

Understanding “sad, mad and scared” and other feelings as fertile soil for anti-oppression/antiracism work.

Our country has a history of over 400 years of racial oppression at personal, interpersonal, institutional and cultural levels. The VISIONS, Inc model for anti-oppression work addresses all four of those levels, AND identifies the way oppression and change function in **three dimensions**. Those three dimensions are **thinking, doing and feeling**.

We address the **thinking** dimension of oppression and change through education. We address misinformation that we were taught and caught by living in a world that produced things like “race science” and “slave holding gospel” to form the intellectual and moral rationale for segregation and/or assimilation to a culture of white supremacy. We address this thinking dimension work as well by defining key terms and concepts like oppression, race, racism, ethnicity, equity, diversity, inclusion, privilege, prejudice, discrimination. We also address this thinking dimension by researching and understanding why laws were set up to segregate, why movies were made to reinforce the justification of exclusion, why monuments to the Confederacy were set up all around the nation following the civil war in spite of the fact that the Confederate government was defeated the the Union.

Addressing this thinking dimension is vital. **And** the work of antiracism is more than just correcting mis-information that we have been taught or caught growing up. It involves more than re-forming our minds, changing our thinking. It is more than identifying conscious and unconscious white supremacy cultural biases that both white and black people continue to operate by and thereby undermine racial equity culture.

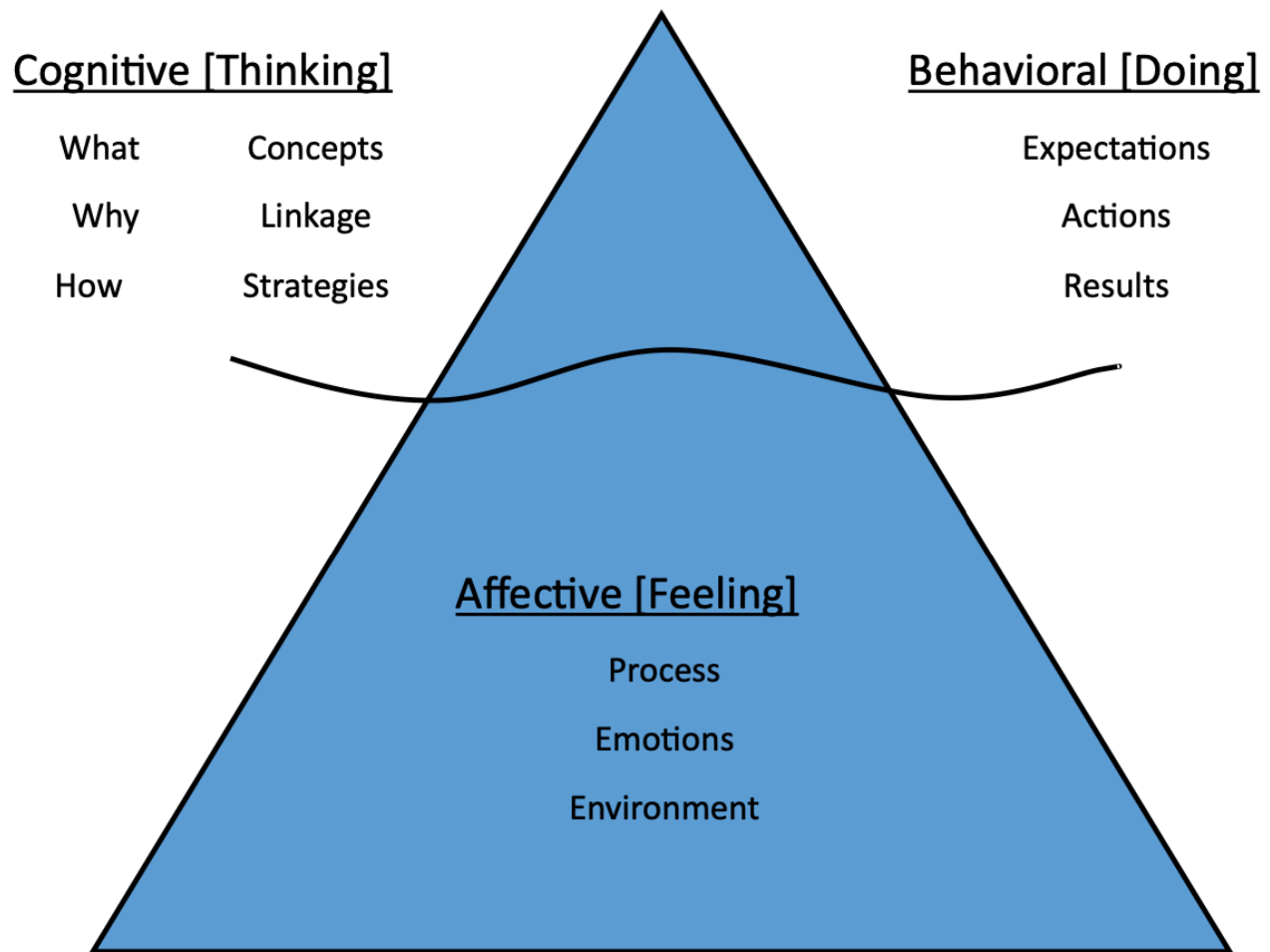
We also need to address the **doing** dimension of oppression and change through new antiracist policies, through adjusted budgets that prioritize equity, repairing and restoring what was stolen through slavery, Jim Crow, mass incarceration and the pervasive culture of white supremacy. The doing dimension addresses hiring of more diverse workforces, leadership teams and board members. Getting body cameras for police officers. Addressing what seems to be the higher number of arrests and citations for people of color in our city. Starting equity accountability groups for city government. And removing oppressive symbols of the confederacy in the public center of our city. The doing dimension of oppression and change is all about action, behavior, results and expectations for ongoing behavior.

