. In your love letter. Remind yourself that whatever pain you're going through is only temporary. Remind yourself that the essence of joy you hold is eternal.

In your letter, lift yourself. Give yourself the compliment you've been yearning to see in words. (You are enough. You matter. You are loved and cherished. Etc.) Now is the time to speak directly to your heart, body and soul. To your full self.

As you close, recommit to yourself and to the evolving process of loving yourself . . . exactly where you are right now. *** Remember that you always have been and always will be perfectly enough.

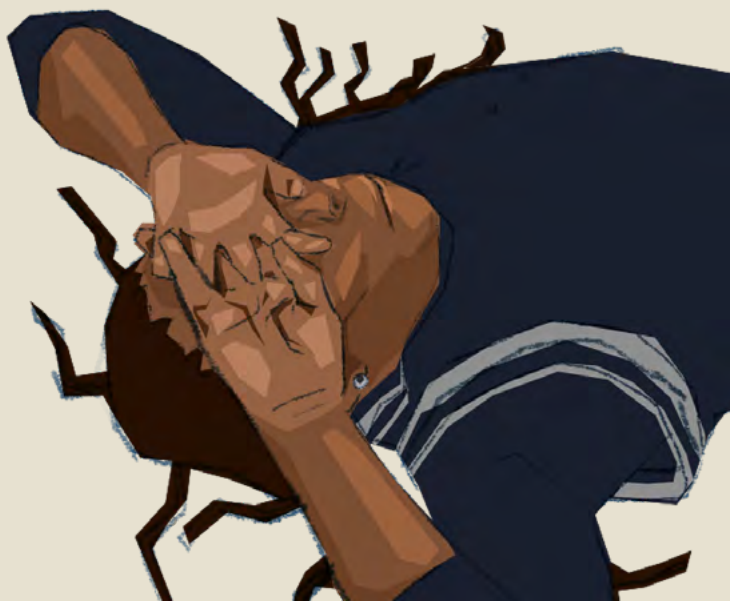
Breathe in the relief and support you provide. May this letter lead to inner peace and enhanced self esteem. Allow yourself to feel all the feels. Often what you're looking for most is self-acceptance. With this in mind, you may feel a wave of relief just by being heard and seen. Without a doubt, you are here for yourself.

NOTE: WHY IS THIS IMPORTANT? ABOVE ALL, A LOVE LETTER TO YOURSELF OFFERS A CHANCE TO FEEL HELD.

A love letter to me:

"Today I just wanted to let you know that
you are amazing, beautiful and resilient.
Thank you for holding your head high even
when storms are knocking at your door,
for showing up even when the battery is out,
for loving all that is around you even when
it's ugly on the inside of a stormy morning.
Thank you. Keep it up."

~Embody our Activism workshop participant



Collective vision

Embody our Activism is more than an idea. It is something we feel inside, connected to our need to be whole. Our need to flourish and thrive, in our body, mind and soul. This vision is hard to put into words – this is the fruit of our efforts:

“Embodying our Activism is about healing our bodies and tending to the suffering and traumas in our body. Embodying our Activism emphasizes the act of listening to the body and listening (connecting) to the space around us. It is about feeling into our wholeness, so we can project that wholeness outwards and lead with that wholeness in our communities.”

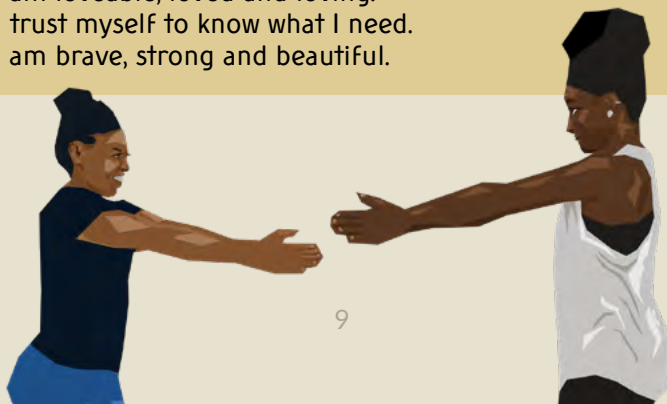
Healing Practice #3 - Closing affirmations

(suggested time: 5 minutes)

Find a comfortable way to be in your body... lying down or sitting.

Choose one of the affirmations below that resonates in your soul. Repeat it to yourself, at least 5 times (if possible, voice the affirmation out loud). Let the words sink in. As you listen to your own voice, gently massage your face, neck or any part of you that feels good.

- I am perfect, just as I am
- Everything I need, I already am
- I am loveable, loved and loving.
- I trust myself to know what I need.
- I am brave, strong and beautiful.



Acknowledgements:

We are deeply grateful to the 30 activists who engaged in this exploration together, generously sharing their lived experiences and creative ideas. We hope this Zine honors their collective wisdom. We would also like to highlight Joyce Christine Nakiwala (Senior Program Manager, HaRT) for skillfully facilitating the two-day workshop, and Lillian Nalwoga (Senior Programme Manager, MEMPROW) for overall coordination. 'Embody our Activism' is part of MEMPROW's 'Stars in the Making' leadership program, generously supported by the Wellspring Philanthropic Fund.

This content in this Zine was co-developed by HaRT, MEMPROW and the 30 activists who participated in the workshops.

Illustration and design: Sarah Ijangolet

'Embody our Activism: a collective exploration with activists from Kampala, Uganda.' MEMPROW and Healing and Resilience after Trauma (HaRT), Uganda © 2024

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