Addressing this **doing** dimension is vital. The work of antiracism is far more than knowing about oppression and then saying “I’m sorry.” It is about removal of barriers to racial equity. **And** the work of antiracism is more than just about changing policies that are racist. It is more than just changing the laws which produce on-going and widening gaps in racial equity and perpetuate racist thinking. (e.g. reparation laws, standardized testing laws, criminal justice laws, etc.). Ibram Kendi’s book “How to be an Antiracist” focuses on this doing dimension as a priority (without discounting the thinking dimension). His central argument is that policies produce and support racist thinking and inequities.

There is a third dimension of oppression and change which has the potential to sabotage the powerful work around the thinking and doing dimensions. It is perhaps like the oil in the engine of anti oppression work. Or maybe like the blood in the body. If this dimension is ignored, dismissed or discounted it can lock things down and kill genuine change and authentic engagement.

This third dimension of oppression and change is the **feelings/emotional/affective dimension**.

Three Dimensions of Change



VISIONS, Inc. materials point out that “Ninety percent of authentic engagement is suppressed beneath the surface within the affective(feelings) dimension of change. Change can only happen when we are emotionally engaged and ready. If a person is overwhelmed by their own fears, sadness or anger the process of change will be very challenging.”

Feelings as Messengers

There are SIX feelings in the Feelings Family. Each FEELING is a response to a STIMULUS. Something happens and a feeling arises. The pattern is . . .

STIMULUS ———> FEELING ———> MESSAGE ———> NEED

FEELING	STIMULUS	MESSAGE	NEED/RESPONSE
POWERFUL	Accomplishment or Anticipated success	I am competent.	Keep on going!
JOYFUL	Inner gratitude, awe and wonder	I am excited or happy.	Keep on going!
PEACEFUL	Deep awareness of connectedness and healthy relationships	I am centered.	Keep on going!
MAD	Real or perceived violation.	My boundaries have been crossed.	I need to set limits and re-establish boundaries.
SAD	Real or anticipated loss.	I am experiencing or anticipating bereavement.	I need comfort, space and support to grieve and let go.
SCARED	Real or perceived danger.	I am threatened or in peril.	I need protection, support and reassurance.

Emotional literacy means that you are aware of what feeling[s] you are experiencing in response to a stimulus at any given moment and that you are paying attention to the message that the feeling is sending so that you can choose whether to and how to respond. The challenge is to strive for the congruence between the feeling and stimulus and the need.

Visions-inc.org

Think about the obstacles that exist within you around authentic engagement in antiracism work.

What has caused you to avoid it,
treat it lightly,
discount the significance of it,
self-sabotage it,
or engage it in self-defeating ways?

How many of these obstacles are related to feelings of fear, sadness and anger that you need help navigating so that you get what you need to “keep on keeping on”?

The VISIONS, Inc. model offers help with this feelings dimension with an invitation to pay attention to what you are feeling. Do not discount and avoid those feelings. Welcome those feelings like messengers who are telling you what you need to stay in the good work of antiracism.

The assumption of this approach to anti oppression work is that of **abundance**. This means that we are 100% responsible for asking for and arranging to get what we need.

As we grow in emotional intelligence and practice “self focus” we recognize the feelings we are having and can act in ways to care for ourselves and others.

As we explore this dimension of our feelings it is important to consider:

Six core feelings: PEACEFUL, POWERFUL, JOYFUL, SAD, MAD, SCARED (see feeling wheel)

What feeling was easiest for you to express at home?

What feeling was not ok or felt wrong for you to express at home? (What feeling did you substitute for that feeling when you had it?)

What feeling you are most comfortable expressing at work?

What feeling was not ok or felt wrong for you to express at work? (What feeling did you substitute for that feeling when you had it?)

What feeling are you most comfortable expressing in a multicultural setting?

What feeling seems not ok or wrong for you to express in a multicultural setting? (What feeling do you substitute for that feeling when you have it?)

Think about the messages that come with our feelings. Consider the way SAD, MAD, SCARED (sometimes feelings you may want to avoid) are where powerful change happens in anti-oppression work.

The Feeling Wheel

The Feelings Wheel as designed by Dr. Gloria Willcox shows us how to identify the original main emotion we are experiencing and connects this with other linked groups of emotions which branch off from the central circle. This helps us identify the root of our feelings by tracing back to one of the main emotions in the center of the chart.